

## Counter Narratives, the Psychology of Liberation, and the Evolution of a Women's Social Movement in Nicaragua

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In response to a rise of dictatorships, the exacerbation of inequality, and violations of human rights in many Latin American countries, individuals have joined together through the formation of social movements to enact powerful, revolutionary changes in the area of human rights. The *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* (Autonomous Women's Movement) in Nicaragua, specifically, was birthed out of the Sandinista Revolution when many women joined a massive national uprising during the 1970s in an effort to overthrow a dictatorship. The current study uses thematic narrative analysis to examine the oral histories of 13 key leaders within the *Movimiento* to understand how women's interactions with counter narratives have played a significant role in creating a more expansive and inclusive notion of human rights, and have fueled a pointed commitment to the use of human rights discourse in a strategic political agenda aimed at improving women's lived experience. The findings suggest that the leaders of the *Movimiento* deepened their understanding of human rights beyond traditional discourse through varied understandings of the consequences of inequality and, through an evolving process of awareness and action, developed a duty to challenge the dominant narratives that limited whose rights were realized. Moreover, our analysis connects the use of counter narratives that employ human rights discourse to current legislation and policy in Nicaragua that enhances the realization of women's human rights.

*Keywords:* human rights, liberation psychology, feminism, narrative

A history of colonialism, the persistence of neoliberal exploitation, and the reality of widespread corruption have led to the rise of dictatorships, the exacerbation of inequality, and violations of human rights in many Latin American countries (Grosfoguel, 1996). However, in response to well-documented injustices, individuals have joined together through the

formation of social movements to enact powerful, revolutionary changes in the area of human rights (Alvarez, 2000; Escobar & Alvarez, 1992). The *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* (Autonomous Women's Movement) in Nicaragua, in particular, is a social movement that emerged out of a socialist revolution to more inclusively attend to the rights of women whose

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voices had been consistently suppressed (Kampwirth, 2004). Prior research in psychology demonstrates that engaging with narratives articulating the experiences of those with the least structural power can challenge dominant narratives surrounding practices that perpetuate injustice (Andrews, 2002). Moreover, it is possible that knowledge gained from engaging with these counter narratives may fuel a critical awareness of societal inequities that can support efforts to enhance the well-being of those whose rights are violated (Martín-Baró, 1996). The objective of this paper is to investigate how members of the *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* constructed and engaged with counter narratives surrounding women's human rights to create a more expansive and inclusive notion of human rights that has fueled a political agenda aimed at improving women's lived experience.

### Social and Historical Context

The *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* was, in part, birthed out of the Sandinista Revolution when many women joined a massive national uprising in the 1970s in an effort to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship (Kampwirth, 2004). During a 40-year period in Nicaragua, the Somoza dictatorship had what was considered the most heavily U.S.-trained military establishment in Latin America and was internationally condemned for its human rights violations (Walker, 1985). Women's participation in the Revolution in Nicaragua was lauded as more substantive than nearly any other revolution during the time.<sup>1</sup> In fact, women made up approximately 30% of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional's* (FSLN) combat forces and were appointed to senior positions in the newly established ministries after the FSLN gained power in 1979 (Kampwirth, 1996; Molyneux, 1985). Nevertheless, despite women's involvement in almost every aspect of the insurrection, and their critical role in numerous political events, concerns regarding women's rights were largely marginalized by male leaders during the revolution (Kampwirth, 2004; Molyneux, 1985). As a result, women began to separate from the FSLN and formulate their own political agendas based on the rights of women (Randall, 1994). This search for political autonomy was strengthened when right-wing candidate Violeta Chamorro defeated the

Sandinistas in the 1990 presidential election and subsequently promoted neoliberal policies that further exacerbated the already existing violations of women's rights.

By 1992, Nicaragua had the largest, most diverse, and most autonomous feminist movement in Latin America (Kampwirth, 1996).<sup>2</sup> The diversity of the movement can be explained, in part, by 10 years of revolutionary government leaving a multiclass revolutionary network of organized women and a legacy of political mobilization (Grabe, 2014; Kampwirth, 2002). Moreover, the neoliberal adjustments of the 1990s created consequences that cut across sectors, creating a shared awareness that various women's rights were being neglected by the government (Kampwirth, 2002). Strategic cross-class and urban-rural alliances were reflected in a slogan that the *Movimiento* began using to characterize themselves in 1992: "Diverse but United" (Grabe, 2014; Randall, 1994).

Although women's human rights in Nicaragua have been routinely suppressed by those with political power, for over two decades a mobilized network of women have maintained a consistent discourse of rights. As a result of their collective action, they have been able to influence both governmental and cultural change that has enhanced women's human rights (Kampwirth, 1996; Molyneux, 1985). Examining how women's attitudes toward human rights materialized within the strategy and actions of the *Movimiento Autónomo* may greatly

<sup>1</sup> The Nicaraguan Revolution began as a campaign led by the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (Sandinista National Liberation Front; FSLN) to oust the dictatorship in 1978–1979 and continued its efforts by governing the country between 1979 and 1980. The FSLN fought the Contra War between 1981–1990.

<sup>2</sup> Following the election in 1990, several women mobilized a national meeting (the 52% festival) to publicly denounce the violation of women's social and economic rights. In 1992, several women's organizations mobilized into a network (i.e., a social movement) under the umbrella name the Autonomous Women's Movement. In 2006, after years of debate and analysis, the Autonomous Women's Movement was "refounded." By that time, the movement existed as a collective of nearly 150 independent organizations. On March 8, 2006, leaders within the movement created an organization under the same name, the Autonomous Women's Movement, with minimal structure to give the movement a "public face." As such, the movement now exists as both a social movement and an organization.

enhance our understanding of the mechanisms associated with working for social justice. In the current study, we use existing social psychological research in the areas of human rights, narratives, and liberation to help understand how women's rights have been negotiated and exercised within the *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* in Nicaragua.

### The Psychology of Rights, Narrative, and Liberation

Within psychology, scholars have examined human rights, and the related duties to uphold them, in terms of power relations, suggesting that both rights and duties are influenced by dominant groups who possess the necessary resources to influence the political systems that legislate rights (Dutt & Grabe, 2014; Moghaddam & Finkel, 2005). Although human rights are well-articulated in international discourse, scholarship, and popular rhetoric, related duties are not (Moghaddam & Lvina, 2002). The concept of "duty" is set up in contrast with that of "rights," in that the former is action engaged in on behalf of others, whereas the latter is something to be demanded by individuals who may have been wronged (Moghaddam, Slocum, Finkel, Mor, & Harré, 2000). It has been suggested that duties have their roots in social psychological features of social life, irrespective of formal law and government, whereas the term "human rights" typically refers to legal rights enshrined in formal documents such as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (Moghaddam, 2000). However, psychologists argue that basic "rights" are central to the organization of social life, and that rights can never be successfully exercised unless there is also a duty to ensure them (Moghaddam & Finkel, 2005). A sense of duty involves the recognition of responsibility for others, opening up the possibility of freedom and justice for other individuals (Moghaddam, 2000).

Research outside of psychology has suggested that marginalized groups often appeal to the "duty" of those in dominant positions to be inclusive and promote diversity in regard to the recognition of human rights (Spragans, 2005). In particular, political scientist Spragans suggests that "conceptions of rights and justice are not only theoretical notions, but inform the behavior, commitments, and attitudes of most of

those who live in a society and participate in the politics" (p. 254). This is similar to Doise's (2002) concept of the social representation of human rights through which he argues that interaction and communication between people in a society initiates symbolic representations, or social norms and contractual principles. Doise suggests that human rights operate as evaluative principles, or normative social representations, which allow individuals to evaluate and organize their behavior and relationships. Therefore, human rights may serve as standards of evaluation by which the duty to direct one's action to the needs of others emerges. In theory, the concepts of rights and duties are forces that play an important part in shaping political events in the real world.

A growing literature in psychology has begun to examine attitudes toward human rights and duties and the related ideologies that predict support of rights or perceptions of rights violations (see McFarland, 2015). However, a limitation of work in this area is that it predominantly focuses on *attitudes* and *perceptions* related to rights and justice, rather than concrete *actions* taken in their service (Moghaddam & Finkel, 2005; for exceptions see Cohrs, Maes, Moschner, & Kielmann, 2007; Jennings, 1996; and Stellmacher, Sommer, & Brähler, 2005). Therefore, several scholars have suggested that one area of research in need of greater attention from psychologists is the study of actual behavior surrounding the enactment of human rights and duties (Harré, 2005; Haskell, 2005; Moghaddam & Finkel, 2005). In other words, researchers need to increasingly examine engaged activism that explicitly targets rights violations and related injustice.

Because rights and duties are heavily influenced and controlled by the more powerful members of society, demanding and achieving support for rights that have been neglected may involve those with less structural power collectively confronting and challenging dominant ideologies and narratives. One of the ways ideologies and values circulate within a society is through interaction with various societal narratives (Hammack, 2008; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Sarbin, 1986). Narratives operate at multiple levels and are transferred through mediums such as political rhetoric, popular media, textbooks, and personal communications. While the dominant

narratives that circulate generally share the perspectives held by those with the most power in society, counter narratives can transmit the experiences of those with less structural power and highlight areas in need of change (Andrews, 2002; Bamberg & Andrews, 2004). Because women's rights historically have been marginalized in Nicaragua, one way of addressing rights violations begins with elevating women's narratives from their position of marginality. This process may thereby diversify the realities that are circulated and considered and allow for more inclusive social representations of human rights (Andrews, 2002; Broderick et al., 2010). In the current study, we investigate the process through which women within the *Movimiento* problematize dominant constructions of rights and justice in the negotiation of women's rights.

In the past two decades, liberation psychology has become an increasingly utilized approach to understanding how individuals develop critical perspectives that get directed toward social change (Burton & Kagan, 2005; Martín-Baró, 1996; Moane, 2003, 2010). Brazilian social theorist Paulo Freire's (1972) concept of *conscientización* is central to this paradigm and refers to a process in which those working to create bottom-up social change participate in an iterative, ideological progression where analysis and action develop together to address social constraints. Among the first steps in this process is the development of critical understandings of how adverse social conditions undermine well-being (Prilleltensky, 2008). These critical understandings are used to problematize one's social conditions, a process that results in deideologizing, or reconstructing understandings of one's lived experience based on rejecting dominant ideologies that justify social oppression (Montero, 1994, 2009). Problematizing injustice may begin a process of conscious mobilization leading to transformations in understandings of inequity and marginalization (Montero, 2009). As critical processes, *conscientización* and problematization in the area of human rights may facilitate a sense of duty to engage in actions that can address conditions leading to injustice and human rights violations. Because the iterative nature of *conscientización* can facilitate in-

creased depth of involvement, it may help to explain the social psychological processes behind the evolving decisions and committed efforts of the members of the *Movimiento*. Although a growing literature has begun to apply this theorization to the development of women's *conscientización* in the context of inequity (Brodsky et al., 2012; Chaudhry & Bertram, 2009; Grabe, Dutt, & Dworkin, 2014; see Lykes & Moane, 2009, special issue; de Oliveira, Neves, Nogueira, & De Konig, 2009; White & Rastogi, 2009), the role of psychology in women's human rights action remains underexplored.

### Narrative Analysis and Human Rights Research

In addition to assessing narratives as a medium through which ideologies and messages are circulated and maintained, narrative theorists distinguish narrative analysis as a method of qualitative inquiry (Ricoeur, 1988; Sarbin, 1986). Narrative analysis takes as a premise that individuals understand their lives in storied form and create meaning by connecting and integrating different situations and events (Josselson, 2011; Sarbin, 1986). Additionally, narrative analysis has been identified as a particularly useful method to employ in research on political events due to its ability to attend to the link between "mind and society" (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012). In other words, how individuals perceive and respond to their sociopolitical environment is unveiled through the stories they tell (Andrews, 2007; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Polletta, 1998). Narrative analysis is thus particularly well-situated for research on action directed on the behalf of human rights because it can attend to the dynamic interplay between individuals' experiences and understandings of rights abuses, and their strategic attempts to address them. To date, traditional experimental and survey methods employed in psychology have been well positioned to make an important contribution to the understanding of attitudes and motivations surrounding human rights and duties. However, an overemphasis on these methods limits the exploration of *processes* by which attitudinal perspectives on rights develop into behavioral duties to uphold the rights of those who have been marginalized (Moghadam & Finkel, 2005).

The use of a narrative approach in the current paper allows us to examine the evolution of a rights-based consciousness that led to specific duties over the course of nearly three decades. Thus far, research in psychology and legal studies has focused on rights as reflected in attitudes and not enough on actual practices. In the current study, we seek to redress this gap by exploring how narratives about women's human rights can provide deeper insight into the processes through which individuals and collectives seek to improve the world around them. We pose the following questions: How did attitudes toward human rights relate to a construction of duties that eventually led to the creation and evolution of a social movement? And, how did the iterative process of awareness and action involving human rights discourse come to be used for the current political agenda in Nicaragua? Our analysis will connect the use of counter narratives that employ human rights discourse to current policy that enhances the realization of women's human rights.

## Method

### Overview

This study was designed in accordance with Mohanty's (2003) assertion that understanding women's struggles for justice must involve illuminating "third world women's" engagement with resistance to oppressive regimes. Although the current study's approach centers on the local, rather than emphasizing political projects or agendas originating in the West, we are conscious of the bias we introduce as transnational feminist authors working from within the United States. Our involvement in this project began with scholar-activist collaborations the first author first established in 2005. The initial project involved collaboration with a community-driven, rural feminist organization that aimed to use research toward an agenda aimed at social justice for women. In recognizing that the organization existed within a multisector, coordinated mobilization of women, the first author became committed to documenting the voices behind the broader *Movimiento Autónomo*. For the current research, both authors were working from a scholar-activist approach aiming to unite social psychological theories

with activist testimony in order to expose how individuals are creating social change and enacting justice. To best understand how women's attitudes and experiences materialized into action within the *Movimiento*, the current study attempts to privilege the standpoint of the activists working in the *Movimiento* (Maddison & Shaw, 2007). In particular, our method centered on the use of *testimonios*, a form of oral history or life story that is an explicitly political narrative describing and resisting oppression (Chase, 2003). *Testimonios* have been widely used with Latin American activists involved in revolutionary movements (e.g., Menchú, 1984; Randall, 1981, 1994). Although this method can bring into focus a greater range of activity, showcasing the often invisible and undocumented activity (e.g., practice of problematizing) that takes place within social movements (Maddison & Shaw, 2007), it is also the case that what we have chosen to report has been filtered by our own social locations that involve power and privilege.

### Participants and Procedure

Because an underlying goal of activist research is a reconfiguration of knowledge production that shifts power and control into the hands of the oppressed or marginalized (Fals Borda, 1985; Sandoval, 2000), the elected representative of the *Movimiento Autónomo*, Juanita Jiménez, in collaboration with solidarity activist Carlos Arenas, constructed the list of women who were chosen to represent the *Movimiento*. The 13 women interviewed for the current study were all identified leaders of the *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* and have all been involved in the movement for nearly two decades (see Table 1). The women have worked in a variety of different sectors including military and government, media and journalism, health, education, and various forms of social services. They come from nine different regions of the country and range in age from 44 to 73.

All of the interviews were conducted in 2011 by the first author with the assistance of a translator. To facilitate rapport and ease, the interviews were scheduled in a location of the woman's choosing, usually her home or workplace. All of the interviews were preceded by a conversation that explained how the woman's story

might be used, and each interviewee granted permission for their names and interviews to be publicized.<sup>3</sup>

The interviews, which occurred through simultaneous translation, lasted approximately 1 hr and were audio and video recorded. The oral history method, which allows women to describe their experience on their own terms, was used to elicit women's stories. In this case, women were invited to be narrators, to tell stories about biographical particulars that were meaningful to them with only a loosely structured set of questions intended to facilitate the progression of the women's stories. The objective was to allow each woman to elaborate on her own experiences. This was particularly important with this sample because the women were more accustomed to being spokespersons for the larger social movement and had vastly less experience talking about their personal histories. All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English by hired staff at the Global Feminisms Project. Analysis of the interviews was conducted on the English transcriptions.

### Analytic Strategy

Narrative analysis was used to better gain insight into the meaning the women attached to their involvement with the *Movimiento* (Marecek, Fine, & Kidder, 1997). Specifically, we employed a thematic narrative analysis to identify how women interacted with, participated in the construction of, and understood their lives and circumstances in the context of societal narratives. Our analyses of the interviews predominantly focused on identifying recurring themes within the interviews that helped to elucidate the iterative process by which attitudes toward human rights materialized into action. In interpreting the findings, attention was given to the ways in which the processes operated within women's complete life stories (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 2002). Both authors read, reread, and met regularly to discuss interviews in their entirety, noting overarching patterns, as well as incongruences, ultimately developing a comprehensive framework that accounted for inconsistencies in both the individual and collective narratives (Josselson, 2011). We then focused on a thematic content analysis of the interviews to identify

patterns of similarity across the women's stories that occurred repeatedly within the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lieblich et al., 1998). Through this process, we identified three themes that addressed the research questions that were examined in more depth: (a) Developing a sense of duty through problematizing political oppression, (b) the formation of the *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* as a manifestation of inclusive attitudes toward human rights, and (c) the use of human rights discourse in a political agenda aimed at liberation. Although we present the findings thematically, the combination of thematic and holistic interpretation enabled us to maintain the integrity of each woman's life history in our analysis, as we integrated individual narrative accounts to develop an understanding of the movement's trajectory.

## Findings

### Theme 1: Developing a Sense of Duty Through Problematizing Political Oppression

As leaders of the *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres*, a movement centered on actualizing women's rights, each of the women interviewed demonstrated a committed sense of duty to addressing issues surrounding inequity and human rights in their communities. Within each of their stories, women described how they came to see activist participation, first in the Sandinista Revolution and later in the *Movimiento*, as a way to express their discontentment with the dominant political narrative that disregarded important issues of inequity. The majority of the women in the sample came to political consciousness during a revolutionary time when alternative narratives regarding how society could be structured were plentiful. A common theme throughout the interviews was the identification of specific events whereby most

<sup>3</sup> Eleven of the interviews are achieved in the Global Feminisms Project (GFP; Lal, McGuire, Stewart, Zaborowska, & Pas, 2010). The GFP is a collaborative international project, housed at the University of Michigan, which conducts, examines, and archives interviews with women involved in feminist activism, social movements, and women's studies departments in China, India, Poland, Nicaragua, and the United States.

Table 1  
*Key Leaders in the Movimiento Autónomo De Mujeres and Their Involvement*

Name	Born	Overview of Involvement in Rights-Based Duty
Mónica Baltodano	1954	Guerilla fighter and eventual commander during the revolution. Appointed to the Ministry of Regional Affairs 1982–1990. Elected Councilor of Managua in 1990. Elected to the National Directorate of the FSLN in 1994. Elected to the National Assembly in 1997. Joined the Movement to Reclaim Sandinismo in 2005.
Bertha Inés Cabrales	1948	Member of the student movement during the revolution. Director of the <i>Colectivo de Mujeres ITZA</i> for over 20 years. The collective emphasizes the promotion of women's rights; physical, psychological, and sexual violence; sexual/reproductive health; and trains women to be leaders. Cabrales was instrumental in the passing of the 2012 Integral Law on Violence Toward Women.
Socorro Chavez	1974	Elected in 1994 to the Board of Directors of Xochilt Acalt Women's Center, an agricultural organization addressing violence, sexual health, and women's property rights.
Violeta Delgado	1969	Member of the Youth Literacy Crusades during the revolution. Elected as the executive secretary in the Women's Network Against Violence in 1994. Part of the National Commission for the UN's 4th World Conference in Beijing in 1995. Politically "black-listed" by President Alemán in 2000 by being removed from a UN delegation (Beijing + 5 in New York). Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. One of nine leaders of the <i>Movimiento</i> who experienced political persecution in 2008 by being accused by the Public Ministry of "obstructing the administration of justice" and "inciting criminal acts." Currently working for the Center for Communication Research, an institution specializing in communication studies, democracy, and public opinion.
Juanita Jiménez	1967	Member of the student movement during the revolution. Separated from the FSLN in 1992 and worked as an independent lawyer. Worked with the Network of Women Against Violence for over 10 years starting in the early 1990s. In 2006, elected as the representative and leader of the <i>Movimiento</i> . One of nine leaders of the <i>Movimiento</i> who experienced political persecution in 2008 by being accused by the Public Ministry of "obstructing the administration of justice" and "inciting criminal acts."
Matilde Lindo	1954	Obtained a sociology degree in Cuba in 1976. Raised on the Caribbean coast; a proud representative of the Black population from the region; one of the prominent activists representing women from the Atlantic Coast. Part of the National Commission for the UN's 4th World Conference in Beijing in 1995. Leader of the Network of Women Against Violence.
Diana Martinez	1958	Left her university studies in 1979 to become part of the revolution. Worked for the <i>Asociación del Trabajadores del Campo</i> (Association of Rural Workers; ATC), the principal FSLN labor organization for farmers in the 1980s. Founded the women's rural organization La Fem in 1995. Based on experiences at the ATC, Martinez constructed an organization not only of professional women as its leaders, but one that included women from the communities on the board of directors.
Yamileth Mejía	1967	Member of the Revolutionary theatre group, the Association of Amateur Artists, as an adolescent. Traveled to Cuba with a brigade to study education. At age 16, taught literacy in the countryside. At 20 years old, joined the <i>Movimiento</i> through the Network of Women Against Violence. Worked for the Network for 20 years. Currently works with the Comprehensive Services to Victims of Gender-based Violence Project and focuses on engendering a feminist focus on violence at the state level. One of nine leaders of the <i>Movimiento</i> who experienced political persecution in 2008 by being accused by the Public Ministry of "obstructing the administration of justice" and "inciting criminal acts."

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Name	Born	Overview of Involvement in Rights-Based Duty
Eva Molina	~1973	Member of the student movement during the revolution. Introduced to the <i>Movimiento Autónomo</i> through the Festival of the 52%. Has been a director of the <i>Colectivo de Mujeres de Matagalpa</i> for over 20 years. The <i>Colectivo</i> was one of the first women's organizations in the <i>Movimiento</i> and currently focuses on: sexuality, violence, domestic work, health rights of women, and legal defense of women's rights.
Sofía Montenegro	1954	One of the most prominent feminist activists and commentators in Latin America. Involved in the revolution. Cofounder of the Sandinista daily newspaper <i>Barricada</i> 1979–1994. In 1989, founded the publication <i>Gente</i> , a weekly supplement to <i>Barricada</i> that allowed for the circulation of marginalized voices in an effort to have an educated, democratic society. Helped start the Center for Communication Research (CINCO) in 1990, a civil society institution specializing in Nicaraguan media studies and public opinion with an emphasis on democracy building. Current executive director of CINCO and codirector of the National Observatory of Democracy and Governance. Montenegro is a widely published author with several distinguished awards.
Sandra Ramos	1959	Member of the student movement during the revolution. Founded the Sandinista Workers' Center, the most important union in Nicaragua that was affiliated with the FSLN. Politically persecuted in 1993 when separating from the FSLN. Cofounded the María Elena Cuadra (MEC) Women's Movement in 1994, which focuses on labor rights for women working in the <i>maquiladoras</i> or Free Trade Zones. Although 14 organizations drafted the Integral Violence Law that was passed in 2012, MEC was the lead organization presenting that legislation.
Luz Marina Torrez	1954	Worked with AMNLAE during the revolution. In 1989, separated from FSLN to begin the <i>Colectivo de Mujeres Ocho de Marzo</i> , which was one of the originally mobilized women's groups in Nicaragua. The <i>Colectivo</i> organized a commission of women—lawyers, doctors, psychologists, public defenders—that could offer services and work with the local police departments. Pivotal in establishing <i>las casas de la mujeres</i> or women's centers in poor, working class neighborhoods that were established to support women who suffered from violence. Still works for the collective after almost 25 years.
Martha Heriberta Valle	~1954	Joined the revolution as a community organizer in 1974. Finished secondary school as an adult during the revolution; completed a technical degree in agronomy at age 36. Worked for the <i>Asociación del Trabajadores del Campo</i> (Association of Rural Workers; ATC) during the revolution. In 1991, started <i>Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos</i> , the National Union of Farmers and Cattlemen, to focus on a peasant movement. Current president and founder of the Agricultural Cooperative Federation of Country Women Producers of Nicaragua.

*Note.* Birth years preceded with a (~) are estimated from information in the respondent's interview.

women came to understand inequitable and oppressive realities firsthand, which thereby solidified their commitment to contesting the dominant narrative. Furthermore, the meaning women attached to their experiences of problematizing explicit oppression is unveiled within their descriptions of these events and highlights why women developed a sense of duty to uphold human rights.

An example of how personal experience facilitated a sense of duty to address injustice can be seen in Bertha Inés Cabrales' recollection of a shift in her youth that caused her to become

more deeply and personally committed to challenging oppressive circumstances. Though she grew up in a politically involved family, and had long been exposed to narratives detailing the consequences of political oppression, Cabrales shares an experience that more explicitly drove her commitment to be involved in change:

I saw for the first time how one of Somoza's guards killed a man who was part of the opposition. This event impacted me profoundly . . . I developed a lot of rage against Somoza. And we were under siege for several days, our neighborhood was, we couldn't leave the

neighborhood because the Guard had us surrounded . . . with their armored cars, and planes and small aircraft would fly above. So it impacted me deeply. I think that it created in me this profound antidictatorship sentiment. Even today I still have that profound antidictatorship sentiment that I reject what is going on these days . . . That's part of the political motivation.

Cabrales compares how this very personal experience facilitated a deeper understanding of what it meant to be involved in political issues by contrasting it with a previous experience that had been rooted predominantly in her family's influence:

[I had been asked] "Why do you want to join the *Juventud Comunista*?" and I said, "Well, because in my house, my father is Communist and I think that it's a good thing." So they said, "But you can't be here if you don't think for yourself, you can't be [a communist] because your father is one, you have to get there . . ."

Cabrales' story detailing her entrance as a committed member into the movement highlights how she developed a worldview that connected political systems and policies to the well-being of people in her community. Furthermore, the weight Cabrales attached to her specific experiences under siege underscores how she developed her own personal sense of duty to participate in eradicating injustice. Though she had previously desired involvement in political activities because of her family's influence, it was through explicitly experiencing the government's violation of rights that Cabrales could more clearly comprehend the necessity of putting her ideology into action. Soon after this incident, Cabrales became heavily involved in the revolution, first through protests, then as a university student in the student movement, and later through the FSLN women's branch AMNLAE.<sup>4</sup> The importance Cabrales attached to living out her commitment to human rights is thus evident throughout the various actions she describes. Additionally, after years of service to the revolution, Cabrales founded a collective focused on women's rights and has remained committed to those efforts for over 20 years.

Several other women shared stories of how direct contact with the consequences of inequality profoundly informed their worldview and resulted in an obligation to seek justice for others. Current congresswoman, and former revolutionary commander, Mónica Baltodano, explained that she developed a "tendency to

protect the poor, a social sensibility" from a very young age based on her experiences working with nuns at the grade school she attended:

I was involved in the events that the nuns organized . . . I came into contact with social inequality very early, with inequity, with justice. It really bothered me to see the situation of workers, of children who went to cut cotton at my father's haciendas and I tried to do something for them and that's why I became involved with activities of a social character.

Additionally, Baltodano explains how the nuns at her school encouraged her to question why inequality existed and to participate in activities to address governmental violations of human rights. Baltodano's description underscores a process of problematization as she observed incongruences between the narratives of justice that she learned at her school and the lived reality of many people in her country. This growing awareness of the realities of the people who are overlooked within the dominant narrative fueled a desire to challenge inconsistency and ultimately supported Baltodano's lifelong involvement in the efforts to enhance societal equity that she describes in the remainder of her interview.

In both Cabrales' and Baltodano's examples, we see how different experiences enabled the women to place their own understandings, lives, and possible actions within the societal narratives of justice to which they had long been exposed. Beyond political rhetoric, they came to understand that justice and rights needed to be upheld through concrete actions. As Baltodano's story progresses, she further describes how the duty she developed to support the rights of others influenced her life course:

The purpose that motivated us to enter the armed fight was the social situation of the people, and we dreamed, and we continue to dream, . . . of a more just society . . . The Revolution—despite all the difficulties, was able to develop social programs that diminished inequality. But we could not develop our feminism because when we were fighting we didn't have enough consciousness

<sup>4</sup> The *Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza* (Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women, AMNLAE) was initially established in 1977 as a women's organization within the FSLN. AMNLAE was widely regarded by women as the "submissive wife of the FSLN," falling short of emancipating women because it advocated for Sandinista priorities rather than those of the Nicaraguan women (Randall, 1994).

that in addition to the general rights of people, we were fighting for our rights as women.

Despite the risks and obstacles involved, including imprisonment and torture, Baltodano ascended to the highest military rank as a commander during the revolution. Later, after years of commitment to human rights through FSLN mechanisms (e.g., appointment in Ministry of Regional Affairs), it remained apparent to Baltodano that women's rights would continue to be marginalized. Therefore, in 2005, Baltodano separated her partisan affiliation to the FSLN and joined efforts to uphold democratic ideals and women's participation in society by assuming the leadership in the Movement to Reclaim Sandinismo. Her story demonstrates a constantly evolving awareness of inequity that continues to inform her choices for involvement in the struggle for the actualization of human rights.

Consistent with Cabrales's and Baltodano's experiences, each of the women in the sample shared a similar route whereby a personal experience with inequity led them to locate their own lives within societal narratives and thus develop a sense of duty to support the rights of others in their communities. For all of the women, the development of duty reflected a process of *conscientización* whereby their awareness and analysis were continuously evolving to facilitate a deeper understanding of how to enhance justice. Through various iterations, the women demonstrate a lifetime commitment to creating a government that would more equitably attend to the rights and opportunities of the people. As this process unfolded, it became evident that a focus on *women's* human rights, in particular, was necessary, and that a concerted effort would be required to have those rights recognized. Overall, the women's stories reveal that a lived personal experience that drives the problematization of inequities or rights violations is one factor that contributes to action.

## **Theme 2: The Formation of the *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* as a Manifestation of Inclusive Attitudes Toward Human Rights**

After the overthrow of Somoza in 1979, the FSLN was faced with the task of setting a new agenda regarding the issues and structures to be addressed in society. However, as shown by

many socialist movements historically, the encouragement to seek unity along class lines when building a new society has often resulted in overlooking other inequitable societal cleavages such as gender, race, or ethnicity (Chinchilla, 1991). This was also true during the Sandinista Revolution when the dominant narrative of the 1980s was a class-oriented socialist agenda that contended that only after class issues were addressed, could issues such as gender equity receive greater focus. The stories women shared during this time period were marked with a growing awareness that their concerns surrounding women's rights and opportunities were marginalized during the revolution. Returning to Baltodano's story, she explains how perceptions toward women's rights began to shift after the revolution:

It wasn't until the revolution triumphed that we had the opportunity to collectively . . . get into contact with feminism . . . that we started to think about our rights, about our historically unequal condition and about the need to fight for women's rights . . . During the Revolution many of our struggles were postponed because we said the revolution came first. For example, when we started to debate the topic of abortion, about a woman's right to decide about her body, the topic of violence against women, many of those topics were postponed.

Baltodano's reflection highlights how the dominant narrative of the FSLN was adopted by many women, minimizing the attention paid to issues that were of central import to women. However, the stories women shared suggested that despite continued involvement with the FSLN, participants identified that their personal experiences of marginalization were shared by many other women, and these experiences were as equally connected to systemic imbalances in power as were class based inequities. Baltodano's example, as several others [quote], reflects a process of deideologization with a growing awareness that the dominant narrative of the FSLN had led to the perpetuation of the active suppression of women's rights. This awareness supported an understanding that efforts toward broader liberation would require giving attention to narratives that ran counter to the dominant discourse.

Narratives pointedly countering those of the FSLN became increasingly apparent as women who were appointed to various ministries and committees during the restructuring efforts of

the 1980s began to take action that was more inclusive of feminist concerns. For example, despite the FSLN's awareness that women's rights were systemically violated, resistance to feminist concerns is apparent in Cabrales' story regarding an attempt to create a questionnaire for committees that were evaluating new FSLN recruits:

I included a question on how they got along with their partners, if they hit them, if they respected them, if they forbade them from participating in politics, because I had seen that there were many militants who were great militants, but they didn't allow their women to participate in the FSLN politics. For me it was important for the new militants to be evaluated on this . . . so that the men would start thinking about how their relationships with women needed to change. When I presented my proposal to the Political Secretary, he says, "But with those questions, we won't have any new militants for the FSLN!"

Several women in the sample shared comparable stories of gender marginalization during the revolution. What is particularly important in Cabrales' example is that the political secretary knew that men's controlling and violent behavior toward their wives was commonplace, though he was less concerned with this reality than he was with recruiting additional Sandinistas. Cabrales' and others' stories demonstrate women's growing awareness that the lack of inclusivity in the FSLN's agenda had perpetuated forms of injustice toward women. Yet, despite the various actions women took to include their concerns in the FSLN agenda, men with higher rank regularly cast these concerns to the margins. As the women shared these experiences of marginalization and participated in a process of deideologization, their shared stories facilitated a developing awareness that their attitudes toward rights and justice—in other words, that rights should be inclusive—were not shared by their male counterparts in the FSLN. Women's more inclusive notion of rights violations, and more comprehensive approach to change, thus manifested in the decision to sever party affiliation with the FSLN in order to uphold women's rights.

As the women began orchestrating this separation, they engaged a counter narrative influenced by inclusivity to begin shaping a new social movement. This movement would be built on recognizing women's rights and the need for women from diverse backgrounds to become directly involved in creating change.

For example, Sofía Montenegro, a nationally renowned journalist and feminist activist, explained how a diversified social movement came together, recognizing that women could and should take action based on their unique social locations:

We [needed] to change from this . . . subordinated vision of a women-only organization to a diversified movement, an autonomous one in which each group of women would organize for what they needed . . . if you were Black or you were from the Atlantic coast you organized as a feminist, as a woman, to fight racism but also fight machismo. And that was the same thing for everybody. So we started organizing . . . against the will and the resistance of the males in the mass organizations.

Montenegro, along with several others in the sample, was demonstrating the extent to which the members of the new movement had learned from their own experience, developing an ideological objection to exclusion that informed their actions. The stories reflect how experiences and understandings of exclusion impacted individual and collective actions and goals. The women thus sought to construct a new narrative that countered the idea of homogenizing diverse concerns. These attitudes led strategically to action—for example, several women discussed the "Festival of the 52%" that was held in 1991 as an initiative to denounce the violation of women's rights and to declare the autonomy of women's groups in Nicaragua. The following year, a national "United in Diversity" meeting was held to establish the political will of women from different backgrounds, groups, and organizations to participate and assert their rights in the newly formed politically autonomous movement. Nearly all of the women in the sample discussed these events as collective symbols that have become part of the identity and narrative of the new movement. Through an iterative process combining knowledge and action, the women within this movement have been intent on elevating the audibility of historically silenced voices.

As the movement began establishing a collective base from which to address women's human rights, they needed to take actions regarding how to move the members' consciousness surrounding inclusivity into a structure that could impact women's lived experience. As Juanita Jiménez, the elected leader of the *Movimiento*, reflected in her story of how the

movement was formed, she shared that success would require taking a different approach than the hierarchical methods of the FSLN:

I believe in collective processes . . . It shouldn't be that one person decides for the rest . . . I wagered a lot in creating this structure [of the *Movimiento*] that feminists wanted so much . . . The rest of us resent in patriarchy that verticalism, that authoritarianism that is reflected in their organizational structure . . . It is possible to create mechanisms where we can all make decisions, where we can all decide about a platform for complete action.

Jiménez's description highlights the denunciation of patriarchal power and authoritarian decision-making that enabled voices to be silenced. The collective approach was valuable both for facilitating an organization that upheld the members' values, and for circulating an alternative narrative regarding how organizations, and society as a whole, could be structured. Using this method, between 1990 and 1992, the *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* became a network comprised of 150 women's groups in 38 locations throughout the country that coordinated efforts, met annually, and had by-laws to direct their action. Thus the meaning the women attached to upholding rights consistently encompassed a goal of inclusivity that manifested in both organizational structure and individual actions. Although they adopted a purposefully diverse and multisector approach, the women were united in their attitudes toward women's human rights.

### **Theme 3: The Use of Human Rights Discourse in a Political Agenda Aimed at Liberation**

In the same manner that feminists the world over have long connected the idea that the "personal is political," women mobilizing during the formation of the *Movimiento Autónomo* were coming to more deeply understand how their lived experiences of marginalization were connected to the growing global discourse of women's human rights. Although a critical awareness of inequality and women's rights violations led to a mobilized coalition of women, the new *Movimiento* was confronted with how to put their awareness into action. The constant evolution of their ensuing efforts to make their vision a lived reality demonstrates the iterative nature of *conscientización*. For ex-

ample, during the initial stages of the movement, community leader Eva Molina describes how women began to articulate and formulate strategies based on a human rights agenda:

In the 1990s, we had internal training processes in the women's movement that I think contributed to its consolidation because in '90 we all did a series of feminist workshops in which women's groups participated and we did an analysis of sexuality, about autonomy, about identity, about self-esteem, about motherhood, about sex-gender. We analyzed all the conventions that occurred in those years of the 1990s . . . the convention of women, of Beijing. All these conventions were under—it was the rights of women. So we analyzed all those . . . that moment, that boom was on the rights of women and for us it was a process of education and also very experiential because we talked about our personal stories of how our lives had been built.

Molina, among several others, reflected how members of the *Movimiento* came into more contact with human rights discourses in the early 1990s, and how the international discourse of "women's rights as human rights," in particular, was beginning to be used as a source of advocacy and legitimacy. Coupled with the development of a critical awareness of gender inequality and a commitment to duty, women's stories now begin to unveil an iterative process of action that is informed by an international human rights discourse. Moreover, collective organizing facilitated a drive to obtain additional sources of knowledge through international collaboration that could inform future action. Members of the *Movimiento* found various forms of support from others in international arenas who were working to circulate more equitable narratives regarding the worth of women in various regions. This increased interaction with others who shared their goals of enhancing women's rights facilitated a deeper understanding of how gender inequity was interwoven throughout multiple areas of women's lives.

One of the first areas in which women targeted their awareness, duty, and new knowledge was the National Campaign Against Violence. Nobel Peace Prize nominee Violeta Delgado explains the meaning and purpose it had within the movement:

The campaign was to demand that the Nicaraguan government ratify the Inter-American Convention Against Violence Against Women. We used a badge as a way to be part of the campaign . . . that said "I'm in

favor of the government getting involved.” . . . We organized national meetings and we worked very hard so that the government would pass a law for the first time in history recognizing and punishing domestic violence. We were persistent until they finally passed this law in 1996. I think that it definitely contributed to saving many women's lives.

That a law passed was a huge success; it reflected that the state was including women's rights in legislation. Moreover, it demonstrated the success made possibly by taking action that incorporated the tools and discourses fostered through interaction with international bodies that viewed violence against women as a human rights issue. However, although this new law served to bring counter narratives surrounding women's rights into broader public discourse, members of the *Movimiento* were critical of its ability to directly impact women's lives. Thus, reflecting an iterative manner in which action and analysis develop together to inform subsequent behavior, members of the *Movimiento* more recently sought to implement an additional law that would more explicitly address the power inequities between women and men that inhibited women's rights. As Cabrales explains:

The [1996] Law Against Domestic Violence [states] that violence is within the family, and so it doesn't reflect the power dynamics between men and women in the way we want [which is] a law against violence toward women and against femicide, because femicide is a product of those power dynamics and the control that men have . . . A government that says it believes in gender equality, what kind of equality is it talking about? Gender equality becomes visible through concrete actions, through policies, through programs, and through specific budgets.

The new law Cabrales is describing, the Integral Law Against Violence Toward Women (Law 779), passed in 2012. This law criminalizes femicide and misogyny and establishes that it is the state's duty to protect the human rights of women and to take action against gender violence. Importantly, because the state is instructed to promote change in the sociocultural patterns that reproduce inequality and replicate violence against women, the law effectively legislates a counter narrative with which the women's movement has been engaged for over 20 years.

Additionally, as a result of the awareness that gender inequity is interwoven throughout numerous aspects of society, the *Movimiento* has

taken a multisector approach to addressing the plurality of ways in which women's rights can be violated. Thus, in addition to the laws aimed at addressing violence against women, actions within the *Movimiento* have been directed toward recognizing how unjust economic systems disproportionately inhibit women's rights. Sandra Ramos, director of the María Elena Cuadra movement, discusses how her organization initially began efforts to address women's rights in *maquiladoras*, or factories in the Free Trade Zones:

The first strategies were about making visible the contribution women make to the nation's economy as subjects with rights. We began by organizing the working women of the Zona Franca because there was a very large number of women whose rights were being violated . . . We began with a strategy of accumulating strength by educating women, educating them to take ownership of their own rights . . . The economic model that we have, and is used in the Free Trade Zones, is a model that tramples on workers' rights, that makes women sick, that does not have the best work conditions, and that still doesn't offer equal pay to women . . . Today, there are so many young women who are not cognizant of their rights. So we want the new generation to know what their rights are and to demand them, regardless of who is governing the country and that any company that comes to this country, comes respecting those human rights that our government has ratified.

The demonstrated connection between awareness and actions within labor unions demonstrates how members of the *Movimiento* are seeking to address the root causes of oppression by critiquing the culture of women's exploitation, while simultaneously working to address the consequences of that exploitation. Demonstrating the depth of their belief in the utility of rights discourses, the members aim to spread awareness of this perspective that runs counter to the dominant narrative regarding expectations about women's rights and work. Indeed, a common thread across the various actions reported thus far is that the women's actions have consistently used a human-rights discourse to implement structural change.

Although the longstanding and concerted efforts within the *Movimiento* have led to various successes in the past several decades, all of the women in the sample expressed that targeted work on women's human rights continues to be an uphill battle. In fact, many of the women recounted stories of political prosecution or blacklisting as a result of their work. Toward

the close of her interview, Jiménez shared how the *Movimiento* remains a marginalized network fighting for women's rights with very little support from the national government:

Today one of the principle challenges that we see is simply the existence of the movement. And from this perspective, you find yourself in a position of resistance or resisting the intentions of the formal political powers of wanting to delegitimize you or of wanting to politically eliminate you.

Nevertheless, overwhelmingly, the strategies and actions taken by this movement demonstrate how processes of *conscientización* among those excluded from dominant narrative can successfully support women's rights. Acknowledging that the process is far from complete, Juanita Jiménez shared that one of the key aspects confronting the *Movimiento* currently, "is actually the struggle of democracy." This struggle, in many ways, is an iterative manifestation of inclusivity whereby the members of the *Movimiento* continue to work for feminist liberation and encourage others to do the same. Overall, by countering the dominant narrative that suggested those in power could deny certain marginalized groups (e.g., women) their rights, members of the *Movimiento* took strategic action to be inclusive of who was considered worthy of rights and, just as importantly, whose voices needed to be heard when taking action to defend those rights.

### Discussion

The *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* in Nicaragua arose out of a dictatorship and subsequent revolution that permitted the subjugation of women; it has evolved into a large, mobilized, coalition of women who have successfully enacted substantive social change by creating and popularizing a more expansive and inclusive notion of human rights. Given that social movements are often formed precisely to address grievances, the *Movimiento* provides a perfect context for social psychologists to investigate what leads to social change. Although there exist significant contributions from interdisciplinary scholars who have studied social movements (e.g., Alvarez, 2000), social psychological investigation of the individual and collective actions of movement actors remains understudied. Examining these questions from a social psychological perspective sheds light on

the processes of individual and collective mobilization and action by which change is actualized.

Investigating the evolution of this movement through the testimonies of women allowed a full examination of how the processes involving *conscientización* lead to social change. For example, the findings demonstrate that institutional changes influenced by the *Movimiento* in recent years actually came about through an iterative process that began decades earlier. Through the women's stories, we observe how the initial development of problematization and *conscientización* surrounding gender inequity led to a duty to address injustice. Establishing political autonomy and a network of organized women was in direct response to the women's increasing awareness of marginalization. Over time, we observe similar iterative processes whereby action and awareness developed together and influenced the behaviors that women engaged aiming to protect human rights. For example, the Integral Violence Law reflects how years of cyclical awareness, problematization, action, and mobilization led to the successful implementation of a law that institutionalizes the counter narrative with which the women had been engaging for over two decades.

In addition to demonstrating how women successfully engaged counter narratives to create a more expansive and inclusive notion of human rights, the current study bridges prior research in psychology that had previously focused on human rights or liberation. Although these two literatures share a core interest in understanding the conditions and processes that lead to improved human well-being, integrative approaches using contributions and concepts from each subfield are lacking. For example, psychologists who study human rights have rarely focused on the attitudes and behaviors of individuals who are marginalized, but instead on those from privileged social locations. Scholars within liberation psychology, on the other hand, often investigate the experiences of those who are marginalized in oppressive situations. The present study blurs the lines between those who intervene and those who are oppressed by demonstrating how women in the *Movimiento* held resistant attitudes toward inequity that facilitated their duty to address rights abuses, while they simultaneously lived in an

oppressive environment where their rights were neglected. Thus, combining approaches from both perspectives allowed us to examine how duty evolved through a process of engaging counter narratives, thereby showing how problematizing and deideologizing can lead to liberatory behavior. Although the exact experiences, methods, and strengths of the women interviewed in the present study will not generalize to all individuals, the realities of experiencing oppression while simultaneously holding resistant attitudes toward rights abuses can be applied to other situations. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that women mobilized locally can take control over their own lives, rather than needing to be “rescued” by international interventionists.

This research also contributes to the study of human rights through the use of narrative analysis. The narrative approach is unique in its ability to transcend the dichotomy between structure versus agency and focuses, rather, on the *links* between individuals and their political conditions (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012). By analyzing individual life stories at these points of intersection, the narrative approach is positioned to contribute to understanding the evolution of actual behavior surrounding the enactment of human rights and duties. Nevertheless, it is also important to point out the limitations surrounding the methodology used in the current study. In particular, although the oral history method attempts to privilege the perspective of the respondent, it is subject to distortion due to gaps in recall, reticence about self-disclosure, a desire to project a certain image to the interviewer, and so forth. Moreover, although our interest was in the realities and truths of the women's lives that were interviewed, it is still the case that as authors we were in a privileged position to make casual attributions and establish meaning. We attempted to compensate for these limitations, in part, by looking for thematic patterns across respondents and for confirmation in existing documentation about the women's movement.

Throughout the past two to three decades, the *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* in Nicaragua has mobilized discourses of rights and waged a strategic struggle to counter the dominant narratives within the country. By refusing to grant those in positions of dominance the power to determine who bears rights and what rights oth-

ers may enjoy, members of the *Movimiento* have articulated, and effectively implemented, a distinct discourse of rights.

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