

HAPPY WEYMOUTH, HAPPY WAPO

The woman who brought us the Pay2Play Salons is also bringing us—or rather, bringing advertisers—nothing but happy stories.

At least that's what I take away from this WaPo story, which works hard to deny that a story about a young woman cheerfully adjusting to body image issues after amputation was spiked because Katharine Weymouth had decreed that the WaPo Magazine needed to have happy stories. But the story reveals that Weymouth wasn't just spiking one story, she was delivering nothing but happy stories for her advertisers.

Weymouth, publisher of The Post, told the story's author, freelance journalist Matt Mendelsohn, at a brunch earlier this year that advertisers "wanted happier stories, not 'depressing' ones," Mendelsohn wrote in an online posting. His story was about a 26-year-old woman whose arms and legs had been amputated.

Weymouth said Monday night that any impact she had was "completely inadvertent, because I would never interfere in an editorial decision and I had no intention of interfering." She said that she had not even read Mendelsohn's story, but that she had "used it as an example" with editors "of the kind of fare we should be moving away from."

The rest of the story features two editors describing a significant shift in direction.

Brauchli said the story was caught in a "big shift" at the Sunday magazine after its previous editor took early retirement this year and during a change in editorial emphasis.

[snip]

Sydney Trent, the magazine's acting editor at the time, said she declined to run the story "because it was clear the newspaper wanted to move in a different direction.

But the best explanation for what that big shift is is away from stories about dwarves getting their legs lengthened and away from "overly long, overly narrow" stories. Or, alternately, that the WaPo has adopted, as a general policy, a happy-only policy.

In case you're wondering, this story does not mention any discussion about quality.