

Preface

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The United States of America, contrary to the convictions of many of its denizens, is not the center of the universe. Fat Studies is, at present, primarily a Western phenomenon, and some of the most cutting-edge work in the field is in fact being done in the United Kingdom, as this rousing volume makes plain.

In my early adulthood, I caught an inkling that something was brewing across the Atlantic from my home in the northeast US, something that seemed more of-the-moment than the brave fat activist work that had come out of feminist scenes on the (US) West Coast in the 1970s and early 1980s, and less conciliatory than well known US-born tomes of roughly the same period that linked feminism to fatness but that ultimately capitulated to the pathologization of fatness and weight-loss agendas. By the late 1990s, finishing up a dissertation on fat politics, I counted as my chief partner-in-crime, in terms of our efforts to subvert the cultural meanings of fatness, and hero, in terms of her clever work at the intersection of academia and activism, Charlotte Cooper – a Brit whom I'd never even met, but whose writing introduced me to a parallel world on the other side of pond.

Over the years, as I steadily contributed to and began to recognize the contours of what we started to call 'Fat Studies' in the US, I kept abreast of similar developments in the UK. It gave me succor to note that the US, derided as the world's leading exporter of 'globesity', was not the only site where provocative, political, intellectual work was happening to question our assumptions about fatness and to advocate not only for the basic stuff of human and civil rights but for a subject position usually denied those with non-normative bodies.

In 2007, I was thrilled to be invited to participate in the international, interdisciplinary 'Bodies of Evidence: Fat Across Disciplines' conference at Cambridge University – a chance, at long last, to interact with colleagues whose global perspectives stood to transform and enrich my understandings of fat politics. And indeed, it was exhilarating. There was refreshing dialogue about fatness with colleagues outside of my usual humanities/cultural studies/activist bubble, and I was delighted to hear some peers in medical science and the helping professions attempt to problematize and deconstruct in-vogue concepts of fatness. Don't get me wrong—there was a surfeit of researchers still using the term 'obesity' sans scare quotes and without a hint of irony, and there were very, very few actual fat people in attendance as presenters or audience members (almost always a sure sign of trouble). The thing that made the conference most exciting to me was the conversation outside of sessions, when I got to know *FSUK* editor Corinna Tomrley, and to see the fire in her eyes that would spark this volume. I saw outrage, passion, and brilliance, vital tools for incendiary work that first took shape in the May 2008 *Fat Studies Seminar* at the University of York and that has resulted in the book you hold in your hands.

In the collection that follows, Fat Studies in the UK gets its due. Eschewing any usual mixture of yawn-spawning academic treatises, *FSUK* blends thoughtful, piquant scholarly essays on topics like 'obesity' policy with insightful meditations on the history of fat activism, fat popular culture, and even fat pets, all amidst an enigmatic gathering of compelling artistic artifacts that contribute to reworking our understandings of fatness. I invite you to take up Corinna's invitation in her introduction to appreciate that Fat Studies is 'about punching the air, slamming a fist on a table, sitting in quiet contemplation and enjoying a mouth-aching grin' and to get in on the action. Turn the page and let the games begin.