

Junior League. In Iowa, for example, a group known diminutively as the "Porkettes" is the women's auxiliary of the Pork Producers Association, despite the fact that many of these women are intimately involved in the farm operation. While there can be no doubt that these groups have increased the sense of well-being among their members and have served to ward off the sense of isolation associated with powerlessness, they have at the same time had a conservative function in legitimizing the powerless condition of women, at least in American life. They have organized women into herds sanctioning the male power structure. They have surely done as much to stultify as they have to "awaken." Satisfaction with life, a worthy goal and one not to be ignored by any individual, is quite a different goal from that of a suppressed group which desires to share an equitable portion of the power in a society. If women, white or of color, young or old, are to achieve power in American life they must understand and challenge forthrightly the structures of power as they are summarized in the early portions of Abbott's essay.

—Faye Pauli Whitaker

Critique

Analyzing the variety of ways in which socio-economic phenomena interact with socio-biological phenomena in women's and men's lives is a complex business. Abbott's essay is to be applauded, therefore, in that it directs attention to a subject often treated superficially, if not more frequently ignored.

Abbott clearly points out the lack of universality (with regard to specifics) of the effect of gender, or gender and aging in tandem, on women's access to power and its sources. At the same time, despite this diversity, she reminds us that "women consistently experience and exercise less power than men" and that "modernization and technolog-

ical innovation have served to depress the status of women in those limited realms where some degree of authority had been accorded by the traditional culture.”

The concept of power, how it is (or should be) defined, and whether it should be used as an organizing concept in analyzing women’s lives are the subjects of much discussion in women’s scholarship. While one might object to Abbott’s use of the seven categories she chooses, the categories serve the purpose of her argument. Her conclusion that these categories are not particularly applicable to women’s life patterns should not come as a surprise to us. More interesting are Abbott’s other conclusions: (1) that women should develop strategies to gain access to power in traditional (male empowered) occupational fields, and (2) that there might be other sources of power available to women.

The essay contains discussions of both personal and institutional power but Abbott’s emphasis in strategy development appears to be on the development of personal power. As a political strategy one has to be skeptical of any hope for power equity that relies on women infiltrating men’s jobs. Encouraging women to enter into, for instance, spiritual and technologically oriented professions, or other careers that offer “legitimate access to power” might give a sense of accomplishment to individual women and even allow some women a measure of limited power. But will it cause a more equitable distribution of power and authority within the profession? Will it redefine the perspectives, values, and standards of the profession in ways that will redistribute the sources of power? Adding women and mixing will not necessarily change hierarchal structures, exclusionary practices, or power abuses.

The second conclusion, that women might make use of other sources of power, is more provocative. What Abbott calls “networks” have been going on for generations in American society and elsewhere, in what feminists call “women’s culture” and in the various organizations and communities of women. Furthermore, in societies where there is formal acknowledgment of a separate sphere for women, or where women and men may lead almost separate lives, there appears to be (despite modernization) a type of power and strength attributed to women that is often missing in more “egalitarian” societies. Oftentimes, as Abbott suggests, this power is tied to land ownership, control of the food supply, or identification with religious deities. But it can also be tied to traditional notions of reproductive capabilities and the value placed on mothering and grandmothering. Whether or not power in these instances constitutes “legitimate” or “illegitimate” power depends on who is doing the defining, obviously.

Abbott notes that there can be strength in numbers. Certainly the

number of aged women of all colors is growing in the U.S. And the percentage of women in this category who are substantially removed from institutional power or even personal power sources climbs. While support, solace, and coping strategies may come from the types of interaction Abbott suggests, unless real economic and institutional changes are made, the interaction of gender and age will continue to result in “gross inequities in the distribution of power,” victimization, and exclusion of a significant segment of society from their rights as citizens.

—Lillian H. Jones