

America's Obsession with Weight

Thin people also face weight discrimination

It happened just a few days ago in Blocker. There I was, gazing at the slowly moving numbers above the elevator door when she tapped me on the shoulder. "Why, you are so thin, dear! You are going to have to wear lots of layers in this weather to keep that tiny body warm." I gave the old bag a half-smile as I steered my sturdy 5'6", 105-pound body out the door.



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involves using another's slenderness for the exclusive purpose of making that person perform unpleasant tasks. I cannot count the number of times I have been asked to put one of my limbs behind something for the purpose of retrieving a trapped object. And we are always the first ones asked to contort or sit in laps in a crowded car. I am flexible, but I can only be stretched so far. Ouch!

Is it just me, or could she have kept that little comment to herself? That woman is more common than you think. She is a personification of an often overlooked and hardly ever discussed dilemma — thin discrimination. I define thin discrimination as the harassment, jesting, pestering and abuse of naturally slender folk.

Thin discrimination runs rampant and it must be halted immediately. To be stopped, it must first be recognized. The discrimination usually occurs on two fronts — verbal and physical.

Verbal thin discrimination involves niceties. A nicety is a comment that is meant to be "nice," but is mainly nasty. That comment in the elevator was an example of a nicety. Other niceties often involve the word "bones." The worst nicety I've heard yet was when a guy told me I would be PERFECT — just as soon as I "plopped out a few young uns." Needless to say, I was not too flattered by that. Another example of verbal discrimination is incorrectly labeling a person as anorexic or a bulimic. Are thin people not supposed to work out to stay toned and in shape? Are thin people not allowed a foot-long at Subway without someone visualizing them with their fingers in their throats?

We get hungry too, you know. Physical discrimination is just as bad, if not worse. This

Another form of physical abuse is the Finger Test. What makes people think that slender people want their wrists and/or ankles squeezed painfully as someone tries to close his or her fingers around that body part? Would they do the same thing to an overweight person? I don't think so.

According to Cynthia Lont, associate professor of communication at Georgetown University and a leading women's studies expert, the average woman stands 5'4" and weighs 144 pounds. Unfortunately, many women seem to be discontent with this number, probably because the media continually perpetuate an ideal thin and waif-like figure. Not only does this fuel jealousy and hostility toward thin people, but it causes self-hatred in women. This is really sad, because women — anybody, really — should be appreciated for their hearts, minds and souls rather than for the shapes of their bodies.

OK, so I might not get quite the same effect when I do booty dances as those shapely women with their rotund buttocks do on the music videos. Still, I proudly shake what my momma gave me.

And whether you are tall or big, short or little, you should lift your head up high and do the same.

Aja Henderson is a junior political science major

Fake fat has appeal but leads to real dangers



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It would be nice to be one of those models who eats whatever he or she wants and never worries about gaining weight.

Not everyone will be able to look like Cindy Crawford, but care-free overindulgence may be possible in the near future. All we have to sacrifice is our health.

After 25 years, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is expected to approve Procter & Gamble's fat substitute, olestra. This would reduce food calories and fat grams without reducing taste.

Olestra is actually fat, only indigestible.

A Jan. 8 Time magazine article explained that olestra molecules "are much bigger than [naturally occurring fat molecules] and packed so tightly that the enzymes can't cut them apart. They pass through the intestines without being absorbed." In short, it goes in one end and out the other.

This seems like great news for our overly weight-conscious society. So why are so many consumer and health groups against olestra?

Perhaps because olestra reduces the body's absorption of carotenoids and vitamins A, D, E and K. Perhaps because olestra can cause cramps, bloating, gas, diarrhea, fecal urgency (or, the need to "go right now") and what has been politely termed as "anal leakage."

But somehow Procter & Gamble has managed to get the FDA to overlook these nutritional problems because they have not been proven harmful. There are only speculations on the consequences of eating too much olestra. Effects are not known because, in order to test it, rats would have to eat only olestra and they would die from malnutrition.

Therefore, human beings will be the guinea pigs.

Sacrificing a healthy immune system and increasing the chances of getting prostate cancer, lung cancer, heart disease and vision impairment are only possibilities. And not everyone would suffer from the disgusting gastrointestinal effects.

Oh, don't worry — olestra products will have a warning label.



Imagine the promotions for this new substitute. The fat-free and toilet paper industries could team up for specials: "Buy two bags of potato chips and get a roll of Charmin free!"

What is the FDA thinking? This government agency was created for national health concerns, and society's health problems will only increase with the approval of olestra.

Studies show that the fat-free market is not decreasing calorie intake. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control have reported that more people are getting fat.

This makes sense. The weight-worried college student eats less so that he or she can drink more — or buys fat-free cookies and then eats the whole box.

People obviously can neither control their craving for fatty foods nor their obsession for looking skinny.

But if the FDA were doing its job, it would refuse to approve olestra. The body needs natural fat. By substituting these with chemically treated or laboratory-created fats, people risk

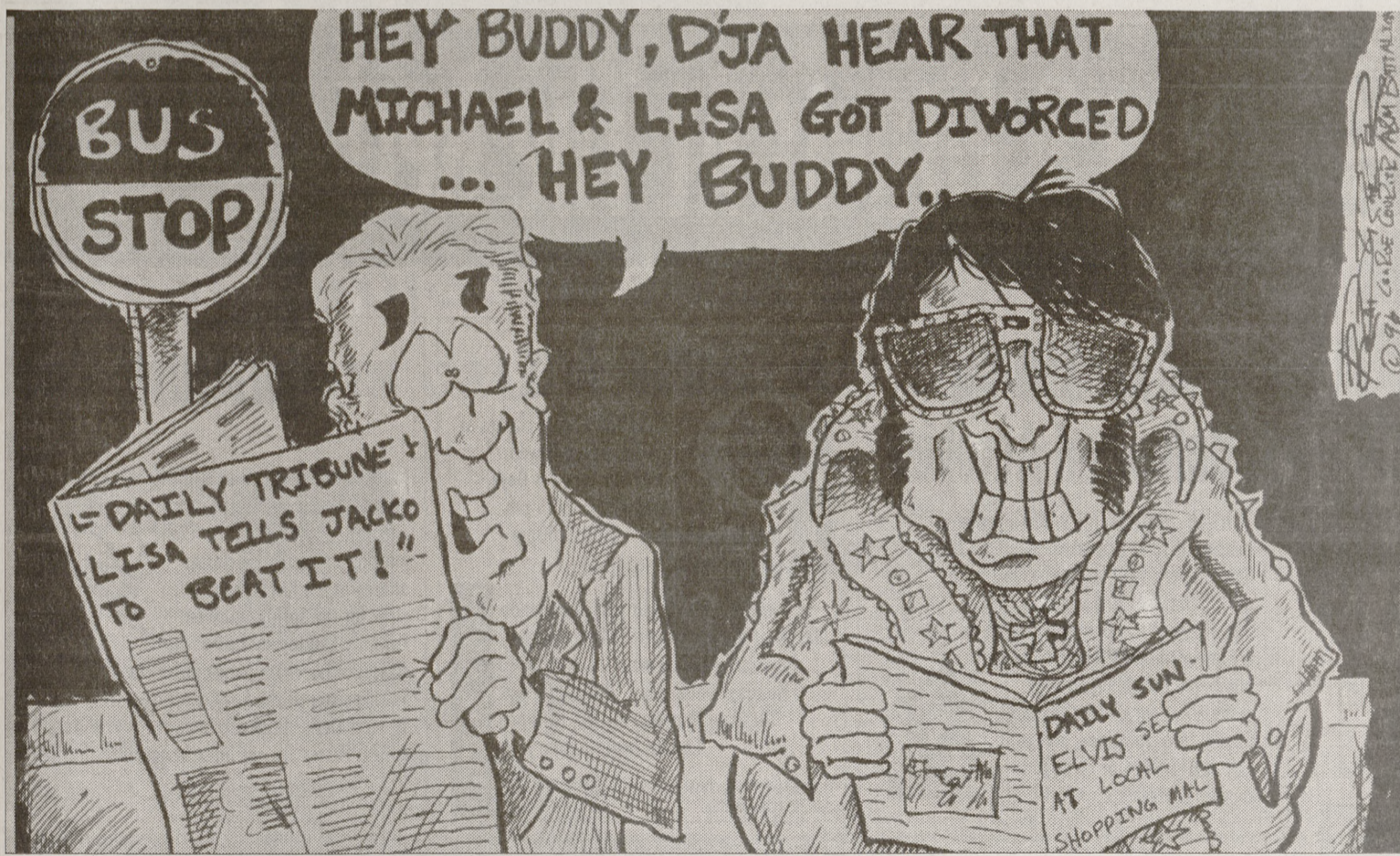
unknown damage. Although olestra has not been proven harmful, it definitely has not been proven safe.

Approval of a fat-free fat will cause physical and mental damage. It indirectly promotes the idea of not living a healthy lifestyle. Obesity is a warning sign sent by the body. Depriving the body of natural fats fools people into thinking that, because they are not dimpled with cellulite, they are healthy.

The FDA does not consider these harms when evaluating foods.

So, since it looks like olestra will soon be available, let's assume the best — everyone's eating habits will remain the same and fat and calorie intake will be reduced. If that happens, there will be a bunch of stinky, blind people running around eating fried food. No one will look skinnier because they will be bloated. Then they'll die from heart disease.

Erin Fitzgerald is a senior political science and English major



Get your lies, deceit and harassment right here

It's the second week of the semester, which means the evil army of sales people is retreating. The battle is over, but not the war.

Vendors of all kinds swarm around college campuses during the first week of school to sell, but also to harass, lie and deceive. They will visit throughout the semester, but we've survived their greatest onslaught.

In one battlefield encounter, my friend's doorbell rang (a surprise attack).

"Here's your prepaid phone card. What's your name?" Not even a "Can I speak to the man or woman of the house?" Not even a "Howdy."

My friend politely answered, "Who the hell are you?"

"Oh, this comes with your subscription to the Hearne Tribune." (I would use the real paper's name here, but it isn't its fault — it's the vendor's. I'll give a hint, though. It's one of the Houston papers, and it rhymes with "monacle.")

"I don't want one."

"OK. What's your name?"

After explaining to this pest that he didn't need her name if he wasn't going to be delivering papers to her door, my friend shut that door pretty close to his face to emphasize the point.

Commission makes people jerks. Other vendors for the same newspaper are constantly getting in my face trying to lure me with a free copy of the paper.

"No thanks," I tell them. "Much like football, the only major league newspaper in the state is from the metropolis to the north."

But this rudeness is my response to many years of deceptive sales tactics. I've been told



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by competing salespeople that The Dallas Morning News doesn't deliver on campus. I've been told that the vendor from the Morning News had gone home

for the day. One guy actually tried to tell me that the Houston Post went out of business. Of course, none of these is true, and I hear the paper thump against my door every morning.

But newspaper vendors are not the only guilty ones. Phone companies do their share of truth-stretching.

When they say, "Our rates are lower," they probably mean, "Our rate from Dime Box to Hearne is lower than two of our competitors' between the times of 12:30 and 12:36 p.m."

And of course there are the credit card companies. All you have to do is sign up, and they'll give you your choice of a t-shirt, expandable thermos or a key chain.

Free stuff rocks, but credit catches up. Credit card companies are the drug dealers of the vending industry. They give you free stuff, but then they've got you hooked.

Friends don't let friends overuse credit cards.

They don't outnumber us, but they're crafty. They divide and conquer. They build on our own weaknesses. And they must be stopped.

The vendors are gone, but they'll be back, and we have to be ready to stand strong.

But it will be hard because they know that in the face of a free koozie, even the strong will fall.

Michael Landauer is a junior journalism major from Houston



MAIL CALL

Concealed guns can prevent crime

Elaine Mejia said in her Jan. 19 column that if people are suddenly allowed to legally carry guns, they will suddenly start killing innocent

people. She ends her article by saying that good sense should keep anyone from carrying a concealed gun.

Tell that to the young lady who helplessly watched as her parents were shot in a Luby's Cafeteria because her gun was in the glove box of her car instead of in her

purse (because that would have been illegal).

Gun regulation does not curb crime. In Washington, D.C. guns are heavily regulated but the number of handgun deaths is through the roof. Virginia has the only constitutional gun law. There it is illegal to carry a gun for the purpose of committing a crime. The violent crime rate in Virginia is one-tenth that of Washington, D.C.

Texas' concealed weapons bill will require permit applicants to attend a training program. There they will learn when they may legally use their weapon and how to do so. We are under a moral imperative to protect our families and neighbors, and stopping law-

abiding citizens from carrying guns will not make us any safer.

Dave Johnston
Class of '97

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