

Clover, D. E., Butterwick, S., & Collins, L. (2015). *Women, Adult Education, and Leadership in Canada*. Toronto, ON: Thompson Educational Publishing. Pages: 384. ISBN: 9781550772487

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Women's leadership education has the ability to fundamentally change the way governance structures exist in Canada, and yet it continues to be relegated to the margins in formal institutional settings. Clover, Butterwick, and Collins' book validates women's forms of leadership, alternative spaces for education, and highlights women and organizations that have created change and opened spaces for women's empowerment.

The First Stitches

In the past decade, women's rights and women's issues in Canada have witnessed a transition from the elimination of funding to core women's programming, to a feminist-friendly regime that introduced a gender-balanced cabinet, announced an official inquiry into the missing and murdered Indigenous women, and will include the first female Canadian on the national currency. Increasing the visibility and dialogue on women's issues is imperative, and the release of Clover, Butterwick, and Collins' *Women, Adult Education, and Leadership in Canada* during a feminist-positive time may increase the resonance of their theme: women's alternative routes to empowerment.

Such a book is long overdue; however, given the intersectionality within the articles, and the current heightened awareness of privilege historically given to middle-to-upper-class women of European descent in the feminist movement, it could be that the timing is perfect. The editors recognize that gaps within the book are inevitable given the breadth of the topic. Nevertheless, the inclusion of LGBTQ issues in only the most minor of intersectional references is problematic. Also problematic is the largely absent discussion of the leadership of women's health education.

Four chapters highlighting the importance of the Women's Institute (Duerden, Ch. 21; Irving, Ch. 17; Stella, Ch. 8; Woodrow & Cullum, Ch. 22), challenge the lack of inclusion of studies relevant to women and the empowerment of women within the post-secondary context, and though religious institutions are only briefly mentioned (Butterwick & Elfert, Ch. 5), the example of the Catholic Sisters outlined from the articles on the eastern coastal regions of Canada demonstrate that it was a space for the development of social justice strategies.

The book as a whole successfully details a thriving alternate community of women educators and leaders from a range of backgrounds who work through adversity to create networks of learning and outreach for women. It also validates female epistemologies, which are fundamental to understanding the problematic nature of mainstream education. The greatest challenge for editors working to bring forth long-suppressed voices is that the intersectionality of identities can make the undertaking too ambitious. Overall, this challenge has been well met by the editors.

Stitching it All Together

Clover, Butterwick, and Collins have created an anthology of Canadian feminist movements, leaders, and andragogy in Canada. They have structured their framework within four themes: Leadership and Activism, Pedagogies for Change, Pedagogy and the Imagination, and Structures and Agency. These themes address challenges faced by women in having their voices heard, their worldviews legitimized, and in gaining the ongoing, stable support to continue their efforts towards equity within a patriarchal, neoliberal society.

The book opens with the more recent developments of the Indigenous Idle-No-More movement of 2013, and concludes with the onset of targeted education for rural women through Canada's Women's Institute. The physical prioritization of Atleo's Indigenous-centered chapter sets the tone and acts as recognition of the Indigenous territories on which these articles have been produced (Atleo, Ch. 3). Taber's (Ch. 4) chapter on military leaders highlights the editors' view of gender-based relativism in leadership, a view that is further supported by Braid's (Ch. 26) auto-ethnographic account of negotiating the male-dominated trades field in the concluding section. Careful to not idealize a gender-binary, Stella's (Ch. 8) chapter on the Women's Institute highlights the male governance structures used in the formulation of Canada's most successful organization for the advancement of women's leadership and adult education.

The Section "Pedagogies for Change" discusses ways that feminist pedagogies subvert the mainstream system while highlighting the blind spots of women's movements with respect to marginalized communities. Young Leon's (Ch. 9) chapter introduces Indigenous alternatives to Eurocentric leadership practices. Zahraei and Mojob (Ch. 10), Ng (Ch. 12) and Kelly and Pillay (Ch. 13) focus on women's equity issues including oppressive refugee policies that increase the vulnerability of women, responsibilities of unions toward the elimination of exploitation in industry and within hiring practices, and the role of newspapers in normalizing or stigmatizing populations.

In creatively reworking andragogical structures, the section "Pedagogy and the Imagination" opens the door to subversive methods to disrupt the system. It discusses the development of libraries as spaces for adult education, and the reinvigoration of museums when used for activism and community education. It opens the world of artists in fashion, fiction writing, and handiwork, and shifts the perception of these fields from being shallow fields "relegated" to women, to being a new method of communicating stories from unheard voices.

The concluding section on "Structures and Agency" delves into the gender binary that has limited the perception of women's capabilities and devalued roles traditionally held by women. Duerden's article confronts the oft-heard challenge to legitimacy of adult female learners (Duerdin, Ch. 21). Woodrow and Cullum's (Ch. 22) retrospective of the Memorial University Extension Unit reveals the tokenization of mandated women's programs that were given no direction and insufficient financial support. The disengagement of governing powers continues with community-based literacy programs that delegated inexperienced, low-cost female teachers, arguing that female nurturing and the instructor's ability to read was all that was required to assist students challenged by text-based illiteracy (Smythe, Ch. 24). "Mommy blogs" are an area where women hold agency and challenge authority on motherhood (Careless, Ch. 25).

The book provides a wide lens of historical movements and small victories, while challenging the current generation of women to learn the nuanced challenges of intersectionality in women's issues. By analyzing challenges through alternative lenses, such as the incorporation of the Indigenous lens and African-Canadian labour issues (Ng, Ch. 12), it opens a wealth of potential for alternative views.

Some Patches Required

Women, Adult Education, and Leadership in Canada is successful in demonstrating the subversion to a system that does not embrace women and continues to see them as subordinate. It highlights the spaces that women have found within the structure to create agency, despite chronic underfunding and lack of support. It identifies communities who have fought against all odds within a feminist sphere that has been dominated by class-privileged women of European heritage.

For each community of women featured within this book, there are a number who have been left out. Such a book cannot be “all things to all people”; however, Clover, Butterwick, and Collins’ omission of the LGBTQ community creates a cis-normative environment that they had clearly not intended. Where other lenses are used to view the intersectionality of feminist issues, feminist leadership challenges within the LGBTQ is only referred to in a nonsubstantive manner, acknowledging their existence and importance but not examining how the communities are also significantly affected. This gap is most noticeable in Smythe’s piece on literacy, where women’s literacy is prioritized when children are involved, a right that historically has been largely withheld from the LGBTQ community through archaic laws, thereby further excluding their community from opportunities of advancement (Smythe, Ch. 24). Gender fluidity also further complicates the chapters on gender binaries in the military (Taber, Ch. 4) and adaptation and gendered communication in male-dominated fields (Braid, Ch. 26).

By looking through the lenses of marginalized women’s communities, the writers bring a greater complexity to the issues, underlining the intersectionality of feminism. However, this tool was largely used to look at areas of feminism that have been dominated by white-privilege. Further legitimacy would be given to marginalized communities if their voices were given the authority to look at each other, decentralizing Eurocentrism (Grande, 2000). It is, however, appropriate that given the Canadian context, the Indigenous lens is used throughout to disrupt ways of thinking, and also to validate the power of using intercultural perspectives as a lens.

In addition to perspectives, place also was present in the background, as place and safe space are fundamental to adult education and women’s leadership practices. The book would have been strengthened by an article addressing safe spaces within the “Structures and Agency” section. It is interesting that in referencing the religious institutions within this book, which is clearly (and rightly) seen as a domain of patriarchy, there are a significant number of nuns who are featured within the book, indicating that religious institutions provided refuge for women who wanted to make change for other women. The power of women in rural and remote communities is also significant as the Women’s Institute, the strongest women’s group to originate from Canada, originated in farming communities. The question of how place affects women’s empowerment is significant, and yet, only read in the subtext.

With regard to content, the absence of discussion on women’s health education and leadership resonates, as it is arguably the single-most important issue effecting women, and has long been de-prioritized in the medical field. The subject is alluded to in Careless’ chapter on “mommy blogs”, as they provide a space for women to disseminate information on the health of mothers (Careless, Ch. 25). It is poignantly discussed in Gouthro and Holloway’s chapter on female fiction writers, where a writer is refused publication of a book on losing a child during pregnancy, but is able to address this in a fictional work (Gouthro & Holloway, Ch. 19). Interestingly, this specificity of these health issues reinforces Smythe’s point of women’s rights being marginally afforded only to those who have had children.

Conclusion: A Pattern to Share

Women, Adult Education, and Leadership in Canada opens the door to conversations that are long overdue. It validates alternative methods that women create to educate and empower themselves, while highlighting the formation of communities of change. The vignettes recognize women and feminist organizations that create transformative change. This book creates more questions than it answers, as the topic of Canadian-specific feminist movements has not been largely examined. By pairing leadership with adult education, there is recognition that women from marginalized communities largely seek out education at later stages in life due to finances, language barriers, and childrearing. Clover, Butterwick, and Collins have addressed the inequities that women face in education both sensitively and in a manner that will entice a generation of researchers to look at the past and present to disrupt the path of the future.

References

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