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Organizing for Social Change Through Cooperative Action: The [Dis]Empowering Dimensions of Women's Communication

The present article investigates a communication, education, and training intervention program intended to initiate a sense of empowerment among women dairy farmers in India. A conceptualization of communication and empowerment is offered. The empowering and disempowering dimensions of women's communication are highlighted through the participants' own words and experiences. Our analysis of the communicative dimensions of women's empowerment yields 3 important insights. First, women's empowerment is displayed through different forms of communication and feminist action, particularly when women organize to accomplish social change within their families and communities. Second, empowerment is embedded in democratic practices, especially when women discuss issues and make decisions that improve their quality of life. Third, paradox and contradiction are an important part of the empowerment process.

India's National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) launched the Cooperative Development (CD) program in 1988-89 to create stronger and more viable dairy cooperatives that are responsive to the needs of its 8 million members. The CD program grew out of NDDB's dissatisfaction with the operation of about half of India's dairy cooperative enterprises, which harbor such problems as inefficiency, politicization, corruption, and economic nonviability (NDDB, 1991; Wayangankar, 1994). During the decade since its inception, the CD program has endeavored to strengthen village-level dairy cooperative societies in India through member education and leadership training. Although a vast majority of dairy cooperative members in India are men, the CD program concentrates its educational activities on women dairy farmers. It does so by encouraging them to deliver milk to the collection point, to

obtain the milk payment themselves, and to enroll as members of the dairy cooperative. The justification for focusing educational efforts on women is linked to the reality of who performs most of the day-to-day activities. Although some 85 percent of the daily dairy tasks associated with dairying are carried out by women, they constitute only 16 percent of the total membership in India's dairy cooperatives (Philip, 1994; Wayangankar, 1994). Also, the money that dairy farmers receive from milk sales is generally controlled by men, who are usually the official members of the village-level dairy cooperative society (DCS) and make up most of the elected officers at the village, district, state, and national levels. Because women in India perform most of the dairying work, they should be the members and the leaders of their cooperative societies (EDA Rural Systems, 1996; Philip, 1994). The patriarchal dominance of Indian dairy cooperatives results from the prevalence of traditional Indian rural values and cultural norms (Chen, Mitra, Athreya, Dholakia, Law, & Rao, 1986; Sen & Grown, 1987; Sharma, 1991–92; Wayangankar, 1994). The social and economic development of some 8 million farmers (and their families), organized in about 70,000 village-level dairy cooperatives, cannot fully occur until women farmers assume their legitimate role in these grassroots cooperatives (Chen, Miytra, Athreya, Dholakia, Law, & Rao, 1986; EDA Rural Systems, 1996).

The present research study investigates a communication, education, and training intervention program intended to spark women's empowerment by encouraging self-development activities and cooperative action. We first explain our conceptualization of empowerment and offer insights into the process of empowering women through cooperative efforts. We then present the methodology used in this study and describe the NDDB's Cooperative Development program for women. Next, the communicative dimensions of women's empowerment and disempowerment are characterized through the participants' own words, stories, and experiences. Finally, we draw insights about theory and praxis regarding how empowerment and disempowerment occurs through communication.

Communication and Empowerment

When people collaborate to create their own social rules, opportunities for individual and collective empowerment can emerge. Although there are different ways to conceptualize empowerment (see e.g., Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Blau & Alba, 1982; Conger, 1989; Conger & Kanugo, 1988; Pacanowsky, 1988; Shehabuddin, 1992; Vogt & Murrell, 1990), we advocate the view that empowerment is a communicative process. Human interaction is necessary for empowerment to occur. Once indi-

viduals recognize their abilities to achieve desired ends, they must act in ways to reach those ends. As Albrecht (1988) concludes: "This [empowerment] is fundamentally an interactional process, where a sense of personal control results from believing it is one's communication behavior that can produce a desired impact on others" (p. 380). The centrality of communication to the empowerment process has also been noted by Craig (1994) and Deetz (1994) who claim that specific dimensions of empowerment are revealed when human decisions or actions are negotiated, coordinated, and codetermined.

A number of communication scholars define and discuss the importance of empowerment (Albrecht, 1988; Bormann, 1988; Bullis, 1993; Buzzanell, 1994; Chiles & Zorn, 1995; Cooks & Hale, 1992; Craig, 1994; Deetz, 1994; Mumby, 1993; Novek, 1992; Pacanowsky, 1988; Sheridan, 1988; Trethewey, 1997). Yet, we still know relatively little about how the empowerment process unfolds and how it is manifest through specific action. In the community psychology literature empowerment is described as an interactional process that allows people to gain mastery over issues of concern to them (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 1995), and empowerment requires an active engagement of one's community (Zimmerman et al., 1992). Recent work has concentrated on the behavioral component of empowerment (Fawcett et al., 1995; Israel et al., 1994; Kroeker, 1995; Paulhus, 1983; Rappaport, 1987, 1995; Rich et al., 1995; Spreitzer, 1995; Zimmerman, 1990, 1995). Empowering behavior refers to the specific actions a person takes to exercise influence on the sociopolitical environment through participation in community organizations and activities.

The interactive dimension of empowerment has been examined in diverse disciplines, including feminist studies (Young, 1994), urban planning (Wilson, 1996), organizational studies (Cheney, 1995; Mumby, 1997; Papa, Auwal, & Singhal, 1995, 1997), and development communication (Jacobson, 1994; Rahim, 1994; Thomas, 1994; White, 1994). Kroeker (1995) argues that collective action increases the potential of overcoming poverty because when people work together they can carry out communal projects, pursue resources, and overcome dependence on government assistance. Furthermore, the process of organizing themselves (talking together, networking, working together on issues, sharing responsibilities, etc.) enhances psychological empowerment and facilitates community empowerment (Alinsky, 1946; Fals Borda, 1968; Jacob, 1991; Young, 1994).

The communication that occurs in democratically organized cooperatives can empower participants who make decisions, share power, and devise methods of work and means of distributing surplus capital (Harrison, 1994). According to Whyte and Whyte (1991), worker-owned and worker-managed co-ops represent attempts to transcend typical

bureaucratic constraints, make economic control and access to policy formation available to all members, and overcome the usual division between labor and capital. Furthermore, the political skills associated with the democratic process in cooperative dairy farming can be transferred to other village activities, social relationships, and institutions (Bricker-Jenkins, 1992). For women in India socialized to accept directives from men, the opportunity to maintain egalitarian work relationships within a cooperative structure can be a transformative experience (Wayangankar, Rogers, Rao, & Shefner-Rogers, 1995; also see Eisenberg, 1994). As Mumby (1997, p. 345) observes, organizations are “principal sites of meaning and identity formation where relations of autonomy and dependence, power and resistance, are continuously negotiated amongst competing interest groups.” Mumby (1997) draws our attention to the notion of hegemony “as embodying simultaneously (and in a tension-filled and contradictory manner) the dynamic of power and resistance” (p. 346). For example, Boyd (1999) observed that women dairy farmers in Kolhapur, India who belong to thrift groups are “on the one hand, participating in an organization deemed ‘acceptable’ because it includes only women and is sanctioned by their husbands. On the other hand, they see their thrift group involvement as a giant step outside of women’s limitations” (pp. 32–33).

Any study of empowerment has to include the study of power and resistance. For example, Mumby (1997) sees power as a productive, disciplinary, and strategic phenomenon with no specific center (e.g., the king, or capitalism). Power is dispersed widely and unevenly; it is neither simply prohibitive nor productive, but simultaneously enables and constrains human thought and action (Mumby, 1997). In addition, scholars such as Bell and Forbes (1994), De Certeau (1984), Jenkins (1988), Jermier, Knights, and Nord (1994), Knights and Vurdubakis (1994), Mumby (1997), Papa, Auwal, and Singhal (1995, 1997), and Trethewey (1994) view resistance as a dynamic element of organizing processes that can lead to empowerment for organizational members. Indeed, a number of scholars have encouraged examining discursive practices of organizational members as they resist and subvert the dominant social order (e.g., Bell & Forbes, 1994; Benson, 1992; Burrell, 1993; Collinson, 1994; Jenkins, 1988; Jermier et al., 1994; Lamphere, 1985; Maguire & Mohtar, 1994; Mumby, 1997). Thus, the enactment of resistance can be particularly interesting to explore in its own right.

Boyd’s (1999) study of women dairy farmers in Kolhapur, India, exemplifies how women resist dominant social forces in ways that are both enabling and constraining. Boyd interviewed women who talked about how their participation in a thrift cooperative provided opportunities for economic and social progress. Their active participation occurs in spite of their husbands’ beliefs that they should not “cross the line” by

becoming too involved in community activities. However, many of the women also recognized that their progress is tied to men supporting their actions. So, their resistance must be carefully negotiated to not engender backlash from men.

Democratically organized cooperatives can provide empowerment opportunities for members through communicative actions such as decision making, negotiation, and dialogue. Cheney et al. (1998) characterize workplace democracy as “referring to those principles and practices designed to engage and ‘represent’ (in the multiple senses of the term) as many relevant individuals and groups as possible in the formulation, execution, and modification of work-related activities” (p. 39). Not only is it important to consider what practices count as democratic, but also what the meanings of democracy are for members. As Cheney et al. (1998) explain, “ideas about what democracy *is* can vary substantially over time in a particular society (or even in a specific organization), just as they can and do across cultures and settings at the same moment” (p. 37).

Social learning through communicative interaction has also been associated with empowerment processes at the individual, organizational, and community levels (Argyris, 1993; Bandura, 1986; Forester, 1993; Friedman, 1987; Habermas, 1984; Healey, 1992; Innes, 1995; Morrow & Torres, 1995; Schon, 1983). Social learning researchers focus on dialogue as a means to individual and group empowerment (Forester, 1989). Dialogue is the route to self-reflection, self-knowledge, and liberation from disempowering beliefs. It is also the route to mutual learning, acceptance of diversity, trust, and understanding (Habermas, 1984; Gronemeyer, 1993). Eisenberg (1994) notes that when dialogue is cultivated in democratic organizations, people feel validated in speaking from personal experience because they are valued by their listeners. Finally, communicative action can lead to emancipatory knowledge that frees groups from the hegemonic values embedded in language (Healey, 1992; Innes, 1995).

Combining the ideals from participatory democracy, critical self-reflection, and collective action, Young (1994) advances a perspective on empowerment that focuses on how dialogue can help the powerless to help themselves:

Empowerment is a process in which individual, relatively powerless persons engage in dialogue with each other and thereby come to understand the social sources of their powerlessness and see the possibility of acting collectively to change their social environment. In this process each participant is personally empowered, undergoes some personal transformation, but in the context of a reciprocal aiding of others in doing so, in order that together they might be empowered to engage in effective collective action. (p. 50)

Following the precedent set by Young (1994) and others in allied fields (i.e. community psychology, feminist and urban studies, etc.), this study attempts to add to the body of literature that describes and evaluates the communicative dimensions of the empowerment process for those interested in organizing for social change.

Feminist Perspectives on Empowerment

Through participating in cooperatives, women dairy farmers can discover pathways to empowerment. The information that women receive and the discussions held during the Cooperative Development (CD) program can spark additional ideas and prompt behaviors that increase women's self-efficacy at home and in other social relationships. These changes among women are consistent in many ways with a range of different feminist perspectives (e.g., liberal, marxist, cultural-dualist, etc.; Buzzanell, 1994; Natalie, Papa, & Graham, 1994). The starting point for most feminist thought is recognizing that patriarchy exists and that men's domination over women must end for women to experience meaningful empowerment (Buzzanell, 1994; Calas & Smircich, 1992). The paths to empowerment differ, depending on the feminist stance taken (Buzzanell, 1994; Donovan, 1985; Jaggard, 1983; Langston, 1988; Shehabuddin, 1992; Tong, 1989).

Feminist scholarship includes rich and complex theoretical perspectives that encompass broad questions of nationalism, state intervention, and control, and the intersections of multiple oppressions (such as race, class, gender, and sexuality) in the lives of women (Boyd, 1999). We wish to highlight this viewpoint because there is the danger of constructing women discursively as a homogenous group (see Boyd, 1999; Morgan, 1984). Standpoint feminism (Buzzanell, 1994) directly addresses these concerns by arguing that women, like men, have a variety of experiences and thus have different "standpoints," that is, perceptions or opinions, from which to view the world. Standpoint feminism has come lately to consider a variety of excluded or marginalized groups and what can be learned about the reform of society from their multiple viewpoints (Bullis & Bach, 1996; Cheney et al., 1998). Standpoint feminism highlights the special understandings of the social order held by comparatively disempowered individuals and groups (Buzzanell, 1994; Cheney et al., 1998).

Buzzanell (1994) argues that three primary themes characterize feminist organizing processes: cooperative enactment, integrative thinking, and connectedness. The theme of cooperative enactment emphasizes the importance of working together to reach individual and collective goals rather than competing against one another. In particular, women emphasize a cooperative ethic by engaging in dialogue to coordinate their efforts in pursuit of common goals.

The theme of integrative thinking centers on the importance of context in evaluating all potential choices and actions. For example, while a given action (e.g., small business development) can bring about a specific intended effect (e.g., increased income), feminists think in an integrated way by considering how specific actions can produce direct and indirect effects. As Buzzanell (1994) explains, when a woman thinks integratively, she considers how a given action will influence her life and the lives of her family members. She may also be concerned with how a new form of behavior (e.g., assertiveness) will contribute to power imbalances in important relationships. Additionally, she may consider the impact of her actions (e.g., purchasing additional buffaloes) on the environment.

The feminist theme of connectedness refers to attempts to integrate the mind, body, and emotions in making sense of the world around us (Buzzanell, 1994). Humans are holistic beings not limited to displays of rationality; rather, there is an emotional side to all of us. Women can thrive in environments where they have opportunities to connect with and nurture others on the path to collective success.

Certain feminist perspectives on empowerment advocate that women display a form of autonomous action that differs from traditional autonomy. For instance, the feminine ethic of care refers to developing a sense of autonomy in the context of caring and supportive relationships (Young, 1994). A woman's personal empowerment can perhaps be viewed, in part, through the lens of power through connection, that is, through the establishment of mutually empathic and empowering relationships (Lerner, 1993; Surrey, 1991).

Many feminists rightly emphasize that women should not be viewed as passive victims of male oppression; rather, they are active agents constituted by and reflective of their social and cultural contexts (Bartky, 1988; Boyd, 1999; Deveaux, 1994; Lerner, 1993; Sawicki, 1991). Although not related singularly to feminist perspectives, women can display "discursive consciousness" by describing not only their social conditions, but the conditions of their own actions (Giddens, 1984).

Women's empowerment transcends consciousness by including specific behaviors that uplift them from oppression. The empowered woman may resist discourses and practices that subordinate her to men (Hekman, 1990), institutions, or social forces (Ferguson, 1984; Hekman, 1990; Okely, 1991; Oliver, 1991; Sawicki, 1991). She can work cooperatively with other women to improve the health care services that are provided in remote, rural towns (Agnew, 1997). Also centrally important to women's empowerment is consciousness-raising talk (Hayden, 1997). Frye (1993, p. 107) refers to women "hearing each other into speech." By this term, he means speaking unspoken facts and feelings. By talking together and sharing experiences, new webs of meaning can be generated.

The power to give voice to one's aspiration to be heard is not so much the removal of an external impediment as it is the beginning of internal empowerment (Held, 1993). There are, however, many internal and external impediments that can potentially limit women's empowerment. Here, Gramsci's (1971) views on hegemony are particularly informative. Gramsci views hegemony as a process of struggle that embodies, simultaneously, processes of domination and resistance. For example, the practice of *purdah* (veiling) in many parts of the world demonstrates how women struggle with enabling and constraining forces in attempts to empower themselves. While the system of *purdah* often reflects a patriarchal code that keeps women within the domestic domain, it may also imply honor for some women. Thus, *purdah* can empower women by helping them form a sense of community through the unifying principle of honor, while disempowering them by confining them to their home (Boyd, 1999; Mohanty, 1997).

A more subtle and oblique form of women's disempowerment is unreciprocated emotional labor, which is rooted in the subjective and deeply interiorized effects of women upon themselves. For instance, women can pressure one another to provide emotional care for their family members yet not protest that it is not reciprocated (Bartky, 1991). On the other hand, consistent with Gramsci's perspective on hegemonic processes, many women derive an intense feeling of satisfaction by caring for others. Thus, the key to understanding women's empowerment and disempowerment is to carefully assess the meanings they give to their specific actions and the contexts within which these meanings are situated.

Indian feminist movements have a rich and complex history (Kumar, 1993). For instance, some Indian feminists do not articulate a consciousness of patriarchal domination (Gandhi & Shah, 1992). This stance may be justified, because women in India struggle not only against men but against class, caste, and ethnic oppression as peasants, tribals, and untouchables. Other Indian feminists articulate a consciousness of patriarchal domination that is wrapped up in oppression perpetuated by modernity (Sangari & Vaid, 1989). For example, the increased availability of new sex-determination techniques such as amniocentesis have encouraged practices such as female feticide (Patel, 1989). In India, women dairy farmers face particular barriers to their individual and collective empowerment. Many Indian women experience more severe economic disadvantages than Western women. In addition, in many regions, Indian women must endure a lack of education, child marriages, and a prohibition against widow remarriage. Dowry deaths are also recognized as a significant problem. India's feminist leaders also report severe problems with violence against women, custodial rape, and feticide (aborting female fetuses; Agnew, 1997).

Study Goals

As the preceding discussion suggests, women's empowerment manifests itself in different ways and can be explained from a number of different conceptual and theoretical perspectives. By focusing on the experiences, stories, accounts, and explanations of women dairy farmers, we addressed four research questions. First, in what ways is women's empowerment expressed through interaction behavior? Second, are the empowering dimensions of women's communication linked to aspects of feminist ideology (e.g., expressions of women's unity and organizing activities)? Third, is women's empowerment embedded in the democratic practices of cooperation and cooperative governance? Fourth, in what ways are women disempowered through communication?

Methods of Analysis and Interpretation

Using the empowerment framework described above as our guide, we designed a survey questionnaire and an in-depth interview protocol for women and men dairy farmers in India. Here we only draw upon the qualitative data that was collected in the Kolhapur and Jaipur District Milk Unions, where women dairy farmers participated in the education and training activities of the CD program.

The present analysis is based on various types of surveys and interviews administered from June through August of 1996. First, each of our 240 survey respondents (20 women dairy farmers from each of 12 villages in 2 districts) was asked three open-ended questions focusing on distinctive aspects of women's empowerment, including the following: "In the past several months, what decision made within your family has affected you the most and who made that decision?" Second, we conducted 46 in-depth interviews, each lasting over an hour, with women dairy farmers (22 from Kolhapur and 24 from Jaipur). A representative question included: "Since your participation in the CD program, have there been any changes in the amount of help you receive from family members in performing household work or dairying activities?" Third, 11 focus group interviews were conducted with women dairy farmers (5 groups from Kolhapur and 6 groups from Jaipur). Seventy-eight women participated in the focus group discussions (group size ranged from 5 to 9 participants). These focus groups used a similar interview protocol as the individual in-depth interviews. Finally, 24 in-depth interviews were conducted with male dairy farmers (2 from each of the 12 villages identified earlier) to gain insight into their perspectives on the extent to which women had become empowered since their participation in the CD program.

In summary, our data set included a total of 388 respondents. Three-

hundred-sixty-four of the respondents were women dairy farmers from 12 villages in India. Of these, 240 responded to a detailed survey questionnaire that included three open-ended questions. Only responses to open-ended questions were examined for this study. Forty-six of the 364 women participated in individual in-depth interviews, and 78 participated in one of 11 focus-group interviews.² Finally, 24 men participated in individual in-depth interviews.

The 12 villages in which the surveys and interviews were conducted were selected based on several criteria. First, the village had an active Dairy Cooperative Society (DCS). Second, we considered only villages in which a CD program had been conducted between July 1994 and June 1995 (allowing sufficient time for empowerment effects to surface). Third, the village had an active women's club as an outcome of the women's CD training. Fourth, the village DCS had some women members. Of the 26 villages in the Kolhapur Milk Union that met these four criteria, we randomly selected six villages. Of the 22 villages in the Jaipur Milk Union that met these four criteria, we randomly selected six villages.

Five interviewers (four women and one man) were selected in each region (Kolhapur and Jaipur). Each had earned a graduate degree in a social science discipline, was fluent in the local language (Marathi in Kolhapur and Rajasthani in Jaipur), had previous exposure to dairy farmers and some previous survey interview experience. These interviewers were trained in a 5-day workshop conducted by one of the present authors. The workshop centered on familiarization with the research instruments (survey questionnaire, in-depth interview protocol, focus group interview), the appropriate way to ask questions (including trial runs and role plays), and response recording, note taking, and coding.

The three open-ended responses in the 240 survey questionnaires were recorded by hand and were subsequently translated and transcribed by the present authors. All in-depth interviews and focus group interviews were audiotaped and were translated and transcribed from either Marathi or Rajasthani to English. A retired professor of dairy development in India, fluent in both Marathi and English, transcribed the Kolhapur interviews. A similarly qualified person translated and transcribed the Jaipur interviews.

The present analysis was based on our examination of various interview transcripts. While reviewing these transcripts, we focused on stories, accounts, and responses that gave us insight into the empowering and disempowering dimensions of women's communication. Before proceeding with our analysis, we describe the nature of the CD program that women dairy farmers experienced.

Cooperative Development Programs for Women's Empowerment

The CD program is carried out by 135 five-member core training teams who work in 85 district milk union cooperatives in India. Each CD team includes two female and three male instructors. A CD team spends approximately 50 person days in each village-level DCS conducting a village analysis and offering training sessions for male and female members of the cooperative. Women dairy farmers who are not members of the cooperative are also offered training and encouraged to enroll. The team organizes a women's club (*mahila mandal*) and a youth club and performs follow-up activities to ensure that new members officially enroll in the cooperative, that more milk is poured to the cooperative (rather than to private vendors), and that cattle feed is purchased and fodder locally grown to increase milk yields and milk quality.

The CD program also addresses social norms in India that restrict women's empowerment opportunities. For example, in many of the villages targeted by CD programs, girls are married off at an early age. Their primary purpose is to have male children, care for their husbands' needs, perform household work and dairying activities, and defer to their husbands and mothers-in-law. Many women are expected to cover their heads and faces (*purdah*) in the presence of men and to not speak directly to men. Whereas breaking these patriarchal norms is very difficult, the CD program has been able to overcome some of this resistance (as we demonstrate later).

The CD training team conducts women's education meetings in a way that emphasizes group discussion, questions and answers, and group singing. Lectures are also offered in which women are informed that although they represent 50 percent of the population, they perform 70 percent of the hourly work, earn 10 percent of the national income, and own only 1 percent of the resources. They are told that because women are the primary producers of milk, the membership in the DCS should be in their names. They are encouraged to learn how the DCS operates because such knowledge is power.

CD trainers encourage women to get elected to the management committees of their DCS, the district milk union, and the state dairy cooperative federation. These experiences increase their involvement in the decision-making activities of their cooperative and offer opportunities for personal and social empowerment. Finally, the CD instructors attempt to persuade the women to support each other in dairying and in other day-to-day activities. As one woman CD trainer illustrated: "Women acting in solidarity (represented by a raised clenched fist) have power that can not be achieved by one woman alone (symbolized by one finger held aloft)."

The Cooperative Enactment of Women's [Dis]empowerment

Our data revealed that the NDDDB's Cooperative Development (CD) program has impacted women's empowerment in a variety of meaningful ways.

Empowerment as an Interactional Process

RQ 1: In what ways is women's empowerment expressed through interaction behavior?

Empowerment can be displayed through different types of interaction and in different relational contexts. Empowering dimensions can be parsimoniously grouped on the basis of three different contexts: (a) improvements in personal and family health care via health care contact, (b) changes in family decision-making and task allocation prompted by information received in the CD program, and (c) altered communicative dynamics stemming from economic empowerment.

Health Communication. In 168 of the 286 individual interviews with women dairy farmers, specific examples were given concerning improved health care. These women described the information they received from CD trainers about health care and offered evidence of how their empowerment was displayed interactively in their increased interaction with physicians. For example, Anjali Patil from Devthane village explained:

I am more careful now about personal hygiene. I do not use stale food and I use more green vegetables. Children are now given enough milk. I keep the environment clean and I consult with the doctor more than before. Earlier we tried homemade medical remedies. Now we consult the doctor.

Ujwala Chowgule, a dairy farmer from Kavethe-Guland village, offered similar comments: "I now avoid traditional medicines and unscientific treatment of diseases. We know that nutrition is important and we keep our place clean to avoid infection. We now also consult a doctor, tell him symptoms, and listen to his advice."

Family Decision-Making and Task Allocation. One important point emphasized by the CD program trainers is that women should play a larger role in decision making related to dairying, as well as in family and personal activities. Another point of emphasis is to encourage greater family involvement in dairying activities and household work to reduce the work burden on women. Some 194 of 286 women dairy farmers reported that the CD program has motivated them to make more individual-level personal decisions. One representative comment was offered by Tulsabai Katala of Katalawadi village: "I get the profit and income by pouring milk to the DCS. I can spend that money as I wish. I got this new decision-making power in me by undergoing the CD program." Parvati Patil, a farmer from the same village, also offered examples of

decisions she made herself: “I decided to increase milk production. To achieve this goal, I decided to take my animal for artificial insemination. Simultaneously, I decided to improve the quality of the milk. Also, my decision to begin to save money was crucial.”

These examples of personal decision-making are more remarkable when considered against the backdrop of male dominance in India’s rural villages. Men are socialized to expect obedience from women and to retain the sole right to make important decisions within the family. Clearly, involvement in the CD program has given some women the confidence and power to make decisions they perceive to be in the best interests of their dairying enterprise and their families.

Making individual decisions is one way to operationalize empowerment for women. Increasing her degree of involvement in family decision-making is another. For example, 108 of our 286 interviewees reported a change from little or no involvement in family decision-making to joint decision-making with their spouse. Anjali Patil from Devthane village explained:

Earlier my husband did not discuss things with me. Now my husband consults with me so I discuss with him when we have to decide something. It is always a joint decision. For example, with family planning we decided together that only two children can best be reared and brought up properly. Whenever something is to be solved or decided, my husband and I now discuss between the two of us and then come to a decision.

Fourteen of the 24 men we interviewed also indicated that the CD program had prompted a change in how family decisions were made. For example, Vasant Patil from Devthane village said: “We now discuss more in the family about doing something. Decisions should only be taken after discussion and after knowing each other’s opinion.” Similarly, Prakash Bhendawade from Kavethe-Guland village stated: “Now I discuss with her. Earlier I used to make all the decisions. Now my wife and I both discuss the matter and take the decision jointly.”

Given the heavy workload most rural women bear in India, an increase in family members’ participation in performing dairying activities and household tasks is an important dimension of empowerment. Some 84 of 286 women dairy farmers indicated that they received more assistance from their children and their husband in performing dairying activities and household work. For example, women from Devthane village echoed similar sentiments. Ranjana Patil explained: “I am getting more help from other family members in my household work.” Indubai Shevre reported: “We all (family members) started working together.” Bebitai Mane revealed: “I am more satisfied than before. My husband and my children now help in household work. I’ve noticed that our family fights are reduced.” Importantly, each of these women has

created within her home a commitment to cooperative enactment by encouraging family members to work collectively toward common goals. These comments offer evidence of how empowerment is displayed through interaction (Albrecht, 1988; Chiles & Zorn, 1995; Craig, 1994; Deetz, 1994).

Communicative Dynamics of Economic Empowerment. Some 224 of 286 women dairy farmers reported an increase in dairying income linked to their participation in the CD program and through their membership in the local DCS. This finding provides clear evidence of how important communication is to the empowerment process. Specifically, CD trainers supplied information to women dairy farmers that could help them increase their milk yields. The women who participated in the CD program also collaborated with one another by sharing their dairying experiences and techniques so each cooperative member could benefit from the collective knowledge of the group. This information was potentially empowering because it could be used to accomplish personal and collective goals (e.g., increased dairy income). One representative comment came from Vasanti Shevre, a women dairy farmer from Devthane village: "I improved the quality and the quantity of my milk production because of the training program information and the dairying techniques that cooperative members shared with me. All these things ultimately resulted in increasing my dairying income." Vimla Patil, a woman dairy farmer from Kavethe Guland village, also reported an increase in dairying income when stating: "I have improved the quality of my milk, therefore, my income has increased. Now there is regularity in my life because I am able to save money. My standard of living has improved."

The CD training program offers information pertinent to dairying during a limited time frame (a few days). Membership in a dairy cooperative society, however, offers opportunities for continued learning for interested women. Mumtaz from village Kirve acknowledged the importance of the information she received after joining the dairy cooperative society.

My economic status increased after I started supplying milk to the DCS. I decided to use the technical inputs and facilities offered by the DCS for increasing my milk production. Based on their recommendations I took a decision to buy more buffaloes and take extra care of hygiene and cleanliness of buffaloes. I learned about saving money from member meetings and I also learned how to deposit and withdraw money from a bank.

A trainer in Jaipur, Dr. Satsangi, recalled a story that showed how women can learn interactively from one another in ways that increase milk production in their cattle. Two women dairy farmers in a CD training village started using cattle feed provided by the milk union to increase milk yields. When one woman dairy farmer's cow did not take

the new feed, she voiced her concerns to her friend. Her friend responded:

I had problems too. Then I started mixing a little of the new cattle feed with her regular green fodder. Then she took it. I slowly added a little more of the new feed each day until she was eating all of the recommended amount.

Clearly, the CD program has been effective in helping many women dairy farmers to increase their incomes through increasing the yield and quality of their cattle's milk. Women also learn from one another by sharing dairying techniques that they have learned through years of experience. The empowerment that many women dairy farmers have experienced, however, is not limited to an increase in earnings. Through increasing their income, women have also experienced empowerment through reducing their dependence on their husbands. Teeja Devi, of Ramsinghpura, observed: "Earlier we were dependent on men but now we can do a lot of work ourselves. Women can do a lot if they have money in their hands." Sumitra Devi, also of Ramsinghpura, concurs: "Earlier women were dependent on men, but now they have become independent as they have started earning money. The women who are unemployed are still dependent on men." Sona, of Mamtori-Kalan, also recognized the link between money and control: "Earlier men have complete control, but now the women have money in their hands and their control has decreased. We can spend money on the education of our children and on medicine." Tara, a dairy farmer from Sardarpura, provided us with the most powerful account of the changes that can occur once a woman empowers herself economically:

Now women go out of the house and do work so the control of men has been decreased. The milk payment is in the women's hands, they don't have to ask for it so the economic control has been reduced. Earlier the men used to beat the women after being drunk but now the women have become aware of their rights so no more beatings.

The preceding statements show how economic empowerment impacts the communication dynamics within families. Women are less dependent on men and they can exhibit greater control in their personal lives when they earn money. Of course, the money earned by women dairy farmers typically benefits the entire family. This fact, however, does not negate the important shift in family power that can occur when women earn money. As Lerner (1993) observed, women's empowerment requires an economic alternative for survival other than marriage.

Women's Unity and Organizing Activities

RQ2: Are the empowering dimensions of women's communication linked to aspects of feminist ideology (e.g., expressions of women's unity and organizing activities)?

Many of our interviewees recognized the importance of women's unity

and organizing as necessary for meaningful empowerment to occur. For some of our interviewees, empowerment was linked to contact with other women in public places and the opportunity to share personal stories. For example, Nisha, from the village of Tisangi, explained, "All women in our village came together and started the women's club. I now have the courage to speak in public situations. Therefore, I can express my feelings." Mangal, another dairy farmer from Tisangi, expressed a similar sentiment, "I developed the courage to speak in the women's club meetings. I did not previously dare to speak in front of men. But now I can speak to them, and go to the bank to open a savings account." Sarju Devi, from the village of Mamtori-Kalan, remarked, "Earlier we were not able to meet other women. We now meet other ladies at the milk collection center and discuss various issues." Finally, through interpersonal contact, women have developed a sense of unity and togetherness. As Banarasi Devi, from the village of Sitarampura, observed, "The DCS is the contact place for village women. When we meet at the DCS we develop a sense of togetherness." Thus, for many women, the starting point for the interactive dimension of empowerment is coming into contact with other women. The local dairy cooperative societies, women's clubs, and thrift groups provide places of contact where women can share their stories and initiate organizing processes for their subsequent empowerment. Interpersonal contact and connectedness are also central to feminist perspectives on empowerment (Lerner, 1993; Norsigian & Pincus, 1984).

Consistent with the feminist organizing theme of connectedness (Buzzanell, 1994), when women come into contact with one another they display their emotions. As Neeta, one of the CD instructors from Kolhapur, informed us: "Women are more emotional in nature. She feels more concerned about her family than a man does. In difficult situations she feels desperate and needs to relieve herself of her agony." Sampada, another CD instructor from Kolhapur, gave us a similar perspective: "Women are very frank when they speak with us in their houses; this is an intimate discussion. They discuss family problems. They find in us a good caring friend." Finally, Dr. Satsangi, a DCS veterinarian and CD program trainer from Jaipur, provided us with a clear description of how central emotions are to women's social experiences:

In my first CD intervention program, the women instructors met with the women dairy farmers and started the program by focusing first on social and family matters. All of the women exited weeping. I learned that the instructors encouraged the women to talk about their personal problems and they talked about husbands who drank, sick children, and problems with abuse from in-laws. This establishes rapport among the women and makes them want to help each other and work together.

CD instructors recognize the importance of attending to the emotions and personal lives of women dairy farmers as these women work toward establishing their own path to empowerment. This approach to empowerment is consistent with the work of many feminist scholars who treat the personal side of relationships as being extremely valuable, as the aphorism "the personal is political" expresses (Cheney et al., 1998). Workplace relationships can be seen in this same light. Feminist values, applied to the workplace, tend to emphasize working relationships characterized by mutual support, empowering behaviors, caring, cooperation, and fairness of treatment (Martin, 1990). In addition, Maguire and Mohtar (1994) argue that by recognizing both the private and public lives of workers, an employer can begin to value employees' entire reality, to promote a type of participation that acknowledges individual differences and yet does not completely "absorb" the individual into the organization.

The theme of women helping one another was clearly present in our interview data. The formation of helping relationships is consistent both with the feminine ethic of care (Abel & Nelson, 1990; Friedman, 1987; Young, 1994) and with the feminist organizing theme of cooperative enactment (Buzzanell, 1994; Norsigian & Pincus, 1984). For example, Bimale Devi, from Sitarampura, described the impact of joining the DCS on her life: "I have developed a cooperative feeling toward other women. I became aware about myself and decided to work for women's welfare. I often meet other women and offer to help them whenever I can." Shakuntala Devi, from Mamtori-Kalan, views her role as one of motivating other women in her community: "We organizers of the women's club tell other women that now the world is changing and therefore we should remove our veil and speak about our problems." Finally, Kanchan Bhonsle, from Adur, offered a more personal example of helping another woman:

A woman wanted to leave the women's club meeting early because her husband was to come home. Then I talked to her husband and got him to agree to allow her to spend time in the women's meeting. Now we are getting together. We can listen to each other's views and help each other out.

When women help one another, they display active agency by accomplishing personal and collective goals through their own actions (Bartky, 1988; Deveaux, 1994). Accomplishing goals in mutually helpful relationships leads women to recognize that their perspectives are not based on subjugated or disruptive knowledge; rather, women's perspectives are primary and constitutive of the real world (Harstock, 1990). When women help each other using their own knowledge and abilities, they do so as active agents who are empowered by the very act of offering assis-

tance to another human being (Gutierrez, 1990; Parsons, 1991).

As women help one another outside the realm of dairying, they also display how multiple rationalities are often present in democratic organizations. As Cheney et al. (1998) explain, we need to attend to “the extent to which democracy and communication are framed in nontechnical or extratechnical ways in the life of the organization, serving not only the needs of greater production or increased efficiency but also distinctively social or people-oriented ends.” (p. 38) Similarly, Bachrach and Botwinick (1992) observe that

if the major assumption of participatory theory is correct—that participatory experience generates a desire for more participation—then progress toward workplace democracy should instigate increasing struggle by women and feminist organizations for sexual equality in all areas of life, including the home. (p. 139)

For instance, women dairy farmers are as likely to share technical information about dairying as they are to talk with each other about how to solve certain family problems.

Clear examples of empowerment through communication were also apparent in our interviewees’ comments concerning the formation of village-level women’s clubs in the face of resistance from men. Yesubai Patil, from Devthane village, remarked: “We shall first organize the village women. Then we will overcome the resistance of men. In the end, we shall organize the women’s club under any circumstances.” Hausabai Patil, also from Devthane, stated: “Men cannot do anything if women come together. Women should show courage and unite. Under any circumstances we will form a women’s club.” Finally, Shalabai Katale, from Katalawadi village, commented more generally about the value of women cooperating with one another. She stated: “If we cooperate with each other then it benefits everybody. I can’t do certain things alone, but I can achieve what I need if we work together.”

When asked how to bring about meaningful social change leading to their empowerment, many of our interviewees described different persuasive strategies. Importantly, most of the women recognized the need to persuade men to change their thinking and behavior. Regarding the attempt to form a women’s club when men in the village offer resistance, Suvarna Patil, from Devthane village, commented: “We would convince the male village elders and then go ahead with the establishment of the women’s club.” Balkabai Katale, also from Katalawadi, explained: “We will pressure men by telling them that if they do not allow us to form the women’s club, then we will not pour milk to the DCS. By any means, we will establish the women’s club.”

Perhaps most interesting were the comments we received that showed a woman’s willingness to organize others to persuade men to form

women's clubs. Anjali Patil, from Devthane, stated: "I will call a meeting of all important male leaders in the village. In the presence of women, I will convince the village leaders about the importance of having a women's club in the village." Recognizing the strength that can be derived from women's unity, Gangubai Atigre, from Katalawadi, remarked: "I would unite the women and with the power of our unity establish a women's club." Finally, Navsabai Ambi, from Kavethe Guland, explained: "I will question why the men oppose the women's club. I will explain to them that if women unite it will be beneficial for the village. So, why should men oppose? We will definitely establish the women's club."

In evaluating the preceding statements as being reflective of empowerment, it is important to recognize the value of women giving voice to their needs. As Held (1993) observed, the power to "give voice to one's aspirations to be heard is not so much the removal of an external impediment as the beginning of an internal empowerment" (p. 303). Even if these dairy farmers are not immediately successful in forming women's clubs, they recognize that "their dramatic vocal protests register their anger and convey the message that specific injustices will not be tolerated" (Houppert, 1992, p. 74). This perspective is consistent with observations made by organizational scholars who contend that "blatant critiques of patriarchy, hierarchy, organizational domination, and controlling practices are the graffiti of organizational crawlspaces; this is a site of resistance and pleasure" (Bell & Forbes, 1994, p. 193).

Collective action has led to some clear positive outcomes for many of the CD-trained women dairy farmers. Ratanbi, a woman dairy farmer from the village of Adur, questioned the milk-fat testing results at her local DCS. She explains:

So samples were taken to the other place (village) by me and the other committee members. These milk fat tests were compared. Then it was shown that our fat test was correct, the misunderstanding was removed, and we received a better price for our milk.

The preceding example shows how empowerment can be produced through collective action. In this case, collective action insured that these women received a fair price for their milk. Other encouraging examples of empowerment involved collective action that extended beyond dairying activities. For example, in the village of Adur, women dairy farmers decided to initiate new business activities. Hirabai Chowgule, a women dairy farmer, explained:

The idea of women getting together to jointly produce snacks was a good thing. We have also started making chalk sticks for schools. Now when we think of purchasing a milk animal and we only get a partial loan from the dairy, we can ourselves arrange the

remaining amount from our activities which helps us earn more. This way our women's activities are very useful.

Hirabai's story shows women can work together to reach individual and collective goals. The enterprising women dairy farmers of Adur have organized themselves into a productive economic collective. They have extended beyond dairying activities into other businesses, and they have pooled their assets to increase their collective wealth. These women of Adur, through their collective action, provide us with a clear illustration of the feminist organizing perspective of cooperative enactment (Buzzanell, 1994; Gutierrez, 1990; Parsons, 1991).

Sampada, a CD instructor from the Kolhapur Milk Union, provided us with an example of a collective action undertaken by women that is consistent with the feminist organizing principle of integrative thinking (Buzzanell, 1994). She spoke about women dairy farmers of village Malwadi who were concerned with both unsanitary drainage in their community and poor quality roads. Although road repair may have improved commerce and made travel easier for the women, they recognized the more pressing environmental problem of poor drainage. Their quick attention to the environmental problem had a payoff, however. As Sampada explained:

The chairperson of the village DCS decided to construct a drainage system in front of her house to set an example for the other village women. Everybody followed her example and very soon the entire village had a drainage system because the women acted together. Then, the dairy society rewarded them for their efforts by donating money for the construction of village roads.

The collective actions taken by the women dairy farmers interviewed for this study provide us with evidence of how social capital produces empowerment. Social capital refers to civic capacities such as collective interpersonal or such relational skills as trust, cooperation, and consensus building (Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 1993; Wilson, 1996). The women of Adur and Malwadi, for example, used their own creative wisdom and skills as resources. Through a process of mutual cooperation they were able to uplift one another. As Hirschman (1984) explained, for the poor, nonmaterial resources (e.g., communication) can produce social energy that can be transformed into cultural, political, or material wealth.

Although many of our interviewees displayed a willingness and determination to oppose the resistance of men when attempting to form a women's club, there were other women who were clearly unwilling to oppose the men in their village. These comments remind us that men still wield a considerable amount of power in India's rural villages. Manjula Kumbhar from Devthane stated simply: "If men oppose, then

we will not organize the women's club and abandon our plan." Sakhubai Patil, from Katalawadi, echoed a similar perspective: "It is impossible to overcome the resistance of men, therefore we will have to cancel our plans of forming the women's club." Finally, Shevantabai Bhagat, from Kavethe Guland, stated: "If men oppose, we will cancel our plans of the women's club."

Despite clear evidence of empowerment for many of the dairy farmers we interviewed, for some of our interviewees empowerment remains an elusive goal. The women quoted above perceive barriers to their empowerment that are impossible to overcome. However, these barriers exist because of their isolation from other women. As Freire (1973) explained, conscientization requires becoming part of a group, identifying with that group, and developing a sense of shared fate with others. Indeed, some feminist scholars would argue that group identification is what makes self- and collective empowerment possible (Buzzanell, 1994). Through social interaction, the disempowered can develop both the belief that effective action is possible and the capacity (skills or resources) to develop effective strategies for action. Finally, through a dialectical process of collective reflection and action, women, when acting in concert, can develop the capacity to act effectively to create social change (Freire, 1970).

Empowerment Embedded in Democratic Processes

RQ3: Is women's empowerment embedded in the democratic practices of cooperation and cooperative governance?

Fifty-eight of 286 women interviewed offered specific comments that gave us insight into how empowerment can be embedded in democratic processes. Some of our interviewees remarked that their involvement in the cooperative taught them how to make decisions in groups. Others explained that they were able to make improvements in the village through cooperative decision-making that they could never have made alone. Ranjana Patil, from Devthane village, explained: "I learned how to take bold decisions after carefully thinking over matters. I also understand how to listen to others and express my opinion. Thus, I understand the process of making a joint decision." Ujwala Chowgule, from Kavethe Guland village, provided a more extended description of how the CD program taught her democratic principles. She stated:

We were told in the training program how to participate in a group; how we should be bold and speak out; how everybody's ideas should be heard; and then how the group should decide. It is essential that there be consensus. There will be differences of opinion but we have to make compromise if necessary and finally it should be a decision of all and only then will it be acceptable to all. For example, we made the decision to get assistance for keeping the village free of mosquitos and have continued a cleaning drive in the village.

Democratic decision-making in dairy cooperatives appears to have influenced some farmer members to see the need for democratic decision-making in the family. Pandurang More, a male dairy farmer from Devthane, who is the chairman of his local DCS, stated:

I always discuss with committee members before a decision is made. If there are two groups of opinion then we have to discuss and talk it over to decide who is the most needy. In the society the management committee makes the decision, not only one person. In the family also, the men and women must jointly make decisions in important matters.

The preceding comments provide evidence of how empowerment is embedded in democratic processes (Cheney, 1995; Eisenberg, 1994; Harrison, 1994). CD program trainers have given some women dairy farmers the confidence to become active in group decision-making. Voices that were once suppressed can now be heard and are often respected. Women who would not previously make comments in a group are now part of a decision-making process, and they have been able to accomplish things collectively in democratically run fora that they could never have accomplished acting individually (e.g., keeping a village free of mosquitos). Importantly, lessons learned from democratic participation in cooperative governance can extend to other relationships. As noted by Bricker-Jenkins (1992), "By participating in the creation of relationships that are open, egalitarian, mutual, and reciprocal, people can begin to formulate a vision of these becoming the norm in their families, workplaces, and communities" (p. 298).

As explained earlier, Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony embodies simultaneously the dynamics of power and resistance. We encountered a specific example of the process of hegemonic struggle among a group of women dairy farmers in village Lutsaan in U.P. state. Although this cooperative received funding from the local district milk union for specifically forming an all-women's dairy cooperative, it is administered by two men. This male-controlled structure, however, violates cooperative governance rules. The male officials indicated to us that some women in the dairy cooperative give the money they earn from milk proceeds to their husbands. They do not try to promote discussions among these women concerning their rights to control the money they earn from dairying work. There is also no women's club in this village. Thus, the women of Lutsaan participate in their own disempowerment by allowing the village men to control their behavior and their rights to administer their own cooperative. Conversely, these same women, through their own democratic decision-making, decided to start a separate business venture that was outside the purview of men. A dozen women joined hands and started a business to make *ghee* (clari-

fied butter) from surplus milk. They sold this ghee in their own village and in the neighboring township of Sasni through private vendors. This example shows how hegemonic relations involve both processes of domination and resistance.

Communicative Disempowerment and Empowerment Paradoxes

RQ4: In what ways are women disempowered through communication?

Despite strong evidence of empowerment embedded in communicative processes, we also encountered numerous examples of disempowerment or empowerment paradoxes. Three women from Mamtori-Kalan all described reasons for their disempowerment, although each was a member of a successful dairy cooperative. Suji Devi explained, "I cannot face my family elders and seek permission for attending the women's club meeting. If they feel it is necessary then they will send me to the program." Kamala Devi speaks of more generalized problems in Mamtori-Kalan: "In our village women are not united, and that is one reason why they are so backward. Women do not cooperate with each other in our village. If women are united, men cannot oppose our ideas." Finally, Prem Devi laments, "Men decide about major important things. Whatever they decide we will agree." Clearly, for these women, dairy cooperative membership has not produced empowering experiences in their family lives nor in their business transactions.

In order to more completely understand the social barriers women face in India, let us turn to a story that was told frequently while our research team interviewed dairy farmers in the Jaipur district. The story focused on Sushila Devi, from the village of Radhapura, who was training to become a DCS secretary. Her trainer, Dr. Satsangi, is a local veterinarian from the Jaipur District Milk Union. One of the last activities in the training program was to learn how to test for milk fat, and this required the use of acid. The chemical reaction created by the ingredients caused the glass test tube to explode, spraying acid in Sushila's eyes. Satsangi flushed the woman's eyes with milk and rushed her in his jeep to the local hospital for treatment. He thought that Sushila's husband would beat him because he had precipitated the events resulting in Sushila's injury and permanent burns. When Satsangi stopped his jeep in front of Sushila's home, she said, "Why have you brought me home?" Satsangi responded, "I have brought you home so you can rest. You need to rest because of your injury." Sushila protested, "Don't leave me here; take me back to the training site." Surprised, Satsangi replied, "Why do you want to go there?" Sushila explained, "I want to complete the fat testing of milk." Shocked by Sushila's statement, Satsangi asked, "Why do you want to complete the testing; you have been badly injured and you need to rest?" Sushila answered:

My husband and the other men in this village have told all of us (women DCS members) that women can do nothing. They say that running the DCS is their job. Women will get hurt if they try to test the milk. If I don't complete my testing today, we won't be able to keep the women's center open, and the cooperative will close. I must complete testing the milk to show that women can do this job and that we can make this cooperative work.

The preceding story is one of remarkable courage and resilience, and local women recounted it with pride. What is the likely impact of this story on women's perceptions, however? Certainly, some women may become motivated and empowered by Sushila's determination to succeed. Unfortunately, others may become disempowered because the story reaffirms how completely women are dominated by men in rural India. Would a man have felt the same pressure to complete the milk testing before the end of the day if he had been seriously injured? Why should we celebrate the fact that Sushila could not recuperate from the trauma of her injuries? Thus, for some women, Sushila's story only shows how high the barriers to empowerment are. Women are not allowed to make mistakes. Furthermore, if a woman does make a mistake (as Sushila did), she must put aside the pain of a serious injury or she will be rightfully put back in her place taking care of the domestic needs of her family.

One interesting facet of our interview data was that some women described how they had experienced some form of empowerment in their lives, but later in the interview they offered a clear statement of disempowerment. For example, Nisha Deshpande, from Tisangi, spoke with pride of the savings group she had helped to organize:

We are only seven at present but we operate a small savings scheme. We have decided that every member, turn by turn, should undertake to collect the contribution, and then go to the bank to deposit the total amount in the club's account. We want every member to know the system and also banking activity.

Despite her central role in organizing the savings scheme, Nisha admitted that women can do little if men oppose them, because of social norms in her rural village. She explained:

If my husband was dominant over me I would nurse a feeling of restlessness. How can a woman act against a man's wishes? It will be insulting him. In our village a man has to be given due respect. How can she go anywhere without the permission of her husband?

Raj Kanwar, from Ramsinghpura, offered us numerous examples of her empowerment. For example, she reported: "I am saving money in the milk business. I am able to use these savings for buying items of my own choice. If we women come together, then we need not be dependent

on the men.” Later in the interview, however, she indicated how village men still control her life: “I will not oppose the men in the village. I will do according to what the men want me to do.” Similarly, Sarju Devi, from Vinobapuri, offers evidence of empowerment followed by disempowerment. Early in our interview with her she stated: “I was helpless earlier. Now I make decisions myself. My life has changed after I joined the DCS.” Later in the interview, however, she explained how little control she has in her own home when she wants to exercise her independence: “I must take permission of the family elders to attend the women’s club meeting. If they permit, then I will go and attend the meeting.” Finally, Karva Devi, from Vinobapuri, reported: “After my participation in the training program, I feel I can make my own decisions.” Several minutes later, however, she described the limits to her decision-making latitude: “I will talk to my husband about the women’s club meeting and then if he permits I will attend the meeting.”

How do we explain the contradictory or paradoxical explanations offered by some of our interviewees? One explanation is that paradox and contradiction are part of the process of social change. Since established patterns of thought or behavior are difficult to change, people often engage in contradictory or paradoxical activities as part of an adjustment process until new behavior patterns are fully internalized. For example, a person may consider a behavior change and even verbally express a commitment to it; however, further pondering may drive that person back to his or her original behavior choice (Ruesch & Bateson, 1951). Alternatively, we can view these paradoxes as evidence of how women are simultaneously victims and agents in systems of domination (Trethewey, 1997). As McLeod (1992) observed, “often women simultaneously attempt to alter their circumstances and to maintain them, to protest and accommodate” (p. 535).

Stohl and Cheney’s (1999) notion of the compatibility paradox gives us another way to frame these seemingly contradictory statements from women dairy farmers. The CD program encourages women to participate in ways that are seemingly incompatible with their normative and expected communication behavior in most other social circles. As Stohl and Cheney (1999) explain, “when participation programs are implemented in national cultures where the central values contrast greatly with the fundamental premises of participation, workers are put in the paradoxical position of being required to act in ways that are incompatible with their ‘natural inclinations’ (i.e., the normative view of their culture).”

In the CD training program women are encouraged to seek help from family members in performing household tasks. Although some of our interviewees clearly indicated that they sought and received help from all family members, others reported only seeking help from other women. When women exclude men from partaking in household tasks, and yet

request the assistance of other women to help with domestic duties, they perpetuate their own disempowerment. Consider the following comments from women dairy farmers who explain what they will do to attend a women's club meeting when they have unfinished household work. Nana Devi, from Oloki Dhani, said: "I will ask my daughter-in-law to take care of my work and then I will attend the women's club meeting." Suraj Kanwar, of Ramsinghpura, stated: "I will get up early to get my work done and also take help from my mother-in-law and sister-in-law." Finally, Gauri Devi, of Vinobapuri, remarked: "My household work can be done by my daughter-in-law." Although these women may have lightened their own workload so they could attend a women's club meeting, they did so at the expense of another woman.

Women dairy farmers who rely only on other women for assistance in completing domestic work have internalized a feminine ideal that is disempowering. This feminine ideal views household work as central to the definition of what it means to be a caring, nurturing woman. A woman who does not perform these tasks may feel that she does not adequately love her family. Bartky (1991) explains that these debilitating ideals represent a more subtle and oblique form of disempowerment that is rooted in the subjective and deeply interiorized effects of women upon themselves. Women pressure one another to care for their family members, yet they fail to receive any care in return by male household members. Some of our interviewees, in a display of discursive consciousness, recognized the barriers that women create for one another. For example, Phuli Devi, from Oloki-Dhani, explained: "Women are their own enemies in restricting one another's progress." Rameshwari Devi, of Sardarpura, also supports this perspective: "Women are jealous of one another and this restricts our progress." Finally, Prachati Devi, of Sitarampura, stated: "Women pressure one another to follow the old customs." As these comments make clear, a critical part of the empowerment process for women is to cease restricting one another's choices.

One way to display empowerment is to engage in a personal action to realize a goal. A disempowered person internalizes a belief of incompetence in realizing goals through personal action so he or she will occasionally seek out the assistance of others whom they believe to be more competent to act. In a number of our interviews we came across women who sought out the help of "sponsors" to promote a particular cause rather than engage in personal action themselves. Suraj Kanwar, of Ramsinghpura, for example, explained how she would go about trying to form a women's club in her village: "We will try to first explain the proposal of having a women's club to about ten men in the village and then we will approach the village chief through these men." In a similar vein, Gauri Devi, of Vinobapuri, stated: "We will consult a few men in the village and through them influence the village chief. Then he will not

go against our proposal.” Bringing outside experts into the villages was another technique mentioned by some women. Panna Devi, of Vinobapuri, remarked: “I will try to explain to the village women about having a women’s club. I will then request experts from outside the village for help. They will convince the village men.” Finally, Ganga Devi, of Vinobapuri, describes a slightly different approach to sponsorship: “We women will convince our husbands to explain to the village chief about having a women’s club. If he approves then only will we establish a women’s club.”

A final example of disempowerment can be linked to what Stohl and Cheney (1999) refer to as a paradox of design. This type of paradox occurs when the “architecture” for participation is formed largely in a top-down manner, as is the case when CD instructors enter a village for the purpose of launching an all-women’s dairy cooperative. CD instructors educate women dairy farmers to use technical inputs such as cattle feed, artificial insemination, and animal vaccinations. They also lecture and conduct training in dairy management and cooperative governance. It would be overly simplistic, however, to argue that these education and training experiences prevent women from carving out their own spaces of control. Once the CD instructors complete their training and education programs, the everyday running of the cooperative is largely left to the women dairy farmers. In addition, the democratic practices of governance and decision making that they learn in the cooperatives are often carried over into women’s clubs, thrift groups, and other collaborative women’s activities. The participatory climate engendered in the dairy cooperative societies allows women to creatively transcend the design paradox. Although their initial actions in the cooperative may be controlled by others, with the passage of time many women learn how to collaborate with each other to establish their own rules and systems of engagement.

Conclusion

In this article, our analysis of the communicative dimensions of women’s empowerment yielded three important insights. First, we discovered that women’s empowerment is displayed through different forms of communication and feminist action, particularly when women unite and organize to accomplish social change within families and communities. Second, empowerment is embedded in democratic practices when women participate in discussion fora that yield decisions that improve the quality of life for community members. Third, we learned that paradox and contradiction are part of both the empowerment process and the process of organizing for social change. Thus, in this concluding section, let us consider the insights we derived about the communicative dimen-

sions of women's empowerment so we can prompt further research into this important social process.

Although the communication discipline has given attention to the subject of empowerment (e.g., Albrecht, 1988; Chiles & Zorn, 1995; Mumby, 1989; Pacanowsky, 1988), we still know little about the specific communicative dimensions of empowerment. In this study, we recognized the centrality of communicative interaction to the empowerment process. In describing the interactive dimension of women's empowerment, our attention was drawn to three themes of feminist organizing: cooperative enactment, integrative thinking, and connectedness. Specifically, women's empowerment is linked to sharing emotions (connectedness), evaluating personal actions for relational and environmental impact (integrative thinking), and helping one another through collective action (cooperative enactment). This study represents a starting point for understanding how women communicate in ways that lead to their empowerment. Future research is needed to examine how women interact with one another in ways that are empowering and disempowering. In addition, researchers should focus on how women's empowerment can be described as an act of feminist organizing, or communicating. For example, how is empowerment linked to a feminine ethic of care in which women establish a sense of personal autonomy and agency in the context of caring and supportive relationships?

The linkages made between economic empowerment and dimensions of communication have important implications for future research. For instance, we need to know more about the relationship between women's communication (e.g., sharing ideas) and economic empowerment. In addition, further investigation is needed to examine how economic empowerment impacts women's communication and interpersonal (familial) relationships in ways that are both empowering and disempowering.

Our respondents gave us clear insight into how democratic practices can be empowering. There are aspects of democratic practice, however, that were not identified by the respondents. For example, democratic practices can suppress minority opinions in ways that are disempowering, particularly if a person always finds herself on the minority side of an issue. There is also room for paradox and contradiction in the practice of democracy. Indeed, a consensus paradox can be created when people feel social pressure to adopt the perspective of the majority (Stohl & Cheney, 1999). Future research is needed to explore in more detail the dynamic relationship between democratic practices and women's empowerment or disempowerment, and also how democracy evolves over time in ways to meet changing needs and situations.

Our interviews yielded many rich examples of communicative disempowerment and empowerment contradictions. In order to more completely understand how empowerment is produced through com-

munication, we need to also attend to how communication disempowers and how empowerment is a dialectical process. For example, women can engage in a form of cooperative enactment if they help one another complete household tasks. Yet, if men are excluded from performing these tasks, ultimately women are disempowered by their particular display of cooperation. In addition, women may need to critically evaluate the stories they share with one another because of the potentially disempowering impact of certain narratives. For example, stories that establish heroic standards as necessary to bring about social change can demotivate women who doubt their ability to struggle despite personal pain and resistance from powerful community members. Thus, future research is needed to more critically examine how narratives impact women's perceptions in ways that are both empowering and disempowering. Future research is also needed to examine empowerment paradoxes. In particular, we need to know more about the communicative processes that unfold as people shift back and forth between empowering and disempowering forms of communication. This perspective on empowerment is consistent with Gramsci's (1971) philosophy of praxis that recognizes both the possibilities for social change and the dominant hegemony that resists such change.

Notes

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² In determining how many women provided evidence of empowerment, we relied only on the 286 individual interviews. Sometimes it was difficult to determine how many of the 78 focus group participants agreed or disagreed with statements made during the discussion. However, comments from focus group members are presented throughout the interpretation section of this article.

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