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Book Review

**Kaye Broadbent, Glenda Strachan and Geraldine Healy (Eds.),
Gender and the Professions: International and Contemporary
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Introduction

Friedrich Engels, in his book titled *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, in the year 1884 stated, “The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time” (p.88). The social status and the rights of women have advanced commendably since then and today we have reached the age of disruption, which is all about radical change. *Gender and Professions: International and Contemporary Perspectives* is a

collection of research that explores how gender and professions interplay in this age of disruption.

Structure, Authors and Intended Readership

The book is a collection of 11 research papers contributed by 23 authors, and edited by Kaye Broadbent, Glenda Strachan and Geraldine Haly, which provides interesting insights on gender issues in a broad range of both conventional and unconventional professions from a global perspective. The chapters of the book focus on three themes, which are I – Intersectionality and the professional worker, II - Gendered precarious professional work, and III – Gendered organizational, cultural and societal practices.

Every study in this book provides comprehensive background information on the identified industry and/or the profession, covering the origin, evolution, and the current outlook, facilitating a comfortable reading experience for a reader from any part of the world. The content of the book bears an evenly matched importance and value for academics, researchers, practitioners in the industry, pressure groups and any individual or a group who has an interest in gender based issues in organizational settings.

Contents in Brief

Chapter 1 presents a preamble by the editors, unfolding the necessity and importance of this research portfolio on gender and professions. This chapter follows a dual faceted approach where the editors have provided a detail description on the concept of ‘profession’ and an overview of the intersectional approach they have followed in compiling this research dossier. In the context of the concept of profession, the editors present an array of definitions emphasizing their key attributes and focus points, and argue that professions are gendered, and highlight the fact that despite the rapid and progressive change in opening unconventional professions for women, they are being largely under represented and segregated into narrow specialties. They further note that these segregations are either horizontal – where people at work tend to continue to work with people of their own gender, or vertical – where men are likely to remain in the top positions. The editors also contend that these segregations are intervened by gendered professional contexts, inequality regimes and culture.

The chapter also includes a summary of the chapters which helps the readers to navigates through the book.

Theme 1 – Intersectionality and Professional Worker

The chapters under this theme explore the relationship between the intersections of age, pay and migration, and gender.

Chapter 2 of the book by Healy, Boardbent and Strachan, presents a study on gender inequality in a female dominant public sector organization in Australia. The authors focus on examining whether the age factor exacerbates practices of pay and career advancement and demonstrate that even in a female dominant environment, women struggle to gain access to higher level positions. Although there is no discrimination in gaining access or pay at entry level, inequality regimes emerge at early stages in the career, leaving us the question whether equal employment policies have any impact beyond the point of recruitment.

In Chapter 6, Forson, Calvely, Shelly and George discuss how ageism, which is a feature of Ghanaian national culture, has been embedded in structural dimensions, and translated into actions and practices among academics. Older female academics are advantaged in their employment experience compared to younger women, and to some extent of younger men. Interestingly, junior academics in Ghana acknowledge that this phenomenon is triggered by the features of their national culture, and they tend to capitulate to age-based discrimination rather than resist. The authors in their introductory note inform that the study was a comparative study between a university in UK and in Ghana. However, they are silent about the academics in the UK both in detailing the research and in explaining their findings, which detracts somewhat from the richness of the chapter.

Chapter 7 by Ressia, Strachan and Baily, explores, through a longitudinal study, the expectations and the outcomes of professional women who have migrated to Australia. The authors highlight that in navigating the labour market in their new home, the experiences of these ambitious women have been negative, caused by the incompatibility between expectations of employers and the gendered social role expectations from women as caretakers of the family. As a result, instead of the expected upward career mobility, all the women in the sample had experienced downward career mobility. The study does not depict how the experiences of migrant professional women differ from the experiences of the migrant professional men; it provides insights only from the women's perspective.

Theme II - Gendered Precarious Professional Work

The chapters in this section examine how precarity associated with professions affect the women engaged in those professions.

Chapter 3 of the book by Broadbent, Strachan and May is a descriptive study that explores precarious work contracts of Australian academics. In investigating how gender interplays with precarious employment among university academics, statistics indicate that women outnumber men who are on insecure employment contracts although the difference is not very significant. It was also affirmed that insecurely employed academics of both genders accept precarious employment, while acknowledging its negative impact; because there are not many other options available for them in universities. These findings are similar to the situation of Ghanaian academics discussed earlier. The findings also disclose that men and women on precarious employment contract follow different approaches in dealing with their work experience. Men were quicker in limiting their casual commitments, which did not help their career ambition. However, due to the gendered social role expected from women as caregivers with childcare and childbearing responsibilities, and constraints on geographic mobility, women tend to take a longer period to limit their casual commitments.

In Chapter 5, Astor and Caven investigate the dynamics of gender among architects in Spain during the economic recession. The study follows an interpretative research approach with a qualitative methodology along with rich data from secondary sources to substantiate their claims. The profession of architects in Spain is gendered, where, although women's enrolment in architectural education exceeds 50%, the registered female architects represent only 29%. According to the authors, there is an apparent interplay between gender and career choices of architectural professionals where male architects build their careers on self-employment while females confine to salaried employment, depicting horizontal segregation, particularly owing to the gendered social role demands from women. In dealing with the recession, female architects appeared resilient, portraying a strong professional identity and holding profession consistent learning goals, indicating that they believed their experiences during recession and precariousness of their profession were only temporary phenomena. This was contrasting to the approaches of women in studies discussed earlier, in handling their disadvantages situations. However, there is a clear difference between the contexts of Spanish architects and the women in previously discussed research, where the recession was merely a temporary or short-term phenomenon. Hence the, different forms of resilience observed.

In Chapter 8, Anne-Marie Greene looks into the professional life of clergywomen in the United Kingdom (UK). Through this study Green attempts to fill a void by

exploring a population under-researched in social research. The author claims that ordained clergy who are paid for their service are in a profession; however, having a religious call as its core, this profession is set apart from other professions. The study identifies that clergywomen are prepared to accept the overt discriminatory treatment since their work in the ministry is satisfying, represents life recovery for them, and allows them to engage in a religious calling. The researcher also notes that lack of radical-feminist attitude and supportive women's campaign groups within the church have pushed the clergywomen to succumb to discrimination. In the introductory chapter the editors map this chapter under the theme II; however, the author does not discuss either the flexibility or precariousness of the profession of clergy in the UK, thus rendering the place of the chapter under this theme somewhat questionable.

Theme III – Gendered Organizational, Cultural and Societal Practices

The chapters under this theme explore how gendered organizational, cultural and societal practices impact on women engaged in selected professions.

In Chapter 4, Ryan and Pringle unveil the nature of the gendered profession of law in New Zealand. The authors argue that it is not the numbers that makes the legal profession gendered, but the gendered firm cultures and practices. They point out that to become a successful partner, women need to possess an undeterred ambition, have strong support at home and maintain unbroken career paths, which are attributes that may be difficult to attain by women who aspire to raise families. It is further stated that women are required be more assertive with clients and male partners. Interestingly, some respondents in this qualitative study have stressed the need for change and they have even recognized the risk of advocating for change within the prevailing masculine structures, unlike the passive women found in previously discussed chapters.

Chapter 9 by Adikaram and Kailasapathy investigates the factors that hinder women's choices to pursue higher education in the field of information technology (IT), and subsequently advance their careers in IT. The chapter differs from the previous chapters as the focus of the authors is not confined to the gendered nature of the profession, but extends to the factors that affect the ability of fulfilling prerequisites that are required to step into the profession of IT. The issues are examined based on a foundation of Social Cognitive Career Theory, and, in addition, throughout the chapter there are rich references to other theoretical constructs, enhancing the value of the study. Although the study is qualitative, there is also a rich collection of quantitative secondary data presented in support of the arguments.

The quantitative data indicate that there is a void in female representation in higher management positions demonstrating vertical segregation, similar to the other professions discussed in other chapters. Factors influencing the development of an interest and then the selection of a career in IT, were governed by the theoretical constructs of self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Although these two constructs form a foundation in women being admitted to the career, their progress thereafter is hindered by subsequent weakening self-efficacy levels which are sustained by their own perceptions of negative outcomes together with impaired self-confidence. Thus, women tend to remain in lower positions in the hierarchy causing the industry to remain horizontally segregated.

The highly gendered Canadian space industry is the central focus of Chapter 10 by Ruel. The study differs from the other chapters in many ways. First, the study uses a recently developed theoretical and methodological approach– which is Critical Sensemaking (CSM) approach developed in 2010. Second, the chapter is written in first person, and the author herself is a member of the target population and she brings forth her personal experiences and sentiments in her explanations and arguments. The chapter explores the gendered discourses, and the impact of these discourses on the self and social identities of the professional women, which ultimately inform their behaviors. Using the CSM model the author maintains that intersectionality determines the level of complexity of both self and social identities of an individual, and she suggests that these complexities could be examined using anchor points which are either ephemeral or permanent. Through identity maps and excerpts of interviews the author demonstrates that routine work experiences of women in space are influenced by gendered interactions.

Chapter 11 by Durbin and Lopes provides an overview of the profession of engineers in UK, which shares similar characteristics with the profession of Law in New Zealand discussed in Chapter 4. Although in all the other professions discussed in this book the underrepresentation of women appears to emerge at midcareer levels, engineering profession in UK bears a unique feature because underrepresentation of women manifests from the very early stage of embarking on the career of engineering as students. The profession is affected by gendered social perception as a “masculine” and “dirty” (p. 176) job, and prevents women from choosing a career in engineering, which the authors explain using the metaphor of a “leaky pipeline” (p. 170). The authors propose that increasing the number of women in engineering education and in practice is essential not only to overcome the underrepresentation and as a possible alternative to the dearth of professionals in this economically critical industry, but

also to create a more gender balanced environment, which would have more female role models.

The case of nurses in Thailand is explored in Chapter 12 by Kattiyapornpong and Cox. The authors argue that the cultural and religious traditions influence the choice of nursing as a career for women as it is aligned with the gendered values of caring. The study emphasizes the prevalence of reverse discrimination for males entering the profession. However, being a female dominant profession, nurses in Thailand are victimized by the unequal power structures that prevail in the health care system, which makes male doctors superior, merely because of the male supremacy that prevails in the Thai culture. In addressing the overt discrimination coming from male doctors, the nurses in Thailand have succumbed to the situation rather than resisting, merely because of their traditional and national values.

Conclusion

The content of the book does full justice to its title “International and Comparative Perspectives”, representing studies covering a wide range of professions belonging to an array of genres such as traditional, contemporary, commonly researched, and seldom researched, from all corners of the world. The philosophical and methodological foundations used by the authors, while belonging to the qualitative category, also range from well-established to recently developed, category, ensuring a comprehensive coverage of research perspectives as well. Without any doubt, the editors have paid careful attention in compiling this collection of research representing solid and valuable insight to both academics and practitioners on gender and professions with contributions reflecting on global perspectives. However, the absence of organizing the chapters under the three themes is a hindrance to the reader, as it obstructs a smooth reading experience, since the reader must refer back to Chapter 1 to identify the theme to which the chapter belongs. While the book comprises studies representing cases from all corners of the world, a study from the South American context would have made the global representation complete, covering all continents with ordinary human habitation.

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