

this volume in hand we can now turn to an index of what archival records of women's history exist, where and what these records are, who has them and how we can locate them. Through this process the shape of Canada's current women's history begins to emerge.

The sprinkling of illustrations from the CWMA/ACMF collection found throughout the book are fascinating snippets of the type of archival record collected here. From an excerpt from the 1970 Abortion Action Caravan, to several evocative photos of '70s demonstrations, to a personal journal entry, the arising visual images hint at the living, concrete experiences that are in fact the root of all these records.

Feminist writers have spoken of the silencing of women's history and the difficulties in achieving recognition of the historical importance of the contemporary women's movement. This is changing, and this book documents the important pieces of women's history as they are collected

and counted. Just as digging through the box in the basement uncovers a bit of personal history, so too does this guide uncover the collective history of the contemporary women's movement. This volume deserves a place on all library shelves. Whether archivist or activist, this guide to archival resources of the Canadian women's movement is unique in filling a gap in feminist history.

### FUNDAMENTAL FEMINISM: CONTESTING THE CORE CONCEPTS OF FEMINIST THEORY

Judith Grant. New York, London: Routledge, 1993.

by Kathleen O'Grady

Grant provides an exhaustive examination of the various strands of thought that constitute the contem-

porary feminist movement; her text contributes a thoughtful critique of feminism that strives to clarify the sometimes tenuous concepts on which feminist theory is based. She demonstrates that, despite the general claim that there is no single feminist theory but a plethora of "feminisms" that function with disparate agendas, there exists an unrecognized, core feminism, a "fundamental feminism," based on defective rudimentary concepts that drive and shape its various forms.

The central aim of the text is to examine the unquestioned and often implicit foundational categories that even opposing strands of feminism employ. Grant lists three pervasive "core concepts" that underlie all feminist theory to varying degrees: "woman"; experience; and personal politics. She claims that the first two categories are the most problematic: the first provides an essentialist view of women and a glorification of the "feminine"; while the second category, evolving out of the first, allows individual experience to become the foundation for all knowledge. In a detailed investigation of liberal, Marxist, standpoint, epistemic and postmodern feminisms, Grant demonstrates the many problems encountered in each due to the unacknowledged concepts on which the theories are based; while these categories were once functional for first wave feminists they must now be abandoned.

The core concepts have remained hidden from the most prominent feminist thinkers, Grant claims, because the history of feminism has been misrepresented. Academics need to reexamine the history of feminism, based on its own writings and activities, not judged as "hyphenations" or "bandaids" to the traditional canon of Western political thought. This hyphenation model of feminism, supported by terms like psychoanalytic-feminism, Marxist-feminism and liberal-feminism, has reinforced the view that feminism is disparate and discordant, allowing theorists to overlook the activism that generated the foundational concepts upon which



Toronto, Canada

## Health and Society

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Applications, with curriculum vitae and names of three referees, should be sent to: John Hutcheson, Chair, Division of Social Science, Faculty of Arts, S757 Ross, York University, North York, Ont. M3J 1P3. Candidates should request their referees to send letters of reference directly to the Chair. Deadline for applications is March 6, 1995.

*York University is implementing a policy of employment equity, including affirmative action for women faculty. In accordance with Canadian immigration requirements, this advertisement is directed to Canadian citizens and permanent residents. This position is subject to budgetary approval.*

all strands of feminist theory currently rest.

Grant performs a particularly astute analysis of Marxist-feminism. She maintains that the use of Marxism has been detrimental to theoretical feminism because of a misreading and analogical misuse of Marxist concepts which go against the very core concepts of feminism. For example, though Marxist-feminists may borrow many of their ideas from traditional Marxist writings, their origins stem from 19th-century feminist activism, not from left-wing political structures which refused to accommodate feminist requirements. With a firm grounding in the history of first wave feminist activism, Grant asks each form of hyphenated feminism, "What is *feminist* about Marxist-feminism? Why not just Marxism? What is *feminist* about liberal-feminism? Why not just liberalism?"

In the last section of the book, Grant advocates a more critical, self-reflective feminism that, for its own health and survival, must eradicate dangerous forms of essentialising. In its place, she proposes the possibility for a feminism no longer based on the "core concepts," but structured on the idea that gender is an independent, ideological formation that must be razed.

In an attempt to abandon all forms of feminism based on *epistemology*—a further perpetuation of the core concepts—Grant posits a "neo-humanist" or "neo-enlightenment" feminism akin to first wave, radical feminism (though she is careful to transform its racist and classist roots). She firmly rejects the core concepts, "woman" and "experience" in her new feminist vision, while maintaining the category of a personal politics. To supplant the two core concepts she calls for the creation of a "feminist lens," highlighting the difference between "women" and "feminist," basing her new theory instead on a subject defined by political feminist practice (both personal and public politics) rather than on a monolithic, transcendental category of "women." She terms her new phi-

losophy, a "feminist-post-enlightenment-humanist vision," calling for the complete abolition of gender structures.

Despite providing the reader with an intricate and complex analysis of the major tenants of feminist thought in the first two sections of the book, Grant neglects to bestow upon her own theory the same care and attention. Her new feminism appears instead as a jumble of poststructural, liberal, Marxist, socialist and humanist thought, generating more puzzling questions than it answers. Based on her own critique, is her "feminist-humanism" not just a new form of the hyphenated feminism that she so thoroughly rejects? Her humanist-feminist theory begs the question, as Grant asked of Marxist and liberal feminists earlier, "What is particularly *feminist* about humanist-feminism? Why not just humanism?" Perhaps her next book will elaborate the new theory she merely introduces in this text.

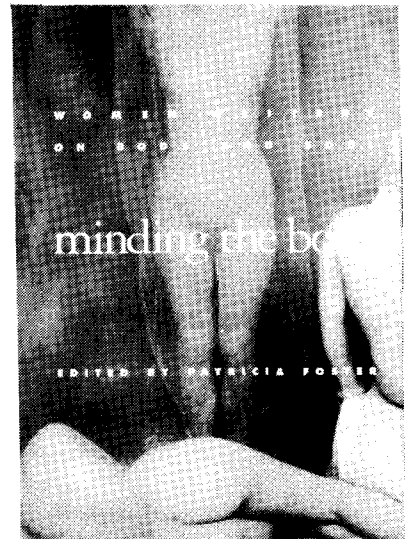
## MINDING THE BODY: WOMEN WRITERS ON BODY AND SOUL

Patricia Foster, Ed. New York: Doubleday, 1994.

by Shannon Gillies

Despite the social, political and economic advances women have made in the last century, it seems we are more dissatisfied with our bodies and our physical appearance than ever. Certainly not every woman is preoccupied with her weight, the size of her breasts or the shape of her nose, but it's likely most women have at least one physical attribute they would like to change.

While Patricia Foster, the editor of *Minding the Body*, was teaching Women's Literature at a state university, she was astonished at how unhappy the young women were with their bodies. One student confessed, "I'd rather have five pounds off my thighs than an A in this class." She discovered that most of the women would choose physical perfection over mental stimulus, if given the choice. Ms. Foster wondered,



"How and why women returned to such a fragile status?" She hoped those young women would eventually realize that "the body is not only a sexual statement, but a social one as well, an ongoing story with multiple plots that women individually and collectively must speak."

With these ideas in mind, Ms. Foster decided to compile an anthology—a collection of women's experiences with their bodies. *Minding the Body* contains a broad spectrum of stories and essays by twenty international women writers. Contributors were asked to "probe what seemed disturbing or exhilarating in their personal lives, what had snagged, invalidated, buoyed, or surprised them about their bodies." In response, the contributors explored topics as diverse as breast implants, infertility, disfigurement, anorexia, dieting and breast cancer to name only a few. Almost every female reader of *Minding the Body* should be able to find at least one essay of particular