

**2006 WINNER OF THE CWSA/ACEF ANNUAL BOOK AWARD
BOOK REVIEW**

***Money in Their Own Name.* Wendy McKeen. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Ontario, 2004; 168 pages; ISBN 0-8020-8544-X; \$27.95 (paper).**

In *Money in Their Own Name*, Wendy McKeen provides an interesting and detailed account of the shifts in feminist politics from the 1970s to the 1990s. Using the formation of federal child benefit programs in Canada as her backdrop, McKeen examines why the feminist vision of the "social individual" failed to come to fruition and instead women's access to social benefits became granted on the basis of their relationship to men and to children, as wives or mothers. During this time period, second wave feminists opposed entrenched notions of women's dependency in Canadian social policy ensuing in a campaign to alter entitlements from the family unit to the individual, thus allowing women claim to benefits in their own right.

Through analysis of archival data and qualitative interviews McKeen finds that feminists slowly lost interest in the campaign for individualized benefits. From McKeen's perspective, changes in the discourse on poverty, produced principally by national social policy organizations, greatly influenced feminists to reformulate their goals and demands to coincide with more mainstream concerns.

By weaving together the concepts of discourse, agency, and policy community, McKeen offers a new theoretical tool for understanding how political interests are formed and often, reformulated. McKeen argues that politics always entails the struggle over meaning and thus discourses that are generated are integral in understanding policy formation. While highlighting the importance of discourse, she rejects the "totalizing view of discourse" wherein consuming attention is allotted to text and no consideration is made for the power of human agency. She argues that people, not discourse, create meaning. Policy communities have varying degrees of power in shaping discourse. Further, each community is assumed to have a shared belief system and codes of conduct. McKeen posits that the combination of these three areas - discourse, agency and policy community - exist in interplay with the sociopolitical conditions prevailing, to produce the conditions and limits the goals of marginal social movements (28).

McKeen argues effectively that as a result of changes in the discourse of poverty, generated mostly by national social policy organizations, feminists were pushed to reformulate their goals to coincide with more mainstream concerns. She explains that in the late 1970s the institutionalized women's movement proposed solutions for social policy

that contradicted. Specifically, they were simultaneously pushing for increased funds for poor women, for women to be treated as independent and for women to be granted access to social benefits as an individual. This push towards individualization challenged mainstream politics aimed at combating poverty. By the mid 1980s, however, the institutionalized women's movement ended up supporting, rather than challenging the dominant agenda in family and child benefits policy. The severe recession and deep unemployment during this time resulted in feminists setting aside their long term goals for equity and autonomy for the more immediate gains of the poor. The neoliberal agenda of the 1990s was one that included the narrowing of the welfare state and deep cuts to the funding of women's organizations. As a result, McKeen argues that women were marginalized from mainstream political communities and were effectively written out of the poverty problem.

The left liberal policy community responded to the harsh neoliberal agenda by creating a new discourse on poverty centered on the child. Feminists supported this child centered movement in order to alleviate some of the immediate pressure of those living in poverty. However, McKeen contends that the result of this shift was that gender neutrality replaced gender specificity in the language of social policy. Single mothers were replaced as deserving poor and the focus was placed on child poverty.

One of the most appealing things about Wendy McKeen's book is her conclusion. McKeen urges us to reengage with the battle for access to benefits based upon individuals rather than through targeting with a focus on familial or child poverty. She recognizes the importance of care work to society and promotes a sense of community and social citizenship. This book is so well argued that it inspires the reader to look beyond the often cited "gains" women have made and to recognize that individual autonomy, programs that offer a genuine alternative to marriage and family, is the only way that women will ever be granted full citizenship.

Money in Their Own Name is an important book for women's studies students as well as for students studying social policy and/or gender equity in other disciplines. Not only does the book provide a detailed account of the ways in which specific policies and discourses have been constructed, it provides an excellent example of why feminism and women's movements are still essential in today's context. The theoretical framework of this book gives the reader insight into where progress has been made, and illuminates where, when, and how, agendas are shifted and manipulated overtime.

This book would be an asset to upper year and graduate students. While pervasive and compelling in her arguments, McKeen utilizes vast and complex social policies and legislation as a backdrop for analysis. Without a general understanding of the policies and legislation reviewed, a student may not be privileged with a true or nuanced engagement with McKeen's arguments. Further, as McKeen relies partially on qualitative material, in future editions of this book it may be beneficial to include the voices of the participants interviewed. While her current framework and arguments are gripping, such inclusion of voice may provide a more detailed representation of the choices that were made in supporting some agendas, while abandoning others.

Sara J. Cumming
University of Waterloo