

Book Reviews

The Sage handbook of social geographies

Susan J. Smith, Rachel Pain, Sallie A. Marston and John Paul Jones III (eds). Sage, London, 2010. 614 pp. ISBN 9781412935593.

It is refreshing to read *The Sage Handbook of Social Geographies*, which reflects on diverse themes within the sub-discipline in ways that are positive, outward looking and stimulate thinking on how we can make our research relevant to creating a better world. This edited collection, perhaps the first of its kind in social geography, brings together more than 30 renowned contributors engaged in cutting-edge research within the field in an effort to achieve this common goal. The book provides diverse insights into common themes such as place/space, social inequality, ethics, morality and justice that are central to social geography and emphasise the methodological diversity and the multiplicity of directions that are possible through engaging in social geographical research.

The aim of the handbook, however, is not to be comprehensive but instead offer interesting and exploratory visions of how the social connects with nature, the economy, the political and the cultural in ways that can contribute to ‘new lines of flight’ (p. 30). The handbook is organised into five sections: Difference and Diversity, Geographies and Social Economies, Geographies of Wellbeing, Geographies of Social Justice and Doing Social Geographies. The collection of chapters in each section is edited separately and an introductory review summarises the core issues and connections with other themes as well as the significance of the theme to the becoming of social geography. Since the book has about 614 pages, this organisation of chapters enables readers to engage with key theoretical debates in sections of interest rather than skim through the entire handbook to find relevant material.

Adopting a creative approach, the editors have produced an excellent handbook that will attract a diversity of readers. It will inspire undergraduate/postgraduate students and stimulate lecturers/researchers interested in the complexity and diversity of the social realm. On the other hand, the book will also satisfy the curiosity of anyone with an interest in issues of social difference, social economies, well-being and social justice looking for a reference text that delves deeper than a dictionary. The accessibility of the book to a range of readers is achieved through the inclusion of tables, maps, graphs and boxes summarising key ideas in some sections and a deeper theoretical engagement with relevant concepts in other sections of the handbook.

All the sections of the book are very insightful, but the sections on Difference and Diversity, Doing Social Geographies and Geography and Wellbeing kindled curiosity and eagerness to explore the themes further. Such reactions are a reflection of my research interests that lie at the intersection of ethnicity, affect/emotion and the lived experience of citizenship in the city, and methodologies that make such research possible as well as relevant. Indeed, the focus on affective/emotional geographies and ethical spaces is a common thread that runs through the handbook and reflects the core concern with the materiality and embodied nature of everyday practices by social geographers as well as the possibility for accepting ways of being and living that are different from our own. However, while there is attention to the politics of fear, anxiety and resilience in social spaces, there is less engagement with ethno-religious diversity and the transformative potential of the much broader spiritual realm. On the other hand, the attention to ‘more-than-human actors’ (p. 177) and non-Western epistemologies is notable because it stimulates us to rethink the dominant and centred nature of the Anglo-American/human

subject and takes social geography down new and exciting avenues.

In conclusion, I strongly recommend the *Sage Handbook of Social Geography* because its creative and selective approach invites reflection, curiosity and eagerness to explore the constitution and multidimensional nature of the social in ways that move beyond the politics of identity and resistance. As the first of its kind in the sub-discipline, it is a book that is enjoyable to read and will definitely add value to a personal or library collection.

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Towards enabling geographies: 'Disabled' bodies and minds in society and space

Vera Chouinard, Edward Hall and Robert Wilton (eds). Ashgate, Farnham, 2010. 270 pp. ISBN 9780754675617.

In what the editors refer to as 'the second wave' of geographical studies of disability, this edited collection of 14 chapters from geographers around the world highlights recent developments in the discourse on bodies and space. Four core elements of the emerging 'second wave' of research are identified to include work that seeks to broaden the meaning of the term disability, includes the embodied experiences of disability and illness, examines the role of technology in creating more inclusive environments and recognises the important role geography can play in shaping policy that impacts on disabled people. While much research and commentary in both the fields of geography and disability studies has focused on how barriers in the environment and practices work to disable people with impairments from full participation, these works examine new understandings of how a wide range of spaces, places and contexts can operate both positively and negatively to enable and disable people of all types, levels and description of ability.

For those new to this field of research, the editors' introductory chapter sets the stage for presenting these latest developments by pro-

viding an engaging and informative synopsis of the evolution of geographical studies of disability. From their early focus on documenting the incidence and distribution of disabling conditions to the identification of access barriers in the environment to the examination of relationships between the distribution of health conditions and the location of health-care services, the important contributions of geographers to current understandings of disability across disciplines are evident. The purpose here is to identify emerging trends, these defining elements of the second wave of research, and to profile current research that exemplifies these core traits. The introduction finishes with a compelling discussion of the challenges ahead for geographical work in the area of disability.

Following the introduction, chapters 2 and 3 examine the meaning and experience of the home for disabled people and those with chronic illness, while chapters 4 and 5 explore the opportunities for inclusion and empowerment afforded by the cyber world of the Internet to people with mental health impairments and people with hearing impairments. Chapter 6 challenges the notion of the dichotomy of those who are 'carers' and those who are 'cared for' and highlights the role of complex networks of 'nested interdependencies' that support people with an intellectual impairment to achieve independence in their lives in the community. In chapter 7, the focus remains on carers, but distance is the element of interest in particular as it relates to siblings of disabled people who take on caring roles from afar.

Many of the remaining chapters are rich examples of extending a disability framework to populations whose experiences have not traditionally been included in the disability discourse. In broadening the concept of disability, the collection presents a more universal understanding of the experience of enablement and disablement with contributors examining the relationships between a person's spatial context and their experience of emotional and behavioural difficulties, aging, obesity and dwarfism. One chapter that seemed to stand alone examined both the challenges and potential for geographers to provide a more comprehensive picture of the experience of disability in the arena of social policy. The fact that it

stood out could reflect its placement in the book, its unique policy focus or simply that it closely parallels my own interests.

Written by geographers for geographers with an aim of encouraging wider adoption of disability scholarship into the discipline, this collection would certainly be a valuable and relevant resource for others working in the health and disability fields. As a health services researcher, I found the collection of research to be a very insightful introduction to the unique perspectives of geographers on the subject of disability that also highlighted areas of common ground, particularly with respect to the challenges of producing policy-relevant research and ultimately using research to make a positive difference in the lives of disabled people. A real strength of the book is how it promotes geography's achievements in the field and its capacity for future contributions and collaborations with other disciplines.

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Injustice: Why social inequality persists

Daniel Dorling. Policy Press, Bristol, 2010. 387 pp. ISBN 978847424266.

The purpose of this book lies in its provocative challenge. Dorling has taken Beveridge's (1942) heuristic of the 'five faces of poverty' – in which the qualities of inequality inhere in the corporeality of the poor (want, idleness, disease, ignorance and squalor) – and turned this thinking on its head. Thus, for Dorling, the new heuristic becomes elitism is efficient, exclusion is necessary, prejudice is natural, greed is good and despair is inevitable. Elitism is something the rich aspire to rather than the poor give shape to. Exclusion and prejudice are enacted by those with the resource and capacity to establish boundaries and set social codes. The 'goodness' of greed can only be understood by those whose lives can be enhanced by the acquisition of excess capital and unlimited capacities to consume. Mental illness and anxiety are the inevitable outcomes of this rising inequality.

This is a damning and prescient view of the role that wealth and privilege play in creating the world as we know it. In eight succinct chapters, Dorling sets out this provocative thesis devoting one chapter to each of his five big ideas bracketed between two introductory chapters and a relatively brief conclusion that is also an appeal to the book's readership to think. 'Everything it takes to defeat injustice lies in the mind. So what matters most is how we think' (p. 320).

All of which begs the question about the status and reach of this work in an academic context and a fight for the high ground of what constitutes 'great academic work' finds some purchase in discussion of Dorling's book. To some, he belongs among the burgeoning group of writers who synthesise for a more 'well-read' than restrictively 'academic' audience, the concerns of 21st century life: authors such as Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, Oliver James, Jared Diamond and Jane Kelsey who are frequently cited in Dorling's work. From an academic perspective, it is easy to be derogatory and accuse such writers of being populist, lightweight or scaremongering: that these authors have some kind of left over, left wing sensibilities that can be foisted on an unsuspecting population under the guise of 'scholarship'. I resist such stereotyping of this work. The shift in perspective from the 'have-nots' to the 'haves' is powerful and too seldom undertaken. The reader is required to radically reframe conventional perspectives and leap to ones that are much less comfortable. As the reading elite, those who are likely to consume this book, such a leap confronts us with the consequential end of our own so-called success and thus is both provocative and salutary. We are not required to 'believe', but we are required to seriously consider who and what really is the problem here.

Dorling is a geographer, mathematician and statistician – a professor of human geography at the University of Sheffield who is affiliated with a number of other universities including the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. He has made a significant contribution to the spatial visualisation of inequality through building atlases of inequality in Britain. Such detailed and innovative cartography is not present in *Injustice*, but informs the work. The

combination of simplified statistical tables with highly readable prose makes this a book for a wide audience: undergraduate and postgraduate students, teachers, policy-makers and the famously 'concerned citizen'.

For some, Dorling's ability to both synthesise a big picture story about inequality in the affluent west and present statistical information in a readable and digestible form to exemplify that story is a strength of *Injustice*. For others, however, the book may lack the intense focus and narrow purview that characterises a perception of scholarly work. It is not a treatise on justice. In fact, it unquestioningly accepts a very prosaic and everyday notion of injustice as 'unfairness'. You would not read or be pleased with this book if you seek an extension of Rawls's ideas of justice or if you were seeking practical policy-level responses to inequality. Rather, if you are open to interrogating why you have sent your own children to private schools or feel more comfortable living in a 'safe suburb' or know nothing about contemporary indentured labour practices or are fascinated by the cult of celebrities or have taken out private health insurance, then this book is a provocation to such interrogation. Read it.

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Agrarian angst and rural resistance in contemporary Southeast Asia

Dominique Caouette and Sarah Turner (eds). Routledge, London and New York, 2009. 289 pp. ISBN 9780415548380.

This edited volume sets out to document the ways in which rural people in contemporary Southeast Asia have resisted agrarian transformations, market integration and globalisation processes in diverse and complex ways. In chapter 1, *Shifting Fields of Rural Resistance in Southeast Asia*, Turner and Caouette lay out

the 'problem' that drives the analysis presented in the book: agrarian transition over the past decade has accelerated the integration of rural livelihoods into global market exchanges, impacting on people's access to land, livelihood security, modes of agricultural production and forms of agricultural outputs. In response to these wider processes, rural people have been involved in a diverse range of resistance strategies, from local-level 'weapons of the weak' (as documented by Scott 1985) to organised and overt forms of resistance that focus on situated conflicts to transnational networks of resistance where resistance is often organised in relation to societal structures such as capitalism. By documenting resistance strategies occurring at a range of scales (individual, local and global) and in a range of sites (Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam), this edited collection makes a significant substantive contribution to our understanding of both processes of agrarian change and the various modes of resistance to such change undertaken by people across Southeast Asia.

The key theoretical contribution of the book lies in the argument that forms of resistance occurring at different scales (individual, local, national, transnational) are more intertwined than has been previously acknowledged in the literature. Building upon the work of Polanyi (1944, 1957), Gramsci (1971) and Scott (1985), the authors of *Agrarian Angst and Rural Resistance in Southeast Asia* seek to demonstrate that contemporary processes of resistance often span several modes of 'action' (including individual 'foot dragging', collective protest and global advocacy). Where previous authors have tended to focus on only one scale or mode of resistance when documenting responses to agrarian change, Caouette and Turner have brought together a group of researchers who clearly demonstrate that various modes of resistance operate in dialogue with the power to shape responses at other levels. This multi-scalar approach is the primary theoretical strength of this volume.

Central to the theoretical contribution of the book is the aim to extend and enrich the important work initiated by Scott (1985), who focused on providing a nuanced account of hidden acts of resistance, thereby expanding

our conceptualisation of dominance and resistance. Scott has argued that hidden forms of resistance have the potential to challenge hegemony when they gain momentum, resulting in a moment when the subordinated 'speaks directly to the powerful' (Scott 1990, p. 223; cited on p. 268). Documenting such moments is important work as it gives credence and support to such acts and contributes to a positive discourse of the power of individual agency, which, in turn, can empower further resistance acts and movements. Several contributors to this book document such moments, thereby extending and enriching the important work initiated by Scott (see the chapters by Franco and Borrás, Kuhonta, Potter and Smelzer). Other contributors argue for a more ambivalent understanding of resistance actions and interventions (see Walker, Turner, Tran and Caouette). The overall effect is a volume that significantly enriches our understanding of contemporary resistance to agrarian change in Southeast Asia.

The many case studies in this book demonstrate that theorising resistance to agrarian change requires a nuanced and open approach because the ways in which people resist agrarian reform and the scales at which such resistance is enacted are not stable and fixed. Rather, resistance strategies and actions are formulated in a dialogue with changing processes and structures of domination. This book will be particularly suited to researchers and postgraduate students working in the broad areas of rural development, politics, human geography and cultural anthropology.

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Unlearning the colonial cultures of planning

Libby Porter. Ashgate, Farnham, 2010. 180 pp. ISBN 9780754649885.

For countries with a colonial history, the issue of how to include indigenous peoples in that history is challenging as it raises question of how their voices should be heard. Equally, indigenous groups have a long and complex history of exclusion or marginalisation within the processes and systems of governance. Libby Porter's book is an attempt to examine how indigenous voices can and should be 'heard' in planning theory and practice. Her definition of planning is broad: 'the social practice of spatial ordering' (p. 2), which positions it, whether intended it or not, very firmly in the ambit of planning theory. This, when combined with a tendency to use the complex language of postmodernism, will inevitably exclude this book from use by planning practitioners, the operators of the very systems the author wishes to influence. This disjuncture between planning theory and planning practice is long-standing, and it is a pity that such an important work that could raise planners' awareness of indigenous issues and concerns is likely to be overlooked as being 'too academic'. It is, however, a volume that will find a useful role in planning and geography courses addressing indigenous issues and as an informed starting point to any serious study of planning and indigenous issues.

The book is composed of seven chapters, with the first chapter providing the framework and essential definitions for the rest of the book, situating it within the existing literature and sensibly stating what it does not cover. Porter makes it very clear from the outset that the book is primarily based on the PhD research she did with regard to the Nyah and Gariwerd people of South-eastern Victoria. She also indicates that she will include mate-

rial from Aotearoa/New Zealand, Canada and the USA based largely on secondary sources (see p. 7). This highlights one of the weaknesses of this book. The inclusion of non-Australian material was surely performed to broaden the scope of the book and to make it more appealing to an international audience. Using secondary sources is a perfectly acceptable approach, but in the case of New Zealand, the material is weak and, in places, inaccurate.

In one part, there is reference to the 'Ngatihaua clan' (p. 68), while Otago residents will be interested to discover they were a New Zealand Company settlement (p. 72). Perhaps more concerning is that the material on New Zealand is based on very narrow and slightly dated sources, missing a wide range of other very available literature that would better reflect the influence of treaty settlements that often include issues concerned with naming of areas and features. It raises the question of similar issues with other overseas material. None of this is fatal in terms of the main direction and value of this book, but they are elements that will distract some readers. The second and third chapters then go on to examine how indigenous people have both been represented in and failed by planning procedures.

The greatest strength of this work lies in chapters 4–6, which move beyond the theoretical to look at how the sacred places of the Nyah and Gariwerd people were managed by the Victorian planning system including the vexatious issue of naming. These are engaging and in comparison with the first three chapters, most readable and accessible, making them very suitable for undergraduate audiences. Porter is clearly very familiar with this material and she conveys with great conviction the case that she makes for more active involvement of indigenous people and recognition of their special interest in planning systems beyond the tokenism of identification as a heritage site. The final chapter called 'Unlearning Privilege: Towards the Decolonization of Planning' is an excellent final summation of what the book has covered while also setting an agenda for future research.

This is not an easy book and requires very careful reading and rereading. Undergraduates

would need guidance to use it, but it will provide a provocative resource for graduates and hopefully, some planning practitioners and is a must for any university library.

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The child: An encyclopedic companion

Richard A. Shweder (ed.). The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 2009. 1105 pp. ISBN 9780226475394.

The Child: An Encyclopedic Companion offers more than 500 alphabetically arranged topical entries of leading scholars' views on 'children's development and the many worlds of childhood from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and on a global scale' (p. xxvii). The inclusion of multicultural and international perspectives is a key strength of this single-volume authoritative reference work. Nonetheless, the focus still lies on North America. For example, the entry 'demography of childhood' first engages with the 'United States' (pp. 244–48) and then offers a very broad 'international perspective' (pp. 248–253).

Contributors belong to 'medicine, biology, law, education, psychology, literature, religion, anthropology, history, sociology, linguistics, communication studies, folklore, and cultural studies' (p. xxvii), which in itself is a very interesting combination and allows a viewing of childhood from many disciplines and perspectives. None of the writers is affiliated with a geography department despite the growing interest in children in geography, which dates back to Sarah James' (1990) question '[i]s there a place for children in geography?' in 1990. For example, there is no entry for 'space', 'place' or the 'environment', and 'spatial abilities' are hidden among other terms. The term 'geography' is limited to the entry 'social studies, history, and geography' and focuses on geography as a school subject.

Entries on topics such as 'play', the 'built environment', 'nature and children', 'parks, playgrounds and open spaces' or the 'universe

of the child' (independent mobility) are of direct interest for children's geographers. Surprisingly, institutions associated with children such as the 'school' feature among the topics, whereas the 'home', which is often on the research agenda for geographers, has not received a single entry. The companion is useful for its many entries not directly related to the physical environment but still of interest for geographers, for example, 'attachment' or 'children as consumers'. Readers can also find guides to general topics such as 'theories of development', 'concepts of childhood' or one of the numerous biographical entries of iconic figures such as 'Jean Piaget'.

Most entries span several pages, providing a comprehensive understanding of each term, but this also leads to some confusion. For example, the entry 'family' is subdivided into three sub-themes covering the historical-cultural, socio-economic and legal perspectives. Such a breakdown makes it difficult to search for specific entries and I often got lost in finding an entry. In this regard, the very extensive index (more than 100 pages) is a helpful tool. The index may also be helpful for non-native English speakers or those unfamiliar with the professional terminology used in the companion.

One highlight of the book is the more than 40 boxes with essays, which are labelled 'imagining each other essays' (p. vi). These focus on one aspect of childhood in a specific place and time. For instance, the entry 'street and runaway children' is further explored in 'The mathematical life of Brazilian street children'. These essays bring life to the easily readable and comprehensive scholarly entries and provide variety within the companion. However, the editors missed a chance to directly include the voice of children into these essays. As a researcher interested in working *with* children instead of on their behalf, I would suggest including the voices of children instead of only writing about them from an adult perspective.

According to Richard Shweder, the book has been designed to provide state-of-the-art research 'readily available to a broad spectrum of inquisitive adults, non specialists and specialists alike' (p. xxvii), and this aim has easily been met by the editorial board. Despite the aforementioned limitations, this reference book is a

most useful and timely companion. I would not hesitate in recommending it to anyone interested in child and adolescent research as, in my opinion, any of the papers can broaden one's understanding of knowledge on children, childhood and adolescence.

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Reference

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North Pole, South Pole: The epic quest to solve the great mystery of Earth's magnetism

Gillian Turner. Awa Press, Wellington, 2010. 274 pp. ISBN 9780958275002.

Ernest Rutherford is reported to have commented that if you ask a geologist to describe a stone, he will conjure up the history of the entire Earth.

Those words from page 173 hint at the breadth of subject matter and depth of coverage of this fine book, and a deceptively simple question – '[w]hat draws the compass unerringly towards the North?' – underlies Gillian Turner's probing account of our deepening understanding of the Earth's magnetic field. For centuries, mariners and explorers have appreciated that the Earth's magnetic poles do not coincide with its poles of rotation, and it is now known that the magnetosphere protects life on the Earth's surface from the damaging effects of cosmic rays.

During the 12th and 13th centuries, some of the detail became evident with the adoption of the magnetic compass as a navigation tool. This instrument appears to have been developed in China and, as Turner discusses, could have been carried from there to Europe or independently invented in the West. Whatever the explanation, it facilitated the European age of exploration. As was so often the case at that time, measurements recorded in

ships' logs became information for thinkers who sought rational explanation through speculation, controlled observation, analysis and experimentation. One of them, Roger Bacon, had observed that the magnetic compass is not always exactly aligned with the area's meridian of longitude, but he could not explain why. Another, Peregrinus, was able to refute the hypothesis of a functional linkage between the North Magnetic Pole and the Pole Star, thus showing an internal origin of the Earth's magnetic field. Also, Mercator recognised that the axis of the Earth's magnetic field is at an angle to its axis of rotation. The latter complicated the mariner's practical task of determining longitude and did so until 1773 when John Harrison produced the first robust and accurate chronometer.

Since then, the quest to solve the mystery of the Earth's magnetism has taken divergent paths. Mariners and explorers had a pragmatic interest in the development of reliable instruments with which to orient their journeys, and scientists sought strong explanations for the observed properties of the Earth's magnetic field.

Among those interested in a fuller understanding of the Earth's magnetic field was the Elizabethan physician William Gilbert, who compared the Earth with a magnet. A little later, Edmond Halley proposed that the Earth was composed of a solid inner sphere and outer shell, with a fluid occupying the space between them. Those propositions set in motion many decades of scientific research in Western Europe, which Turner elegantly highlights, and the first half of the 19th century was a time of discoveries that were to have major implications for Earth science: among them, Alexander von Humboldt had observed that some rocks could be intensely magnetised, Michael Faraday showed how to generate electricity with a copper disc revolving in the Earth's magnetic field rather than between the poles of a permanent magnet and James Clerk Maxwell derived the four equations that unify our understanding of electromagnetism. A little later, Christopher Hansteen was able to show that the geographical positions of the North and South magnetic poles had changed since Halley had located them in 1682.

Despite the increasing depth of understanding about it, the underlying physical causes of temporal variations in the Earth's magnetic field were scarcely known a century ago. One pointer was provided by Bernard Brunhes, who discovered rocks in his native France that had been magnetised with almost opposite polarity to that of the Earth's magnetic field. A stream of research since then has shown that as they cool, molten rock and fired pottery take on and retain the polarity of the magnetosphere.

In the final five chapters, Gillian Turner takes the reader on an exhilarating ride through recent developments in Earth science before closing with a thoughtful account of the broader environmental implications of reversals in the polarity of the Earth's magnetic field. She controls the diverse threads of her narrative with great skill and demonstrates how scientific understanding can progress from compilations of observations through pattern recognition to hypotheses rooted in physical principles, to deeply satisfying explanations and suggestions for further research. Her narrative follows historical order, is clearly expressed and conveys the thrill of the chase. This fine book will give great pleasure to all who read it.

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Geographies of obesity: Environmental understandings of the obesity epidemic

Jamie Pearce and Karen Witten (eds). Ashgate, Farnham, 2010. 331 pp. ISBN 9780754676195.

Obesity has become one of the major public health issues affecting the global population of the 21st century. In high-income countries, population body weights have increased rapidly over the past few decades and contribute to increasing rates of chronic diseases. Also, low-income countries now face dual burdens of both malnourishment and obesity. In New Zealand, approximately 60% of adults and 30% of children are overweight/obese and populations living in the most deprived areas experience the greatest burden of obesity and related poor health. Thus, *Geographies of*

Obesity is a timely and important contribution in understanding the underlying causes of obesity and its inequitable distribution across the population.

Drawing on the expertise of a multidisciplinary team of researchers, Pearce and Witten set out to collate international evidence determining the environmental explanations for understanding the obesity epidemic. The focus on the *environmental* explanations is of particular interest. The traditional public health emphasis has been to examine the *behavioural* determinants (eating and activity patterns) of obesity and this has resulted in numerous behavioural interventions of minimal effectiveness. In total, *Geographies of Obesity* is composed of a useful collection of reviews of the literature describing the macro- and micro-environmental determinants of unhealthy diets and inadequate physical activity.

The first few chapters of the book provide a global and contextual overview for understanding the development of obesity among disparate populations. The chapter by Barry Popkin gives the current state of play of obesity globally, while the chapter by Daniel Kim and Ichiro Kawachi provides the reader with the necessary understanding of the contextual factors that describe our neighbourhoods and wider environments. Following then, the bulk of the book is dedicated to collating the current state of evidence describing the environmental contributions to eating and activity behaviours and the policy options to potentially address them. While not all of the chapters are exhaustive in their reviews of the research (that would require volumes), they are inclusive of the most salient pieces of work and are appropriately cautious in their interpretations.

To anyone working in the field of obesity, it would not be surprising that the conclusion of these literature reviews on the contributions of food environments (e.g. food availability,

pricing, accessibility, marketing, etc.) and physical activity environments (e.g. facilities for physical activity, neighbourhood safety, urban design, etc.) is simply that we need more research. However, rather than leave the reader uninspired, the editors conclude the book with several chapters to advance the field. The chapters on measurement and estimating causal effects highlight two of the major methodological issues challenging researchers in obesity prevention at the moment. Likewise, the chapter by Kearns highlights the need for qualitative research to determine how socio-cultural environments influence eating and activity behaviours.

The challenge with any edited book is the opportunity for repetition, and at times, the chapters within this book fall prey. However, the chapters do all stand on their own and will become required reading for many students studying obesity. The overwhelming conclusion on the state of the current research is that the contribution of the environment to obesity is modest. While the editors have included adequate discussion on the methodological issues that limit the bulk of current research, the reader is left wondering where to next in obesity prevention. While focusing primarily on behavioural determinants is ineffective, will the emphasis on studying environmental factors be adequate? If so, the next big challenge we face is in mobilising communities and creating the political will to rebuild healthier neighbourhoods and environments.

The contribution of this book to the literature that precedes it lies in its primary focus on the physical environment and how that shapes population eating and activity behaviours. With that as its aim, it has captured a hole in the market.

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