

Book Review

Women's Health in Canada: Critical Perspectives on Theory and Policy

Edited by Marina Morrow, Olena Hankivsky, and Colleen Varcoe
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Reviewed by Joan Bassett-Smith

This book makes an extremely important and valuable contribution to Canadian and international literature in the domain of women's health. The feminist and postcolonial perspectives are refreshing and timely, and they move the conversations about women's health forward in a way that provides important direction for research, theory, policy, and practice. Edited by Canadian academics and practitioners, the book is impressive in the breadth and depth of Canadian and international literature that it cites.

Women's Health in Canada is organized into four sections. The first section sets the background for the book, explores the Canadian health-care system, and sets a historical context for the theoretical approaches used throughout the volume. The second section presents an essential and in-depth discussion of theory and methods underpinning the remainder of the collection. The third section addresses the social determinants of health; it includes chapters on topics such as poverty, international migration, disability, negotiating sexualities, and mothering. The fourth section addresses key issues in women's health, such as drug use, mental health policy, HIV/AIDS, breast cancer, cardiovascular care, access to maternity services, hormone replacement therapy, and violence. Each chapter in the third and fourth sections sets out goals for the chapter, discusses the state of inquiry in the field, and moves discussion of the topic forward in a way that provides direction for research and practice. The text boxes and questions for discussion are useful features of the book.

The editors situate themselves theoretically, in the opening chapter, but I would have found it useful to have a short biography of the editors and the contributors included in the collection. That said, I found the book thought-provoking, stimulating, informative, and grounded in research and practice.

Chapter 1, written jointly by the three editors, clearly sets out the purpose and goals of *Women's Health in Canada* and provides a useful link

between topics discussed in the book and relevant chapters. It then discusses the stated goals of the book. For the most part there is a sense of coherency among the chapters.

The collection is organized in such a way that it is possible for the reader to either choose a single chapter pertinent to a particular topic or read the book from cover to cover. By reading only a single chapter, however, one would miss some key theoretical background material. I would suggest that the reader peruse chapters 1, 3, and 4 before proceeding with any other single chapter.

Chapter 2, "Theory and Methods," is essential reading for anyone wishing to pursue feminist and postcolonial scholarship. It reviews theoretical foundations of postcolonial and feminist theories, and in so doing illuminates and extends the critical analysis of various topics in women's health. The reader will gain a deeper understanding of how critical perspectives can inform research, expand and deepen analysis, and provide direction for political and social action with the aim of promoting social justice. This chapter will be useful for feminist and postcolonial scholars whether or not their primary research interest is women's health. The examples provided illustrate the ways in which critical perspectives can inform research and practice and provide direction for both novice and experienced researchers. Current debates and points of tension are clearly discussed. The section on intersecting influences on women's health, such as history, sociocultural positioning, racialization, culture, and gender, adds clarity to our understanding of the multiplicity of factors affecting our research and practice with women and highlights the need to analyze differences among women as well as similarities.

This book will be useful for a wide variety of professionals interested in women's health. It is a necessary and thought-provoking addition to the literature and moves the debate on theorizing and research into new territory, not only in women's health but in a general sense as well. It could be useful for academics and undergraduate and graduate students in a variety of disciplines, such as nursing, psychology, women's studies, sociology, medicine, and midwifery, as well as for practitioners and policy-makers in the field of women's health.

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