

BOOK REVIEW

Changing lives: women, inclusion and the PhD, edited by Barbara Ann Cole and Helen Gunter, Stoke on Trent, Trentham Books, 2010, 165 pp., £20.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-85856-461-6

In many ways, this is an unusual book for the Journal of Education Policy to review. This is because this book is not immediately or obviously concerned with policy in any conventional sense. The book does not centre directly on a piece of policy-making or national legislation. In contrast, 'Changing lives: women, inclusion and the PhD' is a collection of six narratives prepared by women academics in the UK to account for their experiences of completing doctoral studies. And yet, many of the stories that are told in this collection have a policy significance that is frequently unrecognised or silenced. For example, in her chapter that deals with the ways in which 'the institutionalisation of the black and white identity' is 'perpetuated by government policy', as well as through the constant reiteration of the 'black-white duality 'across our 'everyday lives', Gordon (2010, 80) illustrates the ways in which individual lives are inflected by the public-social. She starts her chapter by citing C. Wright Mills (1959, 226); 'Know that the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles and to the problems of the individual life'. In her chapter, and in the other chapters in this collection, it is this concern to connect the public to the private, policy to people's lives, which animates this book.

As Cole and Gunter explain in the first chapter, the experiences of women in higher education (in the UK) have been under-researched. Taking up the challenge set by Professor Diana Leonard (2001, 3) they have set out to explore the 'personal and professional struggles 'of a small number of women whose stories are missing from official accounts of higher education. As they say, borrowing from Leonard, 'what is written about women and higher education is done from the perspectives of faculty and policy makers rather than of students' (2001, 3). Thus, this book is a corrective to the malestream agenda; a corrective that the editors hope 'will also be read by those who formulate policy at government level' (2010, 3).

'Changing Lives' offers a fresh perspective and a valuable, well written contribution to the limited literature exploring women's experiences of undertaking their PhDs and becoming academics. The book consists of a core of six narratives written by Penny Jane Burke, Barbara Ann Cole, Gloria Gordon, Helen M. Gunter, Jennifer Lavia and Heidi Mirza and Kate Hoskins. These stories highlight the role of context, complexity and contradiction. The women's stories and experiences of engaging with higher education discussed in the book illustrate the challenges and struggles women have faced in accessing and progressing through the academy, first as students and later as women academics. The focus on intersectionality between the major axis around which difference coalesces into identities—gender, race and class" (Blair, Holland and Sheldon, 1995, xi: italics as original) illuminates the complex and nuanced experiences discussed by a group of women who share the same professional status. As the title suggests, the book explores issues of inclusion and exclusion in the six women's lives, using a framework drawn from sociological theory.

In the final chapter of this collection, Cole and Gunter reflect back on these 'little stories 'of women doing doctorates and being doctoral students. They point to the dilemmas of knowledge production and the ways in which lived identities shape and construct the experiences of women doctoral students. They talk of Higher Education as 'a man's world', 'a classed, raced and aged world, 'where the 'PhD serves as the entry ticket to career development'(2010, 143). As the PhD does act as a legitimation for access into the academy, there is the need to explore more lived accounts of the policy-processes that shape this experience—particularly for those who have been traditionally excluded from higher education. Thus, while this rich collection contains much food for thought for

policy-makers and practitioners, simultaneously it powerfully illustrates the ways in which the policy context and the social context bear down in sometimes troubling ways on the lives of women doctoral students.

References

Blair, M., J. Holland, and S. Sheldon, eds. 1995. Identity and diversity: gender and the experience of education: a reader. Avon: Multilingual Matters in association with The Open University.

Gordon, G. 2010. Researching life itself: Human centred passionate appreciation. in Changing lives women, inclusion and the PhD, ed. B.A. Cole and H. Gunter. Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books.

Leonard, D. 2001. A woman's guide to doctoral studies. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Mills, C.W. 1959. The sociological imagination. New York: Oxford University Press.

Meg Maguire Kings College, London, UK Email: meg.maguire@kcl.ac.uk Kate Hoskins Roehampton University, London, UK 2012, Meg Maguire and Kate Hoskins
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2011.599598>