



Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession

By Don Kulick, Anne Meneley

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An eclectic and highly original examination of one of the most dynamic concepts-and constructs-in the world.

With more than one billion overweight adults in the world today, obesity has become an epidemic. But fat is not as straightforward-or even as uni-versally damned-as one might think. Enlisting thirteen anthropologists and a fat activist, editors and anthropologists Don Kulick and Anne Meneley have produced an unconventional-and unprecedented-examination of fat in various cultural and social contexts. In this anthology, these writers argue that fat is neither a mere physical state nor an inert concept. Instead, it is a construct built by culture and judged in courts of public opinion, courts whose laws vary from society to society.

From the anthropology of "fat-talk" among teenage girls in Sweden to the veneration of Spam in Hawaii; from fear of the fat-sucking pishtaco vampire in the Andes to the underground allure of fat porn stars like Supersize Betsy-this anthology provides fresh perspectives on a subject more complex than love handles, and less easily understood than a number on a scale. Fat proves that fat can be beautiful, evil, pornographic, delicious, shameful, ugly, or magical. It all depends on who-and where-you are.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This engaging collection of essays by academic anthropologists examines fat as a symbol of aesthetics, social status, economic success and cultural belonging. Many of the pieces look at foreign societies or marginal subcultures that, contrary to the fat-phobic Western norm, view fat as a sign of beauty, health and prosperity. Rebecca Popenoe studies villages in Niger where women try to be as fat as possible, while Kulick and Matti Bunzl explore the world of fat porn. Joan Gross writes about phat rappers whose girth is taken as evidence of masculine potency and financial success, and Julia Harrison writes about the role of Spam in the construction of Native Hawaiian identity. Mary Weismantel probes Andean legends of white fat-sucking vampires—metaphors, she thinks, for the exploitation of Indian communities by the elite. Articles on mainstream Western attitudes toward fat uncover even more strangeness. Fanny Ambjörnsson details the byzantine ways Swedish high school girls talk about fat; Kulick and Thaïs Machado-Borges expose the odd Brazilian enthusiasm for intestinal leakage as proof that fat-dissolving pills are working; and Margaret Wilson asks why Starbucks patrons order their coffee with skim milk—only to dump whipped cream on top. The writers wear their scholarly apparatus lightly and offer a readable, thought-provoking survey of one of the most intimate and complicated issues of contemporary life. Photos.

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About the Author

Don Kulick is a professor of anthropology at New York University. His books include *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture Among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* and *Language & Sexuality* (with Deborah Cameron).

Anne Meneley is an associate professor of anthropology at Trent University in Ontario, Canada, and is the author of *Tournaments of Value: Sociability and Hierarchy in a Yemeni Town*.

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