

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Elizabeth Smyth, Sandra Acker, Paula Bourne, and Alison Prentice, eds. *Challenging Professions: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Women's Professional Work*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. Pp. 334.

Despite coming first in her class three years in a row, the young physicist Elizabeth Laird was not awarded the prestigious 1851 Exhibition Scholarship from the University of Toronto. In her study of early women physicists, Alison Prentice explains that the scholarship, which enabled the top graduate to pursue advanced study abroad, was awarded instead to the man who came second. Elizabeth Laird is one of many talented, ambitious, and determined women we meet in *Challenging Professions*, and like Laird, these women all encounter the obstacles, or challenges, of gender bias in their pursuit of professional work. For this reason, the collection is often painful to read, and the combination of historical and contemporary perspectives serves to remind us that these challenges, for many professional women, continue into the present. The current structural inequalities of such male-dominated professions as forestry, explored by Peggy Tripp-Knowles, or chartered accountancy, studied by Cyndy Allen and Margaret Conrad, provide modern-day counterparts to the injustices experienced by Elizabeth Laird and other first-generation professional women in the 1890s. As many of the essays in *Challenging Professions* reveal, however, inequality is only one aspect of the complex interaction between gender and professionalization.

Growing out of an interdisciplinary research network on women and professional education, *Challenging Professions* is a diverse, absorbing collection of essays. Although the topics range widely in subject matter, perspective, and methodology, the book nevertheless can be read easily as a unified whole; when approached collectively, the seemingly eclectic articles contribute to an overall thematic coherence. The organization of *Challenging Professions* promotes this conceptual coherence, without disguising the diversity of its individual contributions. Rather than grouping the essays according to subject or chronology, the editors chose to divide the collection into three distinct sections. In the first part, "Individual Odysseys," the authors use a biographical approach. The second section,

“Multiple Reflections,” explores group over individual biography, and the third, “Collective Case Studies,” expands the focus to accommodate larger collectivities of professional women. While each article raises numerous questions, there are, in my mind, two main issues emerging from *Challenging Professions* that suggest overlapping and related themes: first, the different personal strategies adopted by women entering a profession; and second, the attempts to define professional identity according to hierarchical assumptions concerning appropriate male and female work.

The first theme, that of exploring women’s own strategies, has been described by the American scholars Penina Glazer and Miriam Slater as falling into four main categories: super-performance, innovation, segregation, and subordination. As the editors of *Challenging Professions* point out in their introduction, the essays in this book suggest that the dominant strategy has been, for many women, to accept subordinate roles. For example, William Bruneau shows how the composer Jean Coulthard used her connections to the Vancouver establishment to retain her marginal, but artistically independent position teaching music at the University of British Columbia. In another study of academia, Alison Prentice argues that although women were well represented in the early development of physics in Canada, they became increasingly excluded as the physics community professionalized after 1940. The strategy of segregation gains complexity in Elizabeth Smyth’s article. Smyth states that Catholic women religious lead dual professional lives: as women maintaining a separate role within the Church, and as members of professions in the secular world. Most of the articles in *Challenging Professions* also reveal evidence of innovation and superperformance, perhaps nowhere so vividly as in Janice Dickin’s study of the Pentecostal evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, who used her personal magnetism to carve out a professional career in an avowedly unprofessional field. W.P.J. Millar and R.D. Gidney conclude that during the 1950s, female entrants into medicine at the University of Toronto possessed much higher records of academic achievement than did their male counterparts. It is clear too that this strategy was as likely to be adopted by women pursuing careers in the “female professions,” as by women striving to enter such male-dominated fields as medicine, physics, forestry, or accounting. The contributions by Meryn Stuart on public health nursing, Carol Baines on social work, and

Ruby Heap on household science, all affirm the importance of exemplary performance as a strategy for advancement.

The second and perhaps most prominent theme among these essays is the contrast between what have been traditionally male and female professions, or rather what has developed as men's or women's work. Central to the gendering of professional work is the hierarchical distinction made between a masculine profession, associated with academic or scientific knowledge, and a skill-based occupation deemed to be better suited to feminine roles and values. On this theme, Carol Baines discusses the difficulties faced by Elizabeth Govan, who chose to work in the male-dominated area of social policy rather than focus on social work practice, and found herself increasingly alienated from male and female colleagues alike. Other contributors explore similar tensions. Ruth Compton Brouwer analyzes the work of the missionary doctor Florence Murray, who rejected the earlier missionary focus on "women's work for women" in favour of a Western—and arguably masculine—model of medical professionalism. Meryn Stuart shows how the perception that public-health nursing was a feminine, skill-based vocation, not a profession, delayed the creation of degree programs for nurses during the inter-war years. Similarly, Ruby Heap's study of nutrition and dietetics at the University of Toronto illustrates how this field was undermined by its association with the "women's faculty" of household science. Heap argues that dietetics gained professional—and scientific—status after World War II, once men began to enter the field, leading eventually to its transfer into the male-dominated Faculty of Medicine in the 1970s. As Linda Muzzin, Patricia Sinnott, and Claudia Lai demonstrate in their article on pharmacy, women working in male-dominated fields still experience stresses resulting from the association of professionalism with masculine values. In a thought-provoking essay on female elementary and university teachers, Sandra Acker examines the strain felt by modern women who try to incorporate perceived feminine values, such as caring, into their professional careers. Acker's study suggests that women in the caring professions often take on nurturing and service roles, and then experience increased job stress, resulting in the syndrome of "doing good and feeling bad."

Challenging Professions is in itself a pioneering effort. It brings together researchers working in a range of disciplines, and represents a valuable contribution to current scholarship on both

the past and the present state of professional women in Canada. The book also points the way for further study. In particular, its focus on middle-class, white, English Canadians highlights the importance of ongoing exploration into the work of "ordinary women," and in particular the need for scholars to examine the ways in which race and class intersect with gender in defining the boundaries of professional identities. The fascinating essays here reveal how rich this field has become, but, as the editors warn us in their introduction, there remains much more to do.

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Jean-Pierre Charland. *L'entreprise éducative au Québec, 1840-1900.* Sainte-Foy : Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2000. 452 p.

D'entrée de jeu, Jean-Pierre Charland pose la question suivante : « Après l'ambitieuse synthèse publiée par Louis-Philippe Audet en 1971, est-il encore pertinent de produire un ouvrage du même genre aujourd'hui? » Trente ans plus tard, les travaux en histoire de l'éducation s'étant multipliés et diversifiés, il ne fait aucun doute qu'un nouvel exposé d'ensemble s'imposait. Le présent ouvrage se concentre toutefois sur la période 1840-1900, depuis la mise en place d'un réseau scolaire permanent (1841) jusqu'à la fin du XIX^e siècle. Il s'intéresse à tous les acteurs du système éducatif, du promoteur à l'élève en passant par l'enseignant et le commissaire d'écoles.

Prenant ses distances avec l'hypothèse selon laquelle la scolarisation est un projet de contrôle social, Charland préfère concevoir le système scolaire comme une entreprise éducative, en y associant le concept d'offre et de demande. Là où « les promoteurs scolaires proposaient des services éducatifs » (p. 8), il se trouvait une population qui les acceptait ou les refusait. Les choix « étaient guidés par l'usage [qu'elle entendait] faire de l'instruction » (p. 10-11). Évidemment, l'offre est porteuse d'idéologie et la demande reflète la perception que la société a de l'école. Au fil de cet ouvrage, l'auteur aborde une multitude d'aspects. Nous en avons retenus quelques-uns.