A thesis
titled

The Influence of Identity and Opportunity on the Nicaraguan Women’s Movement

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Sociology

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August 2010
Sociological and feminist studies concerning women’s social movement activism are well studied; however, the intersecting effects of identity and opportunity are often treated as completely separate variables for consideration. Here, I am looking both at identity and opportunity—examining the inter-connectedness of both. Additionally, this study incorporates the activism and identity of transgender women into the analysis. Traditionally, studies of women’s movements have only considered cisgendered women as participants; however, this study challenges cisgendered bias in examining women’s organizations and includes transgender women in the analysis. Whereas the dominant social movement theory, political process theory (PPT) is criticized for underestimating the role of identity and culture in the sustainability and success of social movement organizations (SMOs), my study analyzes how these aspects are integral to an overall understanding of women’s social movement activism.
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the love and support that I received from my parents, friends and other family members during the entire process. I am eternally grateful to those who donated money in order for my trip to Managua to be a success.

I have benefitted greatly from the guidance and mentoring from my committee chair, Dwight Haase, and committee members Rubin Patterson and Mark Sherry. I was introduced to the field of sociology by Rubin Patterson—and was inspired to learn and understand the workings of our social world and inequalities through his teachings. I am truly indebted to the repeated suggestions, guidance and support offered by Dwight Haase, who really inspired me to undertake a project of this scope. To Mark Sherry, his insistence of incorporating diverse feminist voices within my project really added not only to its authenticity, but to my overall knowledge of the subject. I am beyond grateful to each of them for their guidance, support and constructive criticism.

I would also like to thank my fellow graduate students, many of whom heard drafts of this final product as presentations in many courses. Your encouragement and camaraderie made my graduate experience life changing and unforgettable.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The study of social movements and movement participants has gained increasing prominence in the social sciences. Social movement scholarship has dramatically evolved from its initial social-psychological focus on deviance and control of movement activists to the study of movements themselves and movement participants. Given the increasingly inter-connected network of social activists that exists since the information and communications technology revolution of the late 20th century, new avenues for activism and networking between organizations of various classes, genders, ethnicities and geographic locations is now a reality.

Women’s organizing in Latin America is a topic that has been widely written about in both sociological and feminist literature throughout various political time periods. There is extensive literature concerning women’s activism during authoritarian regimes, women in revolutionary movements, traditional feminine organizations and women’s movements during periods of transitional democracy. The seminal work of Maxine Molyneux (1985) where she discussed “practical” and “strategic” interests is still used, nearly thirty years later, to define women’s activism as “feminine” or “feminist.” My thesis will examine women’s political and movement participation outside of the
polarizing boxes of “feminine” or “feminist” during democratic regimes in order to better understand the complexities of their identities and repertoires of activism.

I will be using a case study of four social movement organizations (SMOs) in Nicaragua for this project. I have chosen to examine this problem in the Nicaraguan context for a few reasons: (1) the Nicaraguan women’s movement has a long history and is well-established in the country—from mothers’ activism against the Somoza dictatorship, women as guerrilla fighters during the revolution, women’s role in the creation of the new Nicaraguan state, and the eventual shift to autonomy for these groups due to both the defeat of the FSLN in 1990 as well as the FSLNs’ inability (or outright denial) to meet the demands of women; (2) the current political situation in Nicaragua provides a back-drop for which to examine the movement’s successes in an unfriendly political climate; and (3) this topic allows me to integrate various theoretical perspectives (sociological and feminist) in order to ascertain which (or how many) best explain the complexity of the situation. I will not only be examining this problem through extensive review of the literature, but also through examining public documents from various women’s organizations and correspondence with members of three major Nicaraguan feminist organizations: Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres (MAM), Red Mujeres Contra la Violencia (RMCV), and Grupo Venancia, who are spearheading the struggle for gender equality despite a marked decline in the democratic process and gender-friendly political climate in Nicaragua. I will also be interviewing activists from Red Trans de Nicaragua (RTN), a prominent transgender women’s organization.

I am focusing on two major areas of women’s activism: feminist activism and transgender women’s activism. While transgender activists identify as women, their
voices are unmistakably absent from the dominant women’s movement rhetoric within Nicaragua. I assert that it is not solely class or the so-called “feminine/feminist split” that divides the Nicaraguan women’s movement, but also the exclusion of transgender women. In this sense, the movement highlights that even within feminist discourse there is a reliance on the traditional dichotomous definitions of gender—ultimately leading to the exclusion of transgender women’s voices.

Transgender women are typically studied under the realm of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) studies, or in gender and sexuality studies; however, I wanted to focus on the activism of transwomen and how they are working actively for their own empowerment and rights. Additionally, given that transwomen self-identify as women, I wanted to include them in my study of Nicaraguan women’s movements.

In order to fully understand the ways through which the Nicaraguan women’s movement has continued during periods of abeyance and through a lack of political opportunities, I will provide an overview of the theoretical literature on social movements, mainly PPT and collective identity theory. These theories provide useful frameworks for interpreting women’s activism in Nicaragua; however, there are unique elements of their movement which challenge aspects of these theories. It is my intention to examine women’s political participation, activism, and organizational structure, in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these theories when applied to the Nicaraguan context. Literature already exists identifying some of the potential flaws of these theoretical approaches. For example, collective identity theory fails to integrate the complexities of class, ethnic, and geographical differences (Taylor and Rupp 1999). And there is an under-emphasis of cultural factors from PPT theorists (such as Ray and
Korteweg, 1999).

To alleviate concerns with the lack of attention to the complexities of identity studied within collective identity theory, I am integrating an intersectional approach to my study. Intersectionality is a growing area of theoretical and methodological study, and is one that I think best fits my theoretical perspective and research goals. However, the amount of literature existing on intersectionality as a methodology is scarce—and I was unable to find any published studies where an intersectional methodological approach was applied to content analysis—this makes my study unique.

**Research Questions**

The overall purpose of this study is to examine the Nicaraguan women’s movement more in-depth. My specific research objectives are as follows:

1. How do identity and opportunity interact in the case of the Nicaraguan women’s movement?

2. How do Nicaraguan women’s activists publically and privately frame their identities, goals and struggles?

3. Are the public documents and private statements of the various organizations and activists inclusive of different women’s voices (specifically—lesbians, working class women and transgender women)?

In order to find answers to these questions, as previously stated, I will be utilizing both interviews with activists and a content analysis of their writings and public statements.

**Summary**

My thesis will outline reasons why utilizing the theories of PPT and an intersectional approach to collective identity in conjunction as opposed to interpreting them as competing theoretical perspectives, would precipitate profound understanding of the situation. Furthermore, an integrated theoretical approach enables an analysis of both
the historical and structural factors that aid/hinder the movement’s success, as well as the ways in which women’s activists interpret their own political struggles. The interviews with women’s activists will provide another layer of depth to the project: including the actual voices of historically marginalized women and hearing their reports of the conditions on the ground that they are facing every day. My thesis will attempt to integrate both theoretical analysis and qualitative observation in order to better identify the issues facing the women’s movement in Nicaragua, as well as providing an argument for the best theoretical perspective to analyze the movement.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The dominant social movement theory, Political Process Theory (PPT), has been criticized for being too over-arching and underemphasizing the role of culture and identity in the emergence and sustainability of social movement organizations (SMOs) (Goodwin and Jasper 2004). Likewise, collective identity theory, conceptualized as a counter to PPT's masculinist, structuralist approach, is sometimes criticized for underemphasizing structure, even assuming a form of “universal identity.” Instead, scholars argue, groups should be understood as “a structurally positioned collective rather than a social group sharing distinctive conditions or whose members are mutually identifying” (Weldon 2005:11-12).

Another potential way to avoid overgeneralizations of groups is to employ an intersectional approach to identity. Intersectionality looks at the ways through which various socially-constructed categories manifest themselves in daily life. This perspective does not require emphasis on one facet of identity—gender or race for example. Instead, intersectionality looks at the ways that gender and race (and other factors) are present and work to define collective identities.

This section will examine the two major competing sociological theories of social movements: Political Process Theory and Collective Identity Theory, addressing the
strengths and weaknesses of both theories as they pertain to the study of social movements. Additionally, I will examine the pitfalls and applicability of feminist theorizing, in specifically the concept of intersectionality, in order to assess feminist contributions to social movement studies.

Theoretical Background

Political Process Theory: All-Encompassing Framework or Over-Generalization?

Amidst rising criticism about the applicability of Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) to the study of social movements, a new dominant theory emerged, Political Process Theory (PPT), which sought to examine the role of structural factors in facilitating movement emergence and mobilization. Although it is difficult to trace its beginnings, Meyer (2004) highlights the work of Eisinger (1973), which questioned why some American cities experienced protests and mobilizations around racial injustices while others did not. Initially referred to as “political opportunity theory,” which emphasized the role of opportunity in facilitating social movement emergence and success, the theory has since expanded into what is now PPT, with the continued emphasis on opportunity structures.

What exactly is a political opportunity? Loosely defined, it can be considered the relative susceptibility of the political system to challenges. A more concrete definition is offered by Tarrow (1998), stating that political opportunities constitute “consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics” (quoted in Meyer 2004:134).

Charles Tilly (1978) offers the following equation of sorts to explain political opportunity structures within PPT:
Opportunity + Organization + Common Interests + Resources = Social Movement

Opportunity structures, as outlined above, constitute the major emphasis of PPT resources—in fact, organizational aspects (such as structure and leadership) as well as common interests of participants (to a certain degree the main mention of identity factors within PPT), have come to be encompassed under various notions of “opportunities”—not separate factors to be studied in and of themselves (Isbester 2001).

Political opportunities, it has been argued, “include ‘structural’ factors and not cultural processes,” (Goodwin and Jasper 2004:8), but what are the implications of reliance on political opportunity as a main factor for explaining movement emergence and participation? Scholars caution that since PPT writings often suggest that movements flourish during periods of expanding or positive opportunities and decline in times of less favorable opportunities,” PPT scholarship may overlook the effect of “missed opportunities” or what possibilities exist in the absence of favorable political opportunities or mobilization (Goodwin and Jasper 2004; Meyer and Minkoff 2004).

A major focus of PPT scholarship is on political activism, more specifically, when groups are targeting existing political structures. Goodwin and Jasper note that many scholars have tested these theories on groups that are working toward “political participation or rights” (Goodwin and Jasper 2004:8-9). An important factor in examining movements whose goals are inside the political system is that, “Most frequently, political action is invited to go down legal rather than illegal routes, electoral rather than disruptive channels, into hierarchical rather than egalitarian organizational forms” (Goodwin and Jasper 2004:12). This is important; as with many so-called “new” or
transnational social movements, the organizational structure does not implicitly follow organizational models of the past, in fact, they tend to be far more horizontally organized as opposed to hierarchical. This distinction is important, as it will be necessary to re-configure the organizational model within PPT in order to address organizations that are structured on a more egalitarian level.

The political opportunity model was considered by many to be too narrow of a framework in examining social movements. The political process model represents for many a more-encompassing framework to examine social movements. Goodwin and Jasper (2004) state, “The political process model addresses some of the difficulties with the narrow political opportunity thesis, adding social/organizational and cultural factors to the latter’s political ones” (17). The political process model, shown in figure 1.1 as conceptualized by McAdam (1982:51) is as follows:

**Figure 1.1: McAdam’s Political Process Model of Movement Emergence**

![McAdam's Political Process Model](image)

Figure 1.1 *Source:* reprinted in Goodwin and Jasper 2004:18.
This model is still applied today in the studies of social movements, although some of McAdam’s (1982) terminology has been replaced. For example, what McAdam termed “indigenous organizations” are now referred to as “social networks” or “mobilizing structures”; while “cognitive liberation” now referred to as “cultural framings” (Goodwin and Jasper 2004:18). In this regard, cultural analysis is incorporated into the inchoate models, which largely ignored cultural impact on the development and mobilization of SMs and SMOs. Additionally, using the terminology “social networks” allows for the examination of SMOs outside of the traditional conceptualization of the formal movement network.

In the two aforementioned models of political process and political opportunity structure, identity formation may be hinted at—with Tilly’s (1978) “common interest” and McAdam’s (1982) “cognitive liberation,’—but it is not often dealt with specifically. This is not to imply that identity is never noted or studied within PPT. In fact, in his study of initiator and spin-off movements, McAdam (1995) notes that the development of a shared identity is imperative in the development and success of spin-off movements in securing popular support. However, it seems as if this identity development is encompassed within existing concepts of political process models, such as cognitive liberation or Tilly’s (1977) concept of “common interests,” rather than being examined as its own integral part of movement studies. In addition to an under-emphasis on identity, PPT has also been accused of ignoring the opportunities created by movements themselves within the existing political structure (Gamson and Meyer 1996)\(^1\). In the

\(^1\) A major exception to this tendency would be McAdam’s 1982 study of the role of black universities, black churches, and black organizations in the development of black insurgency.
following section, I will further examine a few major critiques of PPT and how those critiques can (or cannot) be applied to my research.

_Criticism of Political Process Theory_

Perhaps some of the staunchest criticism of PPT has come from scholars who maintain that the theory is too broadly-defined and under-emphasizes cultural processes. Goodwin and Jasper (2004) argue that “PPT remains conceptually muddled insofar as political process theorists have been unable to reach agreement about the definitions of its basic concepts. This imprecision has allowed PPT to be applied in diverse settings, but it has hindered the testing and refinement of theoretical propositions” (4). Considering that concepts that are an integral part of PPT—such as what constitutes an “opportunity,” for example—are so broadly defined, Goodwin and Jasper argue that PPT has been rendered nearly impossible to be tested empirically. They further contend that ruling class allies and access to political figures are often presented as opportunities, but are concurrently ambiguous in their definitions and practical applicability (Goodwin and Jasper 2004:13).

Goodwin and Jasper (2004) have four suggestions for improving social movement analysis: (1) “abandon invariant models,” cautioning against the tendency toward transhistoricism in PPT; (2) “Beware of conceptual stretching,” regarding the nature of the overwhelmingly general definitions of the basic tenants of PPT; (3) “Recognize that cultural and strategic processes define and create the factors usually presented as ‘structural’”; and, (4) “Do some splitting to balance the lumping,” making sure to emphasize distinguishing between different forms of opportunity and structure when analyzing various social movements [emphasis in original] (Goodwin and Jasper 2004:27-29).
McAdam (1994) contends that cultural emphasis plays an important role in social movements and their emergence, and one that is under-emphasized within PPT. McAdam highlights three major ways in which culture manifests itself in the emergence and study of social movements: (1) “framing as an act of cultural appropriation”; (2) “expanding cultural opportunities as a stimulus to action”; and, (3) “the role of long-standing activist subcultures in movement emergence” (37-43). With regards to framing and cultural appropriation, frame alignment processes that can be thought of as acts of cultural appropriation since the “success of such efforts [of frame alignment] is determined, in part, by the cultural resonance of the frames advanced by organizers” (McAdam 1994:37). The cultural legitimacy that is attached to certain framing processes, at least in part, determines success of frames and tactics. Secondly, McAdam (1994) argues that while he largely agrees with the PPT notion of “expanding political opportunities” as a factor upon which emergence is dependent, the “causal importance of expanding political opportunities, then, is inseparable from the collective definitional processes by which the meaning of these shifts is assigned and disseminated” (39). Finally, while PPT may focus on the role of existing organizations or what McAdam later terms “initiator movements” (McAdam 1995), analysis of these organizations often overlooks “the extent in which these established organization/networks are themselves embedded in long-standing activist subcultures” (McAdam 1994:43). Far from over-emphasizing culture as do some anthropological and relativist studies of social movements, McAdam inserts cultural awareness into PPT, adding a further study of the meso-level to PPTs macro-level analysis.

Returning to the critique of Goodwin and Jasper (2004), the authors argue that PPT and
PPT theorists over-simplify culture and agency from dialectical processes to mere structures (Goodwin and Jasper 2004:4). They argue that “process theorists tend to reify culture—to conceptualize it as a distinct (and delimited) empirical social sphere or type of social action—instead of conceptualizing (and analyzing) culture as a ubiquitous and constitutive dimension of all social relations, structures, networks, and practices” (Goodwin and Jasper 2004:25). Differentiating “choice” for SM participants from PPT, Jasper (2004) analyzes the strategic choices that are made by movement actors not as a function of political process, but as an intrinsic interplay between individual and collective interests. This approach postulates that protest groups and other movement activists should be viewed “symmetrically, instead of reducing the latter to the ‘environment’ of the former,” in order to better understand strategic choices and agency amongst various types of movement participants (Jasper 2004:5).

However, Koopmans (2004) is unconvinced by Goodwin and Jasper’s (2004) critique of PPT. He asserts that they do not offer any viable alternative models; further, that their assertion that PPT is attempting to create a transhistoric theory is without empirical support, “since, no examples of such disrespect for history and context are actually presented” (62).

Koopmans (2004) argues that “Opportunity is not always political opportunity, and political opportunity is not always structural” (68). It is necessary for broader definitions of what defines opportunity and structure, but these concepts should not be ignored entirely; rather, they should be distinctly different depending on the situation that is being studied. With regards to culture, Koopmans (2004) asserts that “Much of the cultural context in which social movements act is beyond their sphere of immediate
influence and may thus be characterized as cultural or discursive opportunity structure” (Koopmans 2004:68-69). This is to say, as opposed to the argument advanced by Goodwin and Jasper (2004) and scholars that emphasize culture as exceedingly important in social movement research, that the effect of culture should not be over-emphasized; rather, it should be viewed as a distinct opportunity structure or variable within the overall study—not the point of focus.

While Koopmans is also critical of PPTs tendency to treat every variable as an opportunity, he contends that “Although the sources of opportunity may differ widely among political systems and have to be specified for each movement individually…political opportunities offer a link between structure and action” (Koopmans 2004:70-72). If PPT is viewed in this manner, it can be the link between the macro-level structural factors and the grassroots intricacies.

Another aspect that I contend is under-emphasized in social movement research (in particularly PPT) is the role of identity and emotions in facilitating the emergence of an SM, sustainability of an SM through periods of abeyance, as well as garnering popular massive support. Randall Collins (2001) contends that one way emotions are transformed within collective action is when “the emotion which arises out of consciousness of being entrained within a collective focus of attention. This is the emotion which makes up solidarity, and which makes the individual feel stronger as a member of the group” (29). Collins (2001) refers to this as “emotional energy” (29). This form of analysis, maintained within a political process frame, may begin to bridge the gap between identity, emotions and PPT, without over-emphasizing the role of identity and ignoring structural factors that influence the various stages of social movement development.
And finally, another weakness is that although PPT has now become the dominant social movement theory, most of the case studies of PPT largely concern U.S. movements (like the extensive work of McAdam on the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement) as well as movements aimed at changing the political system. In my study of women’s movements, the goal is not only to change the political system, but also to target oppressive social and cultural institutions. While PPT may adequately examine the factors involved in the formation of Northern groups, what about women’s and feminists groups in Latin America? These organizations have emerged during both periods of increased political opportunities (with the overthrow of dictatorships and the rise of transitional democracy) as well as decreased opportunities to garner popular support and resources (the influence of machismo and a type-casting of feminism as a Northern, white, middle-class movement), how then to explain the emergence and continued influence and support of women’s movements in this political and cultural climate? Scholars posit that examining the role that the development of a collective identity plays in the emergence and continued presence of social movements may better explain the intricacies of the case of studying women’s organizations.

*The Enduring Relevance of Collective Identity Theory?*

Given the aforementioned assertion that PPT underemphasizes the role of identity in the emergence and sustainability of social movements, this section will examine the role that identity formation has in social movements. Attention has been given to how resources shape movement successes (or lack thereof) or how political opportunities give rise to an increase in movement participation or success, but collective identity theory attempts to examine identity not as a resource; rather, as a fundamental facet of social
movement participation. Recent sociological and, increasingly, feminist examinations of collective action and collective identity are less critical than their predecessors; however, they remain based largely on Northern social movements whose characteristics are often strikingly different than their Southern counterparts. For this reason, it is important to examine how applicable these pieces are to explaining activism, tactics and successes of Southern women’s movements—particularly for my research on the Nicaraguan women’s movement. Additionally, collective identity runs the risk of assuming a “master status” of sorts with regards to identity formation—that a single aspect of personality is the “strongest”—and determines with which groups/causes an individual will participate. It can assume that an identity, such as gender, will outweigh all others, such as class or political identity. Therefore, I will also be including an examination of intersectionality theory and the role that multiple forms of identity and oppression play in identity formation and deployment.

*Identity Theory*

Arguably social psychological explanations of identity provided the basis for Collective Identity Theory. Identity theory in social psychology, according to Michener and Delamater (1999), can be defined as “categories people use to specify who they are and to locate themselves relative to other people” (quoted in Owens 2003:207). Much of contemporary identity theory is derived from Goffman’s (1959) “dramaturgical analysis of social relations and interactions in daily life” (Owens 2003:210). In this study, Goffman posits that actors present a self, and the research focuses on how each individual reacts, responds and interprets social situations (Owens 2003:210).

From these earlier works, Timothy J. Owens (2003) further defines identity theory
as it progressed to Collective Identity Theory as “[unlike] social identity, which is essentially an individual-level concept…collective identity is a distinctively group-level concept referring to the processes by which an action-oriented group comes to identify itself [emphasis in original]” (227). In collective identity theory, it is important not only to gauge participants’ and individuals perception of themselves within the group, but also how she or he perceives others to perceive, value and evaluate their actions. Identity theory moved from micro-psychological analysis to a macro-level study of how and why individuals interact within a group setting. Owens noted the important emerging fields of collective identity study (i.e. social movements) and stressed the importance of linking them to the macro-level studies (Owens 2003:228).

Collective Identity Theory of Social Movements

Many social movement studies recognize the importance of collective identity in social movements. Social movements, within the collective identity framework, can be defined as “organized collective manifestations of issues for which people have considerable concern” (Zurcher and Snow 1990:447). Collective identity theory can be utilized in order to understand enduring emotional and mental transformations amongst participants (Bayard de Volo 2004). Identity, as is defined by social scientists, “creates an image of social movements as clearly differentiated homogeneous entities” (González 2008:24). This last definition of identity provides, paradoxically, an explanation for its cross-identity relevance and a possible explanation for claims of reductionism against collective identity. Commitment varies amongst members and “members dedicated themselves to movement goals and strategies in accordance with their understanding of these goals and strategies” (Zurcher and Snow 1990:480). This acknowledgement of
difference in commitment does not, however, acknowledge differences in identity amongst participants themselves, if they are indeed homogenous.

Anthropological studies of collective action and social movements attempt to distance the research from the view of social movement participants as unified actors, and instead, as in the case of Holland, Fox and Daro (2008), “take a decentered, dialogic approach that recognizes the difficulties and contentiousness of producing movement identities amidst multiple discourses and practices” (2008:95). Their study consists of ethnographic research in Nepal, Canada, and Scotland through interviews and cultural analyzing, attempting to cross the North/South divide in examining social movements. They pose the following question:

How can it [collective identity] signal the fragile dependence of a collective identity on the peripatetic relationships of individuals to a movement; on visions for change that have not yet, and may never be, institutionalized; on forms of organization—including a cephalous ones—that transform over the life of the movement, and on shifting relations of power within and outside of the movement? (97).

They further state that collective identities develop through “movement practices that engage outsiders, including the institutions that movements target, the police, media workers, and bystanders” (Holland et al. 2008:106). Collective identity in this sense may be more encompassing than the individualist or reductionist critique it often implies. An activist identity, in an anthropological sense, develops both internally and externally—it is defined not only by what it is but by what it is not. The interaction between participants and outsiders can further inspire solidarity and commitment to the movement. People that are somehow considered culturally, racially, ethnically, nationally, or gendered different from the majority have basis for solidarity and identity. The authors argue that collective identity can be the basis for collective action (Holland et al. 2008). The impetus to act can
come from the sense that the group with which one identifies is under attack and a need to not only protect the group, but for the activist to protect himself/herself as well.

*The Sociological Study of Women’s Movements*

Women’s social movements have benefitted as well from more traditional, sociological theories of collective identity. Ethnicity and race cannot be studied without including gender as more than a background or “dummy” variable, which many scholars of gender issues and the role of women in society assert was done in past studies. Much of the studies on cultural assimilation in the United States have not adequately integrated gender as an important identity that plays a large role in assimilation (Hurtado 1997). This study implies a necessity to study, as feminist theorists and feminist sociologists have, the role of gender as an important aspect of collective identity. However, feminist activism and feminist identity can have negative effects for participants as well. Women’s anger can play a central role in collective action, with a particular significance for feminist identity and activism (Hercus 1999). Anger, previously thought to be a “deviant” emotion for women to express, is ever-present in feminism; consequently, women found an outlet for their anger. This anger, however, led to problems in relationships with spouses, friends and work colleagues (Hercus 1999). So, while feminist activism can be an outlet for the anger some American women were experiencing, it can also lead to conflict with outsiders.

Feminist-sociological interpretations of collective identity can also be used to describe women’s activism and consciousness in non-traditional modes of participation and thought (Taylor 1995; Miller 2007). In examining how women can use their own language and perspectives to differently interpret psychological disorders, Taylor (1995)
finds that women began viewing post-partum depression as a socially-constructed illness with which women use, negotiate, accept/reject and “resist norms and cultural ideas about gender, motherhood, and the female self” (23). This showcases not only a form of resistance to traditional gender norms, but the ways in which women’s situated knowledge (Collins 1990) is used to express their conditions in ways that differ from the masculinist norm.

In a study of an American midwives association, Miller (2007) finds that, within this group, gender identity was influenced not by the educational setting, but by the larger context of the movement of natural childbirth. Individual identities still remained intact; however, they “recede a bit as the group’s sense of who they are, what they believe, what they seek, and how they are different from others strengthens” (Miller 2007:8). This can help to explain how women from different socioeconomic, geographical, and ideological areas formed a sense of identity within the natural childbirth movement, despite its “outsider” status.

 Movements across the “place” variable, which I assert is a major reason for divisions amongst women’s movement participants in Nicaragua, may provide an alternative explanation; however, both this example and the aforementioned one only examine this identity development within an American framework, and may not be generalizable to a Nicaraguan context. The aforementioned case studies highlight how intersectionality has gained prominence in feminist theorizing as well as how collective identity can be used to explain movements that are both “traditional” in feminist thought and women’s activism, as well as those that fall out of the traditional activist spectrum. However, it is important to note that these deal predominately with regards to American
and other Northern movements.

*Collective Identity and Southern Women’s Movements*

Feminism, as an ideology and as a movement, has experienced increased popularity around the world. Identity, more generally, “made it possible to articulate that which cannot be articulated: the diffuse, the shapeless. At the same time, it enabled the integration of subjective positions within a collective setting” (Gomes da Cuhna 1998:245). Identity, or the recognition of some form of collective similarity, some scholars assert, has inspired women’s activism in Latin America “since the dawning of [its] history” (Jelin 1990:184). Despite the increasing acceptability of identity as a political tactic and ideological framework, the term “feminist” still has a negative connotation amongst many women in the South as being a “Northern, middle-class white women’s movement.”

According to Rupp and Taylor (1999), feminism is more than a gender ideology—it is a collective identity. Many Marxists and others on the left view “identity politics” as dangerous for organizing because it can move from “political action to self-absorption,” as Rupp and Taylor put it. But collective identity as conceptualized by social movement scholars “allows an understanding of feminism as a political identity that is continuously negotiated and revised” (Rupp and Taylor 1999:365). This particular study did corroborate their hypotheses about collective identity being valuable in transnational women’s movements, bridging cultural, language and religious barriers. However, they note that these women were “primarily of European origin from the industrialized nations of the Western world” (Rupp and Taylor 1999:366). Elizabeth Jelin (1990) interprets social movements as a “collective social search for identity and for the appropriation of a
cultural field, as an affirmation of the right to specificity and difference” (206). In this view, collective identity frameworks can be used to explain Latin American women’s activism, including feminist activism and transgender women’s activism; but, the question remains, to what degree do the activists themselves place identity and culture within their struggles?

Helen Icken Safa (1995), in her study of Latin American women’s movements, notes that most participation by women in social movements arises out of their immediate perceived needs and experiences, “or out of what Maxine Molyneux (1986) terms women’s practical gender interests” (Safa 1995:235). These practical interests, although Molyneux claims they cannot accomplish this on their own, challenge gender subordination directly and can lead to a larger collective consciousness that moves into “strategic gender interests, which question or transform the division of labor” (Safa 1995:235). While Molyneux’s (2003[1985]) framework of the development of “strategic gender interests” did provide an excellent analysis of organizing during authoritarian regimes, Latin America’s subsequent shift into democratic governments has altered theoretical interpretations of gender identity.

Within the study of Southern women’s movements, the activism of transgender women has been conspicuously absent, despite a growing number of transgender organizations within the Latin American region. In order to fully understand the ways in which women collectively form a gendered identity, the myriad formations and expressions of transwomen’s identities cannot be ignored. The following section will delve further into conceptualizing transgender identities and activism.
Conceptualizing Transgender Identity

Scholarly work concerning transgender identity and transgender women’s organizations have recently begun to receive consideration in the field of gender and sexuality studies, although their stories have largely been excluded from the social movement literature (Klein 1998). In addition to the importance of theorizing about the presentation of MTF transgender identities, I will examine some of the legal and political issues that hinder the development of transgender organizations or movements as well as their inclusion, (or lack thereof, from feminist and LGBT discourse in the region. I contend that the reason for the exclusion of transgender women’s voices from feminist rhetoric in Latin America is due to a reliance on traditional, dichotomous definitions of “female” and “male,” which require one to be born with (and currently have) female anatomy, both of which are largely impossible for Latin American transwomen due to legal and economic restrictions.

The public performance of womanhood is an essential part of the gender transitioning process; however male-to-female (MTF) transgendered persons face the potential of public scrutiny and prejudice because of their transgender status (Schrock, Boyd and Leaf 2009). Of course, it is not solely public and social circumstances that may prove difficult for transwomen. As Schilt and Westbrook (2009) point out, in social circumstances it may be possible to appear to have the appropriate “cultural genitalia.”

2 For the purpose of this section, I will be focusing almost exclusively on the MTF (male-to-female transgender) portion of the transgender movement. While undoubtedly FTMs (female-to-male transgender) have their own identities and organizations, for the purpose of my research I would like to focus only on MTF individuals. The reasons for this are due partly to the fact that issues of gender identity, identity presentation and acceptance of alternative gender identities are qualitatively different between MTFs and FTMs, as well as the fact that I am focusing my study on the Nicaraguan women’s movement and the contention that transgender women should be included in this category as well. However, I would argue that, conversely, FTM transmen should not be included in the women’s movement if this is not how they identify themselves.
Transgender women (and men) can “do gender” in social situations in a way that is convincing to others. However, in sexual situations, “male-bodied women and women-bodied men present a challenge to heteronormativity,” in that they are challenging the gendered norms that are embedded within heterosexual (or perceived heterosexual) sexual relations (Schilt and Westbrook 2009:441). Indeed, “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987) “in a way that does not reflect biological sex can be perceived as a threat to heterosexuality,” and this can cause potentially dangerous and violent reactions to the discovery that someone’s genitalia does not match their public gender performance (Schilt and Westbrook 2009:441-442). Transgendered people can present, then, not only a challenge to traditional binary gender conceptualizations and the relationship between gender and biological sex, but also to the heterosexist system wherein power relations depend on one’s position in both gender and sexual hierarchies (Schilt and Westbrook 209:443).

Expressions of transgender identities have been widely debated in LGBT and feminist scholarship, with conclusions ranging from transgenderism as a challenge to traditional gender norms to transgenderism being a human rights violation and that transwomen are not “real women” because of the genitalia they were born with (Jeffreys 1997; Wolf 2009). Jeffreys (1997) claims that the manipulation of male genitalia into female genitalia can be viewed as a human rights violation in that “transsexual surgery and hormone treatment [can be seen as] state-sanctioned violence” (39). Further, that lesbians have worked to create deliberately male-free “safe spaces,” which should not be forced to be “opened” for men who “think” they are women or desire to be women (Jeffreys 1997). While a reliance on a traditional (and proponents of transgender rights
would argue transphobic) conceptualization of “male” and “female” as necessarily indicated by genitalia is certainly one perspective, I argue the opposite. It is true that transwomen’s presentation of a female or “feminine” identity may be reliant upon traditional norms associated with “womanhood,” but it is arguably necessary (in today’s society) to present oneself in this traditional way in order to be perceived and accepted as female. Additionally, there are myriad ways of presenting transfemale identity, which are not always reliant on “traditional femininity” and are often, as later will be argued, largely informed not only gender but classed and racialized conceptualizations of “male” and “female” as well. To posit that gender-transitioning surgery represents a subversive surgical practice that maintains male domination and female subordination and that alternative gender identities by those born male (in particular identifying as a lesbian) can never be seen as actively resisting constrictive gender norms is one perspective (Jeffreys 1997); however, one that may be becoming outdated.

Transgender persons often lack government protection; subsequently, many find it difficult to lead a public life as the opposite gender. There has also difficulties coalescing into both lesbian and gay activist groups and women’s groups. It is important to understand that “heterosexuality requires a binary gender system” (Schilt and Westbrook 2009:443), but arguably homosexuality does as well. This leads to a double-exclusion for FTM transgender people—they cannot be heterosexual because they do not conform to the binary gender system, and they cannot be lesbians for the same reason.

The presentation of an alternative gender identity, whether complete with surgical reassignment, or of an identity that runs contrary to your biologically born sex, can as well be interpreted as a form of resistance to traditional gender norms and a radical way
of transforming the ways that “man” and “woman” are conceptualized (Schilt and Westbrook 2009). MTF transgendered persons do not necessarily represent a danger “politically to women’s chances of freedom as it maintains the idea of gender dichotomy which forms the very foundation of male supremacy” (Jeffreys 1997:70). Instead, the myriad ways in which transgendered persons express their identities—ranging from gender-transitioning to maintaining the biological sex organs one was born with but identifying as the opposite gender, to many other things in-between—challenges the dichotomous connection between the biological and the social and can indeed be a form of liberation from gender norms.

It appears clear that in order to adequately conceptualize and explain the varied expressions of feminine and feminist identities in Latin America, and the ways in which these identities include issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, gender identity, geographical location and many other factors, simply looking at a gender-based identity is not enough. The following section will explain the importance of the feminist concept of intersectionality, which incorporates the varied facets of identity in order to attempt an understanding of how various factors influence social position and identity.

*Feminist Theorizing and the Importance of Intersectionality*

Feminist theorists have made vast contributions to collective identity theory through the development of the concept of intersectionality (Collins 1990; Hurtado 1997; Mann and Kelly 1997; Collins 1999; Collins 2000; Lord 2005; Mann and Huffman 2005; McCall 2005; Luna 2006; Davis 2008). Intersectionality is defined as the theoretical framework that examines how various analytical categories are socially constructed and how they interact with one another and manifest themselves in inequality (McCall 2005).
Intersectionality perhaps differs most from its feminist theory predecessors in that it is focused on difference and the argument that knowledge “is and should be situated in people’s diverse social locations…all knowledge is affected by the social conditions under which it produced,” a perspective commonly referred to as “standpoint theory” (Mann and Kelley 1997:392). A self-described “Black lesbian feminist socialist,” (Lorde 2005:245) argues that

By and large within the women’s movement today, White women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist (Lorde 2005:246).

Acknowledging the differences that exist within the women’s movement are essential; Lorde argues that “it is not those differences between us that are separating us…rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation” (Lorde 2005:246). Originally published in 1984, Lorde’s statements echoed points that would come later in intersectionality and standpoint theory.

Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins introduced some of the major tenets of intersectionality, like the interwoven systems of oppression based on gender, ethnicity, class and race, as well as the effects of what she calls the “matrix of domination” in her pioneering work on black feminist thought (Collins 1990). Collins (1990) argued that black feminist thought “fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift…Instead of starting with gender and then adding other variables such as age, sexual orientation, race, social class and religion, Black feminist thought sees these distinctive systems of oppression as
being part of one overarching structure of domination” (222). This is what she refers to as the “matrix of domination.” She writes

> The overarching matrix of domination houses multiple groups, each with varying experiences with penalty and privilege that produce corresponding partial perspectives [and] situated knowledges…No one group has a clear angle of vision. No one group possesses the theory or methodology that allows it to discover the absolute “truth” or, worse yet, proclaim its theories and methodologies as the universal norm evaluating other groups’ experiences (Collins 1990:234-5).

Clearly this statement shows some relation to postmodernist ideas that categories are inherently essentialist and should be deconstructed; however, Collins’ analysis maintains “an analysis of oppression that [is] relational, oppositional, and structural, despite its multiplicity” (Mann and Huffman 2005:62). Intersectionality places gender within a logic that “redefines it as a constellation of ideas and social practices that are historically situated within and that mutually construct multiple systems of oppression” (Collins 1999:263).

An additional point of interest from Collins’ (1990, 2000) work on black feminist thought is her emphasis on reflexive methodologies (Mann and Kelley 1997) and re-defining “expert” knowledge. She maintains that part of both reclaiming and incorporating black feminist thought is to examine “the everyday ideas of Black women not previously considered intellectuals,” that the exclusion of ideas of women thought of as “nonintellectual and nonscholarly…[creates] a false dichotomy between scholarship and activism, between thinking and doing” (Collins 1990:15). Collins’ explicit rejection of positivist traditions that claim researchers “can and should be objective” (Mann and Kelley 1997:393) by using words such as “we” and “us.” She is fully aware that this epistemological stance she may be “discredited as being too subjective and hence less
scholarly,” but maintains that this is necessary to follow the same path that she is advocating (Collins 1990:17). The voices of historically marginalized women can both highlighted and respected for their “situated knowledge” (Collins 1990) through this perspective, giving these women a chance to have their voices heard.

Collins’s analysis is based on Crenshaw’s (1989) work on black women and employment that first introduced the term (Mann and Kelley 1997; Mann and Huffman 2005; McCall 2005; Luna 2006; Yuval-Davis 2006; Davis 2008). Intersectionality declares that “gender is not the only analytical category relevant to a woman” (Luna 2006:1). Further, it argues that one identity may have greater influence at one point in time, but that this can vary situationally (Luna 2006). For example, American black women activists assert that an eradication of racism would not eradicate their oppression, they would still face oppression because of their gender, class, and/or sexuality. Within social justice movements, feminist intersectionalists highlighted the downfall of single-issue movements given this intersectionality (Luna 2006:9). Activists, however, even those within identity or single-issue based movements, stress cooperation and networking with those “outside” of the community. Activists acknowledge multiple statuses as a way to explain and accept difference; it allows for coalition-building between different groups that do not share the same identities.

While initially largely tied to the study of African American women, Collins’s (1999, 2000) substitution of “intersectionality” for “black feminist thought” made the theory more applicable to all women, not just African American women (Mann and Huffman 2005). The re-conceptualized intersectionality and feminist theorizing noted the importance of not only focusing on “external forms of oppression, but also to examine
forms of oppression and discrimination that they themselves had internalized. This required all feminists to pay more serious attention to the difficult process of building a movement connected by difference” (Mann and Huffman 2005:60). The emphasis on the interlocking, interdependent and non-hierarchical nature of oppressions, coupled with an emphasis on how different forms of knowledge are generated, dispersed and internalized brought an entirely new dimension to modern feminist thought (Mann and Huffman 2005).

Intersectionality has emerged as one of the most important contributions from the women’s studies set; however, there is a lack of information about how to study intersectionality (McCall 2005). Noting the methodological concerns within intersectionality studies highlight its evolutorial nature—and how the process of questioning and better examining the theory may give it more far-reaching applicability in the study of social movements. In fact, it may be the open-endedness and varied ways of applying and viewing intersectionality that makes it such a wide-reaching approach (Davis 2008). It has been welcomed by varied factions of feminist thought—from materialists to postmodernist feminist scholars seeking to deconstruct existing binary analytical categories (Davis 2008). Despite its popularity, there is debate as to whether or not intersectionality can be considered a bona fide “theory,” or more of an approach for a broader feminist analysis (Davis 2008). Jennifer Leigh Disney (2008) argues that intersectionality can be used as both a theory and a “empirical method for the study of comparative feminisms” (43). I argue that, despite the fact that intersectionality can be considered somewhat of a reinterpretation of other existing ways of examining intersections of existing social categories, the distinct ways in which it can be
methodologically applied make it a valuable *theoretical* contribution that is key to understanding the social world. It is appealing to both those with specialized academic knowledge and those who have only a “general impression of the theory” (Davis 2008:74). Its open-endedness and varied ways of examining societal conditions means that it can be applied to the study of populations that vary by location, class, gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity.

Nira Yuval-Davis (2008) notes that in attempting to define a concrete set of methodologies for intersectionalist approaches, many institutionalized organizations have been unable to reach consensuses that are applicable to broad studies. Being that these organizations are often those that lobby and/or enforce legislative and policy reforms that are meant to better women’s conditions, the importance of sound methodological approaches is necessary. However, it may be true that there are already existing social scientists and feminists who understand intersectionality far better than their policy-making counterparts (Yuval-Davis 2008). In this case, it is necessary to look for leading scholarship that would provide methodological approaches to intersectionality that could be applied at various levels of study and advocating. McCall (2005) outlines three methodological approaches that could be utilized to study intersectionality: (1) anticategorical complexity that deconstructs analytical categories; (2) intercategorical complexity, where scholars provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to analyze inequality amongst social groups amongst different dimensions; and (3) intracategorical complexity, where scholars focus on a particular social group that is neglected in order to reveal the “complexity of lived experience within such groups” (1773-1774). The
differences between these approaches reflect the multidisciplinary approach of intersectionality and enable it to be used in myriad studies (McCall 2005).

Intercategorical complexity, also referred to as simply the “categorical approach” is perhaps the least-used methodological approach for current scholars of intersectionality (McCall 2005:1784). This type of analysis uses existing analytical categories in order to examine the “relationships of inequality among already constituted social groups, as imperfect and ever changing as they are, and takes those relationships as the center of analysis” (McCall 2005:1784-85). Although these categories may not be static, they can be treated as the primary category from which to base an analysis that examines whether or not there are complex inequalities between groups (McCall 2005). Its primary purpose is to “chart the changing relationships among multiple social groups,” whereas in the other approaches this is a mere premise of the study (McCall 2005:1785). The focus is on the relationships between groups only—not on existing differences within a group or of overlapping groups (McCall 2005).

Anticategorical complexity is based primarily on the fact that social life is too complex to utilize existing analytical categories to describe subjects and social structures (McCall 2005). McCall (2005) claims that, of the three approaches, “this approach appears to have been the most successful in satisfying the demand for complexity, judging by the fact that there is now great skepticism about the possibility of using categories in anything but a simplistic way” (1773). Anticategorical complexity is based largely on the premise that “nothing fits neatly except as a result of imposing a stable and homogenizing order on a more unstable and heterogeneous social reality” (McCall 2005:1777). The act of deconstructing existing categories is understood as an integral
part of deconstructing equality (McCall 2005). This approach, given that it disavows the
use of traditionally socially-constructed categories such as “gender” or “race” as
hegemonic creations, is most espoused by postmodern and poststructuralist feminists
(McCall 2005).

Intracategorical complexity can best be described as falling in the middle of the
two aforementioned approaches (McCall 2005). This approach “interrogates the
boundary-making and boundary-defining process itself…[while acknowledging] the
stable and even durable relationships that social categories represent at any given point in
time” (McCall 2005:1773-1774). This approach most often focuses on those who are at
the “neglected points of the intersection,” who “cross” boundaries of socially-constructed
categories (McCall 2005:1774). There are seemingly two major opposing perspectives:
the deconstructionists that seek to eliminate existing categories on the one hand and
multicultural and identity-politics perspectives that tend to maintain existing group
categories “uncritically in order to revalue them” on the other (McCall 2005:1780). These
two groups constitute those who use anticategorical complexity and intercategorical
complexity, respectively. Intracategorical complexity, then, seeks to “complicate and use
[existing categories] in a more critical way” (McCall 2005:1780). This approach can also
create a way of analysis that homogenizes the standard groups, like “males,” “middle
class,” “whites,” or “Northern,” while the social group under study (typically a
marginalized group at the intersections of these various categories) is identified “in all its
detail and complexity, even though in the end some generalizations about the group must
be made” (McCall 2005:1783).
Intersectionality does present a potential problem for Marxists, in that it equates all analytical categories, including class, as being the same level of importance and does not distinguish the underlying influence of class oppression on larger systems of inequality. While it does acknowledge the interactions of various socially-constructed categories, turning away from identity politics, it can mute the influence of class oppression on individuals. Mann and Kelley (1997) argue that Collins has a tendency to privilege the knowledge of the oppressed over other forms of knowledge and to turn toward an identity politic model (401). However, Collins notes the potential dangers of “judgmental relativism” (Mann and Kelley 1997:401). The use of African American women’s experiences are not because “they are more important or ‘privileged,’ but to invoke on particular social history as a way of interrogating patterns in feminist discourse” (Collins 1999:277). The use of black women as her focal point is not to privilege their knowledge or circumstances as more important than other oppressed groups, or to imply that they alone are the most oppressed.

The importance of examining the role of material conditions in oppression and inequality are not lost on Collins, either. She writes, “Existing power inequities among groups must be addressed before an alternative epistemology…can be utilized…‘Decentering’ the dominant group is essential, and relinquishing the privilege of this magnitude is unlikely to occur without struggle,” bringing materialism back into the argument (Collins 1990:337). Essentializing categories such as “blackness,” “womanhood,” or “working class” can conflate “narratives of identity politics with descriptions of positionality as well as constructing identities within the terms of specific political projects” that render those on the margins or intersections of these categories
invisible (Yuval-Davis 2006:195). This approach may be most likely to occur when utilizing what McCall (2005) calls intercategorical complexity, where existing socially-constructed, hegemonic analytical categories are used. However, if intersectionalists integrate intracategorical and/or anticategorical complexity approaches (McCall 2005), the tendency towards essentializing myriad identities may be able to be avoided. Even in these approaches, it is imperative to not reduce economic relations or class factors as too “reductionist” to be considered as integral factors that determine who can do what, where and when.

Recent Northern women’s movements may rely on a postmodernist, individualistic assumption that people have “an almost infinite ability to transform one’s life,” or is centered on “self-making” or struggles involving only one sector of society (Mann and Huffman 2005:75). However, a melding of a Marxist-feminist approach that “views the relationship between human agency and social structure as more complex,” and a view that integrates that “acknowledging difference in theory and in everyday practice has the potentiality to enhance, rather than to divide, a movement” can lead to a new form of modern intersectionality theorizing (Mann and Huffman 2005: 75-76). It is important to acknowledge the ways in which women’s situations differ at the micro and macro levels based upon geographical location, cultural conditions, race, class, religion and ethnicity without losing sight of the structural factors that maintain multiple oppressions. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) argues that “Ideologies of womanhood have as much to do with class and race as they have to do with sex” (12). The use of an intersectional approach can also re-evaluate former socialist feminist thought with a focus on the informal economy and postcolonial gender relations (Disney 2008). Collins (1998)
argues that it is necessary to integrate an examination of the institutional, symbolic and individual dimensions of oppression in order to be able to challenge the power and privilege systems of stratification and build diverse and empathetic coalitions around common causes of social justice. She challenges all of us to “examine your position” within this interlocking hierarchy in order to dismantle it (Collins 1998:246).

Summary

The evolution of social movement theories, from early social psychological studies to the increasing all-encompassing theories of political process and the challenges of collective identity and intersectionality, provide useful frameworks for studying social movements. However, each has its downfall. Political Process Theory, while acknowledging the role that activists can play in creating their own opportunities that was not present in the top-down focus of Resource Mobilization Theory, under-values the role that collective identity formation can play in engendering a gendered consciousness and sustaining activism through solidarity-building. While some critics (namely Goodwin and Jasper 2004) contend that the political process model is too vague in its conceptualization of what constitutes an opportunity, others defend this vagueness—claiming that it allows for the scholar to define what constitutes an opportunity structure for any given movement. My biggest qualm with PPT is not its openness with regards to conceptualization (in fact, this could be a way to avoid the transhistorical tendencies that Goodwin and Jasper warn against); rather, it is with its under-emphasis of the importance of the role that the development and sustaining of a sense of collective identity and solidarity amongst movement participants plays in the emergence and influence of SMOs.
Collective identity theory has evolved from its initial psychological and social psychological base to incorporate sociological and feminist theory. Although early scholars that attempted to apply the theory to women’s activism relied heavily on Northern women’s groups, the theory has since been expanded to include non-Northern and transnational women’s groups. Feminist theorists expanded this theory with the introduction of intersectionality, which could be used to explain movement coalitions across class, gender, ethnicity, religion and language. The theory is applicable in the study of Latin American movement’s as well, as evidenced by the vast amount of literature on the topic.

The importance of collective identity in procuring a sense of unity, power and empowerment for social actors cannot be ignored. Social identity is not “dead”; rather it has regained some of its importance in the study of social movements and collective action due in large part to the emergence of intersectionality. However, it is imperative to realize the potential intersectionalism has to obscure exploitation and class oppression. It can be an invaluable aspect of conscious-raising but it cannot be used as the sole theoretical approach in studying women’s activism in social movements.

Nancy Fraser (2003) argues that “today’s recognition struggles are occurring despite (or because of) increased transcultural interaction and communication…they often take the form of communitarianism that drastically simplifies and reifies group identities” (Fraser 2003:22). Thus, some of these recognition struggles (of which Fraser considers feminist movements) have developed a universal concept of “sisterhood,” perhaps essentializing (or even falsely defining) gendered identity for women involved in women’s organizations throughout the globe. This is, obviously, not to imply an idea of
“exceptionalism,” or over-emphasize or reify culture to suggest that cultures are so varied that no commonalities exist between women of various locations; rather, it merely notes that within transnational networks or women’s movements around the globe there may be an over-generalizing of shared communal experiences and identical gendered experiences—ignoring place, space and class.

Further, an identity-based approach (in this case the “identity politics” model) is “Largely silent on the subject of economic inequality” (Fraser 2003:24). The role that class plays in defining and contesting identities (as well as its role in facilitating or hindering inter-group networking) should not be underestimated when examining women’s movements. It cannot be assumed that a gendered identity will be the main focus in self-identification or the defining factor in facilitating struggle and cooperation between various women’s organizations. Therefore, it is important to maintain an emphasis on the role of varied constructed identities in the emergence and sustained participation in social movements and social movement organizations; however, relying solely on identity formation as the basis for studying social movements drastically under-emphasizes the role of culture, politics and resources.

I am arguing that the political process model is not completely misguided; instead, that if identity construction and contestation are emphasized alongside the role that grassroots activism plays in creating political opportunity, the theory may be able to go beyond its largely top-down perspective. Accordingly, in my research I plan to emphasize Goodwin and Jasper’s (2004) assertion that “cultural and strategic processes define and create the factors usually presented as ‘structural’” analyzing the important role that cultural factors and movement framing play in the success (or lack thereof) of
women’s organizing in Nicaragua, as well as a potential explanation for why the transgender movement in Nicaragua remains largely unstudied. In addition, McCall’s (2005) analysis of how to study intersectionality provides the important distinction between the use of existing categories (and the corresponding definitions), such as “feminism,” and “woman,” as opposed to deconstructing existing labels into more encompassing categories that more accurately depict the intricacies of “woman,” and “feminist” as it pertains to women’s organizing in Nicaragua. I will use intracategorical complexity, which contests existing analytical categories without relying completely on a postmodernist approach that rejects structural analyses as “reductionist” or “hegemonic.” An intracategorical approach will dually enable me to use existing socially-constructed analytical categories, like “woman,” or “class” to explain the exclusion and factionalization of the Nicaraguan women’s movement while simultaneously contesting the applicability of existing categories as a means to achieve an inclusive social justice agenda that incorporates those who exist on the margins of these existing categories. An intersectional approach has already been applied to the study of the Nicaraguan women’s movement successfully (Disney 2008); however, my study will differ in that it will include the role of transgender women in the struggle for gender justice.
Chapter 3

Background and Current Problem

History of Latin American Women’s Movements

Women’s organizing and activism has been an integral part of the economic and political transformations in Latin America for the past century. This chapter will examine the history of women’s movements in Latin America—from periods of dictatorship through present-day—in order to understand the complexities behind women’s identities and activism. The opportunities for activism and the frames utilized by various women’s organizations in Latin America during these time periods are contingent upon both structural opportunities (political support or opposition, economic opportunities, transnational recognition and support) and cultural forces (the influence of machismo, traditional and revolutionary gender identities and the influence of Northern ideologies), which are continuously re-negotiated and re-defined by various movement actors.

This chapter is divided into two parts: history of women’s organizing in Latin America and women’s organizing in Nicaragua. Each section will focus on some or all of the following major types of organizations: (1) conservative women’s organizations; (2) women and guerilla movements; (3) traditional feminine or mother’s organizations; (4) women’s “wings” of political organizations; (5) community and labor organizations; (6) feminist groups; and, (7) transgender organizations and activism—with a specific focus
on how these various organizations have evolved during the different economic and political systems in Latin America and Nicaragua. Literature concerning feminist groups, community and labor groups, mother’s groups and political organizations is well-developed; however, literature concerning the emerging transgender women’s activism in the region remains under-researched.

While scholarship contends that the largest schism within the varied women’s organizations in Latin America is due largely to the so-called “feminine/feminist split” (Molyneux 1986; Alvarez 1990), I argue that to view women’s activism in this dichotomous way ignores how “feminine” and “feminist” are categories with diverse representation and meanings for different activists. It is important to not reduce women’s activism to either “traditional” or “revolutionary”; rather, it should be understood as a continuum between these two categories that is hardly uniformly expressed in movement rhetoric, tactics, or goals. Understanding the ways in which both structural forces and identities have changed during the various periods of women’s activism in Latin America and Nicaragua will better explain the ways in which women became active agents of their own empowerment—even in structural and cultural conditions that would seem to make this nearly impossible.

Women’s Movements During Periods of Dictatorship

Despite oppressive political conditions, women were active in various movements during the periods of dictatorship in Latin American countries. This section will focus on two distinct types of organizations: those opposed to dictatorships and those in favor of them. During oppressive dictatorships in Argentina and Chile, conservative women played a large role in mobilizing support for these military regimes as well as in the
overthrow of the previous governments. Although these groups organized across classes, the majority of women in pro-revolutionary governments came from the working class while the majority women in pro-dictatorship regimes (especially the leadership) were middle-class and upper-class women who were active to maintain their standard of living and way of life (Deutsch 2001; Power 2002).

**Mothers’ Organizations**

During the period before the shift out of authoritarian regimes, as well as during revolutionary times, women mobilized as mothers or within traditionally defined gender roles, which helped to garner emotional support for many of their movement claims and demands. During periods of authoritarian regimes, feminist frames were largely absent from leftist discourse (Noonan 1995), so women’s voices were most heard through traditional feminine or class discourses.

Women’s groups in Chile during the period of 1953-1978, when feminist discourse was lacking from dominant rhetoric, mobilized under maternal imagery (Noonan 1995). Interestingly, this mode of framing was utilized both by those opposed to the Pinochet regime and by the right in favor of the Pinochet regime (Noonan 1995). The conservative women’s movement in Chile, especially during the years of Allende’s regime (from 1964-1973), played a huge role in mobilizing against the Allende government. Their 1971 “March of the Empty Pots and Pans” signaled the beginning of the massive opposition movement to Allende (Power 2002). From this activism, the influential group, *Poder Feminino* (Feminine Power), was organized (Power 2002). This group was successful in mobilizing women across classes, largely through appearing apolitical—although they maintained close ties to all of the opposition parties (Power
While relying on maternal imagery that placed women as the moral mothers of Chilean society, given the fact that this was largely a middle-class and upper-class women’s organization, the activists were able to have access to phones, cars, taxis and maids to maintain their domestic household duties in their absence—which greatly facilitated their ability to be full-time activists (Power 2002).

After the fall of the Allende regime and the military coup that existed in the following years, *Poder Feminino* disbanded—due to the success of the coup the organization was no longer a necessity (Power 2002). Although *Poder Feminino* was explicitly a non-feminist organization, the group challenged many of the pre-conceived notions about gender and “women’s roles,” especially in the fact that they were an independently-run women’s organization that although conservative was separate from any political organization (Power 2002).

*Poder Feminino* is important to look at, not only due to its support of the extremely conservative junta, but because of the ways that gender consciousness developed even within this markedly “anti-feminist organization.” The political activity that these women partook in dramatically altered their relationship to the state; however, Power (2002) argues that they “did not struggle to alter either their condition or identity as women; they fought to maintain both” (253).

In the case of Chile, while conservative women did provide much support for the Pinochet regime, there were also women’s groups organized in opposition to the dictator, such as the Association for Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared, the Association of Relatives of Political Prisoners and the Association of Relatives of the Executed (Munoz 1999:12). Similarly to other mother’s organizations, these women mobilized under their
claim to the right to organize as mothers to protect their children, provide for their children, and to know what happened to their “disappeared” children. Through this maternal frame, these women were able to garner public support for their cause, and could claim a type of “moral superiority” to those involved in violence against the children of the peaceful mothers. In addition to more “conventional” forms of protest, these women also utilized tactics such as graffiti, literature, poetry, music and performance theater (Munoz 1999).

Feminine women’s groups played a large role in the movements for democracy and revolution in South America. Perhaps the most well-known mother’s organization was the Argentine “La Madres de la Plaza de Mayo.” The “mothers of the disappeared,” as these women are often called, helped to draw attention to the growing number of disappearances and human rights violations during the dictatorship (Hernandez 2002). The maternal rhetoric utilized by this organization relied on an approach that stressed “women’s difference,” in that “women’s position as ‘life-givers’ provides them with privileged knowledge on the sanctity of life and special abilities to nurture” (Bayard de Volo 2001:15). While the Mothers did engender a space for women’s voices, a reliance on a “women’s difference” approach led to the tendency to conflate complex gender identities into static categories (Bayard de Volo 2001:15).

Mother’s organizations, both on the left and right, provided benefits for both the state and for the development of gender consciousness. Through involvement in these various organizations, women began to transform their ideas on their value outside of the home in political life without relinquishing their reliance on the importance of their identity as mothers. While the development of a distinctly “feminist” consciousness
within these groups depends upon the political tendencies of the organization (for instance, the development of a distinctly feminist consciousness in the anti-dictatorship Madres de la Plaza Mayo in Argentina and not in the conservative Chilean *Poder Feminino*), regardless of political ideology these groups enabled women to realize the valuable role they could play in the political scene. The literature surrounding women’s organizing tends to posit a distinctly “feminine/feminist” split in women’s organizing. However, the ways in which women involved in traditional feminine or mothers’ organizations develop a distinctly gendered consciousness and in many cases alter their belief on the ways in which women can participate in the political arena, showcases that this “split” may not be as dichotomous as it appears on the surface.

There has been a great deal of theorizing on this split—leading various scholars to distinguish between “strategic and practical gender interests” (Molyneux 1985), or as to the difference between “feminist groups” and “women’s groups,” although, as the varied ways in which women mobilize for their diverse interests highlights, this is clearly not an easy distinction to make (Craske 1999). In many ways, while “feminist” may be used to describe organizations that explicitly challenged women’s roles within Latin American society, even this was largely informed by the political necessity and opportunities that existed at any given time—and may still rely on “feminine” imagery and frames to garner support (Craske 1999).

*Revolutionary Women: Women and Guerilla Movements*

Women participated in guerilla movements for many of the same reasons as their male counterparts: to end dictatorships, create just communities for themselves and their families, and end economic exploitation of the masses (Kampwirth 2002). Many of the
women who joined revolutionary organizations had familial ties to political activism and began in school, labor or other community organizations (Kampwirth 2002). Women are well-integrated into the on-going Zapatista movement for indigenous autonomy (EZLN), constituting upwards of one-third of all combatants (Kampwirth 2002). Women’s participation in the El Salvadoran liberation group, the FMLN, was also substantial, with women constituting 40 percent of FMLN membership, 30 percent of militants and nearly 20 percent of military officials (Kampwirth 2002). Despite cultural conditions that are often deemed too machista to include women as active participants in public struggle, the desire to overthrow dictatorships and achieve a better society enabled women to be active parts of these movements (Kampwirth 2002).

Despite women’s active participation in revolutionary struggles, most revolutionary organizations did not include gendered issues in their platforms, or at least not what would be considered “strategic gender interests” (Molyneux 1986). While both the Zapatistas and the FMLN called for the acclimation of women into the labor force, they did not address women’s oppression in the home (Kampwirth 2002). As many scholars have noted (Chinchilla 1994; Isbester 2001; Kampwirth 2002; Mendez 2002; Disney 2008), revolutionary organizations often focus solely on practical gender interests and class-based analysis, ignoring the particular ways in which women experience dual oppression both in the labor force and at home and ignoring the important role of women’s unpaid domestic labor. Following the revolutionary shift in countries like El Salvador and Nicaragua, women’s strategic gender concerns were often dismissed as “divisive” or “bourgeois” concerns, leaving many to leave the leftist parties and form their own organizations (Kampwirth 2002; Mendez 2002; Mendez 2005; Disney 2008).
While women’s roles in Latin America were focused on the role of women as wives and mothers, revolutionary times enabled women to participate actively in political upheavals, both as mothers and as militants—and these roles were often blurred (de Volo 2001; Kampwirth 2002). Women’s participation in revolutionary movements often occurred because of familial, religious, or social connections to revolutionary organizations and they joined revolutionary movements for many of the same reasons as their male counterparts (Kampwirth 2002). Despite women’s active participation in overthrowing dictatorial regimes and acting in ways not traditionally reserved for them, post-revolutionary times often meant that women’s gendered concerns were ignored and a return to more traditional “feminine” roles was espoused.

Community and Labor Organizations

The importance of women’s labor organizations must not be overlooked in the broader frame of women’s organizing because the entrance of women into the labor force—in both the formal and the informal sector—has led to a new sense of identity for women as women and women-workers. But a similar set of inequalities exists in the labor force as it does in the home. Sylvia Walby (2000) states that "Gender relations are being transformed with women's entry into the public spheres of employment and of the state, with a consequent reduction in their dependence on individual husbands or fathers" (813). This may lead to a formation of a new consciousness in which women begin to dually define themselves as women workers, but the problem remains that wage inequality only changes form as women "replace [unpaid] housework with low-paid employment" (Walby 2000:814). While entering the labor force may make women less dependent on their male counterparts for economic sustenance, women remain globally underpaid in
comparison to males and also are still largely responsible for the unpaid labor in the home.

Ray and Korteweg (1999) argue that women’s and gender interests are often lost in a struggle for class identity; however, there are certain women’s labor groups in Latin America that defy this trend. Rosa Fernandez, (the Brazilian co-coordinator for a group called Mapping Home-Based Work, a transnational group designed to deal with domestic and home-based female workers), states “At the present time the capitalist system does not have any solutions to the liberation of the working class which lives on the fruits of its labor in a system of flexible labor which is heralding more and more precarious work [for women]” (2004:675). She is self-defining not just as a worker but as a female worker. While Hernandez is fighting for a larger class struggle, she does not place her identity as a woman in the background; rather, she presents a self-identity that is not one-dimensional, she is at once both a worker and woman, and both are interdependent on each other.

Women workers in Brazil have also been a viable force in the non-institutional politics (social movements) in the last decades (Corcoran-Nantes 1993). Women were integral parts of the popular movements protesting unemployment, housing, transportation and healthcare access (Corcoran-Nantes 1993). While women during this time were not playing a large role in institutional politics (which largely led to their exclusion from much of the early analysis of political activism in the region), they developed a distinctive identity and influence through community social movement organizations (Corcoran-Nantes 1993). Through the struggles for practical gender interests, women participating in these organizations developed a sense of solidarity and
common identity—which also facilitated a greater awareness of their strategic gender interests (Corcoran-Nantes 1993). Corcoran-Nantes (1993) argues that whether or not these women chose to define their strategic gender interests as “feminist” or not is irrelevant; the articulation of these interests in the public sphere enabled them to address these interests on a larger level than ever before.

“Party Women” and The Rise of Autonomous Women’s Organizations

Women’s movements and political participation in Latin America have taken two major forms with relation to the state: those affiliated directly with a particular political party and independent organizations. While both have existed during different political periods in the region, the roles of women within these organizations and the degree to which participation in these different organizations facilitates the development of practical and/or strategic gender interests is varied depending on the political context.

Despite women’s participation in political organizations, their representation in formal politics has remained marginal. There are different reasons for this exclusion. Women have largely been excluded from political leadership positions—both in electoral politics and within political party organizations—which may lead to a loss of interest in electoral politics (del Campo 2005). This exclusion may also lead, of course, to women becoming largely active in the informal political sphere; regardless, it has influenced the lack of women participating in formal electoral politics. With the exception of Argentina (which has a gender quota system), women’s representation is below twenty percent (del Campo 2005). Although many countries in the region (Argentina, Ecuador, Cuba, Venezuela, Panama, Peru, and Haiti to name a few) have political offices specifically designed for the advancement of women and legislation designed to promote equality
between males and females, these organizations either lack funding or institutional support to dramatically influence policy or have made their goals so long-term that at present time their effects are negligible (del Campo 2005).

In the case of a comparison between women involved in the autonomous community organization Organización Independiente de Colonias del Oriente (OICO) and the government-sponsored group Federación de Colonias Populares de Jalisco (FCPJ), Craske (1993) found distinct differences in the effects on women who participated in the two groups. Women in the FCPJ were less likely to challenge male political authority, or to have increased knowledge about the Mexican political system, despite their political participation (Craske 1993). By contrast, women who participated in the independent OICO reported feeling a sense of empowerment from their participation in the group and felt more confident to take on power positions—both in the public and private sphere (Craske 1993). In addition, despite the majority of people involved in the FCPJ being women (60-70 percent), only one woman sits on the executive committee, and does not sit with the other male executives during the meetings (Craske 1993).

In El Salvador, collaborations between the Melida Anaya Montes Women’s Movement (MAM) and the Asociación de Madres Demandantes (AMD) led to the cross-political lines support for the “Non-Arrears Bill,” which required that all candidates seeking elective office get legal clearance that they did not owe child support payments (Ready 2001). Another organization, Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida, (the Dignas) argued for the necessity for the support of poor mothers (Ready 2001). The Dignas combined an analysis of the effects of machismo with a political plan that called for
political challenges not just to the laws that denied women child support but also to the larger cultural and political institutions that excluded women’s issues from their platforms and legislation (Ready 2001).

Women from both the left and the right mobilized for practical and strategic gender interests in post-revolutionary El Salvador (Hipsher 2001). Women’s participation in leftist revolutionary activities facilitated the emergence of feminist voices and autonomous women’s organizations; however, this has led to difficulties in becoming autonomous and fighting and sectarianism (Hipsher 2001). By 1992, the women’s organizations had split from the popular class-based movement and demanded “strategic gender interests” that dealt with women’s economic, political and sexual rights (Hipsher 2001:135). The transition to autonomy for the various feminist groups of the country has not been easy. The political left in El Salvador criticizes the feminists as divisive, “it portrayed women as moral, social and sexual degenerates” (Hipsher 2001:145). Women from various political ideologies in El Salvador have united on “practical gender interests” or issues considered liberal political issues, such as domestic violence, political participation, and responsible paternity; however, when it comes to issues of “strategic gender interests” or interests explicitly related to “class and sexuality or morality,” such as abortion and free trade zone reforms, feminists and right-wing women remain divided, with male leftist leaders often falling on the same side as the right-wing (Hipsher 2001:161).

Scholars contend that Latin America is ready for strong feminist movements and can sustain these movements over time. Sternbach et al. (1992) argue that “not only is feminism appropriate for Latin America, but it also is the kind of thriving, broad-based
social movement that many other feminist movements [globally] are trying to become” (394). Latin American feminisms are extremely diverse, as evidenced by the work of Molyneux (1986) and others (Alvarez 1990; Craske 1999; Borland and Sutton 2007) who discuss the varied ways in which Latin American women negotiate and combine practical and strategic gender interests.

While Latin America has seen a feminist boon over the past decades, the work and voices of an emerging group with a female identity, transgender women, has largely been excluded from movement discourses. In the following section, I will conceptualize and discuss the varied transgender identities in Latin America, focusing not only on the ways these women identify themselves, but also the structural challenges that hinder their repertoires of activism.

*Transgender Identity and Activism in Latin America*

The challenges to heteronormativity that are present in transwomen’s identities are certainly not uniformly expressed—especially in the case of Latin America. Some present radical changes to heterosexism both in their gender presentation and ideologies; while others maintain traditional cultural beliefs about the roles of men and women within their identities. While Jeffreys (1997) challenged that gender-transitioning surgery can be seen as mutilation and a violation of “human rights,” this rather ethnocentric view assumes not only that everyone *chooses* to undergo transition surgery, but also that they have the *access* to this procedure. With the exception of Brazil (and this is certainly only available to the wealthy) gender-reassignment surgery is illegal in Latin America; so, regardless of desire to undergo surgical transition, the options simply are not available (Conway 2006). Given this, transwomen in Latin America present their identities in
different ways.

The study of one of the most well-known groups, the Brazilian *travestis*, showcases the heterogeneity of the transsexual and transgender identity, as well as some of the traditional notions of gender that are still maintained even in non-traditional gender identities. In his study of *travestis*, transsexual sex workers in Brazil, Kulick (1998a) discovers that, although *travestis* take hormonal supplements, adopt female names, and use female pronouns, some do not self-identify as women—rather, they identify as feminine *males* (301). Additionally, solidarity between the *travesti* movement and the lesbian movement has not occurred, because the *travestis* largely believe that “God created man for woman and woman for man,” so they view lesbians as breaking the “natural” order of sexuality (Kulick 1998a:301). In fact, they also tend to have negative views of males who seek sex with them that wish to be penetrated, as this is solely for women (Kulick 1998a). In addition to these, Kulick (1998a) discovers through an interview with one *travesti* who identifies as female that she views lesbians as not elegant, they have a loose and lazy way of walking, of dressing, of comporting themselves, of talking, everything. So, a woman who is a lesbian, she is going to leave behind all her feminine characteristics and acquire masculine characteristics. And the moment a *travesti* begins to see those women being masculine, wanting to be masculine, what he imagines about women will come crashing to the ground…the moment he sees a lesbian….he’ll stop seeing a beautiful woman and he’ll see a woman with masculine attributes—which is exactly what he is (Kulick 1998a:308).

The relationships between *travestis* and lesbians is certainly complex, as the above quote states, and is based to some degree on preconceived cultural ideals about what is means to be a “woman” or “feminine,” which are constantly being bended and

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3 The use of “he” in describing this *travesti* woman is worth noting (and perhaps dates the piece a bit), as it is far more common now to refer to transwomen exclusively as “she,” since this is how they identify themselves. But this usage denotes the complexities that some trans women have in self-identification given the existing binary gender language.
negotiated within and in-between lesbians and *travestis*.

In recent years the gender-variant identities in Brazil have radically changed. Once solely the domain of the *travestis*, there is now a wide-array of gender-variant identities, with some even able to undergo gender-reassignment surgery. Cross-dressers and transsexuals have emerged as a distinct group separate from the *travestis*, and have begun to form positive alliances with lesbian and gay organizations in the country (Conway 2006). Additionally, Brazil has led the way in allowing for a limited number of MTF gender-reassignment surgeries and post-surgical counseling (Conway 2006), although the rest of Latin and South America have not followed suit.

In his study of Mexican *vestidas* and *jotas*, Prieur (1998) highlights the ways in which these groups “do gender,” and how it is contingent not only upon conceptualizations of gender but upon class dynamics as well. In addition to the *vestidas* and *jotas*, there are young, masculine men (who also have sex with women) who are referred to as *mayetes* that are a part of this community as well, both as clients and as leisure-time partners (Prieur 1998:288). The *jotas* and *vestidas* gender identity is rooted in cultural and economic circumstances and should be understood as both “an interpretation of themselves [and as taking] place in a dialogue with the surroundings” (Prieur 1998:288). The construction of *jota* and *vestida* femininity is both to be viewed as sexually attractive by the *mayetes* they encounter (this includes large breasts and voluptuous hips), as well as upon their class-determined ideals of what feminine beauty is (Prieur 1998:289). Indeed, many *jotas* and *vestidas* have short skirts, “[l]uminous colors and shiny, glitter materials, their hair combed and teased…the sisters of these *vestidas* would be boxed on the ear if they tried to go to a party dressed the way the *jotas* do,”
because this presentation suggests a sexually loose and lower class woman (Prieur 1998:289). This presentation, one that is both classed and hyper-sexualized, represents how these individuals attempt to negotiate gender identities and sexual desires within a classed framework in order to appeal to the sexual desires of the mayetes with whom they desire sexual relations.

The lack of dominant inclusion, the pervasive ultra-macho machismo attitudes in Latin America, as well as the severe social stigma of transgender or transsexual individuals has led many to engage in the sex industry as a means of economic sustainability (Conway 2006; Torriani 2009). While not solely the domain of travestis, sex work is an (illegal) arena that is available for employment, as there are no laws in place to protect discrimination in hiring practices based on gender identity. Given that the sex industry is not regulated in many of these countries, transgender sex workers do not have much in the ways of legal recourse or protection in their jobs (Torriani 2009). There are no standards that require adequate pay or protection from STDs and HIV/AIDS, leading to an increase in HIV/AIDS infection among transgender sex workers in Latin America and perpetual poverty (Klein 1998; Kulick 1998a; Conway 2006; Torriani 2009).

While transgender, transsexual and other gender-variant identities are emerging in Latin and South America, they remain largely under-studied as a minority group. Additionally, the influence of traditional dichotomous heterosexual gender roles are often a part of transgender and transsexual discourses, leading to a split both between
transgender and cisgender women’s organizations (the latter of which do not consider the former to be “real” women) as well as lesbian and gay groups, which some transgender groups believe are in violation of the “natural” sexual order and who view them as in violation of the “natural” gender order. There are additional issues with becoming a part of the gay and lesbian movement, namely that many are hesitant to join (another) underfunded, non-protected group, as well as the fact that transgender women identify as heterosexual and homosexual, so not all are apt to join gay and lesbian organizations.

**Political Challenges to TransLatinas**

The demands of transgender groups and LGBT groups have largely been ignored by many Latin American governments (Friedman 2009). While governments have improved both women’s overall status and political inclusions, the demands of LGBT activists and the transformation of gender and sexual power relations are ignored (Friedman 2009). For example, in Guatemala and Nicaragua, there are no laws in place that prevent discrimination based upon gender identity or sexual diversity, despite decades of women’s and feminist activism (IGLHRC 2008; Polanco 2008). The fact that there exists little protection for transgender and transsexual individuals becomes especially important when considering that transgendered and transsexual people experience everyday violence in their personal lives as well as their public lives (Klein 1998). Government response to transgender demands has been virtually non-existent, despite the fact that gender fluidity is common in certain aspects of Latin American and Caribbean cultures—for example, in ritualistic events like professional wrestling or when

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4 “Cisgender” is sometimes used as a foil to “transgender”—implying that people identify with the gender that they were assigned at birth. The term “cisssexual” is also used to denote the same meaning.
men (like the Brazilian *travestis* or Mexican *vestidas*) live their lives wearing female clothing and being referred to by female names (Kulick 2008b:259). However, the commonality of gender fluidity does not equate to the general acceptance of it.

In addition to the personal danger and employment discrimination, the lack of cultural and governmental acceptance of transgender issues has led to an increased prevalence of HIV and STD transmissions from males who seek sex with transgendered persons (Bockting, Miner and Rosser 2007). Of course, not all MTF transgendered individual engage in sexual encounters with cissexual men, and transgender behavior and sexual behavior should be understood as independent of sexual partner preference (Docter and Fleming 2001). While initial research tended to focus on MTF transgender sexual partner preference as means of study (and classification), this approach has long been disputed by transgender, transsexual and transvestite persons as too simplistic and not applicable to all groups (Veale, Clarke and Lomax 2008). However, despite the heterogeneity of sexual preferences among the transgender and transsexual communities in Latin America, high rates of HIV/AIDS and STDs are a major issue with which these groups must contend.

While there are government programs and offices designed to combat HIV/AIDS, many like the Nicaraguan AIDS Commission (CONASIDA) lack the funding to aid NGOs and other social advocacy groups in combating HIV/AIDS (IGLHRC 2008). The prevalence of engaging in sex work among transgender women in Latin America also increases the risk factor for contracting HIV/AIDS; however, few programs exist to educate transgender sex workers on HIV/AIDS prevention (Infante, Sosa-Rubi, and Cuadra 2009). This is an increasingly important problem that the transLatina groups are
trying to combat. However, given the lack of cultural and governmental support, in many cases their demands or calls for help are ignored by their governments. In many ways, this has only added to the ostracizing of transwomen, in that it leaves them almost entirely dependent on support from non-Latina NGOs and other international organizations. This only further exacerbates antagonisms between transgender organizations and their governments as well as other SMOs in the region.

The study of transgender identity and activism can be considered a rather nascent area of sociological study; however, due to the potential for the radical transformation of the binary gender/sex system that this group represents, it may play an increasingly important role in gender and sexuality studies. The role of transgender activists, and the ways in which they negotiate and challenge identity and attempt frame bridging with other organizations is also warranted of further study. While there are contentions that the ways in which MTF transwomen “do gender” (as conceptualized by West and Zimmerman 1987) is only reifying oppressive existing gender norms (Jeffreys 1997), transgender people, and other gender non-conformists, have the potential to radically alter our conceptualizations of sex, gender and sexuality. Indeed, transgendered persons provide challenges to both the binary gender system and heterosexuality (Schilt and Westbrook 2009). While transwomen may resort to stereotypical means to deploy their identities, it is imperative to understand that in order to “do gender” successfully in a social setting, they must conform to the gender norms associated with the gender they are presenting (West and Zimmerman 1987). While arguably there is a large degree of debate within and between transgender communities, gay and lesbian communities, and feminist communities as to both the legitimacy and implications of transgender identity—its
ability to resist traditional gender/sex dichotomies cannot be understated. Both male privilege and heterosexual privilege are contingent upon a binary gender and sex system, wherein the gender characteristics of an individual conform appropriately to his/her biological sex. Moreover, heteronormativity requires that only “opposite” sexual relations are “normal” or appropriate. Given that transgendered people (and intersex as well as other gender non-conformists) challenge this binary sex/gender/heterosexual system at all three aforementioned levels, transgender and gender non-conformity should be viewed as an active, radical resistance and challenge to the existing conceptualizations of sex, sexual preference and gender.

Summary

The movement out of periods of dictatorship and into democratic regimes led to marked shifts in the types of women’s organizing in Latin America during these periods. Women organized as mothers from all sides of the political spectrum, as workers, as feminists, and as transwomen. While these organizations had different goals and different political climates, each developed their own unique gendered rhetoric and gendered consciousness that continues to inform women’s organizing in the region. The reliance on traditional feminine and maternal imagery did, in some ways, relegate women’s demands to those traditionally viewed as “feminine”; however, through activism in these organizations women were able to realize the value that their voices could have outside of the home. Additionally, the distinct ways in which women, whether in mother’s organizations or community and labor groups, articulated both practical and strategic gender interests highlights the ways in which gendered consciousness (whether the activists describe it as “feminist” or not) and a collective identity can empower women to
change their material and cultural conditions.

Studies of Nicaraguan Women’s Movements

Democracy can facilitate the emergence of social movements (Tilly 2004). Additionally, the rise of a political system that is dominated by large political parties, like Nicaragua, is one of the key factors of PPT in determining the likelihood of emergence of social movements. Democracy has also given women’s organizations increased autonomy after the defeat of leftist parties. Autonomous movement organizations gave women a space to articulate gender oppression and collective identity where they previously could not (Huiskamp 2000). In Nicaragua, scholars posit that there are three major types of women’s organizations: (1) “the feminists,” that broke from other leftist and Marxist groups, frustrated with their lack of concern for gender initiatives; (2) women’s human rights groups, based largely along “traditional gender lines,” that saw their mobilization as an extension of their familial duties; and (3) neighborhood groups that were started by poor women to address community issues, as well as labor groups. Each of these three groups has been able to advance and continue mobilization in post-Sandinista Nicaragua. Since the work of mothers’ organizations and labor and community groups continues to remain important to an overall understanding of women’s organizations in Nicaragua I am going to detail them here; however, I will be focusing my study on feminist and transgender women’s organizations.

Feminine Women’s Groups

In the period of the Somoza dictatorship, women began to organize primarily as mothers against the regime. Women would write into one of the anti-Somoza papers, La Prensa, in an attempt to influence men to oppose the regime, claiming it shameful to not
support the resistance (Bayard de Volo 2001). Women took to the streets, banging on empty pots and pans to protest the hunger and poverty they were experiencing. These events were largely facilitated by the newly-formed organization, Association of Nicaraguan Women Confronting the National Problem (AMPRONAC), the predecessor to the first major Sandinista-affiliated women’s organization, created in 1977 (Bayard de Volo 2001). By 1979, AMPRONAC’s language largely revolved around the need to make conditions better for women (mothers) and children—rights that were being denied these women under Somoza (Bayard de Volo 2001).

Women played a prominent role in the Nicaraguan revolution. Consequently, understanding the changing gender roles and discourse that occurred following this time period are essential to understanding the current political situation for Nicaraguan women (Bayard de Volo 2001). During the Sandinista period, women were primarily organized as mothers—which could be an empowering experience, but it also “restricted women to political action that appeared deferential and self-abnegating” (Bayard de Volo 2001:4). During the course of two decades, the rhetoric and organizational activities of mother’s organizations (for the purpose of this section I will be focusing specifically on one group, the Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs of Matagalpa), varied greatly depending on political and economic conditions (Bayard de Volo 2001). The Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs of Matagalpa (the Mothers) evolved from a support-based, small organization to a broad organization with income-generating projects for its members (Bayard de Volo 2001). The Mothers adapted a collective identity based on dominant cultural images of motherhood and the Madres Sufridas (suffering mothers). However, the Mothers challenged the traditional ideas of silent suffering and helplessness; they can be
understood as both a challenge to gender norms as well as accommodating traditional notions of womanhood (Bayard de Volo 2001).

The Mothers were organized under a frame that utilized the image of Madres Sufridas, accompanied by an emphasis on “women’s difference” from men; women were able to feel the loss of a child more deeply because they had given birth to the child (Bayard de Volo 2001). Cultural norms specified that these Mothers could display outward suffering and tears at the loss of a child, something that men could not, which only furthered their claim to be the most apt to express grief over the loss of a child (Bayard de Volo 2001). One Mother, Doña Lourdes, expressed this difference in the following way:

The one who feels [the loss of a child] is the mother. It is a feeling that is never erased. Every minute we remember because we mothers are the ones that gave the child its food, loved it. In reality, a child costs the mother more than the father…You raised that child! You gave birth to it! And as it left the womb, you felt it! (quoted in Bayard de Volo 2001:65).

The “costs” of raising a child are differentiated by the Mothers, the father’s are responsible for some of the financial cost, while the mother is responsible for the raising and care of the child (Bayard de Volo 2001).

War is often understood in masculinist frameworks; consequently, during wartime countries often attempt to mobilize female support for war through feminine, maternal imagery (Baynard de Volo 2004). Mother’s groups that developed in Nicaragua both during the 1979 revolution and during the Contra war were largely based on the identity of a “traditional mother,” albeit with a militaristic twinge. Maternal framing can depoliticize and restrict development of a feminist gender identity because it disseminates government propaganda through the frame of an “apolitical” mother, as well as displace
anger away from the military and its state-supported regime and onto anger over a son being drafted (Bayard de Volo 2004). The image of “combative motherhood,” a mother whose duty it was to defend her children, was an image that the FSLN used to garner support from women for its community-based defense programs (Bayard de Volo 2001). One of the most well-known Sandinista images from this time showcases the ways in which “traditional” motherhood and militancy were combined: a painting (taken from an actual photograph) of a young mother with an AK-47 over her shoulder and an infant at her breast (Bayard de Volo 2001). The other major maternal image used during times of conflict could best be described as “universal mothering,” wherein the mothers of Nicaragua were mothers to all of the children of Nicaragua, and responsible for their well-being (Bayard de Volo 2001). The imagery also stressed that women should *want* to have more children so that they could become soldiers and support the revolution (Bayard de Volo 2001).

During the period of the Contra war the FSLN, despite the undercurrent of feminist discourse within AMNLAE (Association of Nicaraguan Women, Luisa Amanda Espinosa, the later version of AMPRONAC), relied on a traditional image of motherhood and maternal needs (Bayard de Volo 2001). The FSLN wanted the majority of resources and focus to be on the war, not on the changing demands of the women’s movement. The FSLN continuously referred to feminism as a “fad,” or claimed that it was “elitist” or “out of touch” with the reality of Nicaraguan women (Bayard de Volo 2001:89). Consequently, the Mothers relied on traditional imagery during this time period—although the major AMNLAE publication, *Somos*, discussed issues such as sex education, domestic violence and women’s double workday (Bayard de Volo 2001). In
In this sense, a feminist identity formed through this process. Baynard de Volo (2004) asserts that participation in movements can be beneficial for both the participant and democracy, because it provides a space for empowerment and a space to enhance their political engagement. In fact, the maternal identity may not stem from sexist frames, such as the tendency to believe that mothers have more time than fathers for participation, but from cultural *machismo* that prevents men from emotional displays. Through this acknowledgement of *machismo* and its influence on different aspects of culture, a feminist identity can develop (Bayard de Volo 2004). Moreover, even though the Mothers and AMNLAE were constrained by Sandinista rhetoric and goals, through their activism and publications a distinctly gendered consciousness developed. These women were organizing as “mothers”; however, they challenged the traditional notion of “silent suffering” and moved from practical demands to strategic gender demands centered on women’s double-shift and violence against women (Bayard de Volo 2001; 2004). In this manner, women’s human rights groups can develop feminist identities through activism along “feminine” lines.

When many of the Mothers joined the organization, they lacked education and political experience; consequently through the organization they learned why their child had died, as well as the way that they could carry on the struggle (Bayard de Volo 2001). The organization, especially during its first decade, was largely responsible with disseminating Sandinista discourse to the Mothers, who had not been exposed to much political rhetoric or action prior to the revolution (Bayard de Volo 2001). Of course, members saw the organization as more than a political group, it also provided a support group and a sense of collective identity, since the Mothers had experienced the “same
pain” (Bayard de Volo 2001:78). The benefits, both material and otherwise, that the Mothers received from the organization provided a strong basis for their continued support for the Committee. In fact, in its later years, there began a schism between the original Mothers that had joined during or soon after the revolutionary period, and Mothers that joined in the 1990s. The latter, referred to as Las Interesadas, were accused of benefitting materially from the work of the Mothers without contributing (Bayard de Volo 2001). This new cohort was not as present at meetings or at other community activities; however, would come when there were material benefits that were being distributed from the Committee (Bayard de Volo 2001). The differences between the first cohort of Mothers and the newer cohort could best be understood as a difference in when these Mothers were mobilized: those who were mobilized into the group directly following the death of a child found emotional benefits and latent benefits from political organization and activism, whereas those who joined later were not generally aware of the emotional stake involved in movement participation and saw the meetings and organizational activities as “little more than a resource of charity” (Bayard de Volo 2001:192).

During the period of neoliberal restructuring, the Mothers’ support network became particularly valuable (Bayard de Volo 2001). The Mothers, through their economic-based and self-help programs, were able to maintain conditions for its members (like land, housing, food subsidies and jobs) that non-organized mothers lost in the period following the FSLN electoral defeat (Bayard de Volo 2001). In many ways the loose membership structure—anyone who had lost a child in conflict could call herself a member—led to the influx of new members during periods of economic crisis (Bayard de
These newer members, who no longer had access to the social welfare programs available to them during the Sandinista period, needed the economic support from the organization. While many of the mature members looked scornfully upon las interesadas, the economic conditions exacerbated by neoliberal policy, coupled with the loose membership qualification standards, led to a dramatic in-flow of new members during the 1990s that needed the economic assistance (Bayard de Volo 2001).

The Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs of Matagalpa evolved from a small FSLN-affiliated organization to a broad autonomous group. By 1994, the group had a reported 2,100 members, although not all were directly involved in the organization—given that membership into the organization was given by having a son or daughter die in conflict (Bayard de Volo 2001). The organization, although large in size, had lost considerable amounts of influence and visibility during this time period (Bayard de Volo 2001). During the decades of the Mothers’ activism, they continuously relied upon and challenged the notions of traditional femininity and motherhood in Nicaragua. The maternal frame worked in order to drum-up Sandinista and non-Sandinista support for the overthrow of Somoza, as well as during the Contra War; however, the changing framing strategies (including opening membership up to mothers of Contras who were killed) may have led to the organization having less public impact. In the beginning of the organization, women got involved for the emotional support and political solidarity; however, new cohorts benefitted the most from the direct economic benefits of membership. While the organization is largely studied as a human rights group, the distinct ways in which the Mothers relied on a gendered discourse paved the way for members to develop a gender, and in many cases feminist, consciousness. Perhaps one of
the most important aspects of the collective identity formed by the Mothers was the ways in which they negotiated conflicting gender identities within changing political climates (Bayard de Volo 2001).

“Nos Tienen Miedo Porque No Tenemos Miedo”5: The Feminists

The development of the women’s movement in Nicaragua was greatly facilitated by the Sandinista revolution in the 1970s (Chinchilla 1990; Chinchilla 1994; Kampwirth 1998; Kampwirth 2001). Prior to the revolution, many of the women who would become Sandinista leaders and feminists belonged to independent socialist organizations in the country; however became FSLN supporters due to the rigidity of the more orthodox leftist parties (Randall 1994). The first women’s organization, the Nicaraguan Democratic Women’s Organization (OMDN) was actually founded by the country’s socialist party; however most women would leave this organization and become a part of the FSLN women’s group (Randall 1994). One of the major leaders of the Sandinista women’s movement, Gladys Báez, on orders from the FSLN national directorate, attempted to bring women together in the Patriotic Alliance of Nicaraguan Women (APMN), which was largely unsuccessful (Randall 1994). By 1977, APMN had been replaced with the Association of Nicaraguan Women Confronting the National Problem (AMPRONAC), the first of the FSLNs women’s organizations to successfully mobilize women across classes (Randall 1994).

The current autonomous women’s movement in Nicaragua is often traced to the women’s wing of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN or Sandinistas), the Association of Women Confronting the National Problem (AMPRONAC), which was the

5 Translates as, “You fear us because we have no fear,” a statement posted on MAMs’ website in response to the late 2008 governmental raids on their offices.
precursor to the Association of Nicaraguan Women María Louisa Amanda Espinoza (AMNLAE) (Chinchilla 1994; Babb 2001; Isbester 2001). AMNLAE had a strong presence in the beginning of Sandinista reforms, but lost power and influence during the civil war and the economic crisis. AMNLAE initially was the most influential of the women’s groups in the country; however, following the Sandinista defeat in 1990 they struggled for autonomy and eventually lost influence to other feminist and women’s organizations in the country (Chinchilla 1994). AMNLAE, although aligned strongly with the Sandinistas, controversially called for the complete legalization of abortion in Nicaragua—against the “official” Sandinista platform (Kampwirth 1998; Isbester 2001; Disney 2008). Despite the undercurrent of feminism in AMNLAE, which has been described as not an “official” platform; rather as one of individual feminists within the group, its direct affiliation with the FSLN greatly constrained its ability to act independently (Disney 2008).

The Sandinista revolution in 1979, although not feminist in nature, gave women an increased place in politics as well as state approval for women’s activism (Randall 1994; Chinchilla 1994; Kampwirth 1998; Isbester 2001; Disney 2008). On International Women’s Day in 1987, the FSLN released a statement espousing the necessity for full equality for women (Chinchilla 1994). It is important to note that this happened under pressure from the “women’s wing” of the FSLN party, AMPRONAC, which was now known as the Association of Nicaraguan Women “Louisa Amanda Espinoza” (AMNLAE). AMNLAE had influence over Sandinista policies and local governing during the beginning of the reforms, but lost much of its power during the Contra War (Chinchilla 1990) and this organization never led to women’s issues being pushed to the
forefront of the Sandinista agenda (Disney 2008). AMNLAE, along with the FSLN, argued that there was a “class-based movement for socialism and a gender-based movement for feminism in terms of an either-or choice” (Disney 2008:65). It has been argued that despite its claims otherwise, the FSLN largely ignored gendered concerns and did not facilitate a gendered discourse in the country (Disney 2008). The FSLN wanted to “integrate women into the fields of defense and [formal] production,” which greatly circumscribed their view on women’s emancipation (Disney 2008). Issues related to reproductive labor (unpaid domestic labor, reproductive freedom, freedom from domestic violence, and the like) were not readily addressed by the Sandinistas, the major concern was overthrowing Somoza; women’s liberation was expected to “naturally” follow (Disney 2008). FSLN leader (and brother of current president Daniel Ortega), Humberto Ortega, would laud women for “putting their reproductive powers at the service of a cause [by having children who would support the revolution]” without addressing that “social change must address women’s condition if it is to mean real justice for all people” (Randall 1994:9). Despite its shortcomings in feminist-friendly policy, the FSLN did create a space for women’s organizing as well as advocating for certain economic policies (such as labor cooperatives and healthcare initiatives) that benefitted Nicaraguan women (Chinchilla 1990).

AMNLAE dramatically fell out of public importance and influence after the 1990 electoral defeat of the Sandinistas (Chinchilla 1994). Many leaders of the feminist groups in Nicaragua were former “party women” for the Sandinistas, who after the 1990 defeat and subsequent refusal of the FSLN to tackle the women’s movement proposed reforms, became steadfast supporters of the autonomous women’s movement (Isbester 2001;
The autonomous Nicaraguan women’s movement is largely “feminist” in nature, although it does network with more traditional women’s organizations; the leaders of the women’s movement in Nicaragua are feminists (Randall 1994).

Following 1990 electoral defeat of the FSLN, which installed the conservative UNO coalition led by Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, widow of anti-Somoza martyr Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, AMNLAE remained aligned with the FSLN, but lost a considerable amount of power and influence (Chinchilla 1994). Many women left AMNLAE not just because of its Sandinista alliance, but also because it followed the FSLNs vertical organizational structure, which did not leave much room for the voices and ideas of rank-and-file members (Disney 2008). The effects of the 1990 election of Chamorro were far-reaching. Chamorro framed herself in an extremely traditional light. She frequently appeared in all white—invoking the image of the Virgin Mary, an image highly revered in Nicaraguan culture (Kampwirth 1998). Chamorro’s victory was due in large part to her promises of peace—emphasized by her public persona as peaceful virgin mother—after a long and violent civil war with the Contras (Kampwirth 1998). The election of Chamorro also, towards the latter part of her term, saw the rise of a strong anti-feminist countermovement.

It was during this period that an autonomous women’s movement began to take shape. Led by former Sandinista “party women,” the new leaders of the feminist groups worked outside of traditional politics, and attempted to form coalitions with other women’s groups in the country (Isbester 2001). These coalitions, however, were not always successful. The National Coalition of Women (CNM) arose after the 1990 FSLN defeat and included left-wing women, right-wing women, and feminists (Blandón 2001).
There were successes from the meeting: the “Minimum Agenda” called for more female representation in politics, as well as healthcare and education initiatives that all groups could agree upon (Blandón 2001), as well as inspiring (to some degree) a sense of female identity for those in attendance (Randall 1994). However, the formation of a collective feminist identity during the meeting generally only occurred for women who already identified as feminists (Randall 1994). There were setbacks at the meeting as well: the right-wing women were generally distrusted by the other groups and viewed as possible “spies” for the UNO coalition; the “party women” were using the meeting to attempt to garner more support from their respective parties; and both groups were attempting to distance themselves from the feminists and tried to “mute” their influence in the meeting (Blandón 2001). Additionally, the government did not respond to CNMs’ (Randall 1994).

Another meeting of Nicaraguan women, known as the “Diverse but United” conference, took place in 1992 (Isbester 2001; Mendez 2005; Disney 2008). Prominent Nicaraguan feminist, Sophia Montenegro, cites this conference as the genuine “birth” of the autonomous women’s movement (Disney 2008). Prior to the conference, AMNLAE instructed its membership to not attend; however, many did—as independent feminists (Disney 2008). Even at this conference, there was a dramatic organizational split that occurred between the Feminist National Committee (CNF), headed by Montenegro, Blandón and others, and the Puntos de Encuentro faction, led by Ana Criquillon and Vilma Castillo over the type of organizational style preferred (Disney 2008). Although both agreed that some degree of verticalism was necessary in order to ensure accountability and organization, the CNF faction favored an organizational style similar
to that of AMNLAE and the FSLN, as opposed to the Puntos de Encuentro faction that advocated a horizontal, participatory style (Disney 2008).

*Women and Reproductive Rights, Healthcare and Labor Rights in Nicaragua*

One of the major issues that has the feminist movement constantly in a combative stance with the Nicaraguan government is the demand for the legalization of abortion and other reproductive freedoms. Abortion is illegal in Nicaragua, and has been for decades; however, under the old FSLN the criminal punishment for abortion was minimal (Wessel 1991). During this time access to contraceptives increased and there were even certain instances of comprehensive sexual education programs in Nicaragua’s public schools (Wessel 1991). The Sandinistas also criminalized using women’s bodies to sell products. Under Chamorro these “objectification” laws were overturned and women were once again sexualized and used to sell products (Wessel 1991).

During the Sandinista regime, access to healthcare (including certain forms of birth control) and education for women increased; however, after Chamorro’s election the education programs were cut (even forbidding the use of foreign-donated sex education textbooks in classrooms) and healthcare was privatized (Wessel 1991). While abortion was not legalized during Sandinista control, the law was less-enforced and there were even clinics that provided therapeutic abortions in certain areas. Under Chamorro, the anti-abortion legislation was further criminalized and actually prosecuted, culminating in the complete outlaw of all abortions in 2002, signed into law eventually by FSLN leader Daniel Ortega (Kampwirth 2006; MAM 2008; RMCV 2010).

Within Nicaraguan law, in addition to outlawing abortion, the family is given a separate set of rights due to it being “the basic unit of society…entitled to protection from
the state” (Political Database of the Americas 2005). This section of the Constitution also protects mothers from discrimination by ensuring paid maternity leave and the “right” to not be dismissed from employment due to pregnancy (Political Database of the Americas 2005). While the Constitution takes away the “right” of women to choose abortion, it also protects them from discrimination based on maternal status. In many ways, this law can be understood as having both positive and negative effects. Women are entitled to pregnancy protections, including prohibiting employers from firing a woman for becoming pregnant; however, this only extends to the formal sector and does not address any informal women’s work or burdens on this work due to pregnancy. It also can be avoided in maquila factories in free trade zones that are not required to follow the law; subsequently, there are cases of women being fired for becoming pregnant, despite it being against the laws of the country (Mendez 2005).

In 1987, women’s activists won another victory, the rights of illegitimate children and the (legal) end of patria potestad (male head-of-household and the power of the father in the family) (Disney 2008:131). These laws were an important step in the attempts to equalize the relations between women and men in the home, as well as calling attention to the difficulties (many spawning from the machismo ideal that the more children a man has the more masculine he is) faced by single and/or abandoned mothers (Disney 2008). However, despite these legal gains, there was a lack of effective decision-making or policy initiatives in these areas (Wessel 1991; Disney 2008).

Economic policy changes during the post-Sandinista years had a dramatic effect on women’s lives as well. The increased privatization of social services, as mentioned above, dramatically reduced women’s standard of living (Disney 2008). Privatization of
public sector jobs led to many women being forced into informal sector jobs, such as street vending, in-home caretaking and domestic work (Mendez 2005). Increasingly privatized and poorly funded public health services, such as water sanitation, means that many women (who are responsible for in-home duties) have to travel long-distances to have access to clean water for washing and cooking, as well as to dispose of waste (Mendez 2005). The privatization of food subsidies and public healthcare programs has shifted the burden of providing these services to poor and working class women, who often cannot afford to pay for these expensive, private services (Mendez 2005). While neoliberal reforms have led to an increase in women’s entrance into the formal labor sector (from 25 percent in 1990 to 47 percent in 2000), increasing women’s “relative importance as wage earners,” they have also led to an increase in transnational corporations that set-up in so-called “free trade zones,” (FTZs) that do not give women much space for collective bargaining to better their economic status within the formal sphere (Mendez 2005:37-38). In many cases, women work what Mendez (2005) calls the “triple shift”: daily work in the formal sector, unpaid domestic duties, and work in the informal sector to supplement needed income (Mendez 2005).

Despite having (somewhat of) an ally in the FSLN, the feminist movement has had to combat the anti-choice and pro-traditional femininity cultural and political climate. Despite the FSLN’s claims to engender equality for all Nicaraguan citizens, women have largely been left out of this push for justice (Disney 2008). The laws that criminalize abortion, homosexuality, and the strong countermovement that greatly influences public opinion and legislation keeps the women’s movement in a constant state of fighting (Isbester 2001). Additionally, neoliberal reforms that occurred during the Chamorro and
Alemán regimes (and continue in an FSLN-led climate) have had dramatic effects on lessening women’s quality of life and hindering their ability to provide adequately for themselves and their families. While reforms have led to an increased number of women in the formal labor force, privatization of much-needed social welfare programs have disproportionately disadvantaged Nicaraguan women.

The “Pro-Life” Countermovement

Kampwirth (2006) argues that there has been much scholarly research on the feminist movement in Nicaragua, however far less research has been done on the antifeminist movement. She asserts that although the feminist movement is stronger in terms of number of organizations, the various different organizations that are “antifeminist” may be more influential due to their connections to the state and the powerful Catholic and Evangelical church networks in the country (Kampwirth 2006). The antifeminist movement is reacting not only to the feminist agenda but to the Sandinista revolution as well (Kampwirth 2006). The antifeminist movement, which really garnered support following the Sandinista electoral defeat of 1990, views the Sandinista revolution as detrimental to the influence of the Church and the “traditional,” conservative familial structure. They equate the feminist movement with the Sandinistas (despite the movement’s official autonomy in the early 1990s) and view it as detrimental to Nicaraguan values (Kampwirth 2006).

The “pro-life” countermovement organizations appealed to a strong sense of Christian commitment against abortion from a “life begins at conception” standpoint (Huemann 2007). Also, these groups argue that medical science has advanced far enough where therapeutic abortions are unnecessary—it is possible to save both the mother and
the fetus (Huemann 2007). But even in cases where medical treatment could harm the mother the fetus must be protected because of its “innocence” (Huemann 2007).

In addition to equating feminism with the FSLN, the countermovement also equates feminist values with wealthy colonizers and considers their movement to be “resisting feminist imperialism,” despite the fact that these antifeminist groups receive international (read: Northern Imperialist) aid from the religious-right (Kampwirth 2006). This countermovement has also described itself as against the feminists’ influence from “left-internationalism” (the UN) and “population controllers” that supposedly are trying to eradicate the Nicaraguan population (Huemann 2007).

In legislating the so-called “sexual revolution” in Nicaragua (Kampwirth 1998), many scholars ignore how even the negative legislation has impacted movement activism. To understand these periods as separate ignores how each of the laws passed based on prior legislation—even those of the Conservative UNO coalition under Chamorro. An after-effect of Chamorro’s anti-gay laws, which were lobbied for heavily by the religious right and antifeminist countermovement, was that the gay and lesbian coalitions within Nicaragua had found a rallying point; and became more involved in activism and more connected to the long-standing and influential autonomous women’s movement (Kampwirth 1998). Kampwirth (1998) argues that the policies have increased discussion, even within Sandinista circles, regarding homosexuality, sexual assault and personal politics in general.

Current Situation

In early October 2008, the Nicaraguan government raided the offices of 15 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the country, including 3 women’s rights groups.
The current president, FSLN leader Daniel Ortega, once allied with the social justice movements in the country, has recently had an antagonistic relationship with these groups. While there have been no formal charges brought against the groups, which include *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* (MAM) one of the leading feminist organizations in the country, the groups did have computers, fax machines and files confiscated by the government (*Miami Herald Online*). Feminists and NGOs both in the country and abroad cried foul. Ortega went as far as to refer to the NGOs in the country as an “oligarchy,” despite wide-spread popular support for Nicaragua’s civil society (*Miami Herald Online*). This situation is exacerbated by the fact that it was through the Sandinista government that social movements and social movement organizations (SMOs) were given a space for political participation and dissent. Many of the women’s groups currently under investigation by the FSLN were Sandinista supporters and party women themselves (Isbester 2001).

One of the most prominent feminist groups in Nicaragua is the *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* (MAM), founded in 1991, that “fights against patriarchal authoritarianism in all of its forms,” and recognizes that the formation of a feminist collective identity is “an indispensable step in our constitution as individual subjects and as political subjects” (MAM 2008). MAM coordinates and networks with other feminist groups in the country (and abroad) to push for gender-friendly legislation and a shift in gender consciousness within the country. Despite its antagonist relationship with the government, the organization maintains its national influence through both its own members, and through networking and collaborating with other feminist organizations in the country (MAM 2008).
Another major women’s organization, Red Mujeres Contra la Violencia (RMCV), formed in 1992, is focused on ending the problem of violence against women, as well as explicitly feminist in calls for an end to the criminalization of abortion and what they call “Orteganismo.” Two of their more prominent slogans: “Not one more dead…Murderers and rapists to jail!” and “I decide: You Respect my Rights!” signal their emphasis on anti-violence and women’s autonomy and ability to make decisions for themselves. As another prominent organization, RMCV has also felt the brunt of the government raids and persecution of some of its prominent activists (RMCV 2007, 2008).

Managua is not the only area where feminist activism occurs. In another, smaller urban city, Matagalpa, Grupo Venancia has been fighting against gendered oppression and organizing women since 1993 (personal interview). Grupo Venancia is not only a site for a massive education program around citizen rights, women’s empowerment and sexual and reproductive freedom, but it is also a cultural epicenter of Matagalpa, with regular performances and weekly video and art events (Grupo Venancia 2010). Despite being not located within the major metropolitan area, the group is still able to network and communicate with other activists across the country—although the majority of their activism is focused in the Northern region, where they are the most prominent feminist presence.

While the political opportunities for these organizations to appeal to the general public may seem deeply constrained by both cultural machismo and their relationship to the Ortega administration, the political climate of Nicaragua allows them to engage in
popular protest, as well as openly confronting and combating the government. The strong influence of the countermovement, both on the government and its ability to resonate with the general public, presents perhaps as daunting a challenge to feminist goals as the state. Indeed, feminist activists must constantly combat not only accusations of “elitism” but accusations of being immoral or anti-Nicaraguan values and beliefs. In Nicaragua, the post-revolutionary society remained, in many ways, as unequal as the non-revolutionary society due to the lack of challenge against the sexual division of labor and the secondary status of women within the private sphere by the FSLN (Disney 2008). Despite an often antagonistic relationship with the FSLN, its revolutionary and class-based rhetoric has had lasting effects on the feminist movement in Nicaragua, with the struggle for class equality remaining an integral part of feminist theorizing and activism in the country (Chinchilla 1992). Perhaps it is in some ways this double-edged opposition (countermovement and administration) that limits feminist involvement with other organizations, such as transgender groups, that are in an even more disrespected position within Nicaraguan society.

“¡Empleo, Si, Pero con Dignidad?”, Neighborhood Organizations

The last major form of Nicaraguan women’s movements are neighborhood organizations, which can be expanded to include women’s co-operatives labor activism, as in Nicaragua women’s labor activism often differs and is somewhat disconnected based on geographical region. Neighborhood movements have been the most prevalent form of women’s political and public participation in Latin American countries (Jelin

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6 MAM goes as far to refer to Ortega as a dictator via statements on their website, with the aforementioned raids being the only form of governmental recourse. RMCV echoes this rhetoric and declares that this government is anti-Sandinismo.

1990: 187). Women’s activism at the local level has included various organizations, including neighborhood committees and homeless shelters (Safa 1995: 231). Since the period of Sandinista defeat in Nicaragua in 1990, economic crisis and structural adjustment policies have led to increased participation by women in social movements. Their increased presence in the labor sector has led to women’s participation in labor activism as well (Safa 1995; Mendez 2002). Many of the independent feminists involved with AMNLAE helped to form the Association of Rural Workers (ATC), to examine the differences of agricultural labor between women and men (Disney 2008).

The FSLN instituted governmental policies that re-allocated land to private farmers and labor cooperatives following the revolution (Wessel 1991; Disney 2008). In many ways, women were helped by these policies, they enabled women to have an increased presence in the formal labor sector, as well as access to land that they previously could not have access (Wessel 1991). However, understanding the role of cooperatives and women’s empowerment is far more complex. While women were involved in cooperatives, the number was only 12 percent by 1990, before Chamorro abolished the policies (Disney 2008). Additionally, only 50 percent of all cooperatives, even during their height, contained women members—women were predominately workers on the cooperatives without any stake in membership (Disney 2008). Following Chamorro’s election, the cooperatives were privatized, leaving many to retreat to the informal economy (Disney 2008). During this time as well, there was an increase in foreign-owned garment factories, maquiladoras that became a source of employment for women in the formal sector (Mendez 2005; Disney 2008). While women did enter the formal labor force in numbers not previously seen, they are subjected to subpar working
conditions and a lack of social welfare programs (Mendez 2005).

Jennifer Bickham Mendez’s (2002, 2005) studies of a women’s labor organization attempts to discern how citizenship and gender manifest themselves in a worker’s rights organization. Additionally, how transnational influence and language “trickle down” to regional and local groups. After conducting her ethnographic research, she concludes that women workers have begun to conceptualize gendered difference in the workplace, which led to a call for “equal rights”; although the rights rhetoric has been largely influenced by transnational organizations (Mendez 2002). It is important to not over-generalize the development of a gender identity strictly to transnational forces, but their influence in the framing techniques used to articulate demands should not be understated. In a follow-up study, Mendez notes that there are strict differences, largely class-based, between these women workers and the Managuan feminists—often resulting in a feeling of alienation amongst these women at national conferences (Mendez 2005).

The organization that Mendez (2002, 2005) focuses on is named the Working and Unemployed Women’s Movement “María Elena Cuadra” (MEC), which formed in May of 1994 (Mendez 2002, 2005). The organization formed after a much-heated debate and subsequent split from the Sandinista Workers’ Central (CST), which was the largest trade union federation in the country (Mendez 2005). Following a heated debate within the CST as to who would be the newest leader of the women’s secretariat, over four hundred CST women left to follow Sara Rodríguez, the former leader of the women’s secretariat (Mendez 2005). This split led to an immediate smear campaign by the CST and FSLN, where warrants were put out for prominent women’s arrests and charges of corruption and embezzlement were leveled at many of the newly-formed MEC activists (Mendez
This mirrors governmental actions against MAM and RMCV after they were critical of the Ortega regime. Women were inspired to leave the male-dominated CST to form their own autonomous organizations; however, male leadership accused them of being “bourgeois,” or “would strip us of our militancy or they would call us political ‘deviants’ or ‘counter-revolutionaries’” (former MEC organizer quoted in Mendez 2005:51).

Many of MEC’s programs go beyond working to improve conditions in the maquiladoras, such as job training (even for “feminine” occupations like seamstress or hairdresser), income-generating opportunities to unemployed women and education about gendered issues like domestic violence and reproductive rights (Mendez 2005). MEC fights against unfair labor conditions in the maquiladoras including things like: lack of pay for overtime, pay rates being printed in languages that workers cannot read, lack of breaks or healthy food for workers, and unfair hiring and firing practices (such as firing women for becoming pregnant) (Mendez 2005). Many of MEC’s goals and framing techniques differ from those of the other autonomous women’s organizations, in that (especially initially) MEC focused on the issues facing poor and working class women due to privatization and economic exploitation, as opposed to reproductive rights as they felt the autonomous women’s organizations focused on (Mendez 2005). MEC also expressed a desire to appeal to, and work with and for, mujeres de base (grassroots women), although this horizontal and egalitarian organizational structure has changed since the movement’s formalization and increased funding opportunities (Mendez 2005). However, the organization includes gender-based programs as well, such as workshops on domestic violence, reproductive health, gender roles and self-esteem issues (Mendez
Through networking with other feminist organizations, MEC women discovered they shared common experiences with “the feminists” (Mendez 2005:103). The organization additionally bridges gender discrimination in the workplace (public sphere) to gender discrimination in the home (private sphere) (Mendez 2005). It is clear that MEC cannot be thought of as either a “feminine organization,” (one that is working solely toward “practical gender interests”) or a “feminist organization,” (one that is working solely toward “strategic gender interests”)—in many ways, MEC highlights the ways in which the “feminine/feminist” split may be a false dichotomy (Mendez 2005). Organizers and members routinely identify as feminists and attend programs sponsored by major urban, middle-class feminist organizations while simultaneously focusing on economic injustice and exploitation and a connection with mujeres de base (Mendez 2005).

MEC faces constant struggles for funding and collaboration, with a great deal of funding coming from transnational NGOs and donor organizations (Mendez 2005). There is a constant struggle between the reliance on outside funding for continued organizational activities and the challenges this “dependence” placed on MEC members’ notions of “autonomy” (Mendez 2005). But, this “NGO-ized” model (Alvarez 1999) must be understood in the broader context: MEC attempted to maintain a very local organizational base and organizational processes; however, they were connected with (internationally-connected) autonomous feminist groups in the country, the larger transnational feminist movement and other Northern NGOs and labor organizations—all of which greatly shaped MECs organizational structure and formation of goals (Mendez 2005). The fact that much of the donor money comes from Northern NGOs is not lost on
MEC members, who often use “chele/a [white woman/white male] as synonymous with “international funder,” and express “resentment at having to spend so much time on impression management for las chelas” (Mendez 2005:119).

It is important to remember that in order to receive protected and legitimate status in Nicaragua MEC had to apply to be considered a non-profit organization (personería juridical), so the shift to a formalized organizational structure was not entirely external (Mendez 2005). In order to achieve personería juridical MEC was required to clearly define their “organizational structure and the positions within them” (Mendez 2005:83). MECs desire to achieve this status required organizational formalization and a degree of verticalization. The need for independent funding sources required a formalization that enabled the organization to divide labor between “writing project proposals and report” and increase the attractiveness of the group to NGO funders (Mendez 2005:113).

MEC can be considered as bridging the (supposed) gap between “feminine” and “feminist” organization in Latin America. The group regularly articulated a class-based idea of justice, while simultaneously arguing from a liberal “rights-based” approach and a strong feminist perspective (Mendez 2005). MEC gendered class-based movements and oppression, as well as advocating a “feminista de base (grassroots feminism)” (Mendez 2005:95). The movement maintains its organizational autonomy, despite relying extensively on Northern-based NGOs for funding; however, this has arguably effected the ways that MEC frames their issues (“human rights,” for instance) and on which issues they choose to focus. Despite networking extensively with urban (and often) middle-class feminist organizations, MEC members routinely express feeling as if they are “left out” of the feminist movement, or that the movement is not “theirs” (Mendez 2005).
Transgender Organizations

Another women’s organization within Nicaragua that is largely, if not entirely, excluded from the autonomous women’s movement and reliant upon transnational and Northern NGOs for funding is the transgender women’s movement. Although the Nicaraguan constitution has protections against discrimination based on sex, it does not protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity (IGLHRC 2008). While transnational women’s organizations, such as MADRE, offer their services and funds to help with prevention of HIV/AIDS, the governmental office in Nicaragua designated for the prevention of HIV/AIDS, the Nicaraguan AIDS Commission, lacks the funds to support local NGOs in their prevention and treatment programs (IGLHRC 2008). This leaves local and regional organizations almost entirely dependent upon Northern NGOs for funding and assistance, which only serves to further divide them from their more nationalist or anti-Northern Imperialist fellow activists. Even if their fellow activists are not opposed to Northern funding per se, they do not want to be associated with Northern funds for fear of both stigmatization and persecution from the government. This problem is only exacerbated by the fact that, although the organizations are legal in the country, they are not provided the same legal status as other social movement organizations—which drastically restricts their ability to help their communities (IGLHRC 2008).

Another immediate problem for the movement is the constant police and public harassment; which is not covered under the country’s laws that prohibit torture and inhumane punishment—this is especially a problem for the Managuan travestis (IGLHRC 2008). The situation for LGBT activists in the country is extremely tense,
given the climate of heteronormativity and homophobia, coupled with the fact that the
government does not offer legal protections for these individuals.

Transgender groups in Nicaragua, and Latin America more generally, are not
solely fighting for legal recognition and protection. They are also, much as is the case
with feminist groups, targeting social and cultural norms that perpetuate dichotomous
gender categories. These activists believe that the reduction of gender variance to the
dichotomous “male” and “female,” and the biological factors normally associated with
them, ignore the myriad of ways in which individuals express gender identities (Torriani
et al. 2009). Transgender organizations are challenging both the Nicaraguan government
and people to consider transgender rights within their push for democracy and justice
(Torriani et al. 2009). This report also highlights the fact that, due largely to the extreme
degree of discrimination and intolerance, transgendered people represent some of the
most poor within the Latin American countries, and the governments do little to
ameliorate their situation (Torriani et al. 2009).

Transgender activists in Nicaragua are facing myriad problems: health issues
related to HIV/AIDS and STDs; lack of government protection in employment, housing
and other legal rights; as well as a strictly masculinist cultural climate that views any
male deviance from masculine gender norms as cause for alarm. These activists struggle
to alleviate these problems within the country; however, due to their lack of the same
legal statuses as other SMOs in the country, they rely largely on international and
Northern-based organizations for funding and support.

Summary

The distinct ways in which gendered consciousness has emerged during various
periods in Latin American history is well-documented. Women were able to successfully advocate their claims even in societies where they lacked important political opportunities, such as freedom of the press and assembly and sympathetic governments and publics. Through the use of re-defined maternal, feminine and feminist identities (all of which were contingent upon myriad factors such as class, location and sexuality) women were able to carve a space for themselves in the public sphere and influence both the political and the cultural.

Despite the gains of women’s activists in the region, there remain many issues that still must be combated—lower pay than males, domestic violence, child support, media objectification, a lack of bodily autonomy and a lack of sexual orientation rights. In many cases autonomous feminist groups are pitted against both the state and the extremely influential Catholic Church in attempting to re-define the roles of women in the region and secure reproductive freedom. Transgender activists remain both largely under-studied as well as disconnected from the majority of both women’s and LGBT SMOs.

The Nicaraguan women’s movement, despite its rich history of successful activism, is currently in an on-going conflict with the ruling Ortega administration—despite the fact that many of the movements’ leaders were (and still are) Sandinistas. Even in this climate of restricted political opportunities, the feminists are able to mobilize and attempt to build further public support. Much as is the case with the rest of Latin America, the role of transgender women’s activism is largely ignored in the literature surrounding the Nicaraguan women’s movement. In fact, I could find no evidence in the literature of collaborative efforts between transwomen’s groups and feminist groups in
the country. In order to understand why this lack of collaboration exists, it is important to understand both identity and structural factors. In many ways, reliance upon traditional definitions of “woman” may lead to the exclusion of those who were not born biologically female. It could also be possible that the feminist movement, which already finds itself in an antagonistic relationship with the government and the dominant cultural norms, does not want to further alienate itself by collaborating with another group that is seen as defying Nicaraguan values. My hope is that through interviews with women’s activists in the region I will better understand the reasons for this divide between activists. I am also interested in the degree to which, if at all, transgender activists and feminist activists utilize a class-based framework for framing their struggles.
Chapter 4

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts: a literature review on the various methodological concerns with this project, a description of the population I studied and the methods I used to gather my information. In undertaking a cross-cultural feminist research project I am well aware of the potential of cultural divides, and will address issues in cross-cultural feminist research. I also am prepared to give considerable attention to the various ways of defining and conducting feminist research (especially the burgeoning field of intersectionality as a methodological approach) in order to ascertain the applicability of these methods to my study. In addition to these two major portions of this chapter, I am also including a brief section discussing the issues of Movement-Relevant Theory (MRT) and reciprocity in research, due to my desire to create research that is both applicable and available to movement participants themselves.

In gathering my data, beginning in the fall of 2009, I became increasingly aware for the necessity to maintain a decidedly intersectional feminist standpoint within my work. I was also aware that this would require me to undertake a more in-depth analysis of not only what feminist methodology is, but how intersectionality fits within this broader methodological framework. I begin this chapter with a discussion on the various forms of feminist methodology, as well as a feminist methodological approach to
interviews and cross-cultural research. I will then discuss intersectionality as a methodological approach and the difficulties that entails. After this discussion, I will outline what content analysis is, as well as how an intersectional feminist approach may be applied to this research method.

**Feminist Methodology**

“Feminist Methodology” is a term with myriad definitions. It is also considered by many to not be a method at all. According to Shulamit Reinharz (1992), in her seminal text on feminist research methods, “feminist researchers do not consider feminism to be a method. Rather they consider it to be a perspective on an existing method in a given field of inquiry or a perspective that can be used to develop an innovative method” (241). This standpoint is nothing new, “discussions of method (techniques for gathering evidence) and methodology (a theory and analysis of how research should proceed) have been intertwined with each other and with epistemological issues (issues about an adequate theory of knowledge or justificatory strategy) in both the traditional and feminist discourses” (Harding 1987:2). There may not be a clear consensus, because “Feminists can have different ontological beliefs (and so different theories) about the nature of reality and the objects of their research (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002:12). So, there is not “one right way” to undertake feminist research methods; instead, it is a variety of different approaches informed by ontological, epistemological and theoretical backgrounds. How then should I define feminist methods?

In the interest of clarity, I think it is important to define what terms like “methodology” and “epistemology” mean with regards to my study. Epistemology, according to Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) is a “theory of knowledge that specifies
how researchers can know what they know… and what criteria establish knowledge of social or natural reality as legitimate adequate, or valid” (171). Harding (1987) defines epistemology in a similar way; as a theory of knowledge that encompasses questions of who can be a knower, what is involved for information to be legitimimized as knowledge, and what types of things can be known (3). From this standpoint, I am taking a feminist empiricist epistemological approach, understanding the ways in which women’s unique social positioning enable them to interpret and analyze their social lives in ways that may seem “unknowledgeable” to an academic “outsider” or researcher. I am defining methodology as “a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed; it includes accounts of how ‘the general structure of theory finds its application in particular. I believe, as Harding (1987) does, that these methodological features are central to our quest to “apply the general structure of scientific theory to research on women and gender” (Harding 1987:9).

Feminist methods like those mentioned above were created out of the demand by many feminists to address masculinist biases within the social sciences. On the subject of the creation of a sociological feminist methodology, Sherry Gorelick writes:

Feminist methodology grows out of an important qualitative leap in the feminist critique of the social sciences: the leap from a critique of the invisibility of women, both as objects of study and as social scientists, to the critique of the method and purpose of social science itself. This is the leap from a sociology about women to a sociology for women (Gorelick 1991:459).

Feminist methodology is concerned with “the way in which the researcher positions herself, the topic she sets out to investigate, the ‘method/s’ or ‘technique/s’ used, the purposes of the research, and the form and style it is written in” (Stanley 1990:12).
Feminist methodologies are not one concrete set of methodological guidelines; instead, it is varied by discipline, theory, and ontological and epistemological approaches. One common thread that seems to connect myriad feminist methodologies is attention to the ways in which women’s situated social positions, as well as their diverse forms of knowledge (that have often been excluded from traditional, masculinist methodological approaches) inform the research. It is also the case, as has been outlined (Harding 1987; Stanley 1990; Gorelick 1991; Reinharz 1992) that feminist methodologists self-identify as feminists. But, does this mean that they are always women as well, as Stanley (1990) claims? While debate surrounds this topic, with some (Stanley 1990; scholar Mary Daly, for example) saying “yes,” and others (Boone 1992; Reinharz 1992) saying “no,” as long as the researcher self-identifies as a feminist.

Another example of a “no” is from Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002): “Feminist methodology is not distinguished by female researchers studying women….those who are materially and socially more-or-less female do not necessarily fully share political interests or experience a common social/embodied existence” (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002:15). This understanding of feminist methodology is important when taking an intersectionality approach to feminist methodology, in that it highlights the myriad identities that exist between supposed “homogenous” groups like women. Moreover, feminist thinkers often assert that “the final product should accurately reflect the voices of those studied, and not an externally imposed analysis” (Cuádraz and Uttal 1999:168). Of course, this method must take into account “how individuals are members of social groups that are differentially and unequally located within a social historical context,” in other words, don’t reduce the findings to performance (Cuádraz and Uttal 1999:169).
Another aspect that sets feminist methodology apart from more traditional, positivist approaches is the notion of the “neutral observer.” Acker et al. (1996) discuss this at some length, including the following pertinent passage:

In developing this knowledge we also try to maintain a critical perspective toward some of the assumptions made within the social sciences. For example, the assumption that the researcher must and can strive to be a neutral observer standing outside the social realities being studied is made by many who use quantitative and qualitative methods in a natural science model. This assumption is challenged by the feminist critique of social science that documents the male bias of theory and research that has previously been taken as a neutral account of human society. A feminist methodology must, therefore, deal with issues of objectivity in social science and, in the process, deal also with the relationship between the researcher and the researched. […] In an ideal case, we would create conditions in which the object of research enters into the process as an active participant (Acker et. al. 1996:63).

I will elaborate on the aspect of reciprocity and active participation and exchange between researcher and participant in a later portion of this section; however, I wanted to highlight it here so as to denote its applicability within an understanding of feminist methodological approaches.

*Cross Cultural Feminist Research*

Another important aspect of feminist research that is pertinent to my research project is the difficulties and issues that arise when undertaking cross-cultural feminist research. According to Reinharz (1992) four major assumptions exist in cross-cultural feminist research:

1. The importance of cultural specificity
2. The necessity of intensive study
3. The possibility of commonalities among women of different cultures
4. The need for a critical evaluation of the study materials (111).
Below, I address the first two in-depth. With regards to the third and fourth assumptions, it is imperative, in my view, to always critically evaluate the study materials. In terms of the content analysis portion of my project, I will be utilizing the words of the organizations themselves, with a keen eye for commonalities and differences. In cross-referencing the reports of the activists with scholarly and news reports on the events, I will be able to ascertain the validity of the narrative. Additionally, it may be that a critical evaluation of the study materials is important in cross-cultural research to avoid the use of solely utilizing Northern scholars’ take on Southern women’s movements. The noted tendency for Northern scholars to imply that Southern women need “saving” from their oppressive conditions, or that Southern cultures prohibit women from achieving autonomy and are a hindrance to empowerment must be critically evaluated when studying populations from diverse cultures. However, within my project, where the sources are varied between North and South, and include the voices of the activists themselves, the issue of critical evaluation may not be as important as other factors.

Additionally, while I acknowledge commonalities that women of different cultures face, such as objectification, lower pay, domestic violence and sexual assault, cross-cultural comparisons are not integral aspects of my research. If anything, learning of commonalities that exist between Nicaraguan activists and my perception of the conditions of women in America will serve to further the reciprocity aspect of my research, which I discuss below. If commonalities emerge during my research, it will help me to better understand some of the commonalities of global sexism; however, it is not a part of my study. Instead, I am focusing solely on the Nicaraguan women’s movement—not attempting to compare and contrast women’s situations in diverse areas.
The reason I am undertaking this specific approach is due, in large, part, to the first of Reinharz’s points listed above. I am attempting to avoid over-generalizations of the conditions for Nicaraguan women, as well as avoid focusing on how it affects women in the North. My project is intended to provide a space for the voices of these activists, as well as understand how these particular groups interact (or don’t) and how they frame and describe their identities and goals.

Specificity

The importance of cultural specificity in research is pertinent to an avoidance of over-generalizing the “other woman” or essentializing behavior based upon the researcher’s own cultural norms and beliefs. As Reinharz (1992) notes, “Even if female subordination is universal, each instance must be understood within its particular cultural context. The insistence on cultural specificity represents a challenge to essentialism, a theory claiming that women have particular qualities or essences, stemming from universal biological factors” (112). As Mohanty (1992; 2003) highlights, when undertaking feminist research and/or activism across borders, it is extremely important to not impose one’s own cultural beliefs and practices onto the group that is being researched and/or worked with.

Northern feminist scholarship has been accused of a Northern, white, middle-class bias (Reinharz 1992), and a reliance upon examining the context of women’s lives that do not fit into these categories that have been written by Northern white male (and female) scholars. Understanding the role that women from these diverse cultures have played in describing their own circumstances, and avoiding and acknowledging racist/classist/sexist/homophobic treatment of non-Northern, non-white, non-heterosexual
women by many scholars is an integral part to making cross cultural research more reliable.

Issues of mistrust between the researcher and participants in cross-cultural research are common, and this problem is only exacerbated by the history of colonialism and U.S. imperialism in Latin America. In order to combat societal sources of distrust (like racism) “some feminist researchers define themselves as learners or listeners rather than ‘researchers’” (Reinharz 1992:29). Additionally, in doing cross-cultural feminist research, “Feminists have had to come to terms with the discomforts of producing knowledge of how women exercise power, promote injustice, collude in their own subordination, or benefit from the subordination of ‘others’” (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002:148). I am aware in doing cross-cultural feminist research in a county that has a history of bad relations with my country of origin, that I may find that “well-meaning” Northern feminists are having adverse effects on the Nicaraguan women’s movement. I may also find that my questions and responses are not as well-received by participants due to our different cultural backgrounds. I am not trying to “bridge the gap” between us nor inspire some form of outdated “universal sisterhood”; instead, I am attempting to develop a relationship with the participants that is based on mutual understandings of diverse feminist and gender-justice aims and an interest to learn from the participants about their lives, ideas and ideologies.

**Intensive Study**

Reinharz’s second point with regards to feminist cross-cultural research, the necessity of intensive study, is an implication of the first point, specificity. I am taking the position in my research that this ultimately necessitates the use of qualitative research
methods. While there are feminist researchers that employ quantitative methods to ascertain data, in order to adequately discuss the unique voices and cultural conditions of Nicaraguan feminists, I must do more than examine demographic trends or discrepancies in pay rates between Nicaraguan males and females. Certainly, Reinharz, myself and other feminist scholars do not discredit quantitative research (Reinharz devotes an entire section to these methodologies); however, in attempting to study marginalized women whose voices have been forcibly silenced from dominant rhetoric, it is necessary to conduct intensive, qualitative study on these organizations.

In-depth ethnographic studies of the Nicaraguan women’s movement are numerous (Randall 1990; Babb 2001; Bayard de Volo 2001; Isbester 2001; Bickham Mendez 2005; Bickham Mendez 2006; Disney 2008), reflecting the desire of many academics conducting cross-cultural research to intensively study groups in order to adequately write about them.8

Feminist methodological approaches are diverse in nature—reflecting the differences in theoretical and ontological approaches as well as disciplines of the researchers. However, feminist methods do share a few common characteristics: an emphasis on women’s experiences through women’s voices and knowledges; a rejection of masculinistic, positivist approaches that claim identification with or empathy for a particular group that is being studied somehow delegitimizes the findings and analyses; and, identification by the researcher as a feminist. Given the variety of feminist methodological approaches, it is imperative to discuss their applicability to various

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8 In many of these cases, the studies are often done with small sample sizes. For example, the works of Bickham Mendez (2005), Bayard de Volo (2001) focus only on one organization, while the work of Randal (1990) focuses on less than 20 activists. These small sample sizes may indicate a preference for intensive and specific research.
methods. The following sections will examine the two methods that I am employing in my research: interviews and content analysis as well as explain why I have chosen them.

*Interviews within Feminist Methodology*

Interview research is common within feminist methodology in a variety of disciplines. In the most general sense, interview research consists of asking questions of participants in order to ascertain information to support research objectives for a particular study. Practical ideas about where the interview will take place, who will record the interview data, and who will be present are all generally necessary steps in the interviewing process (Reinharz 1992). In the case of my two online interviews, many of these will be avoided or not known (with the case of the last one), will be generally avoided by the online format of my interviews. I will not need to decide a location for the interview, nor will it require participants to have to take time out of their schedules to drive to an interview location. The online format will enable participants to complete the interviews at their convenience. There are, of course, additional issues that come up when not interviewing face-to-face. Reinharz (1992) notes that varied forms of non-verbal communication, such as body language and posture, as well as things like silence, voice inflection and speed of delivery can provide additional information for the researcher.

Given this discrepancy, I also conducted five interviews with feminist and transgender women activists in Managua, Nicaragua. These interviews took place over the course of four days in June of 2010. The in-person interview format enabled me to ascertain non-verbal cues from participants, as well as document the offices of the activists. The only downside was that the interviews were rather short (between thirty and forty-five minutes each), which does not allow for the in-depth discussion of attitudes and
beliefs; however, my project was severely constrained by the amount of time I was able to spend in the country, as well as the availability of the activists. Further interviews would be necessary to ascertain more in-depth information.

Feminist methodologists often have a vested interest in allowing women’s voices to come to the forefront of the research process, and “interviewing offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher. This asset is particularly important for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women’s ideas altogether or having men speak for women” (Reinharz 1992:18). In order to listen to women’s voices and allow them to describe their own circumstances in their own words, utilizing open-ended interview questions is one option. “Open-ended interview research explores people’s views of reality and allows the researcher to generate theory. In this way it complements quantitatively oriented, close-ended interview research that tries to test hypotheses” (Reinharz 1992:17). Further, Reinharz (1992) argues that “A woman listening with care and caution enables another woman to develop ideas, construct meaning, and use words that say what she means” (24).

In their study on feminist oral histories, Anderson and Jack (1991), explain that interviews are an important way to garner new insights about women’s conditions as well as offer “possibilities of freedom and flexibility for researchers and narrators alike” (11). But, that interviewing women does not automatically lead to freedom and flexibility for narrator. In order for interviews to really reveal women’s hidden and marginalized voices, the researcher must be committed to reciprocity and “attend more to the narrator
than to our own agendas” (Anderson and Jack 1991:12). The question is, of course, how can this be done while attempting to gather research on a particular topic?

In her study on rural women, Anderson found that the transcripts of the oral histories revealed the significance of certain programs; however, lacked any in-depth coverage of women’s feelings and attitudes (Anderson and Jack 1991). Upon critical evaluation of the interviews, Anderson realized that the shortened time period, coupled with the desire to extract information pertinent to the established research guidelines meant she listened more intently to certain aspects and asked pointed questions (Anderson and Jack 1991). Jack finds that it is necessary to acknowledge that women internalize masculine language and assumptions, and that the interviewer must listen for how women uniquely interpret these (Anderson and Jack 1991).

Additionally, Jack states that it is imperative to learn to listen from the interviewees’ point of view. In order to do this, a researcher should incorporate the following techniques: (1) listening to the interviewees’ moral language: “moral self-evaluative statements [that] allow us to examine the relationship between self-concept and social norms”; (2) attend to the subjects “meta-statements. These are the places in the interview where people spontaneously stop, look back, and comment about their own thoughts or something just said.” (Anderson and Jack 1991: 19-21).

In looking at the various ways in which interview research can (although does not automatically) allow for women’s hidden voices to emerge, Anderson and Jack (1991) provide useful examples of how to ensure that the voices of participants are heard—and not just in terms of what the researcher wants to get out of the project, but what the interviewee wants to say.
While the online and face-to-face interview formats will allow for the respondents to answer the questions in their own words, it should be noted that in the subsequent translation, I may be taking liberty with translating colloquialisms from Spanish-to-English. In addition to these barriers, I also struggle with how to allow for the participants to speak on their attitudes and feelings, really allowing their voices to shine through, while attempting to uncover the necessary information for my project. To minimalize the negative effects of only focusing on what I want to know, I asked the participants open-ended questions about identity like: “What does feminism mean to you,” “How would you define womanhood,” and “How would you describe yourself?” In addition to these questions, I have also left time at the end of the interview for additional information that the interviewees want to share that I have not asked.

In addition to asking these open-ended and individualized questions, I also incorporated Anderson and Jack’s (1991) suggestions for how to listen to the voices of women—looking at how their self-identifications interacted with dominant cultural norms, how spontaneous interruptions or comments about previous questions add to an understanding of the participants views or what she thinks is important for me to know. While there are benefits to interview research, there are pitfalls as well—especially in online interviews. In only conducting one thirty to forty-five minute interview with each of the activists, I can hardly generalize about their entire set of beliefs, or even make a generalization about the overall state of the Nicaraguan women’s movement—this would require prolonged intense personal contact with the various women’s SMOs. However, from my interviews I am able to provide a snapshot of how some of the activists feel about themselves, the movement and their overall political and cultural challenges.
Reciprocity in Feminist Research

As someone with a strong personal commitment to social justice and feminism, it was extremely important for me to conduct research in a way that minimized the exploitation of participants, as well as differentiated from the traditional, top-down approaches to the study of social movements. And I am not alone in this regard: “feminist researchers frequently express a sense of connection to the actual people studied (as distinct from the subject matter being studied)” (Reinharz 1992:263). While the distance between me and the women I interviewed did not lead to the same forms of interpersonal connections as other feminist researchers have described, the communication and reading of these women’s voices has given me a profound respect for their struggle. In this regard, I think it is pertinent that I do not passively exploit their knowledge for my own benefit. A way that many feminist researchers have approached avoiding exploitation is to achieve rapport with the participants. As Reinharz (1992) points out “By achieving rapport, the feminist researcher reassures herself that she is treating the interviewee in a nonexploitative manner. Rapport thus validates the scholar as a feminist, as a researcher, and as a human being” (265).

While the development of rapport and mutual respect is an important aspect to avoiding exploitation of research participants, Reinharz notes that “we can develop nonexploitative relations with the people involved in our research projects, without attempting to achieve ‘rapport’ or ‘intimacy’ with them. Relations of respect, shared information, openness, and clarity of communication seem like reasonable substitute goals” (267). While it is difficult to communicate via email (and in person) across cultural and language differences, I believe strongly that it is necessary that the
participants have access to my writings about them. Here is where movement relevant theory (MRT), which I will discuss later on in this chapter, is an important contribution to methodological and theoretical literature about social movements and, although not explicitly feminist, compliments a nonexploitative approach based on shared knowledge and mutual respect (Bevington and Dixon 2005).

Questions of how to minimize exploitation and emphasize reflexivity are often undertaken by feminist researchers. For my research, I am bearing in mind the concept of reciprocity, or the give and take of social actions, often emphasized and integral to feminist research (Harrison, McGibbon and Morton 2001). Reciprocity can lead to access to participants as well as help to build report by sharing findings and allowing for criticism and comments from the researched (Bloom, 1997; Harrison, McGibbon and Morton 2001). Further, reciprocity can aid in the creation of “conditions in which [the participant] enters into the process as an active agent.” (Acker, Barry and Esseveld 1996:136). This can “reduce the danger of treating them as ‘objects of scrutiny’” (Bloom 1991:111). If participants do not feel as if they are being scrutinized for their responses, or that they are in the presence of someone who is opposed to their actions, this enables them to potentially feel more comfortable in answering questions honestly. I felt it important to disclose my support for the struggles of these women as well as my interest in international feminisms. While this may leave me accused of an unnecessary “bias,” I believe that it gives my participants a greater understanding of me, as well as why I am interested in their struggles.

In my study, I will be utilizing public documents (pronuncimientos posted on the websites of the different organizations) as well as private interviews. The use of public
documents minimizes, in my view, a great deal of exploitation and adds to the principles of reciprocity. It enables me to read documents that these organizations present to the general public as the “voice” of their organizations. It also does not require any additional time from the participants, which does not add to the potential burden of participating in my study.

In utilizing private interviews with activists, I have been extremely upfront with my intentions for my research project, as well as my desire to make the information available to them for comments and critiques upon completion. I believe that my upfront disclosure of my purpose and ideology and my desire to make my findings available to them, aids in the principles of reciprocity and adds to the complexity of my research.

As I discussed above in this chapter, research can be explicitly feminist and non-exploitive without developing interpersonal relationships/connections with research participants. Interviews, while allowing participants to speak in their own voices, cannot be as easily generalized to an entire group (for the purpose of this study, an SMO), if this is possible at all, as can other methods (Reinharz 1992). Since I am attempting not only to learn about individual participants and goals of movement activists, but also how the movement organizations frame their struggles to the public, additional methodological approaches are necessary. I decided to utilize content analysis, and in the following section I will discuss content analysis, as well as why I believe that it is complementary to interview research for the purpose of my study.

Content Analysis

Content analysis, according to Krippendorf (2004), “is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the
contexts of their use” (18). Given the interpretive nature of content analysis, texts can be subject to a variety of different forms of analysis; psychological, sociological, feminist, political, and/or poetic forms can be used and each can offer a different perspective on the original text (Krippendorf 2004). Content analysis has a variety of uses, including those most pertinent to my research, “to identify the intentions and other characteristics of the communicators,” or “to reflect attitudes, interests and, values” of particular groups (Krippendorf 2004:46).

Krippendorf (2004) states that content analysis may be best utilized for the following means:

- To ascertain attributions of particular groups, which can include “concepts, attitudes, beliefs, intentions, emotions, mental states, and cognitive processes” (76);

- To establish the nature/extent of social relationships through language used in communication between groups;

- To understand public behaviors of individuals/groups because “Individuals’ values, dispositions, conceptions of the world, and commitments to their way of being surface in conversations that involve repeated confirmations” (76). Content analysis is most likely to succeed when looking at phenomenon that is public in nature.

- To understand the institutional realities of organizations, since public writings “stabilize organizational memories, identities, and practices” (76).

Content analysis can be utilized for both quantitative and qualitative research (Krippendorf 2004). For this research study, I am taking a qualitative approach to content analysis. Qualitative approaches to content analysis generally share the following characteristics: (1) a close reading of relatively small amounts of text; (2) interpretation of texts into new narratives “that are sometimes opposed to positivist traditions of inquiry”; and, (3) acknowledgment by analysts that “acknowledge working within hermeneutic circles in which their own socially or culturally conditions understandings
constitutively participate” (Krippendorf 2004:17). Qualitative researchers adopt a more holistic approach than do quantitative methodologists when utilizing content analysis: acknowledging that it is justifiable to return to earlier interpretations and revise them after doing later readings, looking for multiple interpretations based on diverse voices, and applying “criteria other than reliability and validity in accepting research results” (Krippendorf 2004:87-89). Some of these alternative criteria include (but are not limited to) “trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, embodiment, accountability, reflexivity, and emancipatory aims” (Krippendorf 2004:89).

Feminist methodology has also incorporated content analysis as a research method, and as with “feminist methodology,” feminist content analysis is diverse. Records used in feminist content analysis are varied: newspapers, children’s books, billboards, feminist non-fiction, clinical records, art, television, and even textbooks and scholarly publications (Reinharz 1992). For the purpose of this study, I will be analyzing statements (pronuncimientos) from MAM, RMCV, Grupo Venancia and Red Trans de Nicaragua published to their websites. These written records provide both a narrative of current events, as well as what Reinharz (1992) refers to as “persuasive literature…designed to sway public opinion” (148). In analyzing these statements, I will be looking not only for the key frames and gendered language that is used, but also examining the larger socio-political context in which they are occurring. For example, in a statements issued by MAM and RMCV in the weeks following a governmental raid on MAMs’ offices in Managua, I will be paying close attention to how the activists frame the incidents, bearing in mind the public record of the actions.
Feminist historians, according to Reinharz (1992) have used content analysis to study “the intersection of race, gender, class, and age identities” (155). In taking an intersectional approach to the content analysis, I will be looking for mentions of key phrases of policy initiatives that speak to the multi-faceted nature of women’s identities. Additionally, my study is attempting to see the degree to which transgender women are excluded from dominant movement rhetoric, and the lack of mention of transwomen, or LGBT people more generally, can lend some credence to not only my assertion that trans issues are not a high priority for the Nicaraguan feminist movement, but also that “woman” has a distinct meaning within the context of the various feminist pronuncimientos. Alone, the content analysis cannot tell us about actual behavior or beliefs of MAM, RMCV, Grupo Venancia or Red Trans de Nicaragua; however, when these public documents are combined with the private interviews, these materials will enable me to define concepts such as “womanhood,” “feminism,” and the goals and strategies of these organizations (Reinharz 1992, see page 158 for discussion of public and private materials).

Content analysis is a widely-used research method for both quantitative and qualitative research projects. My project will focus on incorporating and intersectionality feminist methodological approach to content analysis, with an emphasis on how varied identities and claims are articulated on the individual level within a larger socio-political context. Feminist methodology does an exemplary job of highlighting women’s unique experiences as well as analyzing material though a gendered lens. However, within many of these projects, the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity are often downplayed in favor of an explicit focus on gender (as if it is somehow separate from
other facets of identity). Even within cross-cultural research and comparative studies between different cultures, the roles that other socially-constructed variables play in the articulation of identity is often under-emphasized. While there have been vast amounts of feminist content analysis and interviews undertaken by researchers in diverse fields, an intersectional approach to interviews is under-studied and an intersectional approach to content analysis remains as-of-yet untouched. In the following section, I will further expound upon what I mean by “intersectionality as a methodology,” as well as discuss some of the pitfalls of utilizing an approach (content analysis) within this framework that, to my knowledge, has yet to be directly undertaken.

**Intersectionality as a Methodological Approach**

Employing intersectionality as a methodological approach, although somewhat underdeveloped, has still been employed to different research aims; welfare rights organizations (Edmonds-Cady 2009), feminist organizations (Mizrahi and Lombe 2006); LBGT organizations and LGBT women and men (Bowleg 2008; Harr and Kane 2008; Jones-Yelvington 2008), as well as both qualitative (Cuádraz and Uttal 1999; Mizrahi and Lombe 2006; Bowleg 2008; Cole 2008; Edmonds-Cady 2009;) and quantitative research (Bowleg 2008; Harr and Kane 2008; Shields 2008). These approaches build on the work of theorists like Patricia Hill Collins (1990; 1998; 1999; 2000) and Kimberle Crenshaw (1994), while incorporating specific methodological concerns that arise from diverse studies.

There is much debate within the burgeoning scholarship on intersectional methodology as to whether or not intersectionality (much as was the case with “feminist research”) is a research methodology or a perspective that drives the research questions
Shields (2008) cautions that employing an intersectional approach in methodology, particularly in quantitative methodology, can result in each of the different facets of identity (such as race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, age, etc…) ending up like independent factors when running analysis. Here, it is important to differentiate between what Shields calls structural and political intersectionality, taken from Crenshaw’s (1994) early works on intersectionality. Structural intersectionality “reflects the ways in which the individual’s legal status or social needs marginalize them, specifically because of the convergence of identity statuses” (Shields 2008:304). Political intersectionality, by contrast, “highlights the different and possibly conflicting needs and goals of the respective groups from which an individual draws his or her identity” (Shields 2008:304). A third way of conceptualizing intersectionality within research is to “emphasize the unique form of identity created out of intersections. From this point of view emergent identity is experienced as a uniquely hybrid creation” (Shields 2008:305).

As outlined in chapter 2, I will be taking an intracategorical approach to studying intersectionality, which focuses on those who are at the “neglected points of the intersection,” who “cross” boundaries of socially-constructed categories (McCall 2005:1774). Within this intracategorical approach, I will be utilizing a political intersectional approach, coupled with an understanding of identity as a “uniquely hybrid creation” (Shields 2008:305).

Shields highlights three major ways in which social scientists have typically responded to intersectionality: “[1] excluding the question; [2] deferring the question; [3] limiting the question” (2008:305). Excluding the question includes a tendency to define it
as outside of disciplinary boundaries.\textsuperscript{9} Deferring the question includes recognizing that an intersectional approach may be beneficial, but deferring it to a later date, because there is not enough existing theory to take this approach within a given study. While there is certainly a vast amount of research on intersectionality, as the next section on content analysis will show, there is not existing literature on an intersectional approach to content analysis. However, given my claim that intersectionality would be the most beneficial way to incorporate the idea of identity into social movement research, this will require utilizing intersectionality, even if there is not existing empirical backing. The third roadblock: limiting the question, involves viewing “intersectionality in limited terms, such as a 2x2 study of sexual orientation and gender” (Shields 2008:306). Because intersectionality requires that facets of identity be compared to each other as well as studying the intersections between and within these facets of identity, limiting the question results in “missing the point” of intersectionality as a perspective and reducing identity to separate—not interlocking—components.

In both qualitative and quantitative research on black lesbians, Bowleg (2008) says that the most pressing methodological questions for those attempting an intersectionality approach is the “additive” vs. the “intersectional” approach. The additive approach involves, as Shields (2008) also outlined, reducing facets of identity into distinct (therefore separate) categories. An additive approach also “posits that social inequality increases with each additional stigmatized identity…Critics reject the additive approach because it conceptualizes people’s experiences as separate, independent, and

\textsuperscript{9} Shields (2008) is referring specifically to psychological analyses that define “questions of interlinking identities as sociological” (305). However, difficulties arise in sociological research as well with taking an intersectional approach, which are more in-line with her other two issues; deferring or limiting the question.
summative” (Bowleg 2008:314). Additionally, an additive approach often implies that identities and/or discrimination based on these identities can be ranked, which is one of the major things that intersectionality theory and research rejects (Bowleg 2008). Intersectionality researchers, according to Bowleg (2008), “regardless of whether they are using qualitative or quantitative methods, bear the responsibility for interpreting their data within the context of sociohistorical and structural inequality” (321).

Intersectionality researchers must understand that they are constantly up against what Shields (2008) called “deferring the question,” since variables “are often inconsistently or insufficiently measured,” and “many studies neglect to collect data about identities such as sexual orientation or gender identity” (Bowleg 2008:322). However, in contrast to non-intersectionality-focused researchers that “defer the question” when faced with insufficient or inconsistently defined data, intersectionality researchers must ask these questions.

Bowleg (2008) asserts that if you “ask an additive question, [you will] get an additive answer” (314). She recognizes that intersectionality can be difficult to measure, and provides the following suggestions: (1) if doing quantitative surveys, do not ask respondents to select only one answer with regards to questions concerning identity and discrimination; instead employ “check all that apply”; (2) design questions to measure intersectionality that “focus on meaningful constructs such as stress, prejudice, discrimination rather than relying on demographic questions alone”; and, (3) “questions should be intersectional in design; that is they ought to tap the interdependence and mutuality of identities rather than imply… that identities are independent, separate and able to be ranked” (Bowleg 2008:316). Asking intersectional questions can mean
anything from providing a “check all that apply” option, or asking open-ended questions that do not require respondents to discuss one specific facet of identity; instead, allow them to discuss their identities in the ways they choose (Bowleg 2008).

In my research, in order to attempt to avoid falling into the additive approach, I asked open-ended as well as pointed questions, which enabled the respondents to discuss various aspects of identity (such as “what is womanhood” or “what is feminism” or “how would you describe yourself”) while also being able to gather the information about the organizations that I desired for my project. Of course, my questions focus predominately on gender and the women’s movement, but questions about the most important issues for the movement, political ideology as well as allowing the participants space for their own comments and concerns, are the tactics I employed in order to attempt to avoid additive questions and additive answers.

Using coalitions as a model for intersectionality research, as Cole (2008) did when reviewing oral history studies can be a good example for intersectionality research, as “even constituencies that are often represented as unproblematically monolithic (e.g., “the Black community,” “women of color”) are in fact coalitions of sorts. Because the intersectional nature of all social categories means that uniformity of identity and vision cannot be assumed, all organizations involve building alliances” (446). Moreover, only analyzing relationships between groups (as opposed to within them) may lead to another form of an additive approach that implies a degree of homogeneity to a group (Cole 2008). Variables should be understood as social processes (i.e., socially-constructed categories that are re-negotiated over time in different sociopolitical contexts) rather than as descriptive categories, as existing research often does.
Intersectionality as a methodological approach has the ability—albeit with difficulties like: how to measure identity without a counter-posed group, how to overlay categories like race, class, gender and sexuality if interviewees do not explicitly mention them, and intersect biography and structural conditions while including ideas like race, class and gender—to combine seemingly different topics into one research project (Cuádraz and Uttal 1999). Cuádraz and Uttal included two completely different studies—one on life histories of one generation of Chicanos/as at a major research university and the other on in-depth interviews with employed mothers—to learn “how they perceived their experiences with making, maintaining, and changing childcare arrangements for preschool aged children (1999:161). By combining two dramatically different research projects into one theoretical piece about intersectionality as methodology, the authors were able to show both the challenges and opportunities for diverse intersectional research. A major question that came up in both studies was: “How homogenous or diversified does the sample need to be in order to complete a race, class, and gender analysis” (Cuádraz and Uttal 1999:162).10 Both discovered that different degrees of diversity and homogeneity can be used for different aims. For Cuádraz, who was focusing on a specific cohort (Chicano/a doctoral students) and the effects of affirmative action and experiences of classism, racism, and sexism within this group, a somewhat homogeneous sample worked. For Uttal, diversifying her sample enabled her to discuss the comparative differences of childcare experiences for women with different racial and class backgrounds. Despite using relatively small samples (between 30 and 40

10 Note that the authors include only “race, class, and gender” in their intersectionality approach—this is indicative of what other scholars (Bowleg 2008; Shields 2008; Cole 2008) discussed—namely, the exclusion of certain marginalized groups and/or identities like sexual orientation or gender identity.
participants), Cuádraz and Uttal maintain the scholarly standards of their work and note that “the power of small samples to theorize socially significant issues should not be overlooked…we strongly reject the assumption that larger sample sizes will lead to more valid race, class, and gender analysis. Simply enlarging the sample size only increases the time and energy required without strengthening the inferential representativeness or social validity of the findings” (1999:166).

Cuádraz and Uttal (1999) noted that in their interviews, the respondents did not always outright articulate specific aspects of identity. For example, in Uttal’s study of working mothers, many “did not mention gender as a dimension shaping their experiences with child care or mention the sex of their caregivers to describe or understand their childcare experiences. Nor were they too critical of the absence or lack of father’s involvement in paid child care arrangements” (Cuádraz and Uttal 1999:171). However, gender was still an integral part of Uttal’s (1999) analysis because this exclusion implied that the mothers presumed these gendered relations to be “natural”—i.e., “that child care was women’s work and the absence of men [was] normal” (171). In employing an intersectionality approach, it is sometimes necessary to interpret not only from what is said, but what is excluded, the ways in which multifaceted aspects of identity and experience are understood.

After undertaking the two diverse studies, Cuádraz and Uttal (1999) make the following recommendations for researchers: “the researcher needs to contextualize the social construction of meaning,” and “examine the relationships between structure (e.g. race, class, and gender) and biography (e.g. individual accounts) separately, together, and simultaneously” (179). Taking this approach to analyzing findings takes into account that
the individual members of the study articulate their identities and experiences both
dividually and as members within a socially-defined group—and these two things are
both separate and inseparable in order to more accurately analyze research findings
(Cuádraz and Uttal 1999).

Intersectionality as a methodological approach has begun to receive attention in
the social sciences. While there is much debate as to whether qualitative or quantitative
methods are preferable for undertaking this approach, both have been used. This lends
some credence to my ability to do “intersectionality from afar,” in my online interviews
as well as integrate face-to-face interviews and content analysis. However, I will still be
able to utilize an intersectional approach in both asking the questions as well as
interpreting the findings. The major difficulty I may encounter when taking an
intersectionality approach to my research is with content analysis. As to my knowledge
(and this includes an exhaustive internet search of all combinations of the terms “content
analysis,” “intersectionality,” “intersectional,” and “method”), there have not been any
studies done specifically on an intersectionality approach to content analysis. However,
in understanding the major qualms of analyzing and asking questions associated with the
diverse applications of intersectionality as methodology outlined above, I will attempt to
undertake this approach, albeit with the understanding that it may not be the ideal method
for implication of intersectionality.

I attempted, as previously mentioned, to integrate both pointed questions and
open-ended questions about identity and opinions, in order to allow participants to
articulate their feelings in their own voices. While this certainly does not avoid all aspects
of additive questioning, it did enable me to allow the interviewees to define their own
categories of importance. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of incorporating intersectionality is through the interpretation of both the qualitative interviews and the content analysis. In addition to not having previous templates to work from with regards to content analysis, it was difficult to apply my own interpretation of what was and was not said to existing data. As the findings chapter will show, I relied heavily on the suggestions made by Cuádraz and Uttal (1999)—especially in using both the words of the activists from the interviews and the content analysis to integrate “the relationships between structure (e.g. race, class, and gender) and biography (e.g. individual accounts) separately, together, and simultaneously” (179). I believe that intersectionality as a methodology is most successful when attempting to articulate the individual and the structural, so I spent a lot of time making sure to give adequate attention to the words of the activists, while not ignoring structural contexts.

**Movement Relevance and Reciprocity**

Movement Relevant Theory (MRT) introduces the idea that it is potentially important that the scholarly work done on SMOs be both relevant and accessible to movement participants, seeking to “bridge this divide between social movement scholarship and the movements themselves” (Bevington and Dixon 2005:189). MRT is concerned with more than simply analyzing or conceptualizing movement activism, there is a distinct difference between MRT and other dominant models of social movement research (like PPT) in that the old positivist models of social science research (namely the “detached” or “objective” scholar) are not necessary. In fact, movement-relevant researchers “need not and in fact should not have a detached relation to the movement. Rather, the researcher’s connection to the movement provides important incentives to
produce more accurate information, regardless of whether the researcher is studying a favored movement or its opponents” (Bevington and Dixon 2005:190). In contrast to older, positivist (and potentially masculinist) methods of studying and theorizing social movements, MRT theorists do not view engagement and identification with a movement or organization as a negative, or as a bias that threatens the validity and/or reliability of the study. Instead, this engagement is conceptualized as a relationship of active engagement and reciprocity that “not only informs the scholarship but also provides an accountability for the theory that that improves the quality of the theory” (Bevington and Dixon 2005:190).

An MRT approach requires utilizing language and methodology that makes the study appealing to social movement activists as well as useful for both scholarship and participants (Bevington and Dixon 2005). This accessibility does not denote that the research must be “anti-intellectual”; in fact, Bevington and Dixon (2005) contend that activists do read theoretical literature as well as reporting of and about their movements. Scholars have traditionally assumed that activists are only engaged with tactical issues; however, Bevington and Dixon (2005) contend that, through processes of engaging in discussions, debates and writings about tactics, goals and outcomes, movement activists engage in and produce their own theories about social movements.

To engage in movement-relevant research, scholars must understand and engage with some of the major activists within the movement, as well as others whose voices may not be heard as loudly within these organizations, networks and coalitions (Bevington and Dixon 2005). While Bevington and Dixon’s research focuses predominately on studying the global justice movement (GJM), the applicability of their
approach is by no means only useful in understanding GJM activism. By interviewing and studying both a well-known feminist organization as well as an emerging transwomen’s organization, I can engage with both major and up-and-coming activists within the Nicaraguan women’s movement.

While the distance and methods of communication between me and the activists does negate some of the ability that I have to actively engage with them, I can still maintain an MRT approach. I plan on translating the results from both the interviews and content analysis from English-to-Spanish and making them available, via electronic communication, for the participants. While this may be a trying process (as-of-yet it may either be done by me personally, or hopefully with the aid of other translators), it is pertinent to an MRT approach to make the conclusions and/or recommendations from my research available to those that participated. I also believe that this is one of the most important aspects of reciprocity in feminist research, which I emphasized in an earlier section of this chapter. MRT enables me to maintain my commitment to feminist reciprocity in research.

Integrating feminist intersectionality—with a particular focus the juxtaposition of individual voices within a larger socio-political context—and emphasizing reciprocity and movement relevance enabled me not only to provide a new way of applying intersectionality to research (through content analysis), but also to maintain my feminist and social justice principles while still achieving the desired outcomes of my research study.
My Research

For the purpose of this research study, I am attempting to answer the following questions:

1. How do identity and opportunity interact in the case of the Nicaraguan women’s movement?

2. How do Nicaraguan women’s activists publically and privately frame their identities, goals and struggles?

3. Are the public documents and private statements of the various organizations and activists inclusive of different women’s voices (specifically—lesbians, working class women and transgender women)?

In order to answer these questions, I am employing two methodological approaches: interviews and content analysis.

After receiving approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB) at the University of Toledo, I contacted potential activists to interview from the following organizations: MAM, RMCV, Grupo Venancia and Red Trans de Nicaragua. Women from all of the organizations agreed to the interviews; however, there was one major problem: initially I did not have the funding to travel to Nicaragua to conduct the interviews in person. I decided that I was going to conduct the interviews via email correspondence with the participants.

In the course of pursuing this research project, I was able to gather enough funds (through very generous donations from friends and family to whom I am eternally grateful) to travel to Managua for one week to conduct face-to-face interviews. Since three of the four groups were located in Managua, I focused my in-person interviews on those groups. I conducted interviews with three activists from Red Trans de Nicaragua, and one each from RMCV and MAM. Despite being in Managua, I was unable to stay
long enough to travel to the northern city of Matagalpa, where Grupo Venancia’s offices are located. I decided to retain the online interview format with this organization and was able to conduct two online interviews with members.

For the content analysis portion of my research project, I analyzed fourteen pronuncimientos posted on MAMs’ website, dating from August 2007 to January of 2011. The documents range from two to twenty pages each. These texts were released at various times, both as responses to governmental attacks on the organization, announcements for holidays like International Women’s Day, as well as responses from regional summits on women’s rights. I also analyzed nine pronuncimientos posted on RMCVs’ website, dating from September 2007 to December 2009. Additionally, I analyzed twelve public educational materials from Grupo Venancia’s website. The purpose of utilizing these documents as well as the method of content analysis is to understand how participants articulate their claims and frame their struggles in the public sphere, as well as to attempt to ascertain a better understanding of the facets of identity the group appeals to within their documents. I chose these particular documents because they provide examples of the public voice of the organization, which provides a counter to the personal interviews conducted. This allows me to analyze how the two are comparable, as well as understand the differences between a private interview and a public voice of the overall organization.

11 While MAM, RMCV and Grupo Venencia had readily available information via their website, Red Trans de Nicaragua did not. I undertook an additional internet search to attempt to find any similar statements made by Red Trans, but could not find any. This leads to decidedly more information about MAM, RMCV and Grupo Venancia than Red Trans de Nicaragua; however, additional studies could be undertaken in the future once Red Trans de Nicaragua has advanced to a more formalized organization and may produce similar materials. I do not want to include public statements from trans organizations other than the one that I am studying, as this may not be indicative of the statements, opinions, and/or ideology of Red Trans de Nicaragua.
I have chosen a convenience sampling method, wherein I am using available texts from certain groups, with the full knowledge that this is not the entirety of information available because, for the purpose of my thesis, I am focused on studying three specific feminist groups: MAM, RMCV and *Grupo Venancia* and one transgender women’s group: *Red Trans de Nicaragua*. I am well aware of the potential biases with choosing only information supplied by the organization itself: such as, only getting a few fractions of the voices within the Nicaraguan women’s movement, relying on one particular voice within the organization who may not be indicative of the organizational views as a whole, as well as that it does not allow for alternative opinions and interpretations of the circumstances described by MAM, RMCV and *Grupo Venancia*. However, with the case of not representing the organization as a whole, I am making the assumption that the *pronunciamientos* are approved by the organization and supported by (at least its voting) members. Additionally, since I am attempting to discern how these organizations frame their own struggles and define their own identities, including information from diverse sources will not shed light on this research aim. Of course, I bear in mind the potential biases of my research due to the demographics of the organization I am studying. In their research of queer student support for queer politics, Harr and Kane (2008) noted the biases from choosing only students from Liberal Arts colleges, and the potential, given the demographics of these universities, to have an over-representation of white, middle-class Americans. With my study, I am knowledgeable that including MAM, *Red Trans de Nicaragua*, and RMCV, organizations located in the metropolitan national capital of Managua, and *Grupo Venancia*, located in a smaller yet still urban city, Matagalpa, I may
be biased towards having respondents of similar geographical locations and/or social classes.

Summary

Understanding the ways in which the personal interacts with the political is one of my main reasons for utilizing feminist research methods. I want to hear the interviewees define and discuss their lives in their own words, while understanding the ways in which they frame their arguments to the larger societal context. I identify as a feminist, and believe that my “deep identification” with ideas of gender justice does not detract from my ability to conduct legitimate research. Feminist researchers, in contrast to more traditional, positivist, masculinist methods, have disclosed their identification with and/or solidarity with those who are a part of the research project (Reinharz 1992). Additionally, the necessity of understanding the unique ways in which various socially-constructed categories (such as race, class, gender, sexuality) manifest themselves in identity and daily interactions, means that it is imperative to utilize an intersectional feminist approach. My project attempts to integrate the personal and the political, while being constantly aware of the socio-political context and the necessity for interaction and discourse between myself and the participants.
Chapter 5

Other Actors and Social Movement Organizations

In order to ascertain the degree to which political opportunities and collective identities interact to explain social movement activism, I wanted to look at the roles of feminist SMOs during periods of decreased political and cultural opportunities, and also attempt to explain the exclusion of transgender women’s organizations. The Nicaraguan women’s movement provides the perfect background for this type of research. The various feminist organizations are well-established—many having been formed in the few years directly following the 1990 election of Violeta de Chamorro and the collapse of the FSLN as a political power. Additionally, the recent government raids against Nicaraguan women’s organizations, three of which I am studying for this project, provide the backdrop of decreased political opportunity.

Transgender organizations have begun to become visible in many Latin American countries, and Nicaragua is no exception. However, as I mentioned previously, transgender women are largely excluded from dominant feminist and women’s movement rhetoric. I wanted to examine whether or not this was the case in Nicaragua, as well as attempt to discern some of the possible reasons why this could be. Considering that transgender organizations were not targeted during the aforementioned government investigation of SMOs, I will be focusing mainly on obstacles to transwomens’ ability to
organize as well as how cultural factors affect the degree to which they resonate with dominant Nicaraguan society.

In this chapter I will discuss two important aspects to consider in movement success: the role of the state and culture. I will address political and cultural opportunities for each of the organizations that I studied, as well as summarize the major findings from this research. This chapter is meant to be an overview of two major aspects that may influence women’s organizing in Nicaragua. However, it is not meant to be inclusive of all of the major political opportunities that the organizations may face, as this is far beyond the scope of my study.

The State and Social Movements

Following the research of scholars like Tilly (1978), whose work on political opportunities has helped to create the dominant social movements theoretical framework, I will begin this section with a discussion of the political opportunities (or lack thereof) facing the Nicaraguan women’s movement. To understand the state of political opportunity, and by this I mean “consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics,” I looked at the ways in which both formal (structural, legal) opportunities and cultural opportunities facilitated or hindered women’s repertoires of activism (Tarrow quoted in Meyer 2004:134).

Nicaragua presents a unique set of political opportunities when looking at both government and culture. With regards to politics, on the one hand, three of the four groups I interviewed: MAM, RMCV and Grupo Venancia were all targeted by the Ortega administration and many take a staunch anti-FSLN stance. However, on the other hand,
Nicaraguan law permits freedom of speech, press and assembly and the organizations can have protests, and say that Ortega is, among other things, a “sociopath,” a “dictator” and the figurehead of “male impunity.” With regards to culture, this is a unique set of circumstances as well. In each of my seven interviews, the participants referenced cultural hindrances to their agenda, be it specifically patriarchy or machismo, or generally a culture of sexist stereotyping of women’s aptitudes and abilities or intolerance to alternative gender identities and sexual orientations. However, the women’s movement (and this is especially true in their framing via the pronuncimientos, which will be discussed in the proceeding chapter) often draws on women’s participation in the 1979 revolution and the understanding of the changes in gender roles and gender acceptable behaviors that followed. In order to adequately understand the role of the state and overall culture in shaping activism of the Nicaraguan women’s movement, the idiosyncrasies of these opportunities must be kept in mind.

Below, I address each of the four organizations I studied more in-depth in terms of political opportunities for each organization. Afterwards, I will discuss the overall role of the other actors (the state and culture) in the continued influence of the Nicaraguan women’s movement.

*MAM: Politics and Opportunities*

As mentioned in the literature review, in September of 2008, the Nicaraguan government raided MAMs’ Managua offices; confiscating files, computers and other materials under the guise of suspicion of money laundering. No formal charges were ever brought against the organization; however, this did leave them with a rather negative public image. In addition to assaults against the organization itself, prominent members
within the organization, such as Juanita Jimenez and Sophia Montenegro, were especially targeted for public accusations—including the implication that Sophia Montenegro was actually a CIA operative undercover working for the United State, a charge that was without merit (MAM 2008b). This atmosphere of extreme tension between MAM and the Ortega administration greatly constrained their political opportunities—especially in the period immediately following the raids, when all assets were temporarily frozen and files were police evidence (Associated Press 2008). While it could be assumed that following the governmental raids that MAM would lower their political profile or censor their public political statements (as early as 2006 MAMs’ pronuncimientos accused Ortega of “back room dealings” and referred to him as a “dictator”), this was not the case, as MAM continues to remain a solid organization and continues to do work in Nicaragua for women’s rights up until the present date.

Instead of the government intervention being a crackdown so severe that it curtailed activism or changed the tone of MAMs’ political arguments—it actually may have had the opposite effect. In many ways, the attack on MAMs’ offices only increased their desire to have their side of the story told publically, releasing a public statement on September 9, 2008 only days after the raid, stating their right to organize and reaffirming their position regarding the raids:

Faced with such events, we want to reiterate to the public in general and women in particular that we will not shut up. We will continue raising our voices to protest the harassment and aggression with which they want to terrorize and paralyze us. They are operating outside the law, they are the ones who should be prosecuted and convicted for their nonsense and disruption of country. They are the ones who will go down in history as abusers and violators of women’s human rights (MAM 2008b).
MAM continued with their public campaign, continuing to issue four more *pronunciamientos* via their website in 2009, as well as two co-authored longer bulletins devoted to the “Political Persecution of the Feminists” (MAM et al. 2008; MAM et al. 2009). As opposed to the event marking a change in MAMs’’’ rhetoric away from criticizing the FSLN, and Ortega in particular, if anything, their tone became even more critical. Sophia Montenegro wrote an entire short article discussing the “cowardice and illegitimacy” of Daniel Ortega; referring to him as, among other things, a “malignant narcissist” and a manipulator that must be removed from power (Montenegro 2009:2). MAMs’’’ bulletins and *pronunciamientos* name the government as a source of the problems in Nicaragua, and for Nicaraguan women in particular, a total of 111 times.

*RMCV: Politics and Opportunities*

The Network of Woman Against Violence (RMCV) was another of the women’s organizations targeted during the 2008 raids and subsequently faced the same degree of defamatory statements being made about their organization and members of their organization in the press. RMCV responded in a similar way to MAM: issuing public statements via their website and public statements of solidarity with MAM and the other organizations targeted. In response to the actions of the Ortega administration, RMCV responded with the following:

…it was done] in order to delegitimize and discredit our struggle, leaving no alternative for women to claim and exercise their right as citizens to live without violence Today religious hierarchies, in collusion with the state, make use of threats, intimidation, persecution, judicialization, with the clear political objective to sanction, obstruct or impede the work we do and therefore are not a personal attack but an attack common to all women and Nicaraguan society…Therefore, we call on all women's organizations and national and international joint spaces of civil society and social movements, and people at large to mobilize against this act of persecution and political terrorism, to defend the rights and freedom of the
companeras, which is the right and freedom of all women, and repudiate all actions by the State and the Catholic hierarchy (RMCVaN.d.).

Further, the organization also released a public statement via their website and one of the feminist bulletins that there needs to be a “stopping of the harassment of women of RMCV and the various areas of expression within the Nicaraguan Women’s Movements” (RMCVaN.d.). And linked with MAM in the desire for a participatory democracy wherein there is “full public participation and exercise of civil, political, social and economic rights.”

The feeling that the Ortega administration remains in opposition to RMCV was mentioned in an interview with Klemen, an RMCV activist where she stated “the president, well he is not on our side all of the time.” The interview brought up another important issue that even though there is currently not an open antagonism between the Ortega administration and feminist organizations, that getting their agendas politically implemented remains a huge issue. Klemen said, “the government says they will work with the feminists, but then they attack us—it’s not a coincidence. It’s corruption problems—this is what goes on in the government here.” Despite a “cooling off” between the Ortega administration and RMCV, it seems that distrust of the administration, and their ability to implement a feminist-friendly agenda, remains intact.

Grupo Venancia: Politics and Opportunities

Grupo Venancia, a feminist organization based out of Matagalpa and perhaps the most well-known organization within the Network of Matagalpa Women, also had charges of money laundering and corruption leveled against them during the same period as the raids against MAM and RMCV. Grupo Venancia, being separated from the Managuan feminists geographically, reached out to show their solidarity and support
through *pronunciamientos* and inclusion in the bulletins as well. In a statement released on their website following the raids, Grupo Venancia stated that they were a “legally constituted organization…[whose bylaws were] approved by the Ministry of the Interior” and that

> We found no reason or legal justification [in the] public statements that the Minister of Interior has poured through the media saying that he urged the Attorney General of the Republic to investigate us for money laundering, along with 16 other organizations, in no time we have been called by the Ministry of the Interior to clarify the terms of a cooperation agreement with the Common Fund, nor we have been notified of any penalty or termination for default of our obligations. ([Grupo Venancia] 2008).

At the end of the statement, they demand

> the Interior Ministry and the official media stop this campaign of vilification against the organizations, mainly against the leaders and women’s organizations that have historically contributed to the integral development of Nicaragua, fighting for democracy in the country and at home ([Grupo Venancia] 2008).

Although Grupo Venancia clearly disagreed with the actions of the government, the ways in which they addressed the issue were far less charged than the words of MAM or RMCV. In fact, nowhere in their public documents do they refer to Ortega as a “dictator” or imply an authoritarian government, as MAM and RMCV did. However, the above statements do reiterate their dedication to democracy and the organization did sign a declaration made by various Nicaraguan feminist groups in 2009 or the necessity of participatory democracy and an end to the vilification of feminist organizations and leadership. Additionally, Grupo Venancia declared in a bulletin the necessity of “national and international solidarity” regarding the government’s treatment of women’s organizations ([Grupo Venancia] 2009b). Despite their obvious anger regarding the raids, their official position was to outline their financial holdings and reiterate that no formal
charges had been brought against them. In comparison to the other two organizations researched, *Grupo Venancia* took a far less combative public stance when discussing their relationship to the Nicaraguan government.

*Effects for MAM, RMCV and Grupo Venancia Following the Raids*

In order to understand how, despite political repression, these three organizations were able to maintain a highly critical stance against the government, it is important to understand the laws in place that allowed this to happen. The right to organize is enshrined in articles 49 and 50 of the Nicaraguan constitution, which enabled MAM, RMCV, *Grupo Venancia* and others, to actively protest the actions of the government (Political Database of the Americas 2005). Additionally, the right to freedom of speech is legitimized in article 30 which states “Nicaraguans have the right to freely express their beliefs in public or private, individually or collectively, in oral or written form” (Political Database of the Americas 2005). The existing permanent laws enabled these organizations to express their beliefs via public statements even when there were temporary periods wherein the government was extremely hostile not only to their agenda, but to their organization as well.

One outcome of this incident, especially for MAM, was an increased focus on framing their arguments in terms of being “pro-democracy” and “anti-dictatorship.” In many of their pronunciamientos MAM calls to all Nicaraguans, not just women, to oppose “Orteganism” on the basis that it represents a turn away from democracy and backwards towards dictatorship. It remains to be seen whether or not this has been a completely successful venture for MAM and the other organizations. Ortega will run again,
presumably, in 2011. After these elections, it will be interesting to see if the efforts to discredit the Ortega administration prove at all successful.

It is also difficult to say whether or not membership in these organizations has been disproportionately affected by these occurrences. MAMs’ member of membership has decreased since the 2008 raids from about 110-120 members to around 70 (personal interview with Juanita Jimenez, 2010). However, outside of organizational membership, the raids led to statements of solidarity from other organizations including Catholics for the Right to Decide, Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights, Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights, Women’s Health Network of Latin America and the Caribbean, International Federation of Leagues for Human Rights, Movement Against Sexual Violence, and Cimanoticias, a feminist journal. The national and international support for MAM, RMCV and Grupo Venancia during this time may have led to increased positive sentiment, not only in Nicaragua but transnationally, although it may not have led to an actual increase in membership.

Red Trans de Nicaragua: Politics and Opportunities

Red Trans de Nicaragua (RTN), the sole transgender women’s organization in the country, experiences political opportunities of their own; however, they were not a part of the government raids on SMOs in 2008. This could be due in part to the fact that RTN is not explicitly “feminist,” and they also only had formed in 2007. Perhaps RTN were still “below the radar” of the FSLN, and thus immune from suspect. Although RTN was able to avoid government attacks and have not reported any instances of government crackdown on their organization, they still face a lack problems from the state.
Legally, sexual orientation and gender identity are not protected statuses in Nicaraguan Law (Torriani et al. 2009). Given this, it is difficult for transgender women to bring grievances against individuals, schools, employers or the state to the courts. In fact, many of the major goals of the organization concern engendering a place for transgender voices in public and political dialog. For example, the organization works to promote “participation in discussions of national policy,” “participatory social inclusion,” “promote access to comprehensive health, sexual and reproductive health, human rights, etc…,” and to “advance universal access to programs and services for prevention, diagnosis, care and comprehensive treatment [of] HIV/AIDS in the transgender community” (Red Trans de Nicaragua 2008).

One of the major problems, besides not having legal rights under state law for their transgender status, is that many transgender women do not have much knowledge of their political and economic rights. In an interview with Mistica, a member of RTN, she stated that she did “not have access to an education…We [Nicaragua] don’t have jobs for people of different genders, transgender people, trans girls…Of course there are other things, but these things, jobs really.” Silvia, another RTN activist, brings up another important point: “there are jobs for people, in construction, in other things, but in particular for trans people it is hard [to find a job]. There is a problem getting jobs, because they have different documents with different names…[gesturing towards Mistica] this is ‘Mistica,’…[gesturing towards Inyri]…this is ‘Inyri,’ but they don’t have papers to back this up, no identification to get a job.”
The problem of education again came up when I asked the women about their political affiliations. Initially, Mistica responded that she didn’t have a political affiliation, just “an ideology”; however, later in the interview she had this to say:

“I need to clarify. For many of us, we don’t have a specific political preference. In a lot of ways, it is because we do not have access to knowledge, to the education. But, if the government would include us, we need to be included, then we can learn about politics. Because they are important, right? But many do not know. Also, another problem is with the religious groups. They do not understand us. They effect the government and people, right? But it is very important that we are included, us and our compañeras. Not just in politics, but in all other activities. It’s important that the government does not restrict us.

Sylvia emphasizes this point: “it will take a lot to change the political situation here, for the country, to make them interested in the needs of all the different communities.” And that what transwomen really need is “rights in the street and in the house…What they need is a diploma. What they need is a job, even if it is a job as a sex worker.” It becomes apparent through these interviews that these women recognize that what transgender women need goes beyond acceptance—they need access to jobs and an education in order to be aware of their political rights and be able to exercise them. They also need the government to include transgender people in public policy and give them equal protections under the law.

However, the reasons that transgender women do not have equal access to education and jobs should not solely be looked at in terms of them being transgender. Indeed, during the period immediately following the 1979 revolution, the Sandinistas ran a massive literacy campaign and increased access to education for millions of Nicaraguans; however, during the period of structural adjustment in the 1990s, spending towards education programs and the governments’ focus on massive education of the
poor were relinquished under the guise of “privatization.” Understanding why there are less opportunities for transwomen, who represent the “poorest of the poor” according to Torriani et al. (2008), means looking dually at how government denial of rights for transgender persons interacts with the fact that spending on education for the poor has been dramatically reduced during the last two decades.

Additionally, healthcare programs and HIV/AIDS awareness programs are largely reliant on funding in order to be carried out, which RTN told me they do not receive from any outside organizations. The offices of RTN are located at the Center for Investigations and Studies on Health through the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (CIES-UNAN). The organization responsible for the majority of HIV/AIDS research and programs, the Nicaraguan AIDS Commission (CONISIDA) is funded through the Ministry of Health, and is far too underfunded to be able to fund efforts by NGOs, like RNT, to fight HIV/AIDS (IGLHRC 2008). Likewise, organizations like CIES-UNAN have additional issues that they work on, and may not be able to spend the time or human resources to fully back the necessary education and health programs that would benefit transwomen, especially sex workers.

It seems that the RTN activists are fully aware that they face restrictions under the law and oppression from the government and police force; however, the language used to describe this oppression is far different than the language used by MAM, RMCV and Grupo Venancia. In fact, RTN never mentions the FSLN or Ortega by name in any negative references either on their website or in personal interviews. By contrast, the focus is on inclusion in policy decisions or educating the public about transgender issues—not on whether or not the Ortega administration represents a shift away from
democracy and into authoritarianism. These differences in diagnostic framing will be looked at more extensively in the next chapter, but it is worth mentioning here.

Another major obstacle facing transgender women that differentiates them from cisgender women is the legal recognition of their womanhood—both from their families and society. Silvia stated:

It seems that one of the biggest problems is in the house, with family when people want to live their lives “changed.” It is very difficult for a trans person to live a public life. To live as themselves, publically. There are the police, with challenging trans persons and harassment. This is a problem around the world. Nicaragua is like the rest of Central America and the Caribbean, there are jobs for people, in construction, in other things, but in particular for trans people it is hard. There is a problem getting jobs, because they have different documents with different names. She [gesturing towards Mistica] is Mistica, and [gesturing towards Inyri] Inyri, but they don’t have papers to back this up, no identification to get a job... They have a name, like Mistica or Inyri, these are their names this is what they call themselves, but if they want to go to their families, they cannot call themselves this. They cannot act like themselves.

The lack of private recognition of their transgender status is one thing, but then they must also face the reality within Nicaraguan society of not having their identity recognized. Of not being able to use their own name by which they identify themselves when applying for jobs. This is a problem that is unique to the transgender community and differentiates them from the overall Nicaraguan women’s movement.

*Culture and Opportunities: Patriarchy, Conservatism and Intolerance*

In analyzing public documents and interviews conducted with Nicaraguan women it is important to examine the role that entrenched gender norms, the influence of the more conservative aspects of the Catholic Church, and lack of political and social
inclusion of alternative gender and sexual identities play in affecting political opportunities. Each of the different organizations that I analyzed addressed cultural problems, both in public statements and private interviews, which must be solved before gender equity can be a reality. In this section, I am going to focus on three major issues repeatedly came up in analyzing my data: patriarchy and machismo, religious conservatism and intolerance. I will then assess the role that these cultural issues play in restricting political opportunities for the Nicaraguan women’s movement

Patriarchy

Latin America is often characterized by having a machista ideology. Women’s activists, particularly feminist activists, often focus on the role that machismo and patriarchal oppression play in women’s continued subordinate status. While the organizations I studied do not focus explicitly on patriarchy or machismo as the major (or only) problem, these are mentioned repeatedly in the public and private statements of members of the organization.

Perhaps the area where patriarchy and machista ideology are most referenced (or implied) is in reference to violence against women. RMCV publishes many reports that detail instances of physical and sexual violence against women. In one pronuncimiento RMCV discusses the ways in which the male-dominated courts do not adequately punish men who commit crimes against women. They report “Most of the cases of violence against women go unpunished, a situation that re-victimized women assaulted and families of victims generating uncertainty, insecurity, fear, anguish and suffering. This cannot be ignored by judges and officials and to the solving of these cases.” Further, that it “was apathy that [caused] officers to ignore the call for help that she [the victim] made,
a situation that allowed this crime to be consummated” (RMCVb N.d.). The stance of RMCV regarding domestic violence is clear in many of their slogans. One of the dominant slogans that appears repeatedly on their pronuncimientos is “Not one more dead…murderers and rapists to jail!” (RMCVb N.d.) Also, in their offices they have a large banner that states “We defend our right to live without violence” (see photo eight). The entrance to their office is marked by a large purple banner reiterating the lack of state concern for victims that says “Justice for women…an outstanding debt” (see photo nine).

It is not just women that are noticing the problem of domestic violence. In an interview with Tom\textsuperscript{12}, a man who runs a non-profit organization for orphaned and abused children, he states that he hears stories from women and children coming through his organization that the police are inept at dealing with cases of domestic violence (personal interview). Additionally, Tom echoes other sentiments that are made by feminist organizations in the country—that it is “just something that you cannot get involved in. I mean, you think, you see a woman getting beat by her man…you want to go over and say ‘Hey! Stop! That’s your woman,’ but…I don’t know it’s different. You can’t get involved. You are not supposed to get involved. Everyone treats it like it’s not their business to do anything.”

It is precisely this public/private split, what the Nicaraguan feminists call “calle y casa” or “calle y cama,” literally “street and house” or “street and bed,” that has been an issue to which feminists are constantly drawing attention. Many of the slogans from the organizations I studied dealt with equality in the house and in the street. One of MAMs’ slogans is “The women call on all Nicaraguans to defend our rights in the house, in the

\[\textsuperscript{12}\text{ Name has been changed for privacy.}\]
bed, in the street, in the community and in the country” (MAM 2009a). RMCV calls for “respect for our right to a life free of violence and repression” (RMCV 2008). RTN also describes the necessity for acceptance “in the street and at home.”

Tom also stated that

you see a big difference between how these women are supposed to treat their man’s sons verses the girls too. I mean, you know, these men aren’t really helping, with the child I mean financially or to raise it, but the sons are supposed to get whatever they want. Like little princes. You see them at the store, the mothers tell the sons they can’t have something and the dads, oh you know, grab the woman here [grabs the underside of his arm] and pinch. Sort of like, there’s more of this later…do it. [the daughters] They are not the little princes. I mean you know what they say here, ‘children are a blessing from God,’ but girls are a different blessing. They are for different things and they are living in different lives….umm, different expectations.

Gendered expectations of what the roles of women should be in society are often ingrained since birth, including the ways in which parents deal with interacting with and disciplining children (Arrighi 2007). These differences in gendered expectation can lead to myriad issues in terms of gender discrimination, but the role that gender expectations can play in violence against women should not be ignored. When males are raised in Nicaraguan culture to be unable to show sensitive emotions publically (Bayard de Volo 2001), male dominance over women is considered “natural” and males violence against women (even public violence) is considered “private,” this can lead to a culture where male violence against women is not taken seriously and domestic violence and sexual assault are pervasive and inadequately prosecuted.

Another area in which patriarchal oppression is noticeable is in the continued complete prohibition of abortion in Nicaragua, with the dominant male leadership denying women control over their bodies and reproductive choices. MAM again points to
the role of the state in maintaining patriarchal control: “The politics of gender” of the FSLN disappears women as citizens of rights, privileges the traditional family over the women, treats them not like people and leaves them reduced to vessels for carrying children” (MAM 2008a). RMCV also comments on the results of the abortion ban saying “the criminalization of abortion has been a death sentence for poor women” (RMCVb N.d.). *Grupo Venancia* has an entire educational pamphlet dedicated to understanding reproduction and reproductive rights and have the right to abortion as one of their demands of the Nicaraguan government (*Grupo Venancia* N.d.).

MAM perhaps sums up the integration of patriarchy and the Nicaraguan state in their following declaration

> the gender politics of the government of "reconciliation and national unity," is similar to that of the Alemán fascism that proclaimed the traditional one *kinder, kirche, küche* (children, church and kitchen) for women: political messiah-ism and clerical rhetoric on obligatory maternity, is the offering in the red-black flag of the poor. The patriarchal politics of gender and anti-democracy of the government threatens being enthroned through the pact, the passivity and the manipulation [of the people], endangers the rights of women’s citizenship, just like the rights and liberties of all Nicaraguans (2008a).

When looking at the role of patriarchy and male-domination of politics when discussing issues like women’s rights, particularly abortion access, it is also important to look at the second major cultural factor I have outlined, religious conservatism.

*Religious Conservatism*

The most conservative aspects of Catholic Church hierarchy present a large cultural challenge for the Nicaraguan women’s movement. Not only in terms of advocating “traditional gender roles,” but in terms of influencing public policy that greatly affects women’s control over their reproductive rights. Nicaragua has one of the
most restrictive abortion bans in the world—abortion is prohibited throughout the entire pregnancy without exception. Women often point to the role of the state in maintaining this ban. MAM states that it is “the political class, the rulers and the Conservative groups are still mainly responsible for poverty and discrimination that face the vast majority of Nicaraguans.” MAM demands a “State that does not subordinate the rights of women in negotiations with conservative groups that oppose the freedom of women on their bodies and their lives” (MAM 2009). Further, in a statement signed by 7 Nicaraguan feminist groups, including MAM, RMCV and Grupo Venancia, that they desire a state that is committed to “secular principles” and “the decriminalization of abortion and women’s autonomy” (MAM et al. 2009).

The problem of the influence of the church was also reiterated in the interviews as well. Juanita Jimenez of MAM stressed the necessity of a secular state where the decriminalization of abortion is not “hostage to the church or the conservatives.” In an interview with RMCV, Klemen argued that “the most important [things] are reproductive and political rights and negotiating against violence.” Both women emphasized that the government corruption is also tied to the religious hierarchy in the country saying, “We do not need a religious state, we need religion and we need the state, but not together, not the same” (Personal interview with Klemen from RMCV, 2010).

It is not just in terms of reproductive rights where the women interviewed discussed the negative role that the Church plays in restricting their rights. Silvia from RTN said “Yes, in this country, the religious culture is very present. There is a problem with saying ‘this is a gay person’ ‘this is a trans person,’ it’s like being liviana…they have a negative connotation.” The position of the Church on homosexuality, as well as
their absolute refusal to acknowledge transgenderism a legitimate identity, leads to a culture wherein transgenderism is not widely accepted, and where the term carries a negative connotation in Nica culture.

*Intolerance*

In the interviews with RTN, the women emphasized the role that a general culture of intolerance plays in maintaining oppression of alternative gender and sexual identities. The women reiterated the fear of violence against them from the police, from regular people. They also stressed the affect that intolerance can have on transwomen having to leave their families. Silvia said:

Another problem, in this culture, we do not have a culture of tolerance and respect. A person like us, they face violence. They face violence every day, in the street. They also face problems from their family, because they do not understand. They do not understand our manner, or they do not understand different expressions of identity or sexuality. There are a lot of girls here, they grow up with their families, but they do not return there. There are problems with them being themselves at home, with their families. They have a name, like Mistica or Inyri, these are their names this is what they call themselves, but if they want to go to their families, they cannot call themselves this. They cannot act like themselves.

She also says, “it seems like one of the biggest problems is at home, when people want to live their lives ‘changed,’ it is very difficult for a trans person to live a public life.” This presents some major problems, not just in terms of the psychological damages from being ostracized from their families, but also not having the support and aid from their families during times of hardship. It leaves many transwomen, some of whom according to Silvia come in contact with RTN at sixteen years old, left on their own to attempt to make a living with a lack of educational and economic resources.
Mistica from RTN also emphasizes the level of intolerance, specifically when discussing sex and gender. She said:

We have a lot of problems with culture in our country. A lot of ignorance. Because for a lot of the population, they think there is woman and man [she gestures with her hands to show that they are completely separate] from birth. They don’t accept other identities, and other expressions. The resist anyone who isn’t like that. They resist anyone who isn’t ‘here’ woman [gesturing a box with her hands] or ‘here’ man [again designating a box shape with her hands].

These statements signify that RTN activists feel very strongly that there must be vast cultural changes in terms of acceptance of alternative identities and sexualities in order for them to fully enter the public sphere and be able to live public lives.

Summary

It seems that there is a distinct interplay between the role of culture and the role of the state, with each organization targeting both aspects. However, it seems that the focus of RTN is more concerned with engendering a culture of tolerance and educating people about issues of alternative gender and sexual identities; rather than an explicit call for the dismantling of the current two-party political system or a call to the end of the prohibition of abortion. In fact, any direct negative mention of the current government or the Nicaraguan abortion policy was not mentioned in the public or private data from RTN. The differences in terms of prognostic framing, the identification of who is to blame, will be discussed in the next chapter; however, it seems that this difference in framing of what are the most important issues between RTN and the rest of the women’s movement organizations I studied may also add to their exclusion from the movement. It also seems that RTN focus explicitly on education and acknowledgment of transgender identities as
an imperative for full integration into Nica culture as well as a reason for their continued advocacy in the face of cultural and political restrictions.

Despite dealing with oppressive conditions and a lack of political opportunities (much like feminist organizations) RTNs networking with the various feminist groups is minimal. Silvia says that “In general, we have some contacts [with feminist groups], but with others it is more difficult.” When asked to elaborate on which groups they had worked with, she said “well, we worked with Puntos de Encuentro and the National Feminist Committee… the groups [with which we work] need not be feminist, but that usually works well.” RTN has not worked with any other the other major feminist groups in Nicaragua, including those that are currently also experiencing decreased political opportunities. It would appear that if an incident like what happened with MAM, RMCV, Grupo Venancia and others happened to RTN, that they would not have the same level of internal solidarity.

During times of political repression, the internal support from the various Nicaraguan feminist organizations following the governmental raids on RMCV, MAM, Grupo Venancia and others, was immense. In a joint statement released in commemoration of International Women’s Day, the groups called for: the right to organize, the right to have a participatory democracy, the right of women to live free from violence (including at the hands of the state), and for the state to establish meaningful relationships between the legislative body and the citizens (MAM, et al. 2009). The statement also denounced the attacks against feminist organizations and the continued complete ban on abortion rights for Nicaraguan women. The statement was signed by seven organizations: RMCV, MAM, RMM, The Autonomous Women’s
Movement New Segovia, the Nicaraguan Feminist Movement and the September 28th Campaign for the Decriminalization of Abortion (MAM, et al. 2009). This statement signified, at least on paper, the “united front” of the diverse network of Nicaraguan feminist organizations. Despite decreased political opportunities and increased governmental sanctions against organizations, these groups were able to maintain a public presence and perhaps even a more unified public identity. The feeling of a sense of a collective Nicaraguan feminist “we” is perhaps best articulated in the following statement, made by Catholics for the Right to Decide following the raids, “What they say to Sofia Montenegro they each say to each of us. What they do to them, they do to each of us. That is the heart of all in this fight” (Catholics for the Right to Decide 2008).

In order to adequately understand how these organizations were able to maintain their membership and public presence during periods of political repression, I believe it is important to look at the ways in which the establishment of a collective feminist identity served to unite these organizations during periods of decreased opportunities. Additionally, I believe that looking at the perceived collective identity of the Nicaraguan feminist movement may also help to explain the degree of exclusion of Red Trans de Nicaragua from the Nicaraguan women’s movement.
Chapter 6

Identity and the Nicaraguan Women’s Movement

Collective identity can be a means through which an SMO creates a sense of group identity, defines who is or is not a part of the group, can be a basis for social action, and can also be a way through which groups can be sustained during periods of decreased political opportunities (Holland et al. 2008). Given my assertion that PPT underemphasizes the role of collective identity in the emergence and sustainability of social movements, as well as my assertion that identity must be viewed through the lens of intersectionality in order to be properly understood, I am devoting this section to looking at the various ways that the four organizations studied identity themselves—both publically as a group and privately as individuals. I will outline the ways in which these facets of identity constitute an intersectional understanding of gendered identity and help to encourage women’s activism, even during periods where other actors, like the state and culture, are anathema to feminist and transgender women’s activism. After looking at each of the four organizations, I will then discuss whether or not similarities between the three women’s groups can constitute a form of Nicaraguan feminist collective identity and where transwomen fit into this identity.
Established in 1991, MAM is one of the most well-known feminist organizations in Nicaragua. In order to ascertain the ways the organization defines itself and its identity, I analyzed both material from their website as well as conducted an interview with Juanita Jimenez, a well known member of MAM in June of 2010 in Managua, Nicaragua. Below I will discuss insights into group identity found through these two sources.

MAM describes themselves as “Women who are in favor of democracy…Nicaraguan citizens who have rights and are honoring and carrying on the Sandinista tradition” (MAM 2008b). In an interview with prominent MAM activist, Juanita Jimenez, she traces the start of MAM back through women’s participation in the 1979 revolution:

The Women’s Movement, as a social movement began in 1980…Well as an official organization we began in 1991. But it was way before that…[some of us were] involved in the revolution, overthrowing Somoza. We became involved in the [Sandinista] Party, in AMNLAE…. [later] during the ‘Unity in Diversity’ conference, some of us women got together and decided we needed a separate organization, one that was autonomous from this Party….so, that is how we became an autonomous organization in 1991.

MAM is dedicated to diversity, and places an understanding of “womanhood” and feminism within a framework that stresses differences:

Our starting point is that women are half of society, and each social category (race, class, ethnicity) and we are crossed by a subordinate position. Because women do not share an essential "female identity", nor do we have a prior identity to recover, the foundation of our political identity is the struggle against subordination and oppression and the dismantling of the identity assigned by the patriarchy to women. We believe that the affirmation of this collective identity is an essential step in our constitution as individual subjects and as political subjects (MAM

13 Translates as “The women demand democracy, All against the pact!” A statement posted on MAMs’ website in October of 2008, almost immediately following the governmental raids on their offices.
In terms of actual organization membership, many of MAMs’ members have been involved since the emergence of women’s activism in 1980; however, some have joined during the recent push for democracy, and have only been involved for two or three years (Personal interview with Juanita Jimenez, 2010). Juanita describes the organization as “a social movement…a movement for women…for human rights for women.” She furthers that “we are not only a social movement, but also a political movement…we also focus on political participation for women.”

The intersections between being a social organization and a political organization are repeatedly showcased in their pronunciamientos. In fact, MAM directly correlates women’s lack of political participation with the shift away from democracy, demanding democracy “in the house, in the bed, in the street, in the community and in the country” (MAM 2009a). Additionally, MAM frames Ortega as the image of patriarchy, the personification of male domination over women as the figurehead of “male impunity” (Montenegro 2009). There is a clear distancing of themselves from the dominant political parties—a clear differentiation between MAM and the FSLN.

When asked to define “womanhood” Juanita replied “it’s very complicated for a definition.” She went on to highlight the differences between Nicaraguan women, and say that women deserve “human rights, women’s rights.” But that it was hard to define in terms of a single definition. With regards to how she defines “feminism” Juanita responded “for us it is a platform for struggle. It signifies equality between women and men.” In the next chapter, I will look more extensively at the way that MAM frames their idea of “womanhood” within their pronunciamientos, specifically their emphasis on their
position as *Nicaraguans*, Nicaraguan women deserving of rights. They reach out to public sentiments regarding the revolution and remind the public of women’s roles within the 1979 victory (MAM 2008c). As an organization, MAM clearly defines what they are *not*, they are not “the political class, the rulers, the Conservative groups [that] are still mainly responsible for poverty and discrimination that face the vast majority of Nicaraguans” (MAM 2009). This also represents a sense of explaining diversity of identities within the organization—they are not members of a certain class (the political class and the rulers); rather, they are members of the popular classes, middle class urban professionals and working class women. Additionally, their political ideology is clearly defined as well: as the antithesis of conservatism.

The presence of Juanita’s personal identification as an activist was emphasized when I asked her to describe herself. She said she was “A woman, a feminist, dedicated to human rights, institutional and cultural equality between women and men.” I gathered from this statement that for Juanita, much like for MAM as an organization, activism and dedication to women’s rights is paramount.

When asked what she believed were some of the major issues facing feminists in Nicaragua two things stood out to me in Juanita’s responses: the necessity for a democratic political system and legalization of abortion rights for women. These beliefs are echoed repeatedly in MAMs’ public statements, in 10 of the 13 public documents analyzed abortion is mentioned an area where women lack rights. In one *pronuncimiento* MAM states the criminalization reduces women to “traditional gender roles…vessels for carrying children” (MAM 2008c). This is additionally placed within the larger political context, as it was Ortega who re-signed the complete ban on abortion upon returning to
office in 2006. This position also places them in stark contrast with the conservative elements of Nicaraguan society, which support the ban and were one of the major cultural barriers mentioned in the previous chapter. Additionally, discussing Nicaraguan women’s need for bodily autonomy in relation to abortion suggests a definition of woman that includes having female reproductive organs, where sex and gender are intrinsically linked.

MAMs’ political position of the Ortega administration is perhaps the most critical of any groups studied, and their group identity emphasizes not only women’s rights as women, but women’s rights within a democratic society. MAM emphasizes that women “were and still are struggling in the process of pacification of the country…For four decades, feminists have organized to fight against dictatorship and for democracy” (MAM 2009). Juanita emphasized that women contribute to the democracy of a nation and MAM states that they were “the first women in demanding the liberty of self-organizing” (MAM 2009). In their public statement on their identity, they say they are

Claiming a true democracy based on rule of law and functioning of the institutions required to…assume a position of political subjects, with the right and ability to challenge male power that controls the State and gender regime (MAM 2009).

In studying MAMs’ public documents and interviewing Juanita Jimenez from the organization, the dual emphasis on the role of feminism and democracy constantly came up in discussions and statements. MAM sees itself as being on the frontlines of the movement—emphasizing the role of MAM members as far back as the 1979 revolution. Additionally, the public and private statements indicate an understanding of identity—of womanhood and feminism in particular—that is decidedly intersectional in character. They emphasize that women are half of the population and all deserve rights, but that
defining the term woman is extremely complicated due to the racial, ethnic and class
differences within the movement.

RMCV: “No solo ‘mujer.’ Necesita decir ‘mujeres.’”  

Formed in 1992, RMCV is another major feminist voice within Nicaragua. While,
as their name suggests, many of their efforts focus on ending violence against women,
their other agendas posit a firm identification with feminist principles of gender equality,
reproductive control and economic freedom. Below I will discuss results obtained from
studying the website of RMCV as well as from an interview with Klemen, the Liaison
Coordinator for the Organization.

RMCV “operates independently in their forms of political participation and
decision making…The autonomy enjoyed by members of the Network is exercised on the
basis of mutual respect, tolerance, diversity, commitment, responsibility and coordination
among themselves” (RMCV 2008b). Perhaps the best way to analyze the identity (or
identities) of RMCV is to look at their four major principles: diversity, participation,
coordination and horizontality, and how the public and private statements of RMCV fit
into these different categories.

Diversity

RMCV’s website (as well as a banner hanging in their offices, see photo 11) state:

The Network operates as a space that brings together a diversity of
women’s identities, interests, conditions, positions and different needs that
share a common mission…The basis of unity in diversity is in the fight
against violence against women…This principle includes the recognition

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14 Translates as “Not just “woman.” You must say “women.” Statement made by a member of RMCV
during an interview in June 2010.
of the inequalities that create differences, and the network is committed to addressing them (RMCV 2008b).

This definition of diversity is an intersectional one, as they state “We work from the viewpoint of individual and collective empowerment, human rights and feminist self-sustainability and respect for diversity (ethnic, sexual, political, physical disability, racial)” (RMCV 2008b). In this statement, one of the “Driving Principles of RMCV,” the organization makes it clear that they understand that women’s identities are uniquely different based on a variety of variables. In an interview with Klemen from RMCV she stated in response to how she would define the word woman, “well, you need to say ‘women,’ because there are diverse women. Different women need different things around the world.” When asked how she sees herself, Klemen responded “I am a woman, I understand other women.” Implying that although there are differences in women’s identities, there exists at least some form of a “universal sisterhood” that allows women to intrinsically understand one another.

The organization is committed to working with “urban and rural women—in Latin American and the Caribbean—[women of] different ethnicities and with indigenous women, younger and older women and university women” (Personal interview with Klemen, 2010). Klemen also emphasizes that “if someone is a lesbian, it is not a problem.” She also states that one of the major issues facing the organization is that “younger and older women need to bridge the gaps, because the problem of violence is for everyone; including the children. We need young women, but they only want to work a little. I will need to pass the baton when I can no longer do this.” The organization is attempting to integrate the diverse women within Nicaragua; however, they seem to be
having difficulty integrating more young women into the organization. Future studies will be able to assess the success of this initiative.

This extension of diversity extends to the organizations feminist principles as well. Klemen said “all women [in RMCV] are feminists, but we work with all women because it is necessary for all women.” One of the principles of the organization is “We practice sisterhood, i.e.—specific solidarity among women, understood as a potential political force that subverts patriarchal pillars: the prohibition of women's alliance” (RMCV 2008b). Clearly, in identifying patriarchy as the problem and sisterhood as potential solution, RMCV declares its stance as a feminist organization. Klemen states that the organization is against violence, but it is also about “legalizing abortion, economic rights, employee rights, Toca toda derecho el mano.”\(^\text{15}\) She states that feminism is “a form of life—ethics—[that] includes family women, it includes women in general.” The emphasis on women’s bodily autonomy, specifically the right to abortion implies again, that this is for a specific set of women—namely, those born biologically female that can become pregnant. While Klemens' definition of “women” does not focus solely on biology, the focus on abortion as a necessary right for all women implies this “all women” are biologically women as well.

**Participation**

RMCV is devoted to “bringing together, recognizing and promoting different forms of participation…[it] Includes actions to overcome the obstacles that limit the full participation of disabled women, young women and women in remote geographical areas” (RMCV 2008b). The organization is also committed to a form of specialized labor,

\(^\text{15}\) Loosely translates to “Take all the rights at hand.”
wherein different commitments of each member are used in different areas: “All forms of participation need their own space and their respective expertise and visibility” (RMCV 2008b). Two of the major principles of the organization are “We promote and practice policy debate and argument respecting consensus and disagreement,” and “We practice communication (internal and external) assertively, relevant and timely, from an ethical attitude” (RMCV 2008b). Clearly, participation means not only participation within a certain area of the group, but the recognition that each woman can offer something unique to the organization and the commitment to engage with diverse voices both within and outside of the movement.

Coordination

RMCV defines coordination within their organization as “the organization and visibility of working together at different levels in order to get results and impacts” (RMCV 2008b). They are “open to external coordination” (RMCV 2008b) and will “work with all women, because it is necessary for all women” (Personal interview with RMCV activist, 2010).

Coordination for RMCV also involves maintaining certain principles in interacting with other organizations and the public, they state “Coordination requires willingness to participate, as well as communication skills, tolerance and negotiation. The exercise of coordination requires the recognition of the various leadership and contributions, in addition to the balance between administrative decisions and policy decisions” (RMCV 2008b). The commitment to coordinating with other organizations is evident in the public statements signed by RMCV along with other women’s organizations following the governmental raids.
Horizontality

For RMCV, horizontality means “to encourage and recognize equity in participation and encourage and recognize the various leaders” (RMCV 2008b.). Further, the organization believes that the principle of horizontality

is incompatible with warlordism, cronyism and rings. The horizontal avoids centralization…horizontalization promotes the exercise of shared power, collective leadership…This will facilitate open access to exercise leadership and ensure equal opportunities (RMCV 2008b).

RMCV stresses that their principles are built through discussion and are “negotiated collectively” (RMCV 2008b). Reflecting this commitment, three of their major principles concern a maintenance of horizontality in decision-making and organizational structure (see figure 6.1).


Grupo Venancia: “Por mí, por vos, por nosotras. Haga un alto a la Violencia.”

Founded in 1993 and located in the smaller northern city of Matagalpa, *Grupo Venancia* is founded on the principle of “contributing to building equitable relationships

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16 Translates as “For me, for you, for us. Let’s stop the violence.” Posted on Grupo Venancia’s website in a bulletin from March 2009.
between women and men, promoting non-discriminatory values and practices, and personal and collective empowerment of women” (personal interview 2010). The group initially started out “with rural women in remote areas, young women and urban women, subsequently giving priority to the working class” (Grupo Venancia 2009c). The group gained autonomy following the start of a radio station where women spoke about their daily lives, the reaction from some leaders at the station resulted in the closing of the program and the decision to create an autonomous movement (Grupo Venancia 2009c). Also singled-out for attack during the government raids, Grupo Venancia has maintained a strong presence since then. Below I will analyze information gathered from their website as well as two interviews conducted with activists via email.

Organizational and Individual Identity

Grupo Venancia describes itself as “an organization of Feminist Popular Education and Communication…[we work] on the construction of an autonomous women’s movement between urban and rural women, kids and not-so kids, strengthening the autonomy and personal beliefs from our identity and individuality” (Grupo Venancia 2009c). The organization is focused on bringing equity between women and men, and bases its perspectives “not only on the theory of practical and strategic gender interests, but also a vision of change in organizational culture among women. [Our] Vision was founded in a critique of patriarchal power that promotes hierarchical and oppressive relations” (Grupo Venancia 2009b). Clearly, the organizational perspective incorporates academic material into their analysis, which is perhaps a result of the majority of members, according to one interviewee having attended “technical school or university.”
When asked what the word “woman” meant to them, the two interviewees responded in a somewhat similar manner, one said “it’s like that all women are equal, and although we have many things in common, we have a bunch of different cases we cannot generalize,” while the other responded “Woman, women, it’s like there are differences among us, geography and age and things like that, but that we are treated different and that there needs to be utopia between women and men.” Much as with other organizations, the interviewees from Grupo Venancia stress diversity in women’s lived conditions. Their explicit mention of having a background working with working class women and on “practical and strategic gender interests” implies an acknowledgement of the ways that social class affect women’s lived conditions.

The two women interviewed also expressed the inclusion of lesbians within the organization and that these women needed to have their voices heard. One interviewee stated, “We have applied lesbian reflection spaces and provided a venue at our meetings.” This is also reflected in educational pamphlets put out by the organization as a part of their “popular feminist education” campaigns that discuss various issues of sexuality with titles including “All you wanted to know about sexuality, but Were Afraid to Ask,” and “The more I know about Myself, the More I Love Myself.” The pamphlets on sexuality are distributed especially to younger women to engage them in the process of knowing their rights; however, these pamphlets also address alternative views of sexual expression. Silvia from RTN even emphasized that “In Matagalpa, they are interested in the gay community or the trans community. It’s a different part of the country.”

The interviewees’ responses to how to define feminism equally stressed diversity in terms of what feminism means to different women. As one interviewee stated “it’s like
the previous [question about “women”], feminism is not a linear thing, like for all women everywhere in the world, we all have problems and common interests, yet we have different situations and strategies.”

A major difference between Grupo Venancia and the other groups studied is their emphasis on public performance and women’s art in their gender campaigns. In fact as figure 6.2 shows, Grupo Venancia stresses the following activities at their cultural center:

- Commemoration of the resistance of Indigenous women and Black people
- Conversation about readings previously agreed on a Thursday of each month.
- Playing and reading books for sale.
- Videofem every Friday 7.00 pm
- Cultural Night on Saturday.
- A cultural activity promoted to young audiences every two months.
- Festival for Women in the Revolution and the Revolutionary Women, referring to the anniversary of the Revolution.
- Art exhibitions (painting, photography, etc.) four times a year.
- Two presentations of books a year.
- 2 workshops for critical reading of the Nicaraguan culture and history

**Figure 6.2: Cultural Activities at Grupo Venancia** (Grupo Venancia 2009a).

*Grupo Venancia* is the only organization that emphasizes the importance of public performance as a part of their organization (see photos four and five). This presents another aspect of identity that is important to them: commemorating women past and introducing new women to feminist culture through art.
Red Trans de Nicaragua: “No Somas el Problema, Somas parte de la Solución”\textsuperscript{17}

As discussed in the literature review chapter, transgender activism is a burgeoning, yet understudied area within social movement research—and explicitly excluded from the study of women’s movements. RTN is a regional group that is part of the larger organization, Red Trans de Latino America. RTN operates as an independent, autonomous organization that is a branch of this larger group. Below I will discuss issues of transgender identity uncovered through both public documents and private interviews with three transgender women in Managua. The findings are based predominately the interviews conducted, as RTN does not have a website with the same plethora of information that I found with the feminist organizations.

In comparison to the three feminist organizations researched, RTN is a new organization, having been formed in 2007. The general purpose of the organization is to promote reduction of vulnerabilities, caused by transphobia and other forms of discrimination associated with sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, to advance universal access to programs and services for prevention, diagnosis, care and comprehensive treatment HIV/AIDS and human rights [for the] transgender community, transgender, transvestites and intersex people, through the implementation of an advocacy plan implemented by the RED TRANS NICARAGUA (\textit{Red Trans de Nicaragua} N.d.).

RTN considers the following the vision and mission of their organization:

We want a Nicaragua where we are known as citizens in use of our full rights, with the guarantees and obligations of other citizens. [We want a] Nicaragua without discrimination, and violence, with respect for our gender identity and meaningful access to health, education and justice (\textit{Red Trans de Nicaragua} N.d.).

\textsuperscript{17} Translates as “We are not the problem, we are part of the solution.” Statement made by Silvia of RTN during a personal interview in Managua in June 2010.
The organization is committed to ending discrimination against transgender women and towards integrating transgender women into the larger Nicaraguan society. Despite an absolute lack of political opportunities and little ability to network with other women’s organizations, RTN maintains their organization, I hypothesized that this was due to a sense of collective identity, which I will discuss below and then later determine the accuracy of this hypothesis.

One of the main focuses of RTN, both for its members and the general public, is education. In fact, when asked how the issues facing transwomen could be solved, Silvia responded in her initial interview “with more education and information.” Lack of education is a major problem that transgender women face. Mistica explains “I did not have access to an education. Secondly, we are not in education, we [transwomen] do not have jobs, really not professional jobs.” Silvia re-emphasized this point in her second interview, when she claimed “What they [trans girls] need is a diploma.” The lack of formal education for members of RTN is present through the entire organization as well, as Silvia stated when asked about the average educational attainment level of the women involved, “The vast majority are girls have not completed primary school in some cases they take their secondary education, [but they] have to do so camouflaged [disguising their transgender identity].”

Education also extends to education for transgender people about their transgender identity. Silvia says that “many girls do not have access to education about culture.” Mistica, when asked about some of the benefits of her two years of working with RTN said, “Well, the benefits have been to learn about my trans condition. I thought a lot before working with this organization, but not specifically about trans issues. If you
are a gay person, or a gay guy, you will benefit from this organization.” Inyri additionally
cited “I learned more” as a benefit. She has been involved with the organization only for
about six months. In her answer, Mistica identified that being involved with RTN gave
her access to learning about being transgender—implying that even though she thought
about it before, only upon joining did she learn more about transgenderism. Imagine, not
having the language to describe how you define yourself, or even being aware that this is
an option. Also, the immense loneliness that can resort from not being in contact with
others that you know are like yourself. The ability of RTN to reach out to transgender
women and give them a space to develop and articulate a transwoman identity must
provide an extremely important sense of collective and personal identity for participants.

In interviewing women from RTN, I got varied responses on what the word
“woman” meant to them. When asked, Inyri, who has only been involved with the
organization for a few months, responded in the following way

Ok, for me, what does woman mean? Um, [She smiles, looks away.
Mumbles something I cannot understand to Silvia. Pauses. It has been
about 5 seconds] Ok, for me “woman” means…ahhh [pauses again.
Shakes her head “no” and looks away].

Through her verbal and nonverbal cues, Inyri conveyed that she did not want to answer
the question. I ascertained through this that she was perhaps uncomfortable with the
question, or did not understand it. Considering that she has only been involved with the
organization for a few months, she may be less comfortable talking about identity issues
than the other women. By contrast, both Silvia and Mistica responded to the question.
Silvia stated in her first online interview that woman signified “we are the most of life,
therefore, we must fight for our rights.” Mistica responded to the question in a way that
clearly places her transgender status within the context of womanhood,
Ok. For me, ‘woman’ means many things. It is as a person. Not only is it a part of my body, because my body is not really my soul. I have the soul of a woman, but a body of a man. Through Red Trans, I specifically learned the word ‘trans.’ My gender is different from my sex.

Mistica identifies a difference between sex and gender—that being a woman does not necessarily mean that you are biologically a woman. Additionally, in invoking the concept of a “soul,” she implies that womanhood is something that is intrinsic inside of the individual. It appears to be a mix between the belief that sex and gender are not automatically intertwined, but that gender identification is something that is innate, or even natural for a person.

Another question that led to quizzical looks from both Mistica and Inyri was when I asked them how they would define “feminism.” Silvia responded to my inquiry in this way:

The feminists, well they are a manner that is not like the women workers. We belong in a woman’s group, but in a different one. Basically, the feminists have an ideology—not that others do not believe in women’s issues---in the house, for professional women, but also that it needs to be for sex workers as well. Some feminists say “no” not to include these groups. It seems like they are for certain women. It needs to be for all women, the young, the old, for transgender women. Feminism is an interesting ideology, but it is for some women, and not for all.

Here, she mentions some things that maybe important to look at when assessing how feminism may be perceived by transgender women.

Firstly, there is the idea that feminism is not for everyone and especially not for the workers. When asked about what they do now, or what they did for jobs before working with RTN, each woman named occupations indicative of working class people: construction, working in a kitchen and sex work. Additionally, the fact that many
transgender women work in the sex industry, including one of the activists I interviewed, if they see feminism as not supporting women in these occupations, they may distance themselves from them.

Additionally, the women repeatedly referred to themselves as “femeninas,” which can most closely be translated as describing women who “look like women”; meaning, they dress in ways typically associated with women and exhibit feminine characteristics. A rather wide-spread assumption about feminists is, among other things, that they are “butch” or “manly” or that they abhor any characteristics associated with femininity, so this could be what they mean by it not being for “all women.” Indeed, stereotypes and lack of information about what feminism (and Nicaraguan feminists) is like could explain a lack of identification with it, even if many of their objectives—ending violence against women, sex workers’ rights—may be feminist-friendly.

When they were asked how they would describe themselves, each offered a different definition. Mistica said “I am an honest person, sincere, I am trying to reach higher, [I am] a real woman, a woman happy with life.” Inyri responded that she was “honest, sincere, and a woman worker.” Silvia responded that she is a woman “who loves to talk. In my house, in the street. I am sincere, and also intelligent. I am very, very affectionate and honest. I am the person who thinks we need to work for ten days”18…I also want to say something about my political affiliation. I am a Sandinista. I am a militant member of the Sandinista party.” The diverse ways of self-identification indicate diversity within the organization as well as highlight the importance of being considered a “real woman.”

18 I took this to mean that she is the one who always says to work more, work harder to achieve her goals.
The importance of being recognized as a real woman is also stressed by the activists in terms of their names. The issue of using their names is an extremely important aspect of their identity. When I handed them the informed consent forms, I also discussed that I could use different names for them instead of the names they go by in the findings if they wanted. Their responses stressed the importance of identifying them by the names they use, which I have done here. Silvia said, “It is very important in the fight for transgender people that we use our names. Not our ‘proper names’ But what we go by.” Mistica emphasized this point further, “Yeah, with names, it is a problem for us. For those of us working with Red Trans, we are in the fight. The fight is for our rights. Because it is important, because I am actually ‘femenina.’ I am Mistica.” She continued, “It is important to be called that. I am Mística…here and I am Mística…there. I was born with another name, but I do not use that name anymore, ever. It is very important for me to be called ‘Mistica.’” This emphasis on names as an integral facet of identity deployment is also something that is unique to the transgender women in the Nicaraguan women’s movement.

Summary

This chapter was devoted to my findings regarding identity for the four organizations studied. Given the previous chapter on lack of opportunities and cultural and legal barriers, my results show that the ability to maintain their organizations cannot solely (or even mostly) be attributed to political opportunities; instead, we need to look at the role that sustained collective identity deployment plays in the continued influence of the various organizations. When faced with government repression, feminist organizations banded together—issuing joint public statements proclaiming that they
would “not shut up” and that they will continue the fight for democracy in the home and in the country.

My data showcases that the various organizations are committed to some of the same principles: ending patriarchy, women’s access to abortion, political integration and opposition to the current administration. Of course, RTN differed from these organizations in terms of their main identity indicators; however each organization either implicitly or explicitly incorporated principles of intersectionality into their understanding of womanhood and feminism—the idea of differences with regards to class, sexuality, age, ability status, ethnicity—which implies that if studies are to be done on the collective identity of the Nicaraguan women’s movement, it should incorporate an intersectional understanding of identity.

A main emphasis of these organizations was diversity—both in their organizations and themselves. This is exemplified by RMCV in the following statement “The diversity among the members of the Network is not an obstacle in fulfilling the mission it has been proposed, on the contrary, unity in diversity action facilitates and enhances the efficiency and effectiveness in the work of the Network” (RMCV 2008b). This seems to suggest that they are (at least in my research) committed to diversity and could potentially agree that transwomen could be an integral part of the women’s movement. In fact, this statement echoes RTNs “We are not the problem, we are part of the solution” (Personal interview with Silvia from RTN, 2010). When asked to define “woman” part of Klemens’ answer was “It is not just a body, it is strength.” If woman really does not mean only having a woman’s body, as is implied by this statement, then there is indeed a space for transgender women within the movement. While this is a
positive statement, the fact that RTN has not yet worked with RMCV seems to suggest that this commonality is either not known or not shared by RMCV as a whole.

Additionally, RMCV, MAM and \textit{Grupo Venancia} talk extensively about the need for “economic rights,” “worker’s rights,” and \textit{Grupo Venancia} even states their organization began with a focus on working class women. This suggests that class is an integral part of a collective Nicaraguan feminist identity. However, this facet of self-identification may not be noticed by other organizations, as RTN implied in my interviews that feminism wasn’t for working women. RMCV also denotes the necessity to include women with disabilities as full political participants in their organization (RMCV 2009b). Additionally, each of the four organizations mentions their inclusion of lesbian issues and the necessity for lesbian women to be a part of the picture of equality between women and men.

The emphasis on diversity within the three feminist organizations, and the similar ways through which they articulate this principle, lead to an understanding of a collective feminist identity in Nicaragua as an intersectional identity— one that includes women from different regions, different ages, different sexualities and different social classes. However, the inclusion of transgender women seems to be marginal, despite openings in rhetoric. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that RTN does not explicitly identify as a feminist organization, saying that feminism is “an interesting ideology” but is not for everyone. Despite the fact that RTN is directly challenging the sex/gender binary as well as proposing programs that are in line with women’s economic, political, social and human rights, their lack of identification with feminism may be an additional reason why they are largely excluded from the movement.
Despite decreased political opportunities for both the feminists and transgender women’s organizations, these groups continue to grow and thrive. In order to adequately understand the reasons for this, I looked at some of their political opportunities and identity; however, these factors alone cannot explain the continued activism or identity entirely. In the next chapter I will look at an additional factor that is important to understanding identity and organizational sustainability: framing.
Chapter 7

Framing

In this project, I was interested not only in the myriad ways in which identity and opportunity manifested themselves within and in-between SMOs, but also how SMOs articulate their group identity and goals to the public. Social movements and SMOs use frames to garner emotional support, political support or to appeal to emotions from a broader public. Frames allow movement participants to identify and name occurrences in their life and society (Snow, Rochford Jr., Worden and Benford 1986). Frames function to render events meaningful, and can “organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective” (Snow et al. 1986:464). Collective action frames enable movement participants to “negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition…make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change” (Benford and Snow 2000:615).

In this chapter, I begin by reviewing the literature on the framing theory of social movements—including gendered critiques of framing that must be taken into account when interpreting data. I then discuss the framing strategies and protest tactics of the various organizations that I interviewed. For this, I rely both on public documents posted on the groups’ websites and personal interview information. In analyzing these documents I am also looking at the ways through which the activists represent their
organization in pictures in order to have a better understanding of the ways that they think their goals will be realized.

_Framing Theory of Social Movements_

Framing involves the interpretation of and social construction of a particular event by the mass media, political elite, SMs, and SMOs (Benford 1997). Framing assumes that language carries political influence. However, framing theory often has carried masculine connotations. It has been based on a non-emotional, detached “cold” explanation of cognition (Ferree and Merril 2000). The major problem with this analysis is that “it ‘cools’ the analysis of movement thinking by separating it from the deeply felt passions and value commitments that motivate action” (Ferree and Merril 2000:457). In this sense, social psychological “cold” cognition should not be used—it overlooks the importance of emotional appeals. This also ignores the gendered implications of emotional appeals, often considered “feminine” as opposed to “masculine” in nature. Framing theory, despite its potential masculinist shortcomings, is pertinent to an understanding of the ways through which SMOs articulate their message to the public, and why and how this message succeeds or fails.

Snow et al. (1986) identify four major forms of frame alignment\(^\text{19}\) utilized by social movement activists: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension and frame transformation.

Frame bridging refers to “the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem” that can occur at

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\(^{19}\) Frame alignment is defined as “the linkage of individual and SMO interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals and ideology are congruent and complementary” (Snow et al. 1986:484).
the individual and or structural levels (Snow et al. 1986:467). Frame bridging requires a linkage between an SMO and “unmobilized sentiment pools” (McCarthy 1986), or “public opinion preference clusters” (Snow et al. 1986:487). These refer to members of society that share common grievances with the SMO but “lack the organizational base for expressing their discontents and for acting in pursuit of their own interests” (Snow et al. 1986:487). This form of framing occurs primarily through mass media or interpersonal networks (Snow et al. 1986).

Frame amplification is the process by which SMOs clarify and invigorate “an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem or set of events…support for an participation in movement activities is frequently contingent on the clarification and reinvigoration of an interpretive frame” (Snow et al. 1986:469). There are two major forms of frame amplification: value amplification, the “identification, idealization, and elevation of one or more values presumed basic to prospective constituents but which have not inspired collective action for any number of reasons,” and belief amplification which focuses on “ideational elements that cognitively support or impede action in pursuit of desired values” (Snow et al. 1986:469-470). Appeals to values can be very successful in resonating based on common beliefs and at presenting an image of the SMO as acting in the best interests of society (Snow et al. 1986). It can also appeal to culturally-resonating ideals of moral obligation or working for the “common good” of humanity (Snow et al. 1986).

Frame extension refers to the processes through which SMOs amplify certain elements of a frame that is not necessarily salient or does not have an existing pool of sentiments (Snow et al. 1986). This sometimes involves extending the frame to include
issues that are not pertinent to the goals of the group, but resonate with the values or
desires of the public (Snow et al. 1986). In extending frames past issues that do not seem
pertinent to the SMO, activists must be careful as to not seem “opportunistic” or to have
ulterior motives for aligning themselves with a particular cause or presenting their frame
in a particular way, or they risk losing the support from those they are attempting to
attract.

The final frame alignment process that Snow et al. (1986) discuss is frame
transformation, where activists who may be espousing agendas that appear antithetical to
common values may have to plant new values, reframe “erroneous beliefs” from the
public and jettison old meanings (473). Activists must reframe conditions that were
previously thought of “unfortunate but tolerable…as inexcusable, unjust or immoral”
(Snow et al. 1986:474). It can mean that areas of life previously thought as non-
problematic must be re-framed as an injustice of some sort (Snow et al. 1986). In many
ways, feminist movements have relied greatly on this frame alignment process to garner
support for their demands. Conditions that were previously thought to be “personal,” such
as domestic violence, or “normal” such as lower pay for women in the workforce or
sexual harassment, were reframed as a public injustice—sexism. Women’s activists,
especially during time periods where women were not perceived as having authority in
the public space, relied on transforming traditional notions of women’s capabilities in
order to garner support for their increased public voice.

Benford and Snow (2000) break down core framing tasks into three categories:
diagnostic framing, prognostic framing and motivational framing (615). Diagnostic
framing often focuses on what is referred to as “injustice frames,” wherein activists and
SMOs identify as “victims” and amplify their victimization to the public (Benford and Snow 2000). Diagnostic framing identifies “blame” or culpable agents and to focus blame and/or responsibility on those agents (Benford and Snow 2000). Prognostic framing, which Benford and Snow (2000) outline as the second core framing task, “involves the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem, or at least a plan of attack, and the strategies for carrying out the plan” (616). There is often a relationship between diagnostic and prognostic framing, with the agent of the former largely constraining the course of action of the latter (Benford and Snow 2000). Prognostic framing is often the way in which SMOs differentiate themselves from one another (Benford and Snow 2000), for example in “radical” or “reformist” tendencies within feminist movements. Motivational framing can be thought of as a “call to arms,” or the ways in which SMOs present their reasons for why people should engage in collective action (Benford and Snow 2000). Benford (1993) outlines four “generic motives of agency” (Benford and Snow 2000:617): severity, urgency, efficacy and propriety (Benford 1993).

The relative success of various framing techniques is based upon many factors, including its resonance with the public and the fluidity or rigidity of the frame (Benford and Snow 2000). The credibility of the frame articulators greatly affects its resonance with the general public, as does the level of consistency between framing and goals and tactics of the SMO (Benford and Snow 2000). The ability of frames to resonate with the public is also contingent upon the degree to which the public espouses the framing of the SMO, as well as the degree to which the public identifies with the frame both personally and culturally (Benford and Snow 2000). Framing an issue in language that is too abstract
or unfamiliar to the public can lessen the degree to which the frame resonates with society (Benford and Snow 2000).

The ways that frames emerge are generally a contested and re-negotiated process (Benford and Snow 2000). SMOs may re-negotiate a frame if it is not appealing to the public or if conditions alter that necessitate changing the frames through which the SMO attempts to connect with the public. Additionally, the role of the state, the media and countermovements can lead to re-negotiation of the original frame in order to combat those opposed to the goals of the SMO (Benford and Snow 2000).

Frame diffusion, the process by which ideas and goals are transmitted across movements and cultures, occurs after frame development and can be a way for seemingly disparate SMOs to network and collaborate. Frame diffusion can also occur when what McAdam (1995) called “spin-off movements” utilize frames from other SMOs that do not take an active role in the frame-bridging process. Frame diffusion is a way for newer SMOs to utilize frames that were successful for other organizations in the past, as well to appeal to an already-established sentiment pool.

One of the leading scholars on framing theory, Robert D. Benford, critiques the applicability of the framing theory given the lack of critique of the perspective since its conception (Benford 1999). Benford (1992) previously defended the potential for dramaturgy to provide a framework for understanding how movements acquire resources and commitment from participants. He states that “Mobilization is more difficult if the antagonist is not particularly susceptible to vilification or the protagonist is not very likable” (51). Benford (1999) cautions that the tendency to reify SMOs as “framing” its own activity, which can blur or mute the effects of human agency within social
movements. It is necessary to avoid neglecting the role of emotions in assessing frame alignment and resonance (Benford 1999), mirroring what was noted by Ferree and Merril (2000). A final caution that Benford (1999) proposes is to avoid the tendency of the framing perspective to focus on the actions of the movements’ elites, ignoring the work and language of rank-and-file activists.

While the framing theory of social movements has gained increasing prominence, it is pertinent to keep in mind Benford’s (1999) cautionary critiques in order to avoid muting the agency and complexity of framing processes with SMOs. Understanding that emotions can play a large role in affecting the resonance of particular frames is crucial to an understanding of the ways in which empathetic appeals succeed or do not. Additionally, focusing on the ways in which all movement actors, not simply the elites and movement leaders, negotiate and deploy frames can avoid an elitist examination. Despite critiques, understanding the ways in which social movement actors negotiate and deploy framing strategies, whether successful or unsuccessful, is pertinent to a greater understanding of the ways through which they garner public support or lose public influence. Additionally, the language used in framing processes can give insight into the ways that movement activists define their collective identity to the public and for themselves.

Another important issue to understand with regards to framing is the notion that it is not actually a theory—instead, it is a taxonomy that only describes activity rather than hypothesizing why it happens the way it does. I am certainly using framing in this way: to differentiate between the different types of framing techniques deployed by these organizations. However, expanding framing theory to include aspects of why groups or
individuals choose to deploy specific framing strategies could provide valuable insight into social movement studies. Within my work, I will briefly point out some underlying cultural circumstances that may lead groups to utilize particular framing strategies; however, an in-depth look at how and why groups choose specific frames is beyond the scope of my particular project.

In order to avoid some of the critiques of framing—namely, that it has masculinist overtones, I will constantly bear in mind the necessity of understanding appeals to emotions as not a “negative” aspect of framing, as well as understand the ways in which these organizations portray womanhood and women’s roles within a contested cultural framework.

_Framing in Four Nicaraguan Women’s Organizations_

Below I will discuss the various framing techniques and tactics deployed by the four organizations I studied, MAM, RMCV, _Grupo Venancia_ and _Red Trans de Nicaragua_. For the purpose of this discussion, this section is divided into four parts—one for each of the organizations. My discussion focuses on four major aspects of framing: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, frame bridging and frame amplification. For each of the four groups, I will outline the various framing techniques used, followed by an overall summary and analysis of frames utilized by various Nicaraguan women’s organizations. It should be noted that RTN does not have the same amount of information available via public statements as the other three groups, so the majority of information concerning RTN has come from personal interviews with the RTN activists; however, for the other organizations, I rely mainly on framing via their public statements on their respective websites as well as incorporating some additional insights gained from
interviews.

*MAM: “¡Ni un paso atrás. No nos van a callar!”*20

In order to examine MAMs’ public framing of their organization and their goals and tactics, I analyzed 14 *pronunciamientos* from 2005-2009. Additionally, I conducted one interview with Juanita Jimenez in Managua during July of 2010 where I asked her questions about the major goals and tactics of the organization as a whole. More so than any of the other organizations that I researched, MAM clearly lays out their diagnostic and prognostic framing techniques, as well as utilizing frame bridging to connect their current struggle with Sandinismo ideology.

*Diagnostic Framing*

MAM clearly identifies who is to blame for their conditions, as well as citing themselves (and other women) as the victims of oppression. I am going to focus on what I identify as the two major sources of oppression, according to MAM, the state and patriarchy—which are tied closely together in MAMs’ rhetoric.

The words “FSLN,” “Ortega,” “Ortega-Murrillo,” “Orteganismo,” and “Alemán,” were used a total of 111 times in the fourteen documents I analyzed. With regards to the use of these terms, they were often accompanied by terms like “Somocista,” “Somocismo,” “authoritarian,” “dictator” or “dictatorship,” and even with terms like “sociopath” and “malignant narcissist.” Later, I will discuss the use of bridging between Somoza, Alemán and Ortega, but for now I would just like to focus on how MAM places the blame on these groups, which represent the current Nicaraguan state.

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20 Translates as “Not one step back! We will not shut up!” Posted on MAMs’ website on September 9, 2008 in response to growing pressure from the FSLN government.
As early as 2005, MAM was releasing *pronunciamientos* entitled “For our Rights, All Against the Dictatorship!” (MAM 2005). In this announcement they write, “The FSLN and PLC parties have closed the political system…and established a power sharing that hurts all democratic principles and institutions, but also condemns society to be held hostage” (MAM 2005). And end the document with the following slogan “For equality, freedom and social justice, Not the dictatorship!” (MAM 2005). This tone continued into 2006, with statements like Nicaragua has been “kidnapped by the tyranny of bipartisanship…Only after establishing free, transparent elections will the country no longer be held hostage to the designs of the Ortega-Aleman Party” (MAM 2006a).

This style of argument continues into 2007, in a statement released on March 8, 2007 in honor of International Women’s Day: “The triumph of the FSLN represents the continuity of the things the state denounced, and the worst possible setting for women: the ascent of the new authoritarian obscurantism disguised as ‘direct democracy’” (MAM 2007). Into 2008, only weeks before the government raids on their offices, MAM released a statement entitled “30 Years Later the Enemy Remains the Same,” highlighting the ways that the Ortega-Alemán alliance is reminiscent of Somoza-era politics. In a report by MAMs’ Sophia Montenegro entitled “The essence of Ortegaism: Illegitimacy and cowardice,” she refers to Ortega as representative of “Antisocial Personality Disorder,” “sociopaths,” “manipulative,” and “narcissistic” persons (Montenegro 2008). MAM additionally reacted to the government raids by blaming Ortega for “abuses of power” and that “They [the FSLN government] are operating outside the law, they are the ones who should be prosecuted and convicted for their
nonsense and disruption of country. They are the ones who will go down in history as abusers and violators of women’s human rights” (MAM 2008b).

MAM also places blame for women’s conditions on patriarchy and male-domination over women, which for them, is intrinsically tied to the Nicaraguan state. MAM says in 2008 “‘The politics of gender’ of the FSLN disappears women as citizens of rights, privileges the traditional family over the women, treats them not like people and leaves them reduced to vessels for carrying children” (MAM 2008a). They also provide this highly critical statement, repeated directly from the previous chapter due to its applicability here as well:

the gender politics of the government of "reconciliation and national unity," is similar to that of the Alemán fascism that proclaimed the traditional one kinder, kirche, küche (children, church and kitchen) for women: political messiah-ism and clerical rhetoric on obligatory maternity, is the offering in the red-black flag of the poor. The patriarchal politics of gender and anti-democracy of the government threatens being enthroned through the pact, the passivity and the manipulation [of the people], endangers the rights of women’s citizenship, just like the rights and liberties of all Nicaraguans (2008a).

In identifying the problem as male domination over women, MAM equates this with the state and with Ortega in particular. In 1998, Ortega was accused by his stepdaughter of repeated sexual abuse; charges were never brought against him. MAM responds in the following way, “the man elevated to the Presidency with a mounted minority vote…is an emblem of the sex abuse and of the reigning male impunity in Nicaragua and a true insult of the national dignity” (2008a).

In their pronuncimientos, MAM clearly identifies the sources of their problems as the Ortega-Alemán alliance and male domination—which are intertwined. In addition to identifying the source of their anger, MAM also identifies themselves as victims. In 2007
MAM states that the government has brought charges against many civil society groups, “however, the attacks have become particularly vengeful in the case of women’s organizations” (MAM 2007). Further, that “Government officials and the presidential couple seek to tell us how we can organize ourselves, with whom we network, what alliances we can do and with whom, and at the height of the audacity seek to establish what we can and cannot say” (MAM 2007). In 2009, MAM reiterates that

In recent years we have lived [through] an intense campaign of defamation, harassment and political prosecution against feminist leaders and organizations. They have used state institutions to deny the legitimacy of women’s organizations and their right to participate in public matters (2009a).

In keeping with their dual focus on women being victims of both the state and patriarchy, MAM said the following in 2009 about the condition of Nicaraguan women, that they are victims of “violence, lack of justice, health deterioration, increased poverty, poor quality of health services and denial of sexual and reproductive rights, and the sole responsibility for support and care for families” (2009a). In 2008 they said that “First, after 169 years of existence, they [the FSLN government] eliminated therapeutic abortion from the former Penal Code and the current and condemning us to death,” which was reiterated by Juanita Jimenez in a 2010 interview, where she said the costs of the ban on abortion is that “women die, women die and this could be prevented, but they do not care, do not allow us our rights” (MAM 2008, personal interview with Juanita Jimenez 2010).

It is clear from MAMs” public statements that they place the blame of women’s subordinate status clearly on two intertwined factions: patriarchy and the state. They explicitly state the role of both factions in maintaining women’s subordinate status.
Indeed, they are also quite explicit in emphasizing the oppression faced by women as a whole and particularly women’s organizations, at the hands of the state.

Prognostic Framing

As clear and precise as MAMs’ diagnostic framing is, their prognostic framing is equally as concise: with concrete solutions for the problems that they outline. On their website they make the following list of demands, as shown in figure 7.1:

- The Right to personal integrity and a life free of violence generated in the economic, social, cultural and political development in the private and public spheres.
- Exercise our expressed Sexual Rights:
  - Respect for sexual diversity
  - Self-determination and protection of women in the exercise of pleasant sexuality.
- Training and scientific sex education
- The dignity of women as social and political subjects, and not using us as sex objects
- Exercise our expressed Reproductive Rights:
  - Freely chosen maternity
  - Decriminalization of abortion
  - Full access to reproductive quality health services
- Responsible Fatherhood
  - Rearing tasks and domestic work is shared by the couple and the family.
- The full exercise of our economic and legal rights; equal access to goods and means of production and reproduction:
  - Property Rights: Land, capital, technology, infrastructure, capital assets (housing, furniture and equipment).
  - Equal access to employment and equal remuneration

Figure 7.1: MAMs’ Demands

In addition to these demands outlined on their website, MAM also provides explicit solutions or ways to solve the problems of female subordination and state control. In 2005 MAM declared “we call to women of all political sides across the country to mobilize against the dictatorship in the making, flying our flags of democracy in all spaces should give room to political and civil participation” (MAM 2005). They further this idea of democracy with many of their slogans, such as “For equality, freedom and social justice, not the dictatorship,” “Women demand democracy, all against the pact,”
and, “No more demagoguery: We demand democracy in the country and at home!” These statements reappear repeatedly in the closing of their numerous pronuncimientos.

MAM also lays out concrete steps that must be taken by the organization and other groups to ensure gender equality and democracy. In 2005 they say Nicaraguan society must:

1. Take a strategic interest in fighting all forms of authoritarianism and organizing and mobilizing against patriarchal pacts that oppress us as gender and as nation. For the full exercise of our citizenship in this 2006 election, we have the opportunity to exercise an inalienable right: Breaking down the pact!.

2. Demand to all the social actors, organized or not, to distance themselves from the double moral of the political class and their misleading campaigns that appeal to the citizen vote in an instrumental way, without a commitment to maintain democratic legitimacy required, without moral, political and economic accountability, without respecting the rights and freedoms of all citizens. The 2006 elections are an opportunity to fulfill an inescapable citizen duty: Breaking down the pact!

3. Develop joint policy actions in order to articulate the struggle of all citizens in the demand for a truly democratic society where elected officials feel obligated to be permanently legitimated and not act outside strategic interests of the entire Nicaraguan nation. So as a right and a citizen duty: Let's break down the pact! (MAM 2005).

In 2007, MAM has this to say about the society and state that they envision:

The establishment of an institutionalized democracy; a secular State; a State policies for the effective achievement of the equality and democracy; social justice expressed in a true national strategy of development, in the general budget of the Republic and in a rights guarantor State; and, a population policy that contemplates the needs and rights of reproductive and sexual health (MAM 2007a).

They further their demands in response to the governmental raids on their offices in 2008:
Our struggle has been and continues to ensure that women’s human rights are visible and in place, including gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence, but also to defend economic rights, the right to education and the right to life. So, we demand these to all governments and ours is no exception...We demand that those who are holders of public office, acting in their role in the state separate from their personal beliefs, to realize the constitutional principle of state secularism (MAM 2008a).

MAM sums up their overall opinion of the government and ultimate goals in the following statement: “we denounce this government that usurps and falsifies the exploitation of Nicaragua and we reaffirm that we will not yield in the fight because Nicaragua will again be a republic” (MAM 2009a).

The problem is patriarchy and the government, the goal is to return Nicaraguan to a participatory democracy and establish a secular state with full social, political, economic and reproductive rights for women. As the pictures in their pamphlets and bulletins show (see photos 1-3), this is done through popular protest.

Frame Amplification and Frame Bridging

I have chosen to combine the sections of frame amplification and frame bridging, due to their interconnectedness with regards to MAMs’ framing tactics. A major frame amplification that runs throughout many of these public documents and private interviews is an emphasis on the blame falling on the current political administration, the FSLN and their alliance with the PLC. This problem is then bridged (rather successfully in terms of rhetoric) with the authoritarian nature of the Somocista dictatorship—providing both a successful bridge between the two groups, and relying on an already-existing sentiment pool, a desire to never return to a military state. Further, through this amplification of placing the FSLN outside of Sandinista principles, MAM is able to place itself within them, reminding Nicaraguan society of the role women played in
overthrowing Somoza and maintaining that their platform is simply carrying on the Sandinismo tradition—and the FSLN is not (see photo seven for the FSLNs use of this same frame).

The major frame amplification and bridge is that the FSLN (and Ortega in particular)=the PLC and Alemán= Somocista-era dictatorship. Examples of this framing technique are found in many *pronunciamientos*. In 2005 they state “the dismantling of the shameful Aleman-Ortega [regime]” is necessary for democracy (MAM 2005). In 2006, they incorporate their demands of a direct democracy into an anti-FSLN/PLC statement that they demand the creation “of a parliament that transcends the current two-party dictatorship (PLC-FSLN)…Only then will the citizenry no longer be hostage to the designs of the Ortega-Aleman [party]” (MAM 2006).

The anti-FSLN/PLC campaign continued into 2008, when MAM stated

For some time, the entire nation has watched with stupor the campaign orchestrated by the government against civil organizations and the use of various forms of persecution and harassment of government, reviving—even with the same arguments—the methods used during the administration of defendant Arnold Alemán (MAM 2008a).

This point was also emphasized in 2007, when they said “The triumph of the FSLN represents the continuity of the state of things denounced and the worst possible setting for women: the ascent of the new authoritarian obscurantism disguised as ‘direct democracy’” (MAM 2007). Solidifying their position that Ortega and the current FSLN in no way represent the FSLN of the 1979 revolution, they declared “Any political link that could have been maintained from the Historic Program of the FSLN was finally broken in 1998 when the current President of Nicaragua was denounced by his stepdaughter for sexual abuse” (MAM 2009a).
The repeated mentions of Ortega and Alemán or the FSLN and PLC together indicate that MAM is attempting to frame them as “one in the same,” and emphasize that Ortega and the FSLN-PLC alliance represents the worst possible state for women in particular, but all Nicaraguans, as it is a step backwards towards dictatorship and authoritarianism.

In addition to tapping into existing sentiment pools by bridging Ortega with Alemán and Somoza, MAM calls attention to the role that women have historically played in national liberation, and the role that MAM has as a continuance of Sandinista ideology.

MAM devotes over half of their document entitled “30 years later, The enemy remains the same” to emphasizing the role that women played and continue to play in Nicaraguan liberation. They said

During the Sandinista Revolution, we were players on the first line and on the road--like thousands of women--we lost families, homes, jobs, lovers and friendships. We were and we are still struggling in the process of pacification of the country. We have been proactive in developing alternatives for survival of families from impoverishment, as well as in resistance to globalization and its consequences (MAM 2008b).

This point is emphasized again in the following proclamation: “Historically, Nicaraguan women have been belligerent actors have been present in all areas of history of our country. We were essential for overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship… Many of them lost their lives. We do not accept that they [the current FSLN] manipulate their memory” (MAM 2008b). MAM defines themselves as “Women who are in favor of democracy…Nicaraguan citizens who have rights and are honoring and carrying on the
Sandinista tradition” (MAM 2008b). Juanita Jimenez of MAM re-emphasized that their agenda is representative of the “unfinished principles of Sandinismo.”

MAM heavily employs frame bridging and frame amplification in their public documents, invoking specifically the ideals of Sandinismo and democracy—both of which resonate strongly with Nicaraguan society.

RMCV: “Yo decido, respeten mis derechos!”

Red Mujeres Contra la Violencia is another organization that employs various framing techniques in their public and private statements. For RMCV, I will be focusing on the following framing areas: prognostic, diagnostic and frame bridging and amplification. As with MAM, I am relying predominately on public documents issued by the organization, but will also be incorporating personal interview research as well. After presenting the findings for the various framing techniques I will briefly summarize their main strategies.

Diagnostic Framing

In my analyzing of the data provided by RMCV on their websites and in interviews, I have observed three major areas of blame: the state, the church hierarchy and the courts—all of which are intertwined. Below I will provide examples of each of these. While RMCV has come out publically to denounce the FSLN and their attacks against the organization, much of the framing prior to the 2008 raids focused more explicitly on men’s violence against women and the lack of successful prosecution by the

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21 Although frame amplification is used generally only on the subject—MAM emphasizes it on both the object and the subject. I am choosing to use it in this way, which does represent an innovation in the use of the term.
22 Translates as “I decide, you all respect my rights!” Posted on RMCVs’ website on November 23, 2007.
courts. The calls for an end to the FSLNs’ policies towards women’s organizations and for participatory democracy were emphasized after the raids.

In discussing the Nicaraguan state, RMCV is especially critical of them in two areas: allowing violence against women and not living up to their promises of helping the poor. In one pronuncimiento they state “The government that proclaims itself to be pro-poor, has done the greatest misery to the people of Nicaragua, especially women, where every day the cost of living is compounded even more, falling mainly on women who mostly keep their homes” (RMCV N.d.). They further emphasize the role the FSLN plays in undercutting the poor in the following statement, “It is worrying to see how this government fills their mouths with demagogic speeches, the realities are sometimes we do not see women’s and labor rights protected” (RMCV N.d.).

The state is also responsible for being complacent with religious hierarchies that deny women reproductive freedom in the country and for being complacent with the problem of violence against women. They claim “Today religious hierarchies in collusion with the state make use of threats, intimidation, persecution, judicialization” (RMCV N.d.). RMCV also places itself, and Nicaragua in general, as the victims of this collusion when they end the above statement by saying it is done “with the clear political objective to sanction, obstruct or impede the work we do and therefore not are a personal attack but an attack common to all women and Nicaraguan society” (RMCV N.d.). The state is also, in their view, not adequately addressing the problem of violence against women. They announce that what they really need is “rulers, public officials and officials to exercise their responsibility towards citizens, towards building the country’s democracy and social and gender equity…and ending violence against women” (RMCV N.d.).
RMCV identifies the Nicaraguan courts as an additional problem in fighting the battle of ending violence against women. They state that “Most of the cases of violence against women go unpunished, a situation that re-victimizes women assaulted and families of victims generating uncertainty, insecurity, fear, anguish and suffering. This cannot be ignored by judges and officials and to the solving of these cases” (RMCV N.d.). RMCV denounced “the complicity of the judges of the Supreme Court because it has to weigh the resources unconstitutionality introduced from January this year [from a particular case], made no comment, showing the silent pact between state and religious party leaders on the lives of women” (RMCV N.d.). They further that they “hope that sense will prevail impartiality and independence of the Supreme Court, and we make known that we are following up and supporting the whole process being carried out” (RMCV N.d.).

The blame on the FSLN-PLC agreement and the FSLN in particular only came following the raids. In a non-dated statement that was obviously posted post-raid, RMCV declared that they

join other expressions of civil society in calling for participation in a democratizing, inclusive national dialog to guide us to consolidate the rule of law, [establish] political pluralism, and a minimum agreement of governance that generates a national plan to promote development and define measures to cushion the effects of the difficult economic, political and cultural development that we are facing in our country (RMCV N.d.).

RMCV called the 2008 raids an “act of persecution and political terrorism,” and called on Nicaraguans “to defend the rights and freedom of the companions, which is the right and freedom of all women, and repudiated by all means by the actions of the State and the Catholic hierarchy” (RMCV N.d.)
It is clear that RMCV places the blame for women’s subordinate position and the overall character of Nicaraguan society on the Church hierarchy, the Courts and the state. While their public statements following the 2008 raids were far less openly antagonistic as MAMs’, they did sign a joint statement denouncing the raids and the FSLN, as well as post the following slogans to close their pronuncimientos: “Enough is Enough: Stop Political Persecution of Women!”

Prognostic Framing

Much as was the case with MAM, RMCV clearly and succinctly outlines their demands and proposed necessary actions to make these demands a reality. Most of the following information is taken again from their website and pronuncimientos; however, this section will also include reinforcement of these demands as articulated in an interview with RMCVs’ Liaison Coordinator, Klemen. Of course, one of their major demands is an end to violence against women, reflected in their slogans “Not another dead…murderers and rapists to jail,” “We defend our right to live without violence,” and “Violence Against Women is a Crime, We Need to End the Impunity,” as well as the banners and posters that adorn their offices (see photos 8-11). This demand is also reflected in many of their statements, as shown in figure 7.2, where they call for:

- The immediate protection by state institutions, the life of women due to high rates of murders of women, and prosecute and punish rapists and murderers of women.
- The protection and specialized comprehensive care to children who have suffered sexual abuse, likewise, the prosecution and punishment of violators and offenders responsible for these crimes.
- To be implemented in a belligerent manner, laws and regulations on Violence Against Sexual Offences and Women and Children, through various state institutions and government.
- Likewise, the revival of the National Commission to Combat Board violence and equal opportunities.
- Increase the budgets designated to the National Plan Against Violence.

Figure 7.2: RMCVs’ Demands (RMCV n.d).
The organization also demands additional rights for women, since they are concerned with “negotiating against violence,” but also with abortion rights, political rights and sexual rights (Personal interview with Klemen from RMCV, 2010). Klemen further emphasizes that the most important areas of work are in “reproductive rights and political rights.”

The focus on not only violence against women, but political and reproductive rights are reiterated through RMCVs’ public statements. Through their documents they outline the following major demands, showcased in figure 7.3:

- Respect the character of the secular state of our constitution and real democracy, as a prerequisite for the promotion and protection of human rights women.
- Return of the therapeutic abortion as an inviolable right to life and to decide on your body.
- That the Nicaraguan State, comply with the instruments it has signed internationally for the promotion and protection of women’s human rights, to immediately ratify the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, which gives the opportunity to ask the International Committee investigations of the violation of human rights of women in our country, as referred to at the convention.
- Respect the Secular State, as our rights are not of conscience but of rules of law for social harmony.
- We demand free access to drugs for people with HIV and AIDS and campaigns aimed at prevention efforts targeting women and youth.
- And we call on the hierarchy of the Catholic Church not to continue engaging in politics the state and engaged in social work, there are thousands of children who go hungry in the streets without protection, without access to education without government assistance.

Figure 7.3 RMCVs’ Demands of the State and Church (RMCV N.d.)

In response to how these demands can and should be carried out, please see pictures 1-3 for depictions of popular protest as a means to have their voices heard.

Additionally, figure 7.4 outlines RMCVs’ principles that they will adhere to and carryout order to advance towards their goals:

- We will continue on a war footing regardless of the covenants, compromise and threats from persecutors of women in the background who are just misogynists, abusers and sex stalkers.
- We will continue with our complaints.
- We will continue conducting awareness campaigns and prevention of violence.
- We will continue to hold forums and training workshops to strengthen women.
We will continue to make every effort to dialog with the state and for this to be located responsibly with civil society and seek the right answers for the construction of a more just society.

**Figure 7.4: RMCVs’ Principles** (RMCV N.d.).

*Frame Bridging and Frame Amplification*

In studying RMCVs’ public and private statements, two major instances of frame bridging and amplification came up repeatedly: the right to live free from violence and the right to life, the latter of which can also be viewed as re-framing from the right-wing rhetoric of “respect for life” for a fetus to “respect for life” for women.

RMCV calls for an end to violence against women, and their rights to live free from violence, which is arguably a frame that resonates well within Nicaraguan society. During the Somocista-era, Nicaraguans faced constant threat of violence at the hands of the National Guard and police. Additionally, during the prolonged revolution and subsequent civil war between the FSLN and the *contra* forces, there was constant violence. Arguably, having lived under decades of violence at the hands of the state, and ending the violence against Nicaraguans being a major objective of the revolution, invoking the right to live a violence-free life taps into an already existing sentiment pool.

RMCV also demands a “right to life for women,” that is “free from violence” that has been “denied and violated by the patriarchal system that generates inequalities and vulnerability of women” (RMCV N.d.). The “right to life” frame, as outlined by Kampwirth (1998a; 2006) is often utilized by anti-abortion conservative Catholics in the country as a reason the complete ban on abortion must be maintained. RMCV is utilizing an existing sentiment that “life is precious,” which resonates soundly in Nicaragua, but
also subverting this conservative frame to demand those women’s lives be given consideration in the “right to life” paradigm.

RMCV succinctly declares who is to blame and what is to be done, both by their organization and the citizenry at large, in order to end patriarchal domination over women and restore participatory democracy in Nicaragua. They rely heavily on tapping in to the idea that violence against women is a problem for all Nicaraguans, as well as reaching out to those who are committed to the principles of human rights and ending violence in the country.

Grupo Venancia: “Antes de hacerte cargo de otros, hacete cargo de vos!”

Grupo Venancia, in comparison to the other two feminist organizations studied, did not have as much public material available for analyzing. In addition to this setback, I was also unable to do interviews in-person with activists in Matagalpa, so I had to rely solely on two, somewhat short, online interviews, which hardly provided the breadth of information that the five face-to-face interviews did. However, despite these shortcomings, I was still able to gather enough between the two outlets to provide an insight into Grupo Venancia’s framing. I acknowledge, though, that this section would have greatly benefitted had I had the same access to activists that I did with the other organizations. Below I will outline the various framing tactics utilized by Grupo Venancia and then briefly summarize.

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23 Translates as: “Before taking charge of others, you must take charge of yourself.” This was the slogan for Grupo Venancia’s major 2009 campaign to educate youths about how to take control of their lives, bodies and sexuality.
Diagnostic Framing

As mentioned in the previous chapter, despite being targeted by the government in 2008 along with the other two feminist organizations I studied, Grupo Venancia reacted far less confrontationally than did MAM or RMCV.\footnote{Again, I must reiterate that I did not have the same breadth of information (public and private) available to me with Grupo Venancia as I did with RMCV and MAM. This statement is a reflection of analyzing the materials I had, with the complete disclosure that there may have been the same level of outrage from Grupo Venancia, but that I did not have the access to documentation of it.} While they did denounce and discredit the attacks in one announcement, as well as sign a statement of solidarity and protest with other Nicaraguan women’s organizations, the majority of their framing focuses on gender inequalities and education rather than the state.

In a statement released after the raids, Grupo Venancia declared: “Grupo Venancia was founded in 1991 with the aim of contributing to the development of Nicaraguan women, its organization and defending their rights, in accordance with the provisions of Articles 48 and 49 of the Constitution of the Republic of Nicaragua and other laws” (2008). They further claim that We found no reason or legal justification [for the raids],” and “Therefore we demand that the Interior Ministry and the official media to stop this campaign of vilification against the organizations, mainly against the leaders and women's organizations that have historically contributed to the integral development of Nicaragua, fighting for democracy in the country and at home” (Grupo Venancia 2008). Clearly, in response to the raids, Grupo Venancia places the blame squarely on the government and themselves as the victims of an unfair “campaign of vilification.”

The reason for women’s continued subordinate status, according to Grupo Venancia can be placed on two sources: patriarchy and a lack of education for women about their social, economic and political rights. Grupo Venancia carries out yearly
campaigns for public education designed around issues of importance to women, which exemplify the problems listed above. In 2004 they ran a campaign entitled “Policy: If it is to be Done, Do it with Women: Get the Facts, the Opinions, and Get Involved,” which was structured around “strengthening women’s knowledge for what, how and where to participate in the political process.” They ran another campaign in 2006 called “To Live Better: Women Demand Equal Distribution of the Wealth we Produce,” wherein they focused on an unequal distribution of credit and money for women and men in the home, and the ways in which a patriarchal system led to unequal pay for women. In 2007 they shifted focus onto reproductive rights in a campaign named “We Have the Right to Decide,” where they educated women on how reproductive control of their bodies is a fundamental aspect of democracy that the state and male-dominated Church hierarchy are denying them.

Additionally, Grupo Venancia runs these programs because they place the blame for lack of these rights not only on state and male actions, but on the lack of popular education available, especially for young women, to teach them about their rights. In an interview, Carola from Grupo Venancia stated “the young [women] they do not know, they do not really think about their rights, social, political, sexual, they do not think about their being victims of violence too.”

The organization was founded, it seems, on an explicitly working class feminist basis, that emphasized “practical and strategic gender interests and a vision of change in the organization of women [presumably autonomy based on the date given of 1989 and work with] rural women in remote areas, young women, and urban women, subsequently giving priority to the working class” (Grupo Venancia 2009c). Taking this into account,
it can be interpreted that they are focusing on feminism and issues for working class women, so I expect that many of their programs focus on the dual ways through which capitalism and patriarchy work to oppress women. Again, this would require more in-depth studies of the organization.

**Prognostic Framing**

Much as with MAM and RMCV, *Grupo Venancia* has a set of concrete strategies and programs to outline their goals and proposed solutions. A list of *Grupo Venancia*’s activities are available on their website, which are showcased in figure 7.5:

- 5 Level I workshops on gender and citizenship with 25 adult women
- 5 Level I workshops on gender and citizenship with 25 young women
- 5 Level II workshops on gender and citizenship to 30 young women
- and adults discharged from level I
- 5 training sessions for young promoters of The Cypress-Waslala, El Cua, San Dionisio, Esquipulas, G. Chagiiite, Asturias, Very Very and Pancasdn
- Campaign Celebration March 8, June 1, and November 25 for community youth networks.
- Internship with 8 promoters for the preparation of the Regional Youth Encounter
- Regional Meeting of Young Women
- Content Development: Memory of Youth Meeting:
- 12 training sessions for 21 students of psychology, deepening course
- Course of five training workshops for Promoting Community
- Launching an annual campaign on sexual and reproductive rights of women.
- Preparation of various materials for distribution in the campaign.
- Diffusion of the campaign in several municipalities in the Northern Region.
- Transmission of radio program "Lilac Time" every Saturday from 9-10 am, the radio voice of the Colectivo de Mujeres de Matagalpa

**Figure 7.5: Examples of *Grupo Venancia*’s Activities** (*Grupo Venancia* 2009c).

The above list encompasses both their campaigns as well as specific initiatives the organization is taking to make this a reality.

In addition to these public campaigns, *Grupo Venancia* also deploys, and this differentiates them from the other two feminist organizations studied, the use of music, art and film in order to educate and give voices to marginalized women. In chapter 5 I
outlined the various cultural programs that they offer, and depictions of these can be found in pictures 5 and 6. More research would need to be done to determine the success of these cultural projects, and I cannot say much more about them because I was not able to witness any personally; however, I do believe they are worth mentioning here.

*Grupo Venancia’s* various methods: education, cultural programs and radio broadcasts summarize the ways in which they believe their goals of economic, political and social equality can be met. I want to summarize their overall strategy in terms of what I was told by Louisa and Carola via interviews. The organization accomplishes these by being “in the fight” according to Louisa, and Carola says that they “are convinced that the organization is our opportunity to make changes that would be impossible to do individually.”

*RTN*: “*Nosotras somos Mujeres Reales!*”

In order to report the framing strategies of *Red Trans de Nicaragua*, I will predominately be utilizing information attained during personal interviews with three RTN activists in Managua in June 2010. RTN does not have the same web set-up as the other organizations, running a Google blog site as opposed to a formal webpage, and does not have any public statements available online. I will also be using an official declaration of their principles and objectives that was provided to me by Silvia from Red Trans. I will mainly be focusing on diagnostic and prognostic framing, due to the plethora of information that I was able to receive via my interviews. I will slightly discuss what I interpreted their frame bridging and amplification to be; however, this section is extremely short. I will conclude by summarizing their positions and tactics.

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25 Translates as “We are real women!” Statement made by RTN activist during a personal interview on June 8, 2010.
Diagnostic Framing

In my interviews with Inyri, Mistica and Silvia from RTN, there were two issues that came up in their diagnostic framing: a culture of intolerance and lack of inclusion in Nicaraguan society. Below I will discuss both of these in-depth and how these problems are inter-connected in the lives of transgender women.

The women discuss how intolerance and lack of acceptance, both in the home and in public, greatly constrain their abilities and access to material resources. Mistica said “We have a lot of problems with culture in our country. A lot of ignorance…They don’t accept other identities and other expressions.” Silvia concurred this point, “in this culture, we do not have a culture of tolerance and respect. A person like us, they face violence. They face violence every day, in the street. They also face problems from their family, because they do not understand.” Here, the women are discussing both how lack of tolerance is a problem and how they are victims of this violence and intolerance.

This tolerance is not just in terms of violence in public, but also in the home. Silvia stated

It seems that one of the biggest problems are in the house, with family when people want to live their lives “changed.” It is very difficult for a trans person to live a public life. To live as themselves, publically. There are the police, with challenging trans persons and harassment. This is a problem around the world. Nicaragua is like the rest of Central America and the Caribbean

Silvia connects the public and private spheres here, as well connecting problems that transgender women in Nicaragua face with issues faced by transwomen in other areas as well.
The lack of inclusion is also blamed for many of the problems for transgender Nicaraguan women. This lack of inclusion is emphasized in two specific areas: employment and education. Mistica stated:

Well, the situation for the trans Nicaraguans is really oppressed. First, I did not have access to an education. Secondly, we are not in education, we do not have jobs, really not professional jobs. No, hmm, no no…We don’t have jobs for people of different genders, transgender people, trans girls. We do have many jobs now…like working in a market or a small store or as a domestic worker. It’s very bad for people in sex work. Because they do not have any help. Of course, there are other things, but jobs, really.

Silvia emphasized this point when she said, “in particular for trans people it’s hard. There is a problem getting jobs because they have different documents with different names.” This refers to the fact that transgender women are not recognized as women—instead, they are bound legally by their given names and their given identification papers that identify them as male.

This lack of recognition of transgender women as women also leads to lower levels of education and a lack of access to education. Silvia stated “what they [transwomen] need is a diploma.” Mistica agreed that this was a problem and she stated “we do not have access to knowledge, to education.” This lack of education extends to politics. Mistica said that a lot of transgender women do not have a political affiliation or participate because they do not have access to knowledge about politics. She said “if the government would include us, we need to be included, then we can learn about politics. Because, they are important, right? But many do not know.”

Transgender women, according to RTN activists, face problems of a lack of inclusion in politics, employment and education. They also face problems of being accepted by their families and by general society. Silvia says, “There is also a lot of
problems with ‘this is a gay person,’ or ‘this is a trans person,’ ... They have a negative connotation.” This lack of tolerance has not only personal and psychological effects, but also denies transgender women access to jobs as well as the ability to freely move between countries and have the same opportunities as cisgender women.

Prognostic Framing

The general perspective of RTN in terms of how to solve their problems can perhaps be best summed in one of Silvia’s statements in her original online interview. When asked how transgender women can solve the problems facing them, she stated “With more education and information.” This reflects the major goals outlined by Red Trans de Nicaragua, which include advancing program initiatives that educate transgender women on HIV/AIDS prevention, and “promote reduction, caused by transphobia and other forms of discrimination associated with sexual orientation and gender identity and expression” through education and informational programs.

Education is cited by both Mistica and Inyri as one of the major benefits they have experienced from being a part of RTN, Inyri replied that she had “learned more” since begin a member. Mistica replied she “learned about my transgender condition. I thought a lot before working with this organization, but not specifically about trans issues. If you are a gay person, or a gay guy, they will benefit from this organization.” It seems, at least in regards to providing a space to educate transgender women and others that identify with alternative gender and sexual identities, that RTN has had success. Additionally, their affiliation with CIES-UNAN may aid in this endeavor, especially because they now have increased access to healthcare professionals and educators.
The focus on education is exemplified in one of RTNs recent campaigns with CIES-UNAN, which is to teach transwomen computer skills so that they may have greater access to job opportunities (see photo 13). Also, I routinely receive email updates from Silvia as part of a listserv concerning issues of violence and discrimination against transgender women. In this regard, the computer training will serve not only to aid transwomen in getting jobs, but also to have access to updates about transgender issues.

Another way that Silvia stressed that they could solve their goals is “In the daily struggles, in all areas where we have a say in our lives.” This stress on public participation and daily struggles, it appears outside of the dominant political system that RTN mirrors the strategies advanced by other women’s organizations as well.

A difference I noted between the three feminist organizations and RTN was a lack of concrete objectives in terms of specific policy changes or specific targets, like the FSLN. Instead, RTN focuses on the state, generally, as a means for inclusion and culture and intolerance. This may make their objectives a bit more difficult to concretely obtain, due to the fact that they cover a large area—jobs, education, religion, definition of “woman,” voting rights, identification and recognition with the names that they use—and are a lot to accomplish for a relatively new organization.

Frame Bridging and Frame Amplification

In my interviews and looking at Red Trans de Nicaragua’s official objectives, two major areas of frame bridging and amplification occurred: identifying themselves with people who are of alternative sexual orientations and identification with a human rights paradigm.
The activists routinely mentioned lack of tolerance for transgender people, gay men and lesbians; this is reflected in the general objectives of the organization that define one goal as “To promote the creation of an enabling environment that allows impact in reducing discrimination and stigma associated with sexual orientation of individuals” (Red Trans de Nicaragua N.d.). Mistica said that the organization would benefit people as well “If they are a gay person, a gay guy.” Silvia emphasized this point in her second interview as well. She stated “I mean, even if you are a trans person, or a gay person, we need to work to get what we want. We need to decide what we want. We do not want to just stay in the house. We want rights in the house, but also in the street.” She furthered this bridge by saying “We need human rights. We need human rights for all of Latin America and the Caribbean. For lesbian women. We need rights for everyone.”

This “rights for everyone” and “human rights” is another bridge that was deployed specifically by Silvia. The concept of human rights is becoming a more resonant concept in many countries, and Nicaragua is no exception. Silvia is placing the struggle for transgender liberation and acceptance within a larger paradigm that calls for overall rights for everyone. She said

We need human rights. We need human rights for all of Latin America and the Caribbean. For lesbian women. We need rights for everyone. The FSLN was a part of working for human rights. The FSLN is still a part of working for human rights. What needs to happen, is that through the FSLN, we need to include sex workers, trans girls, lesbian girls. It’s like we say in Latin America ‘Everything with us, nothing without us.’ We must be present in society. We need a voice for public politics and voice in public politics. It is necessary to change society. To include these things. People need protection, people like Mistica, like us, people need to be protected from violence and treated with respect. We need to have the ability. Like for Inyri, if her passions are here, or in another country. It needs to be that we can go. It’s like we need to do this in Latin America
and the Caribbean. But now, I am focused on my compañeras here. I think that the FSLN needs to incorporate trans girls and trans people. I think that when it was fifteen years ago, this couldn’t happen. Now, we have more entry, we need more political participation, though. I am a proponent of the democratic process, I know that we can’t change it by tomorrow. But what they [the FSLN] have done for the workers, for the country it’s important. But I think of a Nicaragua where there are rights for everyone. Where everyone has political participation. Where everyone is there without exclusion.

Here Silvia strongly invokes many of the frames that were used by the other organizations: human rights, political participation, and a Nicaragua where everyone is included. However, Silvia differs in her framing from the feminist organizations because she believes that transgender women can be incorporated into the FSLN and identifies herself as a strong supporter of the party. Although this may not help RTN in networking with the anti-FSLN feminists, it may help to resonate with the public at large, where the FSLN still remains a strong support base (see photo 15).

**Summary**

The four organizations studied utilized various framing strategies in order to define what the problems are, who is to blame and what is to be done. The organizations also deploy frames that resonate with pre-existing sentiment pools in Nicaragua, particularly around the areas of democracy and carrying on the Sandinista tradition. However, the organizations were slightly different in both their tone and specific goals and tactics. Photos and public and private documents indicate that all four groups believe that popular protest and daily struggle are the best ways to achieve these goals (as highlighted in the photograph section). Additionally, the organizations all emphasize that they want a Nicaragua where all people are included in the democratic process. However,
there were differences as well. MAM and RMCV took the most strident anti-FSLN positions, Sophia Montenegro went as far as to say “The moral disease afflicting the Orteganism is called malignant narcissism. For this there is no possible cure or therapy…Therefore, the removal of power is necessary and inevitable.” By contrast, RTN believes that transgender women can and should be incorporated in the FSLN. Grupo Venancia also differs from the other organizations in their emphasis on public performance and cultural activities as a way to disseminate information and educate young women and the public.

One of the major reasons I looked at framing was to ascertain public group identity (which I addressed in the previous chapter) and to see if differences in framing could help to explain why transgender women are not largely integrated into the Nicaragua women’s movement. From analyzing frames, I gathered that perhaps the two major areas where RTNs framing does not correlate with the feminist groups’ framing are identification as feminists and not taking an anti-FSLN stance. To deal with the latter first, it is not solely that Silvia from RTN identifies as a “militant member of the Sandinistas,” or that she thinks transgender women can be integrated into the party. It is also that the organization has not come out publicly, as an organization, opposed to the FSLN and to Ortega in particular. Additionally, when I asked questions about feminism, Mistica and Inyri were not familiar with the term. Silvia responded that “feminism is an interesting ideology…but it is not for everyone.” It is not that she explicitly says that RTN is anti-feminist, and having worked with feminist organizations in the past, RTN is certainly open to this networking. It seems that the major problem may be that RTN is not actively presenting a feminist identity, and feminist groups may not reach out to them.
because of this. Also, the fact that the three feminist organizations I interviewed were
raided by the FSLN, and RTN has not taken a stance opposed to them, may also help to
explain the small degree of networking and inclusion for RTN.

This is not to say, of course, that RTNs non-stance on the FSLN and feminism are
enough to explain their exclusion. The fact that the organization does explicitly identify
with gay and lesbian organizations may also explain this. RTN may reach out to gay and
lesbian organizations and allies before feminist allies, due to similarities in terms of
cultural and political opportunities. Additionally, it would be amiss to not mention that
“woman,” regardless of definitions given in any interview or on any website, is generally
associated with biological sex—this sex/gender binary is present in Nicaragua as well,
and the effects of this should not be ignored.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

Studying the four Nicaraguan women’s organizations provided me with a unique opportunity to discuss a variety of issues: framing, opportunity and identity, while bearing in mind my commitment to providing a space for the voices of historically marginalized women and my desire to establish reciprocity in research. The unique intersections of opportunity and identity, exacerbated by antagonistic relationships with the Nicaraguan government, provided the perfect backdrop to challenge the (masculinist) assumptions of PPT, while never ignoring the unique socio-political conditions under which these organizations operate.

Basing my results on the voices of the activists themselves was an extremely important part of my research, enabling me to maintain my commitment to non-exploitive cross-cultural research and feminist intersectional methodology. Upon completion of this project, I intend to embark on the arduous process of translating the findings into Spanish to make them available for comments, critiques and assessments from the women I interviewed. While this thesis will not reflect the concerns of the activists, future reprints for publication or conference presentations will.
Why Identity, Opportunity and Framing?

In this study, I focused on three major factors to consider when examining social movements and SMOs: opportunity, identity and framing. I believe that these three factors are each integral to a greater understanding of SMOs. PPT has been criticized as underemphasizing culture and identity; however, few studies exist that actually integrate culture and identity into a PPT framework (Goodwin and Jasper 2004). Additionally, collective identity theory has been criticized for underemphasizing the role that structural factors and opportunities can play in shaping group identity. Framing theory, although it provides an excellent taxonomy of various framing techniques, largely lacks a theoretical understanding of why groups choose particular framing tactics and why these are or are not successful. Given this, I decided it was imperative to a greater understanding of social movement actors to analyze how these three factors interact within these organizations and the socio-political context in which they operate.

PPT, and other dominant theoretical perspectives, often analyze the state and political opportunities as completely separate from the overall cultural context, which I believe is a mistake. You cannot understand the role (and actions) of the state without understanding the larger cultural and socio-political context. This is not to over-emphasize the role of culture—it is certainly not static; however, the overall cultural context can help to understand the actions of the state and how these actions are perceived by the public. Likewise, the state must be understood both as responding to culture and shaping culture.

In analyzing both public and private documents from the four Nicaraguan women’s organizations, I repeatedly noticed references to the “patriarchal state,” or other
such statements that implied a sense of interconnectedness between an overall machista culture and a masculinist state. Likewise, the role of the state in targeting three of these organizations certainly had an effect not only on their overall prognostic and diagnostic framing, but also in their emphasis of a Sandinista ideology and desire for democracy.

Collective identity theory can explain a great deal about how organizations and groups self-identify; however, without integrating the overall socio-political and cultural contexts into a discussion on identity, many important aspects of identity formation can be overlooked. Framing theory provides not only a taxonomy of various tactics, but an outlet through which organizations tell the public who they are and what goals need to be achieved. Understanding collective identity theory means an additional understanding of the roles of state and culture and how public framing influences identity formation and deployment.

In framing their organization to the public and discussing questions of identity with me in private, I noticed that many activists relied on expressing their identity in terms of culturally and politically-shaped discourse. For example, many Nica women activists frame and believe feminist principles to be an extension of Sandinismo—an idea with strong cultural relevance in Nicaragua. Why they do this should be understood both in terms of identity and framing. Given that Sandino represents a tradition of anti-Imperialism and Nicaraguan liberation, it is understandable why women’s activists, many of whom participated in the 1979 Sandinista revolution, would identify with this perspective. Additionally, invoking the idea of Sandino and Sandinista principles in their public statements enables these SMOs to tap into existing sentiment pools for support.
Framing techniques should be understood not only in terms of their relative success or lack of success, but how culture and identity may influence a groups’ particular choice in framing tactics. While much more work needs to be done on the degree to which framing can actually be considered a “theory” (more than I can accomplish in this study), looking at framing techniques alongside of opportunity and identity can give insight into the potentiality for theorizing within framing.

While previous studies often analyzed opportunities or identity or framing, I choose to integrate all three within my project—and I believe this was the best decision. Given that identity and framing are influenced by the overall socio-political context, and that the state can be changed by shifts in culture that can result from successful framing by marginalized groups, analyzing each of these three factors is necessary for a more complete understanding of SMOs and social movements in general.

Lessons learned

In addition to writing this thesis for the partial fulfillment of an M.A. in Sociology, I was also hoping to contribute to the growing area of social movement research. Also, given my strong emphasis on reciprocity and movement relevant theory, I hoped to contribute something that would aid these organizations in their further quests for gender justice. Below I will look at what I believe my study has added to two particular areas: how it may aid the organizations studied and how academia can benefit from my findings as well.

For organizations

In undertaking this study, I was hoping not only to add to academic literature concerning transnational feminisms and social movement studies, but to be able to
provide activists within the organizations I studied valuable information that may aid them as well. The main aspects of my findings that I believe are useful for these organizations are seeing how an “outsider” interprets their framing strategies and the openings for greater collaborations between cisgender and transgender women’s groups and heterosexual and lesbian women’s groups.

With regards to the first point, while I am certainly an “outsider,” not even from their country or culture, understanding what someone outside the organization sees as the major points the organization is emphasizing can aid these groups. If, for instance, these organizations are not tapping into existing sentiment pools, perhaps looking at my findings may help them to target which of these tactics they believe are proving unsuccessful.

I also believe that my study, particularly the integration of transgender women into the study, may open up additional areas of networking and cooperation between transgender and cisgender women’s groups. Transgender women are also facing political persecution, poor educational opportunities and oppression at the hands of the state and culture—working with feminist organizations could provide them an additional support network as well as add to movement diversity, which each organization emphasizes. I also hope that this study has brought transgender visibility into the cisgender Nicaraguan women’s movement; likewise, that perhaps it can aid transwomen in understanding feminism and perhaps even identifying with the ideology and goals of the other women’s organizations in the country.
For academics

My project adds to academic literature in three major areas: transnational feminisms, transgender studies and intersectionality theory. Below I will discuss each of these aspects more in-depth. I am hesitant to say which of these three areas of study my project contributes to the most, since in many ways they overlap in the same ways that my inclusion of opportunity, identity and framing did. However, I do think it is important to look at each and assess what I may have contributed.

Transnational feminisms is an area of sociological and feminist theory that I am very interested in—reflected by my choice to examine non-Northern organizations in my study. I included transgender women in my study of women’s movements—something that is rarely (if ever) done. I believe that this adds to the literature on transnational feminisms and opens it up to be more inclusive of transwomen’s voices and identities.

Transgender studies is a bourgeoning, albeit under-developed, area of sociological studies and I believe this projects adds greatly to the existing body of literature. Quite often sociological studies of transgender people focus on theorizing gender, gender presentation or perception by the cisgender public of trans people. My study, however, focuses as well on transwomen’s activism, emphasizing how, despite political, economic and social repression, these women are still active agents in their own empowerment process. While conceptualizing transgender identity is an important aspect of transgender studies, looking at the ways that transwomen (and men) are activists on their own behalf is integral to an understanding of their trans identities. Here, I believe, my study adds significantly to the literature.
Finally, intersectionality as a methodology remains an under-utilized framework. My thesis contributes to this set of literature in different ways: by incorporating a specific focus on transgender and cisgender identities, using it both as a theoretical perspective and a methodological approach, and using an intersectional approach to content analysis. Each of these is an important contribution from this project; especially using intersectionality as a methodological approach to content analysis. This perspective enabled me to look both for what was said and not said regarding diverse facets of identity, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation and others, in the public statements of these organizations. Emphasizing intersectionality in content analysis can bring, in my opinion, far more depth into using it to study identity.

I would also like to use this concluding space to discuss two issues: limitations of this study and areas that would lend themselves for future study. Below I will discuss each of these more in-depth and will end with my overall assessment of the project.

**Limitations of This Study**

One of the main purposes of this study was to get a concrete idea as to the inner-workings, identity and networking of different SMOs from the Nicaraguan women’s movement. I was able to accomplish this, in part, by analyzing public documents, news reports and websites, as well as both online and face-to-face interviews. These outlets provided a breadth of information in regards to framing, tactics, opportunity and identity; however, I must acknowledge the limitations that were present as well.

First, I was only able to analyze four SMOs, which are only a sector of the movement. In order to make generalizations about the movement as a whole, it would be necessary to interview different organizations, in different geographical regions, with
different levels of formalization, in order to really make any generalizations about the overall tone of the Nicaraguan women’s movement.

Second, I was able to meet face-to-face with five activists, which I do feel added an human face and a great deal of substance to my work; however, I was only able to interview these activists briefly, and was not able to really work beside them for an extended period of time to see identity and opportunity at work. I acknowledge that I was constrained both by my time frame and financial means to only one week in Nicaragua. Had I been able to work beside some, all or even one, of these organizations for an extended period of time, I would be able to make more concrete evaluations of their organization.

Finally, a major portion of my methodology was concerned with the necessity to integrate an intersectional approach to analyzing qualitative data. While I was able to do this, I think it is important to reiterate that, had I been able to do more interviews and spend more time with these women, I would have been able to gather more material in defense of the necessity of an intersectional approach to analyzing identity.

Despite these shortcomings, I do feel that I was able to adequately study the organizations for the purpose of this research project. I was able to discern identity, opportunity and tactics through the information I had available, as well as include plenty of information provided by the activists themselves—who are, after all, the best “experts” on their own conditions.

Areas for Future Study

In the course of my research, I came across areas that I couldn’t really delve into, but that I think would be interesting and useful areas for future research. As stated in
previous chapters, the changing political conditions in Nicaragua, and how these effect women’s organizations differently, would warrant itself as a new study—as well as be an area to explicitly focus on PPT.

Additionally, the HIV/AIDS activism and awareness health campaigns done by *Red Trans de Nicaragua* through CIES-UNAN would also be an important area for future research. In fact, the ways through which sexuality, gender and health are articulated and dealt with in these programs could provide additional insight to the intersections of race class and gender in Nicaraguan society. As well, the public perception of HIV/AIDS, and how this effects framing of the advocacy campaigns could be beneficial both for a greater understanding of the work that is being done, as well as provide insights for Red Trans and CIES-UNAN to make these programs even better.

The final area of research that was made visible by this study was the ways that *Grupo Venancia* use media and performance to educate and inspire activism. this was unique to their group, and provided not only a way that they were differentiated from the other organizations, but alternatives to what are traditionally thought of as repertoires of activism. additionally, research in this area could bridge structural analysis with analyses of gender performance (West and Zimmerman 1987, works by Pierre Bourdieu) and even postmodern ideas of power, self and identity and how to articulate the aesthetic sphere (Again, works by Bourdieu and, most recently, Tucker 2010).

*Final Thoughts*

Studying four Nicaraguan women’s organizations proved to be an engaging, informative and inspiring experience. It enabled me to better understand the ways that identity and opportunity uniquely interact to inspire and sustain movement activism. It
also introduced me to new areas in movement research: particularly intersectional feminist methodology and transgender studied, both of which are bourgeoning areas of sociological research. I was able to research, understand and even critique ideas of difference and universal sisterhood, while seeing how Nica women put their ideologies into action. I was able to analyze aspects of the movement, while learning from and being inspired by, their struggles for equity and identity in unfriendly political and cultural climates. From this research I learned the importance of networking and identity deployment in movement activism, as well as learned new areas for social movement activism. Overall, the experience taught me the importance of maintaining reciprocity and non-exploitive research methods. Hopefully, with my findings, I can help these organizations in their further activism towards gender and social justice. After completing this project, I am even more committed to learning about transnational feminisms, particularly the role of social class in identity formation, and more committed to the principles of democracy “in the street, in the home, in the bed, in the community, in the country” and in the world (MAM 2008). ¡Solidaridad!
References:


Huiskamp, Gerard. 2000. "Identity politics and democratic transitions in Latin America:


Personal interview with Silvia Martinez, June 8, 2010.

Personal interview with MisticaGuererro, June 8, 2010.

Personal interview with Inyri Mondarne, June 8, 2010.

Personal interview with Klemen Altamirano, June 10, 2010.

Personal interview with Juanita Jimenez Martinez, June 10, 2010.

Personal interview with Carola Brantome, April 24, 2010.

Personal interview with Louisa Perez, June 3, 2010.


Appendix A

Interview Questions

The following are the initial interview questions that were asked of activists from MAM, RMCV, Red Trans de Nicaragua and Grupo Venancia. During these interviews, there were several follow-up questions that were asked; however, here I am only including the initial interview questions

Questions for RMCV, MAM and Grupo Venancia:

To begin, I would like to ask you some questions about [organization name]

1. When did [organization name] begin?

2. What are some of the major objectives of the organization?

3. How many people are members of [organization name]?

4. How many women and how many men are members?

5. What is the average age of your membership?

6. What would you say is the median educational attainment level of your members?
   a. Are your members mostly urban or rural?
   b. What types of occupations do your membership have?

7. Are there other organizations that [organization name] works within your country?
8. Does [organization name] work with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender organizations?

9. Does [organization name] work with any transnational or international organizations?
   a. If yes, which ones?
   b. Does [organization name] receive funding from these organizations?
   c. What can [organization name] do now that you could not do before receiving international funding?
   d. Are there any negative consequences for [organization name] from receiving international funding?

10. How is [organization name] different from other feminist organizations in Nicaragua?

Now, I want to ask some questions about you and your opinions

11. How do you define “woman”?

12. How do you define “feminism”?

13. What is your political affiliation?

14. Do you vote? Why or why not?

15. Who do you consider to be a role model?

16. In your opinion, what are some of the most important goals of the Nicaraguan women’s movement?

17. How can you solve these objectives?

18. How does [organization name] persuade other people and other organizations to work with you and support your causes?
19. What are some of the major obstacles facing the Nicaraguan women’s movement?

20. How can these problems be solved?

Thank you for your great help. Your comments are very important!

Questions for Red Trans de Nicaragua:

To begin, I would like to ask you some questions about Red Trans de Nicaragua:

1. When did Red Trans de Nicaragua begin?

2. What are some of the major objectives of the organization?

3. How many people are members of the organization?

4. How many men, women and transwomen are members?

5. What is the average age of your membership?

6. What would you say is the median educational attainment level of members of Red Trans de Nicaragua?
   a. Are members rural or urban?
   b. What types of jobs do your members have?

7. Are there other organizations that Red Trans de Nicaragua works within your country?

8. Does Red Trans de Nicaragua collaborate with Nicaraguan feminist organizations?

9. Does Red Trans de Nicaragua work with transnational or international organizations?
   a. If so, which ones?
   b. Does Red Trans de Nicaragua receive funding from these organizations?
c. What can Red Trans de Nicaragua do now that you couldn’t do before receiving these funds?

d. Are there negative consequences for Red Trans de Nicaragua because of this problem?

10. Is Red Trans de Nicaragua different than Red Trans de Latin America? How?

11. Do you work together with Red Trans de Nicaragua?

12. Are there different obstacles for Red Trans de Nicaragua than other trans organizations in other countries?

13. How does Red Trans de Nicaragua persuade other people and organizations to work with you and support your causes?

Now, I want to ask some questions about you and your opinions:

14. How do you define “woman”?

15. How do you define “feminism”?

16. What is your political affiliation?

17. Do you vote? Why or why not?

18. Where did you work before working with Red Trans de Nicaragua?

19. Do you work now?

20. Who do you consider to be a role model?

Finally, I would like to ask you some questions about the Nicaraguan trans community:

21. What is the economic situation for trans Nicaraguan women?

22. What are some of the cultural problems for trans Nicaraguans?

23. In your opinion, what are some of the most important objectives of the Nicaraguan transgender movement?
24. How can you solve these objectives?

25. What are some of the major obstacles facing the Nicaraguan transgender women’s movement?

26. How can these problems be solved?

Thank you for your great help. You comments are very important!
Appendix B

Photographs

*Picture 1: Nicaraguan Women Protest against Ortega*

*Source: MAM et al. 2009b.*
Picture 2: Nicaraguan Women’s Protest


Picture 3: Protesting Violence Against Women

Picture 4: Cultural Activities at Grupo Venancia

Source: Grupo Venancia 2009b.

Picture 5: Cultural Activities at Grupo Venancia

Source: Grupo Venancia 2009b.
Picture 6: RMCV Involving Young Women in their Programs

Source: RMCVb N.d.

Picture 7: Ortega’s Use of the Sandino Frame Bridging Tactic

Photo taken by author. The banner reads: "Nicaragua: Christian, Socialist, Solidarity. 31 years of triumph! Long Live the Revolution!"
Picture 8: At RMCVs’ Offices

Photo taken by author. Banner reads “We defend our right to live without violence.”

Picture 9: At RMCVs’ Offices

Photo taken by author. Banner reads: “Justice for Women, an outstanding debt.”
Picture 10: At RMCVs’ Offices

Photo taken by author. Banner reads “Violence against women is a crime. We need to end the Impunity!”

Picture 11: At RMCVs’ Offices

Photo taken by author of RMCVs’ mission statement.
Picture 12: At MAMs’ Offices

Photo taken by author of MAMs’ mission statement

Picture 13: Red Trans de Nicaragua’s Computer Literacy Program

Source: http://redtransdenicaragua.blogspot.com/.
Picture 14: Las Femeninas de RTN

Photo taken by author. From left: Mistica, Inyri and Silvia.

Picture 15: Pro-FSLN Graffiti

Photo taken by author in Managua, Nicaragua. The statements read: "The Revolution, 30 years and more!" "He has the right to decide the referendum for the people,"