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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Caplan; Paula. *Lifting a Ton of Feathers: A Woman's Guide for Surviving in the Academic World.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. xvi + 273. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8020-7411-9.

Reviewed by Dana Sawchuk (University of Toronto)
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If I had to recommend one book to any woman contemplating an extended stay or career in academia, *Lifting a Ton of Feathers* would be it. Part detailed reference resource, part how-to guide, this text aims to document the sex-based double standard endemic in academia and to provide women with strategies for how to survive and thrive in this male-dominated environment. The title and aims of the book notwithstanding, however, Paula Caplan ends up providing much material of worth to both women and men in academia.

The opening chapters of the book (and the supporting material in the appendices) paint a bleak picture of the status quo in North American universities: discrimination, overwork and harassment are a reality for many women. Caplan skillfully demonstrates how myths, unwritten rules, and catch-22s work to construct an intensely male environment from which few women academics escape unaffected. Impeccably documented, this part of the book is replete with both statistical data and numerous anecdotes and quotations that illustrate Caplan's points. These chapters are disturbing, demoralizing and, at times, enraging. While many women will experience flashes of recognition while perusing Caplan's material, it will also be hard for others to read this material and remain unconvinced and untouched.

Caplan does more than just tell a sad story, however. Besides acknowledging the potential benefits for women pursuing a career in academia, she provides dozens of suggestions for how to cope with and change the "maleness" of the academic environment. These range from the personal (keep a journal, find a mentor) to the institution-transforming (develop a policy for bias-free language in all documents), and from general principles (listen to what other women tell you) to advice for specific situations (how to prepare for a job interview).

In fact, Caplan's advice for how to deal with specific situations will appeal to both men and women. She spells out strategies for how to succeed at every step of the academic ladder, from graduate school and the job search process, through to applying for tenure and promotions, and on to upper-level administrative positions such as department chair or dean. Be forewarned, though: the bulk of the material here is directed toward those who have at least begun the job search process. While this will be invaluable in preparing students for what to expect in the future and for coaching recent graduates along, those presently mired in ABD status will find little concrete assistance for the here and now (the most notable exception to this is the section on preparing for the dissertation defence). For those who have not yet completed course work or comprehensive exams, Caplan offers almost no direct advice.

Nontheless, this book will not leave even beginning graduate students in the lurch. While Caplan herself does not discuss many of the ins and outs of graduate school, her notes and bibliography efficiently point readers to a variety of sources on the personal, financial, and academic aspects of the PhD experience. The bibliography in particular deserves mention. It is a well-organized, thirty-seven-page resource which will be useful to all graduate students, regardless of level or gender.

Actually, the bibliography should prove useful to all academics, be they Canadian or American, younger or older, or from the Sciences or Humanities. Women from non-dominant groups (lesbians, women of colour, women with disabilities) will also appreciate Caplan's extensive list of books and articles pertaining to their unique situations in academia. Finally, it should be noted that Caplan's recognition of the diversity in universities is not restricted to the bibliography; the entire book is written with an eye to acknowledging both the similarities and differences among us and in our fields of study. Caplan has done an amazingly thorough job.

Still, this book does have its shortcomings. For one, an index is sorely needed. In addition, the division of material between chapters and their related appendices is poorly carried out. Chapters One and Two are meant to outline Caplan's main points regarding discrimination

in academia, with the corresponding appendices providing numerical data and further detail. Yet there is too much repetition and overlap between the two sections, which is frustrating for the reader. Each chapter and its respective appendix would be better integrated into one coherent, if longer, whole.

These few weaknesses, however, do not seriously detract from what is otherwise a first-rate handbook. Lifting a Ton of Feathers deserves a permanent and central place on every woman academic's top bookshelf. And while it can also be profitably used by men, for women scholars Caplan's book may well prove to be the key to success and sanity in the academy.

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