

NEW HAVEN FAT LIBERATION FRONT

**34 GRACE STREET
NEW HAVEN CT 06511**

October 27, 1977

We are sending you the enclosed report because we know that you are concerned about some of the issues it raises.

We are a group of fat women and friends in the New Haven area who have researched alternative medical, psychological and nutritional information regarding fat and fat people. Our purpose is to counteract stereotypes with information that will aid fat people in achieving equality and establish fat liberation as an integral part of humanistic social change.

While the report singles out the work of Dr. Judith Rodin for criticism, that is largely because her statements received tacit approval from the American Psychological Association's annual conference in San Francisco this past August. Our criticism actually extends to the mainstream of contemporary psychiatric thought and practice.

We have presented the enclosed report to Dr. Rodin with our demand that she meet with us and other concerned people to discuss it within the next thirty days.

While the criticism is expressed in harsh language, we are eager to resolve this controversy in a way by which all parties involved will become the wiser. We believe that this is best done through mutual honesty, both intellectual and emotional.

If you agree that the issues raised in the enclosed report demand consideration by the academic community as well as by the public, we request that you write to Dr. Rodin, care of the Department of Psychology of Yale University, on your letterhead, expressing this view. (Enclosed is a suggested form letter.)

We also suggest that in doing so you send us a copy of your letter so that we may know of your support. Any financial contributions you can make to help meet the cost of printing and mailing these reports will be greatly appreciated. (Checks can be made payable to the New Haven Fat Liberation Front.)

Perhaps you will also want to share this information with your colleagues and solicit their support.

Thank you in advance.

Yours, for liberation,

The New Haven Fat Liberation Front

(The following letter was sent to prominent obesity and nutritional researchers of the time, including those mentioned in footnotes of the accompanying paper.)

SUGGESTED LETTER TO DR. RODIN

Dr. Judith Rodin
Department of Psychology
Yale University
2 Hillhouse Avenue
New Haven, Connecticut 06511

Dear Dr. Rodin:

A report by the New Haven Fat Liberation Front, critical of the statements made by you at the American Psychological Association's conference in San Francisco this past August, has come to my attention. This report presents evidence that contradicts assumptions that are almost universally accepted in the psychiatric community and are therefore found in your work.

Given the social implications of the issues raised in this report, I feel it is incumbent upon the academic community to ensure that these issues are examined publicly and thoroughly.

Therefore I support the demand of the New Haven Fat Liberation Front and urge you to meet with members of that group in a public discussion of the issues raised.

Sincerely yours,

Introduction

The attached report, "The Calorie Controversy: "Who's Cheating?" was written in response to statements made by Dr. Judith Rodin at the American Psychological Association meeting of August, 1977, as reported in the national press. The report was presented to Dr. Rodin by the New Haven Fat Liberation Front, along with our demand that she meet with us to discuss the political and moral implications raised by it. The meeting took place on January 3, 1978. In light of that meeting, we wish to clarify several points in the report.

The report suggests that Dr. Rodin might be ignorant of the basic nutritional findings that fat people do not eat more than slim people. We found at the meeting that she is well-informed of this. Our criticism of

her repeated use of the word "overeating" and the connection she implies between "overeating" and being fat led to our discovery that Dr. Rodin uses the word "overeating" in a very different sense from the way it is commonly understood. Dr. Rodin stated that she defines "overeating" as any caloric intake which results in weight gain:

Fat Liberation Front, "What do you mean by 'overeating'?"

Dr. Rodin, "Overeating is eating enough so that you gain weight."

Fat Liberation Front, "By that definition a woman who has been on a 500 calorie diet for a couple of months and then goes up to 800 calories and starts to gain weight is 'overeating.'"

Dr. Rodin, "That's right, and that's a scientific term defined by the outcome."

The one point of agreement, shared by all present at the meeting, was that the scientific community, as well as the general public, is misinformed about fat and needs to be re-educated.

Our assessment is that statements such as Dr. Rodin's are a main contributing factor in the continuing of this misinformation. The average health practitioner is not aware of her specialized definition of overeating and upon reading this paper by Dr. Rodin, will probably assume that this term refers to the cliched gluttony. Thus, Dr. Rodin is not communicating with her own profession. More fundamentally, Dr. Rodin's definition of "overeating" applies equally to a well-fed person who gains weight over Thanksgiving and a just-rescued concentration camp victim who is recovering lost weight after starvation. Obviously, the psychology of these two examples is totally different. We condemn the illogic of any theory that ignores the starvation our society enforces on fat people. This sort of theory has its basis in the bigoted assumption that fat is abnormal, which we reject.

THE CALORIE CONTROVERSY--WHO'S CHEATING?

Yale psychologist Judith Rodin's recent statements on the "causes" of obesity are yet another attempt to "prove" the moral inferiority of fat people in much the same way as some racist scientists attempt to "prove" the intellectual inferiority of black people through measurements of I. Q.

Rodin, a follower of Stanley Schachter's school of behavioral research, told the press that fat people are "fighting a losing battle against obesity because they're especially vulnerable to the sight and smell of high-calorie foods."(1) Addressing the American Psychological Association at its recent annual meeting in San Francisco, Rodin described experiments in which, under special laboratory conditions, fat people ate more than thin people. From this, and from her repeated references to "rich foods" and "overeating," we conclude that she goes with the prevailing popular belief that fat people eat more than thin people and that this is what makes us fat. This belief is contradicted by three decades of nutritional research of which, as a scientist, Dr. Rodin ought to be aware. In these nutritional studies (documented below) fat people's over-all calorie intakes averaged the same as those of non-fat people.

When faced with such contradictions, it is the responsibility of a scientist to explain them. It is a political abuse of science to ignore facts that don't fit one's theories, especially when the conclusions drawn from such a one-sided view will be used to reinforce the persecution of a human minority.

Nutritional Studies vs. Behavioral Studies

The assumption underlying virtually all behavioral research concerning fat people is that we are fat

because of some eating behavior, not found in thin people, resulting in caloric intakes greater than those of thin people. This, to our knowledge, is never stated overtly in the literature, but is universally assumed to be the case. The corollary to this is that if we change ("re-educate") our eating behavior (eliminate those behaviors leading to "calorie excess") we can become slim. Dr. Rodin's statements to the APA and the press indicate that this is her belief.

However, when fat people's over-all caloric intakes are measured they prove to be within ranges defined as "normal." J.S. Garrow, analyzing the studies from 1936 to 1972, finds that out of 13 studies, all but one showed the mean caloric intake of fat people to be comparable to those of non-fat people.(2) The single study showing a positive correlation between caloric intake and weight was among the earliest (Beaudoin and Mayer, 1953); and subsequent research failed to duplicate the finding. Furthermore, studies by Passmore in 1955(4,5) and 1963(6) found that the caloric excess needed to gain a pound of fat varies widely among individuals, with some fat people needing only about half as many "excess" calories to gain a pound compared with slim people. The rule that 3500 kcal equals one pound of fat is preached like dogma in every piece of popular diet literature and in many medical reports, but it is not true, at least not in the human body.

In our opinion, scientific knowledge about caloric intake and weight is in a state of chaos. Studies have been done using as few as two subjects(8), bias is often built into the experiment (as when the subjects are fat hospital patients and the "controls" are thin nurses)(9), and no attempt is made to distinguish between dieters and non-dieters. Garrow concludes, and we agree, that "the literature gives no evidence of any relationship between energy intake and body weight in man [sic]."(10) Any research that assumes there is such a relationship is based on prejudice, not science.

However, being fat we also have our own life experiences as a source of knowledge. We have always known slim people who eat more than we (as well as slim people who eat less). We have experienced days of compulsive eating interrupting years of severe dieting, and thought that this "proved" that we were fat because of "neuroses" leading to excess calories. However we have also experienced years of mild, steady calorie deprivation during which we ate less than most slim people and remained fatter. Therefore, although the literature alone does not support any conclusion about calorie intake and weight, our own experience supports A.M. Bryans' statement: "When food intakes of obese individuals were accurately assessed and compared with people of normal [sic] weights, the intakes were identical. There are thin people who eat excessively, 'He has a huge appetite and never puts on a pound'--and there are fat people who eat too much. Likewise there are thin people and fat people who have small appetites. The average fat person is euphagic."(11)

If fat people's caloric intakes do not generally exceed thin people's, it is obviously absurd to blame obesity on specific eating behaviors not found in slim people that presumably result in excessive caloric intake. This absurdity is the foundation of virtually all psychological literature concerning "causes" of obesity. Behaviorists such as Rodin assume that the "excessive caloric intake" is due to specific eating behaviors not found in slim people (caused ultimately by vulnerability to external food-related stimuli not found in slim people). Psychologists of the various psychoanalytic schools assume that this "excessive caloric intake" is due to compulsive eating based in "neuroses."

From our experiences as fat people knowing how it feels to be continually on reducing diets and at the same time continually accused of eating too much, we can propose an explanation for the contradiction that psychologists ignore: The bizarre eating behaviors of fat people in the experiments cited by Rodin are indicators of the guilt, paranoia and hunger enforced on fat people by the constant pressure to diet. Our opinion is supported by the following recent studies (among others):

Hibscher and Herman (1976) finding that dieters, regardless of weight, consume more food after a calorie-rich pre-load than without the pre-load--this is an eating behavior that has characteristically been attributed to fat people and has been labeled a form of "compulsive eating"--while non-dieters, both fat and thin, responded to the pre-load in the "normal" manner of eating less after it.(12)

Jacobs and Sharma (1969) finding that starved dogs and rats, offered either good-tasting or bad-tasting chow, ate much more good-tasting chow and much less bad-tasting chow than animals that had not been starved.(13) This experiment with animals parallels classic experiments by Hashim and Van Itallie(14) and Nisbett(15) in which fat people were shown to be more responsive to taste than to hunger; from such studies Schachter theorized that fat people are more vulnerable than thin people to food-related stimuli and that this is why we are fat.

Nisbett (1974) re-analyzing the famous paper by Moore et. al., "Obesity, social class and mental illness," (1962) found that "almost exclusively, the overweight [sic] members of the middle and upper socioeconomic group are the ones who show excessive symptoms of emotional distress."(16) Nisbett interprets this as due to the chronic dieting and pressure to diet experienced by fat people in these socioeconomic groups. As further support he cites the greater degree of obesity among lower class fat people as compared with the upper and middle classes, and the virtual absence of such emotional distress among the lower class fat people.

Consequences

Obviously there is a controversy and it's not just academic. The scientific community provides the evidence to "justify" the continued expansion of the \$10 billion per year reducing industry.(17) This industry pours money back into research and publicity--only that research which makes good propaganda to make the big profits and keep the industry growing. Aside from economics, some other consequences of this symbiotic relationship between Academia and Capitalism include:

- 1) Fat people are despised and considered inferior. Because this is based on so-called "scientific evidence," the prejudice is often strongest among more educated, "enlightened" people who otherwise tend to be liberal or radical.
- 2) Fat people are discriminated against (in employment, education, health care, public accommodations and social intercourse, etc.) all seemingly "justified" and usually without legal recourse (because the doctors advise the courts).
- 3) Fat people are coerced into supporting the industry that victimizes us--the personal solution of dieting is offered as the way to escape from unbearable persecution.
- 4) The notoriously high morbidity and mortality rate among fat people--since reducing diets have a five year failure rate of 98-99 percent,(18) and since repeated dieting is acknowledged to be a cause of atherosclerosis, leading to heart attacks and strokes.(19)
- 5) The paralysis of fat people in the face of obvious persecution--thinking we "deserve" to be abused, and that the solution is yet another attempt at weight loss--the failure of which is still more proof that one "deserves" abuse.
- 6) The diagnosis of "mental illness" in fat people due to continually having to deny not only the emotion of rage in the face of oppression, but having to deny the physical reality of hunger in the face of repeated starvation (dieting).

Action

In light of the evidence cited above, we demand that the scientific community re-evaluate Rodin's findings, specifically:

- 1) What percent of fat subjects in her experiments are chronic dieters? of thin subjects?
- 2) To what extent does the prejudice of the experimenter influence the outcome of the experiment?
- 3) What are the assumptions that fat people who are subjects of such experiments bring into the laboratory situation, and how do these affect their behavior in the experiment?
- 4) Is there any correlation between the behavior of fat and thin subjects and physiological and biochemical indicators of hunger and stress?--i.e. stomach contractions, free fatty acid levels, insulin levels, etc.?

The scientific community is responsible for abuses perpetrated in its name and under its authority. These abuses include the defamation of a human minority, the mystification of oppression as unappreciated "help," and the enriching of an industry that is based on coercion. These abuses take place in the public and have shaped the public treatment of fat people and thus affect every aspect of our lives. The scientific community must take a public stand against deep-seated prejudice, against financial interests, and for the liberation of fat people.

--the New Haven Fat Liberation Front (September, 1977)

Footnotes

- (1) The Hartford Courant, "Obesity blamed on stimulants," August 29, 1977, p.1.
- (2) Garrow, J.S., *Energy Balance and Obesity in Man*, American Elsevier Publishing Company, 1974, pp. 84-85.
- (3) idem.
- (4) Passmore, et. al., "Energy utilization in overfed thin men." *British Journal of Nutrition*, vol. 9 (1955) pp. 20-26.
- (5) Passmore, et. al., "An analysis of the gain in weight of overfed thin young men," *British Journal of Nutrition*, vol. 9 (1955) PP. 27-37.
- (6) Passmore, et. al., "The effect of overfeeding on two fat young women," *British Journal of Nutrition*, vol. 17 (1963) pp. 373-383.
- (7) For example, Gwinup, Grant, "Effect of diet and exercise in the treatment of obesity," *Treatment and Management of Obesity*, George Bray, ed., Harper and Row, 1974, pp. 93-102.
- (8) Passmore, 1963.
- (9) Stunkard, et. al., "The night-eating syndrome; pattern of food intake among certain obese patients." *American Journal of Medicine*, vol. 19 (1955) pp. 78-86.
- (10) Garrow, p. 4.
- (11) Bryans, A. M. "Childhood obesity--prelude to adult obesity," *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, November 1967, p. 487 .
- (12) Hibscher, John A. and Herman, C. Peters "Obesity, dieting and the expression of 'obese' characteristics," *Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (1977) pp. 374-380.
- (13) Jacobs and Sharma, "Taste versus calories: sensory and metabolic signals in the control of food intake," *Annals of the New York Academy of Science* , Vol. 157 (1969) pp.1084-1125, cited in Nisbett, Richard E., "Starvation and the behavior of the obese," *Treatment and Management of Obesity*, George Bray, ed., Harper and Row, 1974, pp. 45-55.

- (14) Hashim, S.A. and Van Itallie, T.B., "Studies in normal and obese subjects with a monitored food dispensary device," *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, Vol. 131 (1965) pp. 654-661.
- (15) Nisbett, R.E., "Taste, deprivation and weight determinants of eating, behavior, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 10 (1968) pp. 98-106.
- (16) Nisbett, R.E., "Starvation and the behavior of the obese," *Treatment and Management of Obesity*, George Bray, ed., Harper and Row, 1974, pp. 50-57.
- (17) Allon, Natalie, "Tensions in Interactions of overweight adolescent girls," *Women and Health*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (March-April, 1976) p. 14.
- (18) Feinstein, Alvan, "How do we measure accomplishment in weight reduction?" *Obesity: Causes, Consequences and Treatment*, Louis Lasagna, ed., Medcom Press, 1974, p. 86.
- (19) U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, *Obesity and Health*, Public Health Service Report #1485, 1966, p. 40.

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