

tween the two complementary case studies is maintained for the reader via a tight commitment to the theme of the politics of client recruitment, as well as by repetition of points raised in previous chapters.

Overall, this book should cause professionals and institutions claiming exclusivity of privilege to judge because of *a priori* "supposed ownership of exclusive, useful knowledge," to reassess that view in light of their possible political, financial, and professional allegiances. It should raise eyebrows among those of us in education, for example, who in moments of weakness for the postmodern, speak so glibly of "collaboration" among "stakeholders"—as if all stakeholders are even accounted for at that table; and as if that table is ever really level.

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Wendy Chmielewski, Louis J. Kern, and Marlyn Klee-Hartzell, eds. *Women in Spiritual and Communitarian Societies in the United States*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993. Pp. 296. \$17.95 U.S., paper.

Essays in this collection explore the social history of women participants in alternative communities. First and foremost, the essays examine the nature of power and control in communities, raising provocative questions about progressive movements. As presented in this text, spiritual leaders'

attempts to create alternative societies have historically offered women a mixed blessing, even when those communities were designed to improve the lives of women. A central question in these essays is: *who* had the power to decide what was improvement, and did women agree that their lives were improved by these decisions?

Given the sobering lessons in these essays about the problems faced by women in alternative communities, the book is curiously misadvertised with a cover photograph of early twentieth-century Shaker sisters laughing gaily on an apple-picking trip. Equally misplaced is the visionary, liberatory quote by Susan B. Anthony that prefaces the book: "Away with all your man-visions! Women propose to reject them all, and begin to dream for themselves." In only one of the dozen communities described were any women successful at creating the opportunity to dream for themselves, and then only by rejecting not only man-visions, but men themselves. In this case, an all-female religious community founded in late nineteenth-century Texas (quite near Waco, Texas, site of another visionary utopia), women used the strength of their own religious vision to leave unsatisfactory marriages for the Woman's Commonwealth, a community of women and children that survived for over one hundred years. Only by organizing intentionally an all-female environment did these women create a community that privileged women.

In most other communities described here, including the Shaker, Owenite, Oneida, and Brook Farm communities, patriarchal structures

and power relations created gender inequities and forms of oppression that took on new, alternative shapes. In one of the stronger essays of the collection, Carol Kolmerten studies the bitter complaints of women at New Harmony, the largest and best-known alternative community, led by Robert Owen. According to the letters of women Owenites, the very structure of the community threatened married women, who, under presumably egalitarian tenets of the community, worked "equally" with men for the community, but also remained in charge of domestic tasks, including cooking for the entire community. Mothers also objected to communal childrearing, which took away their one source of social authority and identity as mothers, and often their one personal pleasure of life in an isolated, frontier community. Marlyn Klee-Hartzell recounts an even more disturbing story of alternative family organizations gone awry in the Oneida community where proscriptions against maternal bonding and sexual monogamy left women powerless to the male-dominated community. While it may have been a relief for some women to escape the tyranny of the isolated family, Oneida women essentially "exchanged one smaller, patriarchal family structure for a larger, collective one" (p. 184). In no way was this patriarchal control more violently shown to Oneida girls and women than in the chilling scene of a mass bonfire of children's beloved dolls to abolish once and for all any feeling of maternity, or affection for graven images.

In the notorious late nineteenth-century Mormon community, the crux

of the issue is further illustrated: women's role in alternative communities had less to do with the chosen structure (polygamy vs. monogamy, pro-natalism vs. communal childrearing) and more to do with the power and control over women's value as reproducers, workers, and socializers. Polygamy and pro-natalism in the Mormon community gave women the prestige that was absent from the Owenite structure of communal childrearing. Yet for Mormon women and for the more contemporary women in The Farm community of Tennessee, pro-natalism also restricted women's role, even as it glorified it in a haunting mirror of the very traditional, middle-class "cult of true womanhood."

Community leaders, who were usually men, thus held authoritarian power by the way in which they defined the nature of the community and of communal behaviour. In a particularly ironic note, Robert Owen faulted the women of New Harmony for not appreciating their alternative world, and for undermining the community goals by talking too much amongst themselves—in other words, for being too communal within their own women's community. Utopia for women, concludes Kolmerten, "has everything to do with empowering women with an authority to control their own lives and very little to do with communal cooking and house-cleaning" (p. 49).

Even more glum reports emerge from the studies of the Shaker communities, renowned for their alleged gender equality. In a series of essays, it becomes clear that such equality was not an original part of the Shaker phi-

losophy, but an economic strategy occasioned by the decline of value of Shaker men's marketable goods after the Civil War, and the increased economic value of Shaker women's crafts work. In addition, the Shaker spiritual equality was based upon a commitment to celibacy, thus reaffirming the lesson of the Texas Woman's Commonwealth, that true equality between women and men might only be possible if they have limited contact with one another.

The implications of these readings for educational historians are both theoretical and historiographical. Like alternative communities, schools and programmes of education have been formed with social visions and objectives in mind. Yet do students and teachers receive and experience those visions in the same way as the founders intend? To what extent do the daily experiences of participants conform to the visionary intentions of founders? What is the nature of participants' resistance, adaptation, or accommodation to institutional goals, and to what extent is their response determined by gender, class, age, and prestige within the institution?

The historiographical questions raised by this text are equally provocative, if troubling. The nature of available evidence is rarely discussed in these articles (with the notable exception of Beverly Gordon's excellent piece on the uses of material culture in social history). This creates serious problems for the interpretation and evaluation of these communities, since in some cases, the majority of resources used were those produced by the community itself. The evaluation

of the success of the Woman's Commonwealth in Texas is particularly questionable, since evidence of dissenters in the community is either unavailable or unused. Similarly, in an otherwise enlightening study of Sojourner Truth's participation in a number of ill-fated inter-racial communities in the North, we are left unclear about Truth's own experience or observations. The absence of historical sources is a problem that cannot be easily solved; but particularly when studying the experiences of those who are silenced—women, children, and the dissenters in closed communities—the absence of records can not be presumed to mean absence of critique. Educational historians who are struggling with the reconstruction of the history of students and teachers may find this problem, and the often contradictory pressures of power and progressivism, all too familiar.

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Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds. *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992. Pp. 303. \$16.95 paper, \$40.00 cloth.

Edited by historian Franca Iacovetta and sociologist Marina Valverde, *Gender Conflicts* consists of eight essays and an introduction which explore "not only the conflicts that