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'Couch potato hypothesis' explains overweight youths

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Young Americans are more overweight than ever, a "fattening of America" that one researcher blames on a generation of couch potatoes that spends as much time watching television as in the classroom.

Rates of obesity among children and adolescents went up an average of about 45 percent between 1960 and the early 1980s, said Steven Gortmaker, associate professor and acting chairman of the Department of Behavioral Sciences at Harvard University.

A key factor in explaining the rise are 1983 studies that show children spend an average of at least 25 hours a week in front of the television, said Gortmaker, who speculated that the actual number of viewing hours is higher.

"Television viewing for children is now practically a full-time job equal to the time spent in school," he said, adding that television viewing is up from an average of 18 hours per week in 1968.

Diet, a general decline in physical activity, and TV commercials that reinforce the appeal of high-calorie foods contribute to the dramatic increase in overweight youths, said Gortmaker, who explained his "couch potato hypothesis" last month at an American Dietetic Association meeting.

The link between TV-watching and obesity rates holds true for adults, too, he said. One study showed that adults who watch an hour of television a day or more have a 3 percent chance of being obese, compared to a 25 percent chance of obesity among adults who watch three hours per day.

Specifically, Gortmaker found that between the late 1960s and 1980, obesity rates went up 54 percent among children aged 6 to 11. Super-obesity rates went up

98 percent in the same age group. Among youths aged 12 to 17, obesity went up 39 percent and super-obesity rose by 64 percent.

Obesity and super-obesity were measured with a skinfold test that does not readily translate into percentage of body fat or other measurements, he said.

The greatest increase among males was between the ages of 6 and 11, and the biggest among females was in those aged 12 to 17. Obesity was less prevalent among blacks than whites, but that gap has narrowed recently, he said.

Obesity is equally prevalent among wealthy and poor children, Gortmaker found. The greatest number of obese youths are found in the Northeast while the fewest are west of the Mississippi River.

Obese children face health risks including hypertension, psychosocial damage, respiratory and orthopedic problems. They also tend to become overweight adults, Gortmaker said.

To counter the trend, he recommends individualized programs to target overweight youth, and school and community-based nutrition programs.

In another presentation, John Foran, an associate professor at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, reported that eating has become the norm among African women and has become common among young children.

"We have become a nation obsessed with body shape, body size. Women particular are not satisfied with their bodies today, either size or shape," he said.

"Television viewing for children is now practically a full-time job equal to the time spent in school."
 — Steven Gortmaker, associate professor in the Department of Behavioral Sciences at Harvard University.

Houston woman vows fight to keep 700-pound pet pig

HOUSTON (AP) — A Houston woman who has bowed to pressure from city officials and agreed to move her pet pig out of town is calling for friends to march on City Hall in a campaign to "Keep Jerome at Home."

The 700-pound pig known as Jeffrey Jerome has been used as an attraction at charity events by owner Victoria Herberta Ziesig, who believes the animal deserves special treatment as an exception to city ordinances.

"As far as I'm concerned, he is instrumental to the work I am doing as ambassador to the needy," Ziesig said.

"We have parties for him and . . . ask people to bring canned goods," she said. "This helps me because sometimes my demand gets past what I can supply. I

have been feeding street people for four years out of my own pocket."

Jeffrey Jerome appeared on the porch of Ziesig's home Sunday in a "Vampig" costume at a gathering that drew about 1,000 people, who donated a pickup bed full of food for Jerome's last appearance as a Houston resident.

"They agreed to let me keep him for his Halloween party today, but they said after that, they want him out of the city limits," she said.

"In other words, I'm going to cooperate with the city in the hope they'll let me get a special permit and let me continue my work with street people and the needy," Ziesig added.

Election buttons tell political story

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Behind every campaign button is a story. And every dedicated collector is a storyteller.

Put the two together and what have you got? Life, piercing what Charles Cotrell, St. Mary's University academic vice president and political science professor, terms "dead" history.

This particular story begins with 1,000 political buttons dating back to the 1896 William McKinley-William Jennings Bryan presidential campaign that recently found their way to St. Mary's University, thanks to a local anonymous collector whose deceased brother once attended the college many years ago.

The political Americana, which will be on display at the university through Nov. 9, ranges from the somber McKinley photograph to "Drive Carefully — the life you save may vote Republican (Goldwater '64)." Although the collection has yet to be appraised, Cotrell said the button bearing the likeness of McKinley, the 25th U.S. president who was assassinated, is one of the most valuable buttons today.

The McKinley button was the first of the type of campaign buttons used today. Earlier buttons were made

from lithographs on steel and more recent ones are made of paper with a celluloid covering.

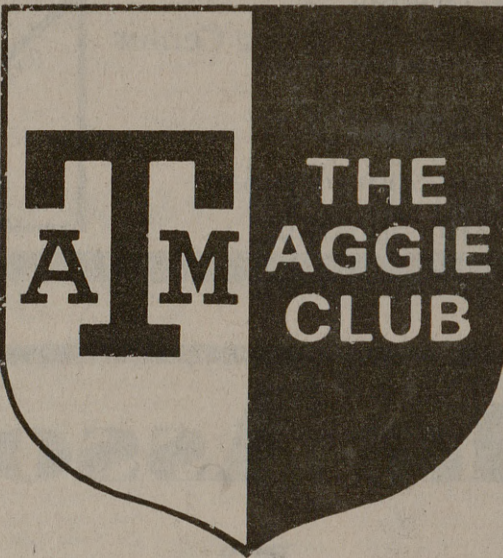
"A button really expresses the First Amendment," Cotrell said. The professor pointed out that symbolic speech is protected by the First Amendment, a ruling made in the 1969 U.S. Supreme Court case of Tinker vs. Des Moines School District. The case arose when the school district forbade its high school students from wearing black armbands to protest U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

"So much of political science is symbols," Cotrell said. "Buttons are fixed imagery that goes back before the turn of the century. They afford a concrete touch with history in an age that almost depends on a flickering image (television) of reality."

David Frost, a paratransit coordinator for VIA Metropolitan Transit Authority, began his button collection 30 years ago and has amassed at least 1,000 assorted buttons.

"Buttons tell where we have been as a nation and how we got to where we are now," he said. One of his most prized items is a George Washington campaign token. "I found it in an antique store in South Carolina," said the 43-year-old history buff.

The Student Chapter



The Aggie Club
 Student Chapter

Wednesday Nov. 2
5:30 p.m.

Meet at the Indoor Pool (DeWare)
 (watch the last half hour of swim practice)

Guest Speaker
Mel Nash
 Swim Coach

For more information call the Aggie Club

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