

¹⁷B. Maoz, N. Dowty, A. Antonovsky, and H. Wijsenbeek. "Female Attitudes to Menopause." *Social Psychology*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1970) 35-40.

¹⁸S. M. Black and C. E. Hill. "The Psychological Well-being of Women in their Middle Years." *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. Vol. 8, No. 3 (Spring, 1984) 282-292.

Critique

"Female Power, Ethnicity, and Aging" will surely be of interest to readers of this journal. Scholars in ethnic and women's studies have, no doubt, considered at one time or another the impact of ethnicity and age on the power of women in our culture and have a sense of the negative influence of these factors on women who as a group have marginal status in our power structures. So it is that we are anxious to have our sense of these relationships documented in some way or to have the philosophical implications of the intersections of these factors explored and defined. This is a big order and not one that is very satisfyingly filled by Abbott's presentation.

The typology which she uses for the discussion of sources of power seems to be derived from standard sociological description, but it is eye-opening nonetheless. Her categories will remind the reader of the varieties of power sources functioning in any culture and they will also suggest for the American reader, at least, the ways in which these power sources reinforce one another and tend to concentrate power in small groups (minorities, if you will) of people with conservative values and extensive economic resources. These people are clearly not women and they are not ethnic minorities. An examination of the power sources, such as the one provided here, is useful in pointing to the avenues by which a powerless group seeking power can endeavor to obtain it. So far, so good.

The method favored by academic sociologists for the analysis of such a multifaceted issue as the one considered here is the collection of data, usually through the use of a statistically reliable survey, and the

presentation of that information in a matrix which will accommodate the three dimensional features of the question. Another approach might be philosophical, descriptive and somewhat more anecdotal. Abbott's analysis seems to be a combination of the two. She reports on the results of surveys from the mid-east, from Slavic, Polish, and Italian cultures to provide a basis for her analysis, though little of the material she selected combines all of the factors under consideration—sex, ethnicity, and age. Primarily, however, her method is to discuss in a somewhat anecdotal manner what is already quite well-known about the powerless groups—the subtle denial of access to economic resources, specialized learning, and spiritual authority, which she sees narrowly as religious authority. Her focus is a bit too broad to provide new and refined insights into the matter.

Abbott's attempt to broaden her scope to include examples of an international character causes her some additional problems. When she selects examples from the statistical literature she introduces some confusion concerning the term "ethnicity." It is unclear whether she intended to select studies which considered these groups as the dominant culture—Slavs in Yugoslavia—or studies of these groups as minority cultures—Slavs in the United States. In some instances she seems to be interested in how various cultures treat status and power with respect to women and aging. In other instances, especially those examples involving Americans and blacks, the matter of ethnicity should be additionally qualified by ethnic minority status, a significant difference she largely ignores. The impact of technology, which seems to be taken up in an effort to expand the discussion to include third world cultures, must be interpreted quite differently in a third world context than within the ethnic variety found in the so-called first world.

Perhaps most disappointing to the reader who hopes to find in this discussion some indication of how power structures once understood can be made to work for the less powerful is the concluding section of the essay which points to ways in which equality can be achieved. Here the factor of ethnicity is abandoned in both its international dimension and as an element in the experience of American women's lives. Attention is given to networking and the creation of a sense of individual well-being. Abbott appears to be satisfied that the development of coping strategies will produce "immediate and significant increases in personal power for women in a variety of age, cultural, and ethnic categories." How, one wonders. "Networking" was not discovered by feminists in the 1960s, though they may have named it. Networking among women has been functioning for generations in quilting groups, in church groups (note the example of Slavic women in Abbott's essay), in PTAs, and in the

Junior League. In Iowa, for example, a group known diminutively as the "Porkettes" is the women's auxilliary 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-