

Dr.Yvonne Bobb-Smith, Ph.D.
Independent Educator/Writer
Trinidad and Tobago

On reading “In the Public Eye” I felt there is a story of the life of Joanne Kilgour Dowdy within it waiting to be told. The book is unique in presenting the published narratives of her life supported by excellently appropriate pictures, yet I felt something is obscured, or is the reader to read between the lines? Whatever is missing or untold this autobiography makes an excellent contribution, briefly, to the history of a particular time in two countries, Trinidad and Tobago and the United States of America. It was a time in which young people reckoned they had to find who they were in their way. That is, they had to break those bonds of colonialism entrapped in race and class. Joanne was one of those, who did it her way, who dared to reject the conventional route which one expected her to take.

Feminism believes that a woman’s story is shared history intending to divulge ways of understanding the world in addition to understanding women’s experience. When Joanne repeats, “I auditioned and got cast...” or “I went off to Juilliard like a “good little girl...” it is vital for us to interpret this as to how women may gain entry points into the wider, often forbidden, contexts. Implicit in her story is that she helps us to see the dynamics in women’s interaction with the social structure. Indeed, it is the use of agency, as she did—dance, acting, theatre—that enables women to self-identify.

The last pages of the book describe the outcome of her goal achievement: she becomes an academic, and teaches with a difference in the USA. This part of the work, gives us her insight into why she has created exceptional activities around drama for teaching teachers; she briefly critiques racism; and, she tells why she rejects some social norms. Added to that, we become acquainted with her success of staging her personal narrative herself in a production entitled “Between me and my Lord”. As women we keep telling our stories to each other, hoping they are heard or we are listened to; if we grow unsure that neither seems to be occurring we resort to documenting, if possible. This is why the book is invaluable; enhanced with pictures, it is excellent for making those links with other recorded and accessible identities.

“In the Public Eye” is a wonderful contribution to add to the description of women’s liberation narratives. This is an inspirational piece, eye-catching and easy to read. It is a profound text that captures the dynamics of gender to encourage younger people to self-analyse their roles for a significant future as Joanne has done for herself.