

Obesity: A Growing Epidemic?

DAWN MORE

The American Obesity Association reported this year that nearly 127 million adults living in the United States are overweight, sixty million are obese, and nine million are severely obese. Many now consider obesity one of the most prominent public health concerns in the US. This number represents about one-third of the American population and indicates that obesity is, in fact, an epidemic.

In the late 1970s, 14.4 percent of the population in the U.S. was obese. A study done in 2000 showed that 30.5 percent of the population was obese. The obesity epidemic in the U.S. has been attributed

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to decreased amounts of physical activity and increased amounts of foods high in fat and calories.

The overall trend shows both genders are increasingly overweight, but in the United States, more women than men suffer from obesity. About 34 percent of women are obese while 27.7

percent of men are obese. There are more than double the amounts of severely obese women (6.3 percent) than severely obese men (3.1 percent). Another study revealed that there is a higher obesity rate for people with lesser education: only 15.7 percent of college graduates are obese while 27.4 percent of high school drop-outs are obese.

Obesity is affecting one-third of the United States population. The implications of this new epidemic are social as well. In our nation, obese individuals are often victims of discrimination and are penalized for their condition despite many state and federal laws to protect citizens from discrimination.

One of the most alarming

medical consequences of our society's partiality for food is the rise in childhood obesity, which has nearly quadrupled over the past 25 years. A few of the more serious health effects of obesity in youth include asthma, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and sleep apnea in which breathing is uneven during sleep due to closure of the airway. However, children are not the only individuals at risk for health problems associated with obesity. The incidence of osteoarthritis steadily increases with a BMI of 25 and higher. Birth defects, infertility, impaired immune responses, and multiple other conditions have been attributed to obesity.

Obesity is on the rise within the US; however, it is a

disease that can be treated with diet and exercise. A general attention to health and wellness within the US could reverse this trend and improve national wellbeing as a whole.



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Siemens-Westinghouse

LEAH HAWKINS

To many students on campus, September 30th passed by like any other day. However, a small percentage of Science and Mathers spent their day scrambling to meet a deadline. The Siemens-Westinghouse competition in math, science, and technology rewards high school students each year with prizes, honorable mentions, and scholarships. "The Siemens Foundation provides more than \$1 million in college scholarships and awards each year for talented high school students in the United States" (Siemens Foundation).

Science and Math has had several national winners in the past, including one team who won at nationals, receiving \$100,000. This year, various groups submitted papers including chemistry, biology, computer technology, and physics projects. The Siemens competition requires a large amount of work; as one senior

stated, "I didn't do Siemens because it seemed to cause a lot of stress and was too much work."

For example, the many students who submitted research papers to Siemens conducted research last school year, over their summer breaks, and this fall in order to collect enough data. Also, two physics teams received curfew extensions from Dr. Warshaw, the head of academic programs, to work on their paper until 3 a.m. the night before the paper was due.

Although the competition is a stressful experience, some seniors enjoyed the experience. As Monica Shah stated, "weekends without LYM (her chemistry research team) will not be the same."

On October 1, all research papers were due to the Siemens Foundation. Only time will tell whether or not these students' hard work will result in snazzy semi-finalist prizes like a top-of-the-line palm pilot or full rides to colleges of their choice.



Logan Couce

Asiri and Jenny hard at work on their Siemens research writeup.

Prejudice Renewed

BRYAN BUTLER

The early morning of October third went by uneventfully for most of the NCSSM community. Most of us do not know the story of Eddie Hartman and do not know that he was executed in our state a little after 2 am that morning. Most of us are not aware of the history of bigotry that Hartman's case represents to many of our fellow Americans.

In the preceding weeks, many groups including Amnesty International, Human Rights Campaign and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force heightened their campaigns for Governor Easley to stay Hartman's execution. Hartman was sentenced to death in October 1994 after he was arrested and confessed to shooting and robbing Herman Smith, his housemate, in Northampton County. There has been a deep concern that Hartman's sexual orientation was used against him at trial.

At sentencing, Hartman's mother, while being cross-examined about sexual abuse her son had experienced as a child, was asked by the prosecutor, "is not your son a homosexual?" The prosecutor was apparently attempting to minimize the significance of the sexual abuse and avoid leniency from the jury. Hartman's aunt was told by the prosecutor, "Well, you knew that Mr. Hartman is a homosexual. You've heard that." This question was objected to and the objection was sustained, at which point the prosecution asked, "Did you know what sexual persuasion the defend-

dant was?"

When I heard of Hartman's case and its dubious circumstances, I began looking for other cases of sexual orientation being used against defendants. According to The Independent, an estimated 40% of women on death row had an implication of lesbianism used against them, whether the charge was true or



<http://www.usatoday.com>

Eddie Hartman

not. Recently, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas prosecutors have featured defendants' gay identities in trials resulting in death sentences.

Many contend that cases such as this one are used far too often to prove a point, or to symbolize some large nebulous social movement, and I try to avoid making an isolated case into a case study of all that is wrong with the world. With this case, though, I could not ignore the fact that such cases in the US symbolize a much deeper problem in society.

If you are serving on a jury, about to decide the fate of a defendant, and you are suddenly told the defendant is gay, something you had not thought of before, how would

you think of them differently?

The only acknowledgment of the inappropriate and discriminatory nature of the comments made by the prosecutor concerning Hartman's sexual orientation was the instruction made by the judge to the jury to disregard the comments. If you are told that someone is homosexual, can you ever look at and feel the same way about them again? Can you discard the connotations, the years of things you have been told about gay people?

The homophobia and intolerance of normal citizens was perhaps played upon in this case, and many others, and that is deeply disturbing. The history of institutionalized prejudice in our legal system (which is indicative of the prejudice in our social systems) has always included gender and race, and is more and more including national origin and religion. The addition of sexual orientation to this list is a terrible fact for a supposedly progressive country such as ours.

At the core of the ability of a prosecutor to utilize someone's sexual orientation to exact harsher punishment on them is homophobia. Where does this type of prejudice come from?

It isn't *NORMAL!* You would be surprised how many times I've heard this.

In our quest for normalcy, the obsessive desire of seemingly all young people (and sadly, many older, supposedly more mature people), the repulsion of all that is foreign or different, we have become prejudiced time and again in