

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

WENDY ROBBINS, MEG LUXTON, MARGRIT EICHLER and FRANCINE DESCARRIES (Eds.), *Minds of Our Own: Inventing Feminist Scholarship and Women's Studies in Canada*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007, xiv + 398 p., index.

*Minds of Our Own* is a collection of essays, written primarily by women who contributed to the creation and groundwork of what is now referred to as Feminist Scholarship and Women's Studies programs across Canada, including Quebec. Not only are their voices reminders of the challenges women have endured in academia and society, but also the accomplishments and progress women have achieved. Each essay imparts a unique perspective of women in academia, the women's movement and the position of feminism in society.

This book offers a very detailed introduction, exploring the shifting social position of women in Western society, primarily in North America, and the various social and political events which occurred from 1965 to 1975. In doing so, the editors better situate the context of each essay and allow readers, particularly if they are unfamiliar with the women's movement, to familiarize themselves with its historical impact. The editors introduce topics such as women in the labour force and the political system, marriage and family life, women's resistance through art, and of course, women's struggles within the higher educational system. The editors also include the various questions posed to the authors, in search of their experiences and struggles, both politically, personally and professionally.

*Minds of Our Own* is an easy-to-follow, clear and concise book. The editors have organized the content in such a way that the reader is able to decide the order in which to read each short essay: by chronological order, by the age of the author, the author's name, by discipline or by thematic grouping. By including these various options, the book offers a more involved reading experience. Following each essay, the editors have also included a brief listing of publications which is particularly useful for those who are interested in reading further into the work and research done by each author.

The various writers of this book discuss their battles with sex and gender-based discrimination and their own personal and professional challenges. Their individual experiences are both appalling and tragic – women were openly discouraged from pursuing their professional goals in order to remain in the household, furthering their domestic oppression. They encountered ridicule, alienation and even forceful threats. Women, it was thought, did not belong in academia. *Minds of Our Own* chronicles the experiences of women who, despite these difficulties, tirelessly fought at the forefront to create Women's Studies

programs across Canada. Although not all accounts conclude with a victorious ending, each offers the reader hope, strength and inspiration.

The authors share many similar experiences, often including accounts about other pioneers who have also contributed to this book. Some essays are written by several authors, providing a dialogue concerning the events they have individually and collectively experienced. One such collective experience, common to many essays, is the author's first encounter with feminism and women's rights. Some authors offer reflections of what feminism meant for them in a time when such a term did not yet exist. Identifying as a feminist or advocate for women's rights had, and continues to have, societal repercussions, which each essay recounts in vivid detail. Undoubtedly, the authors provide the reader with a glimpse into the herstory of women resisting gender-based employment within the academic environment and the possibility of overcoming such injustices.

While this book does offer a voice for the founders of Women's Studies within Canada, it lacks a diverse perspective. The essays within *Minds of Our Own* are written primarily by white women; only two women of colour and two men contributed to this book. The editors do briefly mention this under-representation within their reflective conclusion; however, they do not address why this discrepancy exists. As such, the book fails to address the different struggles which women of colour and men who identify as feminist may experience.

In its entirety, *Minds of Our Own* is a very informative and well-structured book. I would recommend it to any individual interested in the herstory of Women's Studies programs, particularly within a Canadian context. Also, readers who are fascinated by personal accounts of activism and resistance would appreciate this book; or simply, those who feel discouraged by the current underfunding of subversive programs such as Women Studies and need to be inspired by the progress women have made thus far in academia.

*Minds of Our Own: Inventing Feminist Scholarship and Women's Studies in Canada* reveals the struggles women in academia have endured throughout Canada from 1965 to 1975. The essays are inspirational, demonstrating the determination and strength women possess, both individually and as a collective. The editors and various authors of this book have accomplished their goal of documenting the formation of Feminist Scholarship and Women's Studies programs in Canada. Hopefully, *Minds of Our Own* is just the beginning in the process of mapping out the progress women have achieved in academia.

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