

The dynamics of women's access to polytechnic studies

Social theory and practice

Summary

The publication is entitled *The dynamics of women's access to polytechnic studies. Social theory and practice* and describes the problem of the dynamics of women's access to polytechnic (university of technology) studies in the light of changes which took place in recent decades in women's socio-cultural situation (the emancipation process), changes in their identity and increased professional aspirations. In terms of the contrast between essentialist and constructivist approaches to gender the author opts for the second view, because this facilitates two things: the reconstruction of the role played by socialization processes in the development of gender identity, and the reconstruction of changes in women's educational and professional aspirations. In this context polytechnic studies represent almost a crystallization of contemporary trends, a unique laboratory of social change and of identity, and of the way women cross traditional fundamental roles.

The first part of the book is devoted to various theoretical contexts of the social construction of gender identity, primarily feminine (but in the background also male roles), and always in comparison with emerging socio-cultural trends. In this part the analysis is performed on the basis of biological essentialism and social constructivism approaches mentioned above as the basic paradigms of differentiating perspective on the issues of femininity and masculinity. The author goes on to elaborate on gender socialization, on the gender and professional stereotypes operating in public opinion, and the broadly perceived division of roles and tasks allocated to men and women in traditional societies (and ideologies). The author analyzes the role of the family environment in shaping identity, as well as other educational environments into which the child enters and in which, through secondary socialization, the child can gain knowledge about the world and take on all kinds of rules and principles governing femininity and masculinity in a given society.

The next chapter addresses the interpretation of women's access to the labor market. In this part, the author reconstructs selected theories from the sociology of education, which are the theoretical justification for the social phenomena described,

such as: Talcott Parsons' theory of structural functionalism, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis' theory of economic reproduction and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction.

In the next part, the author analyses the dynamics of women's access to higher education from the historical and contemporary perspective with special emphasis on polytechnic education. It contains a synthetic presentation of the history of women in higher education and beginnings of universities of technology in Poland and abroad. This section includes a detailed analysis of women's participation in polytechnic studies in the light of the modern-day phenomenon of female supremacy in higher education.

In the following chapter, the author elaborates on the specifics of the engineering profession and the diverse contexts in which women function in engineering, including in terms of the dynamic tension between professional success and social perception of female engineers and their masculinization, which might occur when performing non-traditional roles and tasks in a male-dominated professional environment.

The theoretical part ends with an overview of selected modern institutions, organizations and social policies aimed at increasing the participation of women in education within the group of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics). The author also attempts to construct a typology of women, who more frequently become part of the universities' advertising campaigns in Poland and abroad.

The second part of the work includes the analysis of empirical research findings on the public perception of the educational choices of women studying in universities of technology and how they function in the professional field of engineering. This qualitative study was carried out in two intentionally selected research groups, namely female students of technical subjects at universities of technology, men working professionally and holding the title of engineer. This research allows two perspectives to be presented as well as such issues discussed in the theoretical part as the professional and personal success of women working in the field of engineering, the masculinization of women in occupations traditionally regarded as male, occupational stereotypes and gender in engineering. In general, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of popular attitudes to the contemporary social phenomenon of the growing participation of women in the engineering profession. As part of contemporary sociology of education and feminology studies, this book contributes to the discussion on the dynamics of women's access to non-traditional fields of study and professions.