

Book / video reviews

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Powerful Subjects: Are Women Really Taking Over the University? Jocey Quinn. Stoke on Trent, UK and Sterling, USA: Trentham Books, 2003; x + 168 pages; ISBN 1 85856 279 1; \$29.95US (paper).

In *Powerful Subjects*, Jocey Quinn discusses a research project in which she examined claims that feminism and the expanded female presence in universities and colleges has resulted in female domination of formerly masculine space. Her project was in response to widespread claims that education has become feminized. Quinn found that far from being feminized spaces, the institutions she studied were uncomfortable for many female students; that being a majority within a student body does not necessarily make female students "powerful subjects."

Quinn's research was done in Britain, where post-secondary institutions are different enough from those of Canada that her research results cannot be directly superimposed. But it is not difficult for the Canadian reader to imagine ways in which Quinn's results might apply to Canadian institutions, and her solid literature review and bibliography will be useful to people interested in this topic.

Quinn examined the experiences of twenty-one female students in two British post-secondary institutions: one a college and one a relatively new university. She studied students in two different subject areas, neither of them male dominated. While she tried to get a cross section of ages and conditions of life, her study subjects were less racially and ethnically diverse than one might expect to find in similar institutions in urban Canada.

Quinn's study results place into question the presumption that feminism and the presence of women in post-secondary education have affected course content and modes of teaching. Explicitly feminist discourse was largely absent in these institutions, even in a class dealing with

feminist issues. Feminist pedagogy was a non-issue, male students still tended to dominate classrooms, female students still felt uncertain of their place. Quinn found that while her subjects were thoughtful, they were not powerful, neither in their self-perceptions nor in the objective circumstance of their classroom and other institutional experiences.

This work has some real limitations. Not all readers will agree with Quinn's theoretical and ideological assumptions about what "feminist" and "feminist pedagogy" mean. The small sample size and restricted locales limit the general applicability of her research results. Yet despite these limitations, readers who are concerned about the place of women in institutions of higher education will find this work useful. Quinn demonstrates some of the ways and some of the reasons why, for all the changes that have taken place in post-secondary education, and despite a vast increase in the presence of women as university students and faculty, women are still far from being powerful subjects within these institutions.

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The Balancing Act: Gendered Perspectives in Faculty Roles and Work Lives. Susan Bracken, Jeanie Allen, and Diane Dean, eds. Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2006; illustrations; xiv+177pp; ISBN 1-57922-149-1; \$24.95US (paper).

The Balancing Act is essential reading for anyone concerned with the uneven impact of institutional policies and unofficial expectations on the lives of academic women and underrepresented minorities, male and female. It provides a body of quantitative and qualitative scholarship substantiating what many of us may already believe, but that can often be conveniently dismissed by university

administrators. In one useful study, for example, Neumann, Terosky and Schell turn their attention to mid-career faculty and find that “career demands do not lessen with tenure” but actually “increase” (91). In another, Jeni Hart studies the creative, far ranging policies initiated at the University of California that give the reader a sense of what is possible when university administrators take the needs of an increasing diverse faculty seriously. As with several other contributors to this volume, Hart argues that no one policy can achieve a sane work-life balance for persons at all career stages and in all personal contexts.

Despite the care contributors took in attending to the variety in academic institutions (research universities, comprehensive universities, and community colleges, where faculty workloads are highest and least flexible), the studies deal exclusively with American institutions. Here in Canada, the legal context for maternity and parental leaves is determined federally, and all employers including academic institutions have the same legal obligations to their employees (up to 12 months leave with a guarantee of returning to the same status of job). Junior faculty, however, still may be reluctant to take full advantage of those entitlements for fear of appearing insufficiently dedicated, as Wolf-Wendel and Ward’s contribution to the volume suggests - albeit in the American context. Canadian female faculty, like their American counterparts, are not immune to delaying childbearing/rearing or “choosing” to have fewer children than we might otherwise, as documented here by Mason, Goulden, and Wolfinger.

Despite its many strengths, *The Balancing Act* pays scant attention to the lives of adjunct or part-time faculty and the policies that inform their work-life “balance.” Although the editors and several contributors make passing reference to the changing institutional conditions that include the ever-increasing “casualization” of academic labour and the hiring of more and more non-tenure-stream faculty, none of the essays takes that body of academic workers as its focus.

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Rocking the Cradle: Thoughts on Motherhood, Feminism and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering. Andrea O'Reilly. Toronto, Ontario: Demeter Press, 2006; vii + 206 pages; ISBN 1-55014-449-9; \$24.95 (paper).

In this book, Andrea O'Reilly has compiled ten of her own essays on motherhood and mothering, spanning 15 years of work, in an effort to address the lack of writing on mothering within feminist literature. The main questions she grapples with in this volume are: How do we challenge patriarchal motherhood? How do we create feminist mothering? And how are these two aims interconnected? Section one, entitled "Motherhood," sets out to discuss the ways that motherhood, as an oppressive and hegemonic ideology, is harmful to women. Motherhood is defined by O'Reilly as a patriarchal institution that differs from a woman's lived experience of mothering. This distinction, like many of O'Reilly's arguments, develops from the writings of Adrienne Rich. Section two builds on this experiential concept of mothering by exploring ways that women can resist motherhood and embrace a feminist mothering model. O'Reilly challenges earlier feminist critiques of mothering by arguing that these blame the mother (rather than the institution of motherhood) and encourage a disconnection between mother and child. As an alternative, O'Reilly advises a return to engaged and connected parenting, specifically, a feminist mothering model which consists of both anti-sexist child rearing and empowered mothering; the latter being more important because it models the former.

As a young mother working my way along the academic career path, I enjoyed *Rocking the Cradle* and could relate to much of what the author has to say. She effectively describes the disjuncture between being a feminist and a mother, as well as the difficulties of juggling academia and child rearing. O'Reilly points out that parenting