Women's Business: Integrating Personal Change into Emancipatory Pedagogy

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WOMEN'S BUSINESS:
INTEGRATING PERSONAL CHANGE INTO EMANCIPATORY PEDAGOGY

A Final Master's Project
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of
Master of Education

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INTRODUCTION
Under the Sandinista government in the 1980’s, many different experiences and experiments in popular education were implemented in Nicaragua. Over time, more and more of those experiences were with women and reflected an increasingly clear commitment to women’s emancipation from subordination. This women’s popular education process has continued into the 90’s, under very different political circumstances. This paper seeks to continue the exploration and discussion begun amongst popular educators in the country on the relationship between popular education, women’s private lives, and their personal learning and growth as they move out of subordination.

Nicaragua has provided a very special context for popular education efforts that seek to promote women’s emancipation. Women’s social situation changed as the revolution and the counterrevolutionary war shook old patterns of women’s role in Nicaraguan society. The Sandinista government espoused a revolutionary vision of equality, human solidarity and participatory government. One of the important outcomes of that policy was an impressive growth in the average person’s sense of their right to speak, to have their voice be heard and effect change in their communities. The war called more and more men to the front and women moved into non-traditional economic and community roles.
Liberation theology work, begun in the 1970's, flourished and proclaimed Christians' role in abolishing injustice in all its forms. Thousands of international volunteers came to support the revolutionary process, and many of those that worked with women brought their feminist vision with them. Women's organizations sprang up and eventually articulated Nicaraguan feminisms, including discussion of the gender and development debate. International organizations generously supported women's development activities, including popular education.

Then as the economic crisis deepened, more and more women were forced to take on new economic roles. After the change of government in 1990, strict structural adjustment policies cut back drastically on public services such as health and education. All of these factors, many of which provoked personal crises in women's lives, opened spaces for a re-visioning of women's role, relationships and sense of self. This is especially true for women who participated in women's and/or development activities.

Popular educators working with women often noted the relationship between women beginning to speak up and their increasing ability to voice their needs, especially in the community development context. At first those needs were actually the needs of others, their children's health, the cooperative's water system, etc. Feminists working with these women were very aware that, even as women began to have increasing impact in their community, family
relations represented almost complete domination of women by the man in the house. Women popular educators began to look more closely at this dynamic, and at the similar patterns of domination that were reproduced in community and labor organizations. They began to explore issues of power in personal relationships, women’s self-image, and structural analysis of patriarchy.

As a result of this exploration, feminist popular educators began to recognize the obstacles represented by women’s internalization of their subordination, complete with all its messages about women’s inability to think or act on their own behalf. This paper seeks to continue that exploration by taking a closer look at the process of growth and change that takes place in women as they learn new ways of thinking about themselves and new ways of acting based on that transformed self-image.

It is important to understand the context which generated the issues this paper discusses, a context of increasingly difficult economic and political circumstances, contrasted with women’s growing articulation of their practical and strategic needs. The first section of the paper reviews the changes that have occurred for women in Nicaragua over the past fifteen to twenty years. It also looks at how those changes might effect women’s sense of themselves and their role in society.
In a selective review of educational and psychological research, the next section identifies a series of factors that seem to be present for many women, at least in certain North American contexts, as they "unlearn" their subordination and learn and create new ways of being with themselves and the world. These women go through a process in which it seems that the focus and direction for their choices, understanding and knowledge moves from exclusively external sources towards an inclusion of their inner understandings. These understandings are based on subjective, emotional and intuitive knowledge, as well as an increasingly clear sense of the women's own worth, needs and desires. As I follow this process, I highlight the aspects that seem to resonate with the lives of the poor women with whom I have worked over the past seven years in Nicaragua.

The next section outlines a series of proposed methodological elements to support women's move out of subordination. Based on the processes and factors identified in the description of women's unlearning of subordination and their creation of new ways of being, its interactive aspects seek to form a whole in which women can experience an environment that respects their knowledges, experience and capacity. This section also gives the background for the popular education program, the Women's Economic Development Program, the specific context in which the issues are discussed in this paper. This paper was written during that projects' development and pilot implementation stage,
and the interchange between the two learning processes was rich and fertile.

The methodological approach proposed in this section consciously contradicts the societal patterns reproduced in most "normal" adult education situations, patterns which obviate women's needs, desires and learning styles, thus unconsciously reinforcing their subordination. By providing a glimpse of an alternative to the societal messages about their capacity, knowledge and self-image, and by establishing the first steps towards personal relations based on collaboration rather than domination, the methodology attempts to support women in their dream that such an alternative can also be possible in their lives and society.

The final section reviews the learning that has come out of the first year of the Women's Economic Development Program's experience. It relies on that experience to suggest some of the implications for the application of the methodology in other contexts. This section raises some of the questions to be explored further, including the potential and limitations for applying aspects of the methodological approach to emancipatory popular education efforts working with other sectors of society.
THE CONTEXTS: WOMEN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NICARAGUA,
WOMEN IN THE PROTESTANT COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The contexts within which the proposed approach to women's emancipatory pedagogy has developed have much to do with its particular flavor and character. It is, in many ways, the result of my contact with Mesoamerican women over the last fifteen years, as I have learned to use critical, liberatory pedagogies in grassroots development work in rural Mexico, the western United States and, during the last seven years, in Nicaragua. It was certainly influenced by my work in women's economic development and leadership development programs in the "Women's Sections" of larger sectoral NGO's over the last six years, most recently the Protestant Council of Churches.

This section will provide background on the evolution of women's roles in the family and the economy in Nicaragua, as a way of establishing a context from which to critique and integrate the methodological proposals to be presented in a later section of this paper. It will also review some relevant aspects about the particular flavor of women's reality within Protestant culture in Nicaragua.

During the past fifteen years, the lives of women in Nicaragua have undergone major changes, as the revolution, counterrevolutionary war, and economic crisis have compelled
women to step outside their traditional family roles and assume new responsibilities in the economy and community. Those changes have also set the stage for changes in women’s way of seeing themselves and their capacity to impact their world, areas which relate directly to the kind of transformations the proposed pedagogical approach hopes to support. The impact of those changes has been noticeable in all areas of society, including the Protestant churches, where staunch fundamentalism had been the norm for most of this century.

Women’s Traditional Economic Role and the Family

The primary economic activity of Nicaragua is agriculture. The country exports coffee, beef, sugar, and cotton, and produces rice, corn, beans and other products for local consumption. An agro-export development model was adopted in the 1950’s, displacing thousands of peasant families to the agricultural frontier as their lands were usurped to provide space for intensive agricultural practices. This model required significant labor inputs at certain points in the agricultural cycle, which caused a major expansion of the migratory agricultural labor sector, with significant repercussions for the structure of rural families.

Women’s central role within this economic structure has traditionally been in the domestic/reproductive sphere, where the family is seen as the basic economic unit within both the
subsistence farming (peasant) sector and in the agro-export sector. Women are responsible for the care and reproduction of the labor force, taking care of their immediate materials needs such as food, health and clothing. They are also responsible for fulfilling many important emotional needs of other family members and the socialization of the next generation. The attend to these needs by using considerable creativity and the very minimal resources at their disposal such as by raising small animals or processing tuffs for sale. The cash from the women's hands, as a resource covered by the man's meager

agricultural and incipient social-labor in the peasant sector and export and incipient labor's relatively low 18% of the economically active sectors by the end of the Latin American average. Nevertheless, her pay was less than her mate's, less than her husband.

This last case serves to demonstrate the degree of subjugation of women to their husbands within this economic model, both as
homemakers and in paid labor. This division of gender roles was supported by both Catholic and Protestant faiths, which serve as the underlying moral framework for Nicaraguan society.

The appearance of migrant labor, combined with the relocation of a great proportion of the peasant population to marginal lands on the agricultural frontier, caused major shifts in family structure. The structure which has evolved maintains the father as ultimate authority, although he may be absent for long periods of time. The mother becomes the daily-life authority figure in the family, assuming many economic as well as social roles previously held by the father. (Murguilday, 1990 pp. 13-23).

In this family structure, the absent father’s authority assumes a mythical nature, which represents the cultural strength of women’s subordination. Women’s assimilation of this myth is sometimes expressed by their wish to return to "their place" in the family structure, including, of course, the male’s significant contribution to the economic well-being of the family. The reality is a disintegration of the traditional family structure, to be replaced by increasing numbers of families without fathers present and blatant economic and emotional irresponsibility on the part of the male population.

At present, estimates for female-headed families range from 38% to upwards of 50%, while a common measure of virility amongst men
is the number of children they have engendered, along with a count of the number of women who have borne them. This family structure, evolved out of the migratory agricultural work cycle, has extended throughout rural and urban Nicaragua and has been exacerbated by the economic crisis of the last decade. Many poor women today bear children through a series of monogamous relationships, while very few of the fathers assume responsibility for their children. Meanwhile, these women must provide the economic support for their children, significantly changing their economic role.

The 1980’s: War and Revolution

The decade of the 1980’s represented a period of revolutionary changes for all of Nicaraguan society, as the Sandinista’s revolutionary government attempted to develop a more just, human society. Their economic strategy was built on strengthening the agro-industrial sector, a protectionist policy regarding international trade, and a mixed public/private ownership structure, with a heavy emphasis on the cooperative sector.

The Sandinista’s social program attempted to rapidly expand public health and educational services, and to include an important portion of the population in community improvement efforts, such as the massive literacy campaign of 1980-81, which reduced illiteracy rates from 50% to 12% of the population. Their ambitious development plans were paralyzed by United
States' counter-revolutionary war, which consumed half of the country's national budget in defense, and caused more than 30,000 deaths and $12 billion in damages to the economy. In 1990, the Nicaraguan people elected a US-backed coalition government (UNO), which has drastically reversed the great majority of the Sandinista's programs.

The impact of the Sandinista decade on Nicaraguan women was mixed, providing new hopes and opportunities, at the same time burdening women with the loss of many loved ones, an ever-deepening economic crisis and multiple strains on their role as the emotional, and often economic, center of their families. The trends, though very interrelated, can be seen as representing two areas, economic and ideological (which I am taking to include the political and social manifestations of ideological change).

**Economic Changes**

Probably the most important economic change for women in the 80's was their incorporation into productive work in greater numbers and more equal conditions than in the past. As the war grew more intense towards the mid-80's, more and more men were called to fight. Women took on increasingly non-traditional responsibilities for production, learning to drive tractors, prune coffee, and a myriad of other tasks once considered appropriate only for men. Equally as important, women demanded, and gained, leadership opportunities. In a highly unionized
economy like revolutionary Nicaragua, union affiliation and leadership represent the results of this trend as of 1989:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Union</th>
<th>% Women Members</th>
<th>% Women Leaders in Union Locals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Farm Workers Federation (ATC)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandinista Workers Central (CST)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Educators Association (ANDEH)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Health Workers Association (FETSAIUD)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Professional Assoc.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>data unavailable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(CONAPRO Heroes y Mártires)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Farmers &amp; Ranchers Union (UNAG)</td>
<td>16,000 cooperative members¹</td>
<td>918 local leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WOMEN IN ORGANIZED LABOR IN NICARAGUA, 1989²

¹ UNAG is a federation of cooperatives and small landowners, and has a different membership and leadership structure than that of the labor unions. These figures are included in this table to give an idea of the level of women’s organizing in this crucial economic sector. Source: “Plan de Lucha de las Mujeres Campesinas Organizadas en UNAG” 1989

² Source: Data presented at the “Primer Encuentro de Mujeres de la Fuerzas Fundamentales de la Revolución” (First Meeting of Women of the Fundamental Revolutionary Forces) in March, 1989, quoted in Murguialday, p. 265
These figures also reflect important changes in women's participation in the public sphere of paid work, especially her increasing participation in union local leadership positions. Higher level leadership positions were much more difficult to gain. Only in the ATC were women able to win national leadership positions, through a skillful campaign in the 1992 National Board of Directors election. Three women were elected to the Board, in positions that are central to implementing ideological changes in the union: International Relations (communication with their funding sources), Union Education, and the Women's Secretariat.

These gains were not a simple result of the war pressures, they also responded to women's increasingly assertive demands for greater economic, social and political opportunities, yet they were always somewhat tenuous. By 1988 and 1989, women's gains in paid work were already being threatened by men returning from the war. Returnees were prioritized for employment and educational opportunities, and women were encouraged to leave their positions. At the same time, cuts in government jobs affected women more than men as the first structural adjustment policies were implemented in Nicaragua. These circumstances pushed many women into the informal sector. (See sections on structural adjustment and its impact on women in Nicaragua, p. 18).

**Ideological Changes**

The relationship between economic and ideological changes only
begins to be demonstrated by the trends in paid work. The Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) included demands for women's emancipation in its original program, and many women played important roles in the war on liberation, leading up to the FSLN's overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship in 1979.

Nevertheless, women's issues were constantly relegated by the Sandinista leadership, being seen as secondary to the more pressing problems of defense and production. Nicaraguan women eventually developed their own brand of feminism, based on their everyday experience and struggles, and demanded that their issues be addressed. It wasn't until 1987 that the FSLN published an official document calling for an end to women's oppression, and the sexist attitudes of most men have been even slower to change.

One indicator of ideological changes could be the changes in laws relating to women. Their application also illustrates the gap between the official stance and reality. One of the early laws promulgated under the Sandinista government prohibited the use of images of women for commercial purposes (advertising, etc.), but it was not enforced in any consistent way. Laws legalizing abortion were never even seriously debated, because that would risk a more serious rift with the Catholic Church, whose hierarchy was already intent on the Sandinista's downfall. Meanwhile, complications from illegal abortions continue to be the greatest cause of death among women of child-bearing age.
Women's organizations and feminists participated actively in the public debate over the new constitution (1985-86), and guaranteed that the result provide a much broader definition of women's rights than the previous constitution. These rights include such specifics as the basis for divorce initiated by one of the parties, recognition of unmarried couples and women's rights within them, including the ability to demand child support. The corresponding laws were never passed by the National Assembly (Congress), making compliance with these precepts difficult. In practice, women's legal rights groups have recurred directly to the Constitution. The Constitution was undergoing a reform at the time this paper was being written, and the future of women's rights is unclear.

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of ideological change to measure is the change in self-concept and gender relations. Because these changes represent a significant element of the learning processes to be presented later in this paper, I will try to use the few resources available to discuss these issues.

In interviews with Sandinista women in leadership positions, Margaret Randall (1994) attempted to recreate the path which brought them to a self-concept built on these women's own definition of themselves rather than on the subordinated roles society gave them. The common threads in these women's lives mirror the changes in women's roles in paid work during that
decade. That is to say, the demands of the revolution and the war pushed them to assume responsibilities far different than what would be expected from women in their traditional roles. Once these women proved to themselves that they were capable of these new roles, their lives were a constant struggle as they sought to maintain and receive recognition for their new (de facto) roles. This struggle required that they question their experience with gender relations, eventually redefining themselves and attempting to redefine their relationships in personal, work, and political settings.

Other factors that were important to the women interviewed were their contact with feminist ideas, the opportunities to share their everyday experiences of oppression with other women and reflect on the mechanisms operating to keep sexism in place, and their participation in a variety of women's organizations. One of the important issues discussed by these women was the constant tension between the egalitarian ideals espoused by the Sandinista revolution and the persistent unwillingness of the leadership to take women's issues seriously. This forced the women to look to themselves and other women for formulas to overcome their subordination, in and of itself a step out of their earlier dependence on the male leadership for direction.

The stories recounted in Randall's interviews can hardly be generalized to the entire population. However, they seem to
reaffirm the experiences recounted to me by the women leaders with whom I have worked, mostly poor rural women and lower level organizers and professionals. My personal analysis of the results of the Sandinista decade in this area is that, even though most social and even legal gains for women have been rapidly undermined since 1990, some long-term changes in self-concept occurred as a result of the Sandinista era.

This conclusion is commonly shared amongst women working in popular education and women’s organizing efforts, but again, cannot be blithely generalized. A certain set of conditions seems to have facilitated these changes, conditions which are present primarily in the lives of women who participated in women’s organizations during this period. Many of these women participated in non-traditional activities either in work or organizational situations. When these women also had opportunities to reflect on gender issues (not necessarily through the same situation), they began to seriously re-evaluate the image of women they had inherited from society. This combination of material and ideological challenges to the traditional self-concept of women as weak, submissive and incapable seems to have helped many women begin redefining their sense of themselves.

The relations between men and women have only begun to change under pressure from the women, and usually only when women begin
to assume non-traditional responsibilities. Working outside the home or participating in organizations are activities for which women traditionally must request, and are often refused, permission from the man in the house. But necessity has required women to take on these new roles. In most cases, this has meant a double or triple workload for women, only occasionally have men begun to assume more of the domestic workload. In work and political situations, women have to "win their space", which results in their having to perform better than the men in order to be taken seriously.

**Structural Adjustment in Nicaragua**

Structural adjustment policies were first applied in Nicaragua under the Sandinista government in the latter part of the 80's, and were strengthened under the present government, as a result of the UNO negotiations to receive renewed funding from multilateral sources such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The overall objective of these policies is to restructure the economy, replacing government-initiated investment with private investment, while placing a high priority on government repayment of international loans. To do this, government spending is cut significantly, government services and enterprises are privatized, protective tariffs are dropped and export activity promoted, amongst other measures.

In 1988, the Sandinistas revalued the local currency and began
laying off significant numbers of government workers, at the same time it began to cut back on military staff and expenditures. But the strongest measures have been implemented since the change in government in 1990, the results of which have had significant impacts on the great majority of the population, but especially women.

The stabilization and structural adjustment program in Nicaragua has been able to stabilize inflation (down from 13,000% in 1990 to 26% in 1993 (FIDEG, Monitoreo Anual de la Economía, 1994) and begin repayment on the international debt. However, the cost has been a drastic rise in unemployment, reaching nearly 60% of the economically active population. Social services have been severely reduced, from an average per capita government expense of US$ 70 in the second half of the 80’s to $44 in 1992, and they have been cut more since then. (Renzi & Agurto, et al, p.34). Credit beneficiaries have been reduced from 80,000 at the end of the 80’s to 16,000 in 1992 (op cit, p. 36), leaving most small farmers, small industries and commercial activities without affordable loan sources.

The Impacts of Structural Adjustment on Women
It has been amply documented that women are more seriously affected than men by the impacts of structural adjustment programs, and the situation is no different in Nicaragua (UNICEF 1989, Pérez 1989, FIDEG 1991). They are affected in all aspects
of their lives: the family, their work outside their home, and their involvement in community and development activities. The impacts are both material, such as the worsening standard of living, and psychological, as the women undergo severe pressure to meet their traditional responsibilities with increased demands and reduced resources.

Data from 1992 and 1993 in three major cities of Nicaragua show that female-headed households, more than male-headed households, have experienced extreme poverty since the implementation of structural adjustment policies, though the trends have been significant in both cases. In 1992, 32% of female-headed households were in a situation of extreme poverty, while this was the case in 26% of male-headed households. One year later, 41% of female-headed households were in extreme poverty, while the percentage of male-headed households had only risen 2% (Renzi, Agurto, et al, p. 156). It is this extreme poverty that has had the greatest impact on women's lives, though its structures and impacts bear further analysis.

In terms of employment outside the home, women have been severely affected by the unemployment resulting from the government cutbacks and privatization. They were typically the first to be laid off, and were poorly represented in the privatization negotiations, which typically involved massive lay-offs. As early as 1992, union leaders in the agricultural sector
acknowledged that 90% of their women members were unemployed. Of women still employed in all sectors in 1991, 75% of those interviewed were at risk of losing their employment, benefits or present number of paid hours, while 65% of men were subject to similar risks. In 1992 and 1993, more women were underemployed than men, while greater numbers of men were openly unemployed. (op cit, p.115) This may reflect the larger numbers of women who were fired or laid off prior to 1992, and are no longer actively looking for work. The return of women to the household sphere also tends to reinforce her traditional gender subordination, which was challenged in important ways by women’s increasing participation in employment and community activities outside the home.

In the domestic sphere, unemployment and the end of the war have resulted in larger family units, for whom the women are expected to provide meals, laundry, childcare, home health care and education, as well as emotional support. At the same time, family incomes have dropped drastically. While an average salary in 1990 covered 92% of the standard shopping list, an average salary one year later only covered 72% of the same list (op cit, p.48). Family income is significantly lower for women-headed households.

In this context, the reduction in government spending on social services has a direct effect on women’s lives, as they are unable
to afford non-subsidized health and educational services. A recent study of the effects of structural adjustment on women in Nicaragua showed that in 1992, 25% of sick people were not able to receive medical attention. In 1993, this figure had risen to 43% (op cit, p.94), resulting in an increased burden on women’s time, resources and creativity. The same study showed that nearly 14% of women-headed households were no longer sending at least some of their children to school, while 7.5% of male-headed households had made the same decision (op cit., p.90). This is often due to the need to incorporate children into the family workforce as well as the rising costs of education; pressures that are more strongly felt in the greater poverty of women-headed households. The final result is that many women spend as much as forty hours a week on household tasks, a notable increase over the situation several years ago. At the same time, the decreased family income is less able to cover basic needs such as food, with over 80% of women-headed households reporting a reduction in food consumption by 1991. (op cit., p.92)

Women’s participation in community and development activities has been affected by the impacts of the structural adjustment policies. With a greater domestic workload, less time is available to participate in outside activities. Also, the sense of hopelessness that such extreme poverty generates tends to undermine hopefulness about the future, a necessary element for community involvement. Many community and development activities
in the 80's were directly related to the Sandinista popular movements, which have suffered serious difficulties remaining active in the nineties. 49% of women interviewed in 1991 had reduced their community participation, compared with 38% of men (FIDEG, 1991).

Not only have the recent economic policies drastically reduced women's standard of living and increased the demands within their traditional roles, these situations have had significant impacts on their personal relations and mental health. The incidence of violence against women has risen dramatically in the last few years. 71% of victims of violent crime are women, while only 1% of the perpetrators are women. Between 1990 and 1992, the incidence of reported rapes rose 23-25% per year, while crime in general rose 7-8%\(^2\). Men's sexual aggression and domestic violence has been linked to the stress men feel in the present economic crisis. Women's psychological reaction to the stress has more often been one of depression, and a sense of great pressure to fulfill her familial responsibilities. For some women, however, "her emotions on the one hand, and the unmet material needs on the other, have led to a change in attitude...a greater gender consciousness, (which has been) assisted by greater access to information and opportunities for sharing with other women." (op cit., p. 196).

\(^2\)From an interview with Aminta Granera, Director of Statistical Analysis in the Nicaraguan National Police. Quoted in Randall, 1994, p.203.
Women’s Response to the Economic Crisis

The resolution of economic crisis generated in Nicaraguan families by higher unemployment, larger family size (due to war returnees and extended family survival strategies) and continuing high prices places severe strains on the traditional gender division of household responsibilities, in which the man provides cash income and the woman makes sure that the family’s daily needs are met.

Given a Nicaraguan woman’s central and immediate role in meeting her family’s survival needs, she is under daily pressure to resolve those needs by any means necessary. Among the most common strategies are: reliance on help from other family members (either in the country or overseas), increasing the hours of paid work, borrowing, reducing expenses to the bare minimum and starting a business. Some of these strategies attempt to increase the income into the family, others to save on expenses. The survival strategies almost always require an increase in time and work in the domestic sphere. For example, many hours are invested in looking for products at a lower price or tending illnesses that have received no medical attention. The only exceptions are cases that are so extreme that domestic work drops off because there is no soap to do washing or wood to burn. In very few cases do men begin to assume a significant proportion of domestic tasks, resulting in a widening of the gender gap in terms of time spent towards family survival.
Women in the Informal Sector

One of most common ways for families to try to increase their income is to enter the informal sector of the economy, either in petty trade or small-scale production and service operations. Over past six years, both the Sandinista and UNO (present) governments' staff reduction plans have included a component of offering people severance pay as an incentive for starting small businesses in the informal sector. By 1993, 57% of the employed labor force was primarily involved in the informal sector, a figure which does not reflect the common practice of combining formal employment with informal sector activities.

For women, the percentage of primary employment in the informal sector has always been higher than for men, reaching 65% of the female labor force in 1993. In 1992, women represented 72% of the labor force in the informal sector. These small businesses are often based in the home or neighborhood, have low capital investment needs, and rely heavily if not entirely on unpaid family labor. The great majority of women's activities in the informal sector involve skills that are similar to those in their domestic roles, such as cooking, sewing, washing and cleaning. Petty trade is also an established area where women are active, such as small stores based in the home.

Gender Impacts of Womens' Participation in the Informal Sector

The impact of women's increased participation in the informal
sector on gender roles and women's subordination seems to depend on the circumstances of her participation. The factors present in a work situation that seem to have the greatest impact on women's subordination seem to be a steady, adequate income, control over the income, learning new skills and social relations, and establishing relations with other women that provide an opportunity to share and reflect on their situation. (Beneria, 1987, Espinoza & Shamsie, 1993, p.68).

It is important to note here the role of flexibility of work hours (and site) and the incorporation of women into international atomization of production processes, which increasingly rely on outwork and small-scale subcontracting of a female work force. These employment situations serve to isolate and place in competition many members of a similar work force, reducing costs to the industry. At the same time, it tends to reduce income and worsen working conditions for the women employed, in comparison with factory-based production. The intersection of women-owned businesses with this new model of production has typically undermined income opportunities and tended to reinstate more traditional worker-management relations (see Baud & de Bruijne, eds., 1993). In Nicaragua, these arrangements are only beginning to be seen, but the trends and impacts seem to be the same.

The possibility of earning a steady, adequate income in the
informal sector is extremely unlikely for most Nicaraguan women. As the economic crisis has worsened and informal businesses proliferated, their profitability and stability has been negatively effected, and the sector is now showing signs that it can no longer absorb the ever-increasing number of unemployed workers. In recent studies on women's participation in the informal sector, it has been demonstrated that women's activities are usually the smallest, most poorly paid and most precarious. Interviews with these women show that the pressure they feel to fulfill their domestic responsibilities forces them to seek any source of income generation, whereas men are less willing to accept remuneration that is not commensurate with their skill levels or experience. (Renzi, et al, Espinoza and Shamsie). A recent meeting of national programs providing credit to women's businesses concluded that the women's businesses they financed have provided women with survival options, and nothing more. (SIMAS, 1994).

An important factor in the impact of women's income on gender relations is her retention of control over that income (Beneria & Roldán, 1987). Even under the present crisis situation, men in poor families usually contribute only about one half of their income to family needs, retaining the rest for strictly personal use. Women typically use all of their income for family needs (Espinoza & Shamsie, p. 25). In most poor Nicaraguan households, independent of headship, the women manages family finances. The
impact of a women’s control over her income is mitigated by the
desperate needs of her family, resulting in a situation in which
"the administration of the household expenses becomes a source of pressure, instead of an opportunity for exercise of power"
(Espinoza & Shamsie, p. 28).

Nevertheless, the women’s emphasis on meeting family needs with
the resources available may have long-term effects on gender
relations. Women are more likely than men to provide for girls’
education and improvements in the working conditions for
household tasks, amongst other expenses that provide the
conditions for establishing new gender roles for her children and
a decrease in her workload. This last condition is often seen as
a major impediment to breaking out of the physical and
ideological isolation of most poor Nicaraguan women.

The relations established within the workplace vary greatly in
small informal sector businesses, with the great majority being
controlled by one parent and relying almost exclusively on family
labor. When the man is in charge, the labor relations tend to
reinforce the existing patriarchal patterns. When women are in
positions of greater control over the business, generally as
proprietors or cooperative members, those patterns sometimes
change.

Women-run businesses are generally more likely to exhibit
flexibility for the irregularities in work hours that women's domestic responsibilities cause, such as care for sick family members, household activities, etc. This flexibility is demonstrated in shorter working days, willingness to coordinate between different members of the production unit to cover for members fulfilling occasional domestic responsibilities, and financial solidarity in times of personal crisis (author interviews of participants in women-owned businesses.)

Although women in home-based businesses run by their male partners effectively mix domestic and business responsibilities, there seems to be a relation between women's ownership of the business and the flexibilization of domestic tasks assignment, at least in some cases. The most common redistribution of tasks is that other women and girls in the household assume tasks that the mother cannot continue to fulfill, which does not represent a change in gender roles. Men's involvement in household tasks seems to relate to the stature they place on their partner's economic activity, and is generally seen as assistance to the woman, rather than the assumption of responsibility for domestic tasks. (Espinoza & Shamsie, Trujillo & Rusmore, author's interviews).

The change in labor relations in collectives and cooperatives is greater, and often requires that women assume a level a shared decision-making and problem-solving that has important impacts on
their self-esteem. Learning new skills also has a positive impact on self-esteem, as it directly contradicts the myth of women as incapable. Other situations and relations inherent in running a business require that women step out of their traditional subordinated roles to be successful, such as negotiating costs of inputs or sales price in the market, changes which tend to impact women's sense of her own capabilities. This improved self-esteem, and the formal or informal opportunities for women to discuss and share information about their condition and position as women through relationships with the other women in their work lives, seem to be crucial factors in effecting their gender relations in other situations.

The economic crisis and the long-standing contradiction between the myth of the male as breadwinner and paternal irresponsibility have forced women to assume the provision of income for her family's survival, creating a situation with de facto if not ideological changes in gender roles. Being in the new situation, whether it be an independent business or a collective, requires that the women act in ways outside the traditional gender roles. This can lead to renegotiation of relationships, and possibilities for new ways of looking at power. Given all the changes in a woman's life, these women begin to redefine their own identities as the neat images of tradition break down under the burden of reality. Business relations in the informal sector depend heavily on one's ability to articulate one's needs,
plans and interests, which also contradicts traditional Nicaraguan standards of silent women.

Nicaraguan women's massive entry into the informal sector of the economy represents a survival strategy in the country's worsening economic crisis and the minimal opportunities for formal employment. Women attempt to fulfill their traditional societal responsibilities to their families and provide the major economic contribution to the household, the latter being the traditional economic role of the man. Even when women are successful in their efforts to bring in an income, this does not necessarily lead to a change in her sense of her self or her role in her family or society at large. That redefinition requires other, additional conditions, which are not always present.
WOMEN IN THE PROTESTANT COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

One of the conditions that seems to be necessary for women to redefine their sense of themselves, their knowledge and their potential is the possibility to reflect on and analyze their situation. Although reflection is a basic tool of Nicaraguan Protestantism, its practice has generally been seen as reinforcing women's traditional roles. The societal changes of the past fifteen years have also had their impact on Protestant culture, however, and some new opportunities have begun to emerge which may support women’s liberatory transformations.

Protestant Culture and Women in Nicaragua

Protestantism came to Nicaragua mostly by way of North American missionaries, especially since the turn of the century. Today, approximately 15% of the Nicaraguan population is Protestant, compared with 84% Catholic. Over 100 denominations are represented, most of which represent the more fundamentalist tendencies within Protestantism. At the same time, some of the denominations with the greatest membership, such as the Nicaraguan Baptist Church, incorporate aspects of liberation theology.

Nicaraguan Protestantism has very specific impacts on women, their sense of self and their participation in the church and community. Between 70% - 90% of the most regular church-goers are women, although nearly all ministers are men, indicating a
staunch patriarchal culture. (Most denominations technically allow women to become pastors, but very few women are actually able to do so.)

The biblical interpretations of women’s role in society vary considerably from one denomination to another. Some continue to defend women’s complete subordination and "obedience" to men while others propose that men and women were made in the likeness of god, and are therefore equal\(^1\). Because Nicaraguan Protestantism promotes a direct relationship with the Bible, a remarkably high percentage of Protestant women are literate as compared to Catholic women, who have traditionally heard the Bible when the priest has read to them. Not only does this allow women to make their own interpretations of the Bible, it provides them with all the opportunities for other learning that literacy allows.

Protestant ministers are encouraged to marry and ministers’ wives become an important factor in the life of the congregation. Sometimes this serves to get women more actively involved in church activities, and sometimes it serves to uphold the most traditional social mores about family unity, even in cases of abuse and violence. It does provide a role model of women in important community positions.

\(^1\) Both of these interpretations come from readings of biblical passages in the book of Genesis.
There are some interesting trends within Nicaraguan Protestant culture that point to openings for women's transformation. At two of the most important protestant institutions of higher education, feminist theologians are regular staff members and one has developed a special program in women's theology. Nearly 70% of the grassroots leadership in one of the largest Protestant youth movements are women. And within the Women's Ministry of the largest Protestant NGO in the country, the Nicaraguan Council of Protestant Churches, leadership training and biblical reflection has developed a nationwide network of grassroots women leaders who are beginning to question the traditional role and definition of women in the church and society.

Organizational Background of CEPAD

The Nicaraguan Council of Protestant Churches (CEPAD) represents over fifty protestant denominations. Founded in 1972, it is one of the oldest and largest non-governmental organizations in Nicaragua, and supports a grassroots, self-help approach to development.

CEPAD provides training, technical assistance and loans to community development groups, mostly in small rural villages. Its pastoral work involves theological and leadership training for local pastors, as well as the strengthening of inter-denominational ties. In the past year or two, efforts have been made to coordinate better between these two areas to strengthen
the local impact of the work, without excluding non-Protestant villagers. CEPAD played a central role in the national reconciliation process which led to the end of the counterrevolutionary war, and has had an active part in other national issues. As part of its local development efforts, CEPAD has managed a revolving loan fund for over a decade.

The Women's Ministry and Participation in Development Activity: CEPAD's Women's Ministry (WM) was created in 1977 to respond to specific needs of the women in its member denominations. Based on the women's concerns, the WM has implemented a variety of social service, community development and theological programs. It has created a network of over 50 community-based women's committees throughout the country, and provides on-going theological, leadership and organizational training for these women. It has one full-time staff person in the national office, two staff people for the Women's Economic Development Program, and occasionally is supported in the outlying regions by volunteer staff. A volunteer advisory board of women theologians participates in long-planning and fundraising activities.

Although the work of the Women's Ministry has been considered pastoral, it began to integrate development issues soon after its inception. The women's concern for social and development issues has been used by CEPAD to mobilize women for the implementation of its programs, though without integrating them into the
leadership. One example of this disparity is that women make up 50% of the workforce for community projects, but only 9% of the leadership is female. Women do have more leadership responsibilities in projects related to their traditional roles; with 32% of the leadership positions in family gardening projects and 49% in preschool projects. Nevertheless, only 9% of participants in CEPAD-sponsored community leadership training activities are women (Aburto, p. 6). CEPAD is presently undergoing a major reorganization process, and the impact of that process on the Women's Ministry is still very unclear.
UNDERSTANDING WOMEN'S GROWTH AND LEARNING

Educational theorists, psychologists and social analysts have all discussed the psychological impacts of subordination. Over the past two decades, research on women's psychology and their learning processes has sought to develop an understanding of women's emotional and cognitive development, and the interplay between those processes and women's subordination. This theoretical work is based on fresh observation and analysis, which allows for rethinking of past theories and the development of new ones. One of the important conclusions of both the psychological and cognitive development research is that women grow, learn and mature in ways that are significantly different from men, at least in the white, North American, middle class context where most of this research has occurred. The impact of this difference cannot be underestimated, as most of adult education theory is based on "universal" understandings of adult learning processes, which are in turn based on theories developed from observation and analysis of men's learning processes.

It is far beyond the scope of this project to review the complex findings of this developmental and educational research, but certain aspects will be explored as they relate to women's learning and action in the world surrounding them. I will discuss aspects of the above-mentioned theory that resonate with internal processes that I have seen expressed by poor and working
class women over the last seven years as I have worked with grassroots women's groups in Nicaragua. Although few written resources exist about this psychological and developmental process in Nicaraguan women, I will attempt to refer the theory to Nicaraguan women's context over the last two decades and its effect on women's ways of being and becoming that I have been able to observe.

My exploration specifically looks at what I call different "ways of being" expressed by women as they take steps to move out of their subordination. This process of change in adult women has been called learning, unlearning subordination, and re-discovery, amongst other terms. Women begin to seriously question, and then dismantle, their sense of themselves and their role in the world around them. Subsequently, or concurrently, they must construct a new sense of themselves and of the possibilities for them in the world. This is obviously a difficult, often painful, and frequently contradictory process.

Through all of these moments, which do NOT necessarily occur in a linear fashion, common threads are issues of identity, personal relationships and power. Women's internal articulation of her understanding and learning about this issues, and her expression of that articulation, are often referred to in women's psychological and learning literature as "voice", which can be an indicator of the nature of the changes occurring. I will first
provide a brief discussion of these common threads, and then look at the ways they are present at different moments in women’s movement out of subordination.

Identity

Marcela Lagarde, in analyzing the role of personal identity in Latin American women’s lives, provides the following definition:

Identity is defined based on the elements which singularize individuals and make them specific, distinct, or which, on the contrary, make them similar to others...In fact, any element, from gender, class or religion, to a simple physical element such as hair color, the skin, or a simple mole or a health condition...can be elements that organize people’s identity.

One essential aspect of identity is change. Our identity changes as we go through life because it [identity] is a process or a set of processes and not something static...Identity is organized through a historical methodology, which takes places using a classification system specific to each society and culture. (1992, p.6)

She continues, discussing the impact of this historical construction of identity on Latin American women:

Culturally, historically, and politically, women’s identity is a negative one, because is the identity of inferior beings in the system. We have an identity that only is positive when it is "natural" and negative for anything else...our self-development is positive when we carry out the actions that considered natural in our culture; that is why we feel flattered when someone compliments our children, how pretty our body is, our eyes. (op cit, p.11)

The traditional Nicaraguan model of women’s identity has been defined by society in similar terms. Women’s sense of self is expected to revolve exclusively around her role as mother/wife, daughter, or lover, all of which are identities constructed in a dependent relation to men. Women are expected to be submissive,
passive, and not intelligent or capable, especially in the public sphere. At the same time, women are expected to work miracles in terms of their families daily needs, preparing food when there is none, curing the sick with no medicine, and providing moral support without receiving any herself.

To be, in this model of identity, is to be for others, to be omnipotent in fulfilling other's needs and desires, while being impotent in terms of fulfilling one's own needs or desires. More exactly, "good" women are expected not to have needs or desires. It is easy to see that when women begin to question their subordinated position and condition in this society, they must confront potential condemnation, not only from those around her, but also from the internalized societal definition of their sense of self.

Relationships
Both traditional and feminist psychologists have observed the centrality of women's personal relationships to their sense of self, their ways of learning, and their choices and actions in the world. Traditional psychology has based its theoretical work on observations of men, and has elaborated models of development stressing autonomy and separation. In such models, women were consistently deficient or deviant in their priorities and actions.
More recent theoretical work, based on observations of women, suggests the process of developing autonomy occurs at different points in life, and through different processes, for women than for men. This more recent theoretical work posits that women's growth and development occurs in relational contexts, thus making separation and differentiation a much more complex process than it is for men, who establish autonomy by setting themselves apart from those with whom they have close relationships early in their lives. Gender plays an important role in these differences, as boys begin differentiating from their primary care-giver, the mother, as soon as they begin to understand gender differences. Girls, however, recognize great similarities with their mothers at this same age (3-4 years old in modern Western society), and identify themselves within the relationship with their mothers, however harmonious or conflictive it may be.

Some of this research suggests that listening, dialogue and mutuality are central to women's growth and development. The ongoing work of the Stone Center at Wellesley College, has identified the following relational elements incorporated in the core self of the women they observe:

1) an interest in and attention to the other person(s), which form the base for the emotional connection and the ability to empathize with the other(s);

2) the expectation of a mutual empathic process where the sharing of experience leads to a heightened development of self and other;

3) the expectation of interaction and relationship as a process of mutual sensitivity and mutual responsibility that
provides the stimulus for the growth of empowerment and self-knowledge. (Surrey, 1991, p.59)

This expectation of empathetic, mutual relations is often nothing more than a myth in male-female relations in Nicaragua, yet it is an extremely powerful myth or ideal. Intimate male-female relations are often examples of brutal domination, with the woman having almost no power of decision over her mobility, sexuality, or activities outside the home. Lifelong monogamy is almost nonexistent in the culture, with male polygamy existing in many forms and women participating in a series of monogamous relationships interspersed by periods of single parenthood. These dynamics are perhaps most obvious amongst the poor and working poor sectors, with whom I have worked most. For wealthy and well-educated women, education and greater access to resources give a different texture to male domination, but the focus of my work is on women in the poorer social sectors. When I refer to Nicaraguan women, it is important to remember that it is these poorer women to whom I am referring.

Nicaraguan women's attitudes towards this structure of male-female relations are mixed, even contradictory. While women generally hope for some idealized, loving, long-term relationship, the pragmatic approach is one of making it on their own without the expectation that such a situation can exist. "Mejor sola que mal acompañada (better off alone than poorly accompanied)" is a common saying that demonstrates this attitude. Yet very few women take action to leave unsatisfactory or abusive
relationships (men’s physical and psychological abuse of women is extremely common), perhaps partly because of the societal expectation that they must remain in the relationship to be "good" women.

Relationships amongst women in Nicaragua reflect these same contradictions and women’s situation vis-a-vis men. Many women have only experienced the kind of mutuality described above in relationships with women, and value it highly. Women often refer to friendships with women as the only opportunity they have to truly be themselves and explore new ways of being and understanding the world. Idealized expectations of women’s friendships (also often assumed in work relationships) in terms of solidarity, commonality of experience and vision, etc. often make these relationships extremely difficult as those expectations are not realized. At the same time, these women’s relationships occur in a society where women’s worth and security is generally determined by their relationships with men, who offer no long-term commitment to that relationship. This sets up conditions of extreme mistrust and competition amongst women. These attitudes are so strongly ingrained that they carry over into all sorts of relations between women, even when no men are involved (such as in all-women organizations).

My experience with women in Nicaragua, and the few written resources available, suggest that Nicaraguan women’s growth and
development is indeed enhanced by mutually respectful and stimulating relationships, but that those relations do not occur "naturally", without challenging existing patterns of competition and mistrust. They are much more likely to exist amongst women than between women and men, but are extremely fragile unless these patterns can be overcome.

Power

Central to the concept of subordination is a definition of power as "power over", an unequal relation where one actor can control the actions of the other. This definition sees power as a quantitative property, something which one has or doesn't have. In traditional western society, men control women's movements, actions, and sexuality. Indirectly, the ideology of male superiority controls the options and possibilities of women, who believe that many actions or thoughts are beyond the range of the possible for them.

Power can also be defined as a creative force, a capacity to move or produce change. (Miller, in Jordan, et al, 1991, p.198) As a force for creativity, power in this sense can expand possibilities, and is no longer limited to a set quantity where one person's gain is another's loss. This capacity can be seen as developing within women, as they take actions to change their lives. This definition of power also allows for the collective development of power, an opportunity to create power through its
exercise in mutually respectful and nurturing relationships, and to strengthen those involved in that process. In this sense, power can be an important tool for learning, as it provides the vehicle for experimentation, new experiences and ways of thinking.

In the Nicaraguan version of women's subordination, men have almost absolute "power over" women. Women who begin to question this power can expect to meet with violence or the threat of violence, as the established domination is threatened. Both definitions of power seem to function within Nicaraguan women's ways of being in the process of moving out of subordination, often in contradictory manifestations. This will be explored further as I look at that process more closely.

Voice
A crucial part of the overall learning process is the women's rediscovery of their "voice", where voice is seen as a metaphor for "...women's emergent sense of self and sense of agency and control." (Belenky, et al, p. 68) The developmental process involved seems to begin with an internal recognition of such a voice, often accompanied by introspection and a primary reliance on feeling and intuition as a way of understanding. Women taking this step enjoy "...an increased experience of strength, optimism, and self-value." (Belenky, et al, p.83) Once they have learned to listen to their own voice, then they are able to begin
IDENTITY, RELATIONS AND POWER: VOICES FROM VARIOUS WAYS OF BEING

Subordinated Ways of Being

First I would like to explore issues of identity, relationships and power for women enmeshed in a subordinated consciousness, women who operate almost entirely within the confines of their subordination. This impacts both their sense of identity and their relationships, which are intimately interrelated. I will present aspects of theory that mostly closely represent my understanding of poor women's experience in Nicaragua, and attempt to illustrate those situations.

The most salient feature of a woman's identity under subordination is that she is defined from outside; more specifically, by men and by the image of women that a patriarchal society places upon her. In her ground-breaking book, Toward a New Psychology of Women, Jean Baker Miller discusses women's identity developed under subordination. "Within the socially-defined "permanent" inequality between men and women, the dominant (male) group is accepted as the norm, anything else is defined as inferior, defective or substandard...More importantly, subordinates themselves can come to find it difficult to believe in their own ability." (1986, p.6-7) This establishes a
framework in which "there is no meaning beyond man's meaning..." as Marilyn Fry describes in her *Politics of Reality* (1983, p. 80).

Women in this position internalize society's definition of themselves to such a degree that they do not see any contradiction between the image that society has of women and their own self-concept, accepting as "natural" the inequities of their experience. These women see themselves as weak, incapable of choice or action, without an articulation of their own thinking, and less intelligent than men. The imposition of this external definition results in the process where "we (women) participate in our own erasure,... we acquiesce in being made invisible, in occupying no space." (Fry, 1983, p. 2)

In "men's meaning", women's role is to serve men, to live for others, and to care for and nurture the people surrounding them. Carol Gilligan posits that women come to know themselves through knowing about others, while men's starting point is self-knowledge, the base from which they reach out to know others. (1993, p. xx). For Nicaraguan women immersed in subordination, their sense of "who I am" is defined by the roles they fulfill in the context of family relationships, and for those who work outside the home, work relationship. These roles are defined by men or other women who also serve men. To think of oneself, for these women, is considered "selfish" and immoral.
One group of women immersed in a subordinated "way of being" is described by Belenky, Clinch, Goldberger, and Tarule as including women of "received knowledge", women who listen closely to the world around them and take their cues for action from the moral codes and opinions of others. In discussing the sense of identity of these research subjects, mostly well-educated, white, North American women, they suggest that "If one can see the self only as mirrored in the eyes of others, the urgency is great to live up to others' expectations, in the hope of preventing others from forming a dim view. ...Conceptions of right and wrong are likely to be as black and white when defining the self as when defining the moral. The either/or thinking that these women confine themselves to makes it difficult for them to express notions of "becoming" - evolution, growth or development." (1986, pp. 49-50)

This rigidity is very present in many Nicaraguan women's sense of themselves, and is demonstrated by their superhuman efforts to meet these imposed standards, as well as their quick criticism of women who fail to meet them.

Gilligan also discusses at length women who look to existing societal structures and mores to define themselves and inform their actions. This way of being focuses on self-sacrifice and responsibility for others. "Here the conventional feminine voice emerges with great clarity, defining the self and proclaiming its worth on the basis of the ability to care for and protect others...The strength of this position lies in its capacity to
Both Gilligan and Belenky, et al have discussed the way that this subordinated sense of self limits women’s expression. Belenky, et al, describe women amongst the most socially, economically and educationally deprived of their research subjects as the "silent women". These women felt as if they were "deaf and dumb", deaf because they assumed they could not learn from the words of others, dumb because they felt that their voices would not be heard. (Belenky, et al, 1986, p.24) These women probably have the most in common, in socio-economic and educational situations, with the Nicaraguan women with whom I have worked, and I have heard these sentiments expressed from women here.

In discussing the women they describe as "received knowers", Belenky, et al, suggest that "women typically approach adulthood with the understanding that the care and empowerment of others is central to their life’s work. Through listening and responding, the draw out the voices and minds of those they help..." (op cit, p.48) While received knowers can be very open to take in what others have to offer, they have little confidence in their ability to speak. Believing that truth comes from others, they still their voices to hear voices of others. (op cit, p.37)

It is also a Nicaraguan cultural expectation that women be

for caring; the limitation of this position lies in the restriction it imposes on direct expression." (1993, p.79)
silent, and men often criticize women for being too "talkative". Because most of the women with whom I work are generally already taking steps to move out of their subordination, I have sometimes wondered if their expressions of total inability to hear, think or speak might not be reverences to the cultural norm rather than expressions of their real sense of identity at that point in their lives. Nevertheless, the ethic of caring that requires putting others before oneself is very strong amongst these women, and many forms of self-censorship prevail.

Relationships of Women Immersed in Subordination:
The received knowers of Belenky, et al's study, and the women immersed in "conventional femininity " studied by Gilligan, had been and were in relationships in which they felt a great deal of responsibility for the caretaking and well-being of others. The relationships of the received knowers were one-way, with the women abdicating decision-making and action in dependent roles. In moments of crisis, when they were forced to make a choice, these women sought to minimize hurt, and look for choices that would lead to the continuance of important relationships, without looking seriously at the way that such a choice would effect their futures as individuals. For example, the "conventional" women in Gilligan's abortion choice study attempted to make their decisions in ways that would cause the least damage to the relationship with the man that impregnated them, without taking into account the real consequences of such a decision for
themselves.

I have rarely been in the position of observing Nicaraguan women who are immersed in a subordinated way of being come up against crises or moral dilemmas, at least not with the degree of intimate information that both studies mentioned above possess. I have seen many of these women prioritize their family over activities that were very important to them as individuals, using a logic that is hard to follow from a North American feminist perspective. I can remember numerous conversations where I have asked women about the importance of an upcoming activity (training session, meeting, etc.) and have been able to explore the subject sufficiently to be clear that they sincerely want to participate. They then begin to invent various excuses why they cannot come, and eventually we get around to the fact that they are afraid that their husband will not approve, or give her permission to come. In this case, the choice is not even an option, the relationship of domination/subordination has already defined the possibilities in such a way that the woman cannot take action for her own behalf without threatening her personal relationships.

These women, actively involved in the upholding conventional image of women in their personal relationships, eventually begin to feel the dilemma of their condition. They feel tremendously responsible for the well-being of the people with whom they have
relationships. They see their role in the relationships as one of caring and nurturing, requiring self-abnegation and self-sacrifice. Ultimately, this results in a moral double-bind, as their ability to act in caring ways is unable to assure that no one is hurt, or that existing relationships will continue to exist (Gilligan, 1993, pp. 82-85).

This double-bind is especially glaring in the context of male-female relations in Nicaragua, where making choices against one's own best interests to assure the continuance of an intimate relationship is extremely risky, considering their frequently unstable nature. I have seen women weigh the impact of her potential decision or actions based on priorities of relationships: first, her children, then her husband.

Power

Women immersed in subordination have little real power over their lives. Independently of whether power is defined as the possibility to create change or as the ability to control the actions of others. In the Nicaraguan context, women may have a certain amount of control over their children, but even there the man in the house may overrule her decisions. Given the centrality of relationships to women's lives and sense of self, women living in very subordinated situations often feel as if they have no power at all. According to Belenky, et al, this is especially true of the "silent women", who feel the world comes
at them, with no logic. These women's forms of knowing are limited to obedience of other's orders, and do not include the capacity to learn from experimentation or independent thinking.

Women in the conventional nurturing roles have internalized the dualistic, hierarchical nature of power inherent in their subordination. A woman in this position finds that "she is responsible for the actions of others, while others are responsible for the choices she makes. This notion of responsibility, backwards in its assumptions about control, disguises assertion as response." (Gilligan, 1993, p. 82).

Central to this logic is a woman's self-abnegation, which doesn't allow her needs to enter into the decision-making process. Such thinking successfully abdicates power seen as control to the men in these women's lives, and sets the stage for what are commonly known as dependent relationships.

**Economic Relationships**

Women's economic dependence on men is often cited as one of the central elements of their subordination. Women in the midst of the most subordinated "ways of being" must rely on the men in their lives for their survival, as well as that of other family members who are fundamental to their sense of themselves. It is easy to see that they are unlikely to take actions that would disrupt that relationship. This is certainly true of many Nicaraguan women, although men's capacity to provide economic
support for a family has been greatly undermined by the recent economic crisis.

This is area of women's subordination that seems to underscore the importance of the myth of the nuclear family, with man/father/husband as breadwinner. Interestingly enough, many of the women described by Belenky el al and Gilligan as operating from a very subordinated perspective actually have incomes of their own, incomes which they put at the disposal of the people they serve. A study of women bringing a new income into the family in Mexico also noted that much of the impact on decision-making and power relations in the family had less to do with women's new income than with security that the men felt in their image as the breadwinner of the family. (Beneria & Roldan). In Nicaragua today, the economic crisis has only exacerbated paternal irresponsibility, yet the absent "man of the house", without contributing significantly to the family's economic well-being is still deferred to in decision-making.

Nevertheless, numerous studies have shown that for women undergoing a process of moving out of a subordinated way of being, financial independence is almost always essential. What must accompany that financial independence is a redefined sense of self, and new ways of understanding and learning that allow women to begin redefining their relationships and lives.
LEARNING SUBORDINATED WAYS OF BEING

Having looked at women's sense of self, power, relationships, voice and economic options within the framework of a subordinated way of being, I would like to explore the learning processes which bring women to this internalization of their societal subordination. Women learn to survive in subordinated relationships from the time they are very young. Robert Stoller's studies indicate that gender identity, as a central unchanging core of personality formation, is firmly established by the time a child is three. Significant aspects of women's "ways of being" can be traced back to the path of girls' growth and development.

This section hopes to contrast this with the theories of "human development" that have been based on male behavior, an exercise I believe to be important because that androcentric framework is so imbedded in common thinking about learning and development. I have focused my discussion on aspects that seem to coincide with the experience of the Nicaraguan women with whom I work, and am not attempting to include many aspects which are extremely important for such a critique. Where possible, I will illustrate aspects of the theory, which have been elaborated almost entirely in US settings, with what I see as examples within the Nicaraguan setting.

One of the important factors in both girls' and boys' development
is their relationship with their primary care-giver, almost always a women. For poor Nicaraguan girls, this is usually the mother or grandmother. Traditional psychological development theory puts great emphasis on the process of separation from the care-giver, and on the development of an autonomous identity. While this may be true for boys, who must establish their gender identity as different from their mother’s, girls tend to maintain a continuous connection to their mothers, the model for their gender identity. This nature of this connection and role model may be as varied as any human relation, but as such it sets the stage for women’s definition of themselves in the context of relationships where they see themselves as similar, rather than different, to the other party, a central aspect of the empathetic relationships described above by Surrey.

As boys are learning separation and autonomy, they also learn the role of rules, rights and moral structures that define the limits and possibilities of human interaction. Girls’ learning seems to place more emphasis on learning to be in connection and empathy with others, the beginning of a moral structure based on caring and responsibility for others.

An analysis of boys’ and girls’ play styles (Lever, 1976), notes that boys spent a great deal of their time quarrelling about their games, seemed to enjoy the legal debates as part of the game, and then continued the game. Girls were more likely to
terminate the game than to argue in ways that would hurt the feelings of others. Girls were also less likely to play games where one’s person’s success (winning) was dependent on another’s failure (losing), another sign of empathy development. In another study of U.S. grade school children, boys were noted to be learning to win, while girls were discussing the problems of their families, and looking for solutions to them (Luria, 1981).

In Nicaraguan families, this basic difference is repeated as boys are taught to win and take action in group situations, while girls are taught to care for their little brothers and sisters. An important variant on the US model is the emphasis on absolute obedience to the male figure in the family, giving him the ability to set the rules, limits and concepts of right and wrong. The concept of morality is subjected to his individual whim to a greater degree than is suggested in the US studies mentioned above, adding a strong element of a subordinated morality to girls ways of being. This is later reflected in Nicaraguan women’s capacity to subject themselves to men’s domination, even when it is conflict with other moral concepts dominant in the culture.

As children move into adolescence, other major developmental processes take place. These processes generate important differences in male (what is commonly considered "normal") and female development. Especially important to issues of
subordination and learning are the development of a sense of self and relationships at this stage. Another important area is that of female adolescents' ability to perceive and use her ability to act in the world, which is expanding rapidly.

Gender pressures mount at this stage. Young men are under ever greater pressure to develop themselves, to act independently and move towards greater autonomy. Their increasing interest in relationships with women "should" fit this framework, and the women are expected to subordinate their interests, feelings and needs to men's. As adolescent women begin to feel the stirring of greater cognitive, affective and sexual capacities, they are coming up against an either/or choice; either they subordinate themselves to men's wishes, or risk losing the growth and mutuality they seek (though may not find) in relationships with men.

Societal expectations in a culture like Nicaragua's make it extremely difficult for women to risk losing men's approval, as a woman's place in the world is defined by her relational status with men. This society, like many others, places an very high priority on male-female relationships, subordinating realtionships between women and the possibilities for growth and mutual learning those relationships might provide.

The outcome on women's sense of self from this period is commonly
what Gilligan calls dissociation, a "... split between experience and what is generally taken to be reality...the coming to not to know what one knows, the difficulty in hearing or listening to one's voice, the disconnection between mind and body, thoughts and feelings, and the use of one's voice to cover rather than to convey one's inner world, so that relationships no longer provide channels for exploring the connections between one's inner life and the world of others." (Gilligan, 1993, p.xxi). This negation of women's ability to know is echoed by Lagarde, as she presents "ignorance" as a gender characteristic of Latin American women:

We are talking about a characteristic to be developed and constructed throughout our entire lifetimes, to be always more ignorant; to such a degree that any one of us, when faced with any theoretical or practical problem, puts our ignorance first, our real or supposed inability, the too-great effort it would require, so as to not learn. (1992, p. 13).

Women's psychological development in adulthood seems to continue to revolve around the same themes: the importance of close personal relationships, the ways those relationships respect or do not respect women's interests and voices and the subordination of self and active, creative activity to the needs and domination of men. The character of those relationships, and their approximation to the mutually supportive, empathetic and shared learning situation described by Surrey (1991, p.59) has a great impact on the relationship's capacity to support growth and learning in women. Very few situations exist in Nicaraguan society which provide these conditions.
Learning gender roles

Women’s ways of being are learned through a complex interaction between women and the world surrounding them. The preceding description provides a picture of women’s psychological development in certain North American contexts, and suggests that similar processes occur for Nicaraguan women. In doing so, it explores the impact that women’s developmental processes may have on those adult women as learners.

Girl’s and women’s learning of subordination is essentially the learning of the role that a female is to play in the world. I would now like to review some of the social processes by which women learn their gender roles, especially those aspects that may be important to adult women as learners.

The entire socialization process, starting from the beginning of a girl’s life, prepares her for her subordinated role in the adult world. This is accomplished through example, personal and mass communication, and force or the threat of force. Because of the importance of relationships to women, it is important to remember that all of these socialization processes happen in relational contexts, preparing girls for subordinated roles in their adult relationships.

As mentioned above, girls do not experience the early separation
process from their mothers in the same way that boys do. Their mothers act as role models of women's interaction with others, and when they are seen acting in subordinated relationships, girls assume that such relationships are what they need to learn to do. In Nicaraguan families, even with the high incidence of women-headed households, there is almost always a man with whom their mother have a subordinated relationship, whether it be her father, older brother, or a semi-present father/husband. The examples of male forms of behavior and relationship exhibit domination and a separation between cognitive and emotional processes, something a girl comes to expect from men, and is one of the differences in typical male and female learning styles.

Communication processes include all aspects of the media, as well the communication within the family. A girl is told, both explicitly and implicitly, what her role is and isn't. She gets dolls for toys, the media projects images of passive, non-thinking women, and her family tells her not to play active sports or climb trees, that it is not "lady-like". This situation has changed some in Western societies, especially amongst certain social-economic sectors, but remains very strong in more traditional societies such as Nicaragua. Here girls are expected to remain silent and still, except when helping the older women with their tasks.

Learning a women's subordinated role in society involves both a
visible process; what the girl is told, sees and experiences, and an internal process, where the messages are incorporated into her way of being. But why would anyone accept, and incorporate into their self-image, untruths about their abilities or potential?

Many theorists point to the importance of violence or the threat of violence in this process. According to Paolo Freire, one of the first educational theorists to write about the process, "There would be no oppressed had there been no prior situation of violence to establish their subjugation. Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons..." (Freire, 1992, p.41). Miller points out that the position of subordinates is one which constantly generates anger against the oppressor. To keep this anger in check, "direct force has to be obviously available, even if it only lurks quietly in the background." (1976, p.?) For example, in the United States, we have only recently recognized the extent to which violence or the threat of violence that has always been exerted against women and incorporated it into an understanding of women's subordination.

The threat of social and economic deprivation is also a form of force, and, in general, men have controlled such resources. (in Jordan, et al, 1991, p.183.) In Nicaragua, this situation is reflected not only in economic relationships in families, but also in the workplace and social structure, where men control
nearly all decision-making positions.

Girls and women are surrounded by a myriad of messages, in the form of relationships, media, communication and quietly lurking violence that inculcate them in a paradigm to which many women cannot imagine any alternative, a Freirean limit-situation beyond which the oppressed cannot imagine any possibilities (1992, p.89). In this situation, "the living of one’s life is confined and shaped by barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict and penalize motion in any direction."(Fry, 1983, p.4) This interlocking web of barriers and messages permeates girls’ lives, and becomes the context and content of their learning process. This situation is extremely strong in contexts such as Nicaragua, which do not constantly present a myriad of supposed possibilities for other ways to live one’s life, such as are portrayed in US culture.

As women’s sense of identity develops within their primary relationships, both their actions and sense of self come to reflect the socially-expected standards. Women, as adult learners, have generally internalized those messages, and try to continue their learning in ways that will strengthen their ability to follow through on the expectations of caring for others in a self-sacrificing way. In the following sections,
this paper will explore the learning processes of women who begin to confront the contradictions in this model of self, womanhood, and learning.

UNLEARNING SUBORDINATION, LEARNING NEW WAYS OF BEING

The role of crisis and change

Women most often begin to confront the contradictions of their subordination through some change in their lives, something that casts a new light on their experience and forces them to question the framework they had taken for granted up to that point. This is usually a crisis situation, and the particularities of which can range from the loss of an important relationship, to choosing to abort or not, to relocation in another town, to the cumulative demands of the economic crisis.

The woman involved is required to make a choice or take action in a way that she had not done before, and this step precipitates a whole new range of possible learning experiences. It forces her to begin a personal cycle of reflection and action where each action precipitates further reflection, which leads to another unfamiliar action, which then stimulates further reflection. This cycle continues at a more relaxed pace after the crisis passes, but rarely dissipates completely once the original framework of self and relationships are called into question. In this process, I would suggest that previous ways of being as a woman are dismantled, and new ones are constructed, based on a set of
premises which allow the woman to respect and define herself, her possibilities and actions, rather than blindly accept what society might impose. New ways of learning, understanding and knowing are constructed as these changes occur.

In reviewing a sample of the work that has been done on this process, I will focus on the changes within women’s sense of their identity and their personal relationships. These are two basic areas of redefinition which interact with women’s actions in other spheres of their lives. From this review I will then try to find threads which can be elements of a methodology for women’s (and perhaps others’) unlearning of the internalization of subordination, as an essential facet of a liberatory educational process. Finally, I will look methodological elements related to learning of specific skills and analyzing the social structures of women’s subordination.

Reconstruction of Identity
Because women tend build their sense of themselves within the relationships of their lives, it is no surprise that the kinds of crises described above shake the foundations of a subordinated woman’s identity. Women who have gone through such experiences often describe a feeling of having lost their sense of "who I am", a sense that was previously provided by their social role. It is important to remember that such a highly subordinated role combined the silencing of women’s personal voice, needs and
desires with strong sense of responsibility to care for others.

An important step for many women dealing with crises is the re-establishment of a relationship with her inner self. At this point, these women choose to listen to themselves instead of what society or the men around them might say, a radical change from the previous "received knowledge". Most of these women had experienced a betrayal of their trust in the male authorities in their lives. Women in this way of being are described by Belenky, et al as feeling an undeniable strength in their subjective knowing, their "inner gut", an interior voice that can be trusted far more than the external (usually male) authorities (1986, pp 54-61).

An important aspect of these women's experience is the intensity of their perceptions. In most of the cases that have been studied, the women's lives were not in danger, but the women described their situations as a fight for survival, where survival is equated with saving one's self. As women in Gilligan's study of women's moral development put it,

"...I think it is a matter of choosing which one (option) I know that I can survive through. I think it is selfish ... I just realized that. I guess it has to do with whether I would survive or not. (1983, p.89)

These statements are in sharp contrast to the women who abdicated all sense of herself to think of the well-being of others. They are indicative of an attempt to take oneself into account, and of the urgency these women feel in attempting to trust themselves
and their ways of knowing. Nicaraguan women with whom I work recognize the shift from that earlier sense of self, and while sometimes labelling themselves as selfish, they are quite determined to continue respecting themselves.

**The Self-defined Image**

The image of self that appears out of this introspective reflection is one that allows for responsibility to oneself as a good and healthy action. This image is one that allows women to value themselves by their own terms, rather than those imposed by common definitions of femininity, such as was expressed by this woman interviewed by Gilligan:

"I am suddenly beginning to realize that the things that I like to do, the things I am interested in, and the things that I believe and the kind of person I am, are not so bad that I have to constantly be sitting on the shelf and letting it gather dust." (1993, p. 93)

These women’s respect for their own subjective views seems to carry over into a heightened respect for others’ views, and a belief that truth is based on personal experience. Truth for the women in subordinated ways of being was defined by others in absolute terms. It is now seen as representing the multiplicity of individual experiences. I have seen this reflected in the tolerance and acceptance that many of the women with whom I work show towards other women and their problem-solving methods; that each of us in our own unique situation and will be the ultimate authority on what is right in that situation.
This regained sense of self seems to be a central, and jealously guarded, aspect of women’s ways of being as they move out of subordination. Knowledge, learning, and relationships are asked to take that sense of self into account. "Objective truth" and knowledge based purely on following a certain methodology are often questioned, when that "information" is not deciphered in relation to the women’s own self (Belenky, et al, pp. 122-124). In my experience, this seems to be especially clear for women with less formal educational training, or women whose questioning of external authorities continues to be an important factor in their lives.

Regaining Voice
The inner voice these women listen to prompts them to think for themselves, while retaining a reflective attitude towards their lives and actions. Instead of repeating what they have been told, these women begin to have their own, firmly held opinions. In the midst of change this new voice gives these women’s lives depth and direction. In analyzing their interviews with women, Belenky et al recognize that "This interior voice has become, for us, the hallmark of women’s sense of self and sense of agency and control."(1986, p.68)

At first this is a very private voice, "...they engage in self-expression by talking to themselves, their diaries, and even, with one woman, talking to her cats about her inner secrets."
These women are "gaining a voice" and a knowledge base from which they can investigate the world." (Belenky, et al., 1986, p. 86) They later begin to gain a more public voice, using a variety of methods of learning and sharing their knowledge. Some women continue to use their subjective knowledge as a focal point, and reject "scientific" forms of knowing sanctioned by the dominant (Western, androcentric) culture. Others master the procedures of that culture as a methodology to give their voices more public credence. Still others seek to join the two knowledge bases, as in the words of one of the women interviewed by Belenky, et al.,

All this stuff accumulates to the point where it is possible to feel something different...It's not dramatic. It's like a little voice...it's like a voice of integration. (1986, p. 131)

The content of these voices reveals a sense of the world and their role in it that differs in significant qualitative ways than that expressed by men. As women become comfortable with their own voice, they reflect a concern with connection and caring as central foci for decision-making, but this now includes caring for themselves as an essential element of the milieu. Men tend to prioritize an "...ethic of justice--that everyone should be treated the same...", while women place an emphasis on "...an ethic of care [which] rests on the premise of nonviolence--that no one should be hurt." (Gilligan, 1993, p. 174) Men, and the institutions they have created, tend to devalue and silence the intuitive and subjective voices, while women trust their inner knowledge as complementary, integrating with, or sometimes replacing "rationalist", "objective" knowledge. Women's voices
tend to integrate thinking and feeling, while men's voices generally seek to separate them. All of these differences are reflected in women's learning styles and relationships as they seek to move out of a subordinated role and consciousness.

Renegotiating relationships
A common tendency for women involved in an intense inner search for self is their chosen isolation from past relationships, especially those that held their subordination in place. The rage and disappointment erupting from their experiences of failed trust in men often pushes these women to reject relationships with men in general. Existing relationships that do continue for women undergo major transformations to allow for this new voice and a redefinition of responsibility to the relationship (whether it be a couple, a family, friendships, or work relationships) that includes a responsibility to herself.

The choice to focus inward also seems to come along with a recognition that this way of being requires striking out one's one, to reflect and redefine oneself, in terms that spring from a women's subjective knowledge and perceptual learning. This is demonstrated in the Nicaraguan context when women finally break with abusive, subordinating relationships with men, even though their already difficult socio-economic may be drastically worsened.
The relationships that women are most likely to nurture while first delving into the inner self are those that can assist or at least be supportive of the process. A relationship where a woman is listened to for the first time, cared for, and respected as an individual with integrity and value, can often be a catalyst for these women to begin caring for themselves. (Gilligan, 1993, p. 110). This relationship may be with a close woman friend, or in a work, community or learning situation.

The new or transformed relationships that women commonly build as they move out of a subordinated way of being continue to interweave women's new sense of themselves with the relationships in their lives. Researchers from the Stone Center call this relationship-differentiation; "...a process that encompasses increasing levels of complexity, choice, fluidity and articulation within the context of human relationship...It is not through separation but through more highly articulated and expanded relational experience that individual growth takes place."(Jordan et al, 1991, p. 60)

To make this type of relationship work, a capacity for dialogue and mutual empathy must be present. These skills must be employed to meet "...the ongoing challenge to feel emotionally "real", connected, vital, clear and purposeful in relationship. It necessitates risk, conflict, expression of a full range of affect, including anger and other difficult emotions; and the
willingness to challenge old images, levels of closeness and distance, and patterns of relationship. This is the challenge of relationship that provides the energy for growth - the need to be seen and recognized for who one is and the need to see and understand the other with ongoing authenticity". (op cit, pp. 60-61)

In the Nicaraguan context, this sort of mutually supportive relationship seems to have occurred most often in the context of situations which provided other factors for the support of women's move out of subordination. Examples of these situations include trade unions, community development groups, and religious organizations which included opportunities for women to develop mutually supportive relationships, activities that supported their questioning of their subordinated relationships and the shared search for responses to their immediate practical needs.

**Taking and Redefining Power**

In discussing subordination, power was defined as "power over", the ability to control or define another's behavior, and often, attitude. In this case, it means men's control over women. In moving out of subordination, many women begin to feel an inner strength, they begin to value their capacities and abilities, and experience a sense of "control" over their own lives.

At the same time, a redefinition of power is may be taking place.
Women are often uncomfortable with an image of power as a set quantity, a resource that is won or lost, and whose exercise requires hurting or belittling others. Another definition of power is "the capacity to move or produce change." (Miller, in Jordan, et al, 1991, p. 198). Women have always been very powerful in this sense, when that capacity has been used to nurture others. Mothering is an example of power which produces change in the children through nurturing, though it is often combined with strong control mechanisms.

Mothering, as an example of women's power even within subordinated ways of being, brings us back to relationships. Women have been most comfortable with power when it is defined within a nurturing role, in the service of someone else. The new definition of power includes the women themselves as recipients of their power to move and change, without requiring a separation from relations.

A term often heard in discussions about power, learning and social change is empowerment. One definition of empowerment that resonates well with women's reality is developed by Janet Surrey as "...the motivation, freedom, and capacity to act purposefully, with the mobilization of the energies, resources, strengths or powers of each person through a mutual, relational process."( in Jordan et al, 1991, p.164) She posits that the mutuality of the process is an integral element that empowers all those involved,
while strengthening those relationships which support empowering growth and leaning.

Empowerment is often referred to in the context of social change, where a greater sense of capacity for creativity and change is channeled into efforts to transform unjust situations in society. Women's socialization as a nurturer has prepared her well to participate in such efforts. In Nicaragua, women have been important actors in the major social movements of the past twenty years, but those movements have often reproduced the subordinated roles of women while seeking redress to issues defined and prioritized by men. It is only since the mid-80's that women's emerging voices have begun to be heard in their own right, searching for a transformation of the unequal and unjust gender relations in their lives.

**Economic Relationships**

Changes in women's economic relationships may occur as a result of her moving out of a subordinated way of being, or vice versa. Many women who begin to value themselves more want their self-worth reflected in the type of work or the pay they receive. At the same time, many women who enter the job market begin to feel their self-worth, as it is reflected in terms of the outside world, the paying job.

The economic power to move or change things that income-earning
women command also impacts other relationships in their lives. (Beneria & Roldan, 1987). It seems that this phenomena is strongly felt by Nicaraguan women. In an interesting study of women in the informal sector in Nicaragua, even women who wished to go back to a more traditional relationship (with the man in the house as the main income provider) stated that they would not want to give up the benefits in terms of shared decision-making that their income represented.

The picture represented here of women as they move out of subordination cannot reflect all the complexities of the process, but it does demonstrate significant differences in these women’s sense of themselves and their capacity to learn, know and act. As well, the ways these women choose to carry out their relationships change significantly, both in their relationship with themselves and those around them. We see a revaluing of their own knowledge, subjective learning processes, and mutually supportive empathetic relationships, often with women. These qualitative changes include important aspects of these women’s expression, or voice, and power, where they are willing to take a stance in favor themselves, without losing the capacity to care for others.
A METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL FOR WOMEN'S EMANCIPATORY PEDAGOGY:
INITIAL ELEMENTS

The previous review of women's growth and development as they move out of a subordinated way of being can give many clues about the kind of pedagogy that might support just such a process. In this section, I will look at several of these aspects, especially issues of voice, relationships, and power. I will also explore the interface between women's processes and the male-controlled context in which this process is most likely to take place. All of these elements are inextricably interrelated, as are the elements of women's struggle to move out of subordination.

I will rely on my experience as a popular educator with women as well the insights provided in the previous sections as I explore these concepts and propose elements for working with women's learning processes as they change and grow.

Before beginning the elaboration of the proposed methodology, I would like to review certain commonly-held concepts about adult education. Knowles succinctly describes four assumptions about adult learners which are incorporated into many adult education programs. He proposes that as individuals mature:

1) their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward being a self-directed human-being;

2) they accumulate a growing resource of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning;
3) their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles; and

4) their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly, their orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of performance centeredness (Knowles, 1981, p. 44-45).

These assumptions seem simple and straightforward when thinking about agricultural techniques or automobile mechanics, but when the subject at hand is the transformation of the "learners" social role, especially women's social role and identity, a different reading must be made. Let us look at these assumptions one by one.

The first assumption above supposes that the adults in the learning experience are already "self-directed", a process that takes place in late adolescence and early adulthood in Western males. As we have seen above, this process is one we hope to promote with the methodology, but we must remember that many of the women we will be working with, although very mature by other standards, will not be particularly self-directed at the moment our work begins. Limitations on a woman's movement, thought and actions are imposed by her subordination, enacted in her family and culture, and internalized to form part of her self-image.

The second assumption, that the accumulated experience of adult learners acts as a resource for further learning, must be examined more closely. Women's accumulated experience has been systematically devalued by society, and must be revalued before
it can be a valid basis for further learning. Much of what women have learned in while growing up in relationships, an activity that is central to their lives and learning process, has taught them subordination to men and must be analyzed critically to recover aspects that can support learning aimed at ending her subordination.

The third assumption, which asserts that readiness to learn springs from the developmental tasks of a learner’s social role, also needs to be understood in a new light when the learner’s social role is in a period of radical redefinition. The inner search for the new sense of self is often an intense and all-consuming learning process. My own experience has been that women going through this transition are very eager to learn about what the new possibilities might be for them, as long as the learning process respects the ways of knowing that the women are using at the time.

The immediate "performance-centeredness" of these learners, Knowles’ fourth assumption, also takes on another meaning for women in transition. New goals and tasks may be vague at some moments, but a focus on a relational process they can trust becomes increasingly important for these women. For other women, who are making a major change in their lives as part of this process, skills that will be useful in their new situations are seen as extremely useful.
Knowles' conceptions are often the basis for the design of adult education programs aimed at providing new skills and information for adults. Another major focus of adult education activities, in a process aimed at undoing subordination and oppression is that first described in print by Paolo Freire (1970/1992). Although Freire's work does not take on the specificities of women's experience, and is in many ways influenced by his early work with male peasant populations, certain aspects of that theory can be applied to women's processes of unlearning subordination. Some of the differences between women's reality and learning processes and those Freire developed in working with an almost entirely male constituency will be discussed below.

One element of Freire's theory, the reflection-action cycle, can serve as an analogy for the unlearning subordination process I will be discussing in this section, with significant distinctions. The reflection-action cycle is generally understood to be a common group process, both the reflection and the action are collective processes, that take place outside the home. The basis for this may be Freire's extensive work with issues relating to economic class oppression, an oppression that takes place primarily outside the private sphere of the home. His pedagogy assumes that collective action against oppression will be carried out on a communal level, i.e., the peasants against the landowners.
A great proportion of women's oppression is enacted within the confines of the home, especially in a society like Nicaragua's, where women may be literally prohibited from going out of the home. The agents of women's oppression, men, are also the focus of many women's most important relationships. The implication for women's move out of oppression is that much of the struggle against their oppression takes place in the daily, intimate relations of their home. It also means that collective action and reflection will take on a new flavor, and may look like nothing more than a neighborly friendship in many ways. Such a friendship which may be essential in terms of moral and physical support should a woman decide to confront or leave a highly subordinated relationship, especially when the kind of formalized support networks generally available in the United States (shelters, legal aid, etc.) may be non-existent. An example of such action could be a group effort to find another place for a woman to be to get away from a man who is beating her, which doesn't discount larger efforts to change legal structures that do not penalize family violence.

In such circumstances, neither action nor reflection are likely to look like the kind of group activity commonly assumed by Freire's methodology. Although shared reflection is very important for breaking through the isolation, internalization and self-blame inherent in Nicaraguan women's subordination, that sharing process may often look like a health or bible study.
class, or even informal conversation in the workplace or at the
community well. Otherwise, women might not get permission to be
in places where such shared reflection could take place.

Freire’s concept of action assumes that people of a similar
social situation/oppression will join together to take action
that will empower them and undo their oppression. Again, the
nature of women’s oppression will change the form that action may
take. Given that the site of much of women’s oppression is her
home and intimate relationships, and following the logic of
Freire’s reflection-action-reflection cycle, we can see that for
women struggling to eliminate their subordination, the "political
action" is in three spheres, her internal psychological changes,
the interpersonal, intimate sphere, and the broader social
sphere. A liberatory pedagogy for women must take that into
account and find ways to promote reflection and action in all
three spheres.

Another important difference between Freire’s methodology and
what is being suggested here is the importance placed on
internal, psychological growth and learning processes. Although
Freire mentions the role of internalized oppression in unjust
social structures, his methodology does not specifically address
or incorporate this aspect. Given the nature of women’s change
and learning processes explored so far in this paper, an
important emphasis will be placed on developing a methodology
that supports this internal process.

Common Themes for the Methodology

Several common threads run through the rich and complex learning process described in the first section of this paper. These are:

1) Voice, as a metaphor for mind, self, and self-worth, as a the articulation and expression of women’s learning, understanding and thinking.

2) The importance of mutually supportive, empathetic peer relationships for women’s continuing growth and development as they move out of subordination.

3) The need to incorporate the inner, subjective, reflective and emotional parts of a woman’s being into to her learning, ultimately weaving them in and through the cognitive and objective ways of learning and knowing.

4) The redefinition of power to include women’s abilities to create, move or change situations, and to include collaborative instead of competitive, dominant/subordinate power relationships.

Specific Elements of the Proposed Methodological Approach, and One Application

The methodological elements described below seek to strengthen and incorporate all of these themes into a women’s non-formal learning situation. In doing so, the hope is that they can create the circumstances that support women’s personal and collective struggles to move out of subordinated ways of being.

During 1994, I have been directing the pilot stage of the WEDP, a women’s small business development training program sponsored by the Women’s Ministry of the Nicaraguan Council of Protestant Churches. The WEDP attempts to incorporate the themes and
elements of a women's emancipatory pedagogy. From this application experience, I will provide examples of specific activities for the different methodological elements and touch on some of the difficulties presented in attempting to incorporate them all.

Women's Economic Development Program: Background and Description

One area of consistent concern and activity for the Women's Ministry has been the development of small-scale economic development projects, mostly in agricultural or consumer goods production projects. Nearly all of the projects begun in the last decade failed to provide reliable income for the women. In reviewing these results in light of Nicaraguan women's situation today, four major needs were identified by the Women's Ministry: 1) training and technical assistance for business skills, 2) access to financing, 3) successful strategies for strengthening grassroots women's committees and integrating them into the leadership of development work, and 4) the gender issues arising from women's changing role in the society. Over two years ago, CEPAD set specific, increasing goals for loans awarded to women from the revolving loan fund, but has yet to reach even their lowest target level.

Since 1991, the Women's Ministry has begun providing occasional training and technical assistance to the women's groups that have existing or planned economic development projects. This support
covers aspects of business administration, organizational development and the gender issues that arise from their economic development efforts. I acted as the main consultant and trainer in this effort, which allowed me to gather insight and information about the projects, the women involved, and the way the different aspects are interrelated.

In trying to meet the women’s training needs, I have found some training programs and materials on small business development and management directed to women, but they do not generally address the gender issues inherent in that process. They often replace men with women in case studies without integrating the daily challenges confronted by women as they take on new economic and community roles.

Program goals and objectives
The Women’s Economic Development Program was conceived to address the issues raised above, and do so in a way that takes into account the way these issues interact. Its overall goals are to improve the ability of grassroots women’s groups to carry out successful small-scale economic development projects, while at the same time strengthening their local organizations and networks, and their strategies for confronting the gender-based obstacles to their assuming leadership in development activities.
The specific program objectives are as follows:

- Develop the women's small business planning and management skills, including market research, cost analysis, production planning, financing strategies, accounting and marketing.

- Develop these grassroots women's leadership and organizational abilities so that they may be more effective in the organizational aspects of their enterprises, and more able to participate effectively in other community development activities.

- Incorporate gender issues arising from women's business activity into both organizational and business skills development objectives, whereby it will assist the women in overcoming the gender-based barriers to their successful participation in the economic and community development process.

- Strengthen the capacity of the Nicaraguan Ecumenical Council to assist small businesses through its staff’s participation in the program’s training and technical assistance activities, and CEPAD’s increased lending to women’s economic projects.

- Develop specific training materials to present aspects of its activities not available in existing materials.

- Promote the development of grassroots networks of women involved in small-scale economic development, including women not in the CEPAD women’s groups.

Relationship to other CEPAD women’s activities

The WEDP represents a first experience for the Women’s Ministry in operating a special program with specific funding. The project comes at a time when CEPAD’s economic resources have reduced repeatedly over the last few years, as the majority of their funding comes from European sources who are now turning their focus to Eastern Europe. It is seen by the WM as something of a test case, and they have already followed the example by developing two new funding proposals, one for a women’s health
training program and another to implement gender training with the staff of CEPAD and the network of pastors that work in the villages. If the WM can successfully execute the WEDP project, it will demonstrate a strength and autonomy to the institution that may expand its options for further work. By providing focus and staff to a chronically understaffed program, it may help revitalize the coordinating efforts between grassroots women’s committees and provide another forum from which women’s issues can be discussed and presented to the rest of the organization.

Program Design

The WEDP revolves around a series of 2-3 day workshops, spaced 6-8 weeks apart. The content of the training was derived from an initial needs assessment which identified difficulties the women were encountering in the administration of their small businesses, and analyzed the organizational and gender dynamics of the businesses.

The administrative and organizational issues to be presented were analyzed from a gender perspective in the planning stages, to illuminate potential gender-based obstacles for the successful use of the technical skills to be learned (marketing, accounting, planning, etc.), and the way that technical issues could act as springboards for gender issues. Some of the areas analyzed at that stage were the intersection between "business life" and "home life", power relations present in the women’s lives, and
ways that internalized misinformation about women would limit their ability to carry out the tasks of their small businesses.

Each workshop includes aspects of business administration, organizational issues, and gender. These are presented based on the way the different aspects overlap in the women's lives. For example, a discussion of the roles and responsibilities of a project's Board of Directors has been carried on through three workshops. In the course of this process, the women have analyzed the way that responsibilities are usually distributed (with most of the control and decision-making in the hands of the president), how this reproduces relations of subordination, how community leaders (usually men) abuse their power, and the development of an alternative model of leadership based on the kinds of relationships they value between women.

At the end of each workshop, the women are given follow-up assignments for each of the topic areas. Two women from each region stay an extra day to receive further training in the topics covered and popular education methodology. When these women go back to their regions, they are responsible for making sure that the participants share and review the training with the other members of their group and complete the follow-up exercises. The emphasis on the follow-up in the local communities is not only to assure that the workshop participants understand the material, but also to begin building the local
networks amongst women involved in economic development.

Initially, a certain amount of resistance to the integral training methodology was encountered amongst staff at the sponsoring NGO, especially concerning the incorporation of gender issues into the technical aspects. However, once we were able to discuss specific issues, they usually recognized the way in which the issues overlap and effect each other.

Women’s Spaces
The move from a subordinated consciousness to one that is self-defined involves a paradigm shift, a new and broader definition of the possible. This shift is described by Freire as a question of perception; understanding a situation of oppression as "fetters" to their liberation, not as insurmountable barriers.

Establishing learning situations where only women are present offers the opportunity to set new paradigms of relations, voice, knowledge and power. As a major change in environment or culture, it can disrupt previously existing patterns and allow new ones to be established and valued. However, an exclusively women’s learning environment does not necessarily provide opportunities for experiential learning of a new paradigm. Establishing this space as truly different from the dominant paradigm requires lots of clear thinking and hard work, and constant attention to details so as not to fall back into the
interactions and self-images based on women's subordination.

In the WEDP, the intent was to have only women in the training workshops, for all the reasons described above. However, one older women brought her son to accompany her, and when the course was opened to the sponsoring institutions technicians, one male technician began attending. The ratio is now about 15 women to every man.

The two men's presence doesn't seem to have affected the dynamic of a "women's space". Obviously the proportions are a factor, but I have seen many situations where one man can dominate an otherwise all-women's gathering. In this case, it may be due in part to the personalities of the two men involved, they are both very quiet and shy, not domineering or overbearing. Another important factor are the other efforts we use to establish the workshops as "women's space", especially through the way the facilitators use language. We always address the group in feminine plural forms, the opposite of "normal" Spanish, which addresses all mixed groups with the masculine forms. We also make constant reference to women's reality within any context being discussed, rather than assuming that there is one "normal" situation.

Reflection

In most developing countries poor women have almost no free time,
as they are responsible for productive, family (reproductive), and community tasks. In time-use studies done by the author in Nicaragua, rural women worked 14 to 16 hours a day, while men's work days, including all three task areas, averaged between 8-12 hours (Trujillo & Rusmore, 1991). This schedule leaves very few opportunities for shared reflection. In the case of women's subordination, often experienced in relative isolation from other women, the sharing is important for the purpose of recognizing that their situation is unjust, not natural, and to envision its being eliminated. The challenge for the popular educator seeking to support this process is to use the opportunities that do exist as well as possible, and to recognize those opportunities even when they don't seem to exist. This often means supporting a shared reflection process leading to an analysis of women's subordination from a starting point of subjects that seem innocuous or unrelated, such as child nutrition, or in the application to be discussed here, small business management.

Women also seem to be need to engage in deep personal reflection to move out their subordination (Gilligan, Belenky, et al, Jordan, et al). Perhaps this parallels the reality of women's oppression, where the agents of women's subordination are most often people with whom they have important, intimate relations (fathers, lovers, husbands, brothers, and sons). Therefore, the struggle to eliminate that oppression requires a woman's rethinking of her self and her relationships with men. This
personal reflection can happen over the washbasin or while nursing a baby, once the process is begun and encouraged.

A methodology that seeks to enhance women's opportunities to carry out personal questioning and reflection, as well as shared reflection and analysis, needs to look at these processes separately and at their interrelations. It also requires great sensitivity to the importance of the relationships with men in these women's lives, and the disruption in the existing nature of those relationships that are likely to be caused by the women's questioning of the relationship's subordinating aspects.

Incorporating personal shared reflection could include activities as simple as asking women to think individually about questions that relate to the topics of interpersonal relations and self-image, then asking them to share those reflections with women in the workshop or their community. In the WEDP, we have used this sort of exercise in the workshops, then asked the women to repeat it when they return to their communities. The fact that several women attend the workshops from each community, and that "homework" is assigned for all training topics, makes it easier for women to value, and follow through with, this sort of request.

The WEDP has an additional opportunity for reflection available, based on the common cultural background of most of the women as
practicing Protestant Christians. In the Nicaraguan context, this means that these women are used to reading the Bible and reflecting on its meaning in their lives. We have incorporated their custom of daily biblical reflection sessions into the training program, giving a feminist reading of the texts used, which are chosen to relate to the topics to be covered in the day.

Inclusion of emotional aspects

In reviewing the process by which women learn ways out of their subordination, one can see the centrality of the emotional, psychological process. One of the major elements in this process is the inclusion of subjective ways of knowing in the women’s learning process. This is accompanied by a redefinition of self and relationships to include the recognition of women’s emotional needs.

If the pedagogy seeks to support such a transition, it needs to include the recognition and encouragement of the emotional aspects of the process. Certain emotions have been considered acceptable for women, while others have not. For example, "...women generally have been led to believe that their identity, as women, is that of persons who should be almost totally without anger and without the need for anger." (Jordan, et al, 1991, p.184) Yet it is understandable that women would be extremely
angry about their subordination. In reclaiming her voice, a woman also begins to reclaim her right to express the full range of her emotions, including anger, grief and fear.

The recognition of anger as an important factor in liberatory pedagogies, in the "reflection-action-reflection" cycle, has generally been glossed over by educational theorists. It is impossible to negate, however, the role it has played in many social change movements. If we are going to recognize it as a factor in women's transformation and their extrication from subordination, it bears a closer look.

Anger is generally depicted as inextricably connected to aggressive, destructive action. Recent theorists suggest that this is an outgrowth of our social structure, and that anger, in essence, "...tells us something is wrong, and needs changing. Thus, anger provides a powerful (and useful) recognition of discomfort and motivation for change..."(Jordan, et el, 1991, p. 188). Understood in this way, and recognizing the role of the suppression of women's anger in maintaining their subordination, the importance of incorporating opportunities for women's expressions of anger into their liberatory pedagogy becomes central. This is also true of other emotions which have been generally suppressed in women, such as grief or fear for themselves. (Women are generally allowed to have these feelings only in their role of caring for others.)
The incorporation of these emotional aspects into liberatory pedagogy is not necessarily an easy task, nor one that has been widely discussed. One example is an all-women's workshop on nuclear disarmament described by Janet Surrey in Jordan, et al. A major portion of this workshop is spent creating mutually-supportive atmosphere for sharing feelings about the possibility of nuclear disaster. In this context, "[f]rom the expressions of helpless rage, despair and confusion, the group builds together to a sense of urgency and shared responsibility: We must do something. Negative affects of helplessness, anger, fear and confusion become transformed into the energy of positive movement." (p.176)

Another example is the methodology used by Khandi Bourne in workshops on racism on the University of Massachusetts campus. Using techniques of Re-evaluation Counseling, Ms. Bourne allows ALANA students opportunities to release the emotional tension built up around the issue, emotions which are not seen as acceptable in most contexts. She has seen that this allows students to think more clearly about the situation and identify

1 Re-evaluation Counseling is a peer counseling theory and practice which places great importance on the relationship between the internalization of oppression and emotional processes, positing that unfinished emotional discharge and healing are major factors in the oppression's continuance. Individuals are encouraged to express their emotions as a way of allowing the healing process to happen, and thus opening their thinking and action to greater creativity than that imposed by the oppression's definition of what is possible. Information about Re-evaluation Counseling is available from Rational Island Publishers: 719 2nd Ave. No., Seattle, WA 98109, USA

2 The acronym ALANA means African, Latino, Asian, and Native American heritage.
the information they need to move on in their social change process.

Most educators feel, and are, highly unprepared to work in this realm. A common fear is that we will be taking the lid off Pandora's box, allowing infinite, uncontrollable emotions to take over the individuals with whom we work. Some think that only psychologists should touch these issues. But if we are going to accept the importance of the subjective, emotional side of the emancipatory learning process, we must begin to gain the skills and understanding necessary to be effective in it.

Two of the elements that seem to be necessary for this emotional process to take place are safety and encouragement. By safety I mean establishing an environment where the participants can be sure that their expressions of emotion will not have the negative consequences that they would in most settings. This seems to require a certain emotional connection with the other participants, a connection which may be based on previous relationships, common interests, or other factors. It also requires recognition of the value, for the person expressing her emotions, of that expression. We often value emotional expressions only for the impact they might have on other people. Her the objective is quite different. Another important element of safety is confidentiality, where what is said in the educational setting is not repeated outside that setting.
Encouragement to touch on the emotional side of issues seems to be necessary to overcome all the socialization that tells women that certain emotions cannot be felt or expressed. An example of such an activity might be eliciting "feelings" as a response to questions or experiences, or of taking advantage of the emotional responses to other questions. I have also noticed the value of my being able to model the inclusion of emotions in my work, without that expression interrupting the overall goals of the training (which I believe to be another fear about the incorporation of this element in many settings).

Another aspect of this subjective process that is important to consider is that, just like the intellectual processes educators work with most frequently, only part of the learning actually happens within processes designed by the "teacher". The individual or shared emotional reflection-action cycle may take place with friends, family, individually or in other contexts.

One of the ways that educators can assist this process is by providing starting points for the emotional process, and by respecting its importance. This is especially true for women, for whom recognition of the subjective side of learning is also a recognition of a very important element in their struggle to overcome subordination. Sometimes, when an emotionally charged atmosphere is present, that feeling can be acknowledged, and pointers or questions given to further the subjective reflection...
process, even if the work cannot be done at that time.

In the WEDP, we have been able to incorporate some work in this area. We have asked women to explore the feelings they experience in many of the situations they encounter in their small business context, especially those that may be specifically related to their subordination. We have encouraged the use of humor (an acceptable emotion) to deal with more emotionally charged issues, recognizing that the tension released with laughter also touched on more difficulty expressed emotions such as anger. We have modelled emotional expression used for its own sake, rather than to elicit certain responses from others. We have worked some with individual women on these issues, mostly by listening to them as they discuss their personal issues. At the point that this paper is being written (after three workshops), the emotional connections between the participants that would allow more direct work as a group on this aspect are just beginning to be established.

Solidarity, connection and relationships

The first section of this paper underscored the importance of relationships in women’s lives: relationships as sites of learning, relationships as contexts for definition of self, and intimate relationships as the locus of a significant portion of women’s subordination. A liberatory pedagogy for women needs to
take all these aspects, and their interconnectedness, into consideration.

Belenky, et al, talk about the importance of relationships in women’s learning as they move out of their subordination. As women begin to integrate feeling and thinking as ways of learning and knowing, they find it helpful to meet in collaborative groups to share their ideas. Some groups depend on set "rules" to establish an interchange of ideas which they bring as fully developed as possible. Others bring "...half-baked half-truths and ask others to nurture them." (1986, p.118) Especially in this second instance, knowing and trusting the other members of the group is essential for the success of the learning process, as is empathy, or the ability to understand a situation from another’s emotional and intellectual perspective.

The use of empathy for learning is even more highly developed as women move beyond specific procedures and begin to construct their own learning processes and knowledge outside typical paradigms. These women thrive in what Belenky, et al call "real talk" situations, where there is "... a mutually shared agreement that together you are creating the optimum setting so that half-baked or emergent ideas can grow. Real talk reaches deep into the experience of each participant; it also draws on the analytical abilities of each...domination is absent, reciprocity and cooperation are prominent." (1986, pp. 144, 146.)
At this point, it is helpful to refer back to Surrey’s definition of a woman’s sense of her self as including "...the expectation of interaction and relationship as a process of mutual sensitivity and mutual responsibility that provides the stimulus for the growth of empowerment and self-knowledge." (in Jordan, et al, 1991, p.159) For women in the process of constructing a new sense of self, the empathetic, relational and collaborative learning settings described above should be ideal. The challenge for the development of pedagogy is how to create them.

The learning experience can be used as a site to demonstrate the mutual acceptance and respect so necessary for women’s growth, and so absent from dominant-subordinate relationships. It is also important to confront the ways that the internalization of negative messages about women sometimes makes it difficult to build and maintain supportive relationships with other women, the role of gossip, etc.

The real pedagogical challenge is to create circumstances which demonstrate a different paradigm for relationships, and establish the circumstances where those relationships can develop. Elizabeth Ellsworth (in Luke & Green, eds., 1992) suggests that smaller groups which provide conditions of greater homogeneity, as well as opportunities for the establishment of close personal relationships, may be one vehicle to provide such opportunities (pp. 108-110).
Not only is it important to foster those types of relationships or interaction within the context of the structured learning activities, but to promote the development of relationships that can provide women with solidarity and support as they struggle to transform or establish relationships outside the learning site. By providing opportunities for women who are geographically close (and therefore can easily continue a friendship outside the learning experience), or have something else in common, to build friendships and support networks, the pedagogy can have an impact on women's unlearning of subordination when they are far away from the structured learning context.

The objective of development of mutually supportive, on-going relationships has been part of the WEDP since its inception. The women who participate are mostly members of an existing network of grassroots women's groups; even at the first workshop, everyone is likely to recognize a few faces from previous activities. Within the workshops, small work groups are developed and continue for several days, allowing women to get to know each other better. The follow-up work in the communities is usually done with groups of 5-15 women from nearby areas, reinforcing the ties begun in the workshops. The ultimate goal is that local networks of women's economic development projects will assume most of the program's training and training and technical assistance responsibilities after a three-year start-up period.
We have also made efforts to establish relationships of empathy and mutual respect in the program. This builds on basic popular education tools of respecting the knowledge of the participants, with the added twist of including emotional, subjective knowledge. We also use shared reflection to analyze the way dominant-subordinate relations are used to enforce women’s mistreatment and establish "ground rules" for respecting differences of experience and perspective. This very subjective work is tricky and sensitive, but the beginnings of relationships that break the dominant-subordinate paradigm are signs that it is possible.

**Practicing voice**

In the following the process of women as they move out of subordination, their ability to articulate their thoughts, feelings and sense of agency in the world grows and becomes a new or rediscovered central aspect of these women’s sense of themselves. In thinking about a pedagogy to support that process, it is important to remember that the process of articulation happens internally first, and then is shared with others.

Belenky, et al use the metaphor of a midwife at a birth to describe the teacher’s role in this process. The midwife teacher acts as a support person for an intense, but natural birthing process for the woman’s newborn thoughts and ideas, which must be
nurtured, given stimulation and careful attention. The students' thoughts are not expected to be like the teacher's thoughts, nor will the teacher do the student's thinking for them; they are truly the student's, and must be respected as growing out of the specific context of that student's life. (1986, pp. 217-218).

This metaphor is in some ways similar to the role of a teacher described by Freire in the "concientizacio" process. It stresses the importance of dialogue and a mutual learning process. However, Freire's critical pedagogy was developed specifically for community analysis of social problems, and the midwife teaching model is more interested in supporting the development of the student's thinking.

Belenky, et al define dialogue to include ideas beyond the student's previous experience, ideas that can be introduced by the teacher. These new ideas incorporation into the student's emerging voice will depend on their resonance with her particular interests and needs. Rather than an action-reflection cycle, they describe the process as "evocation-confirmation-evocation". This cycle entails drawing out the student's voice, a time in which the student confirms that voice's existence and identity, and then another cycle of evoking new thoughts, ideas and emotional understandings. Perhaps both processes occur simultaneously, where action and confirmation enunciate the women's increased sense of agency resulting from evocation and
Elizabeth Ellsworth critiques the role of "student voice" as envisioned by most critical pedagogies. Recognizing the differences of power controlled by the teacher, she doubts that a sharing of ideas amongst "equals" can exist between teachers and students. Rather, she points out that "...self-defining feminist voices have been understood as constructed collectively in the context of a larger feminist movement or women's marginalized subcultures." She also stresses the importance of "talking back" and "defiant speech" constructed within communities of resistance. (In Luke & Gore, eds., 1992, pp.102-103). She recognizes that many good reasons exist for people from subordinated positions to remain silent, including the bad experiences they have had when they spoke in the past, lack of trust amongst and the fact that what they feel or think may be incomprehensible to those present (op.cit., p.107).

Both Ellsworth and Belenky, et al, using their experience in formal education as a reference point, point to issues arising from the unequal power relations so often present in educational situations and their impact on the student's voice and agency. For women, the inequality, and its inherent limitations on externalizing their voices, is exacerbated when men are present. This would underscore the pedagogical value of the "women's spaces" mentioned earlier. Once men are not present, other
pedagogical methods can encourage women to speak on their own terms. Women's experiences, including their subjective and relational knowledge, which are usually excluded in a "male environment", can be revalued and incorporated as part of the rich resource base for further learning. Part of this process is the valuing of the multiplicity of experiences present in any room of women, no matter how "homogeneous" it may seem, and encouraging the multiple voices present to speak, be heard and be respected.

In the WEDP methodology, the issue of voice is closely related to the development of self-esteem. In every workshop, there are activities in which participants are encouraged to express positive valorations of themselves and their co-learners, to confront the misinformation about women in society, and recognize their intrinsic value, independent of their social role or specific relation to men. We are also very careful to encourage everyone present to participate, using small groups and techniques that assure that all the women begin to take steps to externalize their voices. The reflection process mentioned above is in many ways focused on developing the internal voice of the women involved.

"Hard skills"

Franz Fanon, in analyzing the subordination inherent in colonialism, relates the internal, subjective processes to the
external ones by stating that "...if there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: primarily, economic; subsequently, the internalization of this inferiority." (Fanon, 1968, p.52).

The previous sections of this paper have discussed aspects of a pedagogy that relate to the internal process of unlearning subordination in terms of women's sense of self, identity and relationships. They have described ways of using the educational experience to begin building alternatives in women's lives. The central theme has been a learning process "from the inside out", as women rediscover, revalue and redefine themselves, their ideas and their relationships.

The next sections look at themes outside the women; at specific skills for "competing" in a male-dominated world, and at the analysis of the structure and dynamic of that system. There are many aspects of these themes that can take advantage of existing popular and adult education pedagogy for dealing with new ideas. My suggestions will focus on places and ways that such a pedagogy could be modified to most fully support women's unlearning of subordination.

In most countries of the world, most women are economically dependent on men for their survival in a cash economy. Earlier sections of this paper refer to major changes that occur in
women's relationships as they choose to move out of their subordination. This sometimes causes the severance of existing relationships, especially with men who act as agents of their subordination. If we are seeking to develop a pedagogy to support women as they go through the unlearning of subordination, we must recognize that their efforts may endanger their present source of subsistence. Any effort to support women through that process must include assuring that they have the skills necessary to end their economic dependence on men.

A great majority of adult education efforts are focused on teaching what are considered marketable job skills. Within such programs, the suggestion from the previous sections is that issues arising from a women's gender subordination must be taken into account even in the most technical training situations, if the participants are going to have the necessary tools to overcome the daily obstacles that subordination causes. Another set of adult learning situations, especially those promoted by feminist popular educators, focus on gender issues directly, or indirectly through less "threatening" topics such as health or human rights. These situations seek to begin or reinforce the questioning process so necessary to women's moving out of subordination, but rarely bring together the resources or training that would allow women to act effectively on the results of that questioning process.
One of the obvious skills women must have are the means of earning a living. What those skills will be depends on the local context of the women. This is likely to include marketable skills such as carpentry or sewing, but also literacy, numeracy and business administration skills, though not all these skills will necessarily be part of the same program. These other skills are especially important for the growing number of women who go into their own small businesses in the informal market as a response to a labor market that does not provide them with viable alternatives and their need to continue to with their family-related tasks.

They must also learn "the rules of the game" if they are to compete with men in the labor or informal markets. The concept of femininity as passive, submissive, and placing greater emphasis on relationships than competition does little to prepare women for the market economy. Girls in adolescence struggle to integrate female aspirations with masculine competence needed for outside world, something that is not easily done. (Gilligan, p.10). At the same time, millions of women around the world successfully compete in the informal market, having learned the competitive ethic through the school of hard knocks.

Anzaldúa discusses the need for multiple consciousnesses as survival skill in the context of switching back and forth between US and Mexican cultures, (1987, pp. 77-91). I would propose that
this is also a skill that women must develop as they learn to survive in the job market and business world, a context with a different set of expectations and aspirations than those which most commonly define the woman’s sense of self. A challenge for those in working in women’s emancipatory pedagogy is how to support the strengthening of the skills necessary for survival in the competitive world, without forsaking those parts of her identity that allow for her connection to others. The pedagogical implications of this bring us back to the earlier sections (in some ways) in that we are talking about subjective issues.

The WEDP is ostensibly a small business training program for women receiving credit from the sponsoring NGO’s credit program. As such, it serves as an example of a technical training program that has made a conscious decision (in this case, since its conception) to support women’s internal transformation as well as provide technical skills. This has meant integrating technical skills into a discussion of the women’s problems and relationships, as the following example demonstrates:

The needs assessment showed little understanding of the use of working capital, and that it was often depleted by family expenses. To approach this issue, we first worked in small groups, brainstorming all expenses in the household, either business or family. Then each group analyzed the decision-making
for those spending decisions, looking at the gender dynamics involved. The groups then reported back to a plenary session, where the gender dynamics of budgeting and spending was analyzed further through group discussion (men generally contribute less than half their income to family expenses, and reach into the cash register any time they please to cover personal expenses, even when the woman runs the business single-handed, etc.). A very short story was then read which graphically demonstrated the dynamics by which working capital is depleted.

During the discussion afterwards, the name of working capital was introduced, although the concept was quite clear by this time. The participants then suggested and analyzed different strategies for protecting their working capital in the face of family and male pressures, and finally, the daily ledger was introduced as a tool to track expenses and the disposition of working capital. Of all these subjects, only the concept of working capital and the use of the daily ledger are topics that are generally included in small business training, but given the common gender dynamics around use of cash in a household, it is easy to see why the other aspects were important if women are to be able to maintain their level of working capital.

Although the example used here is small business training, the methodological proposal suggests a similar process of needs assessment, gender analysis, and gender issues exploration could
be used in almost any training area. To make it work requires a very good understanding of the gender dynamics of the local culture, as they relate to the topic at hand.

**Structural analysis of subordination**

The shared analysis of the social structure and dynamics of oppression is at the heart of critical pedagogy as envisioned by Freire and others. For women, the process is essential in understanding as structural an oppression which is experienced in the private sphere, as personal. Freire's "naming" process takes on special importance for women as they share their experiences with others and realize that what they had thought was just their personal problem is actually shared by many women and has larger societal causes, that it is not their fault. An understanding of how women's subordination works, how men benefit (and are limited) by it, and the mechanisms that keep it in place are an essential aspect of this methodology.

Critical pedagogy, as developed by Freire and others, concentrates on public group reflection and action. The approach described in this paper proposes the conscious inclusion of the private and internal transformation processes into the methodology. To respect the role of political action in the private sphere, and the many differences represented by each women's context, including the multiplicities of oppression based on class, race, nationality, etc, we must use a pedagogy that
bases its work on a respect for differences. (Luke, in Luke & Gore, eds., 1992, pp. 47-48). Part of that methodology could be an attitude of approaching every subject with sufficient humility to understand that no one, not even the technical experts, have a full understanding of any subject. As an example, the WEDP participants had already implemented a huge variety of accounting systems of their own invention before the program started. The pedagogical challenge is to respect that and build from it.

Ellsworth suggests that affinity groups may be one way of representing the variety of experiences present in a larger group. In my personal experience with women’s non-formal learning situations I have been impressed by the participants’ comprehension of each other’s different situations, which seems to be based on an understanding of the way that different circumstances offer different limits and opportunities.

It is precisely the respect for differences that can allow a women’s emancipatory pedagogy a viable strategy for the collective reflection-action cycle, one goal of which is the strengthening of solidarity and group action. By respecting, and using as a starting point, the complexity and specificity of each woman’s experience, the common threads can be drawn out, without losing track of the concrete context to which each woman returns at the end of the day.
Modeling of alternative paradigms and power

Many of the elements for a potential pedagogy of women's emancipation described above come together to form an important aspect of this methodology, what I call modelling of alternative paradigms. By this I mean that, within the context of the women's educational experience, we pull together these elements that represent alternatives to a subordinated way of being, and that totality presents a tangible, experiential way of recognizing that change is possible.

A place where women's voices are encouraged and respected, where mutuality instead of competition is demonstrated and where the importance of respectful relationships is taken into account, can come together to provide that kind of ah-hah experience which women can take home and remember as a concrete example of all the other aspects that might have been explored during the educational experience. I am not imagining that the environment that is created in the educational experience is a model to be into every woman's home and community environment. Rather, the memory of it will be translated and transformed as each woman interprets it in her own context. It is extremely helpful, as in the case of WEDP, to have several women from each community participate. Not only does it allow them to support each other in remembering the technical material covered, it helps them remember that the alternative paradigm can exist, they saw each other there, and that no one dreamed it or made it up.
Another thread running through the methodological suggestions, and one that contributes to the experience of an alternative paradigm, is the re-thinking of power. This involves replacing a concept of power as a finite quantity used to influence (or force) certain actions of others, to a concept based on the capacity to move or change. That is demonstrated in the use of emotional resources to mobilize women's thinking and action, in the collaborative learning possible within mutually respectful relationships, and the increased sense of personal power and strength women experience as they rediscover their voices.

The power dynamics between student and teacher need to be carefully analyzed, so as to make every effort to build collaborative learning relationships for the women, whether or not those can include the person in charge of the learning situation. Looking at the case of the WEDP, it calls into question the undeniable power relations of the facilitators vis-a-vis the women starting small business projects, where the central team has determined the topics and methodology to be used, at least for this year's pilot project. The inclusion of the women in the annual planning/implementation/evaluation cycle could build more equal relations over time, to the degree that the small business owners assume real responsibility for program direction and implementation. In the meantime, we need to be very aware of the limitations on the women's participation that those unequal power relations might create.
Another important paradigm that can be challenged in this context is that of leadership, usually seen as a distribution of power to one individual or a very small group. Building on collaborative learning models and mutually empowering relationships, a collaborative form of leadership can also be practiced in this context. Also termed collegial or horizontal leadership, it is based on a more even distribution of tasks, responsibility and authority. It seeks to embody a concept of power as a synergy developing out of the relationships of all involved, which strengthens their collective ability to change and create the situations surrounding those involved, and their collective future. This structure usually involves rotating responsibilities and highly democratic, participatory interactions.

WEDP has begun to implement this sort of leadership model in a variety of situations. At the level of the training team, decision-making is very collaborative, taking into account the different cultural and professional backgrounds of the people involved. Nevertheless, certain decisions remain in my hands as program coordinator, partly because I have significantly more program management experience and am more respected by the rest of the NGO staff than the other WEDP staff, partly because the rest of the NGO is very hierarchical and male-dominated.

Within the collective businesses, an analysis of distribution of
tasks has been made, with an emphasis on understanding the
disadvantages of concentrating power in one person's hands. The
collectives have been asked to consider redistributing tasks on a
more equal basis, even though this goes against the dominant
cultural models. In the most recent workshop participants
critiqued common leadership models and their relationship to
patriarchy, and begin constructing an alternative model for which
they would like to strive in their work with women.

The pedagogy that is being suggested here seeks to provide an
opportunity for women to imagine, experience and practice an
emancipatory paradigm for their personal identities,
relationships, and understanding of the world around them. As
the examples from the WEDP in this section hope to demonstrate,
it is a methodology which can be used in even the most technical
content areas. This requires consciously including the ways that
gender relations intersect with the topic(s) to be covered. It
also requires using methodology that is not only participatory
and problem-posing, but that also takes into account the
importance of women's relationships, voice, power dynamics and
emotional/psychological process in moving out of their
subordination.

It is not an easy process to integrate all these elements into an
adult education experience. It requires that those designing and
implementing the process maintain a constant watch for the subtle
ways that the patterns holding women's subordination in place can warp priorities, interactions and the internal processes of those supposedly facilitating the process. It also requires great creativity and perception to successfully recognize and contradict the ways that existing gender patterns intersect with the content area to be discussed.
CONCLUSIONS AND UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Women's Ways of Being

Women's emancipation from subordination is not only a material, social and economic process, it also involves psychological and emotional processes that take place within women as they struggle to move out of their subordination. This process is often catalyzed by moments of personal crisis in the women's lives, and implicates a questioning of previous paradigms about self, relationships, knowledge, agency and power. It involves a process of unlearning old "ways of being"; patterns, models and understandings, in order to learn and create new ones. Those ways of being involve a women's self-concept, her way of enacting her personal relationships under a variety of circumstances, her vision of the world and of what is possible or impossible. It includes a vision of her capacity to know, understand and act on the world around her.

This unlearning/learning process is not by any means linear, and the details are as specific as each woman's life and context. Some common threads can be seen, however, and those relate to redefinition of self, knowledge, and relationships in a way that take the woman's needs and desires into account, rather than always deferring to the needs and desires of the men in her life or the morays of a patriarchal society. These women begin to see themselves as capable of choice and action in their own
interests, not only in the role of attending to others. Knowledge and knowledge making is appropriated by listening to subjective knowledge, by selective use of knowledge production systems from the patriarchal mode ("objective knowledge"), and by searching out relationships which allow for mutual growth and learning. By beginning to listen inwardly, to their own knowledge and conceptions, women begin to develop a capacity to give voice to their needs and desires, and act to change their personal lives and the world around them.

Women’s personal and family relationships are often the private enactment of dynamics reflected in society at large. They are also considered to be an important basis from which women create their sense of self. As such they represent a central locus of women’s subordination, and their efforts to move out of subordination. The development of a new type of relationship which supports a woman’s agency and learning can be extremely important for women in the midst of such a process.

This new paradigm of relationship is different from the dominant-subordinate model not only in its mutuality, but also in its embodiment of a new concept of power. Power, instead of being based on veiled violence as a way of forcing someone else to act (or think) in a certain way, is now viewed and enacted as the ability to move, change or create situations, and incorporates collaboration amongst equals rather than one person or group’s
dominion over another. Empathy, in the sense of being able to understand and be understood from the emotional point of view of another person, while respecting each other's differences, is also present in these relationships of mutual growth and learning.

The kind of ideal relationships women seek to create as they unlearn subordination are very rare, although they seem more possible between women than between women and men. Even when such relationships can be established, it requires constant vigilance against the internalized images of women's subordinated way of being to keep from falling into old patterns.

The issues of empathy, mutuality, power, growth and learning, are present in all human interaction, not just personal, family or intimate relations. As such, the discussion above relates to many different types of relationships, not just the on-going daily ones. Experiencing some aspect of a new paradigm is sometimes very important to women's search for a way out of their subordination, and supports their beginning to imagine new ways of being.

IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S POPULAR EDUCATION

Cultural Critique

Understanding women's unlearning/learning process for their emancipation from subordination is central to popular education.
practice and theory that hopes to support such a process. A cultural critique and comparison of the process described above is imperative, as it was derived from theory developed almost exclusively in white, North American, middle to upper class contexts. My appropriation of the larger body of theory is somewhat selective, to include the aspects that seem to resonate with the reality of the poor Nicaragua women with whom I have worked over the last seven years. I also attempted to further that critique by reviewing these ideas with other women popular educators in Nicaragua.

Nevertheless, there is no way that I can extricate myself completely from my cultural background in this process. There is no way I can be certain that what I understood as a significant shift in identity, for example, is experienced as such by the women I have observed and come to know personally. The question of the cultural validity of certain aspects of the theory is still very undecided and is an area I hope to explore, in conjunction with other women's popular educators in Nicaragua, over the next year. This process requires a deep understanding of the gender dynamics in a certain context, and would be essential for the application of the theory and methodology in any setting. Ideally, the first step would be to spell out the dynamics of women's oppression in a certain context, in the internal (psychological, emotional) and interpersonal realms as well as the larger social dynamics. From there, an understanding
of women's transformations, growth and learning as they move out of their subordination in that specific context, would need to be articulated. Using that basis, a methodology could be developed to support the unlearning/learning process which would be appropriate to that context.

**Supporting emancipatory internal processes**

Perhaps the most important implication for popular education that is committed to women's emancipation is the greater understanding of the internal change processes of women moving out of subordinated ways of being, and the factors that seem to propitiate that process. If questioning of the existing paradigm is essential to the process, when that paradigm is taken to include ways of seeing oneself and personal relationships as well as the larger social system, then the pedagogical challenge is to define methodology that will promote and support that questioning. If that process requires a radical redefinition of relationships, and at the same time we understand that mutually supportive, empathetic relationships are one of the best contexts for women's growth and change, the challenge is to promote the development of such relationships. If an important part of a women's internal processes in support of her emancipation is learning to hear and value her inner voice and her subjective knowledge, then the challenge is to support that very personal process, even when the voice is not articulated in a way that the educator can necessarily hear.
These challenges are outside the realm of most popular education theory. Nevertheless, nearly all of them have been incorporated, though perhaps not all in one place, by myself and women popular educators I have come to know in Nicaragua. These women have relied on theories of human liberation, usually from Christian and/or Marxist roots, their experience within the revolutionary context of the 1980’s, some feminist theory, and their own observation, questioning of paradigms, and intuition (or subjective knowledge) as resources in their search for ways to support women’s emancipation in an integral sense. Many of these women led training sessions on topics seemingly unrelated to the emotional, psychological processes discussed in this paper, such as labor law, credit policy or development project formulation.

A methodology that successfully meets the challenges described above provides an avenue for questioning personal, interpersonal and societal paradigms without necessarily discussing gender or patriarchy as such, at least at first. Once the questioning process is begun, the experiences I have been able to observe in Nicaragua seem to indicate that women are eager to continue and look for resources that will support them in that process. Then, it is very important to work towards a reflection process that illuminates the structural nature of the injustices they experience daily, to provide perspective and counteract women’s conditioning that makes a woman feel guilty for the mistreatment she receives.
To support such a questioning and redefinition process ultimately involves establishing conditions within which women can begin to experience the alternative paradigm described above. It means modelling mutually respectful, supportive and empathetic relationships within a learning environment, and establishing opportunities for such relationships to develop on an on-going basis. It means asking women to listen to, and revalue, the knowledge they have stored deep inside, and to create new knowledges not constrained by the parameters of what had previously been allowable for women. It also means demonstrating an alternative paradigm of power, where women create, move and change the world around them in collaborative, non-competitive ways. It means being willing to incorporate the emotional side of this learning process, as women confront their fears, pain and hopes. Establishing a learning environment and methodology that incorporates these aspects requires very conscious attention to that goal.

**Action-reflection revisited**

A great deal of popular education practice and theory springs from the ideas originally written down by Paolo Freire (1970/1992). He developed a methodology based on collective reflection and analysis of structural injustice, which assumes but does not elaborate on, a collective action process to eradicate those injustices analyzed by the group, also assumed to be a major portion of the community.
The shared reflection and analysis of the structural nature of women's subordination is an important and integral part of the methodology I am proposing. It has been modified some to place more value on the interaction in women's daily relationships, as the site for much of their oppression.

An analogous individual process is also incorporated into the methodological approach proposed in this paper. It seeks to strengthen and bring out women's inner knowledge and voice as they struggle to move out of subordination, and requires personal reflection. Acting from that basis, a woman can enter into a more equal dialogue with outside ideas, articulating her ideas as a confirmation of her inner knowledge and understanding. The ideas that come from others would then be incorporated into another reflection cycle, from which new ideas are evoked and confirmed.

The important aspect of such a process is its emphasis on using the woman's internal knowledge as her yardstick for judging and incorporating new knowledge from other sources. This is in direct contradiction to the patriarchal norm, where society has determined for her what is useful knowledge and what is not.

**Putting it all together, unanswered questions**

To establish such an alternative within the context of a learning experience requires constant attention to a myriad of details.
It could be described as constructing an ecology of emancipatory learning, where all the different actors, ideas and activities are interdependent and need to be in delicate balance with each other for growth and learning to flourish. The first year of the Women's Economic Development Program (WEDP) in Nicaragua has been an experiment in trying to incorporate these varied elements of a women's emancipatory popular education methodology into a series of training sessions, follow-up activities and technical assistance efforts supporting women's small business development. Although no formal evaluation has been conducted at this point, I have continually compared our efforts with the methodology proposed here, and some of those reflections are discussed below.

The complexity of the task at hand, trying to "construct an ecology of emancipatory learning", sometimes seems to be an impossible project. It is just too immense, there are too many aspects to think about, incorporate, and execute. But when I write training plans or am actually in a session or on a site visit, a good part of the methodology comes into being fairly easily. Having the methodological approaches described in this paper available has been helpful, and there is no doubt that the process has been aided by the knowledge and experience of myself and the other member of the training team. That knowledge is sometimes rational and explicit, and is sometimes based on our intuition and subjective understanding of the issues.
I use the methodological elements described in this paper as a guideline, or perhaps as an ideal worth striving for. Yet I recognize that many times some aspects get left out. Perhaps the interesting question there is: Which elements get left out, and why? In asking myself just that question I have noticed several patterns.

Sometimes the training sessions begin to look just like any other small business training: the focus on numbers and business parameters seems to push aside the gender elements; the agreed upon starting point of women’s lives and knowledge. Why does this happen? First, it is important to remember that the methodology proposed is radically different than one might expect for a technical topic such as small business development. I would suggest that most technical training comes from within a patriarchal paradigm.

What that means is an assumption that the participants have no need to be home at any certain time to attend to children, food, laundry or jealous husbands. It also assumes that the content of the training, whether it be tractor mechanics or child nutrition, will be used by people within their already established social roles, not people in the midst of a radical change in that social role. When the content relates to income generation, production, and many other topics, the same assumptions persist about the participant’s ability to focus on the implementation of the
content, without being distracted by a variety of familial responsibilities.

Those of us who have been doing non-formal education for a long time, especially in technical areas, have been deeply inculcated with this thinking. Even though the defined point of departure for the training and technical assistance program is the women's daily life experience, it is difficult to consistently defend that methodology to other technical staff in the NGO and to overcome the internalization of the assumptions mentioned above.

Another area that I see consistently slighted is the inclusion of emotional aspects of the topics to be discussed. Although we have begun some work in that area, I think that our ambiguity about our capacity to take on such activities limits its formal incorporation into the program, as do expectations that such topics are not part of a "normal" training program.

The final tension that I have noticed is between what might be called technical topics and the work on gender and organizational issues, where gender is understood to include the personal transformation processes discussed earlier. Part of the tension comes from the urgent need for the women's projects to succeed. The women's economic situation is desperate, and their projects are extremely important to their family's standard of living. Because gender oppression is often viewed as "normal", or perhaps
an injustice but not related to business success, some participants, but especially technical staff, have a certain impatience with topics that at first do not seem to be directly related to profit or loss.

Once the work begins, the women respond enthusiastically to the gender aspects, and ask for further exploration. Once the connection between the technical issues and the gender issues is clear, the tension usually dissipates, but that connection must be made explicit for people who are not accustomed to gender analysis. It is reasonable to imagine that similar tensions would arise in other programs attempting to recognize the gender issues implicit in, but typically ignored by, most technical training programs.

Implications for other applications

This paper, and the methodology it suggests, is based on one particular set of theoretical premises, my accumulated experience within several different contexts of Mesoamerican culture, and one fairly systematic effort to apply the methodological elements to a situation similar to those in my previous experience. The question to be raised regards the methodology's potential for application in other contexts. As the section above on cultural critique points out, the utility of this proposal will depend greatly on its intersection with the realities of women's oppression in any specific culture, based as it is on certain
assumptions (which I have tried to spell out) about women's growth and learning as they move out of subordination.

The use of a greater understanding of the internal, subjective and interpersonal dynamics involved in overcoming women's subordinated ways of being in a certain context can add a new dimension to popular education work supporting women's emancipation. It is a dimension some popular educators have considered outside their purvey. However, many women popular educators, at least in Nicaragua, have begun to struggle with these areas, and have seen the validity of the effort in their practice.

It may also be worth looking at the role of internalized oppression and interpersonal relations in other struggles to overcome subordination. Women's subordination offers an exceptionally clear picture of those dynamics, and as such, can give popular educators clues about areas to explore with other groups. Issues of power, the capacity to express oneself, and the importance of glimpses of an emancipatory paradigm in terms of relationships as well as intellectually, are only a few of the areas that might be explored. Societal conditioning, at least in North American and Nicaraguan societies, has allowed women to maintain greater access to her subjective knowledge. This seems to be a source of great strength and important learning for women moving out of subordination in these cultures. Perhaps this is
also an area that could be begin to be explored in popular education efforts with other oppressed groups.

One of the most significant impacts of popular education efforts has been their role in social change movements. The action-reflection cycle is interpreted by many educators as being directly related to efforts to overcome societal injustices. Yet nearly 25 years after the publishing of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, social change movements continue to reproduce patterns of hierarchical domination internally, power-grabbing and abuse, and seemingly interminable infighting.

A common Nicaraguan expression comments on this situation by saying "Candil en la calle, oscuridad en la casa", or "Torchlight in the street, darkness in the home". Many popular educators and social movement organizers have begun to look more closely at the patterns of injustice reproduced within social change movements, and the internal and psychological factors that hold those patterns in place. Perhaps it is time to incorporate approaches that will facilitate the unlearning of those patterns, and construct the beginnings of the dreamed-of alternatives in daily life practice. The methodological approach proposed in this paper hopes to be one attempt at tackling this issue, and a contribution to that on-going discussion.

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