

A woman with vibrant red hair and dark lipstick stands in the center of a room, wearing a white, off-the-shoulder, long-sleeved dress. The room is filled with various items, including boxes and bags, suggesting a storage or moving area. The entire scene is bathed in a cool, blue light, creating a moody and ethereal atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the image in a stylized, black, gothic font.

THE
FOOTBINDINGS.

J. KUYPERS CHAPBOOK.
TROY PRESS.

EXPLORING POWER

Imagine a perfect society. Imagine swaying trees, sunny skies and a cool breeze. Imagine when you walk down the all-too-clean streets that everyone you see is friendly. Everyone is your friend, and everyone is good and kind and giving. Imagine being able to come home from the job that you love to a warm, safe home. There is never a disagreement in this society, and differences in people (like gender, race, age) are not hated like they are today but loved and appreciated.

It's a hard society to imagine, I know. The hardest part of this perfect society to imagine is the fact that power, as we define it in today's terms, does not exist. Power, by definition, is the ability of one person to make another person do something against their will, or the ability of one person to do something against another person's will. Power can be physical brute force, the power that a father and mother have over their children, the power that a man can hold over a woman, or the power of one race over another. The problem with power is that it is too often used - and too often used in poor ways. For example, in today's society obedience is considered a virtue in reference to a child's behavior toward their parents, but it is merely a submission on the part of the child to the power of their parents. In most cases the fact that most women care more about their physical appearances than men care about their physical appearances is a demonstration of the woman's submission to the man's power. The statistics show that white men still hold much more than their proportional share of jobs than black men do - and these statistics show that the black race is unwillingly in submission to the power of the white race.

Power as defined above would not exist in the society described here. Whether or not the ability to possess that power would not even matter - for each and every individual in that perfect society may have the capacity for possessing that power (in the same way that each and every individual in society may have the capacity for becoming a mass murderer, but most of us don't realize that potential). In this society, no one would want to possess that kind of power (in the same way that not one member in the society will want to become a mass murderer). No one would want this kind of power because no one would want to feel as if they were hurting someone, and no one would want to force someone into doing something against their will. No one would want to have a job if having the job meant that they were taking the job from someone who was more qualified, even if that person was from a minority group. No child would want to do something that would hurt their parents, and no parent would want to have to reprimand their child (and wouldn't have to if their child had not only their own, but also their parent's best interests in mind). No man would want to force a woman into a situation that she did not want to be in, and no woman would feel the burdens of society to find herself a husband. People would no longer marry for economic reasons but for love.

The kind of power that would exist in this perfect society would only be an entirely self-contained power - a kind of power that we as humans all possess but seldom actually tap and use to our advantage. The power that would exist would be a power that enabled people to

accelerate and do the best that they could (for themselves and for others). It allows personal achievement to become a reality in the pure sense of the word, and it shows how the individual can move ahead if they want to and be proud of their accomplishments. This kind of power will not hamper others, and it involves no competition, but only the completion of personal goals. This kind of power would let people feel good about themselves, knowing that they as humans (even humans that stand alone) can accomplish almost anything that they want to.

Call it power, if you will, or give it another name so that people of this society don't get confused with this self-fulfilling power. Call it self-determinism. Call it the power over yourself, and not the power over others. Call it anything you want. Maybe in this society people wouldn't even have a name for it - maybe people would know that they have some sort of abilities without even giving them names. The most important fact is the fact that this is the kind of power that will exist and dominate in this society, and not the kind of hurting, oppressing power that we in this society are used to.

This power would lead to the most efficient society - it would be economically be producing at it's peak, it would have no crime and thus be a safe place for women and children as well as men to live in, and it would be filled with love for others instead of resentment, jealousy and aggression. A hierarchy of power to implement laws would be unnecessary, and prices of goods and services would not be unreasonable, therefore giving people more money to spend in the market and eliminate both unemployment and competition.

The power structure that we see in today's society would not exist in this perfect society. A structure of power in any sense of the word would not exist, as would not a limit to the power that could exist in a society or the power that one person could possess. This kind of power comes from the inside of a person, and doesn't hurt others - it only helps others, as well as helping the self. Therefore, the only amount of power that would exist in this society would be as much that the members of this perfect society would want. Hopefully, that amount of power may be limitless.

I know, I know, this is a very hard sort of power to imagine, for it seldom exists in this society and it never exists in its pure form. I have a hard time fathoming how this kind of power may affect me, and what may be the end result.

So many times I set out to accomplish a task and I find that there is some sort of obstacle in my way that I have no control over. It may be something as simple as walking out at night alone (that I feel I cannot do because of a fear for my safety), or something as important in my life as trying to get the job that I want, but not getting it because I am a woman and there was a man almost as qualified for the job that took the job from me. An obstacle that has been created by the self can be eliminated and is therefore a problem that can be overcome. However, when there are factors that seem to be outside of one's own control that take precedence, it can become very frustrating. It often makes me feel as if there is no point in even setting goals for myself when there is such a great chance of not being able to achieve that goal because of other people having unfair power over me.

With this sort of power eliminated, I can't help but wonder if there would be anything that I wouldn't be able to do. It's an exhilarating feeling, to think that I would be able to go through life not having to battle other people to accomplish my goals but only battle the person that is my

greatest competitor - myself. If I didn't accomplish what I wanted, I could learn from my mistakes and set new goals for myself, not feeling any vengeance or resentment. If I was able to accomplish my goal, then I would be the better person for it. The sense of satisfaction would be great, I would have tangible proof of my achievement, and I would have done it all on my own, with the help or the hurting of no one. I would then be able to set new goals for myself and improve myself (and possibly the lives of others) even more.

With this new outlook, I almost can't imagine how much better my attitude would be about myself. I would know exactly what my potential was, and I would have a much better chance of achieving my full potential. There would be no regrets in my life. I would never have to be ashamed of myself, because I would be the best that I could be. Everyone would have this feeling of self-satisfaction. How could it not be a perfect society, if everyone felt this way?

In a society like this, with an outlook like this, everyone would have the same opportunities and the same goals. Everyone would then be treated equally, for everyone would be the best that they could be. When people are looked at for their ability, they are seen as capable people - and not as people that are inferior. There would be no need for discrimination, and there would be no need to look down on other people. There would be a feeling of total respect and honor for other people - you would honor every other person the way that you would honor yourself, for they - like you - would be able to achieve anything that they wanted. This philosophy would eliminate the differences that people see today in ages, races or colors of the skin, or genders. With the elimination of this kind of power, this weed that has infested society, the seeds of respect would be able to grow and flourish.

Yes, I know, this kind of society doesn't exist. People depend on using and abusing others in order to get what they want instead of depending on the abilities that they possess within themselves. Maybe the reason that people don't rely on themselves alone is because they are too afraid that they wouldn't be able to achieve all the things that they would want to. But they would, if they only tried. Maybe the reason the people don't rely on themselves alone to do the things that they want and to get the things that they want is because they feel that it is too easy to achieve their goals while stepping on others, since the opportunity is there. But there are others - the oppressed, the downtrodden - who would tell you another story. The people who are oppressed, who are being abused by this power, want to have the same opportunities that others have. And it wouldn't take anything away from the people in power now - if anything, it would only improve the lives of all. The only thing that this society would do is give everyone the opportunity to be the best that they could be. There wouldn't have to be hurting anymore.

MODERN DAY FOOTBINDINGS AND THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

I have never been one to think about my predicament. It's a common predicament-- I have to face it every day of my life, and it indirectly causes me problems wherever I go. I can't walk alone at night because of it. I can't look a male stranger straight in the eye because of it. I have to worry about the kind of clothes I wear, the implications of the statements I make, and even the way I walk because of it. But I've never given it a second thought.

My predicament is that I am a woman. At first it doesn't seem to sound like a predicament at all, but the more one thinks about the lack of freedom sentenced to a woman solely because she is a woman, the word 'predicament' becomes more of an understatement. In this male-oriented society, women are reduced to objects: pornography sells more than the top news magazines, the videos that MTV broadcast flaunt the woman's body for just anyone to see, and instances of rape are at an all time high. Women today are held down by forces that are blind to many - society has evidently become a jail cell so large that its prisoners cannot even see the bars. But there are bars, and if we only look for them and see them for what they really are, we may then be able to make the changes that will make this society a more equal one. And a safer one.

In China, one man created the custom of wrapping up the woman's foot so tightly that it restricted the woman's walking because it caused so much pain. It was a way for men to be sure that women in their society were entirely dependent on them. In many third world countries, women are forced to wear dresses that cover up their entire body, for one man has no right to look at another man's possessions. They call it tradition. If this is so, then tradition dehumanizes the woman.

Even in the United States these bindings are all around us, and these indirect restrictions are so commonplace that we have failed to notice that they are even there, keeping us "in our place". I will only give one example. I feel that only one example is necessary.

I used to get a subscription to a women's magazine. I enjoyed flipping through the pages of Glamour, even if it did only make me feel inadequate as a woman and as a person. As I read, as I flipped through the pages and saw the photographs of beautiful women staring me in the face telling me that I was no good unless I was beautiful and was able to attract the best looking men, I began to feel that I had to change my image in order to become the objectified model that society had typecast to be "the best". These women's magazines devote about one fourth of their contents to careers, and probably about three fourths of their magazines to looking good. These magazines focused on looking like the stereotypical woman, looking sexy, and doing this all for a

man. That's half of the problem right there.

But just the other day I looked through a neighbor's recent issue of Glamour magazine, and I came to a startling realization. As I flipped through the colossal number of advertisements that appear in the first half of these magazines (you often can't find an article until you reach page 50), I looked at the women. I looked at the underlying messages that these advertisements were relaying. And I couldn't believe my eyes.

Here is an example that illustrates my point. "Every Valentine Needs A Hero." The quote itself, from one of the first ads that I saw, gives the impression that a woman needs a man in order to survive. As romantic as the ad may look, I couldn't help but notice the subtle signs: the woman is lying down on the bed, looking up at the man; the man is standing over her, looking down on her. Her back is turned to the camera, so that you can't see the expressions on her face and so that you can't see her humanness. The woman's arms are crossed, evidently covering herself. A rose is placed right in the middle of the tray (remember-- nothing in advertising isn't planned). Yes, the man is the hero, and the woman needs him for support. How would she function otherwise?

"Valentine... I got you just what you wanted." This ad, as I looked at the couple plastered on the page, seemed to scream "submission" to me. As the woman's face is turned toward the man, she is turned away from the camera - and becomes more of a body than an actual woman. Her arms are folded around him in a way that makes the viewer feel that she is clinging on to the only thing that matters to her. Furthermore, the two wide silver bracelets on her hands give the impression that she is handcuffed-- attached to the man, whether or not by force. The man, however, is merely smiling (maybe "smirking" is a better word) as he looks away from the woman. His happiness seems to stem from the fact that he has this relatively valuable possession.

Even the words in this advertisement are misleading. How handy it is that the woman has given her man just what he wanted. And she should, too. It's her duty. She's a woman. And what exactly did she get him? Why, "she got him a year of..." wait a minute, let's put a little pause in there, one just long enough to make your mind wander... "GQ". This relatively innocent ad has taken on a different meaning altogether in this new light.

Then I turned the page and saw another advertisement--and it appeared to be a centerfold. My only question was: how on earth is a clothing company supposed to advertise clothes when the clothes are barely on the model? Then, I'm afraid to say, I answered my own question. This company, like most others, isn't advertising for the product that they are selling, for their products have become the means to another end, as opposed to the end itself. They are advertising an image-- an image of the woman being dependent on her looks in order to achieve success. Keep in mind that this - good looks - is the possible extent of a woman's success. The concept of talent has seemed to fall by the wayside.

After looking at the images that bombarded me, I couldn't help but wonder if I was reacting rather harshly. But then I began to think: what about the images that you see on billboards? What about the flaunting of women on television programs and commercials? What are these images teaching the children of today - the adults of tomorrow that will shape society? I couldn't

help but wonder if these signals were related to the increase in crimes against woman that are so prevalent today. If they are related, when will this ever change? Or will we be forever bound to the system?

Needless to say, I don't get those magazines anymore. I try to explain to others how women are metaphorically abused inbetween the glossy pages of these magazines. But it's only one source. One of many. And it seems that even if we as women were capable of removing one form of this degradation, other bars would still be up to keep us in our cell. Only until we break down the walls will we be able to say that we are free.

THE WORLD IN CONCISE TERMS

A MINI DICTIONARY OF USELESS AND VASTLY IMPORTANT WORDS

ardvark - A creature that sucks up things that aren't cool and uses them for food. Wow. The destruction of crap in order to survive. Also one of the ugliest animals ever.

AIDS - A disease which no one understands. The doctors can't find a cure, the infected don't know why it happened to them, and the ignorant think that gays and lesbians have cooties.

anvil - A cartoon weight dropped on someone's head for laughs. Wish I could do that to people. It's meant to hurt them, I guess, but the cartoon characters are always in perfect shape by the beginning of the next scene. Ah, realism in television.

apple - Something that's supposed to keep the doctor away. Fiber, I guess, as well as just eating something good for you instead of super-processed, refined, bleached, reconstituted shit. Still don't know how spraying the apple orchards with chemical pesticides, then covering the fruits with wax for shine is supposed to be good for you, but there are a lot of things I don't understand.

condom - A zip-lock baggie for a penis. However, you can't seal it with a yellow-and-blue-make-green zipper-gripper. Fun gag: put a lubricated condom on a door knob.

gelatin - The spare parts, including bones and connective tissue, of assorted animals, including horses, pigs and cows. This delectable, delicious delicacy can be found in such unobtrusive treats as jello and gummy bears.

heaven - A place for souls to go after they die (note: this is a myth). Though there are many interpretations, some include streets of gold, or a separate heaven for your pets (though these same people are more than happy to eat other animals), or a place where you can see your dead grandmother again. My question: do you go to heaven in the condition you were in when you die, i.e., if your death entailed dismemberment, would your body be separated in heaven for eternity? Do babies spend eternity as cooing, pooping vegetables?

money - Something all artists claim to hate.

nirvana - (1) A good band. (2) A fantasy-state of perfection.

police - Fat men with moustaches who wear tight blue uniforms and speak as if they are entirely uneducated. Note: they are dangerous; they also carry guns. Police serve two functions: to hand out traffic tickets, which make them inherently evil, and to arrive at the scene of the crime too late to offer any real assistance and to merely harass the victim so they feel victimized twice in the same day.

redneck - Though seemingly everywhere and quite annoying, it is difficult to define a redneck. You can spot a redneck if (1) they live in a trailer; (2) they have a front lawn littered with either

appliances or many junk cars; (3) they are missing teeth; (4) they are drinking Coors beer, (5) they think wrestling is real. They congregate at (1) monster truck rallies, (2) wrestling matches, or (3) strip clubs. Note: their shotguns (not their brains) make them dangerous.

religion - a belief system created and/or perpetuated by a society to explain what happens when people die, because (1) they're too afraid to become worm food, or (2) people need something to be afraid of in order to be good to others. Note: it still usually doesn't work.



PUBLISHERS OF

ATHENA
LITERARY REVIEW

ATHENA LITERARY REVIEW
AND TROY PRESS © 1998

POETRY © 1998,
JANET KUYPERS

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

THIS WORK,
IN WHOLE OR IN PART,
MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED
WITHOUT EXPRESS PERMISSION
FROM THE AUTHOR