

anti-abortion moral absolutism was replaced by considerations of the complex realities of abortion, and increasing press space was given to a reproductive rights discourse. Smyth's analysis of the parliamentary debate surrounding the "X case" and subsequent official responses to it reveals, however, an official reframing of abortion as a medical issue distinct from a moral/religious issue, and a political failure to engage with more complex understandings of abortion. Within this context, the reproductive rights discourse, which gained ground following the "X case," became marginalized as pro-abortion groups adopted the pragmatic strategy of arguing on the basis of women's needs for medical services as distinct from their right to make choices.

The outcome of this reframing of abortion was evidenced in the publication of the Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy Bill in 2002. This proposed legislation allowed for abortion in the case of risk to a woman's life, rather than risk of self-destruction. A constitutional referendum reflecting this proposed legislation was rejected by a majority of less than one per cent in March 2002. Thus, after two decades of debate, a woman's right to abortion in Ireland exists only in the context of a serious medical threat to her life.

Smyth concludes that the various framings of abortion politics in Ireland since 1983 reflect an ongoing connection between abortion access and a politics of nationhood. Her reading of official responses to abortion—as a struggle to maintain a distinctive national identity while simultaneously meeting the standard of rights and compassion expected of a modern democratic nation-state—is original and exciting. Chapter One, which deals with the history of Irish abortion politics, and chapter two, which reviews feminist positions on abortion, are especially accessible to a general audience and could be read on a stand-alone basis. Overall, this work makes a valuable contribution to the existing body of material on abortion in Ireland and will engage readers interested in abortion, politics, sociology, or cultural studies.

A Lot to Learn ***Girls, Women and Education in the 20th Century***

Helen Jefferson Lenskyj
Toronto: Women's Press, 2005

Reviewed by Dorothy Lander

The appeal of this book, which author Helen Jefferson Lenskyj reveals on the first page of her Introduction, is its blend of biography and autobiography written as social history, and the opportunities it offers for comparing Lenskyj's mother's life and education with her own, and for comparing Australian and Canadian contexts of schooling and educational activism, especially anti-

homophobic activism. I wonder why Lenskyj waited until the last sentence of her book to tell the reader that the title, which references Lenskyj's commitment to anti-oppression teaching, is inspired by her mother's phrase, "We have a lot to learn" (165).

Lenskyj identifies many of the feminist, historical, and auto/biographical works that inspired her book project of retrospective adult memories and revisionist feminist life histories. Like Carolyn Steedman, one of the authors who inspired her, Helen Lenskyj explores both her mother's history and her own through contemporary theories of the lives of working-class people. Lenskyj delivers on her declared task of interpreting her mother's story and her own story through the sociological lens of women's history and education, community activism, and feminist pedagogy. She does not accomplish (to my satisfaction) the integrative and comparative links between social contexts—for example, public education in early twentieth-century private schools in Sydney, Australia in the 1950s; parent activism in 1970s Toronto; and, the feminist activist community in Toronto from the 1980s to the present day. On the basis of the Introduction, I expected Lenskyj to make strong generational comparisons of mother-daughter life histories. Yet Lenskyj's chapter-by-chapter narratives from each of these social contexts could stand alone as exemplars of individual life histories and feminist pedagogy.

In chapter one, formal education plays a relatively small part in her mother's life history; for example, her elementary education occupies about two pages and offers little by way of personal stories of the experience of this "free" and compulsory education for children aged six to fourteen in Australia in the early twentieth century. By contrast, her mother's informal education is a richly storied account that includes growing up in poverty, early training in thrifty household management under her grandmother's tutelage, her working life, and her life as a married woman and mother. Chapters two and three focus on Lenskyj's formal education at Australia's Kambala Foundation, a private school for girls. Given Lenskyj's choice of life history as her methodology, why are so many of her accounts of her teachers, including headmistress Miss Fifi Hawthorne, drawn from secondary sources? Lenskyj's vivid accounts of friendships with Kambala girls and sexual identity dilemmas, in which she was attracted to a girl in her class and subsequently to her teacher, anticipates her life history as an activist-educator in part two. She tells how she visited this teacher and her partner some 40 years later; the collapsed time frame anticipates her lesbian-feminist activism focused on curriculum transformation and anti-homophobia education from the perspective of a mother with young children in Toronto public schools and as an instructor in women's studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. These earlier chapters illuminate both the formal and informal systems of learning one's station in life in the context of one's formal education, imbricated with religion, gender, and sexuality, including "heterosexual hegemony" (67). I found myself trying to make comparative links with her mother's family history and informal

education. The influence of mother and grandmother, for example, so central to her mother's life history, is conspicuously absent from Lenskyj's life history.

The tone and writing style change in part two as Lenskyj interlaces life history with increasingly academic discourses of feminist pedagogy, diversity, positionality, and anti-oppression. As a university distance education teacher, I also have learned to declare my "subject position" (156)—White, middle-class, heterosexual woman in my case—and I appreciated Lenskyj's personal positioning that introduces her stories of the promise and perils of confronting questions of difference (race, ethnicity, sexuality) in the context of teaching women's studies by teleconferencing. Her final reflections emphasize diversity issues in the present education of girls and women in Australia and Canada, without specific reference to her own or her mother's life histories.

I was disappointed that Lenskyj did not take up the life history focus that she promised in her Introduction and integrate her mother's life history with her own through the theoretical lens that is prominent in part two. It occurred to me that an academic analysis of difference on the basis of the subject position of "mother" would have effectively integrated the experiential and theoretical dimensions of this book and the distinctive tones of the two parts, allowing a tighter weave of the mother-daughter life histories that purport to be at the centre of this book.

Spirituality in the Mother Zone *Staying Centered, Finding God*

Trudelle Thomas
New York: Paulist Press, 2005

Reviewed by Colleen Carpenter Cullinan

Trudelle Thomas opens her powerful and wonderfully practical book with an anecdote instantly recognizable to anyone who has ever tried to balance a desperate and sincere desire for prayer time with the far more worldly demands of a wiggling preschooler. As her readers will no doubt know, there are no good solutions to that conflict, and the frustration and resentment it engenders are not exactly conducive to anything approaching a joyful, peaceful, blissfully transcendent worship experience. Yet as Thomas points out, despite such conflicts, becoming a mother leads many women to a "deeper, more passionate faith" (3)—just not one that can be contained in the structures of most Christian churches. And it is not just worship time that is often child-unfriendly and mother-unfriendly, Thomas argues, but more basically the theology and spirituality of traditional Christianity.