

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

REBEKKAH ADAMS, *Glass Houses: Saving Feminist Anti-Violence Agencies from Self Destruction*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2008, 121 p.

Based on years of experience in the field, Adams attempts to provide a critical account of feminist anti-violence organizations. *Glass Houses: Saving Feminist Anti-Violence Agencies from Self Destruction* examines the internal dynamics of these organizations and offers strategies for creating safe and effective feminist spaces.

Adams begins by posing some pivotal questions about the current situation facing feminist service organizations. Reflecting nostalgically on the grassroots history of these agencies, Adams asks why organizations which began with such high ideals are "...often places of inequality and pain" (11). In particular, Adams explores the impact of professionalization, critiquing the structures and attitudes which have arisen because of it. Noting the hostile political climate for feminist service agencies, Adams stresses the importance of self-reflection and urges feminists in the anti-violence movement to focus on organizational health. She is concerned that if this does not happen, organizations will crumble from within and will not be able to withstand any external attacks.

Chapter one analyzes organizational structures. Looking at the roles of mission statements, the board of directors, organizational membership and the executive director, Adams contends that professionalization led to the neutralization of feminist service providers, encouraging harmful behaviours and structures. For example, she is wary of the hierarchal structures which have developed and criticizes the accompanying competitive attitudes. Furthermore, Adams questions why political action does not take more precedence. She argues that practices need to reflect the ideals expressed in organizational mission statements. Adams also urges feminists to allow agencies to evolve and adopt strategies and structures which are suited to the necessary political work.

The next chapter explores the operation of feminist anti-violence agencies and considers issues surrounding funding and staff turnover. Adams discusses the internal hierarchies that develop which in turn lead to some workers being valued more than others. She is particularly concerned because she feels that organizations are hiring staff and leadership without any consideration for their commitment to feminism, thus contributing to a

watering down of the agencies' politics. Furthermore, Adams questions the dependency of feminist service agencies on government funding. She suggests ways to improve relations within organizations and recommends more effective business models in order to ensure greater stability.

Adams then discusses organizational administration. In particular, she attempts to illustrate the connection between the physical, emotional and political spaces. Recognizing the stressful nature of anti-violence work, Adams questions why more "family friendly" initiatives are not in place. She contends that clean, welcoming spaces are necessary and emphasizes the importance of community. Calling for a renewed energy in feminist anti-violence work, Adams argues that personnel must focus on building stronger organizations.

By drawing our attention to issues she feels are specific to feminist anti-violence agencies, Adams concludes by addressing the competition and hierarchies among employees and volunteers at these organizations. In addition to the tensions which exist between the personnel, Adams also criticizes the tendency for workers to uphold an artificial distance between themselves and service users. In order to address these issues, she stresses the role of effective communication in the creation and maintenance of a unified community. Furthermore, Adams offers practical advice for creating a more welcoming environment and workplace.

Although *Glass Houses: Saving Feminist Anti-Violence Agencies from Self Destruction* is written with passion and highlights several important issues for feminists, it fails to effectively examine the situation facing these organizations in any depth. While Adams' focus is on the internal dynamics of these agencies, she provides no discussion of the external context. Feminist structures are often a critique of mainstream structures or are influenced by the demands of funding agencies. Therefore, Adams' failure to acknowledge this in any comprehensive way is a serious flaw and leaves our understanding of feminist organizations incomplete.

Additionally, while Adams informs the reader that her findings are based on interviews with front line workers and her own experience in the field, she does not provide a detailed account of her methodology. A significant gap exists in Adams' work because she fails to outline her sample selection and data analysis. Thus, the generalizability of her findings is questionable.

Throughout her discussion, Adams makes many generalizations. For instance, she does not provide a clear definition of feminist anti-violence agencies and disregards differences between women's shelters and rape crisis centres. Although both types of organizations are feminist anti-violence agencies, their needs and problems are often quite distinct; however, Adams does not acknowledge this. Instead, she discusses feminist organizations as an undifferentiated category and ignores specific histories and local contexts.

While the potential for groundbreaking work exists, Adams falls short of achieving this goal. Consequently, it is the reviewer's opinion that one should proceed with caution when reading this book as it does not provide a balanced account of the world of service workers, nor does it adequately represent the unique needs and pressures of specific types of agencies. However, given the limited range of studies on Canadian feminist organizations, Adams' work provides us with a useful starting point for understanding some of the issues facing the feminist anti-violence movement. *Glass Houses: Saving Feminist Anti-Violence Agencies from Self Destruction* is ideally suited for upper-level undergraduate classes involved in a critical analysis of feminist organizations and women's movements; however, a prior understanding of the literature is required. Additionally, front line workers may find this book useful as praxis and as a beginning for creating dialogue regarding the need for healthier organizations.

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