

But that was more than an academic generation ago. Revision has followed revision, and those of us who study women history and feminism have come to a more balanced judgment. We see how our foremothers changed gender relations while modestly disclaiming any such intention. By 2005 the University of Toronto Press felt able to publish a book whose title reflects the rhetoric of the nineteenth-century "woman movement": *Mothers of the Municipality: Women, Work and Social Policy in Post-1945 Halifax*.

This collection of original essays, edited by Judith Fingard and Janet Guildford, is the product of a five-year research project. It presents material concerning a time and a population that are still under-researched: the immediate post-war period and the urban women of eastern Canada. The Maritime provinces are often thought of as conservative, even backward, in respect to women's situation, even though E. R. Forbes effectively debunked the first disparaging accounts of their suffrage movement and recent survey research has shown that this is not an anti-feminist region (see O'Neill and Erickson in *Atlantis* 27.2, spring 2003). What *Mothers of the Municipality* supplies, hearteningly, is a picture of the lively ferment of Halifax women activism post-1945, as well as their solid, continuing involvement in social policy around issues including child and maternal welfare, childcare, and home nursing. Most innovatively, Judith Fingard presents the range of women's organizations in Halifax in this period, Frances Early outlines the founding of the Halifax branch of Voice of Women, and Janet Guildford gives a description and analysis of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women. There is also an exceptionally interesting article, by Wanda Thomas Bernard and Judith Fingard, on the work and lives of African-Nova Scotian women in Greater Halifax in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

Mothers of the Municipality documents the energy and diversity of women and the women's movement at a time when feminism had not yet been re-admitted to the news. It is a solid contribution to the history of women in Canada.

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Telling Tales: Living the Effects of Public Policy, Sheila Neysmith, Kate Bezanson, and Anne O'Connell. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2005; 231 pages; ISBN 1-55266-161-X; \$24.95 (paper).

Telling Tales: Living the Effects of Public Policy explores the lived experiences of forty participants within the context of broad-based policy changes in Ontario. A primary focus of the book is to grasp the multiple and diverse ways in which government cuts to social programs between 1997 and 2000 have affected people's lives, particularly the lives of people living with low incomes.

The methodological challenges of the study were immense. However, in their concluding chapter, "Developing Methodology That Can Deal with Complexity," Neysmith et al. demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of these challenges and offer an accessible and convincing approach to a complex research question. This chapter will be useful to scholars seeking to move beyond mainstream policy research approaches focused on quantitative data and macro-level variables, toward analyses that draw upon qualitative data and situated knowledge. Neysmith et al. explain not only the theoretical and practical importance of qualitative techniques to policy research, but also offer sound research steps that other researchers can draw upon and expand.

One of the distinctive qualities of this book is that, rather than focusing on a single policy field, the authors explore the intersectional and cross-cutting policy processes that have shaped the lives of research participants with a wide-range of social and economic backgrounds. The data was enriched by tracking changes over time, which involved interviewing each participant four times over a three-year period, and by grounding the interview data in analyses of wider policy shifts.

The findings revealed that many of the research participants felt their quality of life had significantly eroded, despite the official rhetoric of policy changes, such as claims that government reforms would harness individual, community, and family competencies and promote greater freedom and choice. Moreover, the findings showed how policy changes shaped and were shaped by social divisions such as race, gender, class, and so on.

In analyzing these findings, the authors conclude that "[m]arginal social location and attendant

lack of power are regulated and maintained by the state, market and informal social institutions. Such forces of social exclusion are powerful protectors of privilege" (142). While others have made similar claims, what is distinctive about this book is that the authors move beyond abstract theorizing to reveal how specific policy changes foster these processes at the ground level. In doing so, Neysmith et al. bring in the voices and viewpoints of people frequently excluded from policy debates, specifically the poor and economically marginalized. Thus, they offer an important counterweight to policy research that recreates the vocabularies and ideas of those with privilege and power.

This book is a refreshing contribution to the study of social politics and administration that would fit well on course outlines in many fields, including social work, sociology, political science, and gender studies.

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Doing IT: Women Working in Information Technology.
Krista Scott-Dixon. Toronto: Sumach Press, 2004; 246 pages; ISBN 1-894549-37-6; \$26.95 (paper).

Doing IT: Women Working in Information Technology provides a window into how women are doing in the new occupational niches created by information technologies. Throughout this five-chapter book, Scott-Dixon juxtaposes the heady claims which heralded the arrival of IT in the latter part of the twentieth century with how the work-life and careers of women in this sector have been unfolding in the "real" world. Her intellectual focus is on whether and how information technologies have disrupted vs. reconstructed vs. reinforced existing worker inequalities based on class, race and gender. She is also concerned about what the answer to this "whether and how" question should mean not only to academic debates about IT work but also to the attitudes and political perspectives of women who have taken up IT work, sometimes achieving a high degree of material and professional success without reflecting on their and other IT workers' experiences and situations.

Scott-Dixon skillfully works back and forth between examinations of the "structural" features of high-tech work and the rich narratives of women who

work in the IT field. Rather than painting a picture which either celebrates or condemns the high-tech revolution, her portrait is multi-coloured and multi-textured, as she reveals an unfolding process in which opportunities for both material and non-material advancement open and close, simultaneously or consecutively. Along with them, the hopes and dreams of IT workers rise, then fall and often rise again. She reveals an immense variety in the situations and experiences of these workers, not only because of the systemic influences of their gender, race and class location but also because of things such as geographical location, time of entry into the IT field, and the nature of their skills and how they acquired them.

Scott-Dixon thus undermines the simplistic predictions and ideological blind spots of human capital theory which, in spite of its intellectual failings, continues to strongly influence policy-making. She also challenges the views of scholars and activists whose political commitments to worker equality are closer to her own. In their also simplistic, often dystopic predictions, these critics of IT fail to take into account the enormous resourcefulness and political potential of people who are pulled into the gravity field of technological change. Workers who find themselves on high-tech's roller coaster ride make and execute plans according to the opportunities as well as obstacles they confront: they do not react in any simple way to the technological imperative.

One weakness of the book is that Scott-Dixon frequently accounts for certain conditions of, and approaches to, IT work in terms of women's distinctive situation and perspective. For example, she argues that women in IT (in contrast to men) don't like to think in a linear way and tend instead to favour non-linearity, interconnectedness and pragmatism (97-102). Yet she uses interviews with only women to support her case. Interviews with men working at comparable levels would have provided better ground for making this argument. Hopefully, Scott-Dixon will adopt a gender-comparative method in future research since it will help to clarify whether IT workers' situations and experiences are shaped more by existing gendered differences, as she tends to claim, than by distinctive features of this technology which, as is claimed by some other researchers and commentators, challenge gender patterns and open up possibilities for gender-bending.