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Book Review

Fat Matters: From Sociology to Science Edited by Gina Tsichlia and Alexandra M. Johnstone



Reviewed by: Brittney Hansen*

Tsichlia, Gina and Alexandra M. Johnstone (Eds.). *Fat Matters: From Sociology to Science*. M & K Update Ltd., 2010, 144 pp., \$45.00 paperback.

Fat Matters is a multi-faceted book written by a range of experts that examines the underlying factors behind the 'Obesity Epidemic'. The aim of the book is to review in a systematic way different aspects of this growing issue from a variety of angles, from sociology, through medicine to technology. Each chapter attempts to define, explain, or present ways to remedy some aspect of the current obesity epidemic plaguing the United Kingdom and the United States. An underlying concept that is mentioned frequently throughout the text is the influence of the media on what society feels is acceptable in terms of how an individual feels about the way they look.

In this text there is not a direct thesis question to be answered, but the goal of reviewing the 'Obesity Epidemic' is obtained. Not only does the text define and explain obesity from a sociological and scientific perspective, it presents new and upcoming research that can further our understanding of obesity and how to curb its detrimental effects for the individual and society as a whole. The book also presents an introduction into a new field of research by arguing that obesity is not only a sociological phenomenon but also a psychological one. This

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research is relatively new and through further study can provide important insights into obesity that are currently unknown. In addition to current and upcoming research the text delves into the current public debate regarding obesity and who is to blame. The debate focuses on whether or not obesity is to be blamed on the individual themselves or the society that influences that individual and enables them to become obese. Much research has shown that obesity is a social construct and is greatly influenced by society.

Although the text is a summary of many separate endeavors within the topic of obesity, I found it to be put together well. The key points of the book were well supported; each point that was emphasized was backed with valid research. Media and cultural influence on obesity seemed to be a central theme throughout the text and it was validated through a variety of studies. An average person without a medical or sociological background could read the text and understand the research and views presented.

Fat Matters had both its strengths and weaknesses. I felt its main strength was the fact that it was relatively easy to read and understand. Another is the presentation of obesity through many different lenses to illustrate the complexity of the issue; there are many underlying, contributing factors in addition to those that are more obvious. The main weakness of the text is the difference in writing styles from chapter to chapter. Although the topics fit together well, I found it difficult sometimes to transition from one author's writing style to the next. In addition, many topics were covered in the book relatively quickly and could have been presented in greater depth. I felt that much more information could have been presented that would have been not only interesting, but informative to the reader.

Fat Matters does not necessarily make a great contribution to the field of sociology or medical sociology, but it is an adequate introduction into one of the subfields in medical sociology. It is ideal for individuals interested in understanding a sociological perspective of a

common medical condition. A Medical Sociology professor could use this text as a resource for his/her students to see how a common medical issue is viewed through a sociological lens.

Fat Matters is a compilation of literary works on the subject of obesity in the UK and the US; its point is to review the obesity epidemic and the multiple factors that tie into it. I feel it succeeds in this mission. It covers a lot of ground in 10 relatively short chapters and provides a decent introduction into obesity as a social phenomenon.