

Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

Caplan, Paula J. *Lifting a Ton of Feathers: A Woman's Guide to Surviving in the Academic World*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993, pp. xxi, 482. Price: \$45.00 (cloth), \$18.95 (paper). Reviewed by Jacqueline Stalker, Coordinator, Division of Postsecondary Studies, University of Manitoba.

Although this book is about academic life, it is not an academic tome. It is easy to read, sometimes shocking, other times depressing, certainly entertaining, and above all useful. Every woman in the postsecondary environment has experienced many of these gender-based inequalities and each situation described could be matched with personal horror tales.

Women, men, and anyone in, related to, or contemplating higher education could learn and profit in some way from the information contained in this guide to survival in academe. Certainly, if Ph.D. completion rates are a concern, this handbook should be required reading for all graduate students.

The Council of Ontario Universities deserves accolades for initiating the project and selecting the author. Dr. Caplan has ably documented and fairly described the "ton of feathers," i.e., the dilemmas, challenges, structures, and practices which reinforce the second class status of academic women. For that, she has earned the gratitude of the women who are a majority of the student population and a minority of faculty.

The subliminal message conveyed by the structure of this book is powerful. The first chapter, which represents less than twenty percent of the book, delineates the benefits and joys of an academic life. This balance approximates the representation of women among academic faculty and administrators.

The second chapter features a description of the academic environment and the effects of the male and hostile culture on women. Chapter 3 exposes many of the unwritten rules, for hiring, orientation of new faculty, evaluation, and the manner in which these covert practices reinforce the traditional power imbalance. In chapters 4 and 5, popular myths are refuted and some of the resulting

“catch-22” situations frequently encountered by women are explained. These chapters fulfill several functions. They confirm the widespread prevalence of particular practices and incidents. They dispassionately expose the gender-based inequalities in academic settings. They also reassure women that the diversion and erosion of their energies, time, efforts, and confidence are widespread in academe.

Subsequent chapters provide valuable advice for all. The general principles, and strategies appropriate for individuals and groups are listed in chapter 6; suggestions are provided in chapter 7 for preparing a curriculum vitae, applying for tenure and promotion, and other obstacles faced by academic women and men. For new faculty and graduate students, this is important information; for experienced academics, the value in these chapters lies in learning how our actions are interpreted and where we can improve.

The check-list in chapter 8 enables institutional leaders, administrators, faculty, graduate students, and faculty associations or unions to assess the degree to which they are creating and supporting a positive environment for women. Governing boards could use relevant parts of this check-list to evaluate the leadership and performance of their administrators. Presidents and deans might use it to alter their reward structures. Faculty and graduate students could use the list as a guide for selecting the institution where they will work and study.

Whereas the first chapters outline the blatant as well as the subtle, insidious, and equally damaging forms of sexism, the appendices provide the “proof of the pudding.” Appendix 1 provides data on gender bias in academe, citing more than a hundred studies. Appendix 2, with twice as many citations, is a description of the male environment. The third appendix features guidelines for hiring, promotion, and tenure committees. Finally, the extensive number of references (pp. 223–273) add to the value of this book, for women seeking validation, documentation, and analysis of their experiences and for skeptics enjoying but still questioning the disproportionate balance of power.

Every academic may not acknowledge that women have been and continue to be excluded from academe; the usual defense mechanisms of avoidance, delay, and denial do still prevail. However, every intelligent academic will want to learn why some women can’t or don’t finish their programs, and why some women terminate their academic employment. Each one of us needs to know how our covert sexist system operates, for or against us, and how to avoid the traps. Chapter 8 alone, the check-list for women-positive institutions, justifies the price of this publication.

We know that universities are expected and, indeed, ought to lead the way in respect to the status of women in our society; we also know that they do not. Women realize that it is truly difficult for a male establishment voluntarily to recognize and end discriminatory sexist practices which are advantageous to its members. The university population also knows that our passive voluntary approach to this shameful problem has not worked. Caplan challenges us. As our public and fiscal support declines, and we wonder why, are we ready yet to acknowledge our responsibility? Will we accept this challenge? Our existence may depend upon our response.

Wise administrators will carefully read and prominently display this book. In doing the former, they might finally learn the dimensions and consequences of our "inequitable treatment of women in Canadian higher education." In doing the latter, they will indicate their intention to heed the AUCC Commission on Canadian Studies' recommendation of almost a decade ago and address this continuing discrimination "as a question of central institutional policy...(of) the entire institution, and...everyone in it."

Brown, D., Cazalia, P., & Jasmin, G. (eds.). *Higher Education in Federal Systems* (Proceedings of an International Colloquium Held at Queen's University, May 1991). Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, 1992, pp. vii, 250. Reviewed by Jim Murphy, Senior Educational Developer, National University of Singapore.

Education is a big ticket item and Canada is a big spender (6.8% GDP or 2% above the OECD average). This is a book of conference proceedings of a three day colloquium to discuss the higher education sector, which accounts for over a fifth of this spending. Systemic and institutional policy makers face three principal challenges in the face of declining real resources: how can our institutions produce quality graduates from the mass of students gaining entry; how can we meet community and national needs or interests and balance them with the traditional scope of the university; and how can we be responsive to global changes?

One gets the impression that the conference was held to assist the Canadian government to gain an insight into such questions and to learn about policy making and outcomes in similar political systems. In fact Ottawa's Education Directorate of the Secretary for State supported the publication of the proceedings. Ronald Watts (Director, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations [IIR])