



Obsession with weight reaches ridiculous level

The recent fen-phen issue shows our need for the easy way out.

The diet drug craze and dangerous weight loss fetish of the '90s is quickly spinning into a ridiculous whirlwind. The FDA pulled fen-phen, the revolutionary diet drug, from the market early this month. Their reasons: dangerous side effects, such as severely swollen ankles and chronic chest pain. Recently

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doctors discovered fen-phen could damage heart valves and tissue of the heart. This find has prompted 175,000 former fen-phen users to demand echocardiograms, a test that can run up a bill of \$800.

This week the FDA announced it plans to study whether or not fen-phen is linked to birth defects. The study was prompted by a \$67 million lawsuit filed by a Long Island woman against her diet center, the drugs' manufacturer and the local distributor, claiming she was not told of fen-phen's risks. There are, to date, three cases of children born with defects to mothers who took diet drugs.

The fact that this drug even exists is absurd. The American public has taken laziness to a new height. Eating right and exercising is a weight loss method of the past. Liquid diets and starvation have been thrown out the window. Even good old-fashioned bulimia has been put aside in favor of phen-fen. Up until last month weight loss could be confined to your own recliner. Does anyone else feel that it is an outrage that this drug has a market? Why can't people take the initiative to eat some salad or run on the treadmill for twenty minutes?

An even more surprising fact: Dr. James L. Weis who runs the echocardiology lab at Johns Hopkins University reported that "many uninsured students were unable to pay for heart tests." Why are so many students on this diet drug? Aren't we considered the more active than the middle aged and elderly population? Sure, the "freshman 15" takes its toll on more than one person's thighs, but in order to receive a prescription for fen-phen, a patient must be diagnosed as chronically obese.

Perhaps a little more absurd than a magic weight-loss pill is the pressure students feel to maintain optimal weight. In a survey of 50-60 students, only 50 percent of the males and 10 percent of the females were satisfied with their bodies. This leaves a huge chunk of the population unhappy with their bodies, their weight and their self-image. There are over 17,000 diet plans in the United States. These industries prey upon overweight individuals, often setting ideal weight for them which is lower than the medically recommended weight. These industries bring in a total of three million dollars every year, proof that Americans, students included, desperately want to lose weight.

The magic-pill solution to weight loss no longer exists. Fen-phen is not only a risky drug with dangerous and expensive side effects — it's the easy way out of weight loss. Students put too much pressure on themselves and each other to achieve the "ideal weight." Is there any way we can escape from this Catch-22 of chancy pills and impossible ideals? Go for a jog!

Alcohol abuse results in alarming consequences

Measures must be taken to prevent more student deaths from alcohol.

Cable News Network and the morning papers report that a freshman student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology died after consuming multiple shots of high-proof alcohol which sent him into an alcohol-induced coma.

His blood level was a toxic .41, quite enough to

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short-circuit breath and pulse. The frightening event occurred at a fraternity party. The chapter is now shut down and all alcohol events suspended pending an investigation.

Yeah, I know, that was way up there in New England, and the recent death of an Louisiana State University student under similar circumstances was down in Baton Rouge. And, besides, that would not, does not, happen around here.

Bull! In my position as judicial advisor for the past two years, I have periodically reviewed reports frighteningly similar to the two above.

The only difference? Our student passed out, was carried away or was assisted to the Health Services in time to stop the poisoning that was well under way. And remember, I'm at the end of the pipeline, seeing only those cases detected and reported. I shudder to think what the real numbers are.

Now, look me in the eyes and deny the following statement if you can.

Individuals, except the very sick ones, seldom set out in a "solitary" attempt to consume 10 shots in 10 minutes. My experience tells me that they regularly do it in the company of others who suggest strongly, in various ways, that it will somehow make them "more acceptable" to some constituency.

And, almost always, the person so poisoned, so abused, so little valued (except as someone's entertainment) will do almost anything to avoid implicating the real culprits. This shows tremendous misplaced loyalty (or is it fear of retaliation or alienation).

We are doing it to ourselves, to our own, to "Wake Forest people." And some of us are even bold enough to defend the practice as a harmless part of the "college experience." Even some who are old enough, and supposedly wise enough, to know better.

Yet the hot debate at present is not over the reality of abusive activities and the need for a concerted effort to do something about it before we kill one of our own.

No, we are all being drawn into a well-intentioned concern that, somehow, a reinvigorated enforcement of existing standards of party management will create abuse where there was none or greatly exacerbate a minor problem.

Wake up, parents, alumni, faculty, students! If we are to save Wake Forest the grief, the shame, the extremely adverse publicity that goes along with an event like the ones above, we cannot afford to delay even one day. We owe it to each other on humanitarian grounds to stop the abuse. But if we need to express the urgency in purely practical terms, here goes.

Fraternity and sorority members, look at MIT. Chapters and parties are shut down when the crisis

occurs — the fun is over, but the grief has only begun (not to mention the litigation). Alumni, Student Development, Admissions and Public Relations — the reputation and respect built up over hundreds of years can come crashing down with one news release, and we can kiss the "rankings" goodbye.

But that's too crass. The university really is a different place and we all love it for mostly the right reasons. Shouldn't we be proud enough to make it truly unique? To show the academic world and the nation at large that we truly care enough about each other to be the first institution to truly attack the insidious culture of abuse which has already killed elsewhere and lurks even now in the very shadows of Wait Chapel? What greater legacy could any class, or Student Government, or Parents' Council leave than the development of a real program to acknowledge, define and defeat the curiously invisible monster among us.

But that would take real leadership and, even more critically, courage. Does anybody care enough to take it on? Is this university worth it?

Let me be clear. This is not a Greek issue or a Student Government or an administration issue. It is a total community concern.

If we truly want to prevent the inevitable, we cannot afford to talk with several voices or act at cross purposes. The subject of alcohol abuse is something we must not deny or avoid by focusing on party management, which can have only a minimal effect on the kind of activity we're talking about.

And by the way, we dodged a bullet this weekend. I'm talking fifteen shots of 100 proof vodka in thirty minutes. How close did that come to hitting us squarely in the heart?

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Solitaire addiction is cause for legislation

The bill indicates a deeper problem of laziness in the workplaces of our society.

In the movie *Live and Let Die*, James Bond learned how dangerous it can be to play solitaire. Solitaire, you see, was a tarot-reading mistress of seduction who was jealously guarded by a couple of pimpin'

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New Orleans crime bosses.

Now, senators Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) and Lauch Faircloth (R) — who are just slightly less pimpish — have introduced legislation that would make it illegal for government employees to play computer solitaire at work, and would require all federal offices to remove games from computers. The senators are overreacting to this newest, imaginary computer-related plague: solitaire addiction.

But if congress passes this bill, it will be prescribing an ineffective medicine based upon a false diagnosis. People who claim to be solitaire-addicted actually suffer from a much broader, ancient disease called laziness.

Laziness is just as common as the

cold. It's a part of the human psychological ambient and it lurks in our systems waiting for an opportunity to become symptomatic.

One acute form of laziness, for instance, can make the afflicted feel an undeniable urge to do six weeks' worth of laundry the night before a big test when he or she ought to be studying.

Since most office environments lack overflowing clothes hampers, lazy employees invent and avail themselves of literally hundreds of ways to avoid their responsibilities. Some make paperclip chains, others make giant spheres with rubber bands and some lazy employees will inevitably turn to computers.

It is only our fascination with a relatively new information conduit that fools us into making an excuse for people who are both uninspired and digitally-inclined. Congress would never try to outlaw paperclip addiction, rubber band dependence or water cooler syndrome. Those afflictions would make for bad political posturing.

And they would make for even worse news reporting. NBC took the initiative to break this alarmist story on a *Night-side* report. They interviewed several people who had lost their jobs because of solitaire addiction, and in the any-quote-is-a-good-quote mentality that so pervades fluff journalism, they actually solicited a response from Microsoft, since it is the company that packages the offending game with the Windows Operating System.

I didn't actually hear or read what the NBC reporter asked of the Microsoft

representative, but it probably was something like, "What can you do help the suffering people? Have you no power to stop this wave of mutilation that you so carelessly put in motion?"

I did read the Microsoft written statement, which said essentially "We're really glad people like playing games with Windows. If you don't like it, stop. Now excuse us while we get busy making crazy, booty-butt-naked kinds of money."

Business computers should be used for business, and games don't belong on machines in government offices, but if it takes a law to coerce managers into holding employees responsible to their jobs, a phantom epidemic is probably the least of our worries.

The games may be trivial, but the law to stop them is not. In seriousness, if the federal government recognizes and validates "computer addiction" enough to pass a law about it, it is a very short and easily argued step to protect the computer-addicted under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The result would be a workplace further choked by ridiculous political concerns that make productivity next to impossible.

But before we allow victims and lawmakers to blame computers for stealing their drive and motivation, we better make sure they had some to begin with.

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