

anthropology associated with Paul Broca had 'never aspired to be a colonial science' (p. 192), for example, she might have used her surprise to develop novel insights into the kinds of knowledge deemed pertinent to colonial efforts. She does convincingly show how such 20th century institution-builders as Paul Rivet developed a case for the relevance of ethnographic expertise to the interests of empire. But she fails to compellingly explore whether such claims might have been largely opportunistic (*pace* B. Malinowski) or how much importance was given to them by the French state. How did the amount of public funding allocated to the Musée de l'Homme, for example, compare to that attributed to the development of other kinds of expertise? Certainly, the small number of professional ethnologists working in France during the period of interest here, as well as their disproportionate interest in indigenous American societies (mentioned but sidelined), would suggest that they played a minor role in the French colonial project—and indeed were not much interested in that enterprise. Again, Conklin's preconceptions disappointingly diminish the reach of her analysis: I would have appreciated a clearer exploration of the claims and counterclaims made during her period about the relevance of ethnological expertise to French international grandeur (colonial or not).

This book offers a plethora of valuable information about French anthropology and anthropologists over the century beginning in 1850 and will certainly interest students of anthropology's history in its various national forms. Unlike the other books cited above, Conklin's bends French anthropology too much into contemporary American preoccupations to offer many 'aha' insights allowing fresh understandings of this distinctive version of the discipline. But the very frustration this produces testifies to the inherent interest of both the topic broached and the data assembled here.

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## **Reconstructing Obesity: The Meaning of Measures and the Measure of Meanings**

*M. B. McCullough and J. A. Hardin (eds)*

New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013. viii + 245 pp. figures, table, bibliog., index. ISBN 978-1782381419. Price US\$90.00 (Hc.)

I agreed to review this book and then immediately regretted it. Did I (does anyone?) really want to read yet another book about fat? The topic, like the phenomenon itself, is inescapable these days, and at a certain point, one inevitably reaches a point of saturation. And one wonders: can anything original possibly be written about fat that isn't just one more tedious re-hashing of the same alarmist statistics, or a predictable criticism of them; or, alternatively, yet another bossy admonition about how fat is dangerous, or an equally predictable indignant screed about how scare tactics about fat only produce anguish and stigma?

Here is where anthropologists really do come to the rescue. One of the few areas of research on fat and obesity that still has the power to surprise is anthropologists' studies on how people actually live with and think about food, identity and sociality. Who couldn't be interested to know, for example, that in American Samoa, where 71 percent of the women are obese and another 19 percent are overweight, and where 61 percent of the men are obese, McDonald's serves something it calls a 'Samoan Burger'—a Big Mac burger topped with a fried egg? Or that, in Cuba, still-fresh memories of nation's recurring food shortages are important factors in the currently steadily-increasing levels of obesity?

This book is an anthology in which most of the chapters are written by anthropologists. It has ten chapters, a helpful introduction by the editors, and a pithy three-page afterword by the director of the International Health Institute. There are two chapters on Samoa (one on fasting and one on diabetes), one on upper class women in the United Arab Emirates (who are stressed about their weight, and who mostly remain thin—and undernourished, anemic and suffering

from muscle degeneration and bone loss), one on how people eat in Cuba, one on the difficulties of measuring obesity that examines material from the Netherlands and Guatemala, one on school-based obesity intervention programs in Canada, one on the stigmatising effects of what has come to be called 'diabesity' (obesity leading to diabetes) in Australia, one on what it means to be pregnant and fat, one on discourses and counter-discourses of weight management and eating disorders, and one that discusses how we might think about the provocative fact that Black women in the United States have been found to have both the highest prevalence of obesity there, and the highest levels of body satisfaction.

The chapters contain intriguing material, and they engage with both the social science and the biomedical literature on obesity. The statistics and summaries of previous research that appear in all the chapters are thorough and up to date. This means that the book, in addition to being an important contribution to fat studies, is also a useful, cutting-edge reference work.

The only drawback is the prose in which the chapters are written, which is the driest kind of acadamese ('The purpose of this chapter...', 'In the prior section, we outlined...', '...the construct of overweight is a deep reservoir of social metaphors that underwrite its enduring and seductive traction in both lay and scientific discourse'). This form of address is unhappy because it makes the contributions' often quite trenchant observations less accessible than they ought to be; it also risks making the texts seem duller than they really are. Megan McCullough's chapter, for example, bristles with energy when she describes the myriad humiliations she was made to experience as a pregnant fat woman, but it keeps looping back to explanations about things like Goffman's stigma and Csordas's phenomenological self. None of that is exactly uninteresting or irrelevant, but it interrupts the flow of a narrative that is much more compelling and engaging. Anne Becker's contribution (from which I have quoted the sentence about the 'deep reservoir of social metaphors') is a crisp and canny review of problems with measuring obesity and classifying eating disorders. But

some of its language is frankly unintelligible: in her summary of a Hong Kong study which found that an intense fear of fat was absent in many patients who otherwise presented as anorexic, for example, Becker writes that the reason for this could be 'the local salience of a rationale for entrenched food refusal' (p.34). Huh?

If the arcane and juiceless nature of the chapters' prose is addressed and compensated for through discussion, this book would be an excellent one to use in even undergraduate classes on fatness, obesity and bodies more generally. The chapters that detail the problems and complexities of measuring bodies make it clear that ways and consequences of quantifying body size are anything but clear-cut or agreed upon. The consistently intelligent engagement with biomedical literature demonstrates how cross-disciplinary this field can be. And the anthology's cross-cultural scope facilitates insight into phenomena and parts of the world that are entertaining, thought-provoking, and fascinating.

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### **Arresting Incarceration: Pathways out of Indigenous Imprisonment**

*D. Weatherburn*

Canberra ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014. vii + 158 pp. notes, refs, index. ISBN 978-1922059550. A\$39.95 (Pb.)

In *Arresting Incarceration: Pathways out of Indigenous Imprisonment*, Professor Don Weatherburn examines some of the drivers for Australia's unacceptable 27% Indigenous incarceration rate. As Director of NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research since 1988 and Professor with the University of New South Wales' School of Social Science and Policy and having published widely on related topics, he is well placed to do so. His considerable experience allows for analysis beyond NSW and he comments widely on the effects of incarceration policy and ideology affecting Indigenous Australians.