

## Karen Messing, Bent Out of Shape: Shame, Solidarity and Women's Bodies at Work (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2021)

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retrouvant autour d'un langage commun, de désirs partagés et d'un sentiment d'appartenance naissant.

*Grossières indécentes* pose des assises claires pour le développement d'une historiographie quant aux pratiques homosexuelles à Montréal au tournant du siècle. Le dépouillement des archives judiciaires est rigoureux et approfondi. Il nous permet d'entrevoir clairement la diversité des pratiques et des regroupements qui s'opèrent autour d'une identité en formation. L'auteur reste toutefois prudent et n'extrapole pas hors des limites de ses sources. Une des forces de Dagenais tient en effet à l'attention constamment réaffirmée qu'il porte aux limites de son étude. De fait, la nature du sujet et des sources disponibles implique d'importants angles morts – on peut penser à la surreprésentation des rapports hommes-garçons dans les sources judiciaires, ou encore l'absence notable de rapports homosexuels féminins –, une réalité assumée par Dagenais sans affecter pour autant la qualité de son analyse. De surcroît, il dédie une section considérable de l'ouvrage – soit la quasi-entièreté du dernier chapitre – à outrepasser ces limites en faisant l'analyse fine de la seule source traitant des réalités lesbiennes connue pour la période à l'étude. En plus de nous permettre d'entrevoir les difficultés auxquelles pouvaient faire face les femmes en quête de rapports affectifs et sexuels homosexuels, le cinquième chapitre du livre présente l'aspect politique et social des relations qui se tissent entre personnes recherchant des relations de nature homosexuelle, mais aussi avec un réseau d'alliés. Bien qu'on y présente ces alliances en termes de valeurs et d'anticonformisme, il est facile d'y voir des parallèles avec les alliances de soutien qui existent aujourd'hui encore entre les membres des communautés LGBTQIA2+ et certains individus cisgenres et hétérosexuels. De plus, le

lexique de la sexualité homosexuelle que nous présente Dagenais n'est pas sans rappeler les termes et rôles sexuels qu'on retrouve aujourd'hui encore dans les communautés homosexuelles de Montréal. C'est d'ailleurs quant à moi une des forces de Dagenais dans *Grossières indécentes*, soit sa capacité à nous mener, sans effort supplémentaire, à percevoir les liens qui existent entre la communauté homosexuelle naissante de Montréal au tournant du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle et son itération présente.

MATHILDE MICHAUD  
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**Karen Messing, *Bent Out of Shape: Shame, Solidarity and Women's Bodies at Work* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2021)**

KAREN MESSING is one of the best-known feminist ergonomists in North America; she has spent her career as an academic working to make women's health at work a priority for research and policy changes. Despite early career obstacles only too familiar to women graduate students, such as doubts about the suitability of a career in biology and having two small children, Messing persisted, receiving support from her supervisors. In this book, she reflects on her research and allied activism, raising difficult questions about the effects on women workers of interventions that are intended to challenge biological determinism and sex/gender stereotyping. Teaching a course on women and biology introduced her to Women's Studies and whetted her curiosity about why there was so little research on women in the scientific literature. Her academic career and research interests in women's occupational health led to her involvement with three Québec trade unions by the 1990s; these unions helped with research

funding to study women's occupational health and train in ergonomics. Readers may be familiar with her 1998 book, *One-Eyed Science: Occupational Health and Women Workers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), which urged the development of scientific approaches to prevent women workers' pain and suffering. This new book reviews many of her research projects, most often carried out with union women's committees or occupational health committees, at the time an unusual and sometimes questioned relationship within universities. Now a professor emerita at the University of Québec at Montréal in biological sciences, Messing shares a retrospective mixture of critical thinking and questioning of her work and that of others, as well as a call to action.

Her book is comprised of four sections: "Shame and the Workplace," "Segregated Bodies," "Changing the Workplace," and "Changing Occupational Health Science." The first describes and names how body shame permeates our culture and silences women in general and women workers in particular and is connected to disregard for women's pain and to sexism and harassment. Her studies in this section focus on non-traditional as well as traditional jobs occupied by women, from technicians to personal support workers to cleaners. Concerning the technicians, she asks why women have higher rates of accidents (size of equipment, poor training, etc.) and notes women's reluctance to complain about fear of denial of access to those jobs. Merging male and female job titles in a hospital revealed the resistance to admitting gender mattered even though the study noted that women performed 30 per cent more physical tasks per hour. Similarly, in evaluating cleaning work, with the abandonment of heavy/light work distinctions, many older women left, rather than ask for adaptations.

"Segregated Bodies" explores sex/gender differences in strength, the processing of pain, the effects of pregnancy and menstruation, and the processing of toxins. Messing suggests that job segregation may play a role in protecting women's health, but it also undercuts gender equality on the job. To move beyond this conundrum, she suggests we need better science, a different approach to human resources and the way work is organized (team approach), and more solidarity among women workers and allies to push for interventions that promote both women's health and gender equality.

In "Changing the Workplace," Messing recommends targeted ergonomic research in cooperation with workers that can pinpoint hidden hazards and point to solutions. Furthermore, the presumption that ergonomic research should be neutral (i.e., genderless) makes women's work invisible. In the case of evaluating the work processes at a women's shelter, not a typical employer, the attitude of promoting women's health and women's solidarity made a world of difference for the employees. In workplaces without commitments to women's health and equality, strong partnerships with women's and occupational health committees within unions facilitate the push for change, sometimes leading to political strife and strikes. In addition, working with legal professionals proved beneficial in translating research results into policy. Such solidarity, Messing writes, is key to challenging the assumptions that women's bodies are the "second bodies at work," that their jobs are "second jobs," that "women's family responsibilities are 'second roles,' underestimated and not respected," and that "women's health is 'second health,' understudied and badly studied." (151)

The final section tackles "Changing Occupational Health Science" so that the science questions the basic perceptions

of women's occupational health problems as stemming from biology or psychology. Researchers have verified that women suffer more from invisible musculoskeletal injuries because of repetitive work, and consequently, they have difficulty proving injury for compensation. Women are still left out of research studies. Even in occupational cancer research, women are underrepresented. Ergonomic research, though based on observation, also relies on large samples and statistical analyses, so this underrepresentation is problematic. Her point is that sex and gender is part of work activity and also inseparable from discrimination, thus necessitating major systemic changes: employers need to change work practices and training practices aided by appropriate government policy and regulations. Equally important, women workers and allies need to build solidarity, overcome shame, name the sex/gender issues, and face the potential tensions between protecting women's health and obtaining gender equality.

The author acknowledges that her research speaks to women broadly but that her research subjects come from a homogenous population. For example, Messing admits that she has not worked with immigrant and racialized women, nor with non-binary/trans women. In addition, social class is often implied in the types of jobs analyzed but not discussed directly by the author. Readers might wish to ask about the consequences for women's health of women's work that is not stereotypically working-class or based on physical labour, such as that of low-paid work as educational assistants or the effects of high-stress professional work on educated, middle-class women. Nonetheless, *Bent Out of Shape* has a wide reach, and asks difficult questions while also issuing calls for specific action. It is also a chronicle of a lifetime's work in a field that is not always valued and

respected, even in academia. This kind of interdisciplinary work among scientists and social scientists tests the boundaries of accepted disciplinary practices. Working with community groups and unions gave Messing, her colleagues, and students not only support but valuable partnerships and feedback.

LINDA KEALEY

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**Working Class History, ed., *Working Class History: Everyday Acts of Resistance & Rebellion* (Oakland: PM Press, 2020)**

IS LABOUR HISTORY dead? Hard to believe after reading this book. *Working Class History: Everyday Acts of Resistance & Rebellion* is the latest product of *Working Class History* (wch), the remarkable international collective that, since its founding in 2014, has amassed over 700,000 followers across its affiliated social media platforms, sharing tweet-sized stories of the struggles of working people in English, Arabic, Farsi, French, Norwegian, Romanian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish. This book translates wch's "on this day in history" social media posts into a full-year calendar featuring two events in global working-class history for each day of the year. The result is a treasure-trove of mini-histories that together put forward a truly global, expansive depiction of workers' history, drawn from all six inhabited continents, spanning (at least) seven centuries, and featuring people from across the hierarchies and spectrums of race, gender, and freedom.

I received my copy in the mail on 18 August, so naturally I flipped first to that date "August 18, 1812. Food riots, primarily led by women, broke out in Leeds and Sheffield, England." After seizures of foodstuffs and assaults on sellers, "Sheffield flour dealers were forced