

## Book review: Private world(s)–gender and informal learning of adults

By Joanna Ostrouch-Kamińska and Christina, C. Vieira (Eds.) (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2015). 194 pp., ISBN 978-94-6209-969-2

The issues of gender and informal learning pose challenges in many social contexts. Therefore, they have become an interest of many researchers, activists and educators around the world. The rapid development of research on gender and education had its beginnings in the 1960s and 1970s (Bank et al., 2007). Nevertheless, there are still some “missing points” in both, social reality where “gender stereotypes have not been changed very much in recent decades” (Ostrouch-Kamińska, Vieira, 2015, p. 1) as well in gender discourse where – to some extent – feminists or “womanism” perspectives (Walker, 1983) still dominate, at least in some countries. Therefore, the book *Private World(s). Gender and Informal Learning of Adults* (2015) is of great value in terms of both, informal and (non)formal learning as well gender issues analyses.

The book consists of 13 chapters (plus Introduction) written by researchers from various countries and classified into three main parts: 1) Private Spheres, 2) Minorities and Activism and 3) (Non)Formal Contexts of Informal Learning. It is worth noting that such book structure reflects the dimensions and spheres where gender has an impact on learning and biographies. It also reflects some continuity from “private” to “public” and “politic” and their interrelations (“there is nothing more public than privacy” as K. Popovic et al suggest in their chapter). As a result, there is a space for various gender aspects analyses: the personal beliefs, values and learning paths; gender role in shaping family life, social activity and commitment; the relationship between gender and health and well-being behaviours; social perceptions of gender and woman and men’s roles in society; gender stereotypes, gender impact on education and career etc. This plurality of aspects covered by the book makes up the book’s good quality – the reader can realize cross-sectional gender impact on individuals and societies.

In general, the book can be characterized by:

1. It is an up-to date book in terms of gender discourse timeliness – while introducing the men’s perspective the book is a part of gender discourse that occurred after the “boy problem” or “boy-turn” shift (Bank et al., 2007 p. 719 -722). The authors of chapters devoted to the men’s perspective (chapters: 2, 4, 8) analyse the social construction of men’s role. As a result, the Editors have avoided introducing (only) the pro-feminist perspective. Highlighting the differences between gender studies and pro-feministic approaches (chapter 13) itself contributes to overcoming social biases and stereotypes accrued around this kinds of research in some countries (sometimes, in some more traditionally-oriented societies, gender studies are wrongly reduced to the feminist approaches not only within particular social groups but also researchers who do not deal with gender analyses). Most of the chapters also refer to the modern and liquid modernity characterized by the crisis-times, uncertainty, migrations etc. As a result, the book reflects the reality in which creating and choosing identity have become a task for individuals (Bauman, 1993) even though this can be a

painful process requiring taking a difficult decision as it is presented in chapters 2 and 7.

2. The value of the book also lies in the fact that it introduces perspectives from the countries that are less visible in the gender discourse (still) dominated mostly by the countries such as United States, United Kingdom etc. The authors have demonstrated that gender shapes biographies regardless of sex and types of societies. As a result, they presented a very interesting picture of some individual and social issues related to learning and gender around the world. Another issue related to the “locality” is associated with the fact that because gender is constructed locally, authors have presented various cultures, even though it was unintentional effect. Thanks to that, the book contributes to overcoming many social stereotypes, e.g. what is “female” and “male” (the great example is presented in the chapter 2).
3. In the book, the chapters are constructed on the basis of research conducted with various methodologies – both, qualitative and quantitative ones. There is also a space given to conceptual-theoretic frameworks and discursive analyses. Therefore, in the book, there are not only the particular perspectives but also the differences and similarities between woman and men’s learning presented. This also demonstrates that the issues raised in the book can be analysed at different levels and from various theoretical and methodological perspectives.
4. Each chapter of the book is of great theoretical and methodological quality. Authors analyse critically the current concepts of informal learning. Therefore, informal learning is presented as a complex issue made up of many dimensions, including the “hidden” ones. Therefore, the book is of great value in adult education research field – it is an analysis of informal learning in many social contexts. What is also worth noting is that gender is presented in the book not only as a “obstacle” for learning but also has its own potential for learning. It can be a trigger for social activity and involvement, as it was presented especially in chapters 3, 6, 8 and others.
5. The book has its own contribution to the practices (of working and education) as well. One of the biggest statements is that gender should be considered in the (formal) education (chapters 9, 10) and working-life (chapters 11, 12). While considering gender practitioners can understand better the individuals and their social capital. Knowing their own gender stereotypes learners can create a new space for learning as it is stressed in the chapter 10 and others.

To sum it up, the book is a great analysis of both, informal learning as well gender issues constantly involved in this learning. Editors invite the readers to analyse informal learning in the context of work, social activity, migrations, family life, health problems etc. Learning analysed in the book is anchored in personal and socio-historical contexts. This is another example of ESREA’s books of good quality and interesting (and relevant) issues being raised.

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