

## **Book review**

### **Diana Leonard (2002) *A Woman's Guide to Doctoral Studies*. Buckingham: Open University Press**

Think of a mobile sweet 'shop' with a wide range of sweets on offer: American Hard Gum, for example – a hard chew but it will come to an end (Chapter One). Lemon Sherbet, the acid of the lemon powder making you winch and ouch with one eye closed, highlights the unpalatable truth of discrimination (an unfortunately related theme which permeates throughout the book) in all its forms in this present age of enlightenment. The Dolly Mixture experience of eating all the orange stripe cubes or maybe all the jelly domes or just eating stripes and jellies consecutively – reflects the choice one has as reader; either to read complete chapters sequentially or move from, and, or between chapters following page references and not entirely reading one chapter at time. Sampling the corkscrew shoe lace lengths of jelly embodies the unpacking of the 'hidden' world of higher education. Liquorice and yellow coloured pear drops constitute the recognition of the bittersweet experience of undertaking and completing a doctoral study.

*A Woman's Guide to Doctoral Studies* is a thoroughly thought provoking read, laden with information, which would otherwise need to be gathered from quite a few different publications and in isolation would not have quite the same impact on the reader. Leonard addresses areas of controversy without being offensive. When she makes reference to the middle class Anglo-Saxon male who wields the power in the corridors of higher education it would take a really insecure 'power-holder' to take flat umbrage with the supporting data provided (arising from independent research work by both female and male researchers). Leonard's discourse is a 'wake up call' for those who are genuinely unaware of what currently happens in higher education and a 'note' suggesting 'we know your game', for those who are aware of the inequalities that prevail; from the doctoral level through to those informing positions of authority within the upper echelons of higher education.

The title of the first chapter 'Understanding the Rules of the Game' is a theme applicable throughout the book. If you know how to 'seek and locate' the 'right' supervisor; complete the same procedure for university or vice versa, followed by the necessary financial research, you are playing by 'the rules of the game' and this information is generic. Leonard's advice in this respect is succinct with a wealth of tips for strategic approaches. Knowing the extent of the support to which you are entitled from your supervisor *before* commencing a doctoral programme is a benchmark by which the doctoral candidate can gauge his/her progress during the period of research.

*A Woman's Guide to Doctoral Studies* offers the reader an overview of the present history of higher education in the UK compared to that of other English speaking countries such as Australia and the USA. For those potential readers who assume the book is solely for women and women researching gender issues, chapter six will certainly appeal to *sympathetic men*. Leonard offers advice to those students who may be with supervisors who have little or no idea about current advances in gender studies; however, when locating a supervisor it is probably advisable to *work with a gender specialist as supervisor or co-supervisor*.

It is not easy to 'pigeon hole' this book as a feminist book. It offers too many applicable possibilities to other areas associated with discrimination. Leonard clearly states these areas to the point that a reader could change a noun and/or adjective to apply to his/her particular position. For example, the concept of a female's approach as being perceived to be aggressive (as opposed to assertive), and regardless of colour (for simplicity in this

example), compared to that of a male; a black male reader could replace female with 'black male' and add the adjective 'white' to male and arrive at the same perception of the insidious nature of discrimination.

Leonard's unusual, and possibly unique, approach of stating relevant links to other parts of the book as reference page numbers beside a particular view or observation, allows the reader to obtain a more comprehensive portfolio of information in as short a time without having to read the entire book. It is a thoroughly 'mix 'n' match' guide according to your needs although reading it in its entirety is to be recommended.

It is a 'must have on my shelf' book for all those undertaking or associated with a doctoral programme and a 'must read first' book for those preparing for doctoral studies.

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