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## CONNECTING GENDER AND FAT

### Feminism, Intersectionality, and Stigma

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In the early days of the coronavirus quarantine, my Facebook feed was inundated with postings about the effects of both—Covid and the quarantine—on jobs, on health, on social connection. The fear was palpable. Amidst all the headlines and dire information, another thread appeared—about the bodies that would be produced during months of inactivity and nervous snacking. One was a chubby dog, clad in green bikini bottoms: “Due to coronavirus my summer body will be postponed until 2021. Thank you for understanding.” Another showed Batman grown large, a hairy belly hanging over a too tight yellow waistband. In yet another, captioned in both Italian and English, we see a buff, swaggering man dancing erotically; after the quarantine we see him fattened, his proud stance looking goofy. There was a separate thread of Barbie dolls, blonde hair, and pink dresses, the “before” slender with a tiny waist and perky breasts—the “after” a doll with a double chin and droopy chest. And one showed a woman pulling up a pair of jeans: “When none of your jeans fit after being quarantined so now you have thigh high boots.” I imagine people posted these memes to encourage a moment of laughter, imagining that a bit of fat shaming would ease the burden of a tremendously frightening period. But they also illuminate a pulsating cultural anxiety about fatness. Indeed, in these memes, the dread of a fattened body scurries alongside other fears—of lost jobs and evictions, of groceries hard to get, of air that carries dangerous particles, of unknown futures, of mortality. Even in this moment of danger, fat looms big. Indeed, in these memes fat marks death—both physical “morbidity” associated with “obesity,” and also social death, the becoming of an abhorrent body, a monster body, embarrassing and too much. And so much of that social death is connected to the way fatness messes up gender. Batman is no longer buff and masculine, but soft and hairy. The dancing man is no longer erotically seductive; he is goofy and embarrassing. The Barbie doll’s double

chin has cancelled her femininity; she looks “silly” in that precious pink dress. And the idea of awkwardly donned non-fitting jeans as sexually charged thigh boots is absurd. These newly fat bodies all “do” gender wrong.

These memes—and the way they worry over fat and gender—illuminate the general question that this volume addresses: What are the connections between fatness and gender? On a visceral level—the feelings that fat and gender evoke; on a structural level, the ways that fatness and gender not only relate but actually constitute each other; on an academic level—the association between these two fields of Gender Studies and Fat Studies? To begin on the academic level, these two fields, Gender Studies and Fat Studies, have a lot to say to each other, the former even having explicitly supported the founding of the latter. Gender Studies is rooted in more than 50 years of scholarship, activism, and institution building, if we note the establishment of the first women’s studies program at San Diego State University in 1972 and the creation of the National Women’s Studies Association in 1977 (Shuster and Van Dyne 1985). Of course, the study of gender has a much longer history, if we choose to look at the history of women’s resistance to patriarchy—just in a North American and European context we could go back to Simone de Beauvoir’s (1949) *The Second Sex*, the 19th and 20th century struggles for women’s suffrage and its attendant multitude of writings that accompanied the activism, the voices of Black feminist activists like Ida B. Wells Barnett in the early 20th century and Sojourner Truth almost a century before in the 1850s (Guy-Sheftall 1995). But even if we address solely its *academic* founding, Gender Studies has a much longer history than Fat Studies, with a legacy of just over 20 years, if we take as its institutional “founding” the publication of Esther Rothblum’s and Sondra Solovay’s *The Fat Studies Reader* in 2009 and the first issue of the interdisciplinary journal *Fat Studies* in 2012. Both these academic fields share a number of crucial attributes: an indebtedness to the activists who pushed for the founding of the academic disciplines, a commitment to liberation and anti-oppressive practices, a centering of the voices and experiences of those most affected. Within Gender Studies, the term “queer” has long been adopted, following the lead of the street activists who reclaimed this term from cultures that had used it as a disparaging weapon. And, likewise, Fat Studies has reclaimed the term fat—eschewing the term “obesity” as a medicalization and pathologizing of a normal bodily attribute and terms like “plump” or “round” as euphemistic terms that presume the horror of fatness.

Gender Studies and Fat Studies also share a core focus on intersectionality, to draw from the term that Kimberlé Crenshaw coined in 1991 to speak to the ways that the U.S. legal system limited the understanding of the complex and complicated ways that discrimination worked out in real people’s lives, whose identities were never just limited to “one” arena. How could an African American woman parse out the precise ways that either sexism or racism served as the source of discrimination in her workplace, when she knew it was an intertwined, inseparable mix of the two, Crenshaw asked. Both Gender Studies and Fat Studies

have been—from their respective origins—resoundingly criticized for centering the experiences and voices of white people for whom the discrimination on the basis of gender or of body size seem easier to “see.” Within a decade of their institutional foundings, both fields saw powerful voices resisting this white-centering in collections like, for Gender Studies, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua’s (1983) *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* and Lisa Albrecht and Rose Brewer’s (1990) *Bridges of Power: Women’s Multicultural Alliances* and, for Fat Studies, May Friedman, Carla Rice, and Jen Rinaldi’s (2020) *Thickening Fat: Fat Bodies, Intersectionality and Social Justice*.

Significantly, Fat Studies, and fat activism before it, found one of its most generative and welcoming homes within feminist activism and Gender Studies academic conferences and interdisciplinary departments. Elsewhere I have documented some of these histories in great detail, particularly the importance of feminist independent publishing to one of the most pathbreaking early texts that bridged fat activism and early Fat Studies, the 1983 anthology *Shadow on a Tightrope* (Farrell 2018). In the United States, the key Gender Studies academic organization, the National Women’s Studies Association, has had a Fat Studies “stream” since the first decade of the new millennium, with focused sessions on Fat Studies at the annual conference and a vibrant group of scholars and activists who share meals, ideas, and plans for both future scholarship and action. Introductory textbooks to the field of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies generally include at least one essay devoted to Fat Studies work. Verta Taylor, Nancy Whittier, and Leila Rupp’s (2019) *Feminist Frontiers*, for instance, published Johnston and Taylor’s essay on the Dove “Real Beauty” campaign and fat activism. L. Ayu Sarasati, Barbara Shaw, and Heather Rellihan’s (2020) *Introduction to Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies: Interdisciplinary and Intersectional Approaches* includes Kimberly Dark’s “Big Yoga Student.” And Susan Shaw and Janet Lee’s (2019) *Gendered Voices, Feminist Visions* anthologizes both Susie Orbach’s early “Fat Is Still a Feminist Issue” and Francis Ray White’s “The Future of Fat Sex.”

Of course, just as there are fundamental disagreements within these two fields, significant points of divergence exist between the two areas. The presumptions of one particularly well-known gender theorist, the late Lauren Berlant, are so at odds with Fat Studies scholarship that it’s difficult to imagine the synchronicities between the two fields. Berlant describes “obesity” as a form of “slow death,” a result of the inexorable pressure of capitalism that exhorts people to try to find some release in “sex, spacing out, [and] food that is not for thought.” These kinds of characterizations of the fat person as inherently on the road to death, as lacking in control or good choices, are the precise types of assertions that Fat Studies scholars not only abhor but see as their object of inquiry and interrogation (Berlant 2007). For the most part, though, scholars in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies sees Fat Studies as an allied field because it is recognized as another layer fundamental to the diversity of gendered experience. As Verta Taylor and her co-editors write in the introduction to *Feminist Frontiers*, the field emphasizes

the “diversity of women’s experiences and the intersection of gender with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, and ability.” Even if not everyone who is fat identifies as fat (or, as Marilyn Wann put it in her 1998 pathbreaking *Fat!So?*, has “come out” as fat—a topic taken up by one of the contributors for this volume, Rachele Salvatelli), for Gender Studies scholars fat is definitely another nexus of potential and real discrimination and another site that bares the lie that anyone experiences life “solely” as a gendered being outside the range of intersecting histories and experiences.

In *Unbearable Weight*, written before Fat Studies had coalesced as a field, Susan Bordo (2003) wrote that fat is “a women’s issue: Fat is a gendered issue. Often immediately thought of as fat is a women’s issue. It certainly is. But if it’s a women’s issue, it means it is a gendered issue.” In these pithy sentences, Bordo was getting at the cruel facts of discrimination and experience that were clear even then: women suffer more than men from weight-based discrimination, women take part in weight loss clinics more than men, women have more trouble than men finding sexual and life partners if they are fat. Today we can point to even higher stakes, as Nikkolette Lee discusses in her essay in this volume, with many more women than men undergoing debilitating weight loss surgeries, from liposuction to extraordinary gastric bypass and stomach banding. This collection of essays certainly confronts some of these difficult facts, including the reality that mothers are particularly blamed for not only their own weight “issues” but those of their children and partners as well. But it also lingers on the second half of Bordo’s comment, that fat is a “gendered” issue. Indeed, scholars such as Jason Whitesel, whose essay on fat gay men’s fat-affirming cultures is included here, point out that weight-based discrimination and pressure to conform to sizing is not so much solely a generalizable division between men and women but has to do with gendering itself—that people whose sexual partners are men tend to have more negative experiences regarding weight, that people who identify as “femme,” no matter their gender, will experience more pressure to conform to smaller sizes, for instance.

Indeed, significant recent scholarship emphasizes the extent to which fat and gender not only relate but actually *constitute* each other. In their important essay “Embodying the Fat/Trans Intersection” in the anthology *Thickening Fat: Fat Bodies, Intersectionality, and Social Justice*, Francis White (2020) argues that we need to see fat as “an active producer, enabler, or even destroyer of gender.” White’s careful analysis illuminates the way that fat in the “right” places (breasts and hips for transwomen, for instance) actually creates a sense of gender, both an internal sense of gender and a gender recognizable and legible to people around them. And, in opposition, fat in the “wrong” places can wreak havoc with one’s internal sense of gender and the ways others “read” them—so much so that among the interviewees it was a consistent area of concern, prompting surgery and dieting. In their much earlier essay S. Bear Bergman’s writing (2009) shed light on the opposite phenomenon—the way that gender constituted fat. As they put it in their

pithy title, they were only a “part-time fatso,” observed as a “big guy” when read as male or masculine, but as a “fat so,” an object of pity and scorn, when read as female and feminine. In other words, what both White and Bergman reveal is that it’s not just that fatness and gender are related, it’s that they actually work as the building blocks of each other, the formative characteristics that constitute both a deep sense of self and the ways that one is perceived and read in the world.

Fat Studies and Gender Studies share a deep-seated concern with the question of humanity, or, to be more exact, with the question of who gets to be defined as *fully* human. As historians, philosophers, Critical Race scholars, and feminist scholars have explored, the *body* connotes meaning. The representation and reading of the body confers status, identity, and power. The problem of the *female body* has been the way it marks its bearer as a partial person, a “second” sex, to paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir, or, dependent upon its additional markings of age, nationality, and color, as a nonperson entirely. The problem of the *fat body* is this: within a Western context, fat is *irreconcilable* with personhood. Instead, fat works as a sign of a degenerate, primitive body, a state incommensurate with selfhood. The category of “body size” and of “gender,” then, are key signifiers of whether or not one is considered a full human or citizen, or only a “partial human being,” to draw from the term Erving Goffman used in his pathbreaking 1963 work *Stigma*.

All these classifications, of course, are deeply imbricated in the Enlightenment project of racialization, of the categorization of people and cultures in a hierarchical ordering from the most “civilized” to the most primitive, from the most human to the most animal-like, from the most perfected to those containing degenerate traits displaying a failure of evolution. Taking a look at almost any form of white-dominated literature, religious text, or philosophical treatise from the Enlightenment through the 20th century, one can see these ideas both explicitly and implicitly assumed, studied, and expressed. As I (2011) charted in my book *Fat Shame*, scientists like the French Georges Cuvier (particularly in his work “on” Sara Baartman) and the Italian Cesare Lombroso (in his work “on” prostitutes and women criminals) worked from a baseline presumption regarding the superiority of Europeans, the inferiority of women, and the meaningfulness of the body—particularly bodily fat—in providing “evidence based science” to prove their assertions about the inferiority of Africans, the biological degeneracy of sex workers, and the irrationality of women. The project of physiognomy—the study of human bodies for evidence of character traits and evolutionary status—was key to this process of racialization and gender-based hierarchicalization that provided the scientific rationale for entire systems of racialized empire, slavery, and the segregation and legal oppression of women and queer people within those racialized categories. As Sabrina Strings (2019) elaborates on in her carefully researched *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*, drawing from popular and scientific writings from the Renaissance through today, fatness has been continually marked as a sign of “savagery” and thinness as “beauty,” key

markers that masquerade as pure aesthetic judgments or as health values when they actually function fundamentally as tools in the oppressive discourse of race and gender science. And we can see these ideas at work, as Strings demonstrates, in everything from scientific journal articles to religious tracts to the popular articles found in magazines like *Harper's Bazaar*. Indeed, once one begins to note these connections, they can be seen everywhere. Just a few years ago, for instance, I was rereading Charlotte Brontë's 1847 classic novel *Jane Eyre* to accompany a younger family member on a summer reading requirement. And there it was again: the protagonist and heroine of the novel, Jane, is slim and white, dainty and fair skinned. The out of control, maniacal wife Bertha—the “madwoman in the attic” in the words of the literary scholars Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979)—is Caribbean, dark, and described as “oversized.” Both women are constrained by the legal and cultural force of the man of the house, Mr. Rochester, but only one—the light-skinned, the European, the slender, is allowed a place—legally and affectively—within the bounds of man in whose house they both reside. The trifecta of race, body size, and gender work closely together.

What is also noteworthy when following the example of Bertha within *Jane Eyre* is the extent to which Brontë seems to want to evoke in reader powerful emotions when considering her person and her situation. The most positive of these might be pity—who wants to see a person imprisoned or so unhappy—but more likely disgust at her behavior, outrage at her violence, fear at what she might do. Throughout this volume we will see these feelings discussed and interrogated—the visceral sensations of grossness and disgust at what Julia Kristeva (1982) called the abject, that which must be expelled or rejected in order to maintain a sense of self devoid of the reality of mortality and morbidity. And, indeed, one can even see clearly how this manifests into the very question of who deserves to be alive and whose lives deserve punishment and derision—whether we think of that as the constant belittlement and torment of TV shows like *The Biggest Loser*, to the torture and killing of Black people like Eric Garner at the hands of U.S. police, to the ways that a neo-Nazi writer described Heather Heyer, the woman killed at the Charlottesville, Virginia protest by another neo-Nazi, as a “fat, childless, 32-year old slut” and a “gross creature” (Khazan 2014; Weber 2017). In other words, the derogatory presumptions about fatness in circulation within Western cultures are linked to historic ideas about race and gender and generate (and legitimate) extraordinarily oppressive behaviors (Mollow 2017).

Even as we discuss the ways these categories—fatness, race, gender—intersect and construct each other, and even as we pay careful attention to the fundamental way that the origins of fat stigma are linked to the historical construction of racialization and gendering—we must also attend to the fact that over time these connections have changed shape. Even in the United States, where the “war on obesity” has gained steam since the late 20th century, there has also been an equally powerful alternative movement, one that advocates against discrimination and for new ways of understanding fatness. And these new ways of seeing fat

often uproot conventional ideas about gender as well; in her novel *Martha Moody*, for instance, Susan Stinson (1995) creates a world that welcomes queer identities, sexuality outside of monogamous heterosexuality, and the beauty and power of fat bodies. Moreover, as we ponder the significance and connections between fat and gender in this volume, we need to remember that the categories themselves are mutable, fluid, and historically situated; Susan E. Hill's essay in this collection on fat and gender in the ancient world gives us the starkest reminder of how we need to specify our historical location before drawing conclusions. And so many of our contributors, and Cat Pausé most explicitly, alert us to the powerful ways that transgender identities and body modification challenge any understanding of gender as static and unchanging. Fatness itself is a category that shape shifts, ranging from the fact that a person can be fat at one moment and, without changing size, thin in another (the "plus size" models that Amanda M. Czerniawski discusses, for instance, would be considered thin in any other context). But it's not just a question of relativity—people often choose to change size, from the men who work to hasten their fatness in Jason Whitesel's study of fat gay men's cultural arenas to the weight loss worlds that Ava Purkiss and Nikkolette Lee ask us so thoughtfully to consider. This volume, then, pushes forward a conversation about the connections between gender and fat even while attending to complexities—the complexities of intersectionality, particularly the ways that race and historic context shape the encounter—and the complexities of mutable categories, ones that can shape shift even as we pay close attention.

Both the fields of Gender Studies and Fat Studies share another characteristic along with a commitment to anti-oppressive practices—a rejection of false "objectivity." That is, both fields emphasize the importance in situating the writer and researcher as "knowers" whose lives, whose bodies, whose background influences how we see and understand the world, how we create the scholarship, from the questions we ask to the methods we use. This does not mean that one has to "be" a certain identity in order to do the work, but it does mean that one should be clear about the perspective from which one is writing. For me, as a cisgendered, heterosexual, middle aged white U.S. woman, I recognize the ways my position can blind me to oppressive presumptions and biased questions. And though I was bullied tremendously as a child for being fat, so I tangibly feel that pain when I write or think about fat children, my weight as an adult affords me both access to most everything I need (furniture, clothing, seating in public places) and the important attribute of being "unremarkable" in public settings, the important courtesy that Jeannine A. Gailey describes in her essay on hyper(in)visibility. Throughout the volume readers will notice how frequently the contributors note their own body size, experiences, or activism—sometimes in their contributor's notes, sometimes in the body of their essay—a practice observed within both Fat Studies and Gender Studies as a way to create what scholar Donna Haraway called in her pathbreaking 1988 essay "situated knowledge." Sometimes this acknowledgment of the way the author is situated will be explicit,

as in my description above; sometimes it will be brief but important, as when E. Cassandra Dame-Griff uses the term “our presence,” placing herself directly within the category of “Latina women”; sometimes it will constitute the bulk of the essay, as with Kimberly Dark’s autoethnography or Mara Mibelli and Chiara Meloni’s analysis of the fat activist group that they began in Italy. What connects each of these pieces, however, is an understanding that no scholar works from an omniscient place, outside of a context that will shape how one sees and understands the world. This is a perspective keenly important to both the Fat Studies and Gender Studies, fields which deny the separation of knowledge from embodiment and which emphasize the importance of listening to and learning from the most effected and marginalized within any historic moment.

The contributors to this volume come to their work not only with a diversity of lived experiences—as I note above—but also with a range of disciplinary perspectives, from history and literature to psychology and sociology. Some of the contributors identify explicitly as fat activists as well as scholars, though even if they deflect the identification as activist they are all keenly aware of fat stigma and its extraordinarily painful and widespread effects. Some of the essays come from people who primarily identify as artists, writers, and activists, an important point to note as much of the most powerful knowledge about fat and gender has originated far outside of academia. All of the contributors are English-speaking, though some make clear that English is not their first language or language of choice. This volume skews to the United States, but the volume also includes contributions from Canada, Finland, Italy, Israel, and New Zealand. The contributors identify as African American, Latinx, white, straight, and queer.

The first section of the volume focuses on some broad discourses of gender and fat, perspectives that can help readers to think about the conceptual ways that our understandings of gender and fat manifest themselves. Discourse refers to a way of constituting knowledge and understanding and is key to how power is produced and maintained. Language is the most obvious discursive formation, but there are also other discursive formations—from medical systems to social practices to religious theology and the list goes on. Significantly, as Stuart Hall explains, one might even consider the fact that “nothing exists outside of discourse”—which is not to mean that there is no physical reality, but rather that nothing has any *meaning* outside of discourse. So, a person’s body may have particular genitalia that we call either a vulva or a penis, but the meanings we attach to those parts, the assumptions we make about how the person identifies and comports themselves are discursive—the discourse of gender. Likewise, adipose tissue exists, but the meaning of that bodily tissue—as fat, as not-thin, as excess—are completely discursive. These discursive foundations frequently rely on binary distinctions—male v. female, thin v. fat, white v. Black, with one half of that binary carrying significantly more positive connotation. Significantly, various institutions both draw from already existing discourses about fat and about gender and *also*, in their laws, customs, and practices, work themselves discursively to shape the



parameters and lived experiences of both fat and gender (Foucault 1972; Hall 1997; Butler 1990).

## The Essays

In this first section of the volume, four scholars—Jeannine A. Gailey, Hannele Harjunen, Cat Pausé, and Da'Shaun L. Harrison—each speak to four broad discursive understandings of gender and fat, all of which help us to understand distinct ways to make sense of foundational, ideological shapings of these categories. Jeannine Gailey, in her essay “Hyper(in)visibility and the Gendered Fat Body,” illuminates the ways that contemporary U.S. and European cultures both highlight and demonize the gendered fat body and render it invisible, limiting the possibilities of what Erving Goffman called good “life chances.” Hannele Harjunen in her essay “Gendered Fat Bodies as Neoliberal Bodies” interrogates the ways that a neoliberal discourse, one focusing on individualism and self-promotion—have exacerbated and insidiously influenced anti-fat gendered experiences. Cat Pausé turns her attention to the queering of fatness, the ways that fat itself dismantles and reconstructs the discursive formation of gender itself as well as how people experience their own gendering. Da'Shaun L. Harrison confronts the fundamental antiblackness of gendered anti-fat discourses, illuminating the ways that this racial formation shapes every aspect of contemporary life, with particularly deleterious effects on Black people.

Following this section on “Discourses” the volume turns to a unit entitled “Narrative,” in which two extremely accomplished writers take us on a journey regarding the stories we and others tell about fat, about gender, and about their tangled connections. The ability to understand and reflect upon narrative is key to almost any kind of analysis of how fat and gender intertwine and to imagining new ways of experiencing and thinking about these categories. Kimberly Dark, in her piece which is both sociology and autoethnography, illuminates the ways that her own and others' embodiments influence everything regarding the ways we understand body size and liberation. Susan Stinson offers a nuanced analysis of so many narratives—from those embedded in the work and experiences of scientists who have studied fatness to those of fat activists and novelists—underscoring the ways they both foreclose possibilities regarding gender and fat and offer emancipatory potential.

The following section, “Historicizing Fatness,” emphasizes how crucial it is for readers to understand how discourses and experiences of gender and fat manifest themselves in distinct ways dependent upon historic context. The two contributors for this section focus their attention on two very different historic periods. Susan E. Hill introduces readers to the perspectives on fat and gender in the ancient world, paying particular attention to the ways that historians themselves have written about the past (what we call historiography) have been shaped by their own contemporary thinking—much of it limited by their own

fat-phobic and sometimes even misogynistic perspectives. Ava Purkiss takes us to the last 150 years, as she traces the ways that Black women in the United States have strategically used body modification as a way to buffer the antiblack, racist context in which they were living.

The following sections each focuses on different discrete areas of concern and the ways that gender and fat manifest within them. The first focuses on gender and fat within institutions and public policy. April Michelle Herndon explores how anti-fat discourse disproportionately effects women and children in the United States. E. Cassandra Dame-Griff zeroes in on the ways that anti-fatness and misogyny work in tandem to both harm Latinx communities and to legitimate xenophobic and anti-immigration policies in the United States. Heather A. Brown moves us to the realm of education, where she details the research on how anti-fatness and gender discrimination work inextricably to limit the opportunities and achievement of fat girls and women in higher education.

The following section attends to the area of health and medicine. Erin N. Harrop explores how anti-fat and misogynist paradigms have influenced the work of practitioners who treat eating disorders; they explore in particular the work of feminist eating disorder specialists who are at the fore of challenging these limiting perspectives. Nikkolette Lee analyzes the many detailed interviews she has collected with people who have decided to undergo bariatric (aka weight loss) surgery, pointing out the complex rationale and experiences of patients, most of whom are women. Emily R.M. Lind, Deborah McPhail, and Lindsey Mazur examine the intricate and problematic ways that presumptions about fat and gender negatively influence infertility treatments and the care of pregnant people.

The next section attends to a variety of perspectives on gender and fat within popular culture and the media. Amanda M. Czerniawski surveys the world of plus size modeling, detailing the ways that it reproduces misogyny even as it was supposed to liberate fat women. Jason Whitesel provides a very detailed discussion of the multiple ways that fat men within gay communities have created art and media and formed activist and social groups to affirm their own identities. In the final essay in this section, Roshaunda L. Breeden and Terah J. Stewart analyze the problematic representations of Black, fat women in popular media, concluding with the provocative question of why many of these have actually been constructed by Black women themselves.

The final section of this volume turns our attention to possibilities—possibilities for new ways of seeing gender and fat, new ways of understanding gender and fat, new ways of experiencing gender and fat. It pulls together the work of five contributors who each offer their own work and analysis on ways for resisting anti-fatness, misogyny, and homophobia. Rachele Salvatelli analyzes the very concept of “coming out” as fat, and what this means about the connections between gender and fat. We then turn to a variety of distinctly different time periods and modes of fat activism. First, we get a deep glimpse into the world of U.S. fat activism in the 1970s and 1980s, as fat activist Judith Stein generously

shares an interview she did many decades ago with Meridith Lawrence and Susan Stinson, which gives readers a glimpse of creating a fat positive, gender affirming, queer-friendly home and community despite a world that was hostile to it. Then we turn to Mara Mibelli and Chiara Meloni, who recount their own most recent experiences as fat activists within the world of Italian beauty and celebrity culture and offer their explanation for why Italian feminists have been slow to pick up on fat liberation. Rabbi Minna Bromberg illuminates the connections among religion, gender, and fat, as she describes how she is working to liberate fatness and gender in her organization, Fat Torah. And finally, activist and scholar Joy Cox, the author of *Fat Girls in Black Bodies: Creating Communities of Our Own*, exhorts us to find joy in our bodies, refusing to wait until a magical “after” moment when our bodies meet societal standards that, she argues, only work to limit us.

Concluding the book are the words of Substantia Jones, the brilliant artist and creator of the Adiposivity Project, in which she photographs fat people, sometimes clothed, sometimes not, in a joyful celebration of fat possibility. In this final essay, Jones shares the tribute she wrote in memory of Cat Pausé, whom we lost much too soon, in the spring of 2022. In the words that Jones shares about their friendship, about Pausé’s *joie de vivre*, about her unbridled enthusiasm at being an Adiposerv herself, we get a powerful glimpse into the wonderful life of Cat Pausé. As the author of *Fat Women Speak* and the editor of both *Queering Fat Embodiment* and the *International Handbook of Fat Studies*, Pausé was an extraordinary thinker in the field of Fat Studies. But she also was a consummate creator of community, hosting the global radio show *Friend of Marilyn*, organizing the extraordinary Fat Studies conferences in New Zealand, and working tirelessly to connect academics, artists, and activists. We are very fortunate to have Pausé’s essay collected in this volume as well as Substantia Jones’ wonderful memorial to her. This volume is dedicated to Cat.

## Using This Volume

When the Routledge Press editor Alexander McGregor first spoke to me about this volume, we envisioned it as part of the *Companion* series, where contributors would clearly define a particular area of research and provide a comprehensive bibliography to help readers understand the full breadth of the field. As work on the volume progressed, some contributors were more interested in sharing their newest research while others maintained their interest in providing a thorough picture of some angle of the interconnected fields of Gender Studies and Fat Studies. We then decided to transition this volume to become a *Reader in Gender and Fat Studies*, one that would offer readers both the chapters that impart an overview of the field and those that push us with their newest research. The result, hopefully, is one that reaches both the reader brand-new to these fields and to those who plan to use these essays to push their own research and thinking.

The grouping of the essays moves from the most overarching and theoretical, in the section on Discourses of Gender and Fat, into many different subtopics (narrative, history, public policy, health, and popular culture) and finally into the last unit on resistance and re-imagination. There are, of course, alternative ways of pairing these chapters and I encourage readers to do just that. All the essays are in conversation with each other. Purkiss' chapter on the history of Black women's anti-fat discourse, for instance, might be contrasted usefully to Lee's chapter on bariatric surgery, as both suggest rather provocatively that fat activists need to be more attentive to and understanding of the reasons why fat women, and fat Black women especially, might choose to engage in weight loss and body modification. To pull from another example, Da'Shaun L. Harrison's essay on antiblack discourse might be paired with many of the essays in the resistance chapter, as he illuminates many of the ways that Black activists have struggled against oppressive structures. For readers particularly interested in the ways scholars and activists are thinking about gender, fat, and Blackness, I would link Harrison's essay with Purkiss' essay on dieting practices among Black women and Breeden and Stewart's essay on the representations of fat Black women in media and popular culture. While I placed Salvatelli's essay on "coming out" as fat in the section on resistance, this is a highly conceptual term that would be usefully used to think about the ways that gendered people claim and resist the identity of fat within almost every context that the other writers in the essay pose. The scenarios that Dark and Stinson explore in their essays on narrative link particularly fruitfully to the frame of "coming out." The three essays in the section on policy might also be paired valuably with the essay by Lind, McPhail, and Mazur in the health section, as their work suggests that the policies that hurt women and children start even prior to birth. And of course, Whitesel's essay on fat gay men's subcultures, Pausé's essay on queer theory, gender, and fat, and Stein's interview on lesbian fat activism might be grouped to think about the ways queer communities have challenged dominant ideas about fat and gender and the ways that fatness itself constructs gender within straight, queer, and trans communities.

I encourage readers to move around the chapters, to see what kinds of connections and oppositions emerge as you pair different essays. Indeed, this book is designed both to provide readers with a comprehensive sense of the literature on gender and fat and to highlight the ways that these categories, gender and fat, never exist on their own but always in relationship to one another and to the complicated contexts in which they reside. Thus, one of the best things that might be done with this text is to mix the essays, to see the kinds of surprising and illuminating connections and questions that these pairings might raise. Mostly, what I hope for readers is that this volume pushes forward the conversation about gender and fat in useful and complex ways, ones that insist on the necessity of intersectionality, ones that resist facile explanations, ones that provide a keen lens to understand how these interconnected phenomena have limited us, and,

finally, ones that push us to remember how activists and artists have imagined the liberatory potential of the construction—and deconstruction—of fat and gender.

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