

Book Reviews

What's Wrong with Fat? By Abigail C. Saguy. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xii+259. \$29.95.

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In an era in which obesity is considered one of our most pressing social problems, to even ask the question “What’s wrong with fat?” would be seen by many as at best ignorant and at worst heretical. Yet, in her book, *What's Wrong with Fat*, Abigail Saguy not only asks this question, she answers it in a way that both flies in the face of conventional wisdom about the relationship between weight and health and provides an empirically solid sociological analysis of the various framings of fatness grounded in the literatures of medical sociology, feminist theory, deviance, and fat studies.

The introductory chapter lays out the plan for the book, but more important, it carefully walks the reader through historical framings of fatness in order to explain how we arrived at our current dominant framing of fatness as a major social problem. In the introduction, as in the rest of the book, Saguy pays careful attention to language and explains her own preference for words like “fat” and “corpulence.” In doing so, she unpacks the various terms we use to talk about body size and shows how this language emerges from the very framings of size she analyzes throughout the book. The introduction also touches on the consequences of current dominant framings of fatness as a problem by showing how body size is an axis of inequality in and of itself and how it intersects with other forms of inequality based on race, class, and gender, a topic she explores in more depth in later chapters.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are dedicated to exploring the various framings of fatness starting with the dominant “problem” frames of fatness as immorality, as a medical problem, and as a public health crisis. As Saguy elegantly shows in chapter 2, the dominance of these frames reflects the interests and economic and political resources of particular groups as well as an etiology and corresponding course of action, which, in the dominant problem frames, come to be seen as the taken-for-granted truth of fatness. One of the central consequences of the dominance of these problem frames is the difficulty of alternative framings in gaining traction or legitimacy. Saguy illustrates these difficulties in discussing framings of fatness as *not* a problem, in particular exploring the framings of the Health At Every Size movement and framings of fatness as beautiful and fatness as a social justice issue. In chapter 4, Saguy builds on her prior research with Rene

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Almeling to show how the *both* the media and science's independent tendencies toward sensationalism and oversimplification affect how the science of obesity is conveyed to the public, contributing to the frame effects Saguy presents in chapter 5. Among the strengths of these chapters is how Saguy balances the complexity of the multiple framings of fatness with a clear mapping of the frames themselves. The tables Saguy uses to lay out the key components of each frame aid this clarity.

Chapter 5 is perhaps the most innovative chapter in the book; in it, Saguy leaves more conventional methodology to report on the findings of three experiments she conducted to measure people's responses to various framings of corpulence as presented in the media. What she found was that, in fact, framings of fatness do shape how we perceive fatness and fat people and that these framings have critical implications for public health as well as size discrimination and antifat bias. Saguy highlights how the results of these experiments speak to how dominant obesity framings do not bring about policies or programs that improve the health of fat people but serve to mask, legitimate, and perpetuate inequality in a neoliberal society that scapegoats fat people for a seemingly endless list of social problems. Saguy concludes by outlining how activists and professionals are fighting to shift the framings of fatness so that we can see beyond the blinders of the dominant framings to ask different questions about size so that we can come up with answers that benefit all of us, rather than stigmatizing and harming all of us, especially those of us who are visibly fat.

What's Wrong with Fat is a well-written, carefully researched book that contributes an essential perspective on body size that will appeal to a wide range of scholars and activists. It is a bellwether in the growth of the interdisciplinary field of fat studies yet firmly grounded in sociological theory and methodology. *What's Wrong with Fat* is an important book, and it is my expectation that Saguy's work will continue to push scholarship on health, weight, and size as well as on gender, race, class, and inequality.

Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality. By Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Laura T. Hamilton. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013. Pp. xviii+326.

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For over 40 years, America has positioned higher education as a critical social institution aimed at promoting social mobility while investing hundreds of billions of dollars in financial aid and promoting a college-for-all agenda. Yet during that same period, socioeconomic inequality in college attainment has widened considerably. In particular, while access to college has expanded, disparities in who finishes college—and who leaves with insurmountable debt—have become a central concern.