

amidst the politics of nations or even "the comfort women issue."

¹"Comfort women" is a translation of the Japanese term *ju-gun-i-ahn-fu*, which was assigned by the Japanese military to the "voluntary corps" of women who were either abducted or (most often) recruited under false pretences. Hwang Keum-ju numbers among those who were "officially drafted" under the impression that they were to perform factory labour. Jin Kyung-paeng speaks as one of many women who were abducted (forcibly conscripted) by Japanese military personnel. Kim Young-shil accepted employment to "a good job" before finding herself in a "comfort station" near Manchuria.

²"Haunting History: Violence, Trauma, and the Politics of Memory in Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Women*," *Critical Mass* 6:1, Fall 1999.

EMBODYING EQUITY: BODY IMAGE AS AN EQUITY ISSUE A MANUAL FOR EDUCATORS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

Carla Rice and Vanessa Russell.
Toronto: Green Dragon Press, 2002.

BY MARGARET WELLS

It is only recently that teachers, curriculum writers, and service providers committed to equity issues have included a focus on body equity in their work. The recently published *Embodying Equity: Body Image as an Equity Issue A Manual for Educators and Service Providers* is an exceptionally valuable resource for those interested in this inclusion.

The resource consists of three sections. The first section provides back-

ground information about body image and equity issues and a description of the authors' work on the *Embodying Equity* Project at the Toronto Board of Education. The second section consists of the history of this project and directions for educators and service providers interested in running their own programs. The third section provides a detailed description of interactive activities that can be used as part of a curriculum unit, support group, camp or youth program.

The first section presents a very useful and accessible theoretical background to body equity issues, outlining how these intersect with other equity issues. This section begins with an insightful discussion of the movement from discussions of body image to the concept of body equity. As the authors point out, this involves a movement away from focusing on *changing* individual girls' attitudes about their bodies to focusing on *shifting* the social contexts and school cultures in which negative self-concepts develop and thrive. *Embodying Equity* explores how racism, sexism, discrimination against people with disabilities, homophobia, and class bias intersect with young people's experience of their bodies. Some practitioners may be tempted to skip directly to sections two and three in which specific directions of programs and activities are provided but they would be well advised to read through this first section because it provides an important context for working with young people in a way that takes the discussion of body image beyond the usual inclusion of size, shape, nutrition, dieting, and eating disorders.

The second section outlines programs that have been developed by the authors with students and staff. This includes support groups for students in elementary and secondary schools, retreats for young women, and staff training sessions. Detailed descriptions of support group and retreat programs in addition to general guidelines for operating such

programs will be very valuable to those who want to initiate such work. Alternative programming options that are less expensive than those outlined will allow people to adapt the suggestions to the current financial realities of education and social services.

The third section presents a wide range of interactive activities that can be used in specialized programs such as support groups and retreats or in the regular classroom. For each activity the suggested age, whether it is suitable for mixed or single gender, the risk level, the objective, the time required, step-by-step procedures, debriefing notes, and adaptations are provided. There are a range of activities including icebreakers, those allowing members of the group to meet each other, setting ground rules, examining media, attitudes to food, eating disorders, the impact of violence and harassment on body image, sexuality and the body, and developing action plans. These very clearly written, detailed directions make the resource user-friendly while maintaining the level of respect for practitioners that is present in the two previous sections.

Another valuable feature of *Embodying Equity* is the extensive annotated bibliography provided in Appendix One. This Appendix includes resources for teachers and service providers, as well as books for youth and children, and a range of magazines, films, and videos. One of the highlights of this section is the valuable annotation that would be very beneficial to people selecting resources to use in various settings. Appendix Two provides useful links to the Ontario curriculum for those teachers who want to incorporate this work into their own classrooms.

Embodying Equity is an exceptionally important and timely resource. It will enable equity educators and service providers to expand their notion of discrimination and exclusion and what constitutes excellent equity education. It will also support those interested in body image to

offer an enriched program for young people. Overall, *Embodying Equity* is an invaluable resource that belongs on the bookshelf of every equity educator and service provider, as well as those engaged in cutting-edge work on body image.

REMNANTS OF NATION: ON POVERTY NARRATIVES BY WOMEN

Roxanne Rimstead.
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.

BY MICHELLE LOWRY

Within Canada the poor are often portrayed as external “others” as poverty is imagined as something that largely happens elsewhere. The poor are made invisible in the national imagination because, as Roxanne Rimstead argues in *Remnants of Nation: On Poverty Narratives by Women*, their visibility embarrasses the nation and compromises national myths that promise prosperity, classlessness and economic stability through meritocracy. Internal colonized and poor groups—the remnants of nation—are believed to have fallen behind in the ‘evolutionary model of history,’ and are thus framed as outside the national community, naturally inferior, and unable to partake in progress.

It is within this context that Rimstead approaches the study of poverty and representations of the poor within literary studies. She notes that while race, gender, and sexuality are now more widely addressed in literary studies, poverty, class relations, and poverty narratives still remain un/derstudied. Poverty as a theme in literature, in general, has been made invisible and has not been studied in a sustained or oppositional

way. Rarely has work on the poor been inclusive of their own voices, particularly those of women. Thus, she is interested in creating a methodology that has as its project a recovery (as opposed to a discovery), of the poor and their voices.

In *Remnants of Nation*, Rimstead argues for the study of *poverty narratives* as a category of analysis, a proposal that should be of interest to those working with literary, feminist, and/or cultural theory. She envisions poverty narratives as a constructed field of study comprised of stories by and/or about the poor. In this specific study, Rimstead explores poverty narratives that are cross-class and cross-genre, focusing on a broad range of women’s prose (novels, short stories, autobiography, oral histories, essays, reportage, and letters) in Canada, 1919 to the present. This approach crosses the levels of “literary, popular and ordinary” culture, and as Rimstead argues, transgresses the canon and ideas about what has literary value.

This call to study poverty narratives and excavate the voices of the poor is exciting for me as a feminist academic and anti-poverty activist. I find Rimstead’s approach to poverty narratives nuanced and engaging. She recognizes the problems in reading these narratives as “true” experiences, and yet struggles with her desire to tell the truth about poor women’s lives—a desire that stems from her wish to engage politically with poverty narratives, in solidarity with the poor. Recognizing her own conflicted reasons for reading poverty, Rimstead ultimately calls for an approach that views texts as sources of knowledge about the complex subjectivities of the poor. She proposes that we engage in an oppositional reading of poverty narratives that sees these texts as sites of “struggle, meaning and power,” and that readers aim to discover subversive and dominant representations of poverty with them. Further, she wishes to excavate from poverty narratives the dialectic relationship between the poor and non-

poor, ideologies of difference, and the relationship between the poor and the nation.

As feminist theory, literary, and cultural studies continue to move away from poverty and class analysis, Rimstead’s goal to once again foreground poverty and the poor as subjects of study is quite radical. One benefit of this move is that it clearly acknowledges the invisibility of the poor in national consciousness, and articulates women’s relationship to poverty. The challenge facing those who choose to engage with poverty narratives is to successfully investigate the interconnections between race, gender, and sexuality in the lives of the poor. However, I find myself asking: is it possible to centre the poor while simultaneously exploring the ways in which various systems of oppression operate?

I found that Rimstead successfully re-reads texts such as Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* and Margaret Laurence’s *The Diviners*, as stories of poverty in the lives of raced and gendered women. She uncovers poverty and resistance in these texts, and reminds us that poverty is experienced both discursively and materially. However, Rimstead fails to fully explore the effects of heterosexism and compulsory heterosexuality in the lives of the characters. While her task is to excavate poverty, I also wanted to understand the ways in which poor women experience their sexuality in the texts, and the ways in which their sexuality is ideologically constructed.

Certainly, exploring the intersections of privilege and oppression in the lives of women—fictional or real—is a difficult and ongoing task for feminist scholars. Ultimately, I believe that Rimstead’s call to read oppositionally offers academics some useful tools with which to do this work.