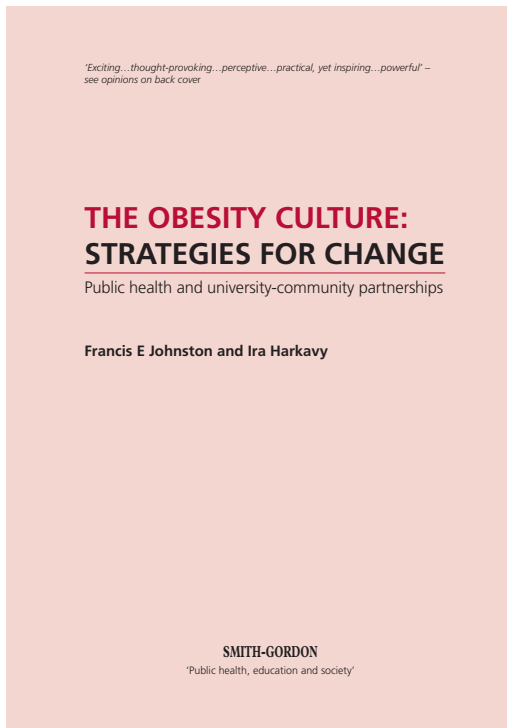


THE OBESITY CULTURE: STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

Public health and university-community partnerships

Francis E Johnston and Ira Harkavy



Bestselling books on obesity come and go each revealing their special specific secret of how to address the obesity crisis. *The obesity culture* suggests strategies for change based on the idea that obesity is a complex problem and not susceptible to a single magic bullet. Johnston's and Harkavy's vision of community partnership, with universities and schools working together to identify and change the conditions that cause the complex obesity problem, may be applicable to many aspects of public health. In the practical projects the authors describe universities and schools benefit along with the local community through opportunities to develop new ways of learning, teaching, gaining experience of life and doing research

This is an exciting, excellently conceptualized book that deals with one of the major public health problems of our time and proposes concrete strategies based on actual partnerships between universities and their communities. A must read for anyone interested and committed to building relevant universities and helping those universities work in a more productive partnership with their communities.

Robert Blum is William H. Gates, Sr. Professor and Chair Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health Director, Johns Hopkins Urban Health Institute, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Johnston and Harkavy have written a highly thought-provoking critique. For everyone working in obesity their book provides a powerful and persuasive case of how to develop genuinely effective public health strategies.

Gary D Foster is Director, Center for Obesity Research and Education, Professor, Departments of Medicine and Public Health, Temple University and recent past president of The Obesity Society

'The obesity culture' is a highly perceptive and original public health critique of interest to us all and particularly to those involved with families, children, adolescents and teaching.

Anthony R Leeds is Visiting Professor, Faculty of Life Sciences, University of Copenhagen, Denmark and Visiting Senior Fellow, School of Biomedical and Biomolecular Sciences, University of Surrey

'Only connect!' indeed. At a time when universities are marketing their products as solutions to global problems, this book provides a much-needed alternative model of how knowledge is generated and expertise can be developed for individual and social betterment. In the face of the apparently intractable public health menace of obesity, Francis Johnston and Ira Harkavy provide a practical, yet inspiring account of a more dynamic and participatory way that universities can join citizens to foster an upward spiral of community and individual health.

William M Sullivan is Senior Scholar, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Stanford, California

Frank Johnston and Ira Harkavy have written a powerful and intriguing book that works on a number of levels. It is a strong scientific and social-scientific analysis of the "ill-defined problem" of obesity. It is a methodological treatise on the promise and performance of participatory action research and community-based research in this area. It presents well-documented worked examples of interventions involving long-standing and durable university-community partnerships. And it is a call to arms: for a twenty-first century revival of the role of the university within and with its community that was at the heart of the foundation of many of our great institutions of higher education. It should be read by those interested in one, some, or all of these important issues.

Prof. Sir David Watson is Chair of Higher Education Management at the Institute of Education, University of London

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- Obesity is a complex, ill-defined problem that cannot be solved by a reductionist science that is based on a model derived from laboratory experiments. The problem of obesity requires a science that is focused on actually working to solve the problem through comprehensive, multisided interventions and participatory action research.
- Obesity is not itself the problem. It is an indicator of a much broader problem, one that points outward to our culture and the structure of our society rather than inward to the individual who manifests the condition. To solve the problem, our focus must be not on obesity per se, but on its causes and the pathways through which they operate.
- Solving the obesity problem requires an approach that is based on collaborative problem-solving. This approach is best realized through mutually-beneficial partnerships.
- The foundation of such partnerships is the collaboration between the community and the university. Neither entity is sufficient unto itself, and while other partnership forms are possible, the most effective, the most promising, and the most sustainable are based on the expertise and the involvement of universities with communities, in particular through university-assisted community schools.

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