

Siemieńska, Renata, ed. 2019. *Academic careers of women and men: Different or similar?* Warszawa: Scholar Publishing House, ISBN: 978-83-7383-867-3, 400 pp. (paperback)

WERONIKA MOLIŃSKA¹

¹ The Maria Grzegorzewska University, Department of Psychology, Szczęśliwicka 40, 02-353 Warszawa, Poland. ORCID: 0000-0002-8319-7149, Email: wmSD14@aps.edu.pl

ABSTRACT: This is a book review of the *Academic careers of women and men*, edited by Renata Siemieńska. The authors of the chapters presented in the book show selected problems of gender inequality and discrimination in Polish higher education compared to other countries. They analyze excitingly, among others: the low share of women in technical and engineering sciences in European countries, mechanisms marginalizing women in the surgical profession, a small percentage of women in the staff of art universities, as well as the course of doctoral studies and access to research grants awarded to women and men by Polish institutions. The discussed aspects also present a historical perspective and investigate the causes of the existing state of affairs. The research results on the situation of women in the academic world cited in the book prove that regularities persist for years, such as slower development of scientific careers among women or their low presence in higher positions in the academic hierarchy.

KEYWORDS: academic careers, gender inequalities, gender differences, higher education, gender studies

The reviewed book raises the subject of differences between women and men in terms of the possibilities of scientific development. It presents research carried out by an international group of social scientists. This item is part of the phenomenological discourse that appeared in Europe in the second half of the 20th century

and developed in Poland very clearly over the last two decades. The main conclusions, supported by the research results described in this book, still show the discriminatory picture of women in the academic world and its potential theoretical reasons. However, the authors draw attention to the growing role of women in the Polish scientific world compared to women's academic careers in other countries.

The scientific editor of the book *Academic careers of women* (2019) is prof. Renata Siemieńska. Both the editor herself and the other authors are scientifically related to equal treatment of women and men or the situation of women in science and the labour market.

The book *Academic careers of women and men* is divided into four main parts: contemporary research issues, historical outline, description of doctoral studies, and presentation of the specificity of applying and awarding grants or funding research. The first part presents the small presence of women in the scientific world in Poland and the world in recent years. It draws attention to the imbalance between women and men in terms of scientific careers and emphasises the low share of women in technical and engineering sciences in European countries. The second part presents how the image of the different careers of women and men in science in Poland has changed over the years. Moreover, the presented mechanisms may impact the marginalization of women in the profession of a surgeon, recognized as a male profession, with a small number of women working at art academies. The third part describes the course of doctoral studies in preparation for research work, describing the level of postgraduate studies, the study picture and the overall assessment of the comparison of women to men. The last part, the fourth, presents the inequality of access to research grants awarded to women and men by Polish institutions, as well as a description of mechanisms that may mediate in this respect. All four parts contain fifteen texts, preceded by an introduction and concluded with conclusions from the described research. The entire book also ends with a summary containing the study's findings, pointing to the persistence of barriers and differences in the scientific careers of women and men, emphasizing that women experience these barriers more often than men.

Moreover, an interesting thread concludes with a description of the specifics of these differences and difficulties. The proposed structure of the book seems to be very clear. Beginning with the presentation of general data and historical comparison of it gives the reader a broad picture of the situation of women and men at universities, constituting a kind of introduction to contemporary research issues, based on the appearance of scientific careers, the image of doctoral studies and the realities and conditions of financing scientific research from national measures.

The thematic breadth of the book can certainly satisfy any reader. Both people associated with the scientific world will find here a number of interesting theses that can constitute the basis for their further research, but also people utterly unfamiliar with the system of the academic world or the characteristics of scientific work may become interested in the image of gender differences or professional inequality in today's and previous times. Each chapter is described in detail, explaining the variety of research methods and results and is enriched with clear, numerous tables and graphs that illustrate the results described. Each text is topped with a structured summary containing

the most important thoughts and theses from each chapter relating to the overall research results described in the first paragraph.

Four texts attracted my attention, each representing a different part of the book among all the texts. At the same time, the first text in the volume is *Determinants of the academic careers of women and men in the world—an outline of the issues and research review*. It provides an accurate account of the gender characteristics and differences between men and women in the scientific world. This is a kind of excellent introduction for the reader, introducing him to the results so far, describing in detail the situation of women and men in the conditions of higher education and Poland in the European arena.

The second of them, which is part of the topic of women in the academic world in Poland, is the chapter entitled *Armored ceiling: why are there so few women in the faculty of art universities in Poland?* presenting not only the preferences of men and women to work as an academic lecturer in their field of study but also the potential reasons that may affect the assessment of this profession by women as unattractive. Moreover, the research results not only show statistical data on gender differences in terms of scientific and professional choices, but most of all reveal the dilemma faced by the art world, even when it is limited within the framework and rules of education centres. Interestingly, the authors point out that it is a hermetic group in which contacts and acquaintances take the lead, despite the postulation that diversity is an integral part of creative processes and spaces. However, this arouses considerable curiosity about the priorities of the artist and the academic group, which may encourage readers (working in science) to explore this area in their subsequent research.

Then, an equally important text, this time in the field of the discourse on doctoral studies (part III of the volume), describes: *The role of the family in the career of young scientists—from the decision to study to the career path after obtaining a doctoral degree*. As the authors themselves indicate, when choosing scientific development and the decision to continue a scientific career, not only the family of origin may be important, but also (or most of all) one's own family. This aspect was particularly interesting for the authors. The fundamental question running through this text is whether the situation of women and men differs in terms of reconciling scientific ambition with having a family. Indeed, the result of qualitative research showing young scientists as resourceful, dynamic people, open to new experiences and potential trips has a positive overtone here. Moreover, these interviews show the fact that men are increasingly involved in caring for their offspring, not wanting to treat children as an obstacle to their or their spouse's career development, supporting their partners' aspirations at the same time. Unfortunately, the positive attitude of young scientists alone is not enough. The authors point out that significant changes are necessary here on the part of the system and even the state to increase the potential possibilities of scientists and develop their scientific potential in the field of building scientific excellence, representing Poland in the international scientific arena, thanks to the increase in the number of publications, patents and grants international. Providing financial support, as well as caring for the offspring of the young generation of scientists, seems to be necessary here to be able to develop them in this direction. Reading this fragment, one

can get the impression that a group of young scientists is lonely in this regard. This is, of course, the so-called group studied in this case; however, this problem certainly affects the academic staff and many other people outside the university. Nevertheless, drawing attention to the importance of this support among the academic culture may even lead to the launch of a discourse that could contribute to the introduction of significant changes that would be an element of building our competitiveness in the international scientific arena.

The last part of the book is the part that introduces the realities of grants—information on applicants and evaluators. As part of the presentation of research funding from national funds and the conditions of this in Poland in the first decade of the 21st century, in my opinion, the chapter *Gender of scientists and their access to research grants in Poland at the beginning of the 2000s*, which is a fragment of from a report for the European Commission originally published in English. It provides a clear description of the statistics that give a picture of the gender gap in funding for research work and projects. It draws attention to the fact that among the applicant beneficiaries, women constitute a significant minority, which may be related to many professional and social factors. In addition, this report shows the opportunities that people had in the first decade of the 21st century and analyzes not only the successiveness of women's applications but also the place of women and men on the committees awarding grants. Interestingly, the author also recalls campaigns encouraging women to work in science and study at technical faculties. At the same time, it emphasizes that the normalization and social acceptance of women in masculinized professions should take place from an early age in the group of preschool children, who are the basis of the new generation and the future of the nation.

The main research conclusions presented in this book draw the reader's attention to the issue of discrimination against women not only in access to grants and research projects but also the uneven image of their doctoral studies and the low participation of women in engineering, technical, plastic and surgical sciences. The statistical data quoted in the book, also included in the historical perspective, point out that the negative perception of women in the academic world has not changed so far.

It is worth noting that women receive lower salaries for their work less research funding, which is also more difficult for them to get. Moreover, they receive far fewer new job offers while being harassed for their "vague management style", which hypothetically reduces the number of women in technical, engineering, and decision-making positions. All these factors are argued by gender differences, the role of women in society, who, as a mother, has more significant difficulties publishing an appropriate number of scientific texts and reconciling maternal duties with professional or scientific responsibilities. The presented arguments may arouse the opposition of the contemporary reader. I doubt whether the binary division of scientists (only women and men in scientific careers) is not significantly limiting. Moreover, it seems that nowadays, it can even be harmful to associate a woman in the patriarchal style with the role of mother. After all, not every female scientist (and women in general) may want or be able to become a mother. At the same time, men may also want to take over the role of the primary caregiver of

a home or family. This aspect is omitted when describing, for example, the differences in financing work or research on women and men. I believe that it would be worth considering other factors that may influence the still full of sexism picture of differences between women and men in terms of professional and scientific development opportunities in Poland and the world. Renata Siemieńska refers to this at the end of the book, calling for the spread of changes and striving for equality in educational and professional centres, as well as in gender roles.

Overall, this book provides an extensive description of the situation of women in higher education and the differences in the picture of academic careers between women and men, and the arguments for these inequalities. It is described in an accessible language and illustrated with many tables and charts, which also facilitate the text's assimilation. Hence, it can be concluded that this item is suitable for various groups of readers. Indeed, it will be an interesting publication not only for people interested in the image of higher education and scientific work, with social institutions, economy, human identity, etc.

In conclusion, I believe that this book should form the basis of the literature of all students. The editor of the volume calls for changes to be made in the scope described in the book. However, they want to conduct a discourse that would cause any change in this respect; it should be based on increasing the awareness of a given issue in the groups most interested, i.e., primarily in the academic community at every level.

FUNDING: This research received no external funding.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: The author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

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Siemieńska, Renata, ed. 2019. *Academic careers of women and men: Different or similar?* Warszawa: Scholar Publishing House.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Weronika Molińska holds a Master's degree in psychology from the University of Warsaw and is currently a PhD student at the Doctoral School of The Maria Grzegorzewska University, Poland.

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ARTICLE HISTORY: Received 2021-10-19 / Accepted 2022-02-26

