Industrial Restructuring and Women's Homework in Appalachia: Lessons from West Virginia

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INDUSTRIAL RESTRUCTURING AND WOMEN'S HOMEWORK IN APPALACHIA: LESSONS FROM WEST VIRGINIA

Ann M. Oberhauser

This paper analyzes the relationship between industrial restructuring and women's homework in Appalachia. Since the early 1970s, industrial restructuring in this region has led to substantial job loss in mining and manufacturing industries and increased employment in the service sector. These employment shifts, coupled with Appalachia's long tradition of informal sector activities, make homework a viable income-generating strategy for women. This paper first addresses some of the literature on the geography of gender and industrial restructuring. Second, women's homework is analyzed as an economic strategy in response to industrial restructuring. In the third section, the types and significance of women's homework in West Virginia is discussed in the context of this state's economic history. The final section outlines the implications of this study for regional development in Appalachia and West Virginia in particular.

Following a period of significant job loss and population outmigration in several Appalachian states, regional development continues to be a major focus for policymakers, practitioners, and academic researchers. Since the late 1970s, West Virginia has experienced a loss of approximately 42,000 manufacturing and 27,000 mining jobs. This has created a situation where 22.8% of the population lives below the federal poverty level (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 1989). The loss of manufacturing and mining employment in Appalachia has produced a variety of responses among the affected population. Some migrate out of the region in search of jobs. Others turn to service sector activities where employment is frequently part-time and wages are lower than traditional manufacturing and mining jobs. Many people draw on resources within the household to generate income.

The financial burden on women has increased in recent decades with declining industrial employment and a rise in female-headed households: women in economically depressed regions such as Appalachia are particularly impacted by these difficult economic and social conditions. In order to cope with both the decline in household income and contin-
ued responsibilities in the domestic sphere, many women are turning to homework as a source of income. This paper examines women's economic strategies during periods of industrial restructuring, particularly income-generation through home-based work. The first section reviews the literature on the geography of gender and industrial restructuring. Women's homework as a response to industrial restructuring is explored in the second section. The third section focuses on West Virginia's economic history and the importance of women's work both inside and outside the domestic sphere. The conclusion addresses how studies such as this can inform policy-makers about the need to address women and economic development.

The field research for this project entailed in-depth interviews with several women engaged in home-based, income-generating activities such as child care, craft-work, gardening, and a variety of other household activities. It was found that women's homework employs a variety of resources and draws on important social and economic networks in the community and household. Assessing women's responses to industrial restructuring could provide additional important information to be used in community and county programs in economically depressed areas of Appalachia.

GENDER AND INDUSTRIAL RESTRUCTURING: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE. Since the mid-1970s, industrial restructuring has been widely studied by economic and industrial geographers (Knox and Agnew, 1989; Massey, 1984; Oberhauser, 1990a; Peet, 1987; Schoenberger, 1988; Scott and Storper, 1986; Storper and Walker, 1989). This literature provides in-depth analyses of deindustrialization, employment shifts, industrial relocation, and uneven development through various local, national, and international case studies. In addition, this work has forwarded important theoretical contributions and debates.

Feminist geography has made significant contributions to the literature on industrial restructuring, demonstrating that women both influence and are influenced by industrial change (Hanson and Pratt, 1988; Johnson, 1990; Lewis, 1983; Mackenzie, 1986; Mackenzie and Rose, 1983; Massey, 1984; McDowell and Massey, 1984; Walby and Bagguley, 1989). In general, feminist geography analyzes how gender relations affect the constitution and use of space. For example, economic strategies of women in the household are examined as the combined use of space for productive and reproductive work (Berk, 1984; Bowlby, 1990;
Lowe and Gregson, 1989; Mackenzie, 1986). In addition, extensive research on women in urban settings has contributed to the more general question of the relationship between gender and environment (Andrew and Moore Milroy, 1988; Bondi, 1990; Mackenzie, 1988; Rose and Villeneuve, 1987). Few of these studies, however, directly link women’s economic strategies in the household to industrial restructuring. Knowing how women generate income at the household level has significant implications for regional development strategies. The remainder of this section explores some of the literature used to construct a theoretical framework for women’s homework and industrial restructuring.

The Gender Division of Labor. Literature on the gender division of labor provides the theoretical framework for this paper. The gender division of labor is influenced by patriarchy and capitalism, two systems which are different and distinct, yet are interrelated in analyses of women’s work (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1986; Brown, 1987; Hartmann, 1981; Mies, 1986). These systems and their impact on the reproduction of the labor force as well as the production of goods and services have been studied from several different perspectives.

Feminist work on the gender division of labor attempts to link theoretically privately organized reproduction and publicly organized production under capitalism (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1986; Brown, 1987; MacKinnon, 1982). This work depicts patriarchy as a system which underlies women’s subordination in the domestic sphere and their exploitation as laborers in the workplace. Mies (1986, p. 38) argued that “capitalism cannot function without patriarchy, that the goal of this system, namely the never-ending process of capital accumulation, cannot be achieved unless patriarchal man-woman relations are maintained or newly created.” Sokoloff (1980) added that patriarchy predates capitalism and is currently maintained by the gender division of labor. In sum, feminist analyses identify strong linkages between patriarchy and capitalism which are manifest in the gender division of labor in both the household and the paid workplace.

Feminist geographers incorporate patriarchy, capitalism, and the gender division of labor in their analyses of human/environmental relationships. According to Mackenzie (1989, p. 43), this literature addresses “the social and environmental processes whereby the two genders—women and men—which make up the category ‘human’ are constituted, reproduced and changed.” In addition, many feminist geographers have
adopted, and are adapting, an historical materialist methodology. This approach involves an analysis of the inherently contradictory material position of women in capitalist society: women are primarily responsible for reproductive work, but control over resources and status-enhancing opportunities derive from productive work (Mackenzie, 1989).

The Implications of Industrialization for Male and Female Employment. The historical development of the gender division of labor under capitalism is linked to contemporary industrial restructuring. Early periods of industrial capitalism brought about a separation of the production of goods in the factory and the reproduction of labor in the household (Lewis, 1983; Mackenzie and Rose, 1983). Domestic work, carried out predominately by women, was considered private and reduced to consumption and biological and social reproduction. In contrast, men were involved in publicly organized production. As industrialization advanced, households became dependent on the market for goods and services and, therefore, the wage-earning power of men. This specialization meant women were economically dependent on men. In many cases, however, fathers or husbands could not earn a family wage: Girls and women had to engage in wage-earning activities to help support the household. For example, during the late 19th century, the textile and garment factories in the United States and the United Kingdom relied heavily on cheap female labor (McDowell and Massey, 1984; Sacks, 1984).

Modern industrialization has brought about a change in the role of women in the labor force but has not significantly improved their status. Women are entering the workplace at unprecedented rates due to the increasing number of female single-headed households, the need for two incomes in a household, and changes in the industrial labor process (Jenson et al., 1988; Massey, 1984; Women and Geography Study Group, 1984). Although women’s labor force participation rates are rising, the gender division of labor spelled out above reinforces and maintains inequalities between men and women in the labor force. For example, the average earnings of women are less than men’s earnings, women’s jobs are typically at the bottom of the authority hierarchy, more women live in poverty than men, and their jobs are frequently dead-end and insecure (Beneria and Stimpson, 1987; Bose et al., 1987; Hanson and Pratt, 1990; Sacks and Remy, 1984).

Since the mid 1970s, industrial restructuring has accompanied a dra-
matic shift in male and female employment. This period marks the transition from Fordism to flexible production: production processes once characterized by assembly lines employing large numbers of relatively unskilled workers are being replaced by more automated and flexible manufacturing systems employing fewer, more skilled workers (Aglietta, 1979; Schoenberger, 1988; Scott and Storper, 1986). The shift in production techniques and labor processes often has significant impacts on regional economies (Storper and Walker, 1989). First, many industrial core regions have suffered plant closings and cutbacks as manufacturers automate their production systems or relocate to peripheral regions with lower costs of production (Oberhauser, 1987; Oberhauser, 1990b; Peet, 1987; Schoenberger, 1988). Second, many primary sector activities such as mining have mechanized production, thereby reducing labor requirements. Producers in this sector also face increased competition from peripheral region producers where primary goods are cheaper (Peet, 1987).

Finally, the transition from Fordism to flexible production has seen a shift in economic activity from manufacturing to service industries with certain implications for employment (Kuhn and Bluestone, 1987; Sacks and Remy, 1984). Specifically, the male unemployment rate rose during the industrial restructuring of the early 1980s as employment in male-dominated primary and secondary sectors decreased. In contrast, during this same period, the female unemployment rate fell below the male rate, and female labor force participation rates rose. This situation is partially attributed to the expansion of jobs in the tertiary sector where female employment is dominant (Kuhn and Bluestone, 1987; Sokoloff, 1987). The relatively low-wages in this sector did not significantly improve what some have referred to as the female occupational ghetto (Jenson et al., 1988; Sacks and Remy, 1984).

Employment shifts in economically depressed regions of Appalachia have been significantly affected by industrial restructuring. The opportunities for Appalachian women are somewhat different from their counterparts in core industrial regions, however, because fewer service jobs are available to replace the lost mining and manufacturing jobs (Appalachia/America, 1981; Widner, 1990). In this context, the importance of women's homework is apparent.

WOMEN AND HOMEWORK. The literature on gender and industrial restructuring often ignores women's homework as an important strat-
egy for generating household income. Homework is defined here as the production of goods or services in the household for monetary or barter exchange. This activity is especially prevalent in economically depressed regions where formal sector jobs are limited and women must engage in alternative types of economic strategies to support their households.

As a prelude to this discussion of homework, it is important to examine reasons behind women's increasing participation in the labor force. First, the proportion of single, female-headed households is rising dramatically, thereby increasing the economic burden on women. Between 1981 and 1990, the proportion of U.S. families headed by a woman rose from approximately 20% to 33% (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 1990). Second, women's increasing labor force participation is linked to structural and cyclical unemployment among men. Many households where the male primary breadwinner has been laid off suffer a depressed standard of living as earnings decline. Although job opportunities for women are expanding, especially in the service sector, they are generally low-paid with limited job security or upward mobility (Kuhn and Bluestone, 1987). Finally, while economic pressures on women are increasing, public support and social services are being cut. For example, in 1981, the Congress passed legislation that eliminated certain subsidies and assistance to working mothers who were recipients of AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children). More than 442,000 families with 1.3 million children lost their benefits as a consequence of these cuts (Sarri, 1988). Support for this legislation stems from the argument that welfare payments should be reduced because they act as a work disincentive. However, the feminization of poverty literature claims that welfare is essential for poor women and children as it curbs the rapid deterioration of their economic status. In an empirical study of poverty among female-headed families, Jones and Kodras (1990) demonstrate this claim by showing that increased state support in AFDC tends to be associated with lower rates of poverty growth among these women.

As a means of coping with increasing economic burdens and rising poverty, some women are turning to home-based income-generating activities. These activities are part of the formal or informal sector, depending on whether or not they occur outside the existing body of law (Fernandez-Kelly and Garcia, 1989). In formal sector homework, women's production of goods and services is not a new phenomenon. In the early 20th century, manufacturers representing many industries em-
ployed women to do all forms of homework. For example, sewing pants and coats, making artificial flowers and feathers, sorting coffee beans, shelling nuts, embroidering and lace work were some of the homework occupations in New York tenements (Daniels, 1989). These women often performed a very specialized task and were paid by the piece.

The relatively widespread practice of homework during the early part of this century produced debates on the role of the state in regulating labor relations and women’s positions in both the public and private workplace (Daniels, 1989; Herod, 1991). Contemporary debates on homework address similar issues surrounding homeworkers’ vulnerability to unfair hiring practices, protection in the areas of working conditions, benefits, and pay, and the effect of homework on positions and wages of formal sector workers. In the early 1980s, the Reagan administration encouraged homework by lifting prohibitions against homework in certain industries. One of the main arguments in support of this move was that women and especially mothers would have greater employment options (Herod, 1991). Homework in the formal sector is expanding alongside advances in technology which facilitate telecommuting, telemarketing and the assembly of high-technology electronic components (Andrew and Moore Milroy, 1988; Christensen, 1988; Hartmann, 1987).

While significant research has been done on women’s homework in the formal sector, there are far fewer studies of informal sector homework. These studies tend to focus on women in developing countries and only recently examine women’s informal activities in industrialized countries (Fernandez-Kelly and Garcia, 1989; Portes and Sassen-Koob, 1987). Informal activities include at least two options, self-employment or working for another person or a firm. In the case of self-employment, women’s homework may involve the production of goods or services for sale directly to consumers. In contrast, women’s homework in the informal sector may also involve doing piecework for an employer. In both cases, women are working illegally without the appropriate permits and risk stiff penalties from government agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service or the Department of Industrial Relations (Fernandez-Kelly and Garcia, 1989). Homework is increasingly attractive to firms in both low-technology and high-technology industries such as apparel and electronics, respectively. Women, especially immigrant women in urban areas, are vulnerable to this form of exploitative employment (Fernandez-Kelly and Garcia, 1989).
Finally, the advantages and disadvantages of homework as an income-generating strategy for women is linked to the gender division of labor and the secondary status of women in our society. The advantages of homework stem from the flexible and part-time nature of these activities. Although more women are working, studies have shown that the household division of labor does not change considerably (Berk, 1984; Dyck, 1990). The fact that women are still responsible for much of the domestic work such as organizing child care, food shopping, cleaning, and cooking contributes to their need for flexible and part-time work schedules. Income-generating activities done in the home can accommodate the double burden of work and home. Lower income women in particular face serious constraints to employment outside the home due to limited support services such as affordable child care and public transportation (Hanson and Pratt, 1990; Rose and Villeneuve, 1987).

Some of the disadvantages of homework stem from the advantages cited above. First, regulations on working hours and conditions are weak, falling outside official workplace guidelines (Herod, 1991). Second, women face increasing pressure to juggle work and domestic responsibilities, often neglecting one or the other. Third, the government loses money and employees lose protection and the right to a decent wage. Employers are the ones who gain the most as they “try to evade responsibilities that may range from the payment of taxes to the provision of benefits” (Fernandez-Kelly, 1989, p. 225). In all of these cases, women are not provided with the basic job protection and benefits that many desperately need.

In sum, feminist analyses of women’s homework as an economic response to industrial restructuring can contribute to the growing empirical and theoretical literature in industrial geography. Women’s employment outside the home is often limited in economically depressed regions. Therefore, alternative means of generating income deserve special attention. Increasing investigations by feminist geographers into this aspect of gender and industrial restructuring can bring about positive change in the area of regional development.

WOMEN’S WORK IN APPALACHIA: A WEST VIRGINIA CASE STUDY. Women have played a critical role in the economic and social development of Appalachia (Maggard, 1987, 1990; Pudup, 1990a; Simon and Justice, 1981). Most accounts of the region’s development, however, fail to acknowledge, much less analyze, women’s contribution to the
production of goods and reproduction of the labor force (Antipode, 1973; Couto, 1988; Rice, 1985; Widner, 1990). Therefore, studies such as this can help to refocus contemporary and historical economic analyses and incorporate issues of gender. This section examines economic development in Appalachia through a case study of West Virginia.² The focus on women’s roles during three eras of economic development—preindustrial, industrial transition, and restructuring—will reveal a more accurate interpretation of the state’s economic geography.

Industrialization in West Virginia did not occur until the 1880s. This was somewhat later than most other states in the region. Several explanations for this late industrialization have been offered (Pudup, 1990b; Rice, 1985; Simon, 1979). First, access to the region was limited due to poor transportation and other infrastructure. Second, the relatively isolated, rural mountainous terrain hindered large-scale penetration of capital. Finally, early immigrants to Appalachia settled in rural areas, primarily engaging in agricultural activities (Caudill, 1962; Rice, 1985). Simon (1979) referred to Appalachia as an undeveloped region during the preindustrial era, removed from capitalist production and largely dependent on subsistence farming.

Recent feminist accounts of West Virginia’s economic history have underlined the crucial role of women in the household and regional economies during this preindustrial era (Eagan, 1990; Hensley, 1990; Pudup, 1990a). Although census figures do not show women in farming occupations, women’s work involved farm labor such as cultivating, weeding, planting, and tending animals. In addition, they made crafts and food products which were brought to market to be traded for goods they could not produce themselves (Pudup, 1990a). A small number of women in the preindustrial era were also earning wages through work as domestic servants, seamstresses, and teachers.

The second era in West Virginia’s economic development, from 1880 to 1930, has been labeled one of industrial transition (Maggard, 1981; Pudup, 1990b). Capitalists from outside the region invested in heavy industry which involved resource extraction and primary processing of goods. These investments and the job opportunities they created established the conditions for economic development in West Virginia. In 1900, the male labor force participation rate in West Virginia was a record high of 80% (Table 1). Many scholars argue that economic growth based on primary resource extraction contributed to underdevelopment of the region (Lewis and Knipe, 1978; Nyden, 1979; Simon, 1979; Walls, 1978).
TABLE 1
PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE AND MALE LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES,* UNITED STATES AND WEST VIRGINIA, 1900–1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>West Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>9.3 (2)</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>13.2 (1)</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>74.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>67.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>29.4 (1)</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>66.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>38.1 (1)</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>72.0 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>41.0 (2)</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>65.2 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>42.6 (1)</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>64.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Female and male labor force divided by male or female population above some age; for 1900–1930, it is population ten years old and over; for 1950, 14 years old and over; for 1960–1985, 16 years old and over.
(1) lowest of any state
(2) second lowest of any state

In the early 20th century, coal mining became a dominant source of employment in some areas of West Virginia. The Fairmont and southern coalfields produced bituminous coal in large quantities, attracting a considerable number of immigrants (North, 1985; Pudup, 1990b). This increase in economic activity affected the state’s population which rose by 500,000, a 92% increase, between 1900 and 1920 (Simon, 1979).

Women’s work in mining camps was an integral part of the coal economy (Greene, 1990; Maggard, 1987). Their production of goods and services for domestic consumption was particularly attractive to coal operators who required the families of its employees to absorb some of its costs of labor reproduction (Simon and Justice, 1981). The predominance of coal mining in early 20th century West Virginia also led to the exclusion of women from paid employment, which is reflected in the low labor force participation rate among women in the state (13.2% in 1930, the lowest of any state). The U.S. female labor force participation rate in 1930 was 24.3%, nearly double the West Virginia rate (Table 1). Those women who were employed worked in a few industries such as textile and knitting mills, glassware shops, and tobacco factories (Hensley, 1990).

The low labor force participation rate described above masks wom-
en's contributions to household incomes. In addition to their paid labor outside the home and unpaid labor in the domestic sphere, many women earned money by taking in boarders and laundry (Pudup, 1990a).3 Women were also active in subsistence farming which provided food, materials for clothing, and other basic necessities in rural households. These home-based services and products were especially important during periods of economic downturn.

During the post-WWII period, industrial restructuring in West Virginia accompanied changing production processes and lowered job opportunities. Specifically, restructuring of the coal industry in the 1950s and again in the 1970s dramatically reduced the labor force in this sector (Charleston Gazette, 1989). In addition, technological advances and rising competition led to significant job loss among workers in traditional manufacturing sectors such as steel, glassware, and machinery. Female labor force participation rates in West Virginia rose nearly 9% between 1970 and 1976, although they still remained the lowest in the country (Table 1).

During the 1980s, it is estimated that 40,000 manufacturing jobs and 30,000 mining jobs were lost in West Virginia. Most of these jobs disappeared during the 1979-1983 recession which cost the state approximately 10% of its jobs (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 1989). These jobs vanished for several reasons. One explanation for this tremendous job loss suggests that the backwardness and uneven development in some parts of Appalachia are outcomes of the "colonial model" of economic development (Lewis and Knipe, 1978; Nyden, 1979; Simon, 1979; Walls, 1978). Under this model, capital investment by absentee owners has contributed to further impoverishment and dependency among the region's population.

Industrial restructuring has also brought mechanization of production in the coal mining sector. Specifically, new longwall mining machines have replaced human labor in the excavation of underground coal seams. Widespread adoption of this technique has created new unemployment in coal mining counties with some counties suffering tremendous job losses and economic decline (Dorsey, 1987; Widner, 1990).

The loss of manufacturing and mining jobs has been somewhat offset by the increase in service jobs (Hanham and Spiker, 1990). These service jobs, however, are oftentimes lower paid, part-time, and nonunionized with no pension plan or health insurance. For example, the average annual base salaries of the lost manufacturing and mining jobs was $24,000 and $36,000 respectively, while the new service jobs pay less
than $12,000 on the average (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 1989). These wage differentials are linked to the fact that the service sector employs more women than men.

Industrial restructuring and hard economic times have forced more women into the national workforce than ever before. Many of these women have never worked outside the home, but due to economic circumstances, a second income is needed. Figure 1 illustrates the most recent employment trends for women in West Virginia compared to women at the national level. Between 1988 and 1990, the number of payroll jobs held by women in West Virginia increased by 23,000, from 247,100 to 270,400 (West Virginia Economic Summary, 1991). These figures represent an increase from 40.5% to 43.1% (Fig. 1). Although the West Virginia ratios are smaller than national ratios, they are quickly catching up and should equal the latter by the end of the 20th century.

The breakdown of women's employment by major industry also reveals some interesting differences between women in West Virginia and the United States (Fig. 2). In retail trade, services and government sectors, West Virginia women are almost equal to their national counterparts. The 23.3% of total manufacturing jobs held by women, however, is

![Fig. 1. Percentages of Payroll Jobs Held by Women. Source: West Virginia Economic Summary.](image-url)
significantly smaller than the national figure of 33%. In addition, the national percentage of mining jobs held by women is more than double that of West Virginia. Overall, those West Virginia industries with high-paid, blue collar jobs, i.e., mining, manufacturing, construction, transportation and utilities, employ proportionately less women than men, while lower-paid, service sector jobs employ proportionately more women than men.

Uneven economic development and employment trends in the state are manifested differently in rural and urban areas. The majority of new jobs, especially in the service sector, are concentrated in urban areas and generally do not affect the rural counties. This is exacerbated by the fact that, as late as 1950, 72% of West Virginia’s population lived in rural areas (Simon, 1979). In 1988, nearly 64% of the state’s population was rural (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 1990). According to Couto (1988), the post-industrial era in Appalachia has brought new forms of poverty, new forms of gender-related inequality, and exacerbated differences among regions and between rural and urban areas.

In sum, the economic history of West Virginia cannot be accurately told without analyzing the major contributions of women. In the household and the workplace, women have added significantly to economic development. Their paid labor is an extension of the unpaid work they do in the domestic sphere. In addition, their work is a reflection of the
overall gender division of labor whereby occupational segregation, low labor force participation, and minimal wages are widespread.

**Women’s Homework in West Virginia.** Homework as an alternative means of generating income is closely linked to deindustrialization in West Virginia (Oberhauser, 1992). The loss of male dominated manufacturing and mining jobs in West Virginia, combined with limited job opportunities in the service sector, have put increasing economic pressure on many West Virginia households. In this context, homework becomes a viable means to generate income. The types and role of women’s homework in domestic economies are analyzed below, drawing from observations and interactive interviews with women homeworkers in both rural and urban West Virginia.4

Homework in West Virginia is relatively common and produces a wide variety of goods. Both monetary and barter exchange is practiced in marketing these goods. This discussion divides homework activities into four categories, recognizing that some categories overlap (Fig. 3). The

![Fig. 3. A Typology and Examples of Women’s Homework in West Virginia.](image-url)
typology outlines two broad categories as agricultural or farm-based and household or domestic-based homework, both of which include informal and formal sector activities. Services and commodities are two other categories used to identify homework activities.

Agricultural-based homework includes the production of services and commodities for barter or monetary exchange. Examples of service activities include the rental or lease of land, farm buildings, and machinery in exchange for money or in-kind payments. These activities are fairly widespread and provide an effective way of earning money from otherwise underutilized property. Agricultural homework also includes the production of commodities such as garden produce, livestock for sale as meat, and animals for sale as pets or farm animals, e.g., dogs, rabbits and horses. Markets for these goods are often family, friends or neighbors. These goods are also sold in roadside stands, fairs or urban farm markets.

In addition to agricultural-based homework is household or domestic-based homework, again in the form of services and commodities (Fig. 3). These activities are done directly in the home and incorporate domestic skills and traditional roles of women. Domestic-based services which are commonly observed in West Virginia are hair styling, cleaning, and child care. These activities represent traditional female skills and thus serve as the most common means of generating additional income for both rural and urban women. Prostitution is less common among West Virginia women, yet it is sometimes a last resort for women who have no other means of earning money. One single mother interviewed in southern West Virginia engaged in prostitution in order to earn money to feed and clothe her children. The fourth category in the typology is domestic production of commodities (Fig. 3). Field investigations revealed several different kinds of household commodities such as baked goods, crafts, refinished furniture, and knitwear. These activities represent both the formal and informal sectors depending on whether or not the earnings are declared for tax purposes. Markets for these goods are found through women's informal networks as well as more formal outlets, e.g., catalog companies, commercial retail stores, and specialty shops.

Homework is especially relevant in the context of West Virginia industrial restructuring and economic decline in the past two decades. In several households involved in the study, either the man or woman had lost his or her job and homework provided necessary resources for
household expenses. One woman lost her job as a result of restructuring in a chemical plant in the Charleston area. Her husband was also unemployed. This couple relied partly on unemployment insurance, but also on income generated from raising and selling Rottweiler dogs and show horses. In addition, former coal company towns in both northern and southern West Virginia have been devastated by the closings of mines, with little hope of them being replaced by either manufacturing or service sector jobs. Overall, people in these areas rely heavily on homework activities to generate income during this most recent period of industrial restructuring.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT. In summary, this paper provides insight to a relatively neglected area in industrial geography. By focusing on women and industrial change, while appreciating the structures within which they operate, this paper contributes to the contemporary empirical and theoretical work in gender and industrial geography. A brief survey of the literature on gender and industrial restructuring serves as a framework for the general analysis of women and homework. In addition, the types and contribution of women’s homework to household incomes is analyzed in relation to the industrial restructuring which has occurred in West Virginia during the last two decades. Finally, this paper outlines the significance of women’s homework for regional development in Appalachia and West Virginia in particular.

Women have always played an important role in Appalachia’s economic development. Recognizing and supporting their income-generating activities must be an important component of regional development (Weiss, 1990). Regional development strategies often overlook the role of household income-generating activities and instead focus on aggregate employment data and work in the formal wage sector. Knowing how women are coping at the household level will aid the region’s growing unemployed and impoverished citizens. In particular, assessing women’s economic strategies during periods of industrial restructuring will provide vital information that could be used to build community and county programs in economically depressed areas of West Virginia. These might include training programs, community support networks, or facilities where women could work and market their goods. Enhancing women’s income-earning capacity and addressing the constraints placed
on women in periods of restructuring should be important components of both feminist academic research and regional policy formulation.

NOTES

1 The author would like to thank three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft and to Hope Dennis for her assistance with the graphics. This study was partially supported by the West Virginia University Extension Service and the Center for Women’s Studies.

2 West Virginia was chosen as a case study for this research for several reasons. It is the only state which lies entirely within the Appalachian region. In addition, its economic and social background typify much of the region with a history of coal mining, subsistence farming, and heavy manufacturing.

3 Class and race must not be excluded from this discussion of women’s work. Higher class women, mostly white, employed domestic laborers to do their household duties. Black women were overwhelmingly concentrated in household domestic services and other personal services (Pudup, 1990a).

4 Women in rural areas of West Virginia have fewer job opportunities than women in urban areas, thus are more likely to engage in homework activities. However, these rural women who engage in homework have less access to markets than urban women. These differences are reflected in the production and market value of goods and services produced by rural and urban women.

LITERATURE CITED


U.S. Census of Population, 1900 & 1930.


