

Reviews

Zuzana Kiczková – Mariana Szapuová – Jana Zezulová (eds.): On the Road to Gender Equality: Women and Men in Academic Milieu
IRIS, Bratislava 2009, 419 pages.

Hackneyed and rather conventional title is the only downside of the publication. Otherwise it is surprisingly complex from theoretical point of view and rich in empirical evidence. "A research report" – this is how we could describe a collection of studies with a common research subject: the standard of equal opportunities for women and men working in research and science at universities. However, the analysis of equal opportunities does not limit itself to a description of gender inequalities regarding advancement, vertical and horizontal segregation, but describes the causes and mechanisms of reproduction, too. Here, the reviewer (and most probably every female and male researcher raised on qualitative research methods) "sits up" since researching the causes, that is uncovering causal relationships between social phenomena requires deep erudition of statistical methods. Initial doubts were quickly dispelled by an amazing consistency in the approach of all authors firstly towards theoretical and methodology basics, then towards the analysis and finally to the interpretation of discovered results. Reviewer, working in hurried applied social research finds it worth envying and emulating how the selected diverse research methods were combined and theory adequately seized.

In this context it is necessary to mention the sponsor and the contracting authority of such a rich structured research. It is a paradox that it was not an official science foundation, but the European Social Fund and Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development. Regarding women and men working in academic research and science as human resources for a unique and specific labour market does not solely serve as an instrument using the topic to raise capital, but also offers comparison of discovered facts on gender inequalities with other niche markets. It emerged once again that the disadvantage of using this programme structure is the division of area in the Bratislava and the remaining regions. As a result, project investigators were forced to select a target group and choose "only" respondents from universities, which were not situated in Bratislava. This deficiency was compensated by other, strict criteria for the selection of a research sample. Nevertheless, it begs the question: should not such a division, meaningful if it is necessary to consider big regional differences when allocating financial means, be granted an exception in case of a research that needs to be generalized for the whole territory of Slovakia?

Editors divided the publication into five parts, while only the first one is devoted to theory and methodology. The rest is divided according to the level of analysis or according to applied research methods from the analysis of gender structure in a given segment based on "hard" statistical data across analysis of quantitative questionnaire survey on gender aspects of academic life of the target group to the analysis of focus groups on career advancement and narrative discussions about individual experience of „opening one's eyes“. Reviewer found it interesting to watch the authors rigorously apply theoretical and methodology basis to analyse or interpret their findings, which is often a sticking point in some areas of knowledge when empirically verifying or applying in a rigorous manner a rather well elaborated theory.

In the first part, *Etela Farkašová, Mariana Szapuová, Jana Zezulová and Zuzana Kiczková* give us a well arranged introduction into a philosophical perspective on the question of women in science and related uneven distribution of power. The texts leave the impression that the authors have already treated the issue from several angles. Etela Farkašová concisely describes the development of feminist epistemology and then proceeds with a description of its three basic lines: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory and feminist postmodernism. Even though, feminist epistemology almost completely draws upon the works of feminist philosophers (Sandra Harding, Lorraine Code), their research does not fall behind, but often resembles or even surpasses the self-reflecting efforts from sociology. Besides uncovering androcentrism and sexist bias in scientific research, methods, concepts and production of scientific knowledge, feminist epistemology plays an important role and is extremely fascinating for a researcher of applied social research due to common instant of all its lines: the instant of opening and making the borders between epistemology itself, ethics and political philosophy more flexible. The demand of feminist epistemology is understandable – to admit and critically reflect on the blurred relationship between knowledge and power relations (ideology of patriarchy) and make the implicit moral norms and values in science explicit.

Mariana Szapuová follows with a description of genderness of science both in the institutions and in scientific theory, methods and language. She criticizes sex counting approach that only describes gender imbalance by counting the share of men and women in particular area, whereas other methods have to be used in order to uncover the causes and mechanisms reproducing the imbalance. In one breath, she adds that even the norms for empirical testing themselves are socially constructed norms of epistemic communities. This only confirms the central thesis of feminist empiricism about science as social and communal happening. Thus a question (that has not been sufficiently reflected on so far, thinks the author) of „trust“ emerges as an epistemic element that

relates to mutual cognitive and intellectual cooperation, even mutual dependence of knowledge subjects that may be projected into a sentence: what we know depends on the knowledge of others.

Since gender is understood differently not only when we speak about women in science (Nicky Le Feubre), *Jana Zezulová* again draws attention to the „gender trouble“ and the pitfalls related to the understanding of gender as an attribute, euphemism for sex and to the loss of its conceptual sharpness as a construct. Obviously, Zezulová like Le Feubre supports the view of gender subversion (gender erosion) as the most complex and the most efficient political agenda that is based on large process against binary splitting into men and women in all areas not only regarding support of mutual interchangeability, but of more extensive diversity, not difference, but differentiation. Additionally, another barrier to implementation and acceleration of gender erosion process is language, theory and thinking, which relies on binary system and does not allow thinking in categories of cultural androgynous identity.

Here, however, both Zezulová and Nicky Le Feubre are ahead of evolution, because according to Zuzana Kiczková, first of all it is necessary to identify the current status of patriarchal society through emancipation processes, in which women were gaining on importance. Still the process is running into problems with ideological manipulation, self-delusion, and the tendency to promote the ideal of the subordination of women. Narrative interview was used as a tool, since it best captures the diversity of women's experience and does not get lost in typologies and statistical reification. Biographical oral history serves as a material for “reconstructing gender constructs”. Assumingly the researcher approaches family, social and historical context with sensitivity. Narrative interview is based on interactive relationship between an interviewer and an interviewee; it is a “dance of two subjects”. Thus, this method satisfies feminist epistemology principle, which rejects false neutral objectivity in research. Three theoretical and methodology bases then relate to the subject-subject paradigm – in the first place, categorical imperative of relational autonomous being, moral respect of asymmetric reciprocity transformed into attentive and respecting listening on the second place and thirdly trust to the ethics of care. The last prescribes responsibility of the one who is trusted (person with power) for the good of the trusting person (person who trusts). Interpretation analysis of narration, which means both representation and construction – relies on a construction of a “second degree”. Doubled construction is based on selected theoretical assumptions forming the codes of “interpretive lens”.

Let us now have a look at the fifth part and see how Zuzana Kiczková applied doubling constructions and what kind of interpretative grid she created in the analyzed 12 narrative discussions with female and male teachers at a Slovak technical university. Construction of the interviewed (i.e. what they talk

about and the way they talk about it) is attached to the construction of the analyst. Her construction has almost identical hierarchical scale – degree and method for identifying gender relations and connections of both female and male respondents: articulation of gender dimension is absent (gender-blindness), matter-of-fact approach to the state/existence of gender inequalities, naming the reasons with their proper names and proposing solutions to gender inequalities. This interpretative grid serves as manual for selection and for new organization of segments (parts of interviews as semantic units). Nevertheless, Zuzana Kiczková forfeits in advance the obligation to make only one single interpretation and points out that the selected and newly organized segments do not only illustrate a pre-formulated opinion (sequence), but also inspire the readers to form their own, differentiating interpretations. The interpretation of Kiczková herself presents an exciting penetration into the way opinions are formed on the role of women in an environment of masculine dominancy at a technical university and into chosen “survival” strategies of female scientists in a strong androcentric work climate. Firstly, she reveals how gender inequalities are substituted on a political level (e.g. party member/non-member), in personal relationships in the workplace (hatred of the head and the researcher turned against the candidate), in the lack of practical experience due to inadequate, too young age. Next follow the gender inequalities and how these were realized (e.g. “I had to carve out my position, the man got it for free”; making the chances more equal by disproportionate additional work of women). Also, six principles how women acquire their academic degrees were revealed – constant presentation of one’s skills, designing skills as a help for getting better position, the remainder principle “there was nobody else at hand”, lucky chance principle (being at the right time in the right place), men evacuating the position. Even though, the analyst refuses to typologise, by uncovering regularities and similarities (woman alibi, gender blindness of the privileged) it tempts to introduce metaphorical categories similar to the already established ones such as “leaky pipes” or “glass ceiling”.

A review does not offer a space big enough to name all relevant findings of the research project. Describing the first and fifth parts in more detail, the reviewer aimed to illustrate richness and depth of the penetration, with which the authors seized the topic and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. The overall gender discriminating academic milieu is even more vivid by the horribly opening scissors diagrams presented by *Jarmila Filadelfiová* that show the level of academic career at all researched schools, followed by the dispelling of the myth of dis/interest of female academic in higher posts or historical and androcentric shaking of epistemic confidence of female academics as part of glass ceiling by *Mariana Szapuová*, Zuzana Kiczková’s importance of dividing the lived and symbolic gender stereotypes, *Katarína*

Čavojská's gender blindness in structural and institutional conditions and for female academics a very dangerous individualization of their own ambitions or unwritten rotation rule of strong males in the untransparent school management described by *Radomír Masaryk*.

Considering the quality of the research report the reviewer strongly disagrees with the modest intention of the authors declared at the book's presentation to open the issue of equal chances of women and men in academic environment. It is a shame that the issue of women in science has not yet become part of a permanent professional discussion and an established and urgent topic of science politics in Slovakia after a number of initiatives by T. Sedová and a team of male and female authors, who had made the issue of women in Slovak Academy of Science a topic as early as 2003 as well as after a seminar and anthology by M. Piscová from 2004, after several national reports on the status of women in science for the Helsinki group (ETAN, ENWISE), after activities of D. Velichová and after several years of teaching feminist epistemology at the Department of Philosophy at Comenius University by M. Szapuová. Academic field with its erudition and the potential of knowledge should play a „key role“ not only in deconstructing gender schemes, but also be a catalyst for gender democracy in other areas of social life.

Barbora Holubová