

## CHAPTER ONE

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### Introduction

We have learned from our experiences . . . that the political will for serious action by those in power is contingent on women organizing to demand and promote change. We therefore need to assert our claim in shaping the major social and economic issues facing our times. (Sen and Grown 1987:22)

#### A STORY OF GENDER AND SOCIAL CHANGE

This is a story of women and collective activism in the coalfields and nearby mining areas of Southwest Virginia. Based on qualitative research conducted in the Central Appalachian mountains between 1990 and 1992, it explores the life histories of working-class women in order to understand their class and gender conditions and their positions of marginalization. The story also explores how women struggle for development and change in grassroots associations, and how this struggle may lead to their empowerment.

The subjects of the story and the study are women in Southwest Virginia who came together in grassroots community development, income generation, and labor support groups. Through life history interviews and informal conversations, these women shared with the author their experiences and analyses of their personal and collective lives. Twelve women participated in the intensive interviews, while many others contributed to the study through conversations with the author in many different settings inside and outside of their collective associations. Together, we have pieced together a story of gender and social change from the standpoint of Appalachian working-class women.

What follows is an iterative and reflexive exploration of change; consequently, the presentation is not linear. Following the introduction (Chapter One) and discussion of the research methodology (Chapter Two), there are three chapters that deepen our under-

standing of Appalachian women's lives in the context of family (Chapter Three), work (Chapter Four), and community (Chapter Five). Because part of the operative definition of empowerment is collective action (see page 7), Chapter Five shifts our attention to community, referring back to Chapter Two because women's collective identity is rooted in the family. Analyses of women's participation in grassroots groups continues in the next three chapters. Chapter Six reveals problems inherent in top-down strategies and groups that are constrained to focus on only one of women's roles. Chapter Seven presents the challenges to class and gender hierarchies that have come from women in a grassroots labor-support group. Chapter Eight looks at the flexibility of community development groups and how their successes may contradict conventional development assumptions. The final chapter (Nine) summarizes what we have learned about women, community, and alternative visions for development and empowerment.

### THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Gender is a central category of social difference that affects and is affected by women's relationship to the means of production. In this study, gender and class are examined in the context of women's collective social practices. The research project sought to answer the following questions:

- 1) How are women marginalized and oppressed on the basis of their class, gender and other positions of difference?
- 2) How do women theorize an understanding of class and gender?
- 3) Under what conditions do women come together collectively for social change?
- 4) What associations provide contexts for women's empowerment? (and)
- 5) How are women empowered through their grassroots collective practices?

A derived question relates the study to theory produced by women in the geographic periphery of the capitalist global economy (Sen and Grown 1987; Mohanty 1991) and by women of color in the United States (Collins 1989, 1990; Davis 1990; Moraga 1986; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; hooks 1981, 1989):

- 6) Does the feminism (as theory and practice) of women in this research setting share standpoints with third world feminisms?<sup>1</sup>

The scholarly discussion of the research findings draws on socialist feminist theory and women in development planning literature. The central theoretical concern is how women may be empowered when they participate in grassroots associations that aim to further their development. Analysis is integrated with theory and is grounded in thick descriptions of women's everyday lives and work in families and communities. By examining the economic, social, political, and ideological dimensions of the process of change these women have experienced in collective associations, we can better understand the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy and how this relationship affects our understanding of empowerment. Defining empowerment, a concern in the women in development (WID) literature, has implications for social policy and planning interventions, as does the affirmation of women's agency in movements for social change.

### THE SETTING

The research was conducted in the coalfields and contiguous economically depressed areas of Southwest Virginia in the Central Appalachian mountains. Because of the region's historic underdevelopment and dependency on extractive industries and the outside ownership and control of its productive resources, it is helpful to recognize structural similarities to other contexts, including the third world, that are expressed in the relationships of dependency that affect women's lives.

In this peripheral region of the United States, working-class women are organizing in response to structural trends in the economy that threaten the security of their families and contribute to their economic, social, and political impoverishment. The coal industry, its once powerful union, and the secondary industries coal once attracted, are on the decline. Manufacturing industries no longer stop in the mountains as they move south beyond U.S. borders. Centralization and bureaucratization of political and administrative authority have effectively excluded working-class participation in public discourse. Whatever social welfare benefits

were won with the struggles of the union and the 'war on poverty' are in peril.

According to Kraybill, Johnson, and Deaton's (1987) study of socioeconomic indicators in Virginia coal counties compared to the state as a whole, the region is characterized by two-thirds more poverty and nearly that much more dependency on transfer incomes. There is much more unemployment, underemployment, and undereducation (Kraybill, Johnson, and Deaton 1987). The conditions of life in the coal counties (Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Tazewell, and Wise), a portion of the seventeen-county region of Southwest Virginia, support the assertion of the marginalization of women in this study.

### LISTENING TO APPALACHIAN WOMEN

For the past twenty years or more, feminist scholarship has been concerned with the qualitative differences between women's and men's experiences of social life and how women's experiences have been left out of received knowledge and discourse (Harding 1987; Jaggar 1988; Jaggar and Rothenberg 1984; Smith 1987). Socialist feminist theorists have fundamentally challenged Marxist political economy by insisting on the theoretical relevance of reproductive work (Hartmann 1981). They have introduced psychoanalytic concepts to explore patriarchy as the ideological form of women's oppression (Mitchell 1971), or patriarchy as a social structure that unites with capitalism to alienate women in gender-specific ways (Jaggar 1988). They have offered a division-of-labor analysis of the unifying systems of capitalism and patriarchy (Young 1980; Mies 1986) and introduced radical feminist insights on the sexual basis for women's oppression (MacKinnon 1982, 1987).

This study contributes to the body of literature in socialist feminism because it addresses the gendered division of labor, the unity of women's productive and reproductive work, and women's sexuality as the nexus of gender and class oppression. It is also concerned with consciousness as a site of feminist oppositional politics (Hartsock 1983) and the relationship of consciousness and the collective (Mies 1986).

In recent years, feminist theory has been challenged from within for essentializing women's experiences (Spelman 1988; hooks 1981; Mohanty 1991). Women of color in the United States and in the geographic third world have deepened feminist critique, challenged

epistemological universals, and opened the possibilities for more inclusive yet indigenous social movements (Collins 1990; Davis 1990; Moraga 1986; Sen and Grown 1987). Although feminist discourse has opened to other voices, it has not yet listened to Appalachian women. This study enlarges the conversations in feminist theory to include the unique voices of women in an historically marginalized region and for whom gender is constructed within a distinctive regional culture and political economy.

Appalachian studies as an interdisciplinary field has countered the stereotypes of Appalachian people and the construction of an Appalachian culture of poverty (Billings 1974; Fisher 1991; Walls and Billings 1991). Structural accounts of the regional political economy (Clavel 1983; Gaventa 1980) have sometimes acknowledged gender differences (Lewis 1970; Lewis, Kobak, and Johnson 1978; Gaventa 1990) but have not yet explored the explanatory potential of feminist social and political theory. As feminist theory empirically grounded in the standpoint of Appalachian women, this study contributes to a new area in Appalachian studies (Maggard 1986).

Just as feminist theory has challenged Marxist political economy, it has also challenged theories of development and underdevelopment and the grand narratives of human progress (Maguire 1984; Jaquette 1982; Sen and Grown 1987; Mohanty 1991). Yet, the mainstream of "women in development" planning literature resists the implications of feminist scholarship, particularly in the area of economic development planning (Buvinic 1986; Tinker 1990). Moser (1989) has looked to organizations of third world women for empirical evidence of more holistic and alternative strategies for economic development (Sen and Grown 1987), yet discussions of the organizations of marginalized women in the United States have not yet entered the discourse.

By locating women in development issues in the Appalachian region of the United States, this research contributes to recent commitments in the field to engage in a "South-North dialogue," and to recognize the marginalization of women in core countries and their connection to women in the South through the new international division of labor (Mies 1986).

Finally, the use of a feminist research methodology (Nielsen 1990; Reinharz 1992) in this study offers alternatives to positivist science in a field (planning) where the construction of knowledge is directly related to policy formulation and planning intervention. By

challenging the quantification of knowledge and the separation of values from meaning, feminist research allows for emancipatory planning practice.

This study gives a voice to women in grassroots associations in their work to change their consciousness and their material conditions. In this sense, respondents are actively involved in the construction of theory, and the researcher is their first audience. Beyond the community of scholars, there is a community of participants in grassroots associations and their enablers in private and voluntary organizations, public institutions and social services agencies, and in solidarity and religious groups. Understanding how women individually and collectively address the structural constraints of gender and class can inform future strategies for women and community development.

Exploring the process of change among marginalized women's groups in the United States will inform domestic and international planners involved in formulating economic, social and political development policies. If those policies aim to ameliorate or eradicate the conditions that contribute to the marginalization of women, planners can learn how women work towards those goals in collective associations. In understanding how women define empowerment, the work of collective associations will be substantively reinforced.

#### WORKING DEFINITIONS OF CENTRAL CONCEPTS:

##### *Marginalization*

marginalize. *v.* To cause to live on the edges of society by excluding from participation in any group effort. (The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language 1990:610)

This study is about people who have been prohibited from full participation in social, economic, and political life, and whose experiences, contributions, concerns, and dreams are rarely considered in planning for the future. Because they are women, because they are working-class, and because they are ethnically defined as Appalachian, these people have been relegated to the margins of the social and political discourse that surrounds policymakers and scholars seeking to solve the economic, social, and political crises of end of the twentieth century.

Marginalization is defined as both a position and condition of women (Young 1988). As women, the respondents in this study are marginalized by the social construction of subordinate female gender roles and their accompanying ideology. These women are further marginalized by the depressed socio-economic conditions of the region of Southwest Virginia (Kraybill, Johnson, and Deaton 1987; Gaventa, Smith, and Willingham 1990; Shifflett 1991). Whether they are unemployed household heads, low-wage service sector workers without benefits, wives of high-wage (for the region), high-risk, and income-insecure mine workers, or miners themselves, the women in this study are affected by the relative socio-economic deprivation of the region and by industrial responses to boom-and-bust cycles in the coal industry.

Marginalization is a struggle concept. It is understood by acknowledging that there are interactions and contradictions in the kinds and levels of class and gender marginalization. Therefore, the marginalization of women on the basis of class and gender is not additive (Spelman 1988): you cannot study working-class persons, then "add women, and stir" (Smith 1974; Andersen 1988:13-16). To do so would ignore the epistemological implications of placing women's experiences at the center of our analysis, where our goal is not to speak "about" or "for" women but to speak "out" for them (Klein 1983 cited in Reinharz 1992:16). When we speak out for women we can move beyond the construction of women as victims of oppression to the affirmation of women as social actors. Marginalization, then, can also provide women the position on the edges of society that allows for critique; it can be the place to imagine more just and creative solutions to the problems of development.

### *Empowerment*

(E)mpowerment is a *process* aimed at consolidating, maintaining, or changing the nature and distribution of power in a particular cultural context. The process is rarely a linear one. It takes twists and turns, includes both resistance and consent, and ebbs and flows as groups with different relations to structures and sources of power come into conflict. (Morgen and Bookman 1988:4)

Empowerment is a term often used to represent a positive material change in the condition of an individual, particularly when

discussing the improved economic efficiency of women in third world settings. Emphases on individualism and the separation of the material and ideological dimensions of change through an economic lens are problematic in feminist theory. The understanding of empowerment in this study is open and reflexive: it is also a struggle concept, defined by those who make the struggle. Grounded theory-building (Glaser and Strauss 1967) allows a central concept to take shape through analysis and is particularly suited to feminist research because it maximizes women's agency in the research process. Therefore, informed by feminist social and political theory (Morgen and Bookman 1988; Hartsock 1983; Mies 1986), empowerment will be partially and tentatively defined as a process and as an outcome of collective identity and political praxis.

Empowerment is a capacity in thought and action to address the condition and position of marginalization. Women are empowered when they recognize and act on strategic (relational) interests as well as practical (material) interests (Molyneux 1986): not only do women in collective association work to materially improve the conditions of life, they challenge the power relationships inherent in their gendered and class position. Thus, a portion of the operative definition is collective action.

Empowerment will further be defined as an outcome of a challenge to androcentric ideology expressed in a bifurcated consciousness that separates the personal and political, public and private spheres, and gender from class consciousness.

## GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

If empowerment is more than economic improvement, it will require social and political as well as economic development. In writing about the setting of this study, Kraybill, Johnson, and Deaton (1987) remind us that "human capital and industrial location in a region are jointly determined" (6), linking social and community development to economic development on more than feminist grounds. From the experience of women in development planning, we can expect that women's associations will address the problems of education, health, nutrition, and housing as well as income generation in defining their practical gender needs (March and Taqqu 1982; Buvinic 1986; Moser 1989). When gender analysis reveals the complex interactions of women's productive and reproductive work, the importance of holistic development strategies becomes even more clear.



Women in development (WID) has emerged as an area in development policy and planning within the last twenty years, in the period roughly equivalent to the emergence of feminist scholarship and the second wave of a women's movement in the United States. Partly in response to pressures from women who were development professionals in the United States, and partly in response to worldwide interest in women's productive capacities during the United Nations Decade for Women (1976–1985), bilateral, multilateral, private and voluntary, and nongovernmental development organizations almost uniformly require consideration of women as a separate class or group in development policy (Tinker 1990). Yet a "conceptual awareness of the issues of 'gender and development' has not necessarily resulted in its translation into planning practice" (Moser 1989:1799). The women in development (WID) focus of development policy has not addressed issues of *gender* as a central category of social difference: women may be isolated in their own projects or integrated into others, but the structural relationship of gender may be unexamined.

As a policy arena, the rationale for WID has been developed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and extended in other bilateral and multilateral institutions and in government and nongovernmental agencies. Over time, it has become a reductionist rationale that finally sees women as an underutilized resource: the purpose of "integrating" women into development, finally, is to enhance the economic efficiency of planning interventions (as in USAID, World Bank policy papers).

The subject of WID literature has been characterized by Young (1988) as the "condition" of women, "the material state in which women find themselves, their poverty, their lack of education and training." This allows development practitioners to find "ways of improving women's condition by targeting ameliorative resources rather than by radically changing underlying structures" (Young 1988:1–2). By focusing on the "condition" of women, one can ignore the "position" of women in relation to men, and how this affects the position of women in other power relationships, such as class, race, ethnicity, and region. By "treating" women out of context, the category "women" is ultimately invalidated, "since in every case it has to be modified by other social signifiers, class . . . , age . . . , civil status, race . . . and so on" (Young 1988:4).

Even when gender, the social relationship and relative position of women and men, is considered in development planning, it is usually limited to assessing the failure of projects to utilize gender

analysis to draw women into the development process. With exceptions like an early critique of the development industry by Rogers (1979), an often cited monograph by Maguire (1984), and Mohanty's highly theoretical (1991) essay "Under Western Eyes," rarely are development assumptions questioned. If development planning were truly gendered, the social relations of power in all of their manifestations would be subject to critique, including assumptions about who are the subjects of development.

With the emancipation of women as her goal, Moser (1989) offers a conceptual framework for what she calls "gender planning" that corrects the tendency to treat women irrespective of their relationship to men and without an analysis of power. As interest grows in addressing the feminization of poverty in the United States (Weiss 1990; Rothenberg 1992) under conditions of global economic restructuring, gender planning can be extended to reflect the needs of marginalized women in Appalachia.

Gender planning is based on the validity of women as a category because gender expresses the socially constructed and unequal relationship between men and women. But it also offers planners "room to maneuver for addressing needs" without necessarily challenging the "specific sociopolitical context" and the "engendered position (of women) in the sexual division of labor" (Moser 1989:1804). Moser (1989) proposes that gender planning must take into account women's reproductive, productive, and community management work, and the strategic as well as practical gender needs of women (after Molyneux 1986):

Strategic gender needs are those needs which are formulated from the analysis of women's subordination to men, and deriving out of this the strategic gender interest identification for an alternative, more equal and satisfactory organization of society than that which exists at present, in terms of both the structure and nature of relationships between men and women.

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In contrast, practical gender needs are those needs which are formulated from the concrete conditions women experience, in their engendered position within the sexual division of labor, and deriving out of this their practical gender interests for human survival (Moser 1989:1803).

Strategic gender interests “arise not from women’s attempts to fulfill traditional, or even modern, obligations imposed by the sexual division of labour, but from women’s growing recognition that the age old structures of male dominance and privilege are not sacrosanct, nor indeed given in the genetic inheritance, but are social impositions, and as such amenable to change” (Young 1988:8).

Working in this conceptual milieu, Moser develops an analysis of five policy approaches in women in development (WID), and evaluates each in the context of meeting practical and strategic gender needs.

- 1) the welfare approach
- 2) the equity approach
- 3) the anti-poverty approach
- 4) the efficiency approach
- 5) the empowerment approach

Moser’s discussion of empowerment breaks out of the limitations of the social reform tradition of planning (Friedmann 1987) where the other WID approaches can be located. An empowerment approach is not grounded in market rationality that ultimately promotes individualism over collective interest. Rather, it is based on a recognition of planning as social mobilization, partly in response to the accumulation crisis and decline of the welfare state in core countries and to structural adjustment policies in the periphery. Planning as social mobilization also resists the tendency in women in development planning to conflate women’s equity with economic participation.

For Moser, and for the third world women’s association of activists, professionals and scholars that has become its most visible advocate, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), the empowerment approach “emphasizes that fact that women experience oppression differently according to their race, class, colonial history, and current position in the international economic order. It therefore maintains that women have to challenge oppressive structures and situations simultaneously at different levels” (Moser 1989:1815).

The discussion of planning as empowerment is emerging out of third world feminist scholarship and grassroots organizing (Sen & Grown 1987; Beneria & Sen 1986; Barrios de Chungara 1978; Afonja 1990), and aims to enable self-reliance and indigenous control by addressing both women’s strategic and practical gender needs.

(It) questions some of the fundamental assumptions concerning the interrelationship between power and development that underlie previous approaches. While it acknowledges the importance for women to increase their power, it seeks to identify power less in terms of domination over others (with its implicit assumption that a gain for women implies a loss for men), and more in terms of the capacity of women to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength. This is identified as the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through the ability to gain control over crucial material and nonmaterial resources (Moser 1989:1815).

Even though the research context for this study is not the geographic third world, the feminism growing out of women's grassroots mobilization in marginalized areas of the United States may have more in common with third world than middle-class North American agendas. When planners advocate the strategic gender interests of women, they enter the terrain of planning Friedmann (1987) calls "emancipatory practice" which falls within the "grand counter-tradition" (p. 307) of planning as social mobilization:

Its aim is the structural transformation of industrial capitalism toward the self-production of life, the recovery of political community, and the achievement of collective self-reliance in the context of common global concerns. In this context, our task is to wrest from the political terrain still held by the state and corporate capital expanding zones of liberation in which the new and self-reliant ways of production and democratic governance can flourish. (Friedmann 1987:412).

Because the goal of social mobilization is transformative, it is antithetical to reformist planning, and it is an oppositional practice that must include historically conscious subjects. For Friedmann (1987), "its starting point is social criticism. And it relies on action from below. . . . It requires the overcoming of resistance (through) (e)mancipatory struggle (which) is always particularized and historical. . . . A key principle . . . is that no group can be free until freedom has been achieved for every group (leading) to results that will always be partial and contradictory. . . . Because it is opposi-

tional, radical practice . . . cannot be organized and sponsored by the state. The impulse for it must come from within the community itself" (p. 297–301).

It is also an engaged position for scholars and planners that challenges both professional and scholarly canons. In addressing the apparent contradiction between "planning" and a radical and oppositional practice, Friedmann argues for planners "never far removed from the action:"

Action needs to be undergirded by structures of meaning or ideology, which is the point of both departure and return for radical practice. The meanings articulated by ideology . . . function . . . to legitimate emancipatory practice, to sustain this practice in adversity, and to disarm and de-legitimize the opposition. Planners who become integrally a part of mobilized groups—in Gramsci's language, organic intellectuals—may have the necessary skills to put together statements that will serve these several purposes (Friedmann 1987:305–6).

Reporting on the Ivanhoe Civic League, one of the associations in this study, Gaventa and Lewis (1988) bring Friedmann's radical planning practice to a local context:

Economic developers who work at building the infrastructure—sewage systems, water, roads—necessary for industrial development emphasize in their economic education technical training to do business plans, feasibility studies, marketing analyses. As important as these may be if one wants to become incorporated into the existent system, there is another infrastructure more basic and more integral to the community if one is interested in looking to alternative systems for more fundamental change. This is the infrastructure which includes education for human development, cultural creativity, democratic decision making, and understanding our history and our religious and political symbols. Then people can rebuild their own communities, can make their own theater, write their own poems, carry out their own research, be their own theologians, build their own economies (p. 2).