
Out of the Ivory Tower: Feminist Research for Social Change was stimulated by two significant events: the replacement of the University of Ottawa’s Women’s Studies Program with the Institute of Women’s Studies (IWS) in 1999 and the Worldwide March for Women held in the fall of 2000. The first represented institutional and intellectual recognition of the growth and vigour of the field in the nation’s capital, while the latter mobilized the women’s movement and feminist studies on a global scale. Energized by the march and by the momentum building on campus and within the community, Andrea Martinez and Meryn Stuart wanted to seize the moment in print: to produce an anthology that could both increase the awareness of feminist research that crosses disciplines and link those disciplines to broader political agendas outside the university’s walls.

In many ways, the collection mirrors the multifaceted environments in which these events took place. Martinez, an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication and Director of the IWS, and Stuart, an Associate Professor in the School of Nursing and former IWS director, chose an unusual method of assembling submissions: rather than framing their collection around specific foci and a rigid framework, they opted instead for a general call for submissions free of firm thematic demarcations. The result is an assortment of contributions “that revealed unexpected paths for collaboration between sites of academic production that are traditionally isolated from each other: arts, health sciences, medicine and social sciences”—and which, together, “conveyed a complex but dynamic interconnection of feminist voices” (p. 12).

Part 1, “Recovering Histories and Meanings,” revisits the past to investigate the relationship between hegemonic discourses surrounding sexuality, femininity, and “appropriate behaviour” for women in male-dominated spaces and the subsequent shaping (and sometimes damaging) of women’s bodies. Sharon Anne Cook explores a range of official educational publications and the suspicious silences around young women and smoking. She considers multiple implications of the absence of girls in anti-smoking educational literature, including “the performative uses of smoking” as an act of empowered rebellion (p. 26). Using the murder...
of 14 young female engineering students at Montréal’s École Polytechnique in 1989 as a site “rich in meanings,” Ruby Heap outlines the underexamined and highly complex territories of feminism, science, and engineering by providing a history of women in the field (p. 49). Tina O’Toole uses archival research coupled with her own experiences to sketch the carving out of political, social, and cultural spaces by lesbian activists in the 1970s and 1980s in both Ireland and Canada, emphasizing the necessity of primary documents—and their houses—for continued feminist scholarship. In a similar methodological vein but in a very different era, Cynthia Toman examines the enlistment of “the right kind” of nurse into the military and her consequent moulding into a “military nurse” during the Second World War, highlighting the pushes and pulls of nurses’ double role as “officer” and “lady” (p. 98).

Rooted in the notion that “patriarchal power in all its forms and theoretical analyses must be grounded historically and culturally, as must resistance, agency, and autonomy,” Part 2, “The Language of Sexuality: ‘Negotiating’ the Female Body,” focuses on the institutionalization—and appropriation—of female bodies in various spaces and places (p. 14). Aoua Bocar LY-Tall traces the migration of female genital mutilation (FGM) from Africa to North America and discusses strategies adopted to eradicate the widespread practice by 2015. She emphasizes the need for further research, political strategizing, and the dissemination of information on a global scale. Sylvie Frigon theorizes the ways in which “deviant bodies” have historically been and continue to be “probed, marked, measured and treated” in the criminal justice system (p. 131) and argues that women’s incarcerated bodies, when given the chance to speak, do so loudly: “to the body as a site of control is juxtaposed the body as a site of resistance” (p. 148, italics in original).

Michelle Mullen argues for the potentially rich merging of feminist scholarship and bioethics, concluding that “empirical research holds the promise of displacing academic and ideological ruminations into the untidy world of lived experience” (p. 169). And Agatha Schwartz revisits the question of female aggression through representations of the female victim in contemporary Austrian fiction.

Part 3, “Shaping Equity for Women in Public Spaces,” addresses issues that persist despite the political acknowledgment (and designation) of particular groups as disproportionately disadvantaged, specifically “racialized, working-class and other marginalized groups of women in the public sphere” (p. 16). Caroline Andrew starts this section off strong with an analysis of gender and Canadian urban space, noting that feminist urban research has a history in which “theory and practice have been closely intertwined; theory informing practice and practice informing theory” (p. 189). Using the University of Ottawa as a case study, Christabelle Sethna and Donatille Mujawamariya expose the fallacy of the “poor boys” argument of recent years, illustrating that “women in academe continue to be caught in an ‘academic funnel’”—a decrease in the proportion of women from one level of the academy to another at both the student and professorial ranks—despite the adoption of equity policies over the past 20 years (p. 205). Cora Voyageur moves the analysis into the realm of politics through her study of 54 (of 90) women chiefs in Canada and their negotiation of multiple roles: “as women, mothers, administrators, mediators, liaisons, community repre-
sentatives and decision-makers” (p. 228). She also makes note of the dearth of academic research on First Nations women in community leadership positions in the contemporary context.

Part 4, “The Intersection of Gender, Class, Language and Ethnicity in Cyberspace,” considers new and emerging technologies: the ways in which they affect women and how women are, in turn, affecting them. Ann Denis and Michèle Ollivier review “the gender gap” in terms of both access and use of the Internet by Canadian women, while Martinez and Elizabeth Turcotte bring to light the “haves” and “have nots” of cyberspace. They argue that “just as in the conventional media, discrimination and inequalities that are inherent to the larger social context shape agendas and communication practices” (p. 270), but also note that there are spaces in which these tendencies are being disrupted. And last, the rise and fall of an Internet appliance conspicuously named Audrey™ provides Leslie Regan Shade the opportunity to analyze the development, marketing, and consumption of gendered technology, to pinpoint the lack of “any awareness of the potential for women to use these communication technologies to engage in the public sphere, contest political and social life and participate in civic engagement” in such designs, and to call for alternatives that don’t simply reproduce existing gender roles.

Given the scope and breadth of each of the 14 essays, the book’s broad thematic organization is effective in showcasing the multiplicity of voices that characterize “the feminist community,” in highlighting the variety of methodological approaches employed within the academy, and in demonstrating the common ground that feminist research shares regardless of disciplinary borders. Out of the Ivory Tower is an unusual collection of essays that successfully “brings to the fore a constellation of issues and concerns relevant to women’s political, social and personal lives” (p. 12) while consciously pointing to a multiplicity of others. Individually the pieces are strong and compelling; together, they illustrate the wide-reaching nature of feminist thought in a broad range of disciplines and showcase a particularly Canadian focus that nevertheless looks beyond national borders. Not all of the chapters will appeal equally to all of the editors’ projected audience of feminist academics, activists, policymakers, and educators. However, this collection contributes significantly to the past, current, and potential promise of feminist research both inside and outside the academy’s walls, but also maps multiple directions for studies in future studies.

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Reviews