

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

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Culture, Liberalism and other Acts of Depoliticization in the Obesity Debate

There is wealth of evidence that points to the pernicious ways in which inequities in health are disproportionately borne. Equally there is a wealth of evidence that critiques the role of neoliberal imperatives for individuals to take responsibility for their health, a form of 'cruel optimism' (Berlant 2011) that is central to the reproduction of inequity. However, health interventions and public policy remain immune to addressing social determinants of health, and ignore the dynamics of power in food systems and society. Drawing from ethnographic research in an Australian community that has high levels of socio-economic disadvantage and obesity, and working on submissions for a new, national obesity strategy, this talk examines the processes and tactics of depoliticization that are used to elide political and socio-cultural phenomenon. I argue (following Brown 2006; Povinelli 2008; 2011) that liberalism's hold on universalisms, autonomy and individual liberty in obesity discourses subjugates a comprehension of political relations, positioning liberal principles and culture as mutually antagonistic. It is precisely this acultural positioning of liberalism that make it possible to remove recognition of the power that produces and contours the 'metabolic rift' between food systems, public health and equity priorities. How then might obesity policy be different if we paid attention to this culturalization of politics?

Biography

Megan Warin is an anthropologist and Professor in the School of Social Sciences, University of Adelaide. Megan has worked in and across a number of disciplines in Australian and UK universities, including anthropology, gender studies, psychiatry and public health. She co-directs the Fay Gale Centre for Research on Gender, is a Robinson Research Institute research leader in biosocial approaches to health, and an international Fellow of the Unit for Biocultural Variation and Obesity in the Institute of Cultural and Social Anthropology at the University of Oxford. Her ethnographic work in Australia investigates the cultural and institutional processes that shape everyday food and eating practices, and how these social practices can be translated into obesity interventions and policy. Current projects examine how developmental perspectives on health and disease and epigenetic understandings of bodies and the environment reproduce biopower and gendered blame, and the emerging dynamics hope and hype in the uptake of Indigenous epigenetics. Her new book with Dr Tanya Zivkovic – *Fatness, Obesity and Disadvantage in the Australian Suburbs: Unpalatable Politics* – will be published by Palgrave in 2019.