

calls for change while taking the focus off individual behaviour and putting it squarely on the cultural systems that create those stories?

With much of this information being new to many readers, the least we can hope for is that this book will become an important first step into the entire existence of and need for a fat justice movement. At the next level, we can hope that the data and statistics Gordon uses so freely finally offer the needed proof that our institutional and individual beliefs about obesity and health are one hundred percent incorrect.

And still, there is a deeper narrative here. It is less overt, and the greatest hope of impact we have, from this book, is that it does not get lost. This narrative positions anti-fat bias as a volatility in the eruption of the moral panic that created the obesity epidemic. Like all moral panics, the narratives around the obesity epidemic are one hundred percent based on imagined threats, center around a moral consensus that fat people are to blame and that something must be done, and disproportionately harm a not-small particular subset of our population.

If the reader sees this narrative, it will be easy to believe in the visions of a better world, and the first steps to achieve it that Gordon lays out in the final chapter. For these readers, answering her call to action, the last line—“So let’s get to work”—will be a given.

Endnotes

¹ From her “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” speech, delivered at the Second Sex Conference, 1979.

² From her “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” speech, delivered at the Second Sex Conference, 1979.

BEING FAT: WOMEN, WEIGHT AND FEMINIST ACTIVISM IN CANADA

Jenny Ellison
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020

REVIEWED BY ANGELA STANLEY

This book is an excellent historical review of fat activism in Canada. Once you familiarize yourself with the many acronyms used, the book is an easy and informative read. Jenny Ellison discusses tensions within the fat activism movement, from its origins to the growth of the fat acceptance branch of the movement. She then goes on to discuss the movement’s impacts on and responses to health, healthcare, femininity, sexuality, and sexual expression. The book also looks at exercising and purchasing clothing, taking these seemingly simple acts and filtering them through a fat activism lens.

Ellison introduces the book with an overview of fat activism and locates it within feminist ideals about body liberation, human rights, and femininity. She is explicit in stating that this book only examines the time period of 1977–1997. She acknowledges the movement in later years, but her analysis focuses on the early decades of activism. This serves to ground the reader in the historical moment under discussion.

It is particularly interesting to this reader that even as the book offers an important and critical historical analysis of fat activism, Ellison’s work was criticized for not being rigorous enough due to the time period covered. But the author contends that 1980s fat activism coincided with second wave feminist activism in Canada, a time when fatness was largely overlooked as it was deemed

to be an individual failing and not a social justice or human rights issue. This thread of dismissal runs through each chapter as the author shows repeatedly that fat bodies have always been marginalized in healthcare, fashion, and other facets of life, and even in feminist organizing, despite the majority of fat activists being female.

The term fat oppression, defined as a form of stigmatization, marginalization, and discrimination experienced by individuals in their everyday lives, is used by the author as the foundation to traverse this twenty-year time period. The author questions the overwhelming whiteness, the absence of men, and the middle-class nature of this activism. Because she uses interviews with key activists throughout the book, she is also able to reflect this narrow focus in her questions to them; what emerges are not pat answers about historical context, but instead an awareness of exclusion that the reader is also invited to sit with and reflect on.

Chapters One and Two highlight important milestones in fat activism. Weight was not seen as an important part of feminist action in the early years, as discussions about femininity and sexualization did not address size and sizeism. The four approaches to weight as outlined by fat activists—“fat oppression,” “weight obsession,” “weight preoccupation,” and “performativity”—not only permeate the rest of the chapters but also show the shifts in feminist activism, its impact on fat activism and the subsequent shift to fat acceptance. However, Ellison notes that regardless of what approach was being used, axes of oppression, gender, and body size were at the heart of the movement.

Of particular note is the author’s discussion of fat exclusion in lesbian spaces. The links between fatphobia and dating are taken up more explicitly in Chapter Three. This chapter discusses the complications of fat

dating and relationships. Ellison further complicates the question by introducing the idea of “fat pride” to argue that rejection and isolation still exist even as fat discrimination is identified. Moreover, a shift to fat acceptance and concrete strategies that allow individuals to feel accepted are needed to fully engage in the notion and practice of fat pride.

Lastly, the concepts and experience of fatness in everyday life were thoroughly discussed in the remaining chapters. These chapters critiqued the fashion, medical, and fitness industries for not catering to fat people and often engaging in harmful practices against them. Folks engaged in the work of fat acceptance and fat liberation resisted the over-prescription of addictive drugs by physicians, the constant pressure to exercise despite the fact that exercises and exercise classes for fat bodies hardly exist, and the belief that fat people should only dress in drab billowing sacks, among other issues.

Although this text is an historical analysis of one twenty-year period, it convincingly argues that the body positivity and fat acceptance movements have not depoliticized the fat activism movement, but instead offer an important addendum to naming and organizing around fat oppression. More than this, Ellison explores and troubles the taken-for-granted notions of fat pride and inserts an intersectional critique to show the limitations of this movement during the 1977–1997 period. The book also offers an avenue for further research into what she refers to as the “silences” and “missing histories” of the fat activism movement.

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FAT STUDIES IN CANADA: (RE)MAPPING THE FIELD

Editors: Allison Taylor, Kelsey Ioannoni, Calla Evans, Ramanpreet A. Bahra, Amanda Scriver, and May Friedman.

Toronto: Inanna Publications, Forthcoming May 2023.

REVIEWED BY ANDREA LAMARRE

In the Canadian context, Fat Liberation as a movement and Fat Studies as a discipline embed rich histories and deep connections between academic, activist, and artistic, community-based work. From *Pretty Porky and Pissed Off's* stage-setting work on fat representation (Taylor & Mitchell) to interdisciplinary scholarship exploring fat body stories (e.g., Andrews & Friedman), pushing back against alarmist “obesity epidemic” discourses (e.g., Ellison et al.), and thickening connections between fatness and social justice (e.g., Friedman et al.), Fat Studies continue to offer vital perspectives that centre and celebrate fatness. *Fat Studies in Canada: (Re)Mapping the Field* collects and extends a body of scholarship and activist art around fatness in Canada. The volume features chapters that build on each other to weave a tapestry of theoretical, personal, and embodied responses to the provocation of what it means to be fat in Canada. I was compelled by the resistance this volume offers to calls for easy answers—how it pushes into and embraces complexity and asks critical questions.

To position myself as a reviewer, I am an early career academic and eating disorder researcher; I am a white, thin, cisgender woman with lived experience of an eating disorder. I do not claim expertise over what it means or feels like to be fat—those

who are best equipped to teach and research in this area are fat people. This volume is an incredible resource that centres the vitality of fatness and that generously invites the reader into various lived experiences of fatness. Importantly, the book offers a balance between deconstruction and hope, offering meditations on potential future directions for fat activism and communities in Canada.

Throughout the volume, creators offer artistic interventions, including poems and visual art, echoing the importance of art to fat activism both in and beyond Canada (Edison and Notkin; Jones and Pausé; Taylor and Mitchell). These contributions are interspersed with rich prose offerings that bring together academic and personal, lived, embodied experiences. Essays and articles draw on a body of research from across the social sciences and humanities. Together, the collection speaks on multiple registers to its readers.

The interdisciplinary nature of the volume is a key strength. Literary analyses, including an exploration of the constructions of fatness and slimness in Anne of Green Gables (Bruusgaard) and an analysis of fatness and social class in Québec (Laurin), anchor the volume in Canadian popular culture. A critical policy analysis (Ioannoni) and response to the 2020 Obesity Canada Guidelines (Carson) offer clear policy suggestions and directions grounded in fat studies. Particularly relevant to the pandemic landscape in which the volume was written is Tidgwell and Shanouda's reflection on COVID-19 triage protocols, which lays bare the horror of hierarchizing bodies in COVID-19 responses and offers concrete strategies for re-imagining an ethical response.

Another key strength of the volume is its engagement with social justice across various spaces of belonging. For instance, in a duoethnographic contri-