Book Review


In the preface of "The Health Gap" the authors describe their book as a "synthesis" of discussions and group work undertaken at four workshops sponsored by the International Development Research Centre (IRDC). Information from papers submitted to essay competitions between 1991 and 1994 sponsored by the IDRC and the World Health Organization (WHO) Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR) on gender and tropical diseases were incorporated into the book as well. The authors also stated that the goal of the book was to "serve as a basis for further dialogue and initiatives aimed at improving the health and well-being of women and to inspire more collaborative work and networking among biomedical and social science researchers."

I found the book to be exactly as the authors had described. As far as my usefulness of the book, I am not a biomedical researcher or pure social scientist. However, I am looking at this book for application within the college classroom in terms of spurring inspirational discussions in Women's Health Issues, International Health Issues and Women's Studies. My only disagreement with the authors regarding the intended description of the book is that I would describe the material within the book to be a compilation of "synopses" rather than a "synthesis of material." For example, the following are typical of various topic subheadings and quotes in the book with each topic consisting of one paragraph to two or three short pages in length:

**Beyond Pregnancy and Reproductive Health**

"Women are viewed first as mothers or future mothers, whereas men's health is never defined from a family or fathering perspective (Rathgeber and Vlassoff 1993, p. 514)."
Gender, Health and Development

"The fields of both medicine and public health have perpetuated the classic androcentric view of woman that focuses on her reproductive capacity and circumscribes her to the singular role of mother".

"Women must be seen as human beings with needs and desires that relate to them personally as women. Research with regard to women should aim to empower them as individuals, as people in their own right, without always looking at their role as nurturers".

"To date, women have been unequal beneficiaries of the forces of international development programs. In Gortaka, India, for example, despite the fact that a great deal of development money has been directed to ease the burden of the poor, women, who are the poorest of the poor, are the least likely to benefit. According to Stackhouse (1995a, p. D1):

"For all the fine intentions of outsiders, it is the men who tend to benefit from development and the richer men at that. While women walk the dirt trails carrying headloads of wood, the wealthy men drive tractors on pukka roads. The men are paid high government wages for building water pipes; the women are expected to maintain these pipes for no wages at all. The schools are filled with male students. Even at the health centre, the ward is occupied by men because women will not allow a male practitioner to see their bodie uncovered."

The Role of Poverty

"In the developing world, women tend to spend whatever wealth they have on food, education, and health care for their children, whereas men tend to spend on such things as prestige goods, alcohol and extra-marital sexual liaisons" (Richters 1994, p. 40).

Women’s Education and Health

"According to the Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, which was held 5-13 September 1994 in Cairo (UN 1994): "There are approximately 960 million illiterate adults in the world, of whom two thirds are women. More than one third of the world’s adults, most of them women, have no access to printed knowledge, to new skills or to technologies that would improve the quality of their lives. There are 130 million children who are not enrolled in primary school and 70 percent of them are girls."