

Epilogue

State Senator Lana Pollack is in her third term in the Michigan Senate, having first taken office in 1983. She is a member of the Appropriations Committee, serving on its subcommittees on capital outlay, natural resources, and agriculture. Among her achievements is a law which requires detention of domestic violence offenders until arraignment. She has travelled extensively around the world and has lived and worked in Zambia and the United Kingdom.

In a brief presentation to the Shelter, Women, and Development conference participants at a banquet on Saturday, May 8, 1992, Senator Lana Pollack spoke about the issue of women and empowerment and the processes by which this is achieved. Her words are very germane to the larger objectives of this conference and these proceedings. She struck a sensitive chord in the gathering of highly trained women architects, planners, university professors, activists, and policy makers present in the room, in pointing out that in the U.S., as in many parts of the world,

Women are deterred from entering certain professions, and if they do enter them are kept from rising to the top of those professions, for example, librarians are women, library directors are primarily men, school teachers are women, principals and superintendents are usually men, hospitals are staffed primarily by females but are managed and run mostly by men. Thus there is both a vertical segregation by field of endeavor and a horizontal segregation by rank along gender lines which results in the appearance of women in certain places as a cause of wonderment

What does this universal truth mandate for women who do achieve such positions in the professions, in academic institutions, in the realm of policy making and regulation? Lana Pollack was elected following only three other women in the State Senate, which was first convened in 1835. Reflecting on her experiences, she recollected an occasion, when she had first gone to Lansing as a new senator, being introduced in a small group of colleagues as "Lana" when all the others, males, in the group were referred to as "Senator." When she corrected her colleague, saying "Senator, that is Senator Pollack," her colleague replied, "I have difficulty in calling you Senator." She answered, "Practice."

Senator Pollack demonstrated that women need to learn ways of consolidating and applying the use of the power that they achieve through very hard work, in fields that are not receptive to their presence or readily respectful of their achievements. As Senator Pollack explained,

My point is not that I need the formality of my title or any other title. That is not what is significant. My point is that I will demand the respect that is generally associated with somebody who has earned that which I have earned. I know, and I have learned this, that with good humor or otherwise we must demand for ourselves the same respect that comes to men in similar positions. Just achieving the position is not enough, demanding the respect, and asserting the authority that comes with that position is the second job that we women must assume. It does make running the race more difficult. We have the problem of being different both by virtue of our gender and by the fact that that

difference can be trivialized. This adds an extra burden to our task. In a related situation I found, in a collegial, at times heated, conversation between a small group of senators in which adversarial positions were being taken, that one of my colleagues, a male, would apologize only to me for differences in opinion. I responded, "Don't apologize for disagreeing with me, because I won't apologize for disagreeing with you." The fact is that men can find it difficult to deal with women in an adversarial position. This senator and others are confused by my presence in the Senate halls.

Asserting that one is an equal, with equal power, is sometimes required to be able to exercise the power that comes with that authority and that position.

In terms of working specifically on women's issues Senator Pollack described a path that must have seemed very familiar to those who were in the room, having reached in their own work the need to deal with the specific topic of women's relationship to shelter and its implication for their development. She recounted,

When I first went to the Senate I did not intend to work on women's issues specifically. I did not want to be pigeonholed in that way. But being a woman in a body that has so few women has been an enormous drain on me. I have found that all issues are women's issues, aspects of workplace safety, access to health care, education, virtually everything has a perspective and voice that is female, that is different because our lives are different, and that perspective is usually missing in the discourse. The suggested topic for my talk was "policies for women." The fact is every policy needs a woman's perspective, a reality check to see the fit of policy with our lives and the lives of our sisters. But more important for understanding policy is that women need power. For women there will be no sufficiency of sensitive, realistic, pragmatic policy until there is sufficiency of power. We in our lives must understand that. We must aspire to power, we must have ambition, we must eschew the modesty that in many ways through socialization we were raised to assume. We will always be, I hope, supportive, humane, human beings, but I would hope we would become assertive, even aggressive, human beings on behalf of human justice for all — and that includes women. We will ourselves see the ubiquitous absence of women in positions of power and, once seeing our absence we will make eliminating it a part of our professional obligation.

I am bringing coals to Newcastle when I talk to this gathering about how it is different for women. You have risen to your positions through efforts that I cannot know or understand. You as women have had to do that much more, the personal responsibility of childbearing, of being pleasing without being too attractive, dealing with sexual harassment from bosses and those with authority over you, just the

undefined burden of being different, slightly off the norm. All of these things make your life harder, and you stronger. It is claimed that women don't help each other. That has not been my experience. Women have helped me tremendously. I have had excellent support, from women and men. When they reach positions of authority and power, women are under the microscope, in the spotlight. You represent all women. You are under special scrutiny. Under this special scrutiny, as the first to get there, to be there, you are asked when you are walking this tight rope and hoping you will get to the other side without tripping, falling, and stumbling with everyone watching you, to reach down and pull someone else, your sister, up. That is very hard. But I think that is what we have to do. Women have been enormously supportive of me. I try to spend a certain amount of time, every month if not every week, with young women. I think we owe it to our daughters, we owe it to our sisters, to help them and hope that their burden of being a woman is a little lighter than ours.

In stressing the need for women to seek out and accept the positions that offer managerial and resource allocation responsibilities and to exercise the power that accrues with these positions and to use it with a women's perspective in mind, Senator Pollack reinforced a posture that many contributors to this book have reached over long years in their chosen professions. As has been pointed out in the introduction of this book, the relationship of women and shelter is one that is only on the margins of the discourse in architecture and planning. The relationship of shelter to women's development has only been recently recognized in the discourse on women and development, which itself has been peripheral to the mainstream professional efforts in development planning. The work presented in this book is an initial step in considering the importance of shelter in women's development as not just a First World, or a Third World, but a global concern that demands more attention, thought, and action. This conference, as a venue for discourse on the topic, has heartened many younger women working in this area by building the understanding that this is a legitimate and important area for them to turn their energies to. The work of the conference and this book needs to be continued in the academic, practical and policy realms. Hopefully, this book will stimulate such continued effort and investment.

Hemalata C. Dandekar