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Abstract: Originally published in *Contemporary Psychology: APA Review of Books*, 1971, Vol 16(9), 568-569. Reviews the book, *Born Female: The High Cost of Keeping Women Down* by Caroline Bird (1970). Although the avowed purpose of this book is that "it counts the social, moral, and personal costs of keeping women down and finds them high," the primary emphasis is on the moral costs. For those who are in favor of the movement, this book is a progress report; for those who are uncertain of its implications, this book offers a glance at the consequences of sex equality and the 'androgynous' life; and for those who are against women's liberation, this book presents evidence of inequities in our laws and in employment practices which make it difficult for even the most complacent to deny or to justify the facts of discrimination against women. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2010 APA, all rights reserved)

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Jesters Do Oft Prove Prophets

Review By: LESLIE ANN MCARTHUR

Review of: *Born Female: The High Cost of Keeping Women Down*

By: Caroline Bird, New York: David McKay, 1970. Pp. xiv + 302. \$6.95.

'WOMEN'S Liberation' has become a household phrase in the last few years. Some people are all for it; many aren't quite sure what it means; and others adamantly insist that there is no need of it. *Born Female* has something to offer individuals of each of these persuasions. For those who are in favor of the movement, *Born Female* is a progress report; for those who are uncertain of its implications, *Born Female* offers a glance at the consequences of sex equality and the 'androgynous' life; and for those who are against women's liberation, *Born Female* presents evidence of inequities in our laws and in employment practices which make it difficult for even the most complacent to deny or to justify the facts of discrimination against women.

American democratic tradition has instilled a deep belief in equality of opportunity and equality before the law. *Born Female* is an effective champion of the women's liberation movement because it capitalizes on this value by cataloguing the history of legal, employment, and educational discrimination against women from Colonial America to the present. Since the history books that the average reader has been exposed to say little about the history of sex discrimination or the women's rights movement, this account makes fascinating and enlightening reading. I found this to be true even for the relatively sophisticated college student who read *Born Female* in a course on the Psychology of Women. Time and again the reader feels himself privy to behind-the-scenes information. For example, the book begins with an incisive account of 1964 Congressional proceedings, which had received scant coverage in the press. We learn that the prohibition of sex discrimination in employment, which is lately making headlines in the form of female phone repairmen and male airline stewards, began as a tongue-in-cheek amendment inserted into the Civil Rights Bill by a Southern congressman in an attempt to prevent its passage. The inauspicious beginning of this amendment and the ensuing bitter controversy over its enactment is dramatically presented. I found myself grinning triumphantly when I learned that the Southern gentleman's joke was on him—the bill *and* the amendment were passed. Every reader may not get this caught up in the congressional 'sideshow,' but no reader can come away from this account with his belief unshaken that there is no prejudice against women.

ALTHOUGH the avowed purpose of this book is that "it counts the social, moral, and personal costs of keeping women down and finds them high," the primary emphasis is on the *moral* costs. The author herself says that "the real argument for equality cannot be made on the basis of expedience. The compelling reason is equity ... the way women are treated is just plain wrong." As a psychologist I do wish a bit more emphasis had been placed on the *personal* costs of keeping women down, but I am in agreement with the relative de-emphasis on *social* costs, inasmuch as those which are tallied consist primarily of the wasted female talent which could benefit society if it were sensibly employed. Unfortunately, these particular societal costs do not carry much persuasive impact in the midst of a serious unemployment crisis.

The moral costs of sex inequality are brought home to the reader in a number of ways. The simple documentation of countless instances of discrimination against women serves this purpose. But probably the most convincing evidence is the parallel that is drawn between the positions of women and

blacks in our society. Most people have finally come to admit that blacks have been ill-treated. These people will find it difficult to justify differential treatment of women in the face of evidence that such treatment is in many significant ways identical to that which blacks have been subjected to over the years.

In addition to the moral lesson to be learned from the parallels between the status of blacks and women, there is much conceptual value to these analogies. Many of them were presented years ago by the Swedish sociologist, Myrdal, but many are new, and all are extremely provocative. Those interested in the nature of prejudice and the sociological problems of minority groups will find here much food for thought. So will those interested in the psychological problems of minority groups, for this is one of the few places in which the *personal* costs of keeping women down are developed in any detail. The book is primarily an account of the sociological rather than psychological implications of being "born female," but in drawing the 'black parallel' the author does attend to the subjective consequences of discrimination. For example, it is observed that the second-class sociological status imposed on blacks and women has parallel effects on their feelings of self worth. Women disparage themselves and other women and wish they had been 'born male.' Blacks, at least until recently, have disparaged themselves and other blacks and wished they had been 'born white'—white *male* of course!

Born Female is more than a documentation of sex discrimination. Alternative approaches toward remedying the situation are also discussed. These methods range from the loopholes utilized by women who've 'made it' to the cry of the 'New Masculinists' that women be encouraged to make their special 'feminine' contributions to society, to the revolutionary attempt of the 'New Feminists' to do away with sex roles altogether. The author clearly advocates this latter solution, and recent progress toward this ultimate form of equality is presented in the last few chapters. For example, we learn that much sex discrimination in employment has been eliminated on the basis of the adventitious amendment to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. And we further learn that the 'androgynous life' not only is possible, but it is even palatable.

THE very last chapter—an addition to the revised edition—describes the most radical sector of the women's liberation movement in frank detail, enumerating their demands not only for equality in legal and employment practices, but for liberation from rigid social roles as well. It becomes quite clear that these New Feminists are striving not to *partake* of the male world, but rather to *remake* that world. This view of women's liberation is somewhat one-sided, and it may seem rather formidable. However, I think even the most conservative reader with ten chapters of *Born Female* under his belt will find himself sympathetic with even these most militant feminists. That is the power of this book—almost as powerful as a Southern congressman's jest...

Biographical Information for Authors: Caroline Bird is a free-lance magazine writer, a lecturer, and the consulting editor for the *New Woman*. She is the author of *The Invisible Scar*, a book on the impact of the Great Depression on American life. Her residence is Poughkeepsie, New York.

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