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Review of: Catherine Manton, *Fed Up: Women and Food in America*

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Erratum

The citation for this review is *11 RISK 255 (2000)* in most commercial databases.

Catherine Manton, **Fed Up: Women and Food in America** (Bergin & Garvey 1999). Bibliography, index, notes. ISBN 0-89789-448-0 [184 pp. \$55.00. Cloth, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881].

Fed Up explores the change in women's relationship to food throughout history and how that change manifests itself in contemporary women. Using food as a metaphor for women's emotional lives, author Catherine Manton suggests that the transition from being intimately involved in food preparation to becoming disconnected with food, in general, has robbed women of the "opportunity to both give and receive nurturance through the medium of food."¹ This has caused women to question their creative and intuitive abilities to nurture their families and has created dissatisfaction and low self-esteem among women. Manton then examines the connection between the change in women's roles and contemporary women's eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia.

Historically, women were valued in their role as primary providers, preparers and processors of food. This tradition began with the forager society. Women's role later expanded to include healers of the sick and injured. "All of these important roles gave females a strong sense of worthiness and value within the family and the wider social group."² As we evolved into an agrarian society as patriarchy flourished, women became isolated in men's houses. While they continued to provide and prepare food for their families, women's influence in the larger community faded. However, "despite revolutionary changes in the social organization of production and distribution, women's role in relation to food remained essentially unchanged from Neolithic times until the industrial revolution."³

Industrialization altered the way women related to food in a number of significant ways. First, the advent of processed foods deprived women of the valued roles they once played. Advertising

1 Catherine Manton, *Fed Up: Women and Food in America* 4 (1999).

2 *Id.* at 1.

3 *Id.* at 30-31.

further aggravated the issue: by encouraging a consumer preference for processed food over fresh or home-produced food, advertising caused the American housewife to doubt her own ability to adequately feed her family. This signaled the first major disruption of one of the basic tenets of women's traditional identity as providers, producers, and preparers of their families' food.

In addition, printed recipes transfigured a woman's work into "one of 'following directions' rather than trusting her own instincts, experience, and personal taste."⁴ At the same time, women were expected to become smaller in size. "Women are considered shameful when they get big because their size is not a sense of failure."⁵ Thus, in the twentieth-century, food has become women's enemy rather than the once-thought source of nurturance.

Overall, *Fed Up* provides an insightful look at the historical context of how women relate to food and how that relationship affects their cultural status and self-image. It is an engaging book for anyone interested in American social history, women's studies, or ecofeminism.

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⁴ *Id.* at 43.

⁵ *Id.*

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