CONSTRUCTING NGO SELVES: A CASE STUDY OF THE GENDERED IDENTITY WORK OF WOMEN IN WORLD VISION COLOMBIA

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2008
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank World Vision Colombia and everyone in the organization for helping to make this project a reality. Without your patience (especially with my Spanish) and invaluable practical support, this work would not have taken place. I would also like to offer my deepest gratitude to all interviewees for voluntarily sharing their personal views and experiences with me, since their voices are the heart and soul of this project. I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Hernán Vera, for his unyielding support and reassurance throughout the development, data collection, and writing process of this study. I thank the rest of my supervisory committee for their encouragement and helpful insights that improved this project at all levels. And finally, I would like to say thank you to my incredible partner, Kelly, who was with me every (difficult) step of the way, as well as to my parents, my uncle, my grandmother, and close friends for providing the type of emotional support that only you could. Your collective love made this undertaking possible.
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By

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May 2008

Chair: Hernán Vera
Major: Sociology

This study utilizes a grounded theory methodology to examine how women in World Vision Colombia (WVC), a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Bogotá, Colombia, discursively contend with(in) their NGO over the meaning of gender power relations. Specific attention is paid to how women frame their identities, concerns, and agendas in relation to the NGO. This study uses a view of framing as “interpretive practice” to offer an active understanding of meaning making work of NGO women. It is demonstrated that WVC women, while tied to the dominant discourse of gender relations of the NGO, contend with this discourse by creating alternative experiences and meanings for themselves. In this way, a dynamic understanding of NGO identity work is illustrated that attends to the interaction between cultural circumstances and social actors’ agency. Finally, a discussion is provided regarding the significance of NGO identity work for evaluating the political impact of NGOs with regards to gender discourse in development.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Specific Aims

The purpose of this doctoral research is to examine the gendered production of selves within nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in one Latin American country: Colombia. Of interest is how NGO women contend discursively over the meanings of gender and power in the context of their NGO. This study explores the “interpretive practice” (Broad, Crawley, and Foley 2004:510-11; Gubrium and Holstein 1997, 2000, 2001) of women in an NGO. Specific attention is paid to how women frame their identities, concerns, and agendas as part of a civil society institution. It is important to understand the meaning making work of NGO women because discourses about gender, power, and democracy are tied to both the everyday interpretive activity of individuals and the settings (e.g., NGO) in which their identity construction is produced.

To accomplish the task of investigating the gendered meaning making work of NGO women, I conducted a case study of an NGO based in Bogotá, Colombia. Drawing on in-depth, qualitative interviews with 27 women, this study focuses on how women construct and negotiate their identities as part of an NGO while managing this self-production in their relationships with other NGO members. Guided by a grounded theory methodology (Straus and Corbin 1998), analyses will thus examine the interpretive processes involved in generating an identity within an NGO and include practical and consequential issues associated with such matters as communication, discipline, affection, educational instructions, spirituality, social support, to name a few. By revealing women’s’ rich descriptions and interpretations of their own experiences and relationships with others, this study offers both theoretical and empirical
insights about the present state of and future opportunities for NGOs in Latin America with respect to democratization and promoting a gender perspective in development discourse.

**Background and Significance**

**What Is an NGO?**

Originally coined by the United Nations (UN), the term “nongovernmental organization” (NGO) emerged as a concept in the post World War II era. In 1945 the UN Charter was adopted, and Article 71 stipulated that “NGOs could be accredited to the UN for consulting purposes” (Martens 2002:271). Early on then, the term NGOs was mainly applied to organizations that were operating internationally and within the framework of the UN. This view of NGOs has changed recently to include an increasingly wider range of societal actors that function not only in conjunction with but also beyond the UN context to pursue myriad of purposes.

For this reason, defining what NGOs are can be a type of “mission impossible” (Martens 2002), making an agreed-upon definition difficult. For some, the term NGO is an “awkward,” catch-all-word used indiscriminately to refer to any social actor that is not clearly situated within the confines of the state/political society or the market (Archer 1983). This results in the inclusion of a “vast range of international and national citizens organizations, trade unions, voluntary associations, research institutes, public policy centers, private government agencies, business and trade associations, foundations, and charitable endeavors” (Archer 1983:303). As Princen and Finger (1994:6) note:

The difficulty of characterizing the entire phenomenon results in large part from the tremendous diversity found in the global NGO community. That diversity derives from differences in size, duration, range and scope of activities, ideologies, cultural background, organizational culture, and legal status.

This has resulted in some scholars arguing that a so-called “typical NGO” does not exist, and that developing precise definitions is near impossible (Willetts 1996a). Because NGOs are
sometimes defined by what they are not, very broad classifications that include a diverse set of organizations and societal actors are common in the NGO literature. NGOs can thus include philanthropic foundations, church development agencies, peasant collectives, academic think-tanks, and community soup-kitchens. They can also focus on a range of issues such as human rights, health, gender, poverty, agricultural development, and the environment, among others.

In attempting to manage the diversity found among NGOs, some have distinguished among organizations according to specific criteria. This, in turn, has produced a multitude of designations, “littering the literature with acronyms” (Fisher 1997:447). Some NGOs are described as CBOs (community-based organizations), GROs (grass-roots organizations), or POs (people’s organizations) in order to distinguish membership based, locally autonomous associations from ISOs (intermediary support organizations) that have urban intellectuals working in impoverished areas. Some categorizations highlight the varying degrees of autonomy of NGOs, differentiating fully autonomous NGOs from government organized or supported NGOs or GONGOs (Brown and Korten 1989), quasi-autonomous NGOs or QUANGOs (Sinaga 1995), and donor-organized NGOs or DONGOs. There are also distinctions made among NNGOs (NGOs in Northern or industrialized countries), SNGOs (NGOs based in Southern or developing countries), and INGOs (international NGOs). Other typologies focus on VOs (voluntary organizations) and PVOs (private voluntary organizations) that differ as being either nonprofit and voluntary or professionally staffed.¹ Other typologies examine NGO practices and associations over time. Korten (1990: 115-27) distinguishes three generations of NGOs: the first

¹ For a more comprehensive overview of the classification system of NGOs, see Aall, Miltenberger, and Weiss (2000); Carroll (1992); Korten (1987).
focused on relief and welfare work, the second dedicated to small-scale, local development, and the third committed to community organizing and coalition building.\(^2\)

Yet others have turned their attention to developing a more comprehensive definition of NGOs that addresses the diversity of the field (see Marten 2002). A common description found in the NGO literature views NGOs as basically “formal (professionalized) independent societal organizations whose primary aim is to promote common goals at the national or the international level” (Marten 2002:282). Others similarly highlight NGOs as primarily formal, private, non-profit organizations that hold a distinctive legal status and pursue a public welfare agenda (Clarke 1998b). The World Bank itself characterizes NGOs as “private organizations that pursue activities to relief suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development” (World Bank 2002). It is helpful to quote Martens (2002:282) at length in order to capture the full breadth of these definitions:

NGOs are societal actors because they originate from the private sphere. Their members are individuals, or local, national branches of an association (which, again, are composed on individuals)—and usually do not (or only to a limited extent) include official members, such as governments, governmental representatives, or government institutions. NGOs promote common goals because they work for the promotion of public goods, from which their members profit and/or the public gains. NGOs can be professionalized because they may have paid staff with specifically trained skills, but they are not profit-oriented. NGOs are independent because they are primarily sponsored by membership fees and private donations. They may receive financial funding from official institutions, but only to a limited extent, so that they are not under the control of governmental institutions. NGOs

\(^2\) Elliot (1987) details a similar typology of NGOs by differentiating among charity, development, and empowerment efforts. According to Korten (1990), first-generation relief and welfare NGOs tend to dominate the developing world, are closely tied to states and international development aid agencies, and are not overtly political in nature. Second-generation development NGOs attend to local issues by organizing community individuals to address concerns about, for example, public health and agricultural sustainability. More political in their activities than first-generation NGOs, second-generation organizations generally aim to help individuals and communities overcome structural constraints by challenging local and regional elites and avoiding dependency relationships. Third-generation NGOs are often viewed as explicitly political in directly challenging, for example, political and economic constraints, focused on mobilization and consciousness-raising. This is done by building network among individuals and organizations (such as POs) to develop strategies to support larger social movements.
are formal organizations because NGOs have—at the least—a minimal organizational structure which allows them to provide for continuous work. This includes headquarters, permanent staff, and constitution (and also a distinct recognized legal status in at least one state).

Given these broad definitions, NGOs have also been considered a distinctive domain of civil society—namely, “human activity outside the market and the state” (Brysk 2000:153). To be sure, the meaning of the term “NGO” has evolved in an exponential fashion since its inception in 1945 by the UN and now extends beyond the narrow focus on international organizations working within the sphere of the UN. Fisher (1997:448) notes that while these categorizations can be important and helpful to clarify different NGO practices, these typologies are “still more ideal than real” since in reality these categories are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, the lack of consensus on how best to define NGOs, which is due in part to the increased heterogeneity and complexity of the NGO field, seems only to solidify attention of these organizations with respect to their perceived impact and significance as social actors.

**Growing Significance of NGOs**

Presently, scholarly and public interest centers on NGOs playing an increasingly significant role in politics and public policy, especially in issue-areas such as human rights, women’s rights, and environmental protection, among others (Gideon 1998; Livernash 1992). Several scholars have commented that this is due in no small measure to the scale of growth in NGOs throughout the globe (Carroll 1992; Clarke 1993; Fowler 1991), particularly within so-called “southern”, “third-world” or “developing” countries such as in Africa, Asia, the Carribbean, and Latin America (Fowler and James 1995). In fact, “only about 30 percent of all development NGOs in the south”—namely those organizations focused on issues of poverty alleviation/eradication, agricultural sustainability, human rights, health, education, and the
development of other basic needs—“are more than 15 years old, and only 50 percent are more than 10” (Livernash 1992:14).

Many factors contribute to the significance of NGOs today. These include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) North-South NGO financial relations, (2) economic and political changes, and (3) alterations in the nature of social movements. First, many southern NGOs are financially dependent on northern NGOs for funds. Development agencies in the industrialized world channel large amounts of aid through NGO partners in the developing world. This in turn has created a substantial financial stimulus for NGO growth. In 1990, for example, Northern NGOs provided US$7.2 billion to Southern NGOs, which accounted for approximately 13 percent of net expenditure of official aid (United Nations Development Programme, UNDP 1993:3). This has prompted some to argue that southern NGOs are too dependent on northern NGOs, thus causing them to have less autonomy, compromise their priorities, and lose a sense of identity (Drabek 1987:xi).

Second, economic and political changes have increased attention paid to NGOs. The economic recession of the 1980’s and the expanding neoliberal environment has led many governments, previously antagonistic to NGOs, to begin to recognize these bodies by officially including them in social, political, and economic programs (Clarke 1998b:37). Thus, NGOs have been recognized for their influence on governments, “either by offering models for new governments programs, proposing reforms of existing policies, or critiquing proposed government policies” (Livernash 1992:19). Nevertheless, government-NGO relations are complex, varying from country to country. In addition, with the emergence of a neoliberal economic climate and the resulting political disenchantment with the state, bilateral and multilateral agencies have also chosen, since the early 1980s, to channel significant amounts of
funding through Southern NGOs. Beginning in 1981, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), for example, has been required by Congress to funnel a minimum 13.5 percent of expenditure through NGOs (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 1988:84). In general, the move towards neoliberalism in regions such as Latin America and its effects has fostered interest in NGOs as agents for service delivery.

Third, large-scale social movements in developing countries that were ideologically and organizationally cohesive (e.g., the Left) and often centered on the state began to fragment, producing newly developed themes and strategies for mobilization. For instance, the hierarchical structure of the Left was scrutinized and understood by many activist women as patriarchal in nature, consistent with the authoritarianism of the governments’ military forces, and thus antithetical to the radical political, economic, and cultural transformations implied in their struggle for liberation. Thus, “Sandinismo was revolutionary…in [Nicaraguan] society, in the socialization of property. But in private life, women were property. It wasn’t revolutionary in this sense, within the family” (quoted in Ewig 1999:82). As Lehman (1990:157) points out, since the late 1980’s, “[i]n place of large formal organizations, we find a myriad of small-scale dispersed movements engaged in an enormous variety of conflicts.” Important to note is that “NGOs acquired important roles in initiating and sustaining these myriad of protest movements” (Clarke 1998b:37), particularly during the creation of new democratic governments in Latin America during the 1980’s.

Democratization and NGOs

Perhaps the most cited reason, however, for the importance of NGOs concerns their contribution to democratization. Indeed, it may not be an overstatement to say the “new watchwords in international development discourses with which NGOs have become inextricably bound up are now civil society, democracy, good governance, and social capital.”
For Clarke (1998a:40), this has meant the production of an “explicitly normative interpretation of NGO ideology” that mirrors Bratton’s (1989) early commentary on NGOs as essentially participatory organizations that foster a strong civil society.

The potential of NGOs to foster democratization has been of interest to a wide range of scholars, development planners, policy makers, and activists. Economists and development planners have examined the role of local NGOs in alleviating rural poverty and facilitating communities to adapt to modernization (Annis 1988; Brown and Korten 1989; Thompson 1992). Political scientists have studied the impact of voluntary associations in promoting a vibrant civil society and on the state’s relationship with civil society actors (Barghouti 1994; Chazan 1992; Fowler 1991). Within the field of international relations, scholars have reviewed the influence of NGOs and their complex local, national, and international networks on international politics and international civil society (Brysk 1993; Ghils 1992; Wapner 1995). In addition, some activists and scholars have considered the relationship between NGOs and social movements for empowering communities and opening up a space for alternative discourses of development and democratization (Escobar 1992; Patkar 1995; Wignaraja 1993).

**Latin American NGOs**

Discourse about the democratic potential of NGOs is especially prominent in discussions about developing regions, such as Latin America. Traditionally, emphasis on Latin American NGOs as a sphere of democratic influence has been attributed to these organizations’ perceived ability to “solve some of the pieces of the development puzzle” (Livernash 1992:13). In this respect, the “megaprograms” initiated by the state are being seen as having been unable to tap the abundance of energy, knowledge, and will that the local level has to offer. Specifically, a surge of grassroots initiatives and NGOs now represent an attempt to bridge the gap between the so-called “everyday” citizen and their larger social structure.
The role of NGOs in Latin America is thus very different today from the older do-gooder model of the voluntary charitable organizations that mainly transmitted goods and services. Currently, many NGOs have as a stated mission to give persons a stake in their society and an ability to determine how resources and power are used in their surroundings. Simply put, NGOs are supposed to be playing an ever greater part in the development of what Latin Americans call *sociedad civil* (civil society) by offering hands-on experience in the workings of participatory democracy. The democratizing discourse surrounding Latin American NGOs, however, is an arguably recent historical phenomenon that includes the gradual politicization of NGO activity. Up to the mid-1960’s, the Catholic Church and NGOs worked primarily on “charitable” relief and welfare efforts that focused on transferring food from industrialized nations (Korten 1989:5). This began to change in the 1960’s and 1970s when organizations diversified their work and orientation to include, for example, small-scale local development. A significant number of these types of organizations were created during the authoritarian military regimes present throughout Latin America. It was in this context that NGO activity, especially in the 1970’s, became more explicitly politicized and identified with social justice work as a response to the violence of the military state (Korten 1989). This development was further bolstered following the Vatican II council of bishops from 1962 to 1965, when the Catholic Church dedicated itself more publicly addressing issues of poverty and marginalization. In 1968, about 130 Catholic bishops met in Medellín, Colombia for a conference to discuss how to apply Vatican II to Latin America. This helped to generate changes in the actual *practice* of Christian people—most notably, in establishing a *preferential option for the poor*. During the conference, “the bishops called for Christians to be involved in the transformation of society …. They denounced ‘institutionalized violence’ and referred to it as a ‘situation of sin’”
A consequence was “a massive organizational effort at the grassroots level, with priests and nuns forming NGOs to work with poor people in rural and urban areas” (Livernash 1992:17). Many secular antipoverty NGOs were similarly established during this time of increased attention to social transformation (Durning 1989:70).

With the democratic transition of various Latin American countries during the 1980’s, NGOs acquired a distinct association with being a potential democratic force. In particular, this period witnessed the growth of many new NGOs seeking to solve the problems of violence and poverty, which were seen as the outcomes of the military regimes that had dominated the region (Loveman 1994). As Ewig (1999:75-76) notes, “[d]uring the military and democratic transition periods, analysts of NGOs and social movements tended to view them as organizations actively opposed to the state, perceiving in them the promise of democracy.” For example, many NGOs began to implement development projects in a wide range of locales, such as rural and urban spaces, as well as sought to “support ethnic groups, women, and the environment” (Livernash 1992:17).

Interest in women’s poverty, domestic violence, and their experiences in different social arenas, for instance, grew in the mid-1970s with the UN declaring in 1976 its Decade for Women. The Decade for Women was a context for the creation of a variety of organizations, such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women, which increased collaboration with NGOs working to organize women and advance their interests (Buvinic and Yudelman 1989:36-39). As will be discussed in Chapter 2, a central issue regarding the democratic potential of Latin American NGOs pertains to their ability to address issues of women’s participation and power, given the expansion of neoliberalism in Latin America and the impact this has had on NGO gender ideology and practice.
Case of Gender: Are NGOs an Alternative Power Base for Women?

With the growing presence and influence of NGOs in national, international, and civil society spaces, some are asking: Do NGOs constitute an alternative power base for women and a platform for generating new gender politics? (Tinker 1999). As Tinker (1999:88, 97) explains, the perception, if not hope, is that

Today NGOs … increasingly challenge the power and scope of traditional political institutions within the state and lobby international agencies to reinterpret development policies. As the civil society expands in most countries in response to this era of limited government, these new organizations are touted as the real arena for citizen participation and the foundation of present or future democracy…. If women and their concerns are in fact being integrated into NGO debates and programs … do women themselves and women’s issues in general benefit?

The sense of uncertainty expressed in these types of questions is grounded, in part, on facets of the legacy of NGOs that have historically excluded women and gender issues from their programs and organization.

As was mentioned, early NGO activity was closely tied to the Catholic Church and thus these organizations were deemed primarily as relief agencies. What is important here is that NGOs not only shared the Church’s welfare work; they also were influenced by the Church’s beliefs on the assumed roles of women and men. In this case, many NGOs, being held accountable to certain institutional legacies and cultural constraints, have “tended to view women solely in terms of their domestic roles” and “contributed to the exclusion of women” from participating in planning and decision-making processes (Livernash 1989:18).

Yudelman (1987:181) notes the marginalization of women within the NGO framework during the 1960’s and 1970s despite the critiques levied against the Church by Latin American liberation theologians:

The Bishops’ message of Medellin had a strong impact on priests, nuns and organizations working with the poor, as well as on grassroots groups throughout Latin America. After Medellin, many religious personnel chose to work exclusively among the poor, and others
left the church to form service organizations. But the Bishops’ call for liberation, radical as it was, did not envision a new role for women. The Church hierarchy historically has been conservative, even reactionary, on all issues relating to gender roles and the family. Thus the Catholic Church strongly influenced the attitudes of the nascent NGO movement toward women and the type of projects NGOs designed for them.

For example, an important issue was the gendered composition of the largely male staff of NGOs, which lead to the lack of women in higher administrative level of NGOs and a skewed assessment of their productive, economic, and leadership skills (Yudelman 1987:181). Exclusion was also evident in the nature of NGO-assisted agrarian development in Latin America which has been directed mainly to men, “largely because households are designated as beneficiaries of an agrarian reform … (and) only male household heads are incorporated into the new agrarian reform structures” (Deere 1985:1037).

Many new NGOs in the 1980’s and early 1990s were started exclusively for and/or by women (Livernash 1992:19). The establishment of women’s and feminist NGOs, in this case, was an attempt to improve the participation of women in development issues, as well as introduce gender proposals into state policies. Thus the creation of women’s and feminist NGOs represented a strategic response to the perceived opportunities made available with the collapse of the military regimes throughout Latin America in the 1980s. As Álvarez (1999:182) explains, “When feminists’ former allies in the opposition to the national security States assumed the reigns [sic] of government in the mid-to-late 1980s and 1990s, many feminist groups began honing their applied research, lobbying and rights advocacy skills in the hopes of translating the feminist project of cultural-political transformation into concrete gender policy proposals.” These efforts have led to “local NGOs succeed[ing] in pressuring many Latin American governments to enact a number of feminist-inspired reforms—such as electoral quotas to enhance women’s political representation and legislation to combat domestic violence.” (Álvarez 1999:182)
However, concerns regarding the democratic efficacy of NGOs have again re-emerged to include questions about the “policy-oriented” approach to gender advocacy adopted by many NGOs (feminist or not) today and their increased dependence on a neoliberal environment. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, a key issue is how these and other developments may or may not “potentially undermine NGO’s ability to advocate effectively for feminist-inspired public policies and social change” (Álvarez 1999:183). To borrow from Murdock (2003:507), questions of whether NGOs are “doing good”—such as in the their gender advocacy work—“keep stubbornly cropping up” and thus continue to be relevant to both scholars and the public that place high value in the answers given.

**Contribution of Research**

The research proposed here attempts to re-examine these types of questions; however, the argument is made that a full accounting of the state of NGOs’ democratic potential in the context of gender advocacy efficacy requires a better understanding of NGO women’s lived experiences, including the “identity projects” that they undertake within NGOs. Although the possible benefits and problems associated with NGO gender advocacy have been well documented in the literature (as reviewed in Chapter 2), far less is known about how NGO women actually experience, interpret, negotiate, and talk about their self-identities and the political projects they construct with others (Murdock 2003).

There is limited qualitative work that focuses on the experiences of women working and volunteering within NGOs\(^3\) and only a handful of these have included Latin American NGOs and specifically those in Colombia.\(^4\) This project will further our understanding of the experiences

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\(^3\) Some examples of this research include: Ahmed (2002); Goetz (1997); Desai (2005); O’Reilly (2004); and Wendoh and Wallace (2005).

\(^4\) Some examples of this research include: Murdock (2003) and Ramirez-Valles (2003).
of women in a civil society institution and more clearly show how the experiences women have in NGOs affects the way hegemonic meanings of gender are reproduced and/or challenged; how the principles and practices of an NGO are appropriated, employed, and transformed by NGO women’s interpretive work; and how these local social processes are connected to and conditioned by translocal cultures and entities such as the state and neoliberal globalization. In short, clarifying the future potential of Latin American NGOs as agents of social change, particularly in the realm of gender relations, is contingent on understanding how women’s self is constructed through interpretive activity within different contexts (e.g., an NGO).

The qualitative study of a Colombian NGO proposed in this study, one essentially absent in this area of research, is uniquely designed for this purpose. Thus theoretical and practical contributions will be generated about the identity work by which NGO women not only construct a sense of self but also fashion lines of collective action with others in the NGO. Much can be gained by examining NGO women’s descriptions and interpretations of themselves and their relationship experiences, such as better understanding the processes and prospects of incorporating a gender perspective in an NGO. What is especially important for NGO scholarship is that investigating how NGO women make meaning reveals the set of development and gender discourses being utilized, sustained, and/or critiqued in NGOs today. In all, this study will answer Murdock’s (2003:511-12) call to “think about the dynamic nature of women’s interpretations of and negotiations with external forces that also inform shifting NGO strategies.”
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

A striking upsurge is underway around the globe in … the creation of private, nonprofit or non-governmental organizations …. Indeed, we are in the midst of a global “associational revolution” that may prove to be as significant to the latter twentieth century as the rise of the nation-state was to the latter nineteenth (Salamon 1994:109).

Contention Over the “Quiet” NGO Revolution

In the context of ever-accelerating globalization and a sense that nation-states are no longer an obvious source of authority over civil society, attention has increasingly centered on a range of local, regional, and international collective action and its impact on social affairs (Lash and Urry 1994). The NGO universe is an example of a set of organizations and associations whose hugely varied activities include implementing grass-roots development, promoting human rights, and addressing environmental concerns, among others. As some have argued, the globe is being swept by an NGO, “associational,” or “quiet” revolution (Salamon 1993:1; 1994:109). Although said to be quiet, the NGO revolution has also roused serious contention over the meaning and impact of these organizations for local and global politics.

This global “associational revolution” is particularly evident in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Clarke 1998b). In the Philippines, for example, between the years of 1984 and 1993 the number of officially registered NGOs grew by 148 percent to 58,000 (Clarke 1995:305), while in Kenya, their numbers increased by 184 percent between 1978 and 1987 (Fowler 1991:54). By 1993, Brazil had the largest NGO sector on record in the so-called developing world with an estimated 110,000 NGOs (Fisher 1993:24), with India holding the second largest, at more than 100,000 (Farrington and Lewis 1993:92-93).

The literature on the NGO phenomenon is itself abundant and dense with a multiplicity of meanings based on different views on the origins, capacities, objectives, and impacts of NGOs. Literature on NGOs covers an expansive gamut that includes NGOs being embraced and
heralded by international development agencies, such as the World Bank, to being attacked by radical critics of development for introducing new institutionalized means of arresting social change. According to Fisher (1997:442), the beauty or unattractive nature of NGOs “depends on the perspective and agenda of the imaginer” who can view these organizations as “a progressive arm of an irresistible march toward liberal democracy that marks ‘the end of history,’ an extension of the push toward privatization, or a means to resist the imposition of Western values, knowledge, and development regimes.”

The wide range of perceptions is no doubt tied to the key themes and discourses associated with NGOs—participation, empowerment, democracy, local, and community, to name a few. Indeed, sharp views on NGOs stem from the high standards NGOs have been measured against; nothing short than a miracle, in other words, has been expected from NGOs (Little 1995). The origin of this standard can be found in the term “nongovernmental”—that is, in NGOs being neither governmental nor for-profit. A heightened expectation for NGOs is not surprising, as they appear the ideal organization, unencumbered by political or monetary interest, for pursuing public welfare goals (Brown and Korten 1989).

These expectations are a reason for NGOs’ inclusion in the so-called “development industry.” As Edwards and Hulme (1996:3) note, NGOs have been the “favored child” of official development (especially northern) agencies and seen as a “magic bullet” (Dichter 1993:vii) that will correct the problems associated with the development process. Specifically, NGOs have emerged as a solution to traditional interventionist, top-down development approaches that have had to face widespread evidence that development strategies of the past few decades have failed to adequately assist the poorest of the world’s poor, and growing support for development efforts that are ‘sustainable’ and that include participation of intended beneficiaries have stimulated existing development agencies to search for alternative means to integrate
individuals into markets, to deliver welfare services, and to involve local populations in development projects (Fisher 1997:443).

Thus, much of the optimism for NGOs as a means of transferring some of the responsibility of implementing development strategies has to do with a critical stance on the development industry itself. The specific role NGOs should play in development, however, is contingent upon the type of critical stance adopted toward the development industry. Ferguson (1990), for example, suggests that there are at least two types of critics of development, which differ on their views on the appropriate role of NGOs for democratization.

The first type of critics is well represented in the NGO literature. A significant portion adopts an instrumental approach to NGOs that considers them as primarily apolitical tools useful for smoothing out and making development objectives more efficient (Clark 1991; Patel 1995). In this case, development processes are flawed but fundamentally positive, inevitable, and corrective. NGOs, therefore, stand to mitigate some of the shortcomings in development. More specifically, development agencies and international NGOs support organizations in developing countries for the purposes of more effectively achieving the goals of what some call the “new policy agenda,” which refers to policies based on neoliberal political theory and economics (Biggs and Neame 1996; Edward and Hulme 1996). According to proponents of this perspective, NGOs represent a cost-effective, small-scale, and easily managed way to transfer the training and skills that will help individuals and communities compete in the marketplace, further policies of decentralization, foster privatization, strengthen civil society, and eliminate (state) corruption (Bebbington and Farrington 1993; Frantz 1987). From this point of view, NGOs are the ideal platform to stimulate neoliberal globalization by implementing neoliberal reform in regions, such as Latin America, where state-directed efforts have been strongly pursued, faced severed limitations, or failed altogether (Adam 1993). NGOs thus constitute an
alternative to the state in some cases and are thus viewed by the World Bank (1991:135) as “an important force in the development process [cutting] the costs of developing countries institutional weakness.”

The second set of critics want an alternative to existing development paradigms and emphasize that the appropriate role of NGOs is as vehicles that challenge and transform relationships of power (Escobar 1995; Patkar 1995; Udall 1995). These critics see as basically flawed the dominant development model (e.g., neoliberal globalization) and its implementation, because it produces privileged spaces and inequality. As Escobar (1995:39) states, development has historically been about introducing discourses “which created a space in which only certain things could be said and even imagined.” NGOs should thus encourage a new type of growth based on discourses and practices that facilitate fuller participation and empowerment.

Mercer (2002) highlights three common arguments made in favor of NGOs as serving to promote greater participation and encouraging democratization. First, NGOs’ relative autonomy from other major actors (e.g., the state and market) is said to pluralize society’s institutional milieu. Simply put, a greater number of civic entities, NGOs among them, create “more opportunities for a wider range of interest groups to have a ‘voice’, more autonomous organizations to act in a ‘watchdog’ role vis-à-vis the state, and more opportunities for networking and creating alliances of civic actors to place pressure on the state” (Mercer 2002:8). In brief, some view NGOs as promoting democracy by “enhancing the number and range of voices addressing the government” and other key actors (Silliman and Noble 1998:306).

Second, NGOs’ work with grassroots organizations, the poor, women, and other marginalized groups creates possibilities for more extensive and deeper citizen participation. Because many NGOs work with and represent a variety of disenfranchised groups, campaign to
influence public policy, and deliver social services, NGOs become an important means of representing the interest of marginalized peoples. Scholarship, for example, draws attention to the efforts of NGOs in aiding indigenous peoples, environmental movements, and women’s interests across Latin America (Clark 1991; Bebbington et al. 1993; Álvarez 1999).

And third, NGOs check state power by challenging its autonomy at the local, national, and even international level. In addition, NGOs pressure for change by building alternative agendas and policies. In the literature, this point is made by emphasizing the role played by NGOs during the democratic transitions and consolidation in several Latin American countries, such as Chile and Brazil. For instance, NGOs are listed, along with other movement actors (e.g., women’s and peace movement) as a key force in the opposition to the Pinochet regime in Chile during the 1970s and 1980s (Bebbington 1997; Lambrou 1997). Garrison (2000:10) similarly notes that NGOs in Brazil were “important players in the groundswell of civil society forces pressing for policy amnesty and opening” during the late 1970s.

A more radical wing of these critics of development, however, point out the danger posed to NGOs by the resilience of the development industry to absorb and transform ideas and institutions for the purposes of reinstating traditional development realities. For these critics, new democratic processes are not necessarily forthcoming from NGOs, since these entities are at risk of being co-opted and turned into the new “technical” arm of development. Under these circumstances, NGOs are more likely to undermine grassroots mobilization by channeling already limited social funds away from smaller, less professionalized groups, while relying on unpaid labor to guarantee program execution (Arellano López and Petras 1994; Valla 1994). NGOs’ quasi-government status has also been examined for indirectly furthering the erosion of the state and its social welfare function because the presence of NGO social service delivery is
seen as reducing pressure to reform ineffective state departments and ministries (Angell and Graham 1995). Others contend that NGOs do help to alleviate the symptoms of poverty and other social problems; however, NGOs leave causes of the ills relatively unchallenged (Edwards and Hulme 1992). For these critics, the potential of NGOs to be a democratic force depends on the degree to which they can address and change—not simply help people and communities assimilate into—arrangements of power:

Seeking alternatives to development, rather than development alternatives, and skeptical about so-called democratization processes, these analysts, activists and radical critics of neoliberal development agendas value NGOs for their ability to politicize issues that were not formerly politicized or that were ironically depoliticized through the discourses of development or “democratic” participation.

Some thus see NGOs, such as grass-roots organizations, as struggling for autonomy from the state, political parties, and the general development apparatus (Friedman 1992). Activists, for example, consider local NGOs, especially voluntary associations, not simply a new feature of civil society but as a means of changing the state and society.

This critical perspective on development attacks the idea that NGOs are (or should be) basically novel instruments of development because it obscures, or even attempts to co-opt, the activities of NGOs. In this way, NGOs are depoliticized and made part of what Ferguson (1990) calls the “antipolitics” machine of neoliberal development. NGOs are used to depoliticize development in two ways. First, the common description of NGOs as being separate from the state and the market contributes to a perception that these organizations are less political in nature. Second, and maybe more important, in being perceived as primarily technical, apolitical tools, NGOs are a way to obscure the power relationships implied in neoliberal proposals. In this case, social problems are solved through the technical implementation of programs via NGOs, rather than through structural transformations of the social order.
The point of the discussion thus far was limited with regards to all the debates and issues in the NGO literature, but it does highlight some of the major discourses and the fact that the type of lens through which NGOs are perceived generates contested notions of whether NGOs are “doing good” or not. For some, NGOs are good because they are a new way to reach the goals of development, while others consider NGOs as good only if they help to rethink the limited goals of traditional development and help foster more open and just societies. For Murdock (2003), NGO scholarship thus remains to a large extent interested in and bound to the question of whether NGOs are “doing good.” The next section takes the Colombian NGO field in Latin America as a case illustrative of this tendency. Later, special attention is given to how discourses about gender and gender equality have become intertwined with the NGO development framework.

**An NGO Universe: The Colombian Case**

For the public—particularly in the United States—Colombia is perhaps best known for the images of violence and drug trafficking portrayed in the media than for its vibrant civil society. And while these images should be given their due attention, behind the headlines exists another face of Colombia, one characterized by the many NGOs and civil society organizations that widely populate and increasingly shape this region’s future.

Defining the NGO sector in Colombia is difficult because the concept refers to a large group of heterogeneous organizations with diverse objectives, strategies, and service populations. Numerically, Colombia’s NGO sector is of comparable size to countries mentioned earlier, such as Brazil and India. Obtaining clear-cut statistics on Colombia’s NGO universe has been difficult, given that there is no absolute consensus as to their categorization. One of the first attempts at a comprehensive overview of Colombia’s NGO sphere was a study by the
Javeriana University, and using the United Nation definition the study identified 58,000 private, nonprofit organizations registered in Colombia (Castañeda, López, Puentes. 1989). Some estimates place the number around 70,000 at the dawning of the 1990s (Ritchey-Vance 1993:28). In his in-depth review of Colombian NGOs, Ritchey-Vance (1993:33) summarizes the significance and impact of NGOs within Colombian society in the following manner:

The most solid figures available are those related to the cooperative sector. The [over] 5,000 cooperatives have a total membership of two million. Directly or indirectly, cooperative services benefit 10 million people, or one in every three Colombians. There is a coincidence of educated guesses that one in every five Colombians belongs to an NGO of some description and that directly or indirectly NGOs touch the lives of nearly half the population.

In addition to their quantitative magnitude, NGOs are significant given the relatively recent trend in Colombia (as in many other parts of the globe) to view these diverse organizations as a key “sector” in the promotion of civic life. As will be discussed in more detail below, the historical role of church and state and the more recent social transformations (e.g., the Constitution of 1991) resulting from the process of “democratic opening” that started in the mid-1980s have encouraged the increasing growth, activity, and significance of NGOs in the country’s public affairs, such as in the area of promoting a gender perspective in development proposals. Before entering into a discussion about the nature of NGOs and the discourses concerning gender in which these organizations are embedded, it is important to briefly review the history of NGO development in Colombia. This in turn will place recent events and debates in the NGO sphere in historical context.
Historical Background: Colonial to Present

Church and the Emergence of the Nonprofit Sector

Historically, the Roman Catholic Church, the state, and political parties were central in the development of NGOs. Although the concept of “NGO” did not gain its contemporary meaning until the middle of the 20th century, organizations considered separate from the government and economic sector have existed in Colombia since colonial times. The origins of the nonprofit sector in Colombia are rooted in the Spanish colonial period and what were the vast powers of the Catholic Church (Flórez 1997). Spanish colonial rule lasted for approximately two and a half centuries (1550-1810) in which the Spanish Crown gave the Church both (material) privilege and (military) protection so long as the Church promised to evangelize conquered populations and legitimate the practice of colonization (Villar 1998).

In this context, the Crown entrusted the Church with the creation and administration of nursing homes, hospitals, orphanages, and educational institutions. Funded by local governments and various donor sources, these pastoral activities—which were seen as opportunities to evangelize and maintain social order by ameliorating the more gross examples of inequality, poverty, and homelessness resulting from colonialism—became some of the first and most enduring “charity organizations” in Colombia (Flórez 1997:387). In fact, it was not until the 18th century that the Crown, under the Bourbon regime, attempted to assume direct control and management of these institutions (Mörner 1979).

The Church’s great influence extended beyond Colombia’s colonial period, as represented in the debates in the 19th century concerning the creation of a nation-state. In this case, questions often centered on the degree to which the state should be secularized and the Catholic Church’s

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5 This section draws primarily from Flórez’s (1997) and Villar’s (1998) reviews of the historical development of the nonprofit sector in Colombia.
material and social power reduced. It was later in the mid-19th century, during its liberal revolution (1851-1876) that government tried to obtain control and responsibility over institutions, such as education, hospitals, and hospices. Control over institutions such as the educational system became, during this period, a central point of religious debate and conflict between the two major political parties in Colombia, the Liberals and Conservatives, a debate which continues today. The former favors secularization of government and other institutions (e.g., education) and the latter supports the ecclesiastical privilege of the Church. Faced with the Liberal’s intention to secularize significant portions of the social landscape, the Church created private religious organizations and associations, such as the Catholic Associations of Medellín, that would defend the Church from the “deCatholization” of education and Colombian society in general (González 1979:50-58).

What is significant for this discussion is the impact of this context on nonprofit organizations. On the one hand, the Church’s efforts and power helped keep at bay the development of Liberal secularization, producing the 1886 Constitution that reconfirmed the Church’s dominion over educational and social welfare services and leading to a period of Conservative hegemony which lasted until 1930. On the other hand, this context spurred the establishment of notable non-Church-related nonprofit organizations in the 19th century, such as workers associations and other secular cooperatives created for the education of their members and as a means of mutual aid, given the absence of a state social security system (Flórez 1997:388). These organizations were supported by the Liberal Party and became important during the liberal social reforms of the 20th century. Until that time, however, the third sector was generally monopolized by organizations—such as Juntas de Beneficencia (Beneficence Associations), Acción Católica (Catholic Action), and the Caja Social de Ahorros (Social

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Savings Bank)—created through the joint efforts of the Conservative government and the Church (Villa 1998:4).

**Liberal Reforms and Political Polarization**

Liberal party reforms in the early 20th century (1930-1945) ended the Conservative hegemony and began a movement toward creating a government more “active” in the economic and social sphere (e.g., fiscal, agricultural, labor, and educational affairs). Social reforms were intended to increase government intervention in such areas, secularize the state, and restrict the various socio-political privileges the Church had acquired throughout the centuries. These efforts led to the constitutional reforms of 1936 and to a re-designation of social welfare as a government responsibility. As might be expected, these changes only reinforced the alliance between the Church and the Conservative party and sharpened the antagonism between the two political parties. The increased polarization between Conservatives and Liberals led, during the period between 1945 and 1964, to the period known as *La Violencia* (The Violence), in which approximately 300,000 Colombians died. But it was as a result of this situation and a growing state of polarization that important third sector, nonprofit organizations linked to the political parties were born.

Supported by the Liberal government and in a legal environment favorable to union organizations, in 1936 the first confederation of unions was established—the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia* (CTC, the Workers’ Confederation of Colombia), as a result of the new political context. As Palacios (1995:159) notes, the alliance between the CTC and the Liberal Party lasted until 1945, ending when the CTC increasingly had to ascribe to the Liberal political network and lost greater and greater control and independence over government affairs. In 1946 a new confederation was created, the *Unión de Trabajadores de Colombia* (UTC, Colombian Workers’ Union), which was assisted by the Conservative party and the Church, and
struggled against liberalism and communism. The UTC became the dominate labor union confederation in the 1950s and 1960s with the aid of the National Security Doctrine and the growing Cold War climate of anti-communism that was being spread throughout Latin America and particularly encouraged by United States (Villar 1998:5). The Church also sought to continue its opposition to the secularization of education promoted by liberal reform. Thus in 1938, the *Confederación de Escuelas Católicas* (Confederation of Catholic Schools) was established with the main goal of “re-Christianizing” education by creating several elementary schools, high schools, and universities (Helg 1987:164). In response to the popular revolts on April 9, 1948, and the beginning of the political party conflict, *La Violencia*, the Conservative government began purging liberal teachers with the help of the Church and the Confederation of Catholic Schools (Helg 1989:114-27).

The polarization and political antagonism generated around educational and labor associations was not as prevalent in other fields. According to Abeil (1996:15, 35), compromises from the Church were relatively easy to obtain so long no political group asked for government plans in these areas. Thus the gradual social involvement in fields such as health did not produce major political contention or confrontation. For this reason, many third-sector, independent foundations in the areas of health and child protection were created in cooperation with to the public sector’s social welfare institutions (Acción en Colombia 1974). Similarly, despite the political division of the time, many women’s organizations emerged, such as the Women’s Citizen Union, composed mainly of upper and middle class women, and the Democratic Women’s Union. These and other organizations were later instrumental in the fight for women’s right to vote, which was eventually granted by the government in 1957 (Flórez 1997:388).
National Front Era

Beginning in 1958, the leaders of the two major political parties, with the support of the Church and business sector, established a bipartisan government called the Frente Nacional (National Front) that laid an agreement between the Liberal and Conservative parties for the rotation of the presidency and more equitable distribution of power between the parties, which lasted officially until 1974. The purpose of the National Front was to end the political violence (La Violencia) and reconstruct a more democratic government (Flórez 1997:388). This arrangement arguably helped to improve the country’s institutional stability and decrease factional violence by restricting political participation to only Liberals and Conservatives; however, the National Front also weakened the two major party’s ability to respond to the citizenry’s demands. Political legitimacy decreased given the heavy institutional limitations for participation outside of the established two party political machine. Thus the government also tried to create its own civil organizations as a strategy to reinforce the state but also address the growing political apathy of much of the population.

One of the greatest examples of organizations created by the government and probably the most extensive popular organizations in Colombia are the Juntas de Acción (JAC, Community Action Committees). JAC’s were started at the beginning of the National Front government in 1958 and were “an obligatory way to formalise participation over community affairs, aiming to shape decisions over the distribution of state funds and … development priorities” (Flórez 1997:388). By 1974 there were 18,000 JACs and in 1993 the census counted 42,582 (Villar 1998:6). As some note, while JACs contributed significantly to the building of social and physical infrastructure (e.g., schools, health centers, roads, water systems, etc), JACs also became sites that contributed to clientelism. This is because they were often used by the party system to offer resources to poor communities in exchange for political votes. In some
cases, however, JACs were able to obtain some independence from the political parties and serve as a base for civic movements (Londoño 1994:50-51).

At the same time, new international forces were extending their social and ideological influence. The Cuban revolution of 1959, the new pluralist, social justice approach introduced by Pope John XXIII, and the divisions of the Left (particularly along racial and gender lines), for example, translated well into Colombia’s political environment. Given the closed nature of the political system, these forces helped to radicalize many social movements and encouraged social actors to seek alternative ways of action beyond the conventional institutional arrangement (Villar 1998:5). It was in this context that organizaciones no gubernamentales (non-governmental organizations, NGOs) emerged and assumed their more recognizable modern identity; many organizations were created because of dissatisfaction with, if not deep criticism of, the government’s social and political system. Indeed, around half of the over 5,000 extant NGOs in the cooperative sector were established between 1961 and 1980, during the years of the National front (Vargas, Toro, and Rodriguez 1992:33-44). World Vision Colombia was itself started during this period and since 1976 has been active in community development and emergency assistance (Vision Mundial Colombia 2005c).

The orientation and impetus behind these organizations, particularly with regards to promoting more participatory development and less charity, was greatly influenced by the new social justice “orientation of the [Vatican II] Church, the participation of professionals discontented with the hierarchical and authoritarian forms of the political left, and the loss of credibility in social action by traditional political parties and governments” (Villar 1998:7). Besides their sense of independence from the government, therefore, these organizations began to include strategies that are today considered catchphrases in describing the NGO universe, such
as “the promotion of community organizations, collaborative work, self-help and community participation” (Villar 1998:7). World Vision Colombia, for example, self-identifies with many of these themes when it refers to itself on its website as a Christian organization that

works intentionally to build a culture of peace, so that society’s transformations and accomplishments will be sustainable; to create the necessary conditions for fulfilling the vision of life in all its fullness for every child, and each person that become involved and make this intention a reality (Vision Mundial Colombia 2005b).

They go on to add that the organization’s work is focused on community participation and self-help through the use of “activities for training persons, families and communities to discover and use their own vision, skills, and resources to overcome extreme poverty and enjoy a full life” (Vision Mundial Colombia 2005c, emphasis added).

In all, the national socio-political context, in the form of the National Front, and changes in the international environment in the realm of politics and ideology of the mid-20th century, helped encourage the emergence of new forms of participation in the universe of civil organization linked to the private, not-for-profit sector. To be sure, the government’s inability to adequately channel citizen’s needs was often viewed as a source of the political apathy among large segments of the population and led to the search for alternatives to solve community problems independent of a political system that was virtually closed off to any groups outside of the Liberal-Conservative monopoly.

While this closed system of political participation contributed to the birth of much of the Colombia’s NGO universe, it also helped establish a new relationship (at times conflictual and sometimes controversially close) between the state and NGOs. This “new” state-NGO relationship was initially forged as the 20th century was coming to an end. More will be said later about state-NGO relations and its connection to gender advocacy in Colombia, as this issue
has become particularly salient due to the expansive neoliberal environment many Latin
American regions are facing.

**Democratic Opening and the Role of NGOs**

A process of reform and opening of the political regime began to take place in the early 1980s, marked by the presidency of Belisario Betancur (1982-1986). Institutional inadequacy to channel participation was cited as a root cause of the apathy among the population, the state system’s crisis in legitimacy, and the bloody political violence (Villar 1998:8). In response, the government introduced plans that were supposed to open the door to more democratic forms of participation that would include a wider range of voices. Some reforms sought, for example, to expand dialogue (arguably unsuccessfully) with guerilla groups and to begin a process of decentralization, which is regarded as a central impetus behind the large voter turnout of 67 percent in the 1986 election (Villar 1998:8). It was in the presidency of Virgilio Barco (1986-1990), for instance, that poverty was for the first time officially recognized as a central problem of Colombian society and an anti-poverty strategy created which uniquely called on civil organization to become active in its alleviation.

The Barco Administration also engaged in efforts to end the violence linked with the very widespread and active paramilitary groups located throughout the country. Barco ended, for example, a 1968 law initially intended as a national security strategy against the assumed threat of communism and “terrorism”, but which also allowed the military to distribute arms to civilians, often paramilitary groups (Dugas 2005:235). There ensued paramilitary reaction to this and other acts of Barco’s Administration (e.g., providing amnesty to ex-guerilla fighters but not paramilitaries). Political violence thus continued among paramilitary groups, drug leaders (who regularly fund paramilitaries), guerillas, and military security organizations in the form of murders, kidnappings, and disappearances. To some, the sustained political violence frustrated
the process of democratic consolidation. It was in this context of political violence; however, that actions were taken that have fundamentally altered to this day the nature, role, and status of NGOs in Colombia, such as with issues surrounding gender.

At the beginning of the 1990’s, an assembly was convened with various governmental and third sector supporters to move toward reformation of the constitution so as to facilitate the process of democratization. From the deliberations emerged a constitution with an emphasis on, decentralization, an extension of economic, social, and political rights, and participatory democracy. In particular, a new orientation toward civil society organizations (CSOs) was established that included more explicit recognition of these entities in the participatory process.


[a] large number of participatory channels were established to encourage debate and discussion with civil society regarding public matters, and the groundwork was laid for greater participation for private sector, both for-profit and nonprofit, in the provision of public and social services.

The new constitution officially recognized NGOs as important (if not necessary) means toward the promotion of democracy and citizens’ representation. Article No. 103 of the Constitution states that governments should promote the “organization, promotion, and guidance” of nongovernmental public-purpose associations, without prejudicing their authority so that they may constitute democratic means of representation in the various function of participation, agreement, control, and supervision of the public activities that they undertake (Political Database of the Americas 2005, unofficial translation).

Article No. 335 even allows for the possibility that public resources be given to NGOs and other civil organizations provided appropriate contractual agreements are met and that the funds be used for public interest activities that follow development plans.

Since its adoption, the Constitution has also brought forth new debates and legislative developments with regards to the favoring of NGOs in service delivery and policy issues (education, health, gender, environment, etc.). One such example is the civil society
organization (CSO) Participation in Public Administration (Participación en la Administración Pública) bill, which aims to regulate the whole CSO sector through the creation of specific definitions of sector rights, duties, and responsibilities with respect to its participation in decision-making processes. Attempts to systematize and further ground this sector’s activity within Colombia’s democratic process (if not to improve the process) are also found in the creation of complex networks and confederations, such as the Confederación Colombiana de ONGs (Colombian Confederation of NGOs). This national recognition has increasingly turned international, wherein multilateral development agencies such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank have begun to support financially NGOs. In all, in Colombia and in Latin America in general, NGOs have to a large extent come to be seen and treated as central vehicles for the implementation of development projects and the fostering of democracy. An important example of this has been in the connection made between NGOs and the promotion of a gender perspective in the Latin American development discourse field.

**Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Develop(me)n(t) Discourse: The Role of NGOs and the State**

NGOs have been increasingly active in trying to mobilize national and international support about their concerns. One site where their presence has been growing in both size and influence, beginning at least in the mid-1970s, is the specialized UN conferences (Hochstetler, Clark, and Friedman 1998; Willetts 1996b). Many NGOs have attempted to include, or as some say, “mainstream”, gender in the development agenda and for democratization. For Joachim (2003:248), “[t]he inclusion of these issues on UN mainstream agendas is significant because it legitimates women’s demands at the domestic level.” In this section we will review what is meant by mainstreaming a “gender perspective” in development discourse and how these efforts are tied to NGOs’ relationship with the state. Specific attention is paid to the Colombian state.
At the 1975 United Nations (UN) International Women’s year conference in Mexico City, delegates concluded that all governments should set up agencies dedicated to encouraging gender equality and improving the status and conditions of women’s lives around the globe. This conference resulted in the famous UN Decade for Women (1976-1985) and led to consciousness-raising on gender issues. Specifically, these years included a push to “integrate” women in development, a strategy that has come to be known as the “women in development” (WID) approach. This initiative prompted the creation of new centralized state bureaucracies, called “national machineries for the advancement of women”, in over 100 countries between 1975 and 1997 (Rowan and-Campbell 1995:141-42).

According to True and Mintrom (2001:28), the historical impetus behind and diffusion of these “state machineries” stem in no small part from civil society organizations, such as NGOs. Indeed, as will be shown later, the relationship between NGOs and the state has played an important, and for some, a central part in delineating the contours of Latin America’s gender discourse (see Álvarez 1999). Public visibility of NGOs increased greatly during the 1990s, especially with The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. This event had a significant NGO presence and NGOs were active in generating the conference’s “Platform for Action”, designed to develop strategic objectives and actions in 12 critical areas, one being the creation of “institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women” (Division for the Advancement of Women 2007).

It was during the Beijing conference that the term “gender mainstreaming” was popularized and the term has now been adopted nearly universally to address this critical area in the realm of policy and social planning (Baden and Goetz 1997:5). In True and Mintrom’s (2001:28) use, gender mainstreaming refers to “efforts to scrutinize and reinvent processes of
policy formulation and implementation across all issue areas to address and rectify persistent and emerging disparities between men and women.” The interest of NGOs with institutionalizing a gender perspective was evident in the numerous workshops given at the conference’s NGO Forum on the very topic of gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming, as a concept, evolved when the efficacy of the central planning approaches of the WID and their strategy to “integrate” women in development began to be questioned toward the end of the 1980s. The notion of mainstreaming reflects, at least in part, the perceived theoretical and practical failure of the early national women’s machineries, many established in the 1970s and 1980s, to achieve significant results or influence policy (Buvinic 1986; Longwe 1991). Mainstreaming thus signifies a push beyond simply “integration” and toward creating and diffusing a “gender perspective in all decision-making aspects of an organization, i.e. policies, strategies, programmes, and administrative and financial activities, thereby contributing to organizational transformation” (Ahmend 2002:298). In its broadest sense, gender mainstreaming encompasses both technical and political processes that change the practices, social structures, institutions and values that reproduce gender inequality (Kardam 1998).

In contrast to WID, gender mainstreaming has come to be associated with what is known as the “gender and development” (GAD) approach. Different from the WID position which was primarily concerned with access and inclusion of women within the modernization project, GAD seeks to make development-work more gender-aware, by at times challenging the development project itself. Specifically, GAD focuses on the social relations that have given rise to gender inequalities in the first place and attempts to “bring the power relations between women and men into the picture” (Kabeer 1994:xii). GAD signaled a shift toward emphasizing the empowerment
of women and their involvement in a development process over which they had little influence or control. In this vein, Jahan (1995:15) refers to the mainstreaming approach of GAD as trying to go beyond integration to include “agenda setting,” since it seeks to transform the existing development agenda by introducing a gender perspective.

Colombia serves as a good example of the GAD approach, since this country is often considered part of the so-called “second wave” of institutionalizing a gender perspective in government policy and planning (WID constitutes the first wave). In 1980 the Colombian government created the National Council for the Integration of Women into Development; however, the Council lacked an administrative structure, personnel, and a budget (Beall 1998:531). Thus it was not really until the 1990s—when liberal candidate Cesar Gaviria (1990-1994) won the presidential election—that important steps toward gender mainstreaming and popular engagement (e.g., participation of civil society organizations) in development policy were taken in the country.

In 1990, Colombia officially adopted “high-level” institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming. This provided for stand-alone government ministries, offices within the head of state’s department, or quasi-autonomous state agencies, such as national commissions (True and Mintrom 2001:31-32). It was during Gaviria’s administration that the Constitutional Convention was set up, drafting a new Constitution in 1991, which at least in official rhetoric guaranteed equal opportunities for women. For instance, Articles 13 and 43 recognize the equal rights and opportunities of men and women, and Article 40 calls for the adequate and effective participation of women in decision-making levels of public administration. Policy and planning changes were promoted through the National Development Plan, known as La Revolución Pacífica (Pacific Revolution). This plan sought a two-prong approach of (1) economic liberalization and intense
promotion of market forces (e.g., decentralization, privatization and increased investment in an export infrastructure) and (2) a parallel commitment to political reform and a strengthening of civil society through a reinforcement of public, private, and community sector partnerships.

In keeping with the two main themes of the National Development Plan, Gaviria created six strategic area programs, within the president’s office, each with their respective Advisory Council so that urgent issues could be addressed quickly without the protracted negotiations characteristic of ministries and department. In addition to the councils on peace and internal security, human rights and government reform, this included a Presidential council for Youth, Women, and the Family. This council’s purpose was to define and clarify policies, instigate activities designed to improve the social condition of women, and to help coordinate programs among multiple social actors, such as government departments, NGOs, and international agencies.

As just mentioned, part of the function of the council for Youth, Women, and the Family was to branch out to civil society actors. Attempts to consult with representatives of civil society led to a 1992 consultative seminar in which women’s organization and NGOs were asked to participate (Beall 1995). Opinions among the various organizations about the council ranged from enthusiasm to skepticism. This was partly due to the rapprochement between government and civil society, which had begun to emerge since the 1990s and was still very new and fragile. It had not been forgotten by many that the creation of a more open political environment to that of the National Front years had been difficult to achieve and remained uneven. To be sure, in 1992 the Colombian government was engaged in its so-called “Integral War”, which included military action and intervention in civilian organizations suspected of links to rebel groups. A variety of civil organizations, such as human rights groups, development projects, and media and
social research centers, were targeted for their potential links to rebel organizations and became vulnerable to “intervention” (Beall 1998:519-10, 531). Given this backdrop, there seemed little guarantee that the government would continue support of civil organizations or their commitment to gender equality. Nevertheless, by the end of the seminar there was general support for idea of the government institutionalizing a GAD perspective that included on-going consultations with civil society.

The process of institutionalizing a gender perspective in Colombia’s policy and planning arguably came of age during the administration of Ernesto Samper Pizano (1994-1998). In its first year, the Samper administration passed the Política de Equidad y Participación para la Mujer (Policy for Equity and Participation of Women, EPAM), making it an integral part of Samper’s El Salto Social (The Social Leap Forward). El Salto Social was part of Samper’s development plan to increase social spending by the government and create over a million new jobs. Because EPAM was part of the national development plan, it was viewed as a central means to institutionalize a gender perspective in development and make a more concerted shift away from any “welfare,” “integrationist” approaches still left over from Gaviria’s administration to one of mainstreaming the importance of gender power relations.

EPAM began to be institutionalized in 1994 with the establishment of the Advisory Council for the Equity and Participation of Women, an advisory body to the national government. A Secretariat for Women and Gender was also set up; it took over the responsibility of the Presidential Program for Youth, Women, and the Family. By 1994 the functions of the various bodies responsible for implementing EPAM were organized and approved. This process was driven in part by the Beijing Conference which was on the immediate horizon.
In 1995 the Dirección Nacional para la Equidad de Mujer (National Office for the Equity of Women) was established as an official, permanent state structure that had administrative autonomy and its own budget. This office eventually took over the responsibility held by the Secretariat for Women and Gender; its functions included the management, planning, coordination, advisement, and monitoring of policies for women, and activities intended to foster gender equality in Colombia (Beall 1998:522). In addition, there were efforts to strengthen the relationships between government and civil society organizations, since it was recognized that institutionalizing a gender perspective in development requires more structural investment that offered by the previous administration’s Presidential Council. In this case, organizations involved in implementing EPAM are monitored by the National Office for the Equity of Women and include the Consultative Group, which was based on a coalition of civil organizations that meet to discuss ideas and coordinate plans related to EPAM.

A variety of problems emerged, however, frustrating the efficacy of EPAM; these included continuing national violence and limited resources. For instance, the National Office for the Equity of Women was made responsible for a policy on women displaced by national violence, but this was soon changed and a National Office for Displaced People created. Other problems included a “lack of information and familiarity with the concept of gender-aware planning among civil servants, and inadequate human and financial resources allocated to EPAM” (Beall 1998:523).

In fact, Samper and his administration early encountered various political and economic problems that would impede the success of EPAM and a national plan for a gender perspective. Besides political scandals (which included a leak by Andres Pastrana of the so-called narcocassettes suggesting that Samper’s 1994 election campaign was partially funded by the drug
cartel) economic problems plagued his term. Although social spending had increased under Samper, so did the nation’s fiscal deficit. Large budgets cuts introduced in response to the deficit affected social investment expenditures between 1997 and 1998. The economic situation was compounded by the continued violence in the country and the lack of foreign support (particularly by capitalist states, such as the United States) for Samper’s unpopular commitment to high levels of government spending. These dynamics helped to usher in a new era, one marked by the winning of the presidential election by conservative Andrés Pastrana (1994-2002) and his return to neoliberal economic policies. Most important with respect to these changes is their impact on gender advocacy and the resulting tension between implementing the nationally and internationally (i.e., United States) approved neoliberal reforms and fulfilling the task of developing a gender perspective. One place where this tension has visibly manifested itself has been in NGOs’ gender advocacy work.

On the one hand, the presumed problems of previous attempts by governments to institute a gender perspective and state weakness within a neoliberal context, has led to increased emphasis on NGOs as sites where gender advocacy can take place. Moser (1993:191) captures this point of view by arguing that “[c]hange instituted though ‘top-down’ interventions of the state as the dominant ‘structure’ of power, control and domination is distinct from change achieved though bottom-up mobilization of ‘agency’ in civil society.” NGOs are crucial in this emancipatory process, Moser continues, “[b]ecause of their capacity to reach the ‘grass-roots’ where ‘real people’ are … NGOs have increasingly been identified as the institutional solution for ‘alternative’ development models.”

On the other hand, while much attention has centered on the democratic potential of NGOs, in recent years there has been a shift toward examining the profound economic and
political changes that have taken place across Latin American regions and how these forces have impacted NGOs and their gender advocacy. In particular, interest has grown around what has been dubbed the “NGOization” or “professionalization” of gender advocacy work. Of interest now is how the ever growing neoliberal landscape has altered the way a gender perspective is promoted within the NGO universe. This has been the case with Colombian NGOs as neoliberal reforms have been strongly pursued in the country, particularly by the current president, Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-present). Recent studies have been for the most part concerned with the historical and political forces influencing the orientation and strategy of NGOs’ gender advocacy (Álvarez 1999; Ewig 1999; Murdock 2003). What follows is a brief review of these processes.

**NGOs, the Emerging Neoliberal Terrain, and the Gender Policy Turn**

As mentioned earlier, NGOs in Latin America, while certainly not new, began to play a more visible and politically significant role beginning in the 1980s. For the many countries engaged in a transition from an authoritarian to a so-called democratic politics in the 1980s, local, national, and international entities comprising the NGO universe were often considered a democratic counterweight to the military regimes of the region and a solution to the worsening poverty induced by the economic and political crisis of the time (Jaquette 1989, 1994; Jaquette and Wolchik 1998). In Colombia, the National Front facilitated the emergence of new forms of participation in the world of civil organizations …. The government’s inability to guarantee basic services for the entire population led to the search for alternatives and the promotion of citizen solutions to community problems independent of the political system and the government. In many cases, the government’s inefficiency and limitations fed the idea that it was possible, and even desirable, for citizens to do things on their own. While this situation contributed to the creation of civic responsibility and an active attitude towards social problems, it also reinforced the paradigm of conflict between the government and the non-governamental agencies.

During the democratic transition period, therefore, scholarship tended to view NGOs as organizations that were important components in the promotion of democracy and the

NGOs’ opposition to the state, however, tempered as the shift from democratic transition to democratic consolidation began to take place. Antagonism between the state and NGOs lessened as a new political climate emerged in the early 1990s that was associated with a change from the national security state of the 1980s to a return to an (albeit uneven) electoral politics. At this time, many civil society organizations began to see an opportunity to exercise influence over state’s that were, at least ostensibly, democratizing. It was also in this context of civil society’s rapprochement with the government that a major turn to policy advocacy was adopted by many civil society organizations, particularly NGOs.

In Colombia, as noted above, the seeds for this new relationship with the state were planted in the mid-1980s during the Betancur and Barcos administrations’ efforts at “democratic opening,” but they did not really take root until the beginning of the 1990s. To borrow from Jaquette (1994), the 1991 Constitution and later the implemented GAD programs of Samper’s government changed the “perceived permeability” of the state to civil society interventions. Many feminist NGOs, for example, viewed the new climate as a chance to influence a democratizing state that might be well-disposed to women’s participation and interested in promoting a gender perspective in policies. As one feminist activist and director of a women’s program of a labor NGO put it:

> In the decade of the 1990s there are huge changes for the Colombian feminist movement, one is the new Constitution that talks about a new participatory democracy …. And this is contextualized with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the radicality of the Left begins to question its methods for changing society. We are part of this profound international movement, it affects us, so we changed from being anti-State to being those who promote the new State (quoted in Murdock 2003:513).
Indeed, it was in this decade that the state funded as much as 40-50 percent of Colombian NGOs (Álvarez 1999:196). During the early- to mid-1990s, therefore, scholars began to document an increased cooperation between NGOs and the state (Carroll 1992; Fisher 1992), focusing on the state-NGO linkage and NGO policy advocacy as a key dimension in the promotion of democracy and in the promotion of a gender perspective.

From the mid-to late-1990s, however, scholarly attention began to center on the changing nature of the state-NGO relationship brought on by the concerted move of many countries toward a more private-sector rather than state-oriented economic policy. The most dramatic and obvious impact on civil society organizations, such as NGOs, was that they were now relating to a neoliberal-state, whose private-sector orientation reinforced a new reliance on and heavy use of NGOs for a wide range of program evaluations and implementation. As already noted, neoliberal policy makers, especially those who understand democracy as inherently tied to capitalism and private enterprise, see NGOs as promoting democracy because they are “independent” of the state apparatus. For this reason, national and international policy makers who are inclined toward so-called “free market principles” tend to view NGOs as an efficient means for the economic and social development of the so-called “third world” countries.

Specifically, the more states were downsized due to neoliberal reforms, the more the integration of NGOs into government programs came to be “regarded as the vehicle of choice—the Magic Bullet for fostering currently fashionable development strategies” (Gruhn 1997:325). State cutbacks resulting from neoliberal reform policy lead to governments using NGOs as substitutes for state services. Here governments “ subcontract out” formerly state provided social welfare programs to NGOs. Colombia serves as a good illustration of how a significant portion
of the work toward developing a gender perspective has become (unfortunately, according to some) overly “NGOized.”

Although Colombia avoided the worst effects of the 1980’s debt crisis that devastated much of the Latin American landscape—Colombia’s economy during the crisis actually has the highest average rate of annual economic growth, at 3.7 percent (Sánchez 2001:9)—this good fortune ended in 1998 when the recently elected President Pastrana declared an “economic and social emergency” (Murdock 2003:514). The country had entered a “full recession” by 1999, and the “official unemployment rate reached 20 percent, the highest in the Americas” (Reina 2001:75). Besides the high rates of unemployment and its effect on the population’s ability to meet its own basic needs, significant adjustments were made in government expenditures as prescribed by neoliberal reform policies—namely, cutbacks in social funding. The Medellín city government, for example, experienced economic cutbacks that postponed planned increases in public expenditures (Murdock 2003:514).

Government funded women’s development programs were affected by this situation. Several programs’ budget approvals were postponed, restricted (as in the case with Medellin’s City Agency for Women, La Casa de la Mujer), or terminated altogether (Murdock 2003:514). As Murdock (2003:514) explains, “[w]hile legal debates regarding women’s rights continued, the more expensive women’s development programs were facing extreme budgetary restrictions, thus reducing the potential for feminist advocacy on development policy even further.” Not surprisingly, NGOs became a panacea in city governments facing the social funding cutbacks outlined by neoliberal policies. One Secretary of Social Welfare and Community Action in Cali, for instance, noted how efficient it was to hire NGOs to execute government programs: “I could contract 1,000 public servants” but instead “I hire 200 NGOs ….” There are no resources … and
that way we can do more in the social realm” (quoted in Álvarez 1999:195). Similarly, the head of The Municipal Division for Women and Gender said, “We don’t execute anything or implement anything … we work with NGOs, but not with all of them” (quoted in Álvarez 1999:195). For this reason, Latin America witnessed a surge in the 1990’s of NGOs specializing in gender policy assessment, project execution, and social service delivery that have received public prominence (Álvarez 1999).

**Neoliberal-NGO Relationship: Some Concerns**

For some, the emphasis on a gender policy agenda has produced several problems. According to Álvarez (1999:182), a result of the growing interdependent relationship between NGOs and neoliberal centers of power and influence is “a less self-evidently progressive set of gender-focused policies, centered on incorporating the poorest of the poor women into the market and promoting ‘self-help,’ civil society-led strategies.” In response to Latin American states embracing the “New Policy Agenda”—based on beliefs organized around neoliberal economics and liberal democratic theory (Hulme and Edwards 1997:5)—many NGOs have needed to formalize their organizational practices as well as moderate their discourses to be able to interact with neoliberal state agencies and international bodies (Craske 1998). For example, the political capital and pattern of donors favoring “larger, already well-resourced, more professionalized feminist NGOs whose work has measurable ‘policy-relevance’ over smaller, less formalized, typically more grassroots … organizations” has put into question the democratizing ability of NGOs (Álvarez et al. 2002:554). In brief, state cutbacks and an intensification of the gender policy advocacy logic has engendered a new set of circumstances with regards to NGOs’ efforts to foster a gender perspective within development discourse and practice. Álvarez (1999) offers three significant consequences to consider.
First, states’ turning to NGOs as *gender experts*, rather than as citizens’ groups advocating on behalf of women’s rights, threatens to reduce any cultural and political action regarding gender equity to simply technical issues. By “technical” Álvarez (1999:192) means to say that governments typically hire specialized NGO research teams to conduct policy impact studies or needs assessments surveys, but seldom encourage, much less require, wider political debate with civil society constituencies with the highest stakes in gender-focused programs or with other actors in the feminist field. NGOs are most often consulted as experts who can evaluate gender policies and programs *rather* than as movement organizations that might facilitate citizen input and participation in the formulation and design of such policies.

Thus while many neoliberal states have adopted a “gendered perspective” in their development approach (e.g., WID and GAD), it has come at the expense of making gender a primarily technical feature. In this case, neoliberal states have sought to further privatize social welfare but have had to face the reality of the deleterious effects of market structural adjustment policies on women (Craske 1998:104). Indeed, “recent Latin American ‘policy with a gender perspective’ forms an integral part of what we might call gendered ‘social adjustment’ strategies—‘programs targeted at those groups most clearly excluded or victimized by [structural adjustment policies]’” (Álvarez et al. 1998:22). Here, “gendered programs” refer to practices that help facilitate women’s incorporation into neoliberal development. The problem emerges because while gender has become a central concept of neoliberal states’ lexicon, it has also acquired an overly technical meaning—“a power neutral indicator of ‘modernity’ and ‘development’ rather than a power-laden field of unequal relations between women and men” (Álvarez 1999:192).

Second, NGOs are increasingly treated as surrogates for, rather than representatives of, civil society. Interest in NGOs as sites of gender advocacy has grown as many neoliberal governments in Latin America express their intentions to encourage “the incorporation and participation of all civil society in the task of generating new gender social relations” (SERNAM
NGOs, in this case, have been targeted as prominent actors within the vast array of civil society organizations that can act as essential “intermediaries” for society’s female constituency. The issue here, however, is that while governments, donors, and other entities profess a deep interest in fostering a strong civil society, the criteria used in choosing which NGOs will be consulted or funded for such purposes may not be related to whether such NGOs actually function as conduits for the people they are supposed to represent.

Again, professionalized NGOs are privileged vis-à-vis other organizations. A hierarchy has emerged whereby “[i]n most countries, those NGOs who possessed policy-specialized staff, had previous experience in the UN process, and earned handsome foreign funding—irrespective of their links to larger social constituencies—were usually the ones selected” (Álvarez 1999:193). Evidence for intermediation is thus highly based on NGOs’ technical capabilities for maximizing impact and conducting policy evaluation, rather than their ability to involve meaningfully women. In this respect, as professionalized NGOs increasingly become the primary surrogate for civil society and gender advocacy, the worry is that this undermines “the need [and I would add willingness] to establish public forums or other democratic mechanisms through which those most affected by gender policies might directly voice their needs and concerns” (Álvarez 1999:194).

A final concern listed by Álvarez (1999:183) is the recent phenomenon of subcontracting out NGOs to advise or carry out government women’s programs, which undermines NGOs’ ability to critically monitor policy, advocate more thoroughly on behalf of women, and even to examine their own internal structures. Fueling this growing trend in Latin America is the persistent neoliberal theme of “co-partnership” which highlights the relationship between the state and civil society as the source for social welfare. “Co-partnership” here must be put within
the context of neoliberal structural adjustment policies which have cutback all but specifically targeted or “emergency” social programs and have led governments to promote “self-help strategies for combating poverty and providing welfare at the local level” (Craske 1998:105). Civil society, and in particular NGOs, have become central components in the implementation of these projects given the social-welfare “responsibilities now eschewed by neoliberalism’s shrinking state” (Álvarez et al. 1998:1).

In this respect, “training with a gender perspective” (capacitación con una perspectiva de género) has become a major growth industry in Latin America and is being performed by feminist and non-feminist NGOs alike. Specifically, “[m]uch of this involves job training programs aimed at the poorest of the poor, particularly women heads-of-household, in an effort to keep them from slipping through the wide fissures at the bottom of the bottom of the neoliberal barrel” (Álvarez 1999:195). But while neoliberal states have created a need for NGOs to supply training programs and other subcontracted services, state cutbacks have also placed NGOs in a context of diminishing funds and resources. Thus Latin American NGOs find themselves in a paradox: they are “increasingly dependent on government-funded programs to survive” (Schild 1998:105), but their funding remains contingent upon their becoming more technical and less oriented toward critical types of movement activities. NGOs are put in the position to have to compete amongst themselves for funds; and what scholars have found is that professionalized NGOs have begun to acquire a privileged position on the funding food-chain, while more grassroots, less professionalized NGOs are either “scrambling to survive or disappearing altogether” (Schild 1998:105).

As Gill (1997) notes, Latin American NGOs have had to face the reality of neoliberal economic policies that limit the pool of state resources and made the process of obtaining funds
more competitive. Given this context, many NGOs have made a commitment to policy advocacy and policy formulation. Simply put, general declarations about the need for women’s equality and justice are not enough in a hostile political arena. NGOs of all stripes must “come armed with well-researched facts and sophisticated, yet practical, proposals” if they wish to be taken seriously and hope to acquire any resources (Murdock 2003:515).

Given the complex, if not difficult, nature of the NGO universe, it is not surprising that there is no consensus on the impact of these organizations for the democratization of Latin America. The experience of feminist and non-feminist NGOs in Latin America has shown that they can serve as a powerful base from which women can organize gender-based interests to influence state policy, but, according to Ewig (1999), it must be recognized that NGOs cannot replace the state, or at least should not act as surrogates to civil society when serving target populations. Subcontracting NGOs simply gives neoliberal states an excuse for dismissing their own obligation to social welfare.

**Going Beyond the “Doing Good?” Question**

There continues to be a great tendency in the NGO literature to evaluate and to ask whether NGOs are “doing good.” Scholars looking at Latin America emphasize how these organizations have been influenced by a context of intensifying neoliberal economic policies and state downsizing, but disagree about the political effects of these influences (Álvarez 1999; Barrig 1998; Garcia-Castro 2001; Lebon 1996; Lind 2000; Thayer 2000). This is largely because there are questions at stake about whether (NGO) “development” is a practice that perpetuates capitalism’s global expansion and, of course, whether globalization is in fact beneficial or harmful. For those who see development favorably, but seek alternative development strategies, NGOs are labeled “good.” In this case, NGOs are compared to the state but considered to be more efficient service providers and more closely tied to grassroots communities (Carroll 1992).
Some are more critical of development discourse, particularly those who are eager to see more grassroots mobilization against capitalist expansion. For them NGOs are more often “bad” because they help the “deepening [of] the neoliberal project” (Gill 2000:11) by facilitating state privatization, obscuring class politics, and disrupting grassroots mobilization (Gill 2000; Edelman 1991; Arellano López and Petras 1994).

According to Murdock (2003), however, the “doing good” question suffers from both epistemological and ethical difficulties. In the first case, the question seems to imply a return to dualistic categorizations, wherein those NGOs viewed as “resisting” neoliberalism, professionalization, and other forces “do good” while others may not. The problem here is that the concept of “resistance” is approached with essentialistic categories. Resistance is thought to have inherent properties, features, and manifestations, but this ignores the socially constructed nature of events. In other words, “resistance” itself must be interpreted within contexts (Gal 1995; Kondo 1999). According to Murdock (2003), classifying NGOs through essentialistic categories obscures their historically specific realities and practices, such as the extent to which NGO members think about, embrace, and negotiate their experiences both with communities and within NGOs themselves.

Ethically speaking, researchers must be cognizant and sufficiently reflexive regarding the impact that their commentary has on their subjects. As was mentioned, the current neoliberal context has made the process of obtaining funding a particularly complex, highly technical, and high stake venture. Thus researchers must consider how they report their findings, given NGOs’ delicate and heavy reliance on donor funding for survival. At issue here is what feminist scholars refer to as the complexity of the researcher-subject relationship (Wolf 1996). In this case, while it is important to deconstruct the power dynamics in which NGOs are situated (e.g.,
white capitalist patriarchy), it is equally important to be aware of the power relations that are part of the research process itself. Simply put, scholarly commentary is also a political act that may have implications within the political realm in which NGO actors reside.

It is in this vein that Murdock (2003:508) calls researchers to go beyond the “doing good” question that has contributed to reproducing a static and reductionistic dimension to NGO research. In other words, asking if NGOs are doing good has imposed a one-dimensional analysis of NGOs, producing oversimplified descriptions that encourage dualistic categorizations of NGOs as being either “good” or “bad.” The following section suggests how a focus on the self- and collective identity work of women NGO members allows for a more dynamic and nuanced understanding of the NGO phenomena and the impact these activities have for the promotion of a gender perspective within this domain.

**Studying NGOs Today: Investigating NGO Identity Work**

**Call to NGO Researchers**

As discussed earlier, state downsizing and neoliberal adjustment policies have significantly changed the conditions under which NGOs operate and fashion a gender perspective in terms of their objectives and practices. In this respect, Fisher (1997:439) notes that a majority of the NGO literature is filled with “statements about the potentials of NGOs for delivering welfare services, implementing development projects, and facilitating democratization; and instrumental treatise on building the capacity of NGOs to perform these functions.” This penchant, however, has led to fewer investigations that recognize NGOs as a “micro-practice”—that is, as evolving processes situated in a complex of competing and overlapping interpretive practices. According to Fisher (1997:441), what is evident in the NGO literature today is relatively few detailed studies of what is happening in particular places or within specific organizations, few analyzes of the impact of NGO practices on relations of power among individuals, communities, and the state, and little attention to the discourse within which
NGOs are presented as the solution to problems of welfare service delivery, development, and democratization.

More contemporary NGO scholars make a similar contention by noting that lack of attention to the “local” dimension of NGOs (Markowitz 2001; Lind 2000). As Markowitz (2001:42) points out, “[l]ocal here, refers not to villages but to close observation of the small interaction that constitutes the lived experience of promoting, accepting, and contesting modes of social change.

In this vein, Fisher (1997:447) cites the need for analyses that find ways to appreciate and reveal NGOs’ “particularities of history, culture, and even individual experience.” The reason for this is the simple fact that NGOs are quite dizzying in their diversity of history, philosophy, objectives, personnel, structures, and constituencies. In short, NGOs are anything but fixed or homogenous; they are instead complex in both form and practice and thus require studies that attend to their dynamic and heterogeneous character.

Murdock (2003:511), for example, contends NGO researchers should concentrate on how NGO women “are engaged in conscious dialogue and debate.” This is because, at present, researcher’s task “may not be to ask whether they [NGOs] are ‘doing good,’ but rather to ask what are the constraints and affordances under which they attempt to ‘do good’ as they define it” (Murdock 2003:508). Specifically, there is a gap in the literature that indicates a “need to think about the dynamic nature of women’s interpretations of and negotiations with external forces that also inform shifting NGO strategies … [to] avoid a superficial rendering of behavior and experience (Murdock 2003:511-12). What is important is that a dimension of the NGO literature has turned its attention to analyzing NGO members’ interpretive activity in the process of constructing an identity (Álvarez 1999; Murdock 200). In short, some scholars are claiming that it is important to study the social construction of identity, especially the relationship between a sense of self and collective identity in NGOs.
NGOs as Discursive Terrains

In this vein, Álvarez (1999:185) suggests that NGOs should be understood in a specific way—namely, as a “discursive field of action” which includes “a vast array of cultural, social, and political arenas.” Drawing from an analysis of contemporary feminism in India, Rakka Ray (1999:6, emphasis in the original) explains that “a political [discursive] field can be thought of as a structured, unequal, and socially constructed environment within which organizations are embedded and to which organizations and activists constantly respond.” While the concept of field is not explicitly taken up in this work, its contribution to social movement scholarship has been to highlight that social movement organizations represent fluid and contested terrains that are shaped by distributions of interests, power and resources.

Applying this view to NGOs reveals both the agenic and the socially circumscribed nature of NGO members. NGOs are not simply a static aggregation of organizational/individual ideas and practices or the mere result of pressures from extant forces. To borrow from Mansbridge’s description of the U.S. feminist movement (1995:27), NGOs constitute a discourse, in that they exhibit “a set of changing, contested aspirations and understandings that provide conscious goals, cognitive backing, and emotional support for each individual’s … identity.” More specifically, NGOs and their members are constantly negotiating and renegotiating political identities and practices while tied to a range of similarly produced economic, political, and social spaces. According to Álvarez, it is significant to talk about NGOs as a form of “discourse” or representing a “discursive field of action” because this approach draws attention to social actors’ ongoing interpretive activity and the context in which it is embedded. In this way, researchers move away from reductionist explanations of the meaning of behaviors that view NGOs as either statically “possessing” an orientation (e.g., gender policy advocacy) or mechanically responding to external factors (e.g., a neoliberal environment).
Murdock’s (2003) study of feminist NGOs in Medellin makes this very point, noting that many women in feminist NGOs in the late 1990’s retained a commitment to policy advocacy as a developed strategy to effect change in a hostile climate. This environment included reduced funding for social programs due to neoliberal state cutbacks, the escalation of political violence between 1998 and 2000 as President Pastrana began peace negotiations with the FARC (Armed Revolutionary Forced of Colombia), and public protests against the budget-cuts, which were met violently by the state and the militarized Right. Presented with these difficulties, women working for feminist NGOs “set about removing obstacles they could control—such as their lack of experience in policy formulation, and their historically antagonistic stance toward parties and government” (Murdock 2003:515). In other words, NGO members’ activity cannot disconnected from the set of meanings used to orient their behavior. Rather than being engaged in the simple reproduction of social reality, NGO members actively interpret and negotiate the structural forces they experience, along with the set of goals and practices employed to respond to this context.

The main idea here is that some NGOs may not simply be described as robotically serving the “handmaidens of neoliberal planetary patriarchy” (Álvarez 1999:199), but rather must be recognized as taking interpretive stances on a variety of issues and factors, such as their commitments to social change and assessment of opportunities. For this reason, Álvarez (1999:200) adamantly asserts that

… NGOs are hardly doomed to become a part of what some critics have dubbed the “anti-politics machine” of development … or the “community face of neoliberalism” …. Blanket assessments of … NGOs as handmaidens of neoliberal planetary patriarchy … fail to capture the ambiguities and variations in both the local implementation of the New Gender Policy Agenda and in and among NGOs themselves. Such variations would surely influence just how much room may be available for NGOs to maneuver within the confines of the restructured late modern, post-transition, and post-Beijing terrain of local and global gender politics.
According to Tarrés (1997), a way to avoid making blanket assessments that render invisible the nuances and variations in the NGO phenomena includes paying attention to the socially constructed identity of NGO members. This means seeing that “the space created by the NGO stimulates a re-elaboration of the identity of its members as social and political subjects” (Tarrés 1997:4). Put differently, studying the “identity work” of NGO members helps to show the interpretive and negotiated quality of their social reality. In this way, researchers gain an understanding grounded in the meanings NGO women use to make sense of their experiences within particular contexts.

Because limited qualitative work has examined the identity work undertaken within NGOs, this study can add to our understanding of how women discursively construct selves and a sense of collectivity within an NGO. A particular benefit of this type of work is that, as Fisher (1997:450) notes, in understanding “the heterogeneity of histories and processes from which NGOs emerge and within which they operate, we are prepared to explore the further opportunities for and constraints on NGOs.” This echoes Álvarez’s (1999) argument that to appreciate better “how much room may be available for NGOs to maneuver within the confines of the restructured late modern … terrain of local and global gender politics” researchers must avoid generalizations by capturing the intricate processes in “both the local implementation of the New Gender Policy Agenda and in and among NGOs themselves.” The study proposed here accomplishes this task by shifting our attention from NGOs as a static set of ideals and practices to a “fluid web of relationships” (Fisher 1997:450). Specifically, highlighting the numerous “connections of NGO actions … to the flows of funding, knowledge, ideas, and peoples” can reveal “new and innovative possibilities for NGO practices” (Fisher 1997:450).
Chapter 3 discusses the key theoretical orientations that will be used to capture the identity work of NGO women. In particular, these theoretical outlooks aid in understanding (1) the interpretive processes of self-construction and (2) how these activities are situated in and contributive to a sense of collectivity—namely, being part of the realities of an NGO. The attempt is made to view women’s selves as actively and dynamically constructed in situ (with the NGO) so that questions about NGOs, such as whether NGOs are “doing good”, are not divorced from an “understanding of what happens in specific places and at specific times” (Fisher 1997:449). In all, this study looks at how understandings of gender in an NGO are constructed, sustained, and critiqued by the way NGO women frame their identities, concerns, and relationships with others in the organization. In this way, a more detailed exploration emerges of the types of gender discourses and practices being reproduced and/or subverted in NGOs today.
CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

This study intends to continue the work in the NGO literature with regards to discourses about gender in development but considers how it might be expanded with the contributions of the following theoretical frameworks: new social movement (NSM) theory, particularly the framing perspective (Snow and Benford 1988, 1992; Benford and Snow 2000; Broad 2002), feminist intersections analysis (Baca-Zinn and Thorton-Dill 1996; Collins 2000; hooks 1981), and active interviewing (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Following the version of grounded theory outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), these perspectives and related concepts provide the basis for the theoretical sensitivity that will be used to understand the identity work of NGO women. Consistent with this view of grounded theory, the point is not to test a specific theory, but rather to use these orientations as guides when exploring identity processes.

New Social Movement Perspective on NGOs: Rationale for Use

Important insights about collective action have come from the literature on social movements. The NGO phenomenon, however, has been under-examined from a social movement perspective.6 Eckstein’s (1989) review of the predominant literature on popular protest and contemporary social movements in Latin America, for example, analyses the variety of forms of protests but not the institutional vehicles, such as NGOs, used to articulate it. This tendency stems in part from what Clarke (1998:38) calls the “anti-institutional bias” adopted by some scholarship. In this scholarship, social movements are often understood as “a collective, organized, sustained, and noninstitutional challenge to authorities, powerholders, or cultural beliefs and practices” (Goodwin and Jasper 2003:3, emphasis added). The general omission of NGOs in the social movement literature relates to how some scholars are “opposed to the

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6 Exceptions to this include Bebbington (1996), Sethi (1993), Landim (1993), and Wignaraja (1993)
institutionalization of social movements that the NGO phenomenon seems to imply” (Clarke 1998:39). Fisher (1997:451) makes this point by noting “[t]his oversight occurs in part because analysts of social movements generally stereotype NGOs as primarily social development agencies and contrast the bureaucratization or institutionalization characteristic of some NGOs with the more fluid and fragmented nature of social movements.”

The idea that NGOs and social movements should be approached as if they were categorically separate concepts, however, “ignores the evidence that NGOs often initiate or sustain social movements … or are the institutional vehicles that articulate protest and collective action”, Fisher (1997:451) notes. It is thus important to recognize that “Latin American NGOs have been vital in fashioning and circulating the discourses, transformational goals, and ethical-political principles that are constitutive of … movement[s]”, such as the women’s, feminist and other collective actions (Álvarez 1999:185). In speaking about the Latin American feminist movement in particular, Álvarez (1999:185) writes that:

NGOs have played a central role in setting up and sustaining these various forms of formal articulation among the vast range of actors who make up the [Latin American] feminist field. They have been crucial to articulating what I call social movement webs—the capillary connections among feminists and their sympathizers who now occupy a wide variety of social and political locations …. That is, in producing and circulating innumerable newsletters and publications, organizing issue-focused conferences and seminars, establishing electronic networks and a wide gamut of other communications media, NGOs have functioned as the key nodal points through which the spatially dispersed and organizationally fragmented feminist field remains divisively articulated.

Indeed, the rise of NGOs in the late 20th century coincides with what some consider as a “new era of women’s mobilization” in Latin America (Jaquette 1989:4; Jaquette and Wolchik 1998). Given the growing view of NGOs as a form of, or support for, collective action, Fisher (1997:450-51) argues that NGO scholarship today is in need of theoretical frameworks that “alert us to the complexities of local sites, … attend to the multiple subjectivities of actors, … [and] direct our attention from local sites to [their] larger contexts.”
This work argues that the role of new social movement (NSM) theory offers a way to understand the construction of subjectivities within NGOs because it captures the everyday interpretive (framing) practices of social actors and the contextual settings in which these identities are fashioned. To the extent that NSM scholarship centers on “identity work”—“anything people do, individually or collectively, to give meaning to themselves or others” (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996:115)—an NSM orientation assists in focusing on issues of NGO members’ identity and meaning, which are necessary “to avoid overessentializing NGOs” (Fisher 1997:450). An NSM perspective allows for this because it understands selves to be principally “agenic and culturally circumscribed” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000:12; Broad 2002). That is, identities represent interpretive constructions that are simultaneously embedded in particular circumstances, such as already established agendas, discourses, and resources. This perspective is relevant given the recent call by some for NGO researchers to start “[u]npacking the micropolitics of NGOs” (Fisher 1997:450) by paying “particular attention to social actors’ ongoing negotiations of meaning and practice (Murdock 2003:508). An NSM point of view offers the conceptual means to examine this understudied facet of the NGO terrain because of its “new emphases on culture, personal identity, and everyday life” (Best and Kellner 1997: 271).

In this study, the NSM perspective known as framing is used as an analytic for examining the production of NGO selves and their collective action. In particular, the recent formulation in NSM literature of framing as “interpretive practice” is principally adopted.

**Framing Perspective: A Brief Overview**

In a recent overview of the framing perspective, Benford and Snow (2000:611) note that the concept of frame has gained widespread use in the social sciences, such as cognitive psychology, linguistics, discourse analysis, communications, media studies and political science. It has been particularly popular in analytical and empirical studies in sociology, perhaps because
of Goffman’s (1974) book *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. In this early formulation, Goffman (1974:21) defines frames as “schemata of interpretation” that allow individuals “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” themselves, others, and occurrences in the world. Frames are the means by which persons fashion and assign meaning to phenomena (e.g., an event, a person, an object, etc.). To borrow from Goffman, frames are a way in which individuals *organize experience* for the purposes of guided action.

Benford and Snow (2000) also point out that within sociology framing has been an important theoretical orientation in the study of social movements and collective action, especially with respect to the framing processes that are part of the collective action. In this context, frames represent organized attempts by persons or groups to highlight certain social conditions in order to create some type of social change (Snow and Benford 1988, 1992). Persons or groups “frame, or assign meaning to and interpret, relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow and Benford 1988:198). For this study, framing will provide both a theoretical and empirical link between micro-level action of NGO members and macro-level conditions in which these actors are situated.

**Framing as Meaning Making Work**

Scholarship focused on the framing processes of collective action emerged, in large part, as a reaction to a dimension ignored in the social movement literature up to the mid-1980s, that is, “meaning work—the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings” (Benford and Snow 2000:613). As Snow and Benford (1992) note, while ideas, meanings, beliefs, values, and the more general notion of ideology have been part of the early history of social movement literature, these concepts tended to be treated as static descriptions or dismissed as irrelevant to collective action. The marginalization of meaning work has
traditionally is a consequence of the heavy emphasis on structure and institutional arrangements in early social movement literature, such as in the perspectives of resource mobilization and political process. Respectively these views emphasized the role of resources (e.g., time, money, etc.) and political conditions in the rise, maintenance, or fall of collective mobilization. In all, social movements were seen as “merely carriers of extant ideas and meanings that grow automatically out of structural arrangements, unanticipated events, or existing ideologies” (Benford and Snow 2000:613). In contrast, the framing perspective recognizes that actors are more than “carriers” of movements; they are also actively involved in the production, maintenance, and subversion of meanings for “constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers” (Benford and Snow 2000:613). To borrow from Hall (1982), actors in collective mobilization are involved in the “politics of signification.”

The notion of “framing” is used by scholars, in this case, to convey the signifying work and meaning construction of movement actors (Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina 1982; Snow and Benford 1988). Reminiscent of the early work of theorists like George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, these formulations attempt to move away from behaviorist notions that view social action in the reductionistic framework of stimulus-response. People do not simply respond to given stimuli (e.g., an economic environment); action is charted from within symbolic interaction. As suggested by its Greek root synbolē, symbol means “to throw together.” In this case, the social world is not obtrusive, or a thing to use Emile Durkheim’s imagery. Instead, reality is symbolic to the extent that persons construct (throw together) a world through a process of meaning making. For this reason, Lyotard (1984:35) argues that behavior does not emerge “stricto sensu” as a product of mechanical stimuli-response processes; instead, “it works.” In short, human volition is not ancillary, but essential to the generation of behavior or movement.
From a framing perspective, social action is thus an agenic, dynamic, and contentious process of constructing reality. As Benford and Snow (2000:614) explain, social action understood as framing is active in the sense that something is being done, and processual in the sense of a dynamic, evolving process. It entails agency in the sense that what is evolving is the work of social movement organizations or movement activists. And it is contentious in the sense that it involves the generation of interpretive frames that not only differ from existing ones but that may also challenge them.

Moreover, this process of creating interpretive frames (meaning constructs) is not done in isolation but with others (in interaction), and thus in the social movement literature the products of framing activity are referred to as “collective action frames.”

There are different traditions with respect to frames. Some scholars (see Johnston 1995; Klandermans 1997) view frames more as psychological schemas, or cognitive maps, when explaining behavior. More sociological approaches, however, prefer to see frames not as maps (that could imply static organization) but more as meaning works produced *in interaction with others*. For this reason, Gamson (1992:111) distinguishes collective action frames from schemas in that “[c]ollective action frames are not merely aggregations of individual attitudes and perceptions but also the outcome of negotiation shared meaning.” The verb *framing* is a constant reminder that humans do not simply read off the meaning of the world via schemas, but more importantly bring a world into being through interpretive activity engaged with others.

**Meaning Work for Collective Action**

Snow and Benford (1992:67-68) define “collective action frames” as “emergent action-oriented sets of belief and meanings that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns.” Collective action frames are thus the result of the signifying work done by social movements, communities, and groups of people. Collective action frames organize and give meaning to the “world out there” in ways that “mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to
garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonist” (Snow and Benford 1988:198).

Collective action frames can be understood as the interpretive set of “beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” (Benford and Snow 2000:614).

Within the social movement literature there have generally been two characteristic features in collective action frames: core framing tasks and discursive processes. The former refers primarily to collective action frames’ action-oriented function that serve social movement organizations, while the latter deals with the interactive process that generate the frames and their core tasks (Benford and Snow 2000:615).

As movement actors construct and negotiate a shared understanding of what they define as a problematic situation (e.g., poverty, gender inequality, etc.) that is in need of change, collective action frames are made. However, the process of meaning making does not end here; movement participants clarify these frames for the purposes of assigning blame for the problem, explaining how the situation could be remedied with alternative arrangements, and motivating others (often non-participants) to act in concert with movement actors to promote the proposed change. These efforts also constitute framing processes and are referred to as core framing tasks; they are centrally important to the livelihood of movements and their related organizations. As was discussed earlier, NGOs may also be regarded as important organizations with respect to their impact on collective action, as in the case of their gender advocacy work.

Snow and Benford (1988) discuss three types of core framing tasks: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing. Diagnostic framing involves the process of identifying a problem or set of problems. Scholars have shown that movement organizations articulate “injustice frames” (Gamsom, Fireman, Rytina 1982). Studies draw attention to the
way in which movements identify the “victims” and “perpetrators” of a specific injustice and often amplify victimization (Best 1987; White 1999). The function of diagnostic framing is to focus on what/who is to blame or stands to be responsible for the existence of situation in need of change. Benford (1987) notes, however, that consensus does not necessarily follow from this process and often can be the source of intramovement conflict. As noted in Chapter 2, for example, NGOs and their constituents may differ in evaluating the impact of the gender policy agenda and professionalization of NGOs for the promotion of a gender perspective in development (Álvarez 1999; Ewig 1999; Fisher 1997).

Prognostic framing consists of articulating a proposed solution to the problem, or at least a strategy to alleviate the situation. Diagnostic and prognostic framing are sometimes related, in that the identification of specific problems and their causes can lead to an implicit solution—namely, the elimination of the source of the assumed problem. Thus the process of diagnosing can constrain the range of perceived solutions and strategies. Because prognostic framing includes offering solutions or alternative arrangements to those suggested opponents, Benford (1987:75) introduce the idea of “counterframing” to convey the way movement organizations contrast themselves to the people or organizations being associated with the problem in question. As Fisher (1997) notes, NGOs have often been dubbed as a solution to the problems associated with development, particularly because of their perceived distance from the politics of the state and private interest.

The final core framing task is motivational framing, and which offers the rationale for people to engage in collective action to ameliorate a condition. Motivational frames are the “call to arms” component that provides the vocabulary and motive for mobilization. Gamson (1995) refers to this facet as the “agency” component of collective action frames. In a study of the Latin
American and Caribbean Feminist meetings called *Encuentros* (Encounters), Álvarez et al. (2002) show that the issue of “autonomy” has recently emerged as an important motive for collective action. In this case, however, questions were raised about the degree of autonomy of NGOs, especially feminist ones, from the expanding neoliberal context and whether NGOs as institutions of this system have “‘sold out’ to the forces of ‘neoliberal patriarchy’” (Álvarez 1999:199).

Beyond the core framing tasks, the second facet of collective action frames noted by Benford and Snow (2000: 623) is the interpretive, discursive process of frame development and generation. Discursive processes refer to the talk, conversations, and written communications of movement participants that take place during or regarding movement activities. Two types of processes are frame articulation and frame amplification. The first “involves the connection and alignment of events and experiences so that they hang together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion” (Benford and Snow 2000:623). Here experiences are assembled and packaged through meaning-work. Álvarez (1999), for example, demonstrates the importance of the publications, pamphlets, conferences, and seminars put together by NGOs to allow itself and other social movements to stay “discursively articulated.” Frame amplification involves highlighting and accenting a particular issue or belief. Sometimes this takes place through powerful slogans that speak to the larger frame of the movement.

The foregoing discussion of the characteristics associated with frames was not mean to be exhaustive (see Benford and Snow 2000), but to draw attention to what Benford (1997:413) refers to as “the fact that ‘frame has two different implications as a metaphor,’” sometimes referred to as the noun/verb tension. That is, frames imply a substantive dimension (frames as noun) and a processual one (framing as verb) dimension. According to Benford (1997), both
sides are needed to appreciate meaning work in collective activities and their dual use is represents a major contribution of the framing perspective.

**Recent Concern with Framing Analysis**

Recently, scholars have been discussing the state of framing practices and its different connotations (Benford 1997; Benford and Snow 2000; Ferree and Merrill 2000; Snow and Benford 2000). In particular, attention has centered on how the noun/verb tension has been treated in the literature. Benford (1997:414), for example, offers an insider’s critique of the framing literature by arguing that inquiry has overemphasized a description of frames (as nouns) which has lead to a “laundry list of types of frames.” This, in turn, has neglected important work on the active construction and generation of frames—namely, the act of framing (as verb). Hart (1996) similarly points out that while much has been said about how movement participants select “frame characteristics that will be appealing to potential participants,” much less is known about how “frames get made.”

The descriptive penchant in framing studies, according to Snow and McAdam (2000:62), suggests that “the link between a movement’s collective identity and the personal or individual identities of movement adherents has received almost no attention in the literature.” In other words, the understandable focus on the “collective” in collective action has rendered invisible the “personal” within this domain. Benford and Snow (2000:624) acknowledge a problem which has, in part, frustrated such analytic work: research on framing is “highly labor intensive, requiring not only fieldwork over time but access to and retrieval of the discourse that is part and parcel of the framing process.”

Some locate the source of this problem in a deep assumption in NSM literature that “movement collective identities become bases for members’ definitions of self” (Stryker, Owens, and White 2000:26). In NSM literature, this assumption is perhaps best characterized by the idea
of frame alignment, which refers to an “interactive process by which individuals’ worldview, grievances and actions are linked to [or made congruent with] an organization or movement’s agenda and actions” (Ramirez-Valles 2003:208-09; Snow et al. 1986). Take, for example, Snow and McAdam’s (2000:49) work on identity construction, wherein they recommend focusing on how “personal identities of prospective participants have to be modified so as to enhance the congruence with the movements’ collective identity.” Personal-identity, then, has to a large extent been understood as self-changes in order to mold to a movement or organization’s collective identity. But as Stryker, Owen, and White (2000:26) contend, the problem is that “merging individual and collective identities by definition or theoretical fiat obviates important theoretical and empirical issues in relation between individual and collective identities.” In particular, subsuming the self within collective action limits analytic approaches to the construction of self in social movement. This perceived limitation in framing analysis has lead to static tendencies that partially undermine what Snow and Benford (2000) consider the original intention of framing analysis: to provide a view of collective action based on the dynamic interaction of self and collective identity.

**Recent Advancement in Framing Analysis**

Recent advancements in the NSM and framing literature attempt to overcome the problems with analyzing the interactive self/movement nexus by understanding framing as “interpretive practice” (Broad, Crawley, Foley 2004:511; Broad 2002). Drawing on the work of Gubrium and Holstein (1997, 2000, 2001) and their view of the construction of subjectivities, these scholars intend to reinvigorate an interactive view of individual and collective action. As Broad explains (2002:319), framing as interpretive practice offers “an analytic that views selves as actively constructed in interplay with a social movement.” This study principally employs this conception of framing. I believe that it better captures the self and collective identity
constructions of women in NGOs regarding gender discourses. The discussion that follows explores some of the central features of this approach to framing analysis.

**Framing as Interpretive Practice**

**Self and Collective Nexus: An Interactive Approach**

Broad (2002) relies on Gubrium and Holstein’s work to understand the construction of individual selves within collective action. According to Gubrium and Holstein (2000:102), the collective (e.g., social institutions, organizations, social movements) represents a set of “going concerns” that refer to “relatively stable, routinized, ongoing patterns of action and interaction.” Selves, on the other hand, are the individual constructions that emerge amidst these “going concerns” or relatively stable patterns of interaction. Especially important is that for Gubrium and Holstein (2000:9), this suggests that the social construction of selves emerges out of “the interplay between circumstantial demands, restraints, and resources, on the one hand, and self-constituting social actions on the other.” For Broad (2002:320) the value of this approach is that it provides “a means by which to examine the self/social movement nexus that does not subsume the dynamics of self-construction into collective constructions but explains them as interactive, reflexive processes.”

In this sense, the construction of subjectivities implies the dual workings of social context and personal agency in their formation. Subjectivities draw from a context of going concern (e.g., NGO) and its discursive resources, demands, and constraints in the construction of self-identities. Holstein and Gubrium (2000:12) clarify that the self is not a passive recipient that simply absorbs or consumes this context for the purposes of constructing an identity; the self is

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7 This section relies on the recent theoretical and empirical work of Broad (2002) and Broad, Crawley, and Foley (2004) on the PFLAG movement organization in which they advance an interactive and dynamic understanding of framing processes in collective action movements and organizations.
far more active and should be appreciated as “artfully agenic.” Put differently, individuals must still interpret, negotiate, or give meaning to the going concern in place. Using this perspective to study women in NGOs, it is thus becomes important to see their construction of self-identities as made under the conditions of the going concern of the NGO (e.g., gender advocacy) and even the broader context in which the NGO functions (e.g., neoliberal environment). Furthermore, this perspective suggests that NGO women, while circumscribed by the NGO, remain agenic since they also actively interpret and negotiate this context. As Broad (2002:320) points out, this approach understands that “discursive environments set the conditions of possibility for constructions of self while also assuming an ethnomethodological view that regards self as continually produced.”

In all, what Holstein and Gubrium (2000:104) highlight is that the production of selves happens in the context of local cultures (e.g., organization) that provide resources for individuals’ identity work; or, as they note, selves are made “in accordance with local relevancies” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000:104). Specifically, local culture represents “the set … of regularized ways of assigning meaning and responding to things that is collectively derived and available for application within proximate circumstances” (Gubrium and Holstein 1997:172). To the extent that selves are constructed in concert with going concerns, NGOs can be viewed as discursive resources for the production of selves within this domain. Indeed, Holstein and Gubrium (2000:165) argue that selves are constituted and informed by local cultures such as groups, organizations, and other collectivities. Thus, in this study, NGOs are considered an important site for self-production, in that they serve as the conditional, discursive resources for individuals’ identity work. Broad (2002) notes, however, that these contextual conditions are “not directives” that speak to selves’ mere “embeddedness” or integration into the
functioning of the larger collective identity (like an NGO). If this were the case, framing would again return to an assumption that ultimately subsumes the self into the collective. Instead, Broad (2002:321) argues that

*It is the production of selves through interpretive practice that is embedded in the working of organization and collectives as they continually create themselves—the interplay between constructions of self and social movement (collectivity). Thus the production of a social movement [in our case an NGO] self … is the interaction between discursive possibilities and constitutive activities of identity work.*

Conceptualizing selves as the result of an *interactive* dynamic between self-production and local cultures (like an NGO), provides a unique and promising means of examining NGO selves. In particular, such a perspective would address the need for “a more ethnographic approach [that] would contextualize NGOs as the product of dynamic social interaction rather than as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ *types*” (Murdock 2003:509; Carroll 1992; Fisher 1997)

**Framing as Interpretive Practice: A Theoretical Strategy**

Borrowing from Gubrium and Holstein (1997), Broad, Crawley, and Foley (2004:511) adopt the strategy of “framing as an interpretive practice” to study the production of selves in collective action. According to these scholars, this view of framing returns to the “original intention in formulating frame analysis [which] was to analyze both frames and framing”, that is, the noun/verb dimensions of collective action (Broad, Crawley, and Foley 2004:511). Again, thinking in terms of NGO women, while women’s selves are circumscribed by the going concerns (discursive resources, etc.) of the NGO, they are also actively constructing their identities through interpretive work. Framing as an interpretive and intersubjective practice thus shows the collective action frames (nouns) of NGOs (what it says it believes and does), along with the framing, or meaning making, processes (verbs) that produce, contest, and negotiate these meanings. At heart, this interactive process is the site of the constitution of NGO selves and thus a central focus of this work, which intends to “alert us to the complexities of local
[NGO] sites” (Fisher 1997:450) by examining more closely women’s experiences and identity work within NGOs.

According to Gubrium and Holstein (1997:114), interpretive practice is “the constellation of procedures, conditions, and resources through which reality is apprehended, understood, organized and represented in the course of everyday life.” For Gubrium and Holstein (1997:114), interpretive practice thus contains two moments that correspond to and link up the “concrete and representational” facets of frames—which they refer to as discourses-in-practice and discursive practice. Interpretive practice, in other words, brings in both the substantive issues (the whats, or frames) and the ethnographic practices (the hows, or framing) that make up the fabric of meaning making in NGO collective action. Discourses-in-practice are those cultural discourses in use and which constrain meaning making, in that they are already in place and functioning locally. It thus relates to the constitutive dimension of discourse/frames—the whats. Thus, the idea of discursive practice stands as the active way individuals make meaning out of discourses already in play to construct a sense of collectivity (NGO) and self—the hows. This relates to the idea that reality (in this case an NGO) is not simply substantive but also an accomplished phenomena created by social actors. Highlighting the interpretive practice of individuals in collective action shows how NGO members “talk themselves into existence” (Broad, Crawley, and Foley 2004). As it relates to this study, NGO women’s identities are tied to their reliance on the dominant discourses of the NGO (e.g., gender advocacy) and their interpretation and negotiation with these narratives.

**NGOs and Intersections of (Framing) Power**

A third theoretical perspective used in this work to examine the identity work of NGO women is intersections analysis (Baca-Zinn and Thorton-Dill 1996; Collins 2000; hooks 1981). Emerging from contemporary feminist theory, this theoretical lens reveals how experiences are
multi-dimensional; they imply the junction of multiple social dimensions such as gender, race, class, nationhood, sexuality, and age, to name a few (Collins 2000). These social dimensions, in other words, do not exist in isolation from one another, but rather are interlocked so as to produce a multiplicity of experiential locations. To borrow from Bhabha (1994), sociological dimensions, such as gender and class, are not mutually exclusive categories, but rather are “hybrid” and crisscross one another. A significant consequence is the production of difference, or the differentiation of experiences due to the varied intersections of these social dimensions.

A specific form of difference that results from intersectionality is the production of specific experiences of privilege and subordination. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins (2000:23) argues that Black women’s subordination in the United States results from “intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation.” In this case, “the relationship among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations” establishes specific power dynamics and arrangements among social actors (McCall 2005:1771). Again, thinking in terms of an NGO, the experiences of middle/upper class, highly educated, light-skinned Colombian women may be different from women who do not have the same racial or class privileges, such as Afro-Colombian or indigenous women. Murdock (2003) has examined the extent to which the professionalization of feminist NGOs in Medellín, Colombia impacts community relations by accentuating class differences, which threaten close relationships between NGO women and community members. Similar work, however, has not been conducted within Colombian NGOs to address intersectional differences between NGO members.

On this note, Kondo (1990) points out that questions about NGOs cannot be answered without close attention to the situational contexts in which social actors experience and construct
their lives and political projects in an NGO. Kondo (1990) adopts a Foucauldian (Foucault [1978] 1990) view that power is not a unidimensional force, but rather is situated within different operating domains. Thus, while some actors may (repeatedly) wield considerable power, this attribute can also be relative to one’s position and shift depending on the relations considered, so that those privileged with power in one relationship may be subjects, to a lesser or greater degree, of power in another (Kondo 1990:45). According to Collins (2000:18, 228), “[i]ntersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice” through the “historically specific organization of power in which social groups are imbedded and in which they aim to influence.”

Especially significant for this work is recognizing the intersectional dynamics of privilege and subordination works to further de-essentialize NGOs. This is done by refusing to universalize experiences along gender, race, class, or other lines. Razavi and Miller (1995:37-38) point out, in this regard, that in the NGO literature the category of “women” is problematic, in the sense that it needs to be disaggregated: in addition to class, women are also divided by age and life cycle, not to mention nationality, race, ethnicity, religion and sexual preference …. Because women are positioned within society according to a variety of difference criteria, the interests they have in common as a group are similarly shaped in complex and sometimes conflicting ways; it is therefore difficult, if not impossible, to generalize about the interests of women. Although it would be a fair generalization to say that all women experience subordination, the fact that subordination has multiple causes and is extremely variable across time and space means that it is not sufficient as the single criteria fro explaining collective action.

To the extent that women do not all have the same experience with subordination, intersectionally advantaged women may be privy to certain benefits and protections of white-capitalist-patriarchy that other women (of darker skin tone, lower class standing, less education, etc.) may not have. Although the former may not have full male privilege, they are nevertheless beneficiaries of privilege.
Returning to our discussion of framing processes, it is thus possible to understand how the interpretive practices of NGO women are also tied to their intersectional experiences. More specifically, framing processes will also be differentiated along lines of privilege and subordination. Simply put, the intersectional experiences of NGO women will influence the legitimacy or power of their interpretive practice. As a result, not all framing processes will acquire the same legitimacy. To the extent that “frames, like metaphors, are ways of organizing thinking about political issues” (Gamson 1992:39), questions may be asked regarding what frames within an NGO are being advocated, if this advocacy is uniform or contested among NGO actors, and what are the consequences of relying on specific framing processes. Capturing the power dynamic (the differential privilege) of framing practices of NGO women thus furthers this study’s general effort to reveal the particularities of individual experience of NGO women. Intersections analysis aids this process by “rendering the category of ‘women’ a highly heterogeneous one” (Razavi and Miller 1995:37-38).

**Active Interviewing**

Finally, this work utilizes the approach to interviewing described by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) as “active”. Using active interviewing is a means to focus attention on NGO women’s active framing processes. In particular, active interviewing fosters a view of the interview as a dialogical, discursive, and active process. In addition, active interviewing can provide insight into how the intersections of gender, race, class, and other dimensions are negotiated and produce positions of privilege and subordination with respect to NGO members’ construction of self and sense of collectivity. As Holstein and Gubrium (1995) note, interviewees are “multivocal,” in that they hold multiple positions and perspectives. This recognition is used to uncover the multiple layers of experience that intersectional analysis suggests exists for NGO women. In all, active interviewing challenges the supposed “passive role” of the interviewee
(and interviewer) and thus is a useful approach to delineating the active identity work of NGO
women. A brief overview of this perspective is given below, with special attention to its
differences from a so-called “traditional” orientation to interviewing, its benefits for studying
identity work, and its utility to highlight the intersectional dimension of NGO women’s
experiences.

Before moving into an exploration of the active interview approach, it is important to
clarify why a discussion of this method is part of this study’s theoretical orientations, rather than
being included in its methods section. After all, is not interviewing more of a methodological
consideration? It is important to note that Holstein and Gubrium (1995) discuss “the active
interview” primarily as a perspective and not simply as a methodological tool called
interviewing. In short, active interviewing makes epistemological comments on the interview
process itself. In their words:

This book presents a perspective—an implicit theory of the interview—more than an
inventory of methods. We are not suggesting that the “active” interview is a distinctive
research tool; instead, we use the term to emphasize that all interviews are reality-
constructing, meaning making occasions, whether recognized or not. We offer a social
constructionist approach … that considers the process of meaning production to be as
important for social research as the meaning that is produced (Holstein and Gubrium
1995:4)

As will be discussed later, active interviewing focuses our attention on not only the substantive
features of meaning making (what is being constructed), but also the production of narratives
(how meaning is made). This provides an interview approach that attends to the hows and whats
of meaning making described in the framing literature.

“Traditional” Interviewing: A Search and Discovery Mission

Interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways people try to understand one
another. There are many different types and approaches to interviews: individual, face-to-face
conversation, face-to-face group exchange, mailed (self-administered) or telephone
questionnaires. Interviews can also be structured, semistructured, or unstructured in nature. For social science researchers, interviews constitute a central means by which information is obtained. Some estimate that 90% of all social science inquiry uses interviews as a source of data (Briggs 1986).

The heavy reliance on interviews, not just by social scientists, but also administrators, politicians, medical practitioners, and the media has lead some to say that we live in an “interview society” (Atkinson and Silverman 1997). The interview as a means of knowing (e.g., to describe, interrogate, assist, test, evaluate) is so pervasive that it is practically a “universal mode of systematic inquiry” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:1). Qualitative researcher, however, now see interviews as more than neutral tools for gathering data; they are fundamentally active interactions between two (or more) people wherein information and meaning are negotiated and constructed (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Increasingly, the focus of interviews is not just on the traditional whats (substantive descriptions of everyday life) but also the hows (the active work to make meaning and order in everyday life) (Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Silverman 1997).

According to Holstein and Gubrium (1995:2), the conventional image used to describe the interview is that of a “search-and-discovery mission, with the interviewer bent on finding what is already there inside variably cooperative respondents.” The primary challenge of the interviewer is to extract information as directly as possible. This conception of interviewing is distinctly positivistic, in that research is assumed to begin with an empirical referent (the interviewee). This point of departure is supposed to represent the so-called “real world” embodied in the subject-respondent, as opposed to particular standpoint(s) being articulated.
To begin a study in this manner, interpretive judgments must be excluded as much as possible from the interview process. Although researchers are only supposed to “reflect nature,” perceptual errors are always possible. Thus while a key methodological approach in the social sciences is observation, it is only after rigorous training that perception can be trusted to discover truth through interviewing. Because the interviewer and interviewee may be unreliable, the interpreter of data must be trained to analyze data in particular way. It is the very fact that interviews represent “conversations” that they are also “framed as a potential source of bias, error, misunderstanding, or misdirection, a persistent set of problems to be minimized” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:3). This issue has often been described as emerging from human errors, such as “response effects” or “nonsampling errors” (Bradburn 1983). For example, error in the data may result when the respondent has faulty memory or deliberately tries to please the interviewer by providing a “socially desirable” response; these factors can prevent the researcher from learning something from the respondent (Bradburn 1983:291). According to this conventional view of interviewing, the researcher must learn to counter the effects of situational exigencies, in order to enhance the prospects for discovering knowledge from respondents.

Due to this requirement, data collection in interviews becomes highly instrumental. Logistical refinements are thought to lead to a more “natural” generation of data. As Holstein and Gubrium (1995:3) note, “the literature on interview strategy and technique remains primarily concerned with maximizing the flow of valid, reliable information while minimizing distortions of what the respondent knows.” One response to this problem has been to increase methodological sophistication so as to neutralize the interview process. To the extent that the interview process is understood as a “pipeline for transmitting knowledge,” various techniques
are introduced to standardize the conversation and ensure the study is not replete with bias (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:3).  

In structured interviews, the interviewer asks all respondents the same series of preestablished questions with a limited set of response categories. There is usually little room for variation in the responses, except where open-ended questions (which are usually infrequent) are asked. Moreover, the interviewer records responses according to coding schemes already developed by the project director. By heavily controlling the pace of the interview, standardizing both questions and answers, and repeating these processes for all interviews, this interview context is supposed to allow the interviewer to play a neutral role. In behaviorist fashion, the structured interview proceeds under a stimulus-response format that assumes that the respondent will truthfully answer questions previously determined to reveal satisfactory indicators of the variable in question. Subjects are considered essentially passive in this scenario, representing “vessels-of-answers.” Survey instruments tend to be structured in this manner.  

Jack Douglas (1985) notes that because conversations take place largely in the situational everyday worlds of societal members, interviews themselves should reflect this type of contingency and spontaneity to better capture the way the world actually works. For this reason, Douglas argues against “how-to” guidelines in conducting interviews, suggesting that interviewing and interviewers must be “creative” by adapting themselves to the ever-changing situations they encounter. Standard survey and structured questions create an overly detached interviewer and present an almost non-human subject to respondents; for Douglas (1985), this approach usually only touches the surface of experience and is unable to tap into the “emotional wellsprings” underneath. “Creative interviewing”, on the other hand, establishes a climate of mutual disclosure, in which the interviewers’ deep disclosure elicits reciprocal actions on the part...
of respondents. As Douglas (1985:51) notes, getting respondents to share deep feelings and emotions requires more than simply “probing” them, since mutual understanding requires that the “researcher…know thyself.”

According to Holstein and Gubrium (1995:13), Douglas presents a more dynamic view of the interview process but one that may be characterized as neo-positivistic. That is, while Douglas jettisons traditional formulae guiding interviews, he does not abandon the idea of respondents constituting a pure empirical referent that the researcher need only access. While interviews now may require “99 percent perspiration” in the form of developing mutual disclosure, subjects are still assumed to contain “wellsprings” of experience and researchers continue to be prospectors who tap into this rich resource. “Thus the subject behind Douglas’s respondent remains an essentially passive, if creatively emotional, fount of experience,” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:13). In all, Holstein and Gubrium (1995:7) argue that discussions of interviews often center on “the characteristics and aims of the interview process, with little attention paid to how interviews differ as occasion for knowledge production.” What is missing, in other words, is the recognition that interviews, or conversations, construct data, as much as they are a source of information.

Active Interview

Because of the fetish for methodological sophistication, Holstein and Gubrium (1995:2) argue that researchers ignore the most basic of epistemological questions in the interview process: “Where does this knowledge come from, and how is it derived?” For no matter what form the interview takes, whether highly structured, standardized, quantitatively oriented, or free-flowing exchange and creative, “all interviews are interactional events . . . constructed in situ . . . [and] a product of the talk between interview participants” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:2). This contrasts with the traditional “vessel-of-answers” approach which assumes that
the subject behind the respondent is passive. In other words, respondents are viewed as merely “containers” that hold information that can be extracted by the researcher in an unbiased manner so long as certain measures are taken (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:8).

Holstein and Gubrium argue that this approach is untenable given the recent “linguistic turn” in social philosophy. Knowledge can never be collected in such a disinterested manner, since “knowledge itself is a product of interaction . . . [and] is created from the action taken to obtain it” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:3). Given their epistemological stance, the traditional methodological image of the interview situation is inappropriate because it obscures the basic fact that “interviews fundamentally, not incidentally, shape the form and content of what is said” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:3).

The thrust of Holstein and Gubrium’s thesis may now be more apparent: The typical “vessel-of-answers” approach fails to recognize that both the interviewer and interviewee are always and unavoidably active; each is involved in “meaning making work” during the interview. The point is that meaning is not simply extracted by “asking the right questions” or by being more “creative” (for Douglas, more friendly and intimate) because meaning is constructed through the actual interview. The interviewer and interviewee are collaborators that assemble knowledge together. For this reason the authors contend that

if interview data are unavoidably collaborative, attempts to strip interviews of their interactional ingredients will be futile. Instead of adding to the long list of methodological constraints under which interviews should be conducted, we . . . [propose] an orientation whereby researchers acknowledge interviewers’ and respondents’ constitutive contributions and consciously and conscientiously incorporate them into the production and analysis of interview data (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:4).

According to Holstein and Gubrium (1995:73), active interviewing represents a “theoretical stance toward data collection and analysis.” This approach to interviewing aids in the study of NGO women’s identity work a couple ways.
**Active Interviewing and NGO Identity Work**

First, Holstein and Gubrium present a clear argument that treating respondents as a “passive vessel of answers” denies their active involvement in the production and maintenance of social reality. Consistent with our earlier discussion of interpretive practice, interviewers must be cognizant that NGO women are not static reservoirs of meanings about gender discourse in an NGO, but rather construct these meanings through interpretive actions within the NGO. In this vein, active interviewing reaffirms the idea presented in contemporary framing literature that NGO women’s identities are fundamentally interactional constructs and reflect the dynamic interplay between selves and their context. Holstein and Gubrium point out that traditional analysis amounts to systematically grouping and summarizing descriptions and offering a coherent framework to explain these details of the social world. That is, the “objective whats overwhelm the hows” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:79). In contrast, “active interview data are analyzed to show the dynamic interrelatedness of the what and the how” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:9). Consequently, in presenting findings the goal is to reveal not only what meanings are present but how they are constructed. Most notably, Holstein and Gubrium suggest that researchers should focus on dialogue or how conversation establishes meaning about self and the NGO. Certainly a better understanding of gender discourses in NGOs involves examining women’s way of talking about themselves, their ideas, and relationships with others in the organization.

Second, active interviewing offers a means of revealing intersectional issues. A primary goal in active interviewing is to cultivate the respondent’s narrative activity: “this means that the respondent’s positional shifts, linkages, and horizons of meanings take precedence over the tacit linkages and horizons of the predesigned questions that the interviewer is prepared to ask” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:76-77). In this sense, the interviewer may want to promote
multivocality and shifts in narrative positions (e.g., asking the interviewee to move from the role of boss to co-worker) to expose the potentially multifaceted answers of respondents. In their terminology, “multivocality” allows for the possibility of “narrative linkages,” which illustrate the multiple ways respondents are connected to one another and even to their own selves (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:69). Fostering multivocality is useful for revealing the multiple dimensions of experience and of attending to intersectionality.

It is also important that these “narrative linkages” can be the groundwork to “demonstrate the reach of the political into areas typically assumed to be personal” (Reinharz 1992: 249-50). Similar to Dorothy Smith’s (1987) idea of “institutional ethnography,” the goal is to reveal the relationship between personal experiences and larger social structures. DeVault (1999: 49) writes that “[i]nstitutional ethnography is always concerned with institutional connections, with relations across and among various sites of activity, and with the coordination of these sites with ruling regimes.” Active interviewing can provide a way to show “relations of ruling” or relationships of privilege and subordination.

What follows in Chapter 4 is a discussion of the methods and analysis used to show NGO women’s identity work and how their interpretive efforts shape discourses about gender in an NGO. Specifically, a grounded theory methodology (Strauss and Corbin 1998) is adopted. Along with the theoretical perspectives mentioned above, this analytic strategy is used generate primary themes associated with how NGO women produce a sense of self and collectivity in the NGO. This strategy examines the women’s experiences, opinions, and concerns in the NGO with regards to gender discourses as they are co-constructed in the interview process.
CHAPTER 4
METHOD AND ANALYSIS

Method

NGO Under Study: World Vision Colombia

Analysis in this work draws material from interviews conducted with women working and/or volunteering for one Colombian NGO, World Vision Colombia (WVC).8 WVC is part of the larger World Vision International community that recognizes itself as a “Christian humanitarian organization working for the well-being of poor and vulnerable people—especially children (World Vision pamphlet). WVC has been active in Colombia for several decades on projects of poverty alleviation and community development with a focus on youth. As they state on their official webpage:

Visión Mundial Colombia es una Organización de carácter Humanitario sin ánimo de lucro, que trabaja desde 1.978 en algunas de las comunidades más pobres, oprimidas y vulnerables del país con especial énfasis en la niñez desamparada (Visión Mundial Colombia 2005a).

World Vision Colombia is an Organization of Humanitarian character without a spirit for profit, that has worked since 1978 in some of the poorest, oppressed and vulnerable communities of the country with special emphasis in the abandoned children.

WVC is regularly characterized as an intermediary social service delivery, or “mainstream”9 NGO, since it is most often identified as a “relief” and “development” organization, although WVC is also committed to raising public awareness and advocating for justice (World Vision

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8 After speaking with WVC members, it was decided that it would be difficult to disguise the identity of the organization to those familiar with the NGO field in Colombia, given its large size and well-known history as an intermediary NGO in the area. As a result, the NGO’s actual name (WVC) is used but in order to protect the identities of the women I interviewed, I disguise identifying information.

9 Some typologize NGOs into the categories of “alternative” and “mainstream” (Fisher 1997:445). The “alternative” NGOs are often seen as similar to social movement organizations. Examples such as Left, feminist, human rights, and other similarly motivated NGOs may fit within the “alternative” category. Álvarez (1999) refers to feminist NGOs in Latin America as “hybrid,” because they are a mixture of gender policy advocacy and movement activities. “Mainstream”, or what some call “intermediary,” NGOs are more associated with development, and often the central focus of NGO literature, such as WVC (Carroll 1992). This second type is characterized as primarily concerned with providing social service provision rather than consciousness-raising and mobilization (Álvarez 1999).
pamphlet). Some social movement perspectives would suggest that this type of NGO (i.e., development oriented) is categorically distinct from a social movement organization. Differentiations of this type are part of the tension between institutionalism and collective action found in social movement literature. As discussed in Chapter 3, however, this work does not start from an assumption that inherently separates NGOs from collective action. Instead this work seeks to understand the narrative production of NGO selves, which includes the creation of both an individual and collective (NGO) identity.

Furthermore, it is relevant to listen to a wide range of women’s voices—such as those working in so-called “mainstream” NGOs—in order to appreciate how these women’s “interpretations of the structural forces they face, and the strategies they ultimately choose, are formed in concert with others” (Murdock 2003:511, emphasis added). Returning to Murdock’s call to go beyond dualistic categorizations of NGO activity, it may be fruitful to avoid simplistic bifurcations of NGOs into “alternative” and “mainstream.” For if the success of a gender perspective relies heavily on the participation of women, “it is the organization of [all] women within civil society that requires examination” (Moser 1993:191). To the extent that so-called alternative NGOs (e.g., feminist) and social movement organizations are not “the sum total of women’s social movement activity” in Latin America (Murdock 2003:522), it is important to study women’s self-interpretations and collective mobilization activity in a wide range of sites. The study of WVC offers a clear opportunity for this type of investigation.

Sample

I conducted and audiotaped, in-depth, private interviews face-to-face and over the telephone with 27 women working and/or volunteering for WVC. I conducted seventeen face-to-face interviews at WVC’s headquarters in Bogotá, and eight telephone interviews with women working and/or volunteering in Cali, Barranquilla, and Soacha for the same organization. Two
more personal interviews were done with women in WVC’s downtown branch office. Interviews were conducted over a six-week period in June and July of 2007. The women were given the choice to respond in Spanish or English; all chose to do the interview in Spanish.

Participants were recruited through a listserv and e-mail announcements directed at a large number of WVC members. I was also presented to each department in WVC’s central building in Bogotá as the principal investigator (P.I.) of a study on gender in the NGO. This allowed WVC staff and volunteers to recognize me and listen to a brief description of the study; they were given information on how to contact me. A number of participants were recruited after these meetings as some personally approached me and volunteered to participate. Other participants were recruited through word of mouth. To be included, the women only had to be working and/or volunteering for WVC in some capacity.

Demographic data (e.g., race, class, age, etc.) was not requested during the interview at the request of WVC administrators and many of the respondents themselves. Some of the women did spontaneously note personal demographic information, such as race and class, but the majority did not. The main reason for refraining from collecting this information was that it would allow for easy identification by fellow co-workers and administrators. As discussed in the results, WVC employees and volunteers consider themselves very close to one another and think that they would be able to easily recognize who said what if certain demographic information was made available. As a result, no descriptive demographic information about respondents is provided.

The lack of these descriptive statistics makes assessing representativeness and the diversity of the sample impossible. Nevertheless, the aim of the sample recruitment strategies in this study was not to generalize about a larger population of WVC employees and volunteers by
obtaining a representative sample. Instead, the goal was to capture a sufficiently diverse sample of experiences to develop a conceptual analysis of the processes associated with how women’s discursive production of a sense of self and collectivity in the NGO, particularly with regards to meanings in their discourse about gender. Consistent with grounded theory studies, sample size and composition is determined by “theoretical saturation,” which means that “no additional data are being found whereby the [researcher] can develop properties of the category” (Glaser and Strauss 1967:61). This approach is also consistent with an active interviewing strategy, wherein the idea is to “continuously solicit and analyze representative horizons of meanings” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:74) related to the identity work of women in WVC. As Holstein and Gubrium (1995:74) note, the “‘sampling frame’ as it were, is meanings.” Thus the idea is not simply representativeness but the acquisition of a diverse set of meanings subjectively relevant to the respondents.

As is customary, consent procedures were used. All participants were asked to read an informed consent form and to sign it before participating in the interview. It was explained to all participants that their participation was voluntary and that their involvement in the study could be terminated at any time. It was also explained that their identity and their responses would be kept confidential to the extent permitted by the law.

**Interviews**

In order to facilitate recruitment and accommodate participants, the majority of the in-depth face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted in a private office in WVC’s headquarter building, which provided both a convenient and comfortable site for the participant.  

10 The PI traveled to the WVC’s downtown building to conduct two interviews that were also

10 I would like to thank WVC for providing me with a private office to conduct both personal and telephone interviews.
done in a private room. Interviews lasted 60 minutes on average with a range of 40-90 minutes. Participants were not paid or given compensation. The audiotaped interviews were subsequently transcribed in Spanish and then translated into English by the P.I. All interviews yielded usable transcripts.

Interviews were open-ended but I did have a general interview guide that consisted of general questions (see Appendices A and B). The scope of this general interview guide evolved after a meeting with WVC members. One of WVC’s administrators asked eight members to participate in an open discussion to generate this general interview guide. This was done in order to reflect the specific interests and concerns of WVC and its interests with regards to gender. This is consistent with the goals of this study to have women reflect and discuss their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with regards to the production of self in WVC. Consistent with an active interview approach, interviews were meant to be flexible enough to encourage dialogue but they still had organization. According to Holstein and Gubrium (1995:76), the active interview is guided by the interviewer who must be “prepared to furnish precedence, incitement, restraint, and perspective as the interview proceeds, not to avoid them.” In general, the direction of the interviews offered WVC women the chance to describe themselves and their relationship experiences in WVC as they relate to gender, but participants were free to focus on issues of interest to them to talk and to their sense of self. In addition to interviews, organizational materials (pamphlets, reports, and other organizational documents) were used to highlight WVC women’s talk of the organization.

**Analytic Approach**

This study uses Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) version of grounded theory and guided the coding process, particularly the strategies of open, axial, and selective coding (all of which are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs). The coding process began with the open coding of
substantive themes that were found in a line-by-line and paragraph reading of the transcripts. The goal in open coding is to capture emergent categories. These categories are abstractions from the raw data and are initially relatively specific concepts that underlie the concrete examples and experiences that make up the data. While no pre-established categories are used during open coding, this process is to a certain extent informed by the theoretical orientations. These concepts helped guide me to develop a line of inquiry and to uncover data that I might have otherwise missed. The point at this initial stage is to generate as many codes as possible without considering the possible immediate relevance to pre-established categories or theoretical frameworks. In addition, open coding was also performed while using the constant comparative method initially explained by Glaser and Strauss (1967). LaRossa (2005:841) succinctly explains this method:

The “basic defining rule” of constant comparison is that, while coding an indicator for a concept, one compares the indicator with previous indicators that have been coded in the same way. An indicator refers to a word, phrases, or sentences, in the materials being analyzed. A concept is a label or name associated with an indicator or indicators.

In this analysis, narrative instances associated with women’s sense of self in WVC were identified. Specifically, coding was done on various aspects of women’s experiences in WVC that focus on how they talk about themselves, their concerns, and their relationships with others in the NGO.

Axial coding occurs simultaneously with open coding and helps to refine categories by revealing how they are associated with subcategories. Axial coding takes place around the axis of a category by focusing on the action/interaction strategies (interpretive activity) by which women construct a sense of self in the NGO, the conditions (narrative resources of the NGO) that might influence women’s construction of self, and the consequences (which interpretive activity and discourses about gender are privileged) associated with these dimensions.
The primary analytic aim is to improve our understanding of NGO women’s identity work—namely, how they construct a sense of self that discursively produce meanings about gender in the context of their NGO. Thus, this study uses selective coding to identify core themes or concepts relevant to how women interpret, negotiate, experience, and interact within WVC to construct NGO selves that impact and shape discourses about gender. Selective coding allows for the integration of categories, their properties, and dimensions as they are identified by open and axial coding. Core categories were determined based on two criteria: (1) the core category must have been related to all apparent categories and (2) it must have been a category that was frequently observed in the data (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995:157-58).

**Presentation of Results**

The following chapters present the results of the qualitative analysis. The focus of these results is WVC women’s interpretive practice with respect to meanings of gender in the context of their NGO. The point is to capture better how NGO women make meaning to frame their identities, interests, and political projects while situated within the context of the NGO. In short, WVC women’s identity work represents the intertwined process of constructing subjectivities in the midst of the collective, “going concerns,” of the NGO. Again, the purpose being to highlight both the circumscribed and agenic quality to NGO women’s identities and the nature of discourses concerning gender, development, and power.

In order to foster clarity, the results will present the discourse-in-practice and the discursive practice of WVC women. In other words, it is first shown how substantive features of WVC women’s identity work draws from the dominant discursive resources provided by the NGO. As Holstein and Gubrium (1997, 2000, 2001) and Broad (2002) note, WVC women should use the discursive resources, or “going concerns,” of the NGO in order to narrate their selves into being. Thus, attention is first directed to how WVC women rely on their NGO as a
resource to discursively produce their sense of self. Second, WVC women’s interpretive practice is presented to demonstrate how WVC women’s selves are also an active construction. Specific attention is given to how WVC women use the narrative resources of the NGO but also engage, appropriate, and sometimes critique these discourses for the purposes of producing new ones. Chapters 5 and 6 explore respectively the discourse-in-practice and discursive with regards to WVC’s use of a gender perspective, while Chapters 7 and 8 will similarly examine the discourse of Christian values WVC adopts in their gender advocacy work.
Gender Perspective as a Narrative Resource

As noted earlier, the notion of mainstreaming a “gender perspective” is considered a central notion for those NGOs working within the gender and development (GAD) context (Baden and Goetz 1997:3). Colombian NGOs are a specific case illustration, given the high-level mechanisms adopted by Colombia in 1990 to mainstream a gender perspective (True and Mintrom 2001:31-32). As Wallace (1998:159) explains, “[g]ender is a major issue of policy and practice for donors and for … NGOs, at least in rhetoric.” Baden and Goetz (1997:4) similarly note that “[u]nderstanding the concept of ‘gender’ in the context of social relations analysis remains a touchstone of gender and development research, teaching, and training” in many development organizations and increasingly NGOs. While a key issue, NGOs often hold conflicting meanings and various perspectives with respect to incorporating gender into their policies and projects, especially when it comes to institutionalizing gender within their organization (O’Reilly 2004; Wallace 1998). Wallace (1998:159), for example, points out that

Recent literature shows that while most development agencies use a common language to discuss their commitment to gender, their practice differs. For some, gender is about equal opportunities. For others it is about women in development, or that it involves a more fundamental commitment to social and organizational transformation. Even with gender policies, organizations often fail to commit adequate resources, planning, or time to ensuring these are implemented.

As will be shown, WVC women also rely on the dominant discourse of gender produced in WVC to produce a sense of self, frame their interests, and elaborate concerns. At times, WVC hold conflicting views on the meanings of this discourse, yet usage is made of the gender perspective narrative of the organization.
Gender as a Personal Mission

WVC’s focus on a gender discourse is particularly evident in that gender constitutes one of the organization’s six transversal themes (temas transversales). Transversal themes are core, or universal, issues considered important for all projects and programs designed and enacted by the organization. As one document states, WVC has six primary transversal themes, which include Christian commitment, disability, environment, gender, construction of peace and conflict resolution, and protection, especially in regards to children (WVC internal document).

According to WVC, gender is critical to development issues and thus constitutes an essential aspect to the transformative and social change mission of the organization:

Visión Mundial, una ONG Cristiana, internacional y comprometida con el desarrollo transformador, reconoce el género y desarrollo (GAD) como un componente esencial y crítico de su ministerio (World Vision International 2005).

[World Vision, an international Christian NGO, committed to transformative development, recognizes gender and development (GAD) as an essential and critical component of its ministry.]

WVC women used the telling of the organization’s history to express the importance of gender to them. Several WVC women, for example, pointed to gender being a focal part of their own work mission. The following examples were some typical acknowledgements of this orientation (identifying information has been changed throughout the text when needed to maintain confidentiality):

Bueno, conozco que uno de los ejes transversales para el diseño, para la implementación para los proyectos y los programas, y la misión de mi trabajo, es precisamente el enfoque de género. (Interview 2)

[Well, I know that one of the transversal themes for the design, the implementation for the projects and the programs, and the mission of my work, is precisely a focus on gender.]

La perspectiva de género tiene que ser un eje transversal. (Interview 26)

[A gender perspective has to be a transversal theme]
Es muy importante hablar sobre relaciones de género. Bueno, estamos un lugar [WVC] en donde siempre se habla de género, donde yo siempre hablo de género. (Interview 8)

[It is very important to talk about gender relations. Well, we are in a place [WVC] where gender is always talked about, where I also talk about gender.]

Here WVC women adopted the idea of “gender as a personal mission” as a way to identify what they do and who they are as part of the organization. Gender as a transversal theme for the organization was thus also a recurring subject in the work lives of WVC women, who regularly hear and talk about it. The centrality of gender in women’s identity is also visible in that some described themselves as changing because of the process of learning about gender, viewing it as important, and incorporating it into their daily life:

Por supuesto que … el género es importante. Yo considero que la institución viene incorporando en nuestro trabajo, en nuestro servicio la noción de género, sí. En ese sentido nos estamos preocupando en procesos técnicas, de fortalecernos para … trabajar el enfoque de género en los diferentes proyectos. (Interview 2)

[Of course … gender is important. I consider that the institution has been incorporating in our work, in our service the notion of gender, yes. In that sense I am preoccupied in technical processes, in preparation for ... working the focus of gender in the different projects.]

Nosotras también hemos empezado a cambiar, en el sentido que estamos pensando que podemos ocupar diferentes ámbitos/cargos. (Interview 4)

[We have also started to change, in the sense that we are thinking that we can occupy different contexts/positions.]

Gender is thus not only a central feature of their service work, but also is a “concern” that has even lead to some to rethink their ability to perform different jobs.

In this vein, several WVC women talked about personal transformation as being associated with a focus of gender in development. In particular, individuals change because they are sensitized to their own and others’ value. WVC similarly describes its focus on gender analysis as having a transformative purpose not just for its social projects, but also for its own personnel:
... es la integración sistemática de una sensibilidad, conciencia, y análisis del género dentro del ministerio de Visión Mundial en cada una de las áreas de trabajo. La equidad de géneros no sólo afecta el resultado y efectividad de los proyectos de Visión Mundial, sino que también contribuye a relaciones y dinámicas sociales transformadas dentro del personal de Visión Mundial (World Vision International 2005).

[
... it is the systematic integration of a sensibility, conscience, and analysis of gender within the ministry of World Vision in each one of the work areas. The equality of genders not only affects the result and effectiveness of the projects of World Vision, but also contributes to transformative social relations and dynamics within the personnel of World Vision.]

WVC women’s narrative parallels the dominant discourse of the personally transformative capacity of pursuing a gender analysis in development. Although WVC are discussing their own “personal” development, the narrative is practically the same as one of establishing a new sensibility, conscience, and self-appreciation.

Ese eje transversal [género] me lleva a una sensibilidad social; me lleva a buscar mis propios intereses. Reconocer la persona con valor. (Interview 23)

[That transversal theme [gender] takes me to a sense of social sensitivity; it takes me to find my own proper interests. To recognize the person with value.]

Un análisis de género es muy importante. Yo creo que es hasta más; es positivo porque es mejorar calidad de vida y auto-percepción. Es un reconocimiento al nivel personal. Obviamente me influye directamente en mi persona, creer y llegar a conocer a sus capacidades, en tener posibilidad. Ayuda en formalizar mi persona. (Interview 25)

[A gender analysis is very important. I believe that it is more; it is positive because it is to improve quality of life and self-perception. It is a recognition at the personal level. Obviously, it influences me directly as a person, to believe and to get to know one’s own capacities, possibilities. It helps the formation of my person.]

In all, gender comprises a dominant discourse of which WVC women used to identify both their sense of purpose in the organization and how a focus on gender analysis has affected them personally. In short, WVC women view gender as a transversal theme in regards to their sense of self in the NGO.
Storying the Self through a Gender Perspective Lens

As was mentioned in Chapter 2, the idea of “mainstreaming” a gender perspective in development work emerged in the 1990s, as it signaled a shift away from merely “integrating” women and women’s issues to taking account of how gender inequality is reproduced through the technical and political realities of social structures, institutions, and cultural values (Kardam 1998). In particular, the movement from WID to GAD represented a recognition that gender and gender inequality goes beyond mere integration to include the multiple relations persons enact and in which they are situated, such as politics, economy, and culture. In short, the notion of mainstreaming a socio-historical understanding of gender dynamics “has been heavily promoted within international development circles by gender policy advocates”, in particular NGOs (Baden and Goetz 1997:5). WVC is no exception.

One way that the mainstreaming of a gender perspective is reinforced in WVC’s mission is by the self-telling of the history of how the larger World Vision community transitioned to a GAD approach:

De modo que, durante más de una década, el personal de Visión Mundial ha estado acumulando conocimientos y experiencia sobre capacitación en género y desarrollo de capacidad. En 1992, la Junta Directiva de Visión Mundial Internacional adoptó una política de “la integración de la mujer en el desarrollo” para toda la Confraternidad. En 1997, se creó un puesto de liderazgo orientado hacia el género para implementar y apoyar esta política, la cual se revisó para reflejar el enfoque GAD en 1999 (World Vision International 2005)

[For more than one decade, the personnel of World Vision have been accumulating knowledge and experience on capacity building in gender and development. In 1992, the Board of directors of World Vision International adopted a policy of "the integration of woman in development" for the entire fraternity. In 1997, a leadership position was created oriented toward gender to implement and support this perspective, which was later revised to reflect approach GAD in 1999.]
As this text explains, the point of the GAD approach is to explore how gender is a “sociocultural” phenomena because “everything is relational and transformation depends on these relations” (World Vision pamphlet). As WV goes on to note,

el género y desarrollo no se enfocan en las necesidades de la mujer y las niñas de manera aislada, sino en las relaciones de género … en contexto.

[Gender and development do not focus on the needs of women and girls in isolation, but rather on gender relations in context.]

A relational and socially constructed view of gender was also prevalent in many WVC women general views about themselves.

Para mi, género es una construcción social, establecido primeramente entre las relaciones de los seres humanos…. Es la manera que personas se identifican, es como yo me identifico…. Género se trabaja. (Interview 1)

[For me, gender is a social construction, created primarily from within human relations…. It is a way persons identify themselves, it is how I identify myself…. Gender is worked.]

Género son esas características de un todo. Es un conjunto dentro de lo social, cultural, económico, como un todo en el cual todo el mundo está inmerso….. Para mi, estudiar el género es hablar de esas relaciones históricos…. No puedo unir género como sinónimo a mujer. Tengo que ver género como esa construcción…. Son características sociales asimiladas a la persona. (Interview 9)

[Gender is those characteristics of a totality. It is a set within the social, cultural, economic, like a totality in which everyone is immersed…. For me, to study gender means to talk about those historical relations…. I cannot see gender as synonymous with woman. I have to see gender as a construction…. It is those social characteristics taken to represent.]

Bueno, género es una construcción social donde se define la identidad sexual y los roles sociales que tienen que cumplir el hombre y la mujer. Entonces género es lo que socialmente se considera femenino, lo que debo hacer yo como mujer. (Interview 22)

[Well, gender is a social construction where sexual identity is defined and social roles that men and women must comply with. So then gender is what is socially considered feminine, what I as a woman am expected to do.]

Importantly, WVC women used this way of talking about gender as a means for telling their own life “stories.” Several of these stories touched upon specific past and present
experiences. Below are two examples of WVC women explicitly adopting World Vision’s

gender perspective discourse to recount their childhood experiences.

Trabajando en Visión Mundial me ha hecho pensar en muchas memorias. Pienso mucho de
mi niñez y cómo me vieron y fui tratada diferentemente de mis hermanos. Tuve que hacer
siempre más trabajo doméstico que mis hermanos. Limpiaba los pisos y tuve que cocinar.
Ahora sé que eso estaba debido a creencias culturales sobre qué las mujeres deben de
hacer. (Interview 6)

[Working in World Vision has lead me to think of many memories. I think a lot about my
childhood and how I was viewed and treated differently from my brothers. I always had to
do more housework than my brothers. I cleaned the floors and had to cook. Now I know
that it was because of cultural beliefs about what women are supposed to do.]

Suena ridículo pero nunca me dieron una llave a mi casa cuando era jovencita, incluso
cuando tenía 16 años. Mi padre pensó que las mujeres no debían tener llaves a la casa. No
era apropiado. Pero eso es un proyecto político. ¿no? Para él las llaves tenia el significado
de poder y el control, más nadie me decía en la escuela o dondequiera diferente. Entonces
(pausa) usted apenas lo acepta. Me duele un poco. Aquí [ WVC ] se habla de eso, y he
aprendido que es importante autorizar a las mujeres para tomar decisiones propias.
(Interview 12)

[It sounds ridiculous but I was never given a key to my house when I was young, even
when I was 16 years old. My father did not think that young women should have keys to
the house. It was not appropriate. But that is a political project, right? For him the key
meant power and control, plus no one was telling me any different at school or anywhere.
So (pause) you just accept it. It hurts me a little. Here [WVC] that is talked about, and I
have learned how important it is to empower women to make decisions for themselves.]

Consistent with the dominant discourse of World Vision, these two women relied on a
socio-cultural view of gender to give meaning to past experiences. In fact, the full awareness
and significance of these moments seems to be a relatively recent event that was sparked in large
part by a context of learning and talking about gender in World Vision. In both cases, they “now
know” and “have learned” the significance of these memories, even to the point of having to face
a certain amount of “hurt” but being able to talk about it.

Another way WVC women employed a gender perspective is by interpreting their present
work and family experiences through this discourse. One WVC woman, for example, chose to
explain her financial success vis-à-vis other WVC women not solely in terms of her individual merit but also the product of gendered institutions.

Me considero una mujer algo acertada con el dinero. Soy afortunada. Bueno, trabajé muy duro, fui a la universidad, y trabajé muchos trabajos difíciles. Mi éxito (pausa) la cosa es que la estructura no permite mujeres. Trabajé en un [trabajo profesional] con todos hombres y la razón que conseguí el trabajo estaba debido a conexiones de mi familia. Merecí el trabajo pero no pienso que lo hubiera conseguido sin ayuda. Realmente me afecta porque otras mujeres aquí nunca han conseguido esas oportunidades y por eso no tienen tanto dinero. Hay estructuras sociales que son el problema que están a favor del hombre en el ámbito económico y en la cultural machista. Yo veo eso mucho en mi vida personal. (Interview 4)

[I consider myself rather successful woman with money. I’m lucky. Well, I worked very hard, went to the university, and worked many difficult jobs. My success (pause) the thing is that the structure does not allow women. I worked at a [professional job] with all men and the reason I got the job was because of family connections. I deserved the job but I do not think I would have gotten it without help. It really affects me because other women here have never gotten those opportunities and because of that do not have very much money. There are social structures that are the problem that are in favor of men economically and in the macho culture… I see that a lot in my personal life.]

Consistent with the larger GAD discourse of WVC, this woman attributes the lack of monetary success of her fellow co-workers as due in large measure to structural impediments, such as an economic and cultural order that favors men. Like the two women mentioned earlier, the following individual recounted her experience growing up having to do a disproportionate amount of housework, but emphasizes how this pattern seems to be recurring within her present family.

Crecí con tres hermanos y nunca hicieron trabajo doméstico. Mi padre y madre los prohibieron hacerlo. Fue esperado que yo hiciera la mayor parte con mi madre. Mi madre decía que no era el trabajo de un hombre limpiar. Cuidar el hogar era el trabajo de la mujer. Me preocupa ahora porque esto pasa en mi casa. A mi marido no le gusta ver a su hijo limpiar. Él piensa que es la responsabilidad de la mujer. Pero sé de lo que he aprendido aquí que esos roles son cultural y no algo natural. Mi marido quiere que mi hijo consiga un trabajo, pero ¿qué de su hija? Ella necesita ser económicamente independiente, no (pausa) si no, ella nunca podrá defenderse. (Interview 20)

[I grew up with three brothers and they never did any of the housework. My father and mother prohibited them for doing it. I was expected to do most of it with my mother. My mother would say that it was not the job of a man to clean. Taking care of the home was}
the woman’s job. I get scarred now because this happens in my home now. My husband does not like to see his son clean. He thinks it is a woman’s responsibility. But I know from what I have learned working here that those roles are cultural and not based on something natural. My husband wants my son to get a job, but what about his daughter? She needs to be economically independent, right (pause) or else she will never be able to stand up for herself.]

Similar to before, a gender perspective is used to interpret a past childhood experience; however, in this case there is a concern that an unequal distribution of work is now taking place with her own children. This conclusion, moreover, was reached from information gathered at World Vision, such as that gender roles are a social construction and not naturally predetermined.

Clearly, these examples again how WVC women adopt the dominant narrative productions of their NGO to give meaning to their own selves.

**Working for Gender Equality**

According to WVC, promotion of GAD in the organization’s development approach is viewed as a direct response to changes in how gender inequality is understood. Consistent with a GAD orientation, promoting gender equality in development is primarily a relational issue, tied to how institutional arrangements are structured in ways that privilege men. WVC emphasizes this way of conceptualizing gender inequality:

[L]as investigaciones a nivel de las bases y académicas comenzaron a demostrar de qué manera las interacciones entre géneros impactan el proceso de desarrollo. El “Género y Desarrollo” se convirtió en el término reconocido para un enfoque progresivo para el desarrollo que enfatizó la perspectiva y experiencia de la mujer. Se centró en la manera en que las relaciones desiguales evitaban un desarrollo equitativo y sostenible (World Vision International 2005).

[The investigations at the base and academic level began to demonstrate in what way the interactions between genders impact the development process. The "Gender and Development" became the term recognized for a progressive focus to development that emphasized the perspective and experience of woman. It centered on the way unequal relations averted an equitable and sustainable development.]

WVC women also emphasized the significance of a relational view of gender inequality. Some typical expression of this are found below:
Equidad tiene que ver con los derechos, como en una época se habló sobre los derechos del hombre. Pero no se habló sobre el derecho de la mujer. Ahora cuando hablamos de esos derechos, estamos hablando de esos derechos que son tanto como para hombres como para mujeres, que sale de la relación entre hombres y mujeres, de un reconocimiento entre ambos. (Interview 4)

[Equality has to do with rights, just like when in one time it was spoken about the rights of men. But the rights of women were not talked about. Now when we speak of those rights, we are talking about those rights that are for equally for men and women, that emerges from a relation between men and women, of a recognition between both.]

Claro, el trabajo de equidad de género es una relación social. Es esa cotidianidad donde tienes que construir con el otro diariamente. Para mí es importantísimo dentro de la institución. No se si hablamos de paradigmas, pero la construcción de género y la equidad de género ocurre en las relaciones. (Interview 9)

[Of course, the work of gender equality is a social relation. It is in the quotidian where it has to be constructed daily with the other. For me it is most important within the institution. I do not know if we speak of paradigms, but the construction of gender and the equality of gender occurs in relationships.]

Desde mi perspectiva, yo veo género y equidad como mucho más amplio que la funcionalidad y más como integralidad [sic]. Hay estudios que ven cómo mujeres y hombres funcionan en sus roles, pero no hablan de una comprensión del ser como tal, en su todo. Y si yo hablo de la integralidad hablo de ese ser completo, sin compartimientos, funciones separados, o roles. Cuál es la diferencia entre los dos, la comprensión. Es saber que un ser completo es un ser con otro. Entonces de esa perspectiva es buscar las relaciones de casualidad y consciencia. (Interview 27)

[From my perspective, I see gender and equality as much more broad than functionality and more as integral. There are studies that see how women and men function in their roles, but do not speak of an understanding of being as so, as a whole. And if I speak of being integral I speak that complete being, without compartments, separate functions, or roles. What is the difference between the two, an understanding. It is knowing that a complete being is a being with another one. So from that perspective it is to look for the relations of causality and consciousness.]

Beyond this general affirmation of the NGO’s approach to issues of gendered inequality, what is noteworthy is the many ways WVC used this dominant discourse to construct a sense of self by framing their perspectives, feelings, and concerns in reference to the organization itself.

One way WVC presents a discourse of gender inequality is through statistics that show the disadvantages women experience in numerous social spheres. Take, for example, an excerpt
from an internal report distributed to WVC staff, which includes the stated objective to “promote
gender equality and the autonomy of women” (promover la igualdad de género y la autonomía
de las mujeres):

El 70% de los trabajos no asalariados corresponden a mujeres y aunque constituyen casi la
mitad de la fuerza de trabajo ocupada como profesional y técnica, solo el 38% se encuentra
trabajando como personal directivo. Además existe una baja participación de las mujeres
en las esferas del poder político, en el período del 2003 al 2006 las gobernadoras
alcanzaron en promedio el 13%. Las mujeres no se encuentran en las mismas condiciones
para acceder al poder económico y político, aunque posean las mismas capacidades que los
hombres (internal report).

[70% of unpaid worker are women and although they constitute almost half of the force
force in professional and technical occupations, only 38% find themselves working as
director of personnel. In addition there exists low participation of women in the political
spheres of power, between 2003 and 2006 the average of women governors reached 13%.
Women do not find themselves in the same conditions to achieve economic and political
power, although they have the same capacities as that of men.]

WVC women virtually mirrored this statistical approach to present information about gender
inequality, but in their case it was used to describe their experience in the organization—at work.
Several pointed to the high proportion of women working and volunteering in the organization as
a statement on the state of equality in the NGO. For two WVC woman, the higher number of
women signals WVC’s commitment to transforming women’s opportunities and power:

Bueno, Visión es una organización que es 60% femenino. Y yo te puedo decir eso por mi
trabajo. Es el hecho de que la organización pide que la mujer tenga voz al nivel de la
comunidad también como al nivel de la organización. Y en eso sí empujén que las mujeres
se capaciten. Apoyan mucho la capacitación. (Interview 4)

[Well, World Vision is an organization that is 60% feminine. And I can say that to you
because of my work. It is the fact that the organization requests that woman also have a
voice at the level of the community and at the level of the organization. And in that they
push women to become qualified. They support very much building qualification.]

Yo he tenido la oportunidad de trabajar en un lugar donde el porcentaje está reversa, con
80% hombres. Aquí es diferente porque es una empresa social. Y aunque mucho de los
pensadores sociales han sido hombres, este trabajo está ocupado por mujeres. Yo sé que
hay un diálogo sobre las diferencias biológicas entre hombres y mujeres, que los hombres
son mas racionales. Pero eso implica que yo no puedo hacer cosas. También esto ignora
que mujeres han dado mucho de su tiempo en otros ámbitos, como la familia. Entonces trabajar aquí me da a mí y a otras mujeres muchas oportunidades. (Interview 28)

[I have had the opportunity to work working in a place where the percentage was reverse, with 80% men. Here it is different because it is a social enterprise. And although many of the social thinkers have been men, this work is occupied by women. I know that there is conversation about the biological differences between men and women, that men are more rational. But that implies that I cannot do things. Also this ignores that women have given much of their time in other arenas, like the family. So then to work here gives me and other women many opportunities.]

The disproportionate number of women represented an imbalance of work distribution for others:

Hay que equilibrar. Veo que un 90% de voluntarios que nos ayuda son mujeres. Entonces tenemos que equilibrar el trabajo voluntario para que los hombres puedan cumplir en este trabajo de servicio para que no se queda en un solo lado y ver este trabajo como femenino. (Interview 9)

[We need to equilibrate. I see that 90% of volunteers that help us are women. So we need to equilibrate the volunteer work so that men can contribute in this service work so that it is not one-sided and seen like women’s work.]

Yo no diría tener más hombres. Equilibrar … en este momento creo que hay más mujeres que hombres, pero yo diría equilibrar porque se daría un equilibrio de percepción. (Interview 15)

[I would not say have more men. Equilibrate … in this moment I think there are more women than men, but I would say equilibrate because it would create a balance of perception.]

WVC women did not all agree on how to interpret the higher number of women than men working and volunteering in the organization (In fact the estimates were not always similar to one another). What was consistent was to use a strategy regularly adopted by the organization to expose gender inequality, especially women’s disadvantages in different social arenas.

Especially important, however, was how WVC women used estimates to switch the conversation from women in general to themselves, to how they view and feel about the issue. Whether this strategy was meant to suggest a positive attitude toward the organization because of its “support” for WVC women to “have a voice” or to express concern over the lack of “equilibrium” and
“balance” in the labor load in this type of service, WVC women relied on the available discourse of the NGO to construct a self-position.

In addition to talking about gender inequality, WVC is also focused on being an example of gender equality. WVC is not just articulating a particular conceptual apparatus, but rather this perspective is presented as its identity and central to its focus:

Género y Desarrollo ... refleja el espíritu, los valores centrales y la política de Visión Mundial (World Vision International 2005).

[Gender and Development ... reflects the spirit, the central values and the politics of World Vision.]

This self-identifying discourse was also applied by WVC women, but was used more specifically to describe their own perceptions and experiences with regards to the state of equality within the organization itself. For some, practicing gender equality included providing the conditions necessary to participate fully as women in social life. This most often meant having the same opportunities as men and to be able to be part of the decision-making process at work.

Para mí equidad es tener las mismas oportunidades. Estoy hablando de igualdad de oportunidades salariales, oportunidades de participación, oportunidades de decisión, oportunidades culturales. Hablando socialmente, es que las oportunidades sean para todos los géneros, sin discriminación. Y también como tener valores iguales para todos. En Visión Mundial, tú participas y en participar te sientes como persona. Aquí tomo decisiones como persona, con mis opiniones. La participación no es solamente levantar la mano y decir tal, es compartir. (Interview 28)

[For me equality is having the same opportunities. I am talking about having the same opportunities in salary, opportunities to participate, opportunities in decisions, cultural opportunities. Socially speaking, it is that opportunities are for all gender, without discrimination. And also to have equal value for all. In World Vision, you participate and in participating you feel like a person. Here I make decisions as a person, with my opinions. Participation is not simply raising one’s hand and saying something, it is to share.]

La equidad de género es importante para todos los seres humanos, porque es un compromiso político y practico. La equidad necesita ayuda a los niveles socioeconómicos y en las oportunidades. Y por supuesto, en las empresas, en el trabajo…. Es cierto que la mayoría somos mujeres, pero como somos la mayoría en la institución ocupamos sobre todo la operación y administración. Eso nos da poder, ¿no?... Yo me siento como que
puedo hablar y participar en los procesos organizativos. Yo creo que es así que se está trabajando el género. Básicamente, eso me hace sentir bien como persona. (Interview 2)

[Gender equality is important to all human beings, because it is a political commitment and practice. Equality needs aid at the socioeconomic levels and in opportunities. And of course, in companies, in work.... It is true that the majority of us are women, but as the majority in the institution we mainly occupy the operation and administration. That gives us power, right?... I feel like I can speak and participate in organizational processes. I believe that it is in this way that gender is being worked. Basically, that makes me feel good as a person.]

Most evident in these quotes is that gender equality requires a practical component that assures persons “opportunities to participate”, such as in decision-making at work. WVC women not only viewed the practice of gender equality as central, but also expressed how the very reality of this practice in their NGO affects their personal sense of worth and set of interests. In other words, the discourse of gender equality in practice is used here to highlight the reality of their own “opinions” and sense of “feeling good” as a person.

In the cases that follow, the discourse of gender equality is used but, interestingly, to show how it is not being fully applied in practice. What is important to keep in mind in these examples is that while the meaning over the practice of gender equality in the NGO is conflictual with those above, the general use of the discourse to construct a sense of self is the same. The difference is that rather than an affirmation of the self, what are emphasized is one’s abilities and feelings of self-worth. As one WVC woman noted,

En términos de género, uno puede ver que Visión Mundial quiere buscar la equidad de género, pero no ha sido tan equitativo y tan funcional en lo practico. Es buscar una persona con carrera, con merito, sin importar que sea mujer o hombre, cierto. Sino que sean personas que puedan hacer el trabajo y que tengas las mismas oportunidades que cualquier otra persona dentro de la organización. Pero no ha sido tan claro para mí; no ha sido. El discurso no es siempre la realidad. (Interview 3)

[In terms of gender, one can see that World Vision wants to find gender equality, but it has not been so equitable or functional in practice. It is to look for a person with a career, with merit, regardless of whether the person is a woman or man, right. That they be people who do the job and who have the same opportunities that any other person within the
organization. But it has not been so clear for me; it has not been. The discourse is not always reality.]

While confident about the importance of the discourse of gender equality, this woman expresses ambiguity and uncertainty regarding its actual implementation in the organization. Although in this case the individual’s feelings are the matter are for the most part general, others are much more descriptive and arguably affected by theirs and others’ experiences in the NGO. One WVC woman described being discriminated against at work and how it deeply impacted her. Her story is discussed at length because other WVC women commented on it.

Bueno, de pronto sí he tenido dificultades. En mi caso personal yo venía de un proceso de [cargo profesional] y pues estuve acá con un equipo mientras que mi jefe no estaba. Mi preparación es [cargo profesional], sin embargo mi jefe fue cambiado y vino otra persona para ocupar esa posición y esta persona seleccionó solamente hombres en su grupo. Y los que veníamos en un proceso de liderazgo pues nos quedamos atrás. Y el nuevo jefe designó quién sería mi jefe. Y pues sentí que mi proceso [sic] no estaba reconocido, porque me quedé con un cargo inferior, digamos así. Y en un proceso de selección mi jefe fue nombrado y llevaba menos tiempo de [cargo profesional] en la organización y entonces no se dio cuenta la experiencia que yo tenia. No hubo proceso, seleccionando sin mirar hojas de resume. Fue todo por simpatías. Me parecía que no hubo la equidad que se habla aquí. (Interview 4)

[Well, I have had difficulties. In my personal case, I was in the process of entering a [professional position] and well I was here with a group while my boss was away. My preparation is in [a professional position], nevertheless my boss was changed and in came another person to occupy that position and this person selected only men for the group. And this new boss chose who was going to be my boss. Put it this way, I felt like my work was not acknowledged, because I was left with an inferior position. And in a selection process my boss was named and this person had less time as [professional position] in the organization and so then the experience that I had was overlooked. There was no process, selections being made without looking at resume pages. Everything was based on friendships. It seemed like there was not the type of equality that is talked about here.]

This WVC women is clearly upset and concerned about the lack of perceived equality in the promotion practices of the NGO. As she notes, all the work done to enter into a higher position “was not acknowledged” as other people—mainly all men and persons with less time in the organization—were given the jobs. In all, the problem seems to have been a disjuncture between the “type of equality talked about” in the organization and what she experienced. When asked
further about what this experience felt like, she expressed a deeper sense of personal hurt and inferiorization:

Pues me sentí relegada y en una forma desaprovechada. Sí, porque considero que tengo talentos y conocimiento de la organización. Ya son casi [numero de años] que llevo en Visión Mundial. Entonces no sé, yo creo que yo puedo tener una posición de [cargo profesional] y me ha dañado mis proyecciones y valor dentro de la organización. (Interview 4)

[Well I felt relegated and unable to take advantage of opportunities. Yes, because I consider that I have talents and knowledge of the organization. I already have almost [number of years] in World-wide Vision. So then I do not know, I believe that I can have a [professional position] and my projections and value within the organization have been damaged.]

This WVC woman continues to explain why this experience also impacted her spiritually and emotionally, citing the disconnection between the larger discourse of practicing gender equality and her lived reality in the NGO. In her words,

Bueno, porque como organización estamos buscando que haya participación y que haya una apertura, cierto. Pero mi experiencia me limitó mi perspectiva para participar en algunos proyectos. También porque esa experiencia me molestó y fue muy fuerte y diferente para mí. Fue incomodo. (Interview 4)

[Well, because as an organization we are looking that there be participation and that there be openness, right. But my experience limited my perspective to participate in some projects. Also because that experience bothered me and was very hard and different for me. It was uncomfortable.]

She explicitly uses the dominant discourse of the NGO with regards to practicing gender equality, even pointing out that this is a goal of the organization. However, the use of this narrative is as a point of contrast to her own personal experience of discrimination. By using the NGOs primary discourse this WVC woman is able to reveal her feelings of being “hurt” and “uncomfortable” in participating at work.

The story of this particular individual was commented on by other WVC women. While these individuals say that they themselves have not experienced discrimination in the organization, they are friends with the woman mentioned above and have been affected by her
experience (they each mentioned her by name). Particularly noteworthy is how they also associate themselves with the NGO’s discourse on gender equality but use their friend’s experience to express concerns about it. Here is what some WVC women said:

Yo conozco a [Interviewee 4] muy bien. Somos amigas y hablamos de cómo van las cosas. Lo qué le sucedió era horrible. Recuerdo llorando con ella sobre eso. Las cosas no son siempre justas. Pero no debía haber sucedido a ella porque nosotros se supone somos equitativos a todos y no importa si son mujeres, hombres, amigos o no. (Interview 7)

[I know [interview 4] very well. We are friends and talk about how things are going. What happened to her was horrible. I remember crying with her about it. Things are sometimes not fair. But it should not have happened her because we are supposed to be equitable to everyone and it does not matter if they are women, men, friends or not. (Interview 7)

Visión Mundial ayuda a muchas personas aquí pero [Interviewee 4]…. Yo estaba trastornada también. Supongo que no llevo a cabo la misma vista inocente de este lugar. Mira, Visión Mundial es mejor que la mayoría de organizaciones. Pero siempre duele cuando es alguien cerca a ti y no están tratado con cariño. (Interview 13)

[World Vision helps many people here but [Interviewee 4] …. I was also upset. I guess I do not hold the same innocent view of this place anymore. Look, World Vision is better than most organizations. But it always hurts when it is someone close to you and they are not treated with care. (Interview 13)

Nunca he experimentado la discriminación aquí y no pienso que Visión Mundial discrimina. Pero (pausa) nuestros valores son mejores que lo que [Interviewee 4] le pasó. Creemos en igualdad y en tratar todos iguales, sin importar quiénes son. Pienso que no vivimos nuestra propia mission. (Interview 21)

[I have never experienced discrimination here and I do not think that World Vision discriminates. But (pause) our values are better than what [interviewee 4] went through. We believe in equality and treating everyone the same, regardless of who they are. I think we did not live up to our own mission.]

In a similar fashion, these WVC employ the NGO gender discourse but point to their friend’s discrimination experience as something that has undercut the organization’s larger mission. Even though none of them talk about themselves experiencing discrimination, the contrast of the dominant narrative of gender equality and their friend’s story prompts them to talk about their own feelings and perceptions of the NGO. This included feeling “horrible” and “upset”, as well
as finding the NGO itself as not living up to its own “mission.” In all, the dominant WVC narrative about practicing gender equality was adopted by these women to speak about themselves as workers in the organization.

This section demonstrates that the discourse of GAD is a substantive focus of WVC women to provide a more critical understanding of gender in the area of development than the earlier WID model. Put differently, the dominant gender perspective discourse found in mainstream development NGOs, such as WVC, was shown to “comprise the field of the possible, constraining what means are coherent yet also providing the resources to contest hegemonic meanings” (Broad, Crawley, Foley 2004:515). How WVC women employed the organization’s gender discourse differed, sometimes to affirm the NGO and at other times to argue that it has not lived up to its own standards of gender equality. In both cases, however, WVC women framed themselves within the recognizable gender narrative of the organization, revealing how a sense of self was made that was congruent with the collective narrative of the NGO. Arguably, in adopting the dominant GAD narrative that holds resonance within the development and NGO context, WVC women reproduce its power. A central question is if the process of using the dominant gender discourse found among mainstream development NGOs, in fact, challenges or maintains hegemony, especially with regards to gender relations. It is at this juncture that the stubborn “doing good” question does crop up again. Unique to this study is that this question is now addressed analyzing how a gender perspective is done. The next section is dedicated thus dedicated to exploring the active side of framing—WVC women’s identity work.
CHAPTER 6
DOING GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND SELF

Interpretive Practice of WVC Women

According to Holstein and Gubrium (2000), the self is a dynamic event that is constructed from both the conditions made available by the public “going concerns” and the active work of agents. To be sure, WVC women rely on a specific gender discourse in their NGO—that of mainstreaming—when they construct a sense of self. WVC women, in other words, tap into the discourse-in-practice of the organization and the larger NGO development field, and in so doing they identify themselves in terms of their interests, views, and concerns. In the language of social movement literature, the gender perspective represents a substantive frame for WVC women in terms of self and their sense of NGO collectivity.

Broad (2002:326) underscores Holstein and Gubrium’s earlier point though, noting that a full accounting of selves “must examine the processes and procedures by which selves are accomplished in addition to the narrative resources that comprise what a self might be.” In this case, capturing the production of self in WVC would include an examination of how WVC women narratively construct a mainstream gender perspective as part of their selves. For Holstein and Gubrium (2000:12), the self is agenic in part because it is “actively crafted in light of biographical particulars, using culturally endorsed formats.” WVC women, therefore, not only make a self from within the discursive framework of their NGO, but also through their identity work, which includes weaving this dominant discourse in accordance to their biographical particulars. In this chapter, I provide an illustration of how to understand the construction of NGO women’s selves in terms of their mainstreaming talk. Specifically, attention is paid to how WVC women construct gendered selves as women by being professionals and telling awareness testimonials which allow them to practice a mainstream
gender perspective. This analysis describes what Holstein and Gubrium (2000:90) refer to as “discursive practice”, or how WVC women *do* self.

**Constructing Professional Selves**

As was discussed in Chapter 2, the mainstream NGO field, including some feminist NGOs, has pursued a “professionalized” approach to their gender advocacy work. A central factor in the process of professionalization has been the “new gender policy turn” that emerged in the 1990s as the economic and political terrain in many Latin American countries experienced the structural reforms of neoliberalism. In the decade of the 1990s in Colombia, many working in NGOs perceived the dismantling of the military state and the creation of the 1991 Constitution as a new opportunity to effect change in gender policy. In this case, many NGOs have formalized their gender advocacy practices and moderated their discourses about gender so that they can interact with neoliberal states and international agencies. Murdock (2003:515), for example, quotes a woman working in a feminist NGO in Medellín who explains the need to develop “qualifications” and expertise as a gender advocate when dealing with the new neoliberal state:

> To qualify ourselves for an effective participation, we need not just to have the force and space to participate, but also to know how to do so in a qualified manner. If they call us about a new law they are formulating about women who are heads of households, we have to have the clarity to make clear and effective and scientific contributions to this law.

WVC has similarly emphasized the important role professionals play in gender advocacy in the organization. Specifically, development professionals, such as those working in NGOs, now need the practical tools to implement gender into development programs:

> Ahora, este cambio en la cultura organizativa y en la práctica del ministerio necesita ir más allá de tan sólo un mejor entendimiento y cambio de valores. No es suficiente enseñar la importancia del género en el desarrollo. Nuestros profesionales de todo el mundo ya saben esto ahora. Lo que necesitan son herramientas que les permitan aplicar lo que saben. Los corazones y las mentes han cambiado, y ahora los profesionales de desarrollo quieren saber qué hacer y cómo hacerlo (World Vision International 2005).
[Now, this cultural change in the organization and in the practice of the ministry needs to go beyond a mere better understanding and change of values. It is not sufficient to teach of the importance of gender in development. Our professionals around the world already know this now. What they need are tools that allow them to apply what they know. The hearts and minds have changed, and now the development professionals want to know what to do and how to do it.]

Thus the practice of doing a gender and development approach is in large measure a professional undertaking, requiring “tools” that allow for them to apply this value system.

In this vein, WVC women construct selves not only through the dominant gender narrative of the organization, but also by “being professionals” within the NGO. A mainstream gender perspective, in other words, is made as WVC establish professional selves in their relationships with themselves and others in the organization. And as was mentioned above, this identity work included the bringing together the larger “going concern” of the NGO (i.e, advocating a mainstream gender perspective) and WVC women’s biographical particulars. One way WVC women crafted professional selves was by associating their personal everyday social service work as a form of professional gender advocacy. WVC women, for example, drew a distinction between their own experiences as “practical” social service workers to the “theoretical” efforts of academics. Here are some examples of this way of doing, or framing, professionalism:

Yo entiendo que la experiencia es muy importante, porque la experiencia te da capacidades técnicas y al mismo tiempo te da la seguridad en qué hacer y saber hacer. Te hace una persona práctica; te hace una persona decidida. La parte de academia y lo empírico son diferentes, y los dos son importantes. No te puedes limitar a uno, pero la práctica es necesario ahora para hacer nuestro trabajo, para trabajar el concepto de género. Nosotros aquí trabajamos los dos aspectos, pero es central trabajar en la práctica de género. (Interview 28)

[I consider experience very important, because experience gives you technical capacities and at the same time it gives you the security in what to do and to know how to do it. It makes you a practical person; it makes you a determined person. The part of academia and the empirical are different, and both are important. You cannot be limited to one, but practice is necessary now to do our work, to work the idea of gender. Here we work the two aspects, but it is central to work the practice of gender.]
Cuando yo entro en Visión Mundial, yo tengo que confrontar lo teórico con lo empírico. Parte de ser profesional es la práctica. Acá estamos tratando de transformar nuestro país; trabajamos con comunidades de base. Es la misión de Visión Mundial manejar un programa de género y la organización nos está dando las herramientas para eso. (Interview 9)

[When I enter World Vision, I have to confront the theoretical with the empirical. Part off being a professional is practice. Here we are trying to transform our country; we work with base communities. The mission of World Vision is managing a gender program and the organization is giving us the tools for that.]

Yo no soy un académico. Soy profesional, pero no en lo académico. Yo considero que trabajamos en práctica lo que se dice en teoría. (Interview 7)

[I am not an academic. I am a professional, but not in academia. I consider our work the practice of what is said in theory.]

As these WVC show, a mainstream gender perspective is done by being a “practicing” professional that implements the ideas that are produced by academicians. While theory is not divorced from their gender advocacy work, putting into practice ideas plays a uniquely “central” role. As one women noted, entering World Vision requires that she confront theory with the empirical or everyday world—not the other way around. What is important here is how WVC women construct a professional identity by drawing from the professionalism discourse of the NGO and their own personal biography as practicing social service agents. To be sure, these WVC women reaffirmed the present task, as outlined by the NGO, of gender and development professional as being able to know “what to do and how to do it.”

Another way WVC women constructed professional selves was by how they actually act like professionals. This was most often expressed by describing how they perform their duties in a professional manner—namely, by spending long hours working, being organized, and paying attention to details.

Yo dedico mucho tiempo en el ámbito laboral. Hay algunas personas que llegan tarde y ya a las 4:59 de la tarde están listas para ir a la casa. Parte de ser profesional es hacer el trabajo bueno y con cualidad y eso requiere tiempo. (Interview 20)
[I dedicate a lot of time in the work environment. There are some persons who come in late and at 4:59 in the afternoon are ready to go home. Part of being a professional is doing the job well and with quality and that requires time.]

Me considero una persona muy organizada y detallista. Pero eso se necesita en nuestro trabajo, ¿no? Es nuestra responsabilidad ser organizado para las proyectos que trabajamos. Si yo veo una palabra incorrecta, yo lo corrijo. No todo el mundo es así. Yo sí. Es mi papel como profesional. (Interview 5)

[I consider myself to an organized and detail-oriented person. But that is needed in our job, right. It is our responsibility to be organized for the projects that we do. If I see an incorrect word, I fix it. Not everyone is this way. I am. It is my role as a professional.]

Estamos en un contexto profesional aquí en Visión Mundial. Si queremos cambiar las condiciones de las comunidades tenemos que trabajar mucho. En mi trabajo, yo soy muy organizada. Si no lo soy, las cosas no manejan bien. Algunas veces yo me quedo por más tiempo para terminar lo que tengo que hacer. No lo puedo dejar para el próximo día, porque siempre hay algo nuevo que hacer. (Interview 10)

[We are in a professional context in World Vision. If we want to change the condition of the communities we have to work a lot. In my work, I am very organized. If I am not, things do not work well. Sometimes I stay for more time to finish what I have to do. I cannot leave it for the next day, because there is always something new to do.]

WVC women’s own personal work habits and style are important components in how a professional is supposed to act, given the “professional context in World Vision” and the “responsibility” that goes along with being a professional.

Interestingly, not everyone enacts the type of performativity described by WVC women. In fact, according to WVC women, it is women who are more likely to be more organized, spend longer hours, and focus on details. For example, the following WVC women draw from their personal experience as “women” and “mothers” to explain how and why women are more likely to do this type of performativity than men:

Well, basically it is different because women are more sensitive toward others. It is to say, men are a little stern (pause) I do not know the word. He is a little uncoordinated. The relationship between son and mother creates this a lot. Although I do not think that all mothers do this, I do not think. But yes, yes many do. They [men] are dependent on breakfast. Men are not detail-oriented, to use a word.]

Yo tengo dos jornadas, la de mi casa y la de mi trabajo. Entonces cuando yo estoy aquí estoy trabajando para Visión Mundial, pero durante el día estoy pensando en mis hijos. Porque cuando llego a la casa ellos me van a necesitar para la comida y para ayudarlos en una tarea del colegio. Las mujeres necesitan ser más organizadas que los hombres porque no tenemos el tiempo para hacer las cosas otra vez. Yo sé que muchos hombres acá no tienen hijos y si los tienen sus esposas son las quien hace el trabajo en la casa. Entonces, los hombres acá siempre están caminando con un paso lento, pero yo no. Yo corro. (Interview 21)

[I have a double work day at my house and at my job. So when I am here I am working for World Vision, but during the day I am thinking about my children. Because when I get home they will need me to cook and help them with some homework from school. Women need to be more organized than men because we do not have the time to do things twice. I know that many men here do not have children and if they do their wife are who do the work at home. So, the men here always are walking at a slower pace, but not me. I run.]

Es interesante que las mujeres son más detallistas que los hombres. Pienso que sería por la manera que las personas están criadas. Aquí en Colombia, desde pequeño los hombres están criados para ser pendientes de la mujer. La mujer es la quien mantiene el orden. Por eso ves que las mujeres en Visión Mundial son más organizadas. También en ser mamá, la mujer tiene que manejar dos jornadas que el hombre no tiene. Yo, por ejemplo, tenía un jefe que era hombre que estaba completamente pendiente de mí. Si yo no tenía todo en orden él no sabia qué hacer. En un sentido la mujer reproduce eso, aunque no debe ser. (Interview 10)

[It is interesting that women are more detail-oriented than men. I think that it is because of the way persons are raised. In Colombia, from very little, men are raised to be dependent on women. Women are who maintain order. For that reason you see women in World Vision as more organized. Also in being a mother, women have to maintain two working days that men do not have. I, for example, had a boss who was a man who was completely dependent on my. If I did not have everything in order he did not know what to do. In one sense women reproduce that, even though it should not be.]

Yo no creo que el trabajo de la mujer está siempre reconocido. Ser detallista es necesario en nuestra profesión y ayuda en el ámbito laboral (Interview 1)

[I do not think that the work of women is always recognized. Being detailed-oriented is necessary in our profession and helps the work environment.]

Sí, los hombres acá toman su tiempo, por decirlo así. (Interview 17)
[Yes, the men here do take their time, to put it one way.]

As these quotes reveal, WVC women not only identify themselves as professionals and “do professionalism”, but they produce these professional selves by tapping into their personal biographies as women and mothers. Consistent with the dominant gender narrative of the NGO, they use their identity as women and mothers to explain that their professional performance is based on women’s and men’s relational dynamics, in this case early childhood socialization in the family. Specifically, men in World Vision, and Colombia in general, are more “uncoordinated,” “slower paced”, and “dependent” than women because they were taught this behavior when young. Significantly, the intersectional experience of being a professional woman and/or mother creates disparities at work, which include women having to be the ones who “keep order” and deal with two work-shifts—one at work and then another at home. As one WVC woman noted, this reality “is not often recognized,” yet the women themselves reproduce it to an extent by taking on these responsibilities that are “necessary in our profession.” In all, a contrast between women and men was delineated by WVC women who drew on life experiences that they considered uniquely their own.

Commentary about organizational interpersonal relationships was also extended to a perceived hierarchy existing among professionals. Importantly, both were described in relation to the construction of professional selves. WVC women, for example, highlighted the hierarchy existing between individuals working in the central offices of WVC and those working more directly in the communities, in the *campos* (camps). As WVC women point out, this hierarchy is one that is based on whether individuals have acquired professional titles or degrees and privileging those who do. Significant at this juncture is how WVC women attempt to challenge this scenario by constructing by a broader definition of professional selves that sees value in a wider range of biographical particulars beyond simply title—such as, persons’ practical
experience. The following represent some examples of the making of this type of professional self (quotations were taken from WVC women in both central offices and camps, but any markers identifying their location were removed to preserve anonymity).

Yo trabajo en [name of location] y sé que personas con título son tratados como mejores que personas sin título. Durante una reunión, personas del campo tienen que cualificar lo que dicen porque no hay el título que te da una voz legítima. Pero yo considero que personas en los campos tienen mucha experiencia práctica, empírica. Un título no te da la experiencia que se necesita para trabajar en las comunidades. Me considero profesional con o sin título si tengo la práctica. (Interview 9)

[I work in [name of location] and I know that persons with titles are treated better than persons without titles. During a meeting, persons from the camps have to qualify what they say because they do not have the title that give you a legitimate voice. But I consider that persons in the camps have a lot of practical experience, empirical. A title does not give you the experience that is needed to work in the communities. I consider myself a professional with or without a title.]

Si hay un problema en cómo personas del campo y de las oficinas centrales comunican. Muchas de las personas del campo no tienen título o el mismo nivel de educación que personas en el centro. Los dos no están tratados como iguales. Es verdad que un título trae mucho valor, especialmente en la teoría. Pero lo empírico es igualmente importante y no se debe considerar menor. Creo que todo el mundo debe tener una educación, y Visión Mundial ayuda en eso. Al mismo tiempo, las personas de los campos tienen una reserva de experiencia que es central para actualizar la visión de esta organización. Tenemos que ampliar la definición de ser profesional. No es solamente tener título. (Interview 17)

[Yes there is a problem in how persons from the camps and the central offices communicate. Many of the persons from the camps do not have titles or the same level of education than persons from the center. The two are not treated the same. It is true that a title brings a lot of value, especially in terms of theory. But the empirical is equally important and should not be considered inferior. I think that everyone should have an education, and World Vision helps in that. At the same time, persons from the camps have a reserve of experience that is central to actualizing the vision of this organization. We have to broaden the definition of professional. It is not simple having a title.]

Hay diferentes formas de abordar situaciones. Hay que reconocer que la experiencia es una forma de saber. En realidad sí hay una jerarquía entre personas con títulos y los que no los tienen. No debía ser, porque personas en los campos traen mucho, algunas veces más que otros porque son las personas que hablan y trabajan en las comunidades. Creo yo que eso es suficiente para ser un profesional…. Debemos hablar más de eso acá, simplemente porque somos unidos en un trabajar para justicia. (Interview 10)

[There are different forms of dealing with situations. It needs to be recognized that experience is a way of knowing. In reality yes there is a hierarchy between persons with
titles and those without. It should not be, because persons in the camps bring a lot, sometimes more that other persons because they are the ones that talk and work in the communities. I think that is sufficient to be a professional…. We should talk more about that here, simply because we are united in one job for justice.]

Professionalization, at least the form that emphasizes titles, is expressed as threatening the close relationship between persons working in the camps and those in the central offices. As some explain, there is a “problem” and a real “hierarchy” between persons without professional titles and those who do have a certain level of educational achievement. One WVC woman noted an extra problem with this scenario:

Son más mujeres en los campos que hombres. No sé los números, pero no es igual. Entonces cuando hablamos de una jerarquía en términos de títulos, es entre mujeres. Es una lástima. (Interview 15)

[There are more women in the camps than men. I do not know the numbers, but it is not equal. So then when we talk about a hierarchy in terms of title, it is between women. It is a shame.]

A central problem with this hierarchy is that it is primarily between women given that women represent a majority in the organization, especially the camps. WVC women, however, artfully craft a broader definition of what it means to be a professional by referring to persons personal experience and practice in working with communities as a “way of knowing” that is as valuable as that associated with a title. In a certain sense, WVC women again rely on the “going narrative” of the NGO regarding the need for practical professionals and weave this discourse with the biographical particulars of themselves as women to construct an alternative meaning of being professional and doing a gender perspective. Thus, WVC women are clearly bound by the meaning of being professional of the NGO, but contest the narrow application of it as simply title-oriented to offer a more inclusive perspective.
Doing Self through Awareness Testimonials

As was noted earlier, WVC views the mainstreaming of a gender perspective as more than an added dimension to its overall mission and work; instead, a GAD approach is central to the organization’s very sense of identity. In this respect, a gender perspective is not external to the NGO, but also a focal point within the organization. An objective of WVC is to

aplicar los conceptos de GAD a los procesos de desarrollo transformador en curso, en particular en el contexto de la cultura organizativa de Visión Mundial y del trabajo diario en las comunidades (World Vision pamphlet).

[apply the concepts of GAD to the processes of transformative development in course, in particular in the context of the organizational culture of World Vision and in the daily work in the communities.]

A stated goal of these implementation efforts is a form of consciousness raising that highlights obstacles that personnel have encountered in their gender advocacy work. According to WVC literature, a gender perspective is meant to

levantar conciencia del personal sobre los asuntos de género y desarrollo en un entorno participativo de aprendizaje, en donde el personal puede discutir los obstáculos que ellos han enfrentado y los éxitos de los que han sido testigo al trabajar con los asuntos de género (World Vision pamphlet)

[raise the consciousness of personnel regarding issue of gender and development in a participatory and educational context, wherein personnel can discuss the obstacles that they have confronted and the successes they have been witness to when working with gender issues.]

Like their production of professional selves, WVC women also construct themselves in line with the larger NGO discourse about consciousness raising. Here again though, this production of self is not solely based on the narrative resources of the NGO but also include the interactional processes that construct identity. In this case, WVC women accomplish an identity by building self-testimonials about their ever-growing awareness of obstacles to gender equality, both within and outside the organization. Centrally important though is how WVC women rely on a broader, intersectional understanding of “gender issues” to constitute this self-awareness.
As the following examples illustrate, WVC women draw on theirs and others’ biographical specifics to point out how gender is itself fractured along multiple axis of race, class, and age, which create differential obstacles.

As one WVC pamphlet explains, in raising public awareness regarding injustice, the organization “seeks to promote public involvement and government policies” that work for the well-being of “vulnerable people.” Similarly, WVC women constructed selves by storying their own personal accounts of gender awareness, an awareness that has lead them to become more involved both on a personal level and in the NGO to expose obstacles to gender equality. The construction of these awareness testimonials was done primarily by telling stories about who are the “vulnerable people”, which included themselves and others in the NGO. More specifically, vulnerability was determined by taking into account how the intersection of gender and other categories of difference introduce new levels and types of disadvantage and difficulties to gender equality.

In one organizational pamphlet, WVC explains that their service is “available to all those in need, regardless of race, gender, ethnic background, or religious belief” (World Vision pamphlet, “Who We Are”). Several testimonials revolved around the theme of race and how it changes gender dynamics, in particular the reality of women. WVC women build awareness stories by talking intersectionally about their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences in the organizations. The examples below shows awareness being built around the intersection of race and gender, revealing how women are not a homogenous group, each experiencing the same types of obstacles to gender equality.

En términos de género es importante saber que no todo el mundo tiene las mismas oportunidades o experiencias. Aunque todos acá sabemos de la injusticia, no es siempre fácil verlo… por ejemplo, una mujer negra no es igual a una mujer blanca o mestiza. No tienen las mismas experiencias en la vida. Yo tuve una amiga [raza] y sus experiencias en
el trabajo fueron muy diferentes a los míos. Después de hablar con ella, vi que había diferencias en confianza, en el hablar durante reuniones, y en el respeto de personas. Nunca me olvido de ella, porque hablando con ella abrió mis ojos que hay diferencias entre mujeres y que es importante reflexionar sobre eso en nuestro trabajo. (Interview 20)

[In terms of gender it is important to know that not everyone has the same opportunities or experiences. Although everyone here knows about injustice, it is not always simple to see...for example, a black woman is not the same as a white or mestiza woman. They do not have the same life experiences. I have a [race] friend and her experiences at work were very different than mine. After talking with her, I saw that there were differences in confidence, in speaking during meetings, and in respect from people. I will never forget her, because talking with her opened my eyes that there are differences between women and it is important to reflect on here at work.]

En Colombia hay racismo ¿no? Es parte de nuestra cultura. Pero algo que no se habla tanto es cómo el racismo afecta mujeres en maneras diferentes. Trabajando en Visión Mundial me ha enseñado eso. Trabajando con las comunidades se ve cómo mujeres negras y blancas son tratadas diferente. Yo soy una mujer [raza] y eso me afecta mucho. Todavía tenemos que trabajar más esa realidad de desigualdad entre mujeres. Por esa razón hablo con otros en el trabajo sobre eso y mi experiencia. (Interview 12)

[In Colombia there is racism. It is part of our culture. But something that is not talked about much is how racism affects women in different ways. Working in World Vision has taught me that. Working with the communities one can see how black women and white women are treated differently. I am a [race] woman and it affects me a lot. We still need to work more on the reality that there is inequality between women. For that reason I talk to others at work about it and my experience.]

Lo que yo noto es la desigualdad entre mujeres, como entre blanca e indígena. Aunque no debe ser así, en la sociedad a las personas no le gusta tener relaciones con las indígenas. He llegado a ese reconocimiento mirando mi vida personal. Por ejemplo, cuando iba a la universidad noté que no se estudia el lenguaje indígena. Ya la mujer indígena tiene que enfrentar los obstáculos de la mujer y de ser indígena.

[What I notice is the inequality among women, like between whites and indigenous. Although it should not be this way, in society people do not like to have relationships with indigenous people. I have come to this recognition looking at my personal life. For example, when I went to the university I noticed that indigenous language is not studied. And the indigenous woman has to confront the obstacles of a woman and being indigenous.]

Bueno, yo soy [raza]. Y para mí no hay dificultad en relacionarme con otros. Pienso que aquí en nuestra oficina no tenemos esas dificultades. De pronto uno sí puede examinar más adentro y ver cómo las personas se relacionan y ver que hay instancias cuando personas blancas conversan menos con personas negras. Me parece que esos instancias son importantes porque ser una mujer negra no es decir que el individuo no tiene las mismas capacidades que una mujer blanca, las mismas capacidades de hablar, de pensar, y
de participar. Ver eso en las oficinas me duele. Dice que no hay igualdad entre las mujeres y que todavía tenemos mucho que hacer al nivel de género y raza para saber mejor cómo trabajar la inequidad. (Interview 8)

[Well, I am [race]. And for me there are no difficulties in relating to others. I think that here in our office we do not have those problems. But one can look more deeply and see how people relate and see that there are instances when white people speak less with black people. It seems to me that those instances are important because being a black woman does not mean that that individual does not have the same capacities as a white woman, the same capacities to speak, to think, and to participate. Seeing that in the offices hurts me. It tells me that there is no equality among women and that we still have much to do at the level of race and gender to know better how gender inequality functions.]

As these stories show, a sense of self-awareness was achieved by making visible how the intersection between race and gender function in their own and their friends’ lives. These women’s testimonials highlight how this dynamic produces subtle, often less discussed, differences in privilege among women, such as in their “confidence”, “respect”, and opportunity to “participate”.

An important point expressed by many WVC women is how significant these experiences are for them. These stories are important not just because they change their perceptions about women’s experiences, but also because they are often about close friends, making a sense of awareness an emotional event and thus long-lasting. Indeed, these testimonials are central to self because they are about individuals which they will “never forget” and refer to the “hurt” they felt in witnessing the differential treatment given to their friends. For other WVC women, this was more explicitly the case, noting that awareness sometimes becomes too overwhelming to bear if it were not for being able to share their stories.

Tuve una compañera [raza] en Visión Mundial y éramos muy buenas amigas. Pero si salíamos a almorzar algo, sentía que la gente en la calle nos miraba. Yo sé que ella lo notó también. Pero nunca hablamos de eso. Hemos aprendido acá que eso es el racismo. Lo que me duele, y he llorado muchas veces sobre esto, es que ella ya no está acá en Visión Mundial y era mi amiga, pero nunca pudimos hablar sobre lo que pasó. Pienso en eso casi cada vez que voy a almorzar y que si nosotras como trabajadoras para justicia no podemos comunicar, cómo vamos a cambiar la realidad de otros. Yo sé que no puedo cambiar el pasado, y lo que hago ahora es hablar con mis compañeras que tengo ahora. Eso es lo que
me ayuda. Es importantísimo saber que el racismo puede funcionar para afectar hasta las relaciones entre mujeres. Si no hablo me siento peor y no pudiera aguantar mis emociones. (Interview 3)

[I had a [race] companion in World Vision and we were good friends. But if we went out for lunch, I felt like people in the street would stare at us. I know that she noticed too. But we never talked about it. We have learned here that that is racism. What hurts me, and I’ve cried many times over this, is that she is no longer here in World Vision and she was my friend, but we never were able to talk about what happened. I think of that almost every time I go to eat and if we in working for justice could not communicate, how are we going to change the reality of others. I know I cannot change the past, and what I do now is talk to my co-workers that I have now. That is what helps me. It is very important to know that racism can function to affect even the relationships between women. If I do not talk I feel worse and would not be able to contain my emotions.]

Tenemos que hablar de raza cuando hablamos de género. Aunque somos hermanas, no todas estamos tratadas igual. Como puedes ver soy [raza] y tengo una amiga [race]. Cuando estamos juntas todo el mundo nos mira muy raro. En Visión Mundial sabemos que tener amigos de diferente color es normal. Pero yo sé que no todo el mundo en la organización tiene amigos de diferentes razas. En ese sentido es todavía difícil expresar esas experiencias de discriminación. Este tema es muy importante para mí, porque me ha dañado mi relación con mi amiga. Ella prefiere no hablar de estas cosas en público en la organización. Pero yo sí quiero y he hablado con otros. Hemos fallado varias veces por mis conversaciones con otros trabajadores. Me frustra que en una organización en la cual he aprendido la importancia de la equidad también no es tan simple en realidad. En un sentido he perdido una amiga porque ya no hablamos como antes. (Interview 6)

[We have to talk about race when we speak of gender. Although we are sisters, we are not all treated equally. As you can see I am [race] and have a friend who is [race]. When we are together people look at us very strange. In World Vision we know that having friends of different colors is normal. But I know that not everyone in the organization has friends of a different race. In that sense it is still difficult to express those experiences of discrimination. This topic is very important to me, because it has hurt my relationship with my friend. She prefers not to talk about these things in public in the organization. But I do want to and I have talked to others. We have fought various times because of my conversations with other workers. It frustrates me that in an organization in which I have learned the importance of equality it is not so simple in reality. In a certain sense I have lost a friend because we do not talk as we did before.]

In these stories, awareness is not simply conceptual; self-awareness occurs at an emotional level and is remembered through tears shed over lost friendships and the frustration felt in trying to manage one’s awareness in certain contexts. In fact, this frustration has lead some to claim that more work needs to be done with regards to “race and gender to know better how gender
inequality functions.” Other WVC women have been compelled to be more proactive and “talk to others” about their experience to continue the process of raising consciousness. In short, achieving awareness about gender inequality is an embodied phenomenon that is brought on by recognizing intersectional differences.

Awareness testimonials also engaged how other dimensions, such as age and class, come together to form new types of gendered experiences. WVC women who touched on the intersection of age and gender often mentioned the differences between “younger” and “older” women in varied WVC scenarios, such as in meetings, times of decision-making, and informal settings. In all, these WVC women again relied on an intersectional understanding of gender to express a self-awareness of how age impacts women’s experiences within the organization.

Algo que me ha inquietado, porque yo soy empleada, es la edad. Aquí en Colombia se usa mucho el concepto que una mujer puede ser muy veterana para trabajar. Y no estoy hablando de tener 60 años. Hay muchas empresas que ya no están recibiendo mujeres de más de 35 años. Eso es parte de la cultura y es muy duro hablar de lo contrario con un director o líder en la empresa. Yo no creo que eso pasa aquí en Visión Mundial, pero si se notan cositas. Por ejemplo, en los pasillos puedes oír chistes de mujeres viejas. Pero claro, un hombre se ve como ganando experiencia con los años. La mujer tiene que vivir con varias dificultades que un hombre no tiene. De verdad no lo he pensado tanto como ahora que tengo [edad] años, que no es mucho creo. (Interview 8)

Lo que noto durante reuniones es que se usa mucho la idea de edad para hablar de mujeres. Por ejemplo, es común si una mujer jovencita y una más mayor quieren hablar, oír el director decir, “Bueno, edad antes de belleza.” Yo no digo nada porque es un dicho muy común en Colombia, pero me molesta porque se usa nada más para mujeres. Entonces si eres jovencita eres bonita. ¿Pero si eres más mayor qué significa? También no me gusta que mi cuerpo sea parte del dialogo durante una reunión profesional. No creo que lo están
haciendo con mal intención, pero produce un contexto en cual no me siento confortable. 
Esto es algo que esta más y más en mi mente. (Interview 16)

[What I notice during meetings is that the idea of age is used a lot to talk about women. 
For example, it is common if a younger and older woman want to say something to hear 
the director say, “Well, age before beauty.” I do not say anything because it is a very 
common saying in Colombia, but it bothers me because it is used only for women. So then 
if you are young you are beautiful. But if you are older what does it mean? Also I do not 
like it that my body is part of the conversation during a professional meeting. I do not 
think that they are doing it intentionally, but it produces a context in which I do not feel 
comfortable. This is something that is more and more in my mind.]

These WVC describe a growing awareness of how age and gender shape their work experience, 
one that has for the most part only recently become a focus of attention. Age is felt to be a way 
not only to discriminate against older women, but also an officially legitimate means to make 
women’s body part of discussion. In this case, legitimation is based on using culturally accepted 
sayings.

Other WVC women, however, shared that they have confronted this issue for some time. 
For these WVC women, being aware of the intersection of age and gender produced a deep sense 
of insecurity and ambivalence at the work place and with co-workers.

Yo llevo [numero] años trabajando en Visión Mundial y yo sé que me ven como vieja. No 
son malos conmigo, pero (pausa) es que me hablan como si fuera su abuelita. En un 
sentido eso es bonito, pero no cuando estoy dando mis opiniones o perspectiva en algo. 
No tengo la misma autoridad, no. Entonces no me siento segura en reuniones. Esto no es 
algo nuevo. Y también me ha afectado cómo comunico con personas de menos edad, con 
los jovencitos. Tengo más distancia que antes con ellos. No me gusta eso. (Interview 24)

[I have been working in World Vision for [number] years and I know that they see me as 
old. They are not bad to me, but (pause) it is that they talk to me as if I were their 
grandmother. In one sense it is nice, but not when I am giving my opinions or perspective 
on something. I do not have the same authority, right. So then I do not feel secure in 
meetings. This is not something new. And it has also affected how I communicate with 
younger persons, with the youth. I have more distance than before with them. I do not like 
it.]

La equidad de género necesita equidad de edad también. No es todo el mundo, pero si se 
ve hombres tratando mujeres más jóvenes diferente a mujeres mayores. Si una mujer más 
joven hace algo incorrecto, no la regañan. Le dicen, “no te preocupes.” Pero una mujer de 
mayor edad no puede hacer un error, porque indica que ya no sirve. Por eso tengo más
cuidado ahora porque estoy más nerviosa en como hago mi trabajo. Algunas veces no duermo bien. Por eso digo que es muy importante hablar no sólo de género sino de la edad también. No creo que un hombre vaya a entender esto como una mujer. (Interview 3)

[Gender equality needs equality in age also. It is not everyone, but one does see men treating younger women differently than older women. If a younger woman does something incorrect, she is not reprimanded. They tell her, “do not worry about it.” But an older woman cannot make a mistake, because it indicates that she no longer is useful. For that reason I am more careful now because I am more nervous in how I do my job. Sometimes I do not sleep well. For that reason I say that it is important to not only talk about gender but also age too. I do not think that a man will understand this like a woman.]

In these examples, awareness is narrated by expressing the various emotional concerns and consequential effects associated with the intersection of age and gender. In particular, the differential treatment of younger and older women leads WVC women to feel unsure and nervous about their daily work to the point of affecting their relationship with fellow co-workers and impacting their ability to sleep.

Finally, some WVC women highlighted class in their awareness testimonials. Class was talked about as primarily personas having the financial resources to hire domestic assistance. Being able to afford domestic help was viewed as distinctly affecting women, with those who could hire domestic help standing to benefit over women who could not.

Sabemos que las mujeres tienen dos trabajos, uno laboral y uno domestico. Aquí en Visión Mundial hay muchas mujeres con hijos, pero no todas pueden pagar para ayuda. Esas mujeres que no tienen los recursos llegan al trabajo mas cansadas. Yo lo veo todos los días. Lo extraño es que trabajamos una perspectiva de género acá, pero nunca hablamos de las dos jornadas para las mujeres dentro de Visión Mundial. Después de tener hijos empecé a entender esto más. Por eso creo que es importante promover este reconocimiento al hombre, que hace menos en la casa, y a las mujeres que se han olvidado de las experiencias de otras. (Interview 13)

[We know that women have two jobs, one at work and the other at home. There are many women here in World Vision with children, but they cannot all afford to pay for help. Those women that do not have the resources come to work more tired. I see it everyday. The strange thing is that we work a gender perspective here, but never talk about the double-shift for women within World Vision. After having children, I came to understand this more. That is why I think that it is important to promote this awareness to men, who do less at home, and to women who have forgotten the experiences of others.]
Es muy difícil tener una carrera y ser mamá. Muchas veces no puedo ir a reuniones durante los fines de semana, porque necesito estar con mis hijos. ¿Qué puedo hacer? Visión Mundial entiende y por eso esas reuniones no son obligatorias. Pero yo todavía quiero participar. Los hombres siempre van porque su esposa se queda con los hijos, pero yo no puedo. También hay mujeres que tienen ayuda; lo pagan. Yo conozco muchas mujeres acá que no pueden hacer eso; no tienen el dinero. Las mujeres acá lo reconocen, pero necesitamos una manera de comunicar esta experiencia porque nos daña como mujer y como profesional. (Interview 24)

It is very difficult to have a career and be a mother. Many times I cannot attend meetings held during the weekend, because I need to be with my children. What can I do? World Vision understands this and for that reason those meetings are not obligatory. But I still want to participate. Men always go because their wife takes care of the children, but I cannot go. There are also women who have help; they pay. I know many women here who cannot do that; they do not have the money. The women here recognize this, but we need a way to communicate this experience because it hurts us as women and as professionals.]

Esta es una organización en cual muchas de nosotras somos mamás, algunas divorciadas. En hablar de género yo he realizado que la situación económica es central. Por ejemplo, poder pagar a alguien para ayudar en la casa es un recurso grande que no todos tienen. Yo no veo los hombres hablando de qué cansados están porque no durmieron anoche porque estaban con su hijo hasta la madrugada. Como mamá, he entrado al trabajo muy cansada, sin dormir, y todavía teniendo que hacer mi trabajo igual como una persona que descansó toda la noche. Esto no está siempre reconocido acá, pero es vital para nuestro trabajo de género. Mira, el otro día tuve que trabajar hasta las 7:00 de la noche, entré a las 7:00 de la mañana, y cuando llegué a la casa mi hija necesitó ayuda con su proyecto de escuela. Nos tocó hasta las 11:00 para terminar. Ni comí. El próximo día fue muy duro, pero ¿qué pude hacer? (Interview 4)

[This is an organization in which many of us are mom, some divorced. In talking about gender I have realized that the economic situation is central. For example, being able to pay someone to help in the house is a big resource that not everyone has. I do not see the men talking about how tired they are because they did not sleep last night because they were with their child until the morning. As a mom, I have come to work very tired, without sleeping, and still having to do my job the same as someone who rested all night. Look, the other day I had to work until 7:00 at night, I entered at 7:00 in the morning, and when I got home my daughter needed help with her school project. It took us until 11:00 to finish. I did not even eat. The next day was very hard, but what could I do?]

The awareness testimonials of WVC women regularly center on how obstacles that women face are not homogenous and thus require a host of other considerations to understand how certain personas are advantaged vis-à-vis others. As these WVC highlight, social class is another key category to consider when understanding what prevents women from participating fully and
fairly in the workplace. Indeed, the inability to pay for domestic assistance affects everything from their energy levels to if they will be able to attend weekend meetings.

In all, by telling testimonials WVC women simultaneously construct a sense of self as a woman and practice the promotion of a gender perspective in the NGO—namely, by engendering awareness of about gender inequality. Importantly, WVC women’s awareness stories are built on their own and others’ personal, biographical experiences and the larger awareness narrative of the NGO. As many noted, these stories are important to their sense of identity because they touch on a range of emotional and relational facet of their lives. Thus, in constructing professional selves and telling testimonials, WVC women produce gendered identities within WVC that reveal the interplay between the narrative resources of the NGO and the interaction production of selves.
CHAPTER 7
CHRISTIANS FOR A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Christian Values as Narrative Resource

Such as in Chapter 5, the purpose here is to present yet another way that WVC women’s selves are constructed in reference to the going concerns of their NGO. In particular, Christian values stand as a primary substantive focus of WVC and also provide a set of narrative resources from which WVC women produce their identities. Especially important is how WVC women, in their production of selves, also adopt the NGO’s approach of using its dominant discourse of Christian values to pursue the promotion of a gender perspective.

Promoting a Gender Perspective as Being Christian

Although WVC is an NGO working toward mainstreaming a gender perspective within its internal and external projects, this was not the organization’s central focus from its inception. While gender is a stated “transversal theme” of the NGO, WVC (as the Colombian arm of the international World Vision organization) principally identifies itself and emphasizes a discourse of and about religious Christian values. This is made evident in a description of the organization by the President of World Vision International:

World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization. We follow the great commandment to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Heeding Christ’s model of unconditional love, our work is focused on those who are most vulnerable or most in need: those who are sick, hungry, persecuted, homeless or defenseless (World Vision pamphlet).

This is echoed by WVC on their website where under the heading of “Who We Are” (Quiénes Somos) they explain that “We Are Christians” (Somos Cristianos):

Nos comprometemos a conocer a Jesús como nuestro Señor y Salvador, nuestro modelo, lo que implica para nosotros la adopción de un estilo de vida individual y corporativo, caracterizado por la oración, la lectura y la práctica de la palabra de Dios, la adoración, el testimonio personal, la proclamación y la presentación de un servicio de calidad a los pobres con quienes interactuamos (Visión Mundial 2005d).
[We commit ourselves to know Jesus as our God and Savior, our model, what it implies for us the adoption of a style of individual and corporative life, characterized by the oration, the reading and the practice of the word of God, the adoration, the personal testimony, the proclamation and the presentation of a quality of service to the poor with whom we interact.]

In this sense, “World Vision is motivated by Christian faith” (World Vision pamphlet), a set of religious Christian values that constitute a vital, if not “the”, substantive discourse of the NGO.

What is important for this discussion is how WVC’s narrative of Christian values is intentionally used to legitimize and engage a gender perspective, in particular a relational understanding of the gender order. In other words, for WVC gender issues are not divorced from but rather constitutive of its religious values. Instituting a gender perspective is central to carrying out a Christian’s mission. This is clearly stated in the prologue of an internal document by the Vice President of World Vision International’s Development and Resources of Nourishment:

Según se nos cuenta, Dios creó al género humano, tanto al hombre como a la mujer. Juntos, complementados, ninguno está completo sin el otro. ¿Qué otra cosa podría esperar de un Dios relacional que es tres personas en una? Desde el principio, todo es relacional y la transformación depende de las relaciones. Esto es el fundamento de un entendimiento cristiano acerca del género y su relación con el desarrollo humano y social. Ninguno de los géneros puede lograrlo sin el otro. Ambos aportan sus dones y cumplen con sus papeles. Esta piedra fundamental cristiana es avalada por un alud de estudios que demuestran la importancia de las mujeres para lograr un desarrollo sostenible; y que la debilitación de las mujeres o el fortalecimiento desmedido de los hombres dificultan el cambio social (World Vision International 2005).

[As the story goes, God created to the human species, as much man as woman. Together, complemented, no one is complete without the other. What else could be expected from a relational God that three persons in one? From the beginning, everything is relational and transformation depends on relations. This is the foundation of a Christian understanding concerning gender and its relationship to human and social development. No one gender can obtain it without the other. Both contribute their gifts and fulfill their roles. This Christian cornerstone is guaranteed by an avalanche of studies that demonstrate the importance of women to obtain sustainable development; and that the debilitation of women or the excessive fortification of men makes frustrates social change.]
The association of Christian values with the promotion of a gender perspective is similar to the way WVC women describe themselves as Christians. Specifically, WVC model their storying of self after the dominant discourse (being a Christian) of the NGO and utilize this narrative to justify a gender advocacy position.

This strategic move to associate being Christian with gender advocacy is illustrated in several of WVC women’s descriptions of what it means to be a Christian themselves.

Para me, género es parte del cristianismo, ¿no? Es parte de la filosofía, de los principios cristianos. Es parte de mi misión como cristiana seguir una perspectiva de género, porque la importancia de género es en los procesos sociales de desarrollo. Como cristiana estoy dedicada a un desarrollo justo y equitativo y eso incluye lo de género. Entonces si estamos hablando de esos valores fundamentales, y si hablamos de ese espacio espiritual tenemos que hablar y reconocer también el género como un eje transversal. (Interview 23)

[For me, gender is part of Christianity, right. It is part of the philosophy, of Christian principles. It is part of the mission of a Christian to pursue a gender perspective, because the importance of gender is in the social processes of development. As a Christian I am dedicated to just and equal development and that includes gender. So then we are taking about those fundamental values, and if we talk about that spiritual space we have to talk about and recognize gender also a transversal theme.]

La parte espiritual es muy importante en mi vida. El primer eje en Visión Mundial es una buena relación con Dios—es como el eje, el centro. Ser cristiana es manejar los valores del reino. Estos valores incluye valorar al otro, a ser sensible. Manejar una perspectiva de género nos ayuda a desarrollar espiritualmente como personas. No cada cristiano maneja la parte de género, pero es central como un modelo para un desarrollo que es sensible con el otro. Por eso yo me considero una cristiana que trabaja género como parte de mi espiritualidad. (Interview 16)

[The spiritual part is very important in my life. The first theme in World Vision is a good relationship with God—it is like the theme, the center. Being Christian means working the values of the kingdom. These values include valuing the other, to be sensitive. Working a gender perspective helps us develop spiritually as persons. Not every Christian works the gender aspect, but it is central as a model for a development that is sensitive with the other. For that reason I consider myself a Christian that works gender as part of my spirituality.]

La religión es también importante en el discurso de género. Como una persona que trata de vivir con los principios de Jesús Cristo, tengo que reconocer la realidad de género. Es mi obligación como cristiana analizar el desarrollo de la mujer y del hombre como una relación de seres. Por eso Visión Mundial trabaja una perspectiva de género, porque te permite un desarrollo de oportunidades y equidad. (Interview 17)
[Religion is also important in the discourse of gender. As a person who tries to live with the principles of Jesus Christ, I have to recognize the reality of gender. It is my obligation as a Christian to analyze the development of women and of men as a relation of beings. For that reason World Vision works a gender perspective, because it allows you a development with opportunities and equality.]

WVC women provide descriptions of themselves that are similar to the depictions for the NGO. Like the NGO, WVC women talk about promoting a gender perspective as what it means to be a Christian. These individuals clearly emphasized this linkage as something “fundamental” and “obligatory” to their spirituality as “living for the principles of Jesus Christ”. This was made particularly evident in one WVC woman’s personal account of how gender has become a central feature of her Christianity:

Trabajando aquí en Visión Mundial me ha enseñado cómo me puedo amar. Yo crecí en una familia en cual la mujer fue tratada como inferior al hombre. Desde pequeña aprendí eso y hasta hoy lo llevo conmigo. Pero acá enseñan que Dios quiere a todo el mundo, sea hombre o mujer. Acá se maneja el género como parte del la espiritualidad. Ahora sé que me puedo valorar como mujer porque es lo que Dios quiere. Esto ha sido algo duro para mí y todavía me toca duro. (Interview 5)

[Working here in World Vision has taught me how I can love myself. I grew up in a family in which women were treated as inferior to men. Since I was little I learned that and until today I take it with me. But here they teach that God loves everyone, whether they be a man or woman. Here gender is worked as part of spirituality. Now I know I can value myself as a woman because it is what God wants. This has been something difficult for me and it still hits me hard.]

The relevance of gender in this WVC woman’s relationship with God is explained as a direct result of working in the NGO and coming into contact with its discourse concerning the role of gender in a Christian’s mission. As this individual notes, this narrative is one that has helped her to learn how to love herself in ways that were frustrated before.

In general, WVC women’s sense of self as a Christian mirrors the NGO narrative of gender being important for social and human development. As was mentioned earlier, WVC understands transformational development as contingent upon a relational view of gender. According to the organization, a relational approach is “fundamental to a Christians
understanding concerning gender and its relationship to human and social development.” Thus another significant way WVC women articulated a sense of self was more specifically in terms of their social service work. Important to note is how gender advocacy is a central feature in their “Christian service” efforts in communities.

Nosotros como institución, que somos el desarrollo, pues tenemos esa misión de género también. Es parte de mi servicio como trabajador, como cristiana, modificar esos elementos sociales y culturales en las diferentes instancias en las comunidades. En realidad la equidad es precisamente un trabajo cristiano. Así es como nos creó Dios. Necesitamos trabajar para promover la atención a la mujer, sin dejar el hombre. (Interview 23)

[As an institution, as development, we have that mission regarding gender too. It is part of my service as a worker, as a Christian, to modify those social and cultural elements in different instances in the communities. In reality equality is precisely a Christian job. That is how God created us. We have to work to bring attention to women, without leaving out the men

Tenemos un trabajo muy importante que hacemos para nuestras comunidades. Es un privilegio hacer el trabajo de Dios y ayudar en el proceso de desarrollo. Dios permitió que la mujer tenga hijos, pero es importantísimo también saber que la mujer necesita un poco de protecciones afrente de la inequidad. Es muy raro, por ejemplo, oír un hombre en las comunidades decir que “tengo que ir a recoger a mi hijo; tengo que comprar la ropa de los niños.” Hay que trabajar esa relación para transformar los papeles históricos de la mujer y del hombre. Por eso me preparé, estudié, y ahora trabajo para esa transformación social que es también una transformación deseado por Dios. Hago este trabajo no porque tengo, sino porque está en mi corazón. (Interview 16)

[We have a very important job that we do for our communities. It is a privilege to do God’s work and help in the development process. God allowed women to have children, but it is very important to know that women need some protection with regards to inequality. It is very strange, for example, to hear a man in the community say that “I have to pick up my child; I have to buy the kids clothes.” That relation has to be worked to transform the historical roles of the woman and man. For that reason I prepared myself, studied, and now work for that social transformation that is also a transformation desired by God. I do this job not because I have to, but because it is in my heart.

These WVC women see their social service work as constitutive of their own identity as Christians, pointing out how their labor stems from their heart. In addition though, gender advocacy is also explained as a central part of their work. This was again done by associating gender and development with a Christian mission. Indeed, a religious rationale was used to
justify working a gender perspective in communities. According to one WVC woman, all of her “preparation, studies, and now work” is to do the type of transformative work “desired by God.”

Other WVC women slightly modified this focus of social service to also include the internal realities of the organization. In other words, being a Christian working for a gender perspective not only occurs in communities, but also in the everyday interactions at the workplace.

Deseo que esos proyectos de género se implanten y que se vean efectivos, no solamente en los programas y proyectos sino en la cultura, en la estructura organizacional. Como una organización cristiana, yo tengo que crear una unidad de género. Es mi misión porque es la misión de Dios. Entonces mi trabajo es formar los técnicos para poder implantar programas para que se camine hasta la equidad. (Interview 2)

[I want those gender projects to be implemented and that they are seen as effective, not only in the programs and projects but in the culture, in the structure of the organization. As a Christian organization, I have to create gender unity. It is my mission because it is God’s mission. So then my job is to formulate techniques to implement programs so that we walk toward equality.]

Hay que mantener la reflexión interno, para que se transcienda esos discursos feos que tratan la mujer como inferior o el hombre como superior. Yo trabajo en una organización cristiana, entonces esos discursos no deben existir acá. Es verdad que la mayoría somos mujeres, pero todavía existe inequidad en posiciones de poder. Visión Mundial está trabajando eso, pero es mi trabajo también cambiar esos instancias. Jesús dijo que el reino esta aquí, no solo afuera en el cielo. (Interview 4)

[Internal reflection has to be maintained, so that those ugly discourses that treat women as inferior and men as superior are transcended. I work in a Christian organization, so those discourses should not exist here. It is true that the majority here is women, but there still exists inequality in positions of power. World Vision is working that, but it is my job also to change those instances. Jesus said that the kingdom is here, and not only outside in heaven.]

One WVC woman spoke specifically about the relevance of this study for the implementation of a gender perspective within the organization in explicitly religious terms.

Yo creo que Dios creó todo y está detrás de todo. Tu estás aquí ahora porque Dios quiso que nosotros trabajemos más el concepto de género dentro de Visión Mundial. Para mí su trabajo afirma mi creencia en Dios, porque hace tiempo que nosotros hemos tratado implementar una posición acerca de género. Por eso quise hacer esta entrevista. Es para promover la misión de Dios. (Interview 5)
[I believe that God created everything and is behind everything. You are here now because God wanted that we work more the concept of gender within World Vision. For me your work affirms my belief in God, because it has been some time that we have been trying to implement a position on gender. It is for that reason that I did the interview. It is to promote God’s mission.]

WVC women understood gender advocacy to not simply be the work of the organization, but represents their personal duty as a Christian. Some described this duty in more general terms as including “formulating techniques” and “changing instances” of inequality within the workplace. Another WVC woman spoke more specifically citing her participation as an interviewee in this study as a way of promoting “God’s mission” to “implement a position concerning gender.”

As these examples show, WVC women obtain a sense of self from their social service work but from within the dominant discourse of the NGO, which sees Christian social development as one that seriously considers gender dynamics. In these cases, WVC women built a sense of self by associating, as the dominant discourse of the NGO does, being Christian with employing a gender perspective.

**Reading the Bible: Finding Gender in My Faith**

In addition to associating a Christian faith with a gender perspective, WVC more specifically employs the biblical text as a means for conveying the importance of gender in analyses of development. For the organization, the Bible represents the central text of the Christian faith and is considered an integral feature in its orientation and work. It is the explicit intent of WVC to

> proporciona al personal de Visión Mundial un entendimiento integral de los pasajes bíblicos claves relacionados con la equidad de géneros(World Vision International 2005). [provide to the personnel of World Vision an integral understanding of the key Biblical passages related to the gender equality.]

In this case, the Bible assists in delineating the basic identity of WVC, especially how a Christian organization goes about its work. This is particularly the case with regards to promoting a
gender perspective. The biblical basis to gender issues is explained by the organization in this manner:

Para una ONG cuya identidad, historia y valores centrales son cristianos, una base bíblica y teológica es esencial para determinar la prioridad, la estrategia y la respuesta en cada nivel de nuestro trabajo diario. Esto es particularmente cierto con respecto al género (World Vision International 2005).

[For an NGO whose central identity, history and values are Christian, a Biblical and theological base is essential to determine the priority, the strategy and the answer in every level of our daily work. This is particularly certain with respect to gender.]

To this end, a primary strategy adopted by WVC is to engage in reflections of biblical texts to better aid professionals understanding of concepts and pursuit of a GAD approach.

Accordingly, WVC

incorpora reflexiones bíblicas con la intención de ejercitar el “alma” de una organización cristiana de desarrollo, así como también las practicas, los conceptos y las herramientas de GAD reconocidas internacionalmente, requeridas cada vez más para todos los profesionales de desarrollo (World Vision International 2005).

[incorporates Biblical reflections with the intention to exercise the "soul" of a Christian organization of development, as well as its practice, the concepts and the tools of GAD recognized internationally, increasingly required for all professionals of development.]

WVC women similarly incorporate Biblical reflections. WVC women, however, did not always use the Bible as a context to understand gender. Importantly, this tactic often started after working and participating in the organization, making it clear that WVC women’s sense of (religious) self relies on the NGO’s very specific use of the Bible to broach the issue of gender.

Desde que era pequeñita he leído la Biblia. Mi madre nos hizo leer la Palabra en voz alta antes de ir a dormir. La Biblia es importante para mí porque es mi manera de comunicar con Dios cuando estoy confundida o necesito ayuda. No era hasta que trabajé aquí que empecé a utilizar la Biblia para entender mejor yo misma como mujer. (Interview 22)

[Since I was little I have read the Bible. My mother made us read the Word aloud before going to sleep. The Bible is important to me because it is my way of talking to God when I am confused or need help. It was not until I worked here that I started to use the Bible to understand myself better as a woman.]
Trabajando en Visión Mundial me ha enseñado que la Palabra de Dios habla de género. Ahora leo la Biblia con esa perspectiva. Como mujer, como cristiana eso es importante porque no se oye mucho de eso en la iglesia. A veces me pongo un poco brava que en la misa no se toca el tema de género. Sabemos que las mujeres son un grupo vulnerable y que Dios requiere la justicia para todos. Pero en mi vida personal yo veo la Palabra como hablando de mis condiciones como mujer. (Interview 17)

[Working in World Vision has taught me that the World of God talks about gender. Now I read the Bible with that perspective. As a woman, as a Christian that is important because one does not hear very much about that in church. At times I get a little angry that in mass gender is not touched upon. We know that women are a vulnerable group and that God requires justice for all. But in my personal life I see the Word as taking about my conditions as a woman.]

Siempre se habla del dinero, de la salud, de la familia en nuestra fe. Pero nunca se habla del género y qué dice la Biblia sobre ese tema. Acá sí se habla de género en términos de los principios cristianos. Ahora cuando rezo con mis amigas, rezo por las relaciones que tenemos con los hombres. Siempre digo, “que nuestras relaciones sean justas y sin machismo.” Algunas veces me miran un poco raro, pero como cristiana es importante esos esfuerzos. (Interview 23)

[Money, health, and family are always talked about in our faith. But gender is never talked about and what the Bible says about the topic. Gender is talked about here in terms of Christian principles. Now when I pray with my friends, I pray for the relationships we have with men. I always say, “that our relations be just and without machismo.” Sometimes they look at me strange, but as a Christian those efforts are important.]

Visión Mundial es muy especial. Hacemos algo que no pasa en muchas organizaciones. Acá usamos la Biblia en nuestro trabajo diario. Incorporamos la reflexión bíblica para analizar género. Esto nos prepara como cristianos y como profesionales. Por eso digo que tenemos un espacio especial, porque unimos nuestra fe con nuestro trabajo profesional. Eso es necesario porque somos personas integrales. Mi trabajo y vida personal como una mujer cristiana no están separados. (Interview 16)

[World Vision is very special. We do something that does not happen in many organizations. Here we use the Bible in our daily work. We incorporate biblical reflections to analyze gender. This prepares use as Christians and as professionals. For that reason I say that we have a special space, because we unite our faith with our professional job. That is necessary because we are integral people. My job and my personal life as a Christian woman are not separated.]

While using the Bible as part of their faith is certainly not a new, WVC women emphasize how the organization has introduced the idea of placing gender within the context of the Bible. For some, it was not until they began working in the NGO did they “start” and “learn” to use the
Bible to understand gender. As they note, this novel approach has shaped their own selves by leading them to “better understand myself as a woman”, change the focus of prayer with friends to include gender, and at times become angry with the apparent silence in church with respect to gender. For another woman biblical reflections aid in integrating her own personal life, in particular her Christian faith as a woman with her professional work.

Humble Followers of Jesus: Examining Gendered Selves

WVC considers it important, however, to make a differentiation between reading the Bible for “inspiration” and for the purposes of “interpreting” its passages:

Visión Mundial afirma que las Escrituras son para ser interpretadas integral y temáticamente, y también distingue entre inspiración e interpretación. La inspiración se relaciona con el impulso divino y reconoce todo el canon de las Escrituras así como la Palabra de Dios. La interpretación es nuestra actividad humana al tratar de discernir la verdad relevada en armonía con la totalidad de las Escrituras y bajo la guía del Espíritu Santo(World Vision International 2005).

[World Vision affirms that the Scriptures are to be interpreted integrally and thematically, and also distinguishes between inspiration and interpretation. Inspiration is related to the divine impulse and recognizes the entire canon of the Scriptures as the Word of God. Interpretation is our human activity when trying to discern to the truth revealed in harmony with the totality of the Scriptures and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.]

WVC draws this distinction in order to address the central question of whether the Bible is an infallible text. While not denying that the Bible represents the “Palabra de Dios” (Word of God), WVC maintains that human understanding is not error-free and can lead to misinterpretations of Biblical passages. Take for example the following organizational statement:

Con humildad reconocemos que los cristianos a través de la historia se han equivocado con la interpretación en varias ocasiones y han tenido que apoyarse en la gracia de Dios al volver a rendirse a la autoridad de las Escrituras a la luz de un nuevo entendimiento. Así como ahora reconocemos que Copérnico estaba en lo cierto a pesar de que las autoridades de la iglesia lo condenaron y así como Jesús tuvo que reprender a Nicodemo, a sus propios discípulos y a los líderes religiosos de la época por no entender las Escrituras de manera precisa…( World Vision Internacional 2005).

[With humility we recognize that Christians throughout history have been mistaken with the interpretation in several occasions and have had to lean on the grace of God when again
surrendering authority of Scriptures to the light of a new understanding. Just as we now recognize that Copernicus was correct despite that the authorities of the church condemned him and just as Jesus had to reprimand Nicodemus, his own disciples and the religious leaders of the time for not understanding the Scriptures in a precise way.

The organization goes on to state what Christians must do, given humankind’s fallibility with respect to the Bible:

Para ser verdaderamente bíblicos, los seguidores de Jesús deben examinar constantemente su fe y su práctica a la luz de las Escrituras (World Vision International 2005).

[To be truly Biblical, the followers of Jesus must examine constantly their faith and practices in light of the Scriptures.]

According to WVC, it is our human condition, not God, which suggests the inevitability of interpretation and the constant need to examine one’s faith.

This is particularly the case for how Christians interpret what the Bible has to say about gender:

así que nosotros, los seguidores de Jesús de hoy día debemos estar dispuestos a reexaminar con humildad nuestras suposiciones sobre lo que Dios nos dice respecto de las relaciones entre los géneros y la reconciliación (World Vision International 2005)

[so should we, the followers of Christ today be ready to reexamine with humility our suppositions about what God says with respect to gender relations and reconciliation.]

Interestingly, while the organization talks about the need for Christians in general to examine their assumptions about gender, this suggestion is taken personally by WVC women and used to assess their own personal histories. Specifically, many WVC women offered personal, at times painful, accounts of the importance of being “humble followers of Jesus” whose faith is open with regards to gender.

Claro, hay diferencias entre cristianos. Por ejemplo, no todos interpretan la Biblia igual en cómo se deben relacionar los géneros. Eso es algo muy marcado en mi familia con mi padre. Para mi padre la mujer estuvo creada después del hombre y por eso debe de estar debajo, por decir algo, del hombre. Yo sé que eso no es verdad, porque acá se enseña que la mujer y el hombre son iguales y los dos creados en el imagen de Dios. Hasta hoy mi padre todavía cree eso y me trata muchas veces como una sirviente (pausa). Pero mi experiencia con mi padre me ha causado mucho dolor y he llorado con mi padre, pero él no
entiende. Es parte de una interpretación de la Biblia que es machista. Pero hay que tener cuidado en cómo interpretamos la Palabra de Dios, porque somos seres humanos; no somos perfectos como Dios. Como cristianos debemos ser como Jesús y no juzgar. (Interview 22)

[Of course, there are differences between Christians. For example, not all interpret the Bible the same in how genders should relate. That is something very specific in my family with my father. For my father woman were created after man and for that reason should be beneath, to put it one way, the man. I know that that is not true, because here it is taught that women and men are equals and both were created in God’s image. But my experience with my father has caused me a lot of pain and I have cried with my father, but he does not understand. It is part of a machista interpretation of the Bible. But we have to be cautious in how we interpret the Word of God, because we are human beings; we are not perfect like God. As Christians we should be like Jesus and not judge.]

Yo me conozco. Cuando hablo con un hombre actúo diferente que cuando hablo con una mujer. Es como que (pausa) soy inferior o menos. Dejo que él hable más y que sus decisiones son las que vamos a promover. Había un tiempo en mi vida que eso no me importaba, pero ahora sí. Tengo amigas acá que me han dicho que eso es una ideología antigua y que ahora los seguidores de Jesús están usando la Palabra de Dios para la liberación de la mujer…. Estoy tratando de cambiar mi perspectiva, pero no es fácil. (Interview 17)

[I know myself. When I talk to a man I act differently than when I talk to a woman. It is like (pause) I am inferior or less. I let him speak more and that his decisions are the ones that are followed. There was a time in my life that it did not bother me, but now yes. I have friends here that have told me that that is an old ideology and that now followers of Jesus are using the Word of God to liberate women…. I am trying to change my perspective, but it is not easy.]

Yo pensé que una mujer cristiana tenía que servir a su esposo porque el es el rey de la casa. Desde cuando era niña pensé que los valores cristianos eran que el hombre tenía voz y la mujer no. Pero eso es una perspectiva ignorante que se trata como absoluto. En Visión Mundial trabajamos la idea que debemos interpretar la Biblia como Jesús, para promover la justicia y equidad entre géneros. Estoy hablando con mi marido sobre todo esto. El ha cambiado un poco, pero todavía le da dificultad no ver la casa como el dominio de la mujer. Claro que eso me molesta mucho. El me ama mucho pero cree que los papeles del hombre y de la mujer son diferentes. Y sé que no soy la única acá. Hay muchas mujeres con esposos así. Pero poco a poco vamos abriendo las mentes. (Interview 3)

[I thought that a Christian woman had to serve her husband because he was the king of the house. Since I was a little girl I thought that Christian values were that the man had a voice and the woman did not. But that is an ignorant perspective that is treated as absolute. In World Vision we work the idea that we should interpret the Bible like Jesus, to promote justice and equality between genders. I am talking to my husband about all this. He has changed a bit, but it is still difficult for him to not see the home as a woman’s domain. Of course that bothers me a lot. He loves me very much but things that the roles of men and]
women are different. And I know I am not the only one here. There are many women with husbands that this. But little by little we open minds."

These accounts show that WVC women utilize the organization’s general call for Christians to examine their views on gender to explore their gendered self as it relates to family, friends, and spouses. Particularly noteworthy is how WVC women adopt the dominant discourse of “humble followers of Jesus” to give their personal histories meaning and reveal their gendered nature. By framing their experiences within a Biblical context, WVC women located the origins of their feelings of inferiority and obligatory servitude to specific interpretations of the Bible, such as with the creation story in Genesis. In addition, WVC women framed their own present-day efforts to encourage more “cautious” and not “absolute” interpretations of gender. These efforts were at times directed outwardly to either a parent or spouse, but in one case to herself also to oneself.

In all, WVC women’s sense of self is bound by the available meanings of what it means to be Christian. This dominant discourse of the NGO was used by WVC women to identify both their sense of purpose in the organization and how a focus on gender analysis has affected them personally. In short, WVC women view gender as a transversal theme in regards to their sense of self in the NGO; it is not only the mission of WVC, but also the “personal mission” of WVC women as Christian in pursuit of a gender perspective.
CHAPTER 8
DOING CHRISTIAN VALUES AND SELF

Interpretive Practice of WVC Women as Christians

It was shown how WVC women build a self-identity from the substantive Christian frame available within the organization and in so doing reaffirm a sense of collectivity as NGO selves. The purpose here is to examine more closely the active way WVC women narratively produce selves (discursive practice), in addition to their reliance on the discourse-in-practice to establish an identity. For as was noted in Chapter 7, WVC women are not only construct selves as women, but equally significant is that they do so as Christian women by using a primary “going concern” (i.e., Christian values) of their NGO. In an effort to study both the substantive and active side of WVC women’s framing activity, attention is given to the processes by which they narratively accomplish Christian selves.

Consistent with the work of Holstein and Gubrium (2000) and Broad (2002) that this study is based on, WVC women’s identity work is represented in their efforts to weave together the circumstantial resources of the NGO with their own biographical particulars. In this way, WVC women’s selves are explored as more than reflections of the NGO culture, but also including historically unique and active self-productions. In the following sections, I present how WVC women’s selves are produced through their Christian talk, which is composed of storying leadership, communal prayer, and social support.

Leading by Example: Doing Self Through Christian Leadership

As was mentioned previously, a central way WVC women construct their selves is by adopting the NGO’s dual discourse of a gender perspective and Christian principles. In short, it is the duty of a Christian to foster a gender perspective because an understanding of gender is the alma (soul) of a Christian organization. Indeed, as WVC states:
Una base sólida en las “dinámicas de género” que Jesús vivió y demostró es esencial para cualquier entendimiento cristiano del género (World Vision International 2005).

[A solid base in the "dynamics of gender" that Jesus lived and demonstrated is essential for any Christian understanding of gender.]

Much of WVC’s reliance on a discourse of Christianity to talk about mainstreaming a gender perspective is based on a view of leadership modeled after Jesus’ life—namely, leading others by making one’s own life an example. Take for example the way WVC describes the responsibility of all Christian organizations concerning its leadership in fostering a gender perspective:

Las organizaciones cristianas tienen una responsabilidad aún mayor de proporcionar liderazgo en esta arena. Los más altos estándares de justicia, equidad, dignidad humana y relaciones transformadas arraigadas en nuestra fe nos desafían constantemente a mejorar nuestros esfuerzos e iluminar el camino para otros. Como cristianos creemos que el hombre y la mujer fueron creados a imagen y semejanza de Dios. La vida y obra de Jesús recalcaron esta realidad cuando Él desafió las limitaciones y restricciones culturales a las que se enfrentaban las mujeres en los tiempos del Nuevo Testamento para honrarlas y fortalecerlas. Él lo sigue haciendo hoy día (World Vision International 2005).

[Christian organizations have a still greater responsibility to provide leadership in this arena. The highest standards of justice, fairness, human dignity and transformed relations rooted in our faith constantly demand from us to improve our efforts and to illuminate the way for others. As Christian we think that man and woman were created the image and similarity of God. The life and work of Jesus stressed this reality when He defied the cultural limitations and restrictions which the women in the time of the New Testament to honor and fortify them. He continues to do it today.]

Here WVC emphasizes that Christian organizations have a “responsibility to provide leadership” in the way of the “life and work of Jesus”. Working from within a Christian faith, leadership includes both an understanding that men and women were created of equal value by God and an active stance against the “cultural limitations and restriction” to this viewpoint as Jesus is said to have done so in the New Testament. What is important is that in addition to constituting selves through the NGO narrative of “Christians for a gender perspective”, WVC women also actively craft themselves by “doing Christian leadership” inside the organization. WVC women’s identity work represents their efforts to interpretively insert their own biographies into the
discourse of Christian values to narrative stories of model Christian leadership. This interpretive practice is manifest in their relationship experiences with self and others.

One way WVC women produce selves through Christian leadership is by drawing from their everyday work experience to narrate what for them were “good” and “bad” Christian leadership examples for promoting a gender perspective. Some WVC women, for example, drew distinctions between leadership styles:

Hay diferentes estilos de liderazgo que he visto aplicado acá. No quiero decir que un líder sea a toda hora autoritario o que a toda hora sea democrático. Pero si hay situaciones en donde se ve esos estilos de liderazgo. Yo, por ejemplo, tenía un jefe que era más bien autoritario en su estilo de interactuar con mujeres. Una vez mi hija tuvo fiebre pero mi esposo no pudo dejar el trabajo. Pregunté a mi jefe si puedo ir a la escuela a recoger a mi hija. Me dijo que si, pero que tenía que regresar al trabajo después de dejarla en la casa. Pero nadie estaba en la casa. Entonces mi esposo tenía que salir de su trabajo ese día, porque yo no iba a dejar mi hija sola en la casa con fiebre. Ahora, yo se que ese jefe ha dado muchos días libres a hombres que dicen que tienen mucho trabajo en la universidad. Para mí, no hubo equidad en este caso. Acá se dice que ser líder significa trabajar en la manera que vivió Jesús, con justicia. No creo que ser estudiante en la universidad tiene más valor que ser mama y las responsabilidades que vienen con ese cargo. No soy un líder, pero trato de ser un ejemplo acá para otros para que eso no pase a otra persona. (Interview 15)

[There are different styles of leadership that I have seen applied here. I do not want to say that a leader is always authoritarian or always democratic. But there are situations in which one sees those leadership styles. I, for example, had a boss who was for the most part authoritarian in his style of interacting with women. One time my daughter had a fever but my husband could not leave work. I asked my boss if I could go to the school to pick up my daughter. He told me yes, but that I had to return to work after I left her at home. But no one was at home. So my husband had to leave work that day, because I could not leave my daughter in the house alone with a fever. Now, I know that that boss has given many free days to men that say that they have a lot of work from the university. For me, there was no equality in that situation. It is said here that being a leader means working in the way Jesus lived, with justice. I do not think that being a university student has more value than being a mother and the responsibilities that come with that role. I am not a leader, but I try to be an example for others so that will not happen to another person.]

Mi jefe anterior era una persona con estrategias viejas. Pensaba que para hacer las cosas hay que mandar personas con fuerza. Pero esa no es la misión de Jesús, que guió sin fuerza, con amor. Esta persona trabajó desde una perspectiva machista que ve la mujer cómo una secretaria que tiene que hacer todo. Aunque tengo un título profesional, el me mandaba a conseguirle cosas o hacer trabajos que no tenía nada que ver con migo.
Cuántas noches lloré y recé para salir de ese trabajo. Ese estilo de liderazgo no es bueno y no sigue una dirección para equidad de género. (Interview 10)

My previous boss was a person with old strategies. He thought that to do things one has to command people with force. But that is not the mission of Jesus, who guided without force, with love. This person worked from a machista perspective that sees women as secretaries that have to do everything. Although I have a professional title, he would command me to get him things or do jobs that had nothing to do with me. How many nights did I cry and prayed to get out of that job. That still of leadership is not good and does not follow a direction toward gender equality.]

Yo hablo de dos tipos de liderazgo, uno que es sano y otro que no es sano. Ya llevo (numero) años trabajando en esta organización. Y en ese tiempo he tenido muchos jefes de diferentes niveles y con diferentes estilos de liderazgo. Pero un jefe mío siempre está en mi mente porque fue una persona extraordinario, una persona que siguió el modelo de Jesús. En vez de mandar en una manera autoritaria, hablaba con el personal con amor y con flexibilidad. Eso es importante porque no todo el mundo tiene los mismos problemas. Aquí hay muchas madres, pero no siempre se reconoce esa responsabilidad. Cuando yo necesitaba tiempo o ayuda en mantener mis dos jornadas, que son mi casa y mi profesión, no había problemas con este jefe. No todos son así, especialmente los hombres que no tienen esa experiencia de ser mama. Pero en ser bueno con migo, yo siempre trabajé hasta más duro porque así es el camino de Jesús. Si alguien te ayuda, tú también das cuando puedes. Entonces por eso digo que hay diferentes tipos de liderazgo. Uno es abierto y recíproco; es sano. Y el otro es más autoritario y con coerción. (Interview 18)

[I talk about two types of leadership, one that is healthy and another that is not healthy. I already have work in this organization for (number) years. And in that time I have had many bosses in many different levels and with different leadership styles. But one boss of mine is always in my mind because he was an extraordinary person, a person who followed the model of Jesus. Instead of commanding in an authoritarian way, he spoke with personnel with love and flexibility. That is important because not everyone has the same problems. There are many mothers here, but that responsibility is not always recognized. When I needed time and help in maintaining by double-shift, that are my home and profession, there were no problems with my boss. Not all are that way, especially men who do not have the experience of being a mother. But in being good with me, I always worked even harder because that is the road of Jesus. If someone helps you, you also give when you can. For that reason I say that there are different types of leadership. One is open and reciprocal; it is healthy. And the other is more authoritarian and with coercion.]

As these examples illustrate, WVC women narrate model examples of Christian leadership as following a specific style. What was referred to as “healthy” (sano) leadership is central to the discursive production of WVC women’s self in the NGO. In this case, each drew from their personal biographies as women and mothers to explore their feelings and opinions about what
counts as Christian leadership. Some of the essential features of this style of leadership include being democratic, fostering an open environment, and showing love and flexibility with all personnel.

Of the many dimensions to Christian leadership mentioned above, the ability to do transformative, participatory leadership was particularly emphasized by WVC women. As an organization, WVC seeks a “transformative vision” with regards to gender relations (World Vision International 2005). Importantly, WVC women leadership accounts are geared to both promote the gender discourse of their Christian NGO, but to be a means of doing identity work. The following were some common stories of the significance of transformative leadership as Christians working to establish a gender perspective.

[I think that the most important thing for a leader is to direct in a manner so that everyone can participate. That is how Jesus treated his disciples. There are people here who direct in that manner and you can see the results of those efforts. I have a boss now that does that. In everyone meeting he asks us how we are and what can be changed so that the job can be more open for everyone, for men and women. Women are still behind men in their participation in social institutions. But as a women I participate, talk, and think here. A leader who promotes that is vital for a Christian organization that requires equality. When you participate you feel good; you want to work. I arrive to my office happy and with energy. Not everyone has that experience, and we should demand that all leaders do that type of transformative leadership.]

Yo estaba a cargo de un grupo acá. Un líder tiene que promover un ámbito en cual todo el mundo se siente bien y puede compartir. Particularmente, un líder tiene que mantener equidad entre los géneros, sino se pierde los talentos necesarios para un trabajo. Déjame dar un ejemplo que me gusta mucho, porque refleja la misión de una organización cristiana. Cuando yo estaba a cargo de un grupo había una señora que no hablo mucho.
Todo el mundo decía que ella no le gustaba participar en reuniones y cosas así. Entonces yo la invite a mi oficina un día para hablar y me empezó a decir que antes de trabajar en Visión Mundial trabajó para un jefe muy autoritario. Nunca le importaba lo que decía una mujer. Pues así cuando entró en esta organización, ya no tenía ánimo. Yo le dije que a mí me importa lo que piensa y que quiero que ella participe más. Mira, después de un mes, todo el mundo estaba sorprendido de cuanto hablaba. Por eso digo que el estilo que tiene un líder es central en cómo personas contribuyan. Ese es mi papel como cristiana ser un ejemplo como Jesús, un líder transformativo. (Interview 1)

[I was in charge of a group here. A leader has to promote an environment in which everyone feels good and can participate. Particularly, a leader has to maintain equality between genders, if not necessary talents for a job are lost. Let me give you an example that I like very much, because it reflects the mission of a Christian organization. When I was in charge of a group there was a woman that did not talk much. Everyone said that she did not like to participate in meetings and things like that. So I invited her to my office one day to talk and she started to tell me that before working in World Vision she worked for a very authoritarian boss. He never cared about what a woman had to say. So then when she entered this organization, she no longer had any spirit. I told her that it matters to me what she thinks and that I would like her to participate more. Look, after a month, everyone was surprised of how much she talked. For that reason I say that the style that a leader has is central for how people participate. It is my role as a Christian to be an example like Jesus, a transformative leader.]

Yo tengo una posición de liderazgo y considero que mi misión como profesional y cómo cristiana es promover encuentros de participación. Un encuentro de participación es uno de transformación. Es cuando trabajadores pueden hablar abiertamente y sin miedo de sus emociones y frustraciones. Yo he visto muchas personas en posiciones altas que ni preguntan como están sus trabajadores. Yo se eso porque varias personas me han hablado de problemas que tienen con ese tipo de liderazgo. Me afecta porque veo mucho dolor que no tiene que existir. También no es bueno para la organización porque entonces las personas no tienen ánimo y no quieren trabajar. (Interview 8)

[I have a leadership position and I consider my mission as a professional and as a Christian to promote encounters of participation. An encounter of participation is one of transformation. It is when workers can speak openly and without fear of their emotions and frustrations. I have seen many people in high positions that do not even ask how their workers are doing. I know this because various people have talked to be about the problems they have with that type of leadership. It affects me because I see a lot of pain that does not have to exist. It is also not good for the organization because then people do not have spirit and do not want to work.]

Había un tiempo que estuve trabajando para un jefe y me trato tan mal que casi me fui de Visión Mundial. No quiero hablar mucho de eso, pero esa experiencia me dolió bastante. No pude dormir; no comí. Mi mamá estaba tan preocupada con mi situación que iba a la iglesia cada día para rezar para mí. Ya él se fue, pero no me olvido. Gracias a Dios, mi jefe ahora es muy bueno con mí y me respeta y me trata con amor. Para mí, esa es la misión de una organización cristiana, pero no se. Parece que mi jefe anterior pensó que yo,
puede ser porque soy mujer, no merecía valor. Yo se que Jesús nunca trato a la mujer así porque no es justo. Cómo cristiana, estoy más alerta a la situación de la mujer en el ámbito laborar debido a mi experiencia cómo mujer en la organización. (Interview 5)

[There was a time that I was working for a boss and he treated me so bad that I almost left World Vision. I do not want to talk too much about it, but that experience hurt me a lot. I could not sleep, I did not eat. My mother was so worried about my situation that she would go to church everyday to pray for me. He now has left, but I do not forget. Thanks to God, my boss now is very good to me and he respects me and treats me with love. For me, that is the mission of a Christian organization, but I do not know. It seems like my previous boss thought that I, maybe because I am a woman, did not deserve value. I know that Jesus never treated women that way because it is not just. “As a Christian, I am more alert to the situation of women in the context of work because of my experience as a woman in the organization.”]

Ser un líder no es fácil, y ser un líder bueno es hasta más difícil. Lo más difícil de ser un líder es poder escuchar a la otra persona. Si tu no escuches, nunca vas ha entender y nunca vas ha integral las perspectivas y experiencias de diferentes personas. Por eso en mi departamento siempre nos sentamos para hablar y escuchar la otra persona. Yo no soy líder, pero creo que es mi responsabilidad porque nos enseñan aquí que así es cómo Jesús vivió. Escuchando es cómo uno vive cómo Jesús y cómo condiciones de inequidad se cambian. En un sentido todo el mundo en mi departamento es un líder, porque nosotros participamos igualmente. (Interview 13)

[Being a leader is not easy, and being a good leader is even more difficult. The most difficult thing of being a leader is being able to listen to the other person. If you do not listen, you will never understand and will never be able to integrate the different perspective and experiences of people. For that reason in my department we always sit down to talk and listen to the other person. I am not a leader, but I think that it is my responsibility because we are taught here that it is that way that Jesus lived. Listening is how one lives like Jesus and how unequal conditions are changed. In one sense everyone in my department is a leader, because we equally participate.]

In these stories, WVC women talk about Christian leadership not only as a style, but more importantly as a practical application of the transformative mission set forth by the organization and based on the Biblical accounting of Jesus’ life. A serious dedication to fostering participation is especially associated with “healthy” Christian leadership. Participation involves many things, such as creating a space for people to talk openly, express freely, and listen to one another. But what is notable about the accounts above is how WVC women craft a Christian discourse about gender as part of their identity and do so by drawing from their own personal
experiences with leadership within the organization. This was accomplished through the telling of both “happy” and “painful” stories.

One WVC woman, for example, tells of her current boss who “asks us how we are and what can be changed so that the job can be more open for everyone.” This is not only a way to articulate a Christian approach to leadership (“how Jesus treated his disciples”) but also an opportunity to talk about gender equality in a personal way. She goes on to add that while disparity exists between men and women in terms of their participation in social institutions, in her case “as a woman I participate, talk and think here…. I arrive to my office happy and with energy.” This is followed with a recognition that “[n]ot everyone has that experience” and a “demand that all leaders do that type of transformative leadership.”

Another WVC women told a similar story, but from the point of view of being in a leadership position. This WVC women noted that a “leader has to promote an environment in which everyone feels good and can participate.” She recounts the time she lead a group in WVC and the level of participation of a particular worker she oversaw. This employee was said to “not talk much” and “did not like to participate in meetings and things like that.” A personal meeting between the WVC group leader and the employee reveled the latter’s experience with a “very authoritarian boss” that “never cared about what a woman had to say.” During the meeting, the WVC group leader expressed that she did care, saying “I told her that it matters tome what she thinks.” After a month, the employee was described as changing so much that is was a “surprise” to others who had known her. The telling of transformative leadership stories such as this one shows how WVC women construct a sense of self that links the dominant NGO discourse Christian values and a gender perspective to the active identity work taking place on
the ground. Indeed, as this WVC woman said, [i]t is my role as a Christian to be an example like Jesus, a transformative leader” to “maintain equality between genders” (emphasis added).

In contrast, WVC women also told stories that spoke about theirs and others’ pain and frustration. For one WVC woman, the experience with a previous boss was so painful that she did not wish to talk about any details, but shared that the experience affected her ability to sleep and eat, as well as worrying her mother. Significantly, this WVC woman cites the possible origin of the hurtful experience as being related to her previous boss’ view of women as “not deserv[ing] value”, and seems to challenge it by saying that “Jesus never treated women that way because it is not just” (Interview 20) Her final comment reveals the integration of both Christian values and a gender perspective for the purposes of her identity as both Christian and a woman: “As a Christian, I am more alert to the situation of women in the context of work because of my experience as a woman in the organization.” Another WVC woman confirmed the fact that people have painful experiences associated with certain approach to leadership: “I know this because various people have talked to me about the problems they have with that type of leadership. It affects me because I see a lot of pain that does not have to exist”.

These cases illustrate how WVC women construct selves by narratively doing Christian leadership. WVC women story both happy and painful accounts from their personal lives to produce Christian selves that work for gender equality. Again, they rely on the “going narrative” of the NGO and unite this discourse with their biographical particulars to construct, as one WVC woman said, a practical way that “one lives like Jesus and … unequal conditions are changed”. By telling leadership stories that hold resonance in the organization, WVC women thus make meaning in a way that constructs distinctly NGO selves.
Gender Reflexivity through Prayer

In addition to Christian leadership narratives, WVC women also do Christian values by talking about prayer. By utilizing stories about prayer, WVC women further produce themselves as Christians who through their faith actively reflect on gender issues, in particular the needs, concerns, and realities of women in the organization. As an organization, WVC encourages its personnel to use their faith in order to reflect on gender. In discussing a specific community workshop regarding gender, the organization states:

Visión Mundial … invita a los participantes a reflexionar sobre la respuesta de Jesús a las dinámicas de los géneros en su vida y obra [para] proporciona[ar] entendimientos espirituales, motivación y resistencia mientras el personal busca las dinámicas de género transformadas (World Vision International 2005).

[World Vision … invites the participants to reflect on Jesus’ response to the dynamics of gender in his life and work [to] provide spiritual understandings, motivation, and resistance while the personnel search for transformed dynamics of gender.]

The organization goes on to add that WVC personnel should make special efforts to examine gender as it related to their everyday work:

[explorar] las conexiones entre el trabajo diario de una agencia de desarrollo—in particular, el de una agencia Cristiana e internacional de desarrollo—y los asuntos de genero (World Vision International 2005).

[explore the connection between the daily work of a development agency—in particular, of a Christian and international agency of development—and gender issues.]

WVC women tell stories of prayer to actively construct reflexivity in their own lives with regards to gender. Interestingly, WVC women also remain consistent with the NGO’s discourse that emphasizes gender reflexivity as part of a Christian organization’s mission and daily work. For WVC women, this meant a specific call to reflect on their own organization and work experiences.

An important way gender reflexivity is produced is by engaging in group prayer with fellow co-workers before starting the work day. WVC women give accounts of how the time
and space allotted to pray in the morning with other workers is a central means by which they encounter one another and come to understand how gender impacts people’s lives. In the examples below, group prayer fostered an appreciation of women’s needs and concerns at the workplace.

Nosotros aquí oramos antes de empezar el día. Es bueno porque nos ayuda a reflexionar sobre qué está pasando en mi vida mía y de otros. Mira, hace unos meses que estábamos orando y mi amiga nos dijo que su mamá estaba muy enferma, que ya no podía caminar y todo eso. Cuando nos dijo eso ya sabía porque ella estaba tan cansada durante la semana y le toco un poco de catarro. No es fácil. Ella está casada, pero es la mujer que muchas veces cuida la familia. La mujer es quien cuida los niños cuando están enfermo y también a los abuelitos. Me dio lastima con ella porque no había equidad en esa situación. Ella tenía toda la responsabilidad de cuidar a su mamá, y claro estaba cansadísima. (Interview 5)

Cada mañana oramos en Visión Mundial. Es un espacio que nos da la organización para pensar del día nuevo y como vamos a actuar. Yo lo uso también como un tiempo para reflexionar sobre mi vida y qué está pasando con mi familia, con mi esposo, con mi trabajo. Había una vez que mi esposo y yo estábamos discutiendo. Ni sabía porque. Pero un día estábamos orando en la mañana y una compañera mía pidió la ayuda de Dios porque estaba inundada con trabajo y frustrada. En ese momento realicé que yo me sentía igual y por eso estaba peleando con mi esposo. El no entendía todo el trabajo y las responsabilidades que tengo, con los hijos, con la casa. Yo estaba frustrada que yo tenía que hacer más trabajo que él. Aunque hablamos mucho de género acá, no lo podía ver en mi vida hasta ese momento, cuando todos estábamos orando. Dios maneja en maneras extrañas. (Interview 2)

Every morning we pray in World Vision. It is a space that the organization gives us to think about the new day and how we are going to act. I also use it as a time to reflect on my life and what is happening with my family, with my husband, with my job. There was one time that my husband and I were fighting. I did not know why. But one day we were praying in the morning and a friend of mine asked the help of God because she was inundated with work and frustrated. In that moment I realized that I felt the same way and that is why I was fighting with my husband. He did not understand all the work and responsibilities that I have, with the children, with the house. I was frustrated that I had to
do more work than him. Although we talk a lot about gender here, I could not see it in my life until this moment, when everyone was praying."

Cuando oramos en la mañana siempre trato de pensar en cómo yo, como mujer, puedo avanzar el tema de género. Digo esto porque somos una organización cristiana, pero uno que entiende que género es central al desarrollo social. Entonces cuando oigo de las problemas o frustaciones de mis compañeras en el trabajo, pido a Dios que les ayude y que me de la fuerza a mí para cambiar condiciones de inequidad. Así contribuyo como una persona religiosa a la misión de la organización. (Interview 14)

[When we pray in the morning I always try to think in how I, as a woman, can promote the theme of gender. I say this because we are a Christian organization, but one that understands gender as central to social development. So when I hear of the problems or frustrations of my co-workers at work, I ask God to help them and to give me the strength to change unequal conditions. That is how I contribute as a religious person to the mission of the organization.]

Through prayer, WVC women are engaging in acts of reflexivity about gender within the context of Christian values. As these stories reveal, reflexivity about gender is grounded on theirs and others’ personal experiences about work and family that were made visible through group prayer. Indeed, as one person noted, it was praying made gender visible in her own life and not so much the organization’s emphasis on a gender perspective: “Although we talk a lot about gender here [WVC], I could not see it in my life until that moment, when everyone was praying.” What is thus important is how WVC women discursively unite prayer with the promotion of a gender perspective.

WVC women further practice Christian values by utilizing prayers as a site to exhibit social support for one another. The following examples illustrate how WVC women use prayer for the purpose of creating solidarity within the organization, especially among women.

Cuando estás orando en la oficina con otras mujeres, se crean ciertos vehículos y se hacen amistades de oficina en que tienes confiancilla para hablar de sus problemas. En mi grupo de amigas particular, nos ayudamos. Decimos a nosotras, “cómo te puedo ayudar, yo te acompañó, yo te presto.” Ayudamos en muchos sentidos, en tiempo, dinero. Se hacen esos espacios cuando estamos juntas orando, hablando de nuestras vulnerabilidades. (Interview 7)
When you are praying in the office with other women, certain vehicles are created and workplace friendships are made in which you have confidence to talk about your problems. In my group of friends particularly, we help one another. We say to one another, “how can I help, I will accompany you, I will lend you.” We help in many ways, in time, money. Those spaces are made when we are praying together, talking about our vulnerabilities.

La experiencia de orar con otros en la mañana es algo agradable para mí en el sentido que yo no tengo muchas amigas. Es decir son básicamente de la oficina. Y que no tengo el tiempo para gozar mucho porque soy una mamá soltera con mi hija. Estoy en mi casa con mi hija, haciendo tarea, los fines de semanas. Entonces esos espacios me dan esa confianza para hablar con alguien y sentir como parte de una comunidad de mujeres. Yo puedo llamar y decir, “Mira me paso esto…hice tal cosa.” Es bueno en ese sentido, en que tienes mujeres que te entienden y en quien puedes compartir y no ir a las calles. (Interview 11)

The experience of praying with others in the morning is something very pleasing for me in the sense that I do not have many friends. That is to say they are basically of the office. And that I do not have the time to enjoy very much because I am a single mother with my daughter. I am in my house with my daughter, doing homework, on the weekends. So those spaces give me that confidence to talk with someone and feel part of a community of women. I can call and say, “Look this happened to me…I did this.” It is good in that sense, in that you have women that understand you and in whom you can share and not go to the streets.

Orando como hacemos acá te da la oportunidad de obtener amigas verdaderas. Pues, me siento escudada, cómo apoyada. Hay muchas mujeres sin nadie que las escucha. No para oir soluciones, pero simplemente estar escuchada, o poner en el conocimiento de alguien más lo que uno esta experimentando en su vida. Los retos. Y nosotras normalmente hablamos de esas cosas en la oración para que el Señor nos ayude en ese tipo de retos que enfrentamos en la vida. (Interview 2)

Praying as we do here gives you the opportunity to have real friends. Well, I feel heard, like supported. There are many women without anyone who want to be heard. Not for solutions, but simply to be heard, or to put in people’s mind more of what one is experiencing in one’s life. The challenges. And we normally talk about those things in prayer so that God helps us in those challenges that we confront in our lives.

As these examples show, WVC women not only are engaging in prayer to understand the gender dynamics of their co-workers, but use it as a means to create systems of support for one another. Similar to their narrating of Christian leadership, prayer establish the conditions under which a “single mother” and “women without anyone” can be heard and feel confident to “talk about our
vulnerabilities”. WVC itself also highlights prayer as a way to reflect on the challenges faced by women:

[Esas] actividades permiten al personal reflexionar sobre lo que la Biblia dice respecto de las relaciones entre géneros, la discriminación, la mujer, injusticia y los asuntos culturales en las relaciones entre géneros. El contexto histórico real de la vida de la mujer...ilumina la respuesta de Jesús a las tradiciones nocivas y a las restricciones culturales enfrentadas por la mujer (World Vision International 2005).

[Those activities permit personnel to reflect about what the Bible says with respect to gender relations, discrimination, women, injustice, and the cultural issues in gender relations. The real historical context of the life of women...illuminates the response of Jesus to injurious traditions and the cultural restrictions that women confront.]

For WVC women, however, prayer can not only point to gender inequality but also provide a practical solution to overcome everyday problems associated with “money”, “friendships”, and “being heard”. In other words, through prayer WVC women construct an everyday gender perspective within the organization, one grounded on Christian values.

The significance of this practice is further emphasized by the fact that WVC women also discussed the negative consequences if this resource was not available. In this case, WVC women point out that the social resources produced through prayer are lacking institutionally. One WVC women spoke broadly about whether providing social support is a central concern or focus of WVC or even could be of any organization:

No se si ese apoyo que viene de oraciones seria un objetivo de la organización. No se. Porque realmente la organización tiene una visión y un comportamiento que regula cómo es. Entonces no se sí la organización o cualquier empresa tendría eso como un objetivo. Porque hay cosas que también son muy personal de cada uno que una institución no puede entender o manifestar. (Interview 1)

[I do not know if that support that comes from prayer would be the objective of the organization. I do not know. Because in reality the organization has a vision and a way of acting that regulates itself. So then I do not know if the organization or any business would have that as an objective. Because there are things are also very personal for individuals that an institution can not understand or manifest.]
Other WVC women described more explicitly, and more personally, what would happen if the social resources created through prayer were no longer available:

Sin ese apoyo que creamos acá, no se. Yo creo que serian un poco mas largo los días. Es decir, si tú no tienes la oportunidad para hablar con tus amigas y usar su ayuda, entonces seria muy dificil hacer el trabajo. Porque en realidad son ellas, como amigas y mujeres, que te dan el animo y confianza para continuar en tiempos dificiles. Ese apoyo es central para todos, pero para mujeres hasta más. (Interview 11)

[Without the support that we create here, I do not know. I think that the days would be a little longer. That is to say, if you do not have the opportunity to talk with your friends and use their help, then it will be very hard to do one’s job. Because in reality it is they, as friends and women, who give you the spirit and confidence to continue in difficult times. That support is important for all, but even more so for women.]

Yo creo que sí, seria mas dificil trabajar. No se si es por el espacio en cual trabajamos, pero se necesita a veces hablar con alguien y alguien para compartir ceritas experiencias, de quien tu esperas una mirada que no es critica sino mas para decir cómo son las cosas. Ese amor que viene de orar con el Señor trae un amor incondicional para cosas complicadas, problemas en el trabajo, y especialmente para las condiciones de la mujer. Entonces contar en esa experiencia si es importante y lo necesitamos acá. (Interview 24)

[I think that yes, it would be more difficult to work. I do not know if it is the space in which we work, but it is at time needed to talk with someone and someone to share certain experiences, from whom you expect a look that is not so much critical but more to say how things are. The love that comes from praying with God brings an unconditional love for complicated things, problems at work, and especially for women’s conditions. So then to count on that experience is important and we need it here.]

Without prayer to construct lines of support, these accounts point out the various difficulties that would likely emerge. Importantly, a lack of social support is described as affecting everyone, but “especially women”. In other words, the support systems produced through prayer are ones that are unique in that they build understanding and confidence by women. In particular, it is the fact that “in reality it is they, as friends and women, who give you the spirit and confidence to continue in difficult times.” The fact that “God [is] present” in prayer also allows for all types of problems, such as the conditions of women, to be understood “unconditionally”. In all, WVC women draw from their positive experiences from communal prayer to imagine the consequences if that resource was missing in their lives.
In sum, WVC women create a gender perspective from within the framework of Christian values by constructing themselves through prayer. In this case, prayer produces both an awareness of gender dynamics in their own and others’ lives, and also it establishes practical lines of social support that are used to overcome personal hardships. Through prayer WVC women narratively critique the organization. They argue that the institution may not view social support as an organizational objective, given the fact that in the absence of group prayer this social resource would likely not be available. By doing prayer, therefore, WVC women establish identities within WVC that reveal the interplay between the narrative resources of the NGO and the active production of selves that extend beyond the mere reproduction of the NGO’s gender discourse.
CHAPTER 9
DISCUSSION

This research underscores the circumscribed and dynamic aspects of the production of selves. Moreover, this study looks at how selves are constructed within the specific site of a Colombian NGO mainstreaming a gender perspective into its organizational culture and practice. The preceding chapters include interview data with WVC women and organizational material that highlight the self-collective nexus in which identity work is both situated and in process. Although WVC women draw from the NGO’s dominant discourses (i.e., (mainstreaming a gender perspective and enacting Christian values) to fashion selves, analyses also indicate that WVC women actively do a gender perspective and moral values through their interpretive practice. In other words, WVC women discursively insert their own biographical particulars (e.g., relationship experiences, intersectional location, self-perceptions, concerns, etc.) into the dominant discourses of the NGO to produce identities—namely, Christians working toward a gender perspective.

Over the last few decades, there has been a growing interest in the political effects of NGOs across the globe and particularly in their development approaches and practices in Latin America. Since the mid-1980’s, Latin American NGOs have been a key place where development funding is channeled, especially “intermediary” or “mainstream” NGOs that interface between (inter)national donor agencies and local communities and organizations (Carroll 1992). This heightened level of attention has also lead to new debates and concerns about the efficacy of these civil society actors to foment social change and development. As many NGOs have become “professionalized” and more policy oriented in the new neoliberal climate, both the public and scholars are asking whether this is “good” or “bad” for democracy. With regards to NGOs specializing and advancing a gender perspective, the issue is whether
expertise in gender policy advocacy simultaneously undermines a commitment to more movement (grassroots)-oriented activities that seek to promote women’s empowerment and transform dominant gender power arrangements (Álvarez 1999). As was discussed in Chapter 2, there is a lack of consensus in the literature as to the answer to these types of questions (see Álvarez 1999; Arellano López and Petras; Barrig 1998; Gill 2000; Lebon 1996, Murdock 2003), with many assessments resulting in broad classifications of either “good” or “bad” NGO types. At the same time, some scholars have called NGO researchers to begin grounding their assessments on the everyday and actual constraints and affordances under which NGO actors try to “do good” as they understand and define it. The study here represents an effort in that direction because it examines how WVC women construct NGO selves and simultaneously fashion a discourse and set of practices about gender.

This chapter provides a discussion of how the interpretive practice of WVC women reveals, as Fisher (1997:439) puts its, “statements about the potential of NGOs” for fostering democracy, empowerment, and altering gender power structures. In short, the identity work of NGO women shows how the “doing good” question is a dynamic and complex issue, so that value-statements about NGOs must be situated within the historical realities and evolving processes of persons’ self-identities and political projects. In order to accomplish this discussion, this chapter is organized in the following manner. First, I identify how the interpretive practice of WVC women attends to the call to pay attention to women’s interpretations and negotiations that inform NGO strategies. Second, I examine the degree to which WVC women’s interpretive practice challenges or reproduces hegemonic meanings and practices of gender and power. And third, I conclude with a discussion of how understanding
NGOs as discursive sites of identity work can further our understanding of the state of NGOs and their overall strategies in important ways.

**Seeing NGO Selves**

In this study, an interactive view of the self/collective nexus was adopted to reveal the reality of NGO selves. Seeing NGO selves involves unraveling the dual process of individual-level self-construction in collective action—in this case, in an NGO. As was noted in Chapter 3, scholars have cited some problems in analyzing the interactive dynamics of self and collective movement activity. This issue has been considered by Snow and Benford (2000) who argue that it is both the intention and requirement of social movement analysis, particularly a framing perspective, to offer a holistic view of collective action that includes the fluid interplay between self and collective identity. From a framing perspective this means not only detailing frame characteristics (what social movement actors say), but also exploring the active construction of frames (how frames are made). For some time, NSM studies have sought to introduce a discussion of personal issues as part of social movement action. In particular, the scholars associated with this type of work intend to see how a sense of collectivity is garnered from individual identity work, or the everyday processes that produce and sustain collective identities (Friedman and McAdam 1992; Taylor and Whittier 1992). As Broad (2002:319) points out, a focus on the personal and individual experience has now been extended to collective action studies more generally, since “in social movement literature there has emerged an interest in examining the actual relationship among self, identity, and collectivity—between the individual and collective levels of identity.”

The NGO phenomenon, as a type of collectivity, was similarly approached here, given that “[a]mid their wide range of translocal connections, all NGO practices remain discursively constructed through reference to the ‘local’.” An appreciation for the relationship between self
and collectivity of NGOs was thus achieved by understanding NGOs as a site of “interpretive practice” (Broad 2002; Broad, Crawley, Foley 2004). These scholars apply the understanding of the construction of subjectivities set forth by Gubrium and Holstein (1997, 2000, 2001) to describe selves as an interactional process of identities being both produced and circumscribed by the set of available discursive resources. According to Gubrium and Holstein (2000), these narrative resources represent the “going concerns” of an institution, such as an NGO. Clearly, the importance of this approach is that NGOs are more than mere entities; they are discursive sites where NGO selves are produced as the interaction between the creation of self and the conditions in place (the NGO).

In this study, the NGO known as WVC was examined to show the manner in which WVC women rely on the organization’s discursive resources to construct a sense of self that is congruent with the NGO while at the same time incorporating other meanings into their identities by drawing from their own personal biographies. In particular, I focused on how WVC women constructed gendered NGO selves. This was accomplished by first demonstrating how WVC’s dominant narratives provided a set of discursive resources that WVC women utilized in making a sense of how the self is gendered. This is what Holstein and Gubrium (200) refer to as the “discourse-in-practice”, or what comprise conditioning resources in the identity construction process. I then showed how WVC women accomplish a sense of self through their interpretive efforts. Holstein and Gubrium (2000) refer to this as “discursive practice”, or the way WVC women use their agenic capacity to do self.

It was illustrated that WVC women draw from WVC’s dominant discourse of mainstreaming a gender perspective, often to “mainstream” a view of gender into their own lives. As was noted in Chapter 5, WVC women described a gender perspective not only as a central
focus of the larger organization, but also as a “personal mission” due to its transformative qualities to foster sensitivity, conscience, and self-appreciation. Others utilized a gender perspective to story their life experiences in various social arenas, such as family, friends, and co-workers. The next chapter demonstrated the interpretive practice of WVC women who construct NGO selves by doing professional selves and awareness testimonials. In both cases, WVC women rely on the NGO’s going concerns about professionalization and consciousness raising, but tap into their personal experiences to provide uniquely individual expressions of these narratives.

In a similar vein, Chapters 7 and 8 illustrate additional ways that WVC women construct gendered NGO selves as part of the interplay between resources of the NGO and their interpretive work. Like their reliance on the dominant discourse of a gender perspective, WVC women also adopt the NGO’s prevalent narrative about Christian values. In this case, WVC women mirror the NGO’s strategy to explicitly link Christian values with the promotion of a gender perspective. Indeed, WVC women distinctly talked about their “being Christian” as requiring the advancement of a gender perspective. Some others incorporated Biblical reflections about gender into their daily lives, both personally and with others. And finally, WVC women drew upon the discourse of being “humble followers of Jesus” to open up further discussion and reflections about gender in Christianity, particularly the Bible. WVC women also demonstrated their identity work in their doing Christian leadership and gender reflexivity via prayer. Again, WVC women used their own biographies to narrate Christian identities by designating what for them are “good” and “bad” examples of Christian leadership. Good forms are those that foster participation and gender equality. Similarly, their personal experiences of prayer were a means by which WVC created a space to reflect about gender in their own and
others’ lives, as well as to establish lines of social support to other women. WVC women’s identities as NGO selves represented the confluence of both NGO discursive conditions and creative interpretive activity.

**Seeing the Significance of NGO Selves**

To a large extent, NGOs hold a “go-between” status in development discourse and practice that is based on their capacity to act as bridges that link local and translocal activities together. In the case of international intermediary NGOs, such as WVC, they are regularly a primary channel through which development funds, planning, and implementation are managed and generated (Chambers 1995). Nevertheless, as was discussed in Chapter 2, the acceptance of NGOs as legitimate agents within development agendas has been inextricably tied to their perceived relevance and connection to their local constituencies (Edwards and Hulme 1996). It is precisely the NGOs’ unique association with the concept of the “local” in their valued links with and service to local community interests that distinguishes them from both mega-state programs and laissez-faire market approaches. In short, their commitment to the local remains critical to their legitimacy, especially in development discourse.

The heavy emphasis on “the local” is no doubt related to two other popular development buzzwords—namely, participation and empowerment (Fisher 1995). According to Chambers (1995), development strategies based on top-down approaches have for some time been critiqued for not optimizing participation and at times undermining it for not including local actors in the process of planning and organization. At the same time, what counts as participation and empowerment depends on the meanings given to these concepts by different actors. For some, incorporating individuals and communities into current economic markets and political processes appears beneficial, while more radical critics see new types of dependencies emerging and amounting to no more than a realignment of control (Ribot 1996). As it relates to NGOs
advancing a gender perspective, concerns have been raised about the competitive gender policy terrain that has arguably changed the relationship of NGOs to it constituents. In particular, the pursuit of a gender policy orientation is said to establish a “technical-advisory relationship” between NGOs and their communities that undercuts long term transformative change in gender power relations in favor of, for example, “short-term training courses or conduct[ing] surveys to assess the poverty levels of female-headed households” and other “at risk” women (Álvarez 1999:197). In terms of their gender advocacy the question seems to be whether NGOs can “maintain the delicate balance between movement-oriented, contestatory activities and their expanding technical-advisory relationship” (Álvarez 1999:197). As Álvarez (1999:198) states, the issue is if NGOs can have a *hybrid* identity that allows for both a technical policy approach and more “transformative” activities in their gender advocacy:

The movement side of NGO identity is being challenged by their contractual relationships to States and donors who expect visible, short-terms results on gender projects. Such exigencies may undermine NGO’s ability to pursue more process-oriented forms of feminist cultural-political intervention—such as consciousness-raising, popular education or other strategies aimed at transforming those gender power relations manifest in the realms of public discourse, culture and daily life—forms of gendered injustice that defy gender-planning quick fixes.

The success of NGO gender advocacy, for Álvarez, hinges on their ability to hold a dual-identity (a hybrid one) that allows them to secure a presence within the development field but also promote more movement oriented action that extends beyond the visible and quantifiable rubric of neoliberal state policies.

In many ways, the issues raised by Álvarez regarding the gender advocacy of NGOs mirror the broader “doing good” question that seems to perpetually crop up. To be sure, when it comes to questions about the efficacy of NGOs, there are abundant of studies that offer responses of both their effectiveness in stimulating local participation and contributing to political empowerment (see Viswanath 1991) and their failures to fulfill democratic development
expectations (see Carroll 1992; Farrington and Lewis 1993). Thus NGO literature is not short of questions and (often opposing) responses. But what some scholars are presently advocating is a different approach to answering these that move us beyond statements about whether or not NGO are actually “doing good” and to the situated process in which NGO actors actually attempt to do good. As Fisher (1997:456) contends, “NGOs cannot be understood as a forum in which real people are social and political actors without attention to the micropolitics of these groups.” What are needed are investigations that highlight not only the professionaliation of gender advocacy in NGOs, for example, but also how NGO members practically interpret, negotiate, and employ this approach in their everyday.

The study of NGO selves presented in this study, one which sees the identity of NGO members as both circumscribed and agenic, alerts us to the “local work” being done within NGOs. In the case of WVC, this local work includes not only producing identities consistent with the NGO’s larger policy discourse of gender advocacy, but also involves a struggle to establish lines of social support, promote democratic leadership models, and raise both personal and social consciousness within the NGO. In highlighting the everyday identity work done by NGO members, NGO selves allow us to better assess, what Álvarez (1999:198) refers to as, NGOs’ potential to encourage and implement more process-oriented, transformative forms of gender advocacy.

Situating the “Doing Good” Work of NGO Gender Advocacy

To the extent that within the present NGO field the discourse about gender is central to how development, power, and democracy are conceptualized and specific gender policy formulated, it is also important to consider how gender discourse is used by an NGO on a practical basis. This is because NGOs use gender discourse as a practical means to communicate and establish relationships with entities key to development processes, such as the state, funding
bodies, and communities. In this study, it is further argued that gender discourse is important beyond the fact that it is increasingly part of the practical realities of NGOs, but that it is also a way that meanings, values, and practices regarding gender and development are made, changed, and implemented. In other words, the way gender discourse is actually appropriated by NGO members is critical to understanding whether or not Latin American NGOs can really work “‘with a gender perspective’, advocate for alternative understandings of women’s rights, and promote gendered social justice into the 21st century” (Álvarez 1999:197). In terms of WVC women, it was shown how they talked a gender perspective into being, and also broadened meanings about gender.

According to Fisher (1997:457), “[o]ne perspective on how [transformative] change can be brought about is contributed by analysts ... interested in the connection between personal and social change.” Change, Fisher (1997:457) continues, “rests on the ability of individuals and associations to challenge the terms of ... ‘truth’ and struggle to change the limits of what is ‘thinkable’.” In their work on a social movement organization, for example, Broad, Crawley, and Foley (2004:522) rely on a similar view when assessing the transformative capacity in organizational members’ appropriation of social discourses for the purposes of change. These authors refer to Ewick and Silbey’s (1995:222) understanding of subversive and hegemonic narrating, wherein subversive or transformative narratives are ones that “make visible and explicit the connection between particular lives and social organization.” Hegemonic narratives, on the other hand, represent those that accomplish the opposite by emphasizing the individual, obscuring the connections between individuals and the social organization of experience, and thus rendering invisible how such experiences are socially constituted. This, in turn, assists the perpetuation of “taken-for-granted assumptions” about social life, reproducing them as
essentially dominant and natural. Using WVC as an illustrative case, this section will consider
the extent to which WVC women’s interpretive practice (identity work) offer possibilities in the
arena of “transformative” gender advocacy.

**WVC Women and a Relational View of Gender**

WVC women’s interpretive practice can be seen as transformative because it reveals how
the lived experiences of women are part of how gender is socially organized by institutions.
Besides expressing a general agreement with the idea that gender is a social phenomenon
constituted within relationships, WVC women also shared stories illustrating how they have
come to understand their own personal histories in new ways with the aid of a gender perspective
lens. This included stories of their childhood experiences within the family wherein women, not
men, were differentially treated and were disproportionately placed in charge of domestic labor
due to cultural expectations and economic dependencies. Others’ narratives were based on
concerns about whether their present marriages were also based on an unequal share in domestic
responsibility. Rather than inherent, individual differences between men and women, WVC
women emphasized that their unequal treatment in childhood and presently within the family is
based on “cultural beliefs about what women are supposed to do” (Interview 6) and that “social
structures … are the problem that are in favor of men economically” (Interview 4).

Some WVC women also extended the use of a gender perspective to understand economic
relations between men and women. Specifically, the need to have women participating
economically in the workforce was cited as important because conditions to achieve economic
and political power are uneven. As one WVC woman explained, women have not had the same
institutional opportunities because what is “ignore[d] [is] that women have given much of their
time in other arenas, like the family” (Interview 28). This recognition led several WVC women
to reflect upon the disproportionate number of women working within WVC. While WVC
women disagreed as to whether this phenomena was positive (i.e., an organizational attempt to include women) or negative (i.e., an organizational attempt to segregate women into social service work), there was a general agreement that inequality emerges from the gendered organization of work. Other WVC women took a more critical stance toward their NGO, with some feeling “ambiguous” about WVC’s actual practice of a gender perspective and some expressing certainty that the organization has not lived up to its gender discourse. According to one WVC woman, the presence of informal ties or “friendships” made it so that there was no official “process” to establish “the type of equality that is talked about here” (Interview 4).

In addition, WVC women reveal the social organization of gendered experiences through their narratives about being professionals. The practice of professional work was described as a way that WVC women actually do gender advocacy work—by putting into “practice” the ideas produced by academics. WVC women explained that being professional means acting like a professional, which means working long hours, being organized, and caring about details. While this is what it means to be a professional, WVC women explored the relational dynamics of their professional experience. In this case, WVC shared that the responsibilities associated with being a professional were more often enacted by women than men at the workplace. Importantly, the reason given for this was the relations established between men and women and between mothers and sons, which encourage men to rely on women to be organized, sacrifice time, and be alert to details. WVC women drew from their own experiences as mothers, noting that mothers are often expected to “keep order”, unlike fathers.

At the same time, the way WVC women interpretively engage gender discourse may also be viewed as reproducing hegemony. According to Álvarez (1999:200) a central difficulty associated with professional gender advocacy is that the “weight of the New Gender Policy
Agenda was forcing NGOs to privilege technical-advisory activities and to neglect other
dimension of ‘movement work’ so central to feminist vision of social transformation shared by
most NGOers.” For one Colombian feminist NGO member, the issue is not “being functional as
NGOs; it is not good or bad, it’s just a reality. But we must ask ourselves, functional to an
agenda constructed by whom?” (quoted in Álvarez 1999:200). Returning to WVC, WVC
women can be understood as at once revealing how their professional experiences are gendered
but also obscuring their truly social character by subtly depicting women as having to continue
being held to different standards. For example, WVC women noted that unless they did not do
the work that men fail to do, that the organization would be in chaos: “If I did not have
everything in order, he [boss] would not know what to do” (Interview 10). The same WVC
woman also expressed that “[i]n one sense, women reproduce that, even though it should not be”
(Interview 10). Silences regarding what can be and is being done about changing this situation
may help reconstitute hegemonic gender relations, despite the presence of a critical reflexivity.
To the extent that specific professional functions are seen as “necessary in our profession” and
men repeatedly take on fewer professional responsibilities than women do, then transformative
change is arguably truncated.

Space for Reflexivity

For NGOs to maintain a transformative dimension to their gender advocacy, Álvarez
(1999:201) argues that it is important to secure “more regularized public spaces in which [NGO
members] could regularly debate and critique.” The way WVC women narrate self through
awareness testimonials and use prayer as a space for public reflexivity presents an example of
this type of transformative work. WVC women narrated stories of consciousness-raising
concerning gender by relying on theirs and others’ intersectional experiences. Many WVC
women built awareness about gender inequality around axes of race, class, and age. For WVC
women, self-awareness was produced by making visible how these categories of difference work to create different and uneven experiences among individuals, especially between women. In this case, several WVC women explained that talking about injustice against women is not enough because injustice does not function the same way for all women: “Although everyone here knows about injustice, it is not always simple to see …. For example, a black woman is not the same as a white or mestiza woman. They do not have the same life experiences” (Interview 20). For this reason, WVC women noted that gender equality requires that women not be treated as a homogenous group: “We still need to work more on the reality that there is inequality between women” (Interview 12). Telling testimonials was one way WVC women reflected on their own and friends’ lives and the differences in privilege among women, such as in confidence, respect, and opportunities.

Beyond moments of personal reflection, WVC women also engaged in public forms of reflection. Morning prayer with other workers was a primary way WVC women encounter one another and understand how gender shapes women’s lives. In particular, WVC women came to hear and know about one another’s needs and concerns because of the open sharing that takes place during group prayer sessions: “when I hear of the problems or frustrations of my co-workers at work, I ask God to help them and to give me strength to change unequal conditions” (Interview 14). The use of personal testimonials and group prayer as a process by which WVC women reflect on the gendered nature of women’s lives addresses, what Álvarez (1999:201) calls, the “imperative for [NGOs] to continually evaluate and interrogate.”

It may be argued, however, that WVC women’s use of prayer can also be part of the process of hegemony that obscures the social organization of gendered experiences, since the space for critical reflection is discrete and not officially used by the NGO as a form of gender
advocacy. For example, one of the issues raised by WVC women during prayer were the stresses felt from juggling multiple responsibilities, such as work, children, and sick parents. Thus while prayer helped WVC women reflect on these experiences, it appears that it may also reproduce silences on how economic relations between men and women have relied on women taking care of the majority of domestic duties, known as the “second-shift” phenomenon, which afford men a variety of psychological and emotional privileges. Feminist scholars have shown that distinguishing work and family life has been a central means by which the labor done by women in the home is devalued as “work” and thus given less consideration at the workplace. Yet keeping the awareness of these experiences discretely separate from the rest of the working day (i.e., morning prayer and not all day) may disguise the social organization of gendered work, wherein women face high levels of stress and responsibilities that often go unrecognized by the organization. Indeed, as one WVC woman noted, the process of hearing people speak of issues and problems during prayer offered a type of social mirror that helped her reflect on the reasons for her own frustrations at work and home: “He [husband] did not understand all the work and responsibilities that I have, with the children, with the house. I was frustrated that I had to do more work than him. Although we talk a lot about gender here [WVC], I could not see it in my life until this moment, when everyone was praying” (Interview 14). Thus it seems that WVC women’s interpretive work in fashioning personal and public spaces of gender reflection can be seen as both transforming and sustaining hegemonic meanings of gender organization.

Revitalizing the “Movement Face of NGOs”

Finally, Álvarez (1999:201) points to the “need for NGOs to devise ways of negotiating collectively … not just about resources and time-lines for projects, but also to secure long-term programmatic lines of action and set more movement-oriented project priorities.” In this vein, it is important to consider the way WVC women discursively unite prayer with the enactment of a
gender perspective. In particular, prayer not only created a space for critical reflection, but also acted as a practical solution in the form of establishing lines of social support to overcome everyday problems women face. In a certain sense, the type of social support created from prayer encounters were often a response to the lack of institutional support experienced by WVC women: “I do not know if that support that comes from prayer would be the objective of the organization” (Interview 1). WVC women described the connections established from prayer sessions as “vehicles” in which one can “have confidence to talk about your problems” (Interview 7). Relationships built on solidarity, especially among women, are the outcome. According to one WVC woman, “those spaces give me that confidence to talk with someone and feel part of a community of women” (Interview 11).

Strategies for more collective mobilization were also part of WVC women’s description of the nature of Christian leadership. Several key dimensions to Christian leadership included creating more democratic, participatory, open, and loving work environments for all personnel. According to WVC women, this style of Christian leadership was one way to mobilize individuals that were previously marginalized and secure a place for their voices. In speaking about a former employee, this previously quoted WVC woman explained it this way: “I told her that it matters to me what she things and that I would like her to participate more. Look, after a month, everyone was surprised of how much she talked …. It is my role as a Christian to be an example like Jesus, a transformative leader” (Interview 1).

Questions still remain about whether this interpretive work by WVC women helps to “revitalize the movement face of NGOs” (Álvarez 1999:201) by pursuing more process-oriented ways of transforming gender power relations. One the one hand, emphasizing the singular role of a “Christian leader” to create change may detract from how the ability for NGO members to
be able to talk openly, express freely, and fully participate is tied to the social organization of
their experience within the NGO. One WVC woman clearly expressed that in the absence of this
type of leader, individuals may face various hardships that go unrecognized by the organization
itself yet leave them feeling as “not deserving value” (Interview 20). Others confirmed these
accounts from what specific co-workers have told them with regards to the “painful” experiences
with bosses.

According to Fisher (1997), NGO researcher should continually consult the context in
which actors construct meaning and practice when making assessments about NGOs’ capacity to
reproduce or subvert hegemonic gender relations. As he notes:

Power is less a confrontation between two adversaries that it is a question of government,
in which to govern is to structure the field of possible actions …. The relationship of
NGOs to this practice of governing is complex. Since … NGOs differ radically from one
another in nature and composition, it follows that NGOs may emerge from, contribute to,
or challenge the moral regulation inherent in governing. In practice, specific NGOs may
move in either democratic or oligarchic directions, depending on their constituencies and
their particular circumstances. NGOs may serve both as extensions of regimes or practice,
like development, and as a source of alternatives to such regimes. The transformative
potential of the NGO sector may emerge less from an ordered and controlled participation
than from relatively chaotic sets of multiple opportunities and interdependencies (Fisher

Because the interpretive practice of WVC women is necessarily based on the specific context it
is embedded, it is important to be cautious about its political import and that of NGOs in general.
While WVC women do appropriate gender discourse to make visible the social organization of
gender and inequality in their own and others’ lives, researchers must be careful in their
evaluations about the subversive or hegemonic character of NGO members’ identity work.
Broad, Crawley, and Foley (2004:523) make a similar point regarding the political nature of
narratives, noting that “the degree to which narratives can subvert hegemony depends on the
social organization of their telling and how they reconstitute that social organization.” Thus this
work follows the suggestion of these authors that questions about whether NGOs are “doing
good” must be attuned to the interpretive practice of NGO members in their appropriation of (gender) discourses and the organizational context in which such activity unfolds. In this way, a better, more historically situated, evaluation of the political impact of the discursive work by and in NGOs can be fostered. This, as Murdock (2003:525) argues, is a more appropriate way of assessing NGOs because it helps to get away from a moralizing perspective that condemns [NGO] professionals as “sell-outs.” A focus on practices enables a view of the potentially negative impacts of processes affecting NGOs without condemning the NGOs themselves. What it emphasizes is that NGOs are not fixed, nor are their strategies: these shift and transform over time.

It is thus suggested that future research should further detail the discursive work by NGO members, such as “mainstream” NGOs, to show the interrelationship between the local and wider context and how this relationship is part of the production of meanings central to the NGO field.

**Conclusion**

This project was an attempt to answer the call being made by some NGO scholars to examine more closely “what is happening within and through organizations such as NGOs” to improve our understanding of NGOs as complex micropolitical sites (Fisher 1997:450, emphasis added). In particular, these scholars suggest that studies on NGOs should center on their social actors and “their own interpretations of their experience, and the dialogic construction of their social realities” (Murdock 2003:525). The point is to begin “seeing NGOs as ‘processes’ rather than entities” (Murdock 2003:525). Borrowing from the works of Broad, Crawley, and Foley (2004) and Gubrium and Holstein (1997, 2000, 2001), a perspective of NGO selves takes the position that subjectivities are results of the dual workings of the circumstances in place and interactional activities. According to these authors, identities within NGOs are “projects”, in that
they are in reference to a plan in the form of the “local relevancies” of the organization and the interpretation of this plan by social actors (Holstein and Gubrium 2000:104).

To this end, this study examined the identity work done within WVC so as to attend to the simultaneous construction of self and of NGO, referred to in this work as the production of NGO selves. Specifically, the way in which WVC women appropriate gender discourse within their NGO illustrates the process by which meanings about gender are produced, configured, and then reconfigured. Importantly, this type of work attends to the dual side of framing analysis because it demonstrates not only the substantive frames regarding gender in WVC but also how frames are actually created by WVC women who draw upon their own life experiences to give new meaning to a gender perspective. Thus while WVC women rely on the religious discourse of the organization to justify the adoption of a gender perspective, they also actively do a gender perspective through acts of prayer that establish moments critical reflection and systems of social support. In other words, WVC women at once rely on substantive frames (Christian values) but also interpretively appropriate this discourse in accordance to their own needs, feelings, and situations. This reaffirms the original intention of framing analysis to reveal both the substantive frames by which social movement actors establish an identity and the fact that framing is also an ongoing accomplishment based on the meaning making work of individuals. In short, the case of WVC women’s interpretive practice illustrates how subjectivities in collective action (NGO) are the product of the interaction between the self (discursive practice) and collective (conditioning discourses-in-practice). And to the extent that, as Fisher (1997:459) notes, “nongovernmental organizations [are] one specific possible form of collective action” then such an approach aids in not ignoring the process side of NGOs and not reducing the collective side of NGO to the individual level.
At heart, this work has highlighted a gap in the NGO literature with regards to gender discourses and power relations at the local and internal level of NGO work. As was discussed in Chapter 2, research on NGOs has done much to classify these organizations in terms of their orientations, practices, funding sources, and size given their immense diversity. However, studies have paid less attention to the process by which such positions within NGOs are actually constituted. In terms of a gender discourse employed by NGO, Murdock (2003:524) argues that this overemphasis on classification has meant missing how positions about gender and power are “thought about, worried over, embraced, and negotiated by various women at various moments and in relation to diverse sets of potential outcomes.” Given that both the public and scholarly community continues to ask question about the efficacy of NGO to “do good” for issues concerning gender and development (e.g., professionalization and gender policy advocacy), the adoption of a process-oriented perspective to NGO work is valuable. For as Murdock (2003:524) adds,

such a perspective allows us to think about reversibility. Although many social movement scholars (and NGO studies) appear to take the “iron law of oligarchy” to mean that professionalization is a final, fixed, and irreversible moment, if we pay attention to its human creation, we can see that it is not. In the life of any organization there are moments when individuals can create change within it.

Investigating the identity work of NGOs not only reveals how NGO actors are engaged in complex dialogue and critique with themselves but also signals potential avenues for renewed debates and practices between NGOs and their constituencies, such as with the state, a neoliberal environment, and communities. It has been the intention of this study to offer an example of the production of selves in collective action—NGO selves—and thereby reveal just how much “room may be available for NGOs to maneuver within the confines of the late modern … terrain of local and global gender politics” (Álvarez 1999:200). This project aspires to aid in that venture.
APPENDIX A
SPANISH INTERVIEW GUIDE

Pensamientos Generales

1) ¿Cómo define usted género?
   a. ¿Piensa que las relaciones del trabajo son parte de esta definición?
   b. ¿Cambia su definición dependiendo en la persona o tipo de relación en cual estás?

2) ¿Cómo define usted equidad del género?
   a. ¿Piensas que las relaciones del trabajo son parte de esta definición?
   b. ¿Cambia su definición dependiendo en la persona o tipo de relación en cual estás?
   c. ¿Piensas que equidad del género es importante y porqué?

Experiencias en Visión Mundial

3 ¿Cómo usted describiría la orientación de Visión Mundial hacia la igualdad del género?

4) ¿Me puedes hablar sobre sus relaciones con compañeros/as en Visión Mundial? ¿Por ejemplo, que sabes de ellos/as (la familia de los trabajadores, las vidas, salud, historia etc.)?
   a. ¿Lo qué sabes depende en la persona?
   b. ¿Si es así, porque?

5) ¿Cómo describiría usted su comunicación diaria con otros en Visión Mundial?

6) ¿Cómo le afecta estando en un contexto profesional, o siendo un profesional, en Visión Mundial?

7) ¿La religión afecta su experiencia diaria en Visión Mundial?

Ayuda Social

8) Cómo describiría usted el proceso de ayuda social en Visión Mundial? ¿Por ejemplo, sientes que tienes individuos en cual puedes hablar sobre preocupaciones, ediciones, o sensaciones que tienes en Visión Mundial?

9) ¿Cuántas veces confías en estas personas para ayuda?
   a. ¿Piensa que sus experiencias en Visión Mundial serían igual sin estas personas?
   b. ¿Cómo cambiarían? Por ejemplo, en sus sensaciones, motivación, comodidad, etc.

Estrategias Futuras

10) ¿Cuáles son algunas soluciones posibles para ayudar el proceso de promover equidad del género Visión Mundial?
   a. ¿Qué trabaja actualmente y porqué?
   b. ¿Qué tienes gusto ver cambiar?
   c. ¿Qué no trabaja definitivamente y porqué?
11) ¿Quién debe ser responsable en promover las estrategias necesarias para la equidad del género en Visión Mundial?
   a. ¿Piensas que cada uno debe compartir en este proceso?
   b. ¿Por qué?

12) ¿Hay cualquier cosa que no hemos hablado pero piensas que es importante saber?
APPENDIX B
ENGLISH INTERVIEW GUIDE

General Thoughts

1) How would you define/describe gender?
   a. Are working relationships part of this definition?
   b. Does that definition change depending on the type of person or relationship you are in?
   c. Do you think gender equality is important and why?

2) How would you define/describe gender equality?
   a. Are working relationships part of this definition?
   b. Does that definition change depending on the type of person or relationship you are in?
   c. Do you think gender equality is important and why?

Experiences at World Vision

3) How would you describe World Vision’s attitude/orientation toward gender equality?

4) Can you tell me about your relationships with fellow workers. For example, what do you know about them (workers’ family, lives, health, history, background, etc)?
   a. Does what you know change depending on the person?
   b. If so, in what way?

5) How would you describe your everyday communication with other workers in World Vision?

6) How does being in a professional context, or being a professional, impact your experience at World Vision?

7) How does religion impact your everyday experience at World Vision?

Social Support

8) How would you describe you sense of social support at World Vision. For example, do you feel confident and comfortable talking to individuals about any concerns, issues, or feelings you may have at World Vision?

9) How often do you rely on this person(s) for assistance?
   a. Do you think your experience at World Vision would be the same without them?
   b. How would your experience change? For example, feelings, motivation, comfort, etc.

Future Strategies

10) What are some possible solutions to better promoting gender equality at World Vision?
   a. What currently works and why?
   b. What would you like to see change?
   c. What would not definitely not work and why?
11) Who do you think should be responsible for providing the necessary support for these strategies?
   a. Do you think everyone should share in this process?
   b. Why do you say that?

12) Is there anything that we haven’t talked about that you think is important for me to know?
LIST OF REFERENCES


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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Steven L. Arxer is a graduate student at the University of Florida. He received his M.A. from the University of Miami. His present interests include globalization, new social movements and intersectional theory.