

Book Reviews/Recensions

OUT OF THE IVORY TOWER: FEMINIST RESEARCH FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Andrea Martinez and Meryn Stuart (Eds.). (2003). Toronto: Sumach Press, 312 pages.

Out of the Ivory Tower: Feminist Research for Social Change is a good introductory reader to a range of different issues in Women's Studies. The book contains an eclectic mix of research reports on topics as diverse as feminist bioethics, military nurses, internet technologies, and women aboriginal chiefs. In their introduction, the editors explain that they "put out a general call for research papers without setting any specific boundaries on what authors should write about" (p. 11). The result is fourteen chapters that are generally unrelated except for the underlying theme of power issues and women's lives. However, the editors have created four general-themed categories within the book: recovering women's histories, sexuality and negotiating the body, women in public space, and intersections of gender, class, language and ethnicity in cyberspace. Since these researchers are connected with the Institute of Women's Studies at the University of Ottawa it is not surprising, but a little disappointing, to have a Canadian text read as though Canada is Ontario with Quebec as a sidebar. While there are a couple of chapters that make connections to research outside of the country, such as Tina O'Toole's comparison of lesbian activism between Ireland and Canada and Agatha Schwartz's examination of female victims in Austrian fiction, it would have also been beneficial to have greater representation of research that addresses experiences of women in other regions in Canada.

Reading this book is a bit like meandering through a trip with no clear destination or route—pleasurable, occasionally provocative, sometimes a little dull, but generally interesting. At the end of the book the reader has been exposed to a variety of different research projects, which, depending upon the interests of the reader, may lead to further exploration of those particular topics. For instance, the chapters by Caroline Anderson on urban planning and those by Andrea Martinez and Elizabeth Turcotte on the use of the internet by Aboriginal groups provide some interesting ideas to consider around women and citizenship. Anderson discusses how lack of safety in

urban centres undermines “women’s equal access to citizenship” (p. 199), while Martinez and Turcott note that despite problems with access and limitations around utilizing indigenous languages with modern technology, “engaging in alternative electronic networks represents a new trend in building a more democratic and empowered reality for Aboriginal women” (p. 288).

Although the book is not written specifically as an educational text, many of the chapters take up issues relevant to both school-based and adult educators. For instance, Sharon Anne Cook points out problems with the lack of gendered analysis contained in anti-smoking literature in high schools. She proposes that this analysis fails to address both the slightly higher percentage of young girls who smoke or acknowledge the implicit media messages of thinness and sexuality connected with smoking that targets a young female audience. The chapter by Ruby Heap on Canadian women in science and engineering as well as Christabelle Sethna and Donatille Mujawamariya’s study on employment and education for women students and professors at the University of Ottawa, explore ongoing feminist concerns with equity and inclusion issues in higher education. Some chapters, such as Aoua Bocar LY-Tall’s discussion of female genital mutilation, provide background information about activist work and policy formation, and Sylvie Frigon’s exploration of women’s experiences in prison alludes to the importance of developing an arts-based curriculum to assist women in healing from violence. Michelle A. Mullen’s discussion of feminist bioethics raises some thoughtful points about selecting appropriate methodology for feminist research, noting the usefulness of quantitative research in some instances, while skillfully arguing for the importance of narrative research to assess underlying value beliefs. Caroline Andrew’s chapter on women in the urban landscape is the most theoretically sophisticated feminist analysis in the book, which examines how urban planning is influenced by gender issues of autonomy and control. She draws upon Nancy Fraser’s “politics of needs interpretation” to explore how safety is addressed for women in the urban landscape to include “expert” technologies such as security systems, “reprivatization” which assigns responsibility to family and neighbourhoods within the context of civil society, and “oppositional” approaches that emerge from the needs of specific communities (p. 200).

The main emphasis of this book, however, is to provide good descriptive overviews of different research projects on women rather than develop a deeper philosophical or theoretical analysis of the problems of gender and

power. The book reads primarily at an undergraduate level, although since it is multi-disciplinary, some chapters (ie. Schwartz's feminist literary analysis) may lead the reader into unfamiliar territory. While the book does not explicitly take up the challenge of developing or implementing feminist pedagogy, it touches on a number of issues that inform feminist perspectives in learning for a variety of different contexts, from the community to higher education settings. As a consequence, adult educators may find this book useful for providing some background information on women's issues, but it is more likely to be a peripheral reader rather than a central text.

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