

Maureen Baker, *Academic Careers and the Gender Gap*. Vancouver, Canada: UBC Press, 2013. 220pp. \$35.95 ISBN: 978-0-7748-2397-5

In *Academic Careers and the Gender Gap*, Baker demonstrates how the gender gap and university institutions have changed simultaneously over time and offers an explanation as to why the gender gap persists in liberal states despite numerous economical, social, and institutional advances that have been made: “The gender gap has been diminishing for decades, yet it is nonetheless perpetuated by institutional priorities, academic practices, collegial relations, variations in family circumstances, and gendered priorities,” Baker writes (173). The first study, which she undertook in 1978, dealt with women employed at University of Alberta in western Canada (175). The following two studies, each conducted in 2008 at two different universities in New Zealand, focused on comparing responses from both men and women (175). In an effort to situate her findings in a global context, Baker complements her own research with results and statistics from studies done in the following liberal states: the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (17). Baker cautions the reader however that her studies are not meant to provide “a systematic comparison” of the gender gap in either country, but rather to promote “a fuller understanding of the personal experiences and perceptions of individual academics” (175).

With 38 years of experience in the academic field at the time of her book’s publication, Baker is no doubt well-qualified in and knowledgeable of her chosen area of study on both a practical and a theoretical level (21). Having taught and researched at the university-level in five different liberal states, Baker no doubt has an insider’s perspective on the glass-ceiling predicament and knows the long hours and hard work involved in obtaining and maintaining a successful academic career (21). Furthermore, Baker uses feminist political economy theories, social capital theories, and interpretive frameworks as lenses through which to examine the gender gap. She also considers how ‘the motherhood penalty,’ as well the domestic division of labor, effect women’s experiences in academia.

Overall, Baker’s study is organized and presented well. Baker initiates each chapter with colorful, verbatim quotes taken from interviews she conducted. “[My parents] thought that after I got my PhD I would settle down and be ‘normal’. . . They brag about what I have done, but they think I’m a deviant,” reads one quotation from a part-time Canadian lecturer in 1973 (26). Before launching into new material in each chapter, Baker quickly and briefly reviews findings from previous chapters and finishes each chapter with well-written conclusions. Though these recapitulations seem repetitive at times, they ultimately help keep the reader on track and prevent him or her from getting lost in the large amounts of data that are presented. Furthermore, Baker divides her chapters into themed sections, which are then separated into subsections by the year in which studies were conducted. For example, Baker divides her chapter entitled “Social Capital and Gendered Responses to University Practices,” into sections discussing job qualifications, mentoring trends, hiring practices, and even institutional support programs. For each of these topics, Baker presents data that is clearly delineated by year, thereby making continuities or differences easier to spot.

Though Baker’s work is well researched and well documented, as evidenced by her extensive list of references, her study does harbor some limitations of which the reader should be aware. Her studies each consisted of relatively small samples and were not selected at random, two characteristics that prevent us from drawing any general conclusions from her work. Baker herself acknowledges this disadvantage (180). Furthermore, Baker acknowledges that the differences among teaching and research universities are “blurred” as more academics at each type of institution are pressured to produce more research (7). Additional studies with a focus on smaller liberal arts colleges might be an interesting expansion on her existing study.

Overall, Baker's book *Academic Careers and the Gender Gap* offers a nice balance between quantitative and qualitative data. Even readers who dislike statistics would find her study an enjoyable read. Her own personal perspective, as well as those of the individual participants, personalize and enliven what might otherwise be perceived as dry empirical data. Furthermore, anyone considering an academic career, especially a woman, would find Baker's unsugar-coated, straightforward presentation of academic life enlightening and likely helpful in making a decision about a future career. Currently employed academics, both male and female, might also benefit from reading Baker's work as it identifies common shortcomings and problems in the field that might not be blatantly obvious. Baker's study would leave them better informed and improve chances of remedying setbacks found inside academic departments.

Finally, Baker's study remains refreshingly positive despite the numerous remaining obstacles to surmount. Rather than an angry, feminist diatribe against unfair policies, the evidence Baker presents is neither partial to men nor to women and offers both the male and female reader fodder for contemplation and self-critique. Baker's prediction of a slow, yet continued eradication of the gender gap, while realistic, ultimately leaves one with hope.

Caroline Boone
Vanderbilt University