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Book Review: *The Kaleidoscope of Gender: Prisms, Patterns, and Possibilities*

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***The Kaleidoscope of Gender: Prisms, Patterns, and Possibilities*, Joan Z. Spade and Catherine G. Valentine, 2014. Sage: Los Angeles. 587 pages, black and white photographs chapter 6 only. Paperback.**

Reviewed by Cynthia J.W. Svoboda¹

Joan Z. Spade is professor emerita of sociology at The College at Brockport, State University of New York, in Brockport, New York). Catherine G. Valentine is professor emerita of sociology at Nazareth College in Rochester, New York). In the fourth edition of *The Kaleidoscope of Gender*, Joan Z. Spade and Catherine G. Valentine, have revised their sociological reader on gender to reflect current views and include new literature in the field. They keep this edition contemporary, but still maintain their original format and general sub-themes. As with the previous editions of this work, the authors use the metaphor of the kaleidoscope as a comparison technique to explain their interpretations of the sociology of gender, the social construct of gender, and the relationship between gender and other cultural concepts. They explain this through the lens of a kaleidoscope.

A kaleidoscope is an optical viewing tube containing mirrors and prisms, colored transparent pieces of glass, plastic, or paper that refract light. When rotated, these geometric shapes produce patterns that can change and make new pictures and an endless array of design possibilities. The authors explain their use of the kaleidoscope metaphor in their preface: "It focuses on the prisms through which gender is shaped, the patterns gender takes, and the possibilities of ourselves and our relations with others, both locally and globally" (xi). This statement succinctly delineates the authors' purpose and introduces the reader to the three part structure of the book. With this focus in mind, Spade and Valentine's revised work includes a higher concentration of readings on masculinity, an emphasis on current "social movements for gender justice," and a greater global and intersectionality concentration. Approximately fourteen percent (seven) of the readings in the new edition are also from the original edition, an additional twenty-eight percent (fourteen) were first added to the second addition; fourteen percent (seven) were new in the third edition, and forty-four percent (twenty-two) are original to this edition. The readings original publication dates span from 1993 to 2012.

This book consists of three major sections or themes that are part of a kaleidoscope: prisms, patterns, and possibilities. Each of the three parts of the book is subdivided into chapters, of which there are ten. Each chapter includes introductory and overview information as well as a list of references. Most of the fifty readings in the book were originally published in academic journals, such as *Gender & Society*, *Men and Masculinities*, *Social Problems*, *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *Ethnography*, and *Signs* or from chapters in books. Each reading in the text includes an "Introduction to the Reading," followed by three to four questions for reflection and analysis. After each of the readings, which vary in length from six to eleven pages, are notes and references.

The intended audience for this work is undergraduates enrolled in courses that focus on gender studies, women's studies, and/or social change. It may be used as the main text for a course or chosen for selected readings. Professors who assign this book as a textbook may find it

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invaluable to require students to read and study the introduction. The introduction not only summarizes and explains the various sections of the book, but also provides an extensive vocabulary of rich text and definitions. Within this section, the authors define the term “metaphor” and thoroughly explain their metaphor of “kaleidoscope of gender.” The introduction also describes key terms including prisms, social prisms, gender stereotypes, hegemonic, and intersectionality. Theoretical approaches for understanding gender, including “Functionalism,” “Conflict Theories,” “Social Conflict Theories,” “Queer Theories,” “Relational Theory,” “Feminist Theories” and more are also discussed here. These theories are followed by a summary of the three parts of the book that will follow.

Part I: “Prisms” begins with an introduction to “Chapter 1: The Prism of Gender.” The kaleidoscope metaphor is used here to provide the reader with a further understanding of gender as a “social construct;” particularly as applied in western society, but inclusive of nonwestern culture as well. The second chapter of this section explores “The Interaction of Gender with Other Socially Constructed Prisms,” including many of the variations of power and privilege that affect membership within race, social class, age, and more. “Gender and the Prism of Culture,” the third and final chapter of this part, outlines what culture is and discusses its interrelationship with the prism of gender. The philosophies and viewpoints expressed in the introduction to these three chapters are reinforced with the inclusion of fifteen different readings on femininity, masculinity, and intersectionality. This part of the reader emphasizes that gender and culture are social prisms that are not ubiquitous across various cultures, are not permanent, and do not exist in a vacuum.

In “Part II: “Patterns” the authors further develop the information they have presented in Part I by discussing the many patterns and interrelationships of various social prisms, particularly as they relate to femininity and masculinity. This section of the anthology is the largest and consists of six chapters. It begins with “Chapter 4: Learning and Doing Gender,” which defines social patterns, gendered patterns and socialization; discusses their emergence in society, and relates how the perception of gender identity is taught and socialized. The following chapter “Chapter 5: Buying and Selling Gender” begins with a discussion of corporate capitalism and discusses the exploitation of gender as a marketable entity in the American culture. This sense of society’s suppression and control is heightened and made more intimate in “Chapter 6: Tracing Gender’s Mark on Bodies, Sexualities, and Emotions” where gendered patterns are shown to affect very personal aspects of peoples’ lives. The way we see our own images and those of others are strongly influenced by the prism of gender and the patterns they create. These dynamics and other forces are woven into “Chapter 7: Gender at Work.” Gendered patterns in the work environment affect the roles people play and the opportunities of individuals. As seen in “Chapter 8: Gender in Intimate Relationships,” these patterns also influence personal interactions. In the concluding chapter of “Patterns,” “Chapter 9: Enforcing Gender,” inequalities are highlighted with emphasis on how they are maintained through “Social Control,” “Gender Violence,” “Institutionalized Enforcement of Gender,” and “Sexual Harassment.” “Part II: Patterns” includes thirty supportive readings on work, family, marriage, youth privilege, race, class, and violence. This section provides many differing facets of gendered patterns and the interplay of other forces at work.

Part III, “Possibilities,” consists of chapter 10: “Nothing is Forever,” which includes four readings on feminism and a fifth one on masculinities. In this section, Spade and Valentine emphasize the certainty and complexity of change, both unplanned “Trends,” such as the Industrial Revolution, and planned “Social Movements” such as feminism. The authors also stress the need for people to be aware of change within the social construct of gender and ask their readers to consider the future of gender and its possibilities. The subsequent and final piece of the book is

“Epilogue: Possibilities,” a quick review and reflection of the changing culture of America in the last half of the Twentieth Century and into the Twenty-First during the authors’ own life time.

The 4th edition of *The Kaleidoscope of Gender*, is a well-organized gender anthology that is accessible to undergraduate students. Most of the readings may be found in other resources, particularly *Gender & Society*, but the short introductions and discussion questions enhance these writings. There are also several other anthologies on gender that cover similar themes, but this one uses a unique metaphor in its approach to the study. The font and two-column layout make the work easy on the eyes, but there is little else that breaks the book up other than sub-headings within the readings. Only one reading has illustrations, three black and white photographs. The readings are mostly qualitative. However, some survey data and a couple of quantitative tables are included. This book is recommended for stimulating course discussions that might include gender, sex roles, sex differences (psychology), gender identity, man-woman relationships, and interpersonal relations. Most undergraduates would have difficulty reading and responding to all of the material available within this book in a single semester. Selecting specific readings within the reader might be the best approach for using this resource. The discussion question included in the readings are well-formulated and may encourage further thoughts. Since *The Kaleidoscope of Gender* includes a large list of defined terms, the work would be greatly enhanced by a glossary of terms and an index.