



NAAFA Newsletter

Official Publication of the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance Winter 2006

In this issue:

Calendar of Events

NAAFA Health Care Grant

Editorial: The Fat Paradox

Media and Research Roundup

NAAFA Merit Scholarship 2006

Guerilla Activism: New York's Bookmark Brigade

Names and Frames: Talking about Fat Rights

I hope you all have survived the January onslaught of diet ads. These ads succeed because of, and in fact are part of, the intense pressure on the fat to become thin, or to otherwise disappear. But there's hope: major news weekly US News and World Report ran a big article on how diets don't work. You and I can file this under "Duh!", but to the general public, it's a revelation. In this issue, we've got a media roundup focusing on that and other interesting stuff, my own thoughts on what I call The Fat Paradox, and lots more. Join me, won't you?

• NAAFA Health Care Grant

*by Frances M. White
NAAFA Treasurer*



In keeping with NAAFA's mission of support, education and advocacy for people all sizes of large, we are pleased to announce a \$1,000 grant to WomanCare Plus. This project is based at the Center for Health Training--Resource Group in Oakland, a non-profit organization specializing in training health professionals. The Project is in follow-up to a research study funded to the UC Berkeley Center for Weight and Health; long-time NAAFAn Pat Lyons RN, MA (pictured at right) is the Project Director.

The WomanCare Plus mission is to research and develop public programs and policies to address health disparities resulting from weight discrimination and the cultural stigmatization of fatness. Some examples are the education of emergency medical technicians on how to deal with fat clients, and getting health care practitioners to understand the importance of diagnostic tools suitable for the larger patient.

Results of the initial study were published in 2005 in the International Journal of Obesity Research, and described barriers to gynecological cancer screening exams experienced by fat women. Many NAAFAn participants in the research at a NAAFA convention in San Diego. The study's principal investigator, Nancy Amy, expressed to me how grateful she was to those of us who participated, because we were the proof that these barriers were not the result of ignorance and lack of exposure to medical service. NAAFA participants were largely middle class Caucasian and African-American women who had health insurance and still found it unpleasant, uncomfortable and demeaning, in many cases, to seek gynecological care.

But both genders encounter barriers to good health care. If you are large and experience an accident or health problem, you have many fears beyond recovering from the crisis - will you be able to be transported by an ambulance, will there be appropriately sized gowns and beds where you are taken, and will you be accommodated by

Calendar of Events

Chocolate Valentine's Celebration, Chicago NAAFA, Saturday, February 11, 2006, www.ChicagoNAAFA.org

Hearts A-fire Dance Party, Capital NAAFA, Saturday, February 11, 2006, www.CapitalNAAFA.org

Chapter Meeting, New York NAAFA, Friday, February 17, 2006, www.NYnaafa.org

St. Patty's Mardi Gras
Dance Party, Capital
NAAFA, Saturday,
March 4, 2006,
www.CapitalNAAFA.org

Business Meeting,
Northern Ohio NAAFA,
Saturday, March 4,
2006,
www.ltech.net/naafa

BBW/BHM Literature,
Art, and Music
Appreciation Day,
Chicago NAAFA,
Saturday, March 18,
2006,
www.ChicagoNAAFA.org

Business Meeting,
Northern Ohio NAAFA,
Saturday, April 1, 2006,
www.ltech.net/naafa

:: newsletter@naafa.org
:: <http://naafa.org>

:: 916-558-6880

whatever diagnostic equipment needed to examine you. As we age, we are going to need medical care and assistance that is compassionate, supportive, and patient friendly. The work of this project will go a long way toward helping physicians live up to their responsibility to heal and do no harm.

If you want to be a part of this important work, you can make a tax-deductible donation to the Center for Health Training-Resource Group (CHT-Resource Group), WomanCare Plus Project, 614 Grand Avenue, Suite 400, Oakland CA 94610. You may contact Pat for a copy of the study at lyons.pat@sbcglobal.net.

• **Editorial: The Fat Paradox**

by *Bill Weitze*
NAAFA Newsletter Editor

Note: The following does not necessarily reflect official NAAFA positions.

What is the Fat Paradox? Put simply, it is that unhealthy lifestyles can make some people fatter, but healthy lifestyles don't make fat people thin. The first part of this feeds directly into how society treats us fat people, and the second fuels our frustration.



What do I mean by an unhealthy lifestyle? Dieting, for starters. Many fat ex-dieters say that they dieted their way up to their current weight. All diets, even the "good" ones, restrict the intake of something your body needs. The body responds by demanding that which is restricted, be it carbs, calories, protein, fat, or whatever is called for in the diet of the month. Eventually the dieter gives into the body's demands, goes off the diet, and the pounds come back on, plus a bit more.

The whole idea of dieting (restricting intake of something to lose weight) throws our view of food out of whack. I think that our bodies naturally know what we should be eating, but dieting has made some people lose touch with this inner sense. And I don't think that there are any "bad" foods, except for actual poison. (And no one craves arsenic or nightshade.)

So what's the paradox? I may get some grief for this, but I think that unhealthy lifestyles such as dieting and lack of physical activity make some people fatter. The paradox is that, when these fat people stop dieting and become more active, they find that they are still fat. But what they often don't realize is that they are healthier; they just don't look it by our society's standards because we are conditioned to see fat as unhealthy.

The tragedy is that people often quit these lifestyle improvements because they don't seem to be working. But they do! Heart rate, blood pressure, insulin sensitivity, and blood cholesterol are all improved by a healthy lifestyle.

There is plenty of evidence that you can be fit and fat, and that diets don't work. As reported in the [Summer 2005 edition of the NAAFA Newsletter](#), a two-year study by University of California - Davis researchers showed that behavioral change and self-acceptance was far more effective at improving the health of fat women than dieting,

and without any long-term weight loss in either group. The "Media and Research Roundup" article in the current issue has more evidence.

But it's hard going against what the media and the medical industry want us to believe. I had to go through this journey myself. I was mostly a skinny kid, and didn't really get fat until I was in my 30s. By that time, I had found NAAFA, so I never gave in to the pressure to diet. But I have been getting fatter as I age, and haven't always felt good about it. Then I realized that my father went through the same thing, fattening as he aged. Now, he's 80 years old, eats a great variety of food that he grows (or sometimes hunts) and prepares himself, and is about as active as a man with bad knees can be. While his health is by no means perfect, his lifestyle is healthy, and I think that has led to his longevity. And I am learning from his example.

- **Media and Research Roundup**

by Bill Weitze
NAAFA Newsletter Editor

Fat and Happy? A study of over one million Swedish men published in December 2005 in the American Journal of Epidemiology shows that slim people struggle with depression, and are more likely to commit suicide than fat folk. Commentators have attributed these surprising results to the woes of dieting, forgetting that many fat folk diet as well. Whether or not these findings are confirmed, they remind us that the slender are not our enemies, that even "successful" dieting isn't a ticket to happiness, and that they also suffer from size oppression.

Fat and Healthy. Confirming the recent study by Dr. Katherine Flegal of the Centers for Disease Control (reported here a few months ago), a study by Jerome Timothy Gronniger of the Congressional Budget Office shows that body mass index (BMI) is a poor predictor of a person's risk of death. (BMI is your body mass in kilograms divided by the square of your height in meters.)

Fat and Healthy, Part 2. Sociologists at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) led by Abigail C. Saguy find that while Americans are indeed getting fatter, the so-called "obesity epidemic" is at best a metaphor, and not a very effective one at that. The current anti-fat environment can keep fat people from adequate health care.
<http://www.college.ucla.edu/news/05/obesitystudy.html>

A Japanese Perspective NAAFA Member Avery Ray Colter has translated a Japanese article that features him and his fiancée Kat Rhodes. Reporter Yukiko McCarty wrote the article for Japan's Spa Magazine based on her observations and interviews at NAAFA's 2005 Convention. (Warning: some adult content.)
http://www.infoasis.com/~avery/spa_kyodebutachi_kaihouundou.html

Dieting Dangers. A study of same-sex Finnish twins published in June 2005 in the Public Library of Science's Medicine Journal showed that, of those intending to lose weight, the risk of mortality was actually greatest for those who successfully lost weight. The authors conclude "Deliberate weight loss in overweight individuals without known co-morbidities may be hazardous in the long term."

US News Says "Stop Dieting". The January 16, 2006 issue of US News and World Report includes an article by Amanda Spake that questions this country's dieting craze. In it, Ms. Spake interviews Joanne Ikeda (a nutrition specialist at the University of California, Berkeley and speaker at the 2003 NAAFA Convention), Linda Bacon (a

nutrition professor at the University of California, Davis and speaker at the 2005 NAAFA Convention), Steven Blair (CEO of the Cooper Institute in Dallas), and many others in the Health at Every Size movement. While I applaud the article, and hope it helps those who are unsure of whether to diet, I find it interesting that the article's web page contains a bunch of diet ads (automatically selected by Google based on the article's content). It seems like there's still a lot of progress to be made in the fight against dieting.

<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/health/articles/060116/16diet.htm>

Size Acceptance Spreads. There are signs of hope. The February 2006 issue of fashion magazine Marie Claire contains an article titled "Why America Hates Fat Women", investigating what they call the final frontier of open discrimination in the U.S. Also, the market research firm NPD Group found that, over a 20-year period, the percentage of Americans who said they find overweight people less attractive dropped from 55 percent to 24 percent. And El Paso Times columnist Annamaria Longo says fat jokes in movies are no longer funny.

Idol Issues. NAAFA Public Relations Chair Peggy Howell spoke against the sizism evident on *American Idol* this season. Although supersized Ruben Studdard went to the top two years ago, "Simon Cowell continues to make rude remarks about [fat] contestants." Peggy's statements earned NAAFA mentions online, in newspapers across the country, and even on VH1's *Best Week Ever*. Commentator response was mixed, as some predictably conflated fatness with laziness.

Hawaii Lawmaker Proposes Teacher Weigh- Ins. Meanwhile, sizism hasn't disappeared, as a state lawmaker has suggested Hawaii's public schoolteachers be forced to weigh in as part of the fight against obesity in students. The president of the Hawaii State Teachers Association calls the proposal "offensive". I agree; instead of teaching children to be healthy, it teaches them that it's OK to discriminate against fat folk. This seems to be part of a larger trend toward more intrusive "wellness" programs imposed by employers.

Study Spin. Sizism even infects scientific research, which is supposed to be unbiased. A study by Northwestern University researchers (published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in January 2006) found that being overweight in mid-life substantially increased the risk of dying of heart disease later in life. The headlines declared "Study confirms you can't be fat and healthy". But what they didn't tell you is that, in the words of Glenn Gaesser (professor of exercise physiology at the University of Virginia, and member of the NAAFA Board of Advisors), is that "the authors assume that diet, physical activity, and fitness play no role in health or mortality risk (I am not kidding)." Since these are known risk factors that often correlate with fatness, the authors can't truthfully say whether fatness actually causes heart disease.

Corrupted Opinions. The January 30 issue of BusinessWeek reports that "stealth sponsorship of talking heads and op-ed columnists is surprisingly common". One example: Anti-fat columnist Michael Fumento benefited from "payments totaling \$60,000 from agribusiness giant Monsanto Co. . . . On January 13, Scripps Howard News Service canceled his weekly column."

Note: Where no web link is given, do an Internet search using your favorite search engine to find out more.

- **NAAFA Merit Scholarship 2006**

The NAAFA Merit Scholarship Essay Contest is open to NAAFA members (of at least one year) who are furthering their education at a college or university during the 2006/2007 school year. Applicants must write a 700 to 1000 word essay on one of the following topics:

1. How NAAFA has changed my life and personal education goals
2. The importance of fat acceptance in the year 2006
3. Personal Fat Activism
4. Another fat related topic on approval

In addition to the \$1000 merit scholarship awarded for first place, a second place scholarship of \$500 will also be awarded. Both winners will also receive a free membership renewal to NAAFA for one year.

Essays will be judged on relevance, creativity and clarity, as well as grammar, writing mechanics and structure.

Please contact [Kara Brewerallen@naafa.org](mailto:Kara_Brewerallen@naafa.org) for more information.

- **Guerilla Activism: New York's Bookmark Brigade**

*by Kimberly Smith
New York NAAFA Member*



Fat activism, like fat activists, comes in all shapes and sizes. Some people are vocal and fearless, shaking their pompoms at demonstrations, or writing letters to their local paper. Others deal with fat discrimination on a more personal level, educating their friends and family when those special "teaching moments" arise. But one of my favorite forms of activism is guerilla activism - getting out the message where people are least likely to expect it, in unique and creative ways.

Last year, New York NAAFA president Sandy Schaffer brought a great idea back from the annual NAAFA conference.

Bookmarks.

Sounds simple. Sounds boring. But what if those bookmarks have fabulous size positive slogans, and facts about the failure of diets? And what if those bookmarks tell to find out more information by Googling "size acceptance"? And how about if those bookmarks turn up in every book in the diet section of the local library, or bookstore. Now we're talking!

NY NAAFA members spent an evening making a batch of these bookmarks with our favorite slogans: "Fat and Fit and Proud of It!", "Body Liberation!", "98% of Diets Fail, Don't Be a Failure", you get the idea. Each book mark had the tagline "Google 'size acceptance' for more information", rather than just posting a link to NAAFA, so that no one could be blamed if a store happened to take offense.

Next was the bookstore infiltration! On a cold January evening, NAAFA members descended on Barnes and Noble. The process is pretty easy . . . pick up the latest diet craze book, browse, and then stick in a bookmark as you replace it on the shelf. We found that plain old copy paper works best, because it makes the bookmarks hard to fall out or be found in the book until someone is actually reading it.

But don't just hit the diet section! There are plenty of other great targets . . . fashion magazines, diet and fitness magazines, diet related cookbooks, anything with Oprah or Dr. Phil on the cover, Star Jones' biography . . . the possibilities are endless.

It gives me a lot of satisfaction to know that maybe, just maybe, someone who is contemplating their umpteenth diet, and feeling badly about themselves, might run across one of our little pleas for sanity in a fat-hating world as they peruse "The Rice Diet". And instead of buying the book, they take the bookmark home to learn about the wonderful world of fat liberation! This is really easy and cheap to do. So why don't you become a guerilla activist?

• **Names and Frames: Talking about Fat Rights**

by Marilyn Wann

NAAFA Board Member and Fat Rights Agitator

I scrutinize my words when I talk or write about weight. I consider the assumptions, the politics, and the likely effect of my words on readers or listeners. Twelve years into this practice, I'm still refining my word choice.

A while ago, a group of fat activists (Jennifer Portnick, Elena Escalera, Esther Rothblum, and myself) attended a year's worth of monthly meetings of a task force appointed by San Francisco legislators that was initially called the Task Force on Childhood Obesity Prevention; then, before they even saw us coming they changed the name to the Task Force on Childhood Nutrition and Physical Activity (perhaps in hopes we'd be appeased?). In talking about this profoundly irksome group, I called it the Task Force for the Abolition of Fat Children. All three of these names were accurate descriptions of the body in question.



People in this culture are trained to view the world through weight-colored lenses. The anti-"obesity" crowd will co-opt weight-neutral descriptors to push their weight-biased agenda. When we talk about celebrating weight diversity and Health At Every Size (HAES), we also need to point out the distorting lenses to people, ask them to remove them, reassure them they'll still be able to see, perhaps more clearly than they did before.

Years ago, I heard oppression compared to being in an elevator, and having someone stand on your foot. Whether the person is knowingly or unknowingly standing on your foot isn't immediately clear, but they keep doing it. What do you say? Do you clear your throat and say, "Excuse me, but you're standing on my foot"? Still, they stand on you. What do you say next? "Please stop stepping on me." "Hey, get off my foot." "Ouch, that hurts!"

What do they say in response? "I'm not standing on you." "People who allow their feet to get stepped on must enjoy it." "Foot-stepping is an honored tradition in elevators." "If you didn't want me to step on your foot, why did you place it under mine?" If you witnessed this exchange as a fellow passenger on the elevator, what would you say or do?

I don't think anyone is a bad person. I think foot-stepping is bad. In old-school elevators, everyone is at risk of stepping on feet or being stepped on. Not fun for anyone, I imagine. Wouldn't it be lovely if feet were respected and safe from harm in elevators?

