

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

**ADIE NELSON and BARRIE W. ROBINSON, *Gender in Canada*, 2nd edition. Toronto: Prentice Hall. 2002, xviii + 557 p.**

A vast and impressive body of feminist and other scholarly work has emerged over the last several decades to shed light on gender relations in Canada and elsewhere. It illustrated how ideas about gender and patterns of gender relations shape and are shaped by key areas of human activity (e.g., family, education, communication, work, politics, sexuality) in ways that generate and perpetuate gender inequalities. In the process, it has challenged us both to reflect critically upon our conventional understandings of sex and gender and to envision the paths we might best pursue to eliminate gender inequalities and the constraining aspects of gender.

By providing a broad and detailed review of significant theoretical and empirical contributions to this literature, this second edition of *Gender in Canada* serves as a well-constructed vehicle from which to survey the field of gender relations at the start of the new century. While there is some integration of results from cross-cultural research as well as conceptual and theoretical insights from researchers around the world, the focus is, as the title suggests, on understanding patterns of gender relations in Canada and how these have changed and are changing over time. The authors have retained the engaging and frequently witty style of presentation as well as the structure of the first edition.

A useful interrogation of key concepts is followed by a critical examination of the contributions proponents of various theoretical perspectives (biological, psychological, social psychological, sociological, feminist, and masculinity focussed) have made to our understanding of gender. These early chapters challenge the dichotomous thinking that underwrites dominant conceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality, and encourage reflection upon both their socially constructed nature and the constraining aspects of these constructions. At the same time, gender is fleshed out as a multi-faceted area of practice that operates from individual to global levels.

Turning to the content and dynamics of gender socialization, the authors offer illuminating reviews of how the family, the school, and the media participate in socializing children in ways that either reinforce or challenge traditional notions of what boys and girls are to be, and provide a compelling account of how language can shore up gender inequalities.

Though they do not touch on the gender socializing influence of religion, they include an interesting discussion of peer-group influences and the disciplining power that peers exercise through participation in sports and in regard to physical appearance.

To illustrate the ways in which gender is inextricably intertwined with areas of human activity, Nelson and Robinson devote three chapters to examining how gender is engaged with work (paid and unpaid), family, and intimate relations. In addition to providing a wealth of empirical data on various aspects gender relations in these areas, the authors seek to demonstrate how the social arrangements defining work, family, and intimate relations create and sustain gender yet are also created and sustained by gender. They draw our attention to how the demands of work in the paid labour force and in the home continue to sustain a gender division of labour and how work arrangements (e.g., the emergence of "mommy tracks" and home-based working) are being shaped in part by gender. While reference to the body of research on the gendered nature of organizations would have strengthened the discussion of gender's impact on work arrangements, there is still much in these chapters to alert the reader to these processes of reciprocal influence.

Nelson and Robinson also undertake a more in-depth look at gender and aging. The rationale for positioning this topic in its own chapter near the end of the text is not immediately obvious. Some of the content (e.g., on the notion of "gender depolarization" and the breaking down of rigid gender expectations with age) complements the discussion on gender socialization and might usefully have appeared earlier. Similarly, the material on caregiving work and retirement might have been integrated into the earlier chapter on work. Still, the authors' claim that giving this topic its own chapter will help to flag issues that are all too often neglected in a youth-oriented society may have merit.

The final chapter attempts in a relatively brief span of pages to provide some assessment of how Canada compares with other countries in terms of gender equality as well as highlight some of the problems and possibilities of social change. While the discussions on the resistance to feminism and the "stalled revolution" are informative, the micro-level focus of the final "where do we go from here" section and the silence on current initiatives of the Women's Movement provide a somewhat disheartening conclusion to the text.

Overall, the text succeeds in providing a wealth of information about gender relations in Canada, and in highlighting the ways in which gender intersects with age, social class, and sexual orientation in particular. That there is less material on how gender intersects with disabilities no doubt reflects the relative paucity of work in this area to date. However, the text would be usefully supplemented by additional reference to the substantial contributions from anti-racist feminists in Canada, particularly over the past decade (e.g., on integrating racialization into feminist theorising, on

discourses of race and the nuclear family, on violence against women in communities of colour, etc.).

*Gender in Canada* will serve as a solid introductory text for an upper-level sociology course on gender. The material will engage students on a number of levels and the websites provided at the end of each chapter together with the seventy-seven page bibliography will provide plenty of avenues to explore particular interests.

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