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Editorial

Obesity discourse and fat politics: research, critique and interventions

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EDITORIAL

Obesity discourse and fat politics: research, critique and interventions

Challenging the dominant narrative

Since the WHO (1998) lamented the so-called ‘obesity epidemic’ over a decade ago, there has been much rhetoric and concern about fatness/weight/obesity across an increasing range of national contexts.¹ Alarmist claims about an ‘obesity time-bomb’ are continually recycled in policy reports, reviews and white papers, each of which begin with the assumption that fatness is fundamentally unhealthy and damaging to national economies (UK examples include: AMRC 2013; Foresight 2007; HOC 2004). This rhetoric and the associated moral panic have been amplified by a dramatising mass media (Boero 2012; also, see Boero in this issue) and have in no way dissipated even though certain ‘sceptics’ maintain the ‘crisis’ is coming to an end (Gard 2011; for a critique, see Lupton 2013). Recent examples of what Saguy and Almeling (2005) call ‘fat panic’ are not difficult to find. In February 2013, shortly before we finalised this special issue, the AMRC (2013, 7) released a well-publicised report, *Measuring Up*, which reiterated the dominant view: fatness is ‘a problem of epidemic proportions’ that ‘must now be tackled urgently’. Similar to earlier manifestations of fat panic (see McPhail 2009, for example), these public health concerns intersect with broader political economic anxieties about poor *national* fitness, with the UK labelled as ‘the “fat man” (*sic*) of Europe’ (AMRC 2013, 3). This document, like others before it, legitimises calls for various interventions to tackle the ‘problem of obesity’ (e.g. intensified surveillance inside and outside of the clinic, including injunctions that healthcare professionals must attend to their own weight); interventions which aim to literally reduce the number of bodies of ‘size’ and the size of individuals’ bodies (Evans and Colls 2009).



1. There are important differences in terminology that warrant note here. Medicalised accounts tend to use the terms 'obesity' and 'overweight', since these terms refer not only to the size of a body, but also that it is diseased or at increased risk of disease. Critical work, such as that within this special edition, problematises the use of these terms, and where we use them here, we do so with caution – using them when we are referring to academic or policy work which labels bodies as such, or branches of social science that challenge obesity science on its own terms. We are critical of these biomedical terms and the pathologisation of bodies on the basis of size. More often within the social sciences the term 'fat' is used by writers in order to distance themselves from biomedical categories and for fat activists, it is used as part of a political strategy to reclaim the word, transforming it into a marker of pride thereby countering its use to stigmatise particular bodies (Cooper 2010).

2. Not all of the papers in this special issue were presented as part of this seminar series, and there are some presented that are not included here. Most presentations from the seminar series are available as audio/video files for download from the website:

http://www.dur.ac.uk/geography/research/researchprojects/fat_studies_and_health_at_every_size/ [Grant No. RES-451-26-0768]



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Source: Oxford University Press

Men and the War on Obesity

Source: Routledge

Fat Studies

Source: Wiley

Think of the Hippopotamus: Rights Consciousness in the Fat Acceptance Movement

Source: Wiley

‘Physician Heal Thyself’, Part 2: Debating clinicians’ bodyweight

Source: Springer Science and Business Media LLC

Neoliberalism, public health, and the moral perils of fatness

Source: Informa UK Limited

Adolescents’ Perspectives on Personal and Societal Responsibility for Childhood

Obesity — The Study of Beliefs through ‘Serious’ Game (PlayDecide)

Source: Wiley

Bodily sensibility: vocabularies of the discredited male body

Source: Informa UK Limited

Big Handsome Men, Bears and Others: Virtual Constructions of ‘Fat Male Embodiment’

Source: SAGE Publications

Human vulnerabilities, transgression and pleasure

Source: Informa UK Limited

‘Change4Life for your kids’: embodied collectives and public health pedagogy

Source: Taylor & Francis

Big Girls Having Fun: Reflections on a ‘fat accepting space’

Source: Edinburgh University Press

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All the News that’s Fat to Print: The American “Obesity Epidemic” and the Media



Source: Springer Science and Business Media LLC

Fat is a Sociological Issue: Obesity Rates in Late Modern, 'Body-Conscious' Societies

Source: Springer Science and Business Media LLC

'Looking alright, feeling alright': emotions, sizing and the geographies of women's experiences of clothing consumption

Source: Routledge

Healthism and the medicalization of everyday life

Source: SAGE Publications

Happy Re-birthday: Weight Loss Surgery and the 'New Me':

Source: SAGE Publications

Food

Source: SAGE Publications

Everyday Politics of Fat

Source: Wiley

The epidemiology of overweight and obesity: public health crisis or moral panic?

Source: Oxford University Press (OUP)

Ideology, obesity and the social determinants of health: a critical analysis of the obesity and health relationship

Source: Informa UK Limited

Monitoring the 'diabetes epidemic': A framing analysis of United Kingdom print news 1993-2013

Source: Public Library of Science (PLOS)

Materialising bodies: the intersection and the work of fat (F+M)

Source:

Measuring the impact of anti-obesity interventions on body mass index (BMI) in

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Extending the obesity debate, repudiating misrecognition: Politicising fatness and health (practice)

Source: Springer Science and Business Media LLC

Education, Disordered Eating and Obesity Discourse

Source: Routledge

Introduction: Questioning Obesity Politics

Source: Wiley

From Theory to Policy: Reducing Harms Associated with the Weight-Centered Health Paradigm

Source: Informa UK Limited

Material Feminism, Obesity Science and the Limits of Discursive Critique

Source: SAGE Publications

Framing the mother: childhood obesity, maternal responsibility and care

Source: Informa UK Limited

Outsize/Outside: Bodily bignesses and the emotional experiences of British women shopping for clothes

Source: Informa UK Limited

Fat, queer, dead: 'obesity' and the death drive

Source: Edinburgh University Press

Weighing Health: The Moral Burden of Obesity

Source: Informa UK Limited

Why a Journal on Fat Studies

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