

Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik, *Edukacja i (nie)równość społeczna kobiet. Studium dynamiki dostępu* [Education and social (in)equality of women. A study of the dynamics of access], Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", 2011, pp. 516

The book under review constitutes a new opening in the contemporary Polish research into education. The author analyses the relationship between female education and female identity in the context of social (in)equality adopting an interdisciplinary perspective. At the same time she carries out her project both eloquently and with ease. Also, the book contains the most recent and comprehensive international literature overview.

The publication is divided into two parts. The first one contains theoretical considerations regarding various "alternative" socio-educational realities inhabited by the contemporary woman. Here, the author discusses processes of educational socialisation saturated with androcentric models and values. Considerations of the phenomenon of "learned helplessness" of girls with regard to acquiring mathematical competencies can be seen part and parcel of the same research trend. Furthermore, the issues of social constructions of boys' educational failure are also addressed. The author demonstrates that their educational achievements are significantly lower than is the case with girls. It is worth emphasising the part of the book that treats about issues surrounding single-sex and mixed-sex education. The results of analyses are somewhat surprising as they point to the fact that—in the majority of countries—women have not only caught up with men, but they have even become the primary parties to be granted access to higher education. This also concerns countries which have been perceived as exotic, i.e. Namibia, Jordan or Mongolia. These observations also refer to the

stereotypically male studies, such as law, management or medicine and are valid for elite universities such as Oxford or Harvard.

An immensely interesting is the insight into the identities of contemporary women referring to the neoliberal ideology, the issue of masculinisation of successful women, relocating social aspirations of women to the domains of body and consumption, and the complicated relationship between professional career and motherhood. Theoretical research in this part of the book, carried out by Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik, draws on a representative sample of the literature in the field. One notices reference to the direct gender hierarchy theory as well as structural inequality, which enable the researcher to provide an alternative view of the dynamics of access/exclusion of women from education and from the job market.

The second part of the book is empirical in nature. The author presents research results which are the output of a superbly designed qualitative methodology. Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik carried out in-depth interviews with female managers occupying high positions in corporations as well as with female academics affiliated with prestigious Polish universities (PhD-holders and above). As a result, the reader is granted access to a subjective but genuine picture abounding in dilemmas regarding identities of contemporary successful women in relation to the following categories: individuality, issues of discrimination against women (also coming from women), motherhood, masculinisation of aspirations in the bodily and sexual domains, and the role of consumption in the construction of identity of the research participants. In this way, the researcher transfers the assumptions and theories reconstructed in the first part of the book to the “real” world where contemporary women live and function.

Within the developing research into femininities and masculinities, Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik’s book is a definite must-read. This publication goes beyond the stereotypical perceptions and analyses of female and male access to education and the job market. The innovative suggestion as to how girls and boys should be socialised into their genders—an alternative to the pedagogies of gender—is especially worthy of readers’ attention. It is beyond doubt that this interesting book provides new contexts for social and professional analyses of contemporary women and constitutes an immensely important stage of analyses of femininities and masculinities.

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