This volume is an outcome of the work of our colleagues Sue Jackson, Irene Malcolm and Kate Thomas. They examine the impulse towards and agenda of lifelong learning from a feminist point of view and the perspective of “non-traditional learners”. The authors are concerned to alert their readers to the point that lifelong learning policies, structures and activities can become a forum for “academic” women in “the academy” to work alongside women participants in the workplace and in educational institutions and social associations to press forward a feminism that promotes all women’s interests. Their argument is that feminism has a responsibility to offer useful solutions that take into account the realities of all women, maintaining coherence between theory and practice.

They lead us in this direction by demonstrating, through concrete examples, the importance of taking note of the point that many of the choices that are open to women in developing their desire to engage in lifelong learning activities are largely silent on the importance of addressing the issues of gender and to that extent tend to militate against the emancipation which might otherwise be promised and made available through such activities. The arguments advanced in this volume are directed towards the end of arguing for and demonstrating how the experiences expressed in the “voices” of women and non-traditional learners may throw light upon ways in which all lifelong learners can enjoy equal emancipation and benefit from their enmeshment with the work and insights of women in the academy in an interactive, participatory dialogue, where both can undertake and achieve a deep
educational emancipation. The present work presents arguments to show why and how this might be brought about; it does so by concentrating on and distilling lessons from the experiences of individuals with such emancipatory interests, working together in dialogic interchange in ways that can function to promote and expand resistance to the hegemony claimed by many of such writers to be found in most current policies of lifelong learning, particularly in its globalised form.

*Gendered Choices: Learning, Work and Identities in Lifelong Learning* brings together insights and narratives of a group of women scholars, who address issues of feminism and social inclusion within the framework of adult education and learning throughout life. The authors discuss the experiences and insights of feminists in adult education, among them many non-academic women, who, they argue, have been historically silenced from the feminist mainstream discourse and are now claiming their voice. The work is particularly concerned to emphasize the following:

- That the field of gender studies is currently under-represented in lifelong learning literature
- The role of gender as a shaper of participation in and experience of lifelong learning
- The importance of gendered choices across the lifespan and personal and professional identities
- The need for gender(ed) perspectives on work-based/work-related learning and the labour market
- The importance of developing international comparisons and the significance of globalisation in the text.

This volume assumes the standpoint of feminist epistemology and ontology and seeks to provide a rigorous theoretical analysis of feminist thought and real women’s lives. It seeks to draw a connection between the lack of gendered choices and marginalised women’s workplace location, social participation, dialogically oriented adult education and solidarity. These the authors see as key elements in the creation of personal meaning and social transformation in situations in which their workplace and life choices can be given value and significance. Grounded in a dialogic educational perspective, the authors’ insightful work and the voices of the women with whom they have worked is based upon the realisation that the “personal is the political” and that praxis will serve to call into question and resist many of the ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions with which globalised lifelong learning policies, practices and institutions have been hitherto normalised. The style, tenor and purpose of the arguments contained and set out in it this volume make for a unique, engaging, accessible reading experience. This book will prove to be of great value to professors, researchers, graduate students, teachers and teacher trainers with a strong interest in Adult Education, Lifelong Learning and Gender Studies. Above all it is a work that should be defined as required reading for all those engaged in promoting and providing lifelong learning activities in workplace, home and society.

Sue, Irene and Kate have done all of us a signal service in their writing of this book. They have shown us the experiences and contributions of women making
choices and decisions about the valued elements in their lives and how these may contribute to de- and re-constructing educational and social practices and theories. These, and the policies emanating from them, should in future embody lessons arising from and validated through women’s experiences of learning, working and developing a sense of identity in all aspects of learning throughout and across the lifespan. Their work shows how women may in future make better and more informed decisions on the pathways and explorations of their own future learning by articulating their own voices for themselves and pursuing their own interests and needs for growth. These authors tell us that it is vital to listen to women’s voices in explaining and exploring their problems of choice; for they have much to teach us.

It also shows us how institutions must take the interests of such learners seriously and seek to open up and ameliorate their learning options offered to all learners indifferently in all the structures and lifelong learning activities they provide by incorporating their own contributions of thought and language into more traditional approaches and, by effective dialogue and learning activities, seeking to change both for the better. Finally their analysis locates all these arguments and explorations in a thoroughly informed, complex and sophisticated set of theoretical considerations bearing upon, underpinning and implicitly or explicitly shaping all such initiatives and undertakings. This is where the experience of the authors, their gifts and abilities with interests and concerns of the “non-formal” students with whom they conducted their research are so fruitful for and helpful to the counter-hegemonic and wider emancipatory agenda of lifelong learning.

We are pleased and excited that this highly important work helps carry forward the agenda of the Springer Series on Lifelong Learning. We trust that its readers will find it as stimulating, thought-provoking and controversial as we have found it and we commend it with great confidence to all those working in this field. We are sure that this further volume in the Springer Series will provide the wide range of constituencies working in the domain of lifelong learning with a rich range of new material for their consideration and further investigation. We believe that it will encourage their continuing critical thinking, research and development, academic and scholarly production and individual, institutional and professional progress.

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