Culture and Communication

A Study of NGO Woman-to-Woman Communication Styles at the United Nations

A Dissertation

by

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This original doctoral study is dedicated to the
Nongovernmental Organization Women Representatives
to the United Nations working devotedly for
the advancement of women worldwide.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's world, the United Nations functions as a complex infrastructural organization that administers far-reaching roles and responsibilities. Unquestionably, the modern era women's movement has succeeded in expanding principal elements of the UN charter that foster universal human rights, fundamental freedoms and social development. The modern era women's movement has affirmed that women's rights mean human rights. Nongovernmental organizations (NGO), mandated to promote the social development of women, have been instrumental in forging the advancement of a worldwide women's agenda since World War I and have solidified their position in conjunction with the United Nations since its inception in 1945. Since 1975, NGO women from all cultural regions of the world actively participate and freely provide expert knowledge and experience to this 30-year women's movement in connection with the official platforms and programs that have been sanctioned and launched by many divisions of the UN.

Since 1978, I have been active in the women's movement and since 2001 have served as an NGO representative of Soroptimist International at United Nations Headquarters New York. In addition, for fifteen years I have taught and lectured on gender and cultural communication, interpersonal relations and international affairs at universities in Europe and the United States. With this background, and as an NGO representative at the UN for three years, I have come to realize that NGO women representatives who attend UN sponsored international women's conferences and sessions continue to struggle to communicate effectively with one another, despite their universally bonding mission to elevate human rights and advance social conditions for women on a global and local scale.

Culture stands as the primary source for the development of an individual's communication style. The environment of early childhood strongly shapes the norms and traditions of gender communication within any culture; therefore, NGO women representatives inherently communicate with each other using their deeply ingrained, cultural approach toward

social interaction. As the women of more and more cultures rally to find their "women's voice" in the modern era women's movement, social interaction among NGO women becomes increasing more diverse at UN international gatherings.

At such events, one witnesses a broad range of woman-to-woman communication styles, from highly collaborative, harmonious social interaction to harshly competitive, combative behavior towards one another. Seemingly negative social interaction among women appeared alarming at first, especially given their need for general consensus with regard to the common universal goals that they strive to achieve on behalf of women around the world. Personal observation and hands-on experience have revealed that communication interaction among NGO peers who serve on committees and task forces at the United Nations is normally cooperative and courteous even when working closely with NGO women from vastly different cultural backgrounds. Through the years, the United Nations, like any other institution, has developed its own linguistic etiquette and behavioral protocol, and participants learn to adapt to the appropriate norms of social interaction to communicate effectively within this world organization.

Yet, many NGO women who attend international UN conferences/sessions do not enjoy this frequent exposure, and, lacking experience, they often remain unaware of practiced cultural UN language, protocol and social interaction at UN events. Others armed with reactionary, even revolutionary, agendas simply do not care to adhere to UN communication protocol, and, to the contrary, their intent is to arouse discomfort and discord, thereby gaining attention. Many activists participate at such events to promote their own special agenda, e.g., to improve specific aspects of the lives of women indigenous to their cultural region. Their actions can be driven by *cultural relativism* in terms of their social interaction and particular agendsa. The culturally diverse approaches applied to face-to-face communication by the representatives as they present, debate and resolve social issues, certainly expand the discourse on the advancement of women. Yet, the pervasive lack of understanding of one another's social interaction among UN NGO women representatives, from a cultural perspective, can also seriously impede progress for social development of women at the international level.

1. Hypothesis Statement

This dissertation is an original study that will confirm that culture determines the foundation for shaping one's communication style. A multitude of communication styles strongly impacts woman-to-woman interaction among UN NGO representatives. As a result, progress on the advancement of women involves an enormous amount of effort and energy in the never-ending challenge to communicate effectively with one another.

The United Nations is divided geographically into seven cultural regions of the world, and NGO representatives from all regions usually attend major international events, even if their presence is numerically uneven. An individual's communication style is indigenous to one's cultural environment and its uniqueness. People are seldom conscious of the strongly formulated ways of social interaction developed in their early childhood. A heightened awareness of one's culturally induced communication styles, a source of misunderstanding and miscommunication among NGO women representatives, would enable the women's movement to move forward more swiftly with its platforms, goals and objectives.

Section Two of this dissertation, the academic review, defines gender communication from biological, sociological and cultural perspectives. It highlights the academic viewpoints of numerous social science experts who focus on the sociological and cultural elements of communication and social interaction. It describes the evolution of late 20th Century contributions to feminist theory and perspectives and their impact on the communication styles of the NGO women active in the modern era women's movement. It introduces current studies on academic feminist thinking and the role of the media. The independent research draws upon the numerous perspectives of feminist ideology that have helped form the culture, language and social interaction of UN NGO women representatives.

The discussion explains social interaction as defined by *symbolic interactionism*, a leading sociological perspective in North America throughout the 20th Century that remains

popular today. Initially, its principles were presented informally by George Herbert Meade in the early part of the 20th Century. They were later developed into a formal sociological school of thought, dubbed *symbolic interactionism*, by his student protégé Herbert Blumer who refined and further developed this concept for more than half a century. The independent research draws extensively upon the research methodologies that Blumer explicitly designed for social interaction studies undertaken by participatory observers for empirical research of social science topics. Elements of Erving Goffman's work on self presentation are also included as an important and relevant contribution to the study of social interaction.

The academic review section also describes the worldview of experts who attended the International Forum on *Cultural Values and Human Progress* held at Harvard University in 1999 which, among other critical topics, addressed the impact of culture on gender communication and social change. This section also includes excerpts of articles from several internationally respected NGO women from diverse cultural backgrounds who describe the need for cultural sensitivities and understanding of cultural realities in order to promote the advancement of women.

This part then connects the power of language usage to foster joint activities towards mutual goals through understanding common symbols and establishing common grounds, a topic exhaustively researched by socio-linguist Herbert H. Clark. It also includes language and the media and describes how the media creates and reinforces gender images and stereotyping. Finally, it explains the interconnection of gender communication, strategies, culture and linguistics based primarily on the research of Deborah Tannen and Caja Thimm. The independent research also draws upon the works of these three researchers for further study and analysis.

The academic review establishes the foundation of culture and its influence on the complexity of communication styles among NGO women representatives attending international UN events for the advancement of women. Equally important, this section presents, in detail,

Herbert Blumer's methodological research approaches that were utilized as the blueprint for the quantitative and qualitative strategies undertaken for this dissertation's independent research.

Section Three first describes the historical background and present-day organizational structure of the United Nations through a close examination of its six main organs. It then discusses key UN women's divisions, agencies, commissions, conferences, conventions and sessions as they pertain to women's human rights, fundamental freedoms and social development for the advancement of women. This section also presents the role of the NGO community and its official interaction with the UN. Finally, it provides a classic example of the interconnection between the UN and a major NGO for women's human rights and the status of women, Soroptimist International, the world's largest service organization for professional and business women.

United Nations Headquarters New York is the contextual environment of the dissertation's independent research study group which revolves around the NGO women's community that officially attends UN women's conferences/sessions. The UN possesses its own workplace culture, language and protocol for social interaction as an international institution. The UN NGO women representatives who interact frequently must adapt to UN dictates which have in turn influenced their communication styles and social interaction. These women work closely with UN staff, member-state diplomats and delegates and, most important, other UN NGO women (and men) representatives. Official UN positions on women's social issues directly and strongly impact the efforts of the NGO community within their respective cultures. Therefore, the UN deserves detailed examination as the context for the all encompassing socio-cultural environment of the quantitative and qualitative independent research of this study.

Section Four presents the socio-cultural setting, preparation, methodologies, execution, examination and conclusions of the independent research undertaken at UN Headquarters New York from 2002 to 2004. It articulates the influence of cultural differences based on communication styles among UN NGO women representatives who gather at UN sponsored,

international women's events. These women come from the seven officially designated UN cultural regions: Africa (Sub-Sahara); The Middle East and North Africa, East Asia and the Pacific; South Asia; Europe and Central Asia; Latin America and the Caribbean; and North America (Canada and the United States of America).

The three research methodologies involve the following quantitative and qualitative approaches: (1) a comprehensive survey questionnaire on communication styles of UN NGO women representatives attending an annual international UN women's conference in New York City; (2) participatory observation as a UN NGO representative for Soroptimist International at three annual international UN women's conferences in New York City and (3) four interviews with UN NGO women in selected areas of women's communication styles and social interaction including: the media, the modern era women's movement, language usage and symbolism, and culture— an extended definition. These three research methodologies were employed at the 2003 and 2004 Annual Sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), sessions that have been held nearly annually in New York since 1946.

The first CSW session that I attended was held at UN Headquarters New York during the first two weeks of March 2002. As a newcomer to the process, I became acutely aware of the numerous communication problems among participants that appeared to hinder their progress toward achieving common social development goals. After attending the 2002 CSW NGO Consultation Day and ensuing session, I concluded that the social interaction among international NGO women representatives attending such an UN sponsored event warranted serious study and analysis.

At a second CSW session in March 2003, I distributed the survey questionnaire titled **Communication: NGO Women and the United Nations** at the annual NGO opening event called Consultation Day. This day is specifically organized for NGO women representatives to prepare them for the dynamics of the ensuing two-week CSW session. At the CSW sessions in March 2003 and 2004, I observed the interaction of NGO women at important CSW parallel events each year in order to test and substantiate the results of the questionnaire. The survey

questionnaire and participatory observations helped to determine the topics and focus of the four interviews with UN NGO women specialists in communication who attended the CSW 2003 Session.

The quantitative research has been conducted in the form of a comprehensive survey questionnaire that covers the following categories: NGO woman-to-woman oral and written communication styles; communication resources for informational social development and emotionality applied to their delivery styles; women's persuasive approaches toward other women and men in regard to current social issues concerning the improvement of women's lives; women's interpersonal relations and interrelated communication styles; and the role of women and the media. It concludes with space for respondents to comment on perceived NGO woman-to-woman communication problems and welcomes their suggestions on how to solve them. A copy of the survey questionnaire is included in the Appendix.

The qualitative research has been conducted in the form of participatory observations and four interviews. In March 2003, as co-chair of the ***Women and the Media*** task force, and in March 2004, as chair of the ***The Role of Men and Boys in the Achievement of Gender Equality*** task force, I was deeply involved in both CSW sessions. For each session, the task force created and coordinated several events and served as organizers, speakers and facilitators throughout the two-week period. I attended numerous deliberations at the UN's Economic Social Council (ECOSOC) on CSW themes as well as concurrent NGO programs, lectures, workshops, panel discussions, breakout sessions and networking receptions. At the Consultation Days and annual NGO award receptions, I observed, then examined, the communication styles and social interaction among NGO women representatives in direct correlation to their cultural background.

During and following the CSW session in March 2003, I conducted four lengthy interviews with UN NGO women from diverse cultures and NGO organizations; they are experienced NGO professionals who have attended numerous UN women's conferences in addition to the annual CSW sessions. They responded at length to specific areas of cultural communication that were also included in the questionnaire, and their comments substantiated its

findings. More specifically, topics of discussion during the four interviews included: women, gender profiling and the media; the evolution of the feminist theory and perspective; the development of the feminist movement the last thirty years and its impact on communication strategies; women gender (female) language use and the power of symbols; and the extended definition of culture to include the workplace, generational perspectives, etc., and their far-reaching influence on communication styles of UN NGO women. The four interviewees also discuss ways to improve woman-to-woman communication to forge the advancement of women, worldwide.

Section V presents the conclusions of the independent research findings based on the survey questionnaire, participatory observations and four interviews. They prove this study's hypothesis that culture, as extensively defined and examined throughout the dissertation, impacts the communication styles and social interaction of woman-to-woman UN NGO representatives as they work together on behalf of women's human rights and social development in the 21st Century.

SECTION II

COMMUNICATION STYLES AND SOCIAL INTERACTION
REVIEW OF THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE

This academic review covers a range of relevant studies that directly connect the impact of culture on communication styles and social interaction among UN NGO women representatives at international UN meetings/sessions. I chose select academic perspectives established through the 20th Century until today that best develop, substantiate, and direct the discourse of this dissertation. The critical areas of concentration include interrelated perspectives on gender identity and sociological schools of thought throughout the 20th Century; modern era feminists theories and perspectives since the seventies; culture and social interaction; the sociological perspective: social interaction and symbolic interactionism; language usage and joint interaction; the media, language and gender profiling; and gender language and discourse. Together, they provide a comprehensive foundation for the independent research based on the premise that culture impacts women's communication style and social interaction. More specifically these six areas will concentrate on the following points:

- Gender and female identity are defined and traced through the major historical eras of the last 10,000 years that have radically shaped a woman's role and accepted behavior in society from global and cultural perspectives.

- Cultural points of view on gender issues and social change are presented by international pundits who attended the *Cultural Values and Human Progress Symposium* hosted by Harvard University 1999. *Cultural relativism* is explained and multiple NGO perspectives on cultural issues are also provided.

- The sociological perspectives of gender identity and stratification are presented as well as 20th Century functionalist, conflict, and feminist perspectives. Current work to achieve gender equality that include male participation are mentioned. The social interaction

points of view from a sociological perspective are examined to connect communication styles and social interaction through symbolic interactionism, drawn from the extensive works of sociologists Herbert Blumer and Erving Goffman. Blumer's methodological research strategies, including the critical role of participatory observations, are also explained as they guided the independent research.

- Language usage and its impact on joint interaction as presented by Herbert Clark and others are examined to connect language use as a dominating influence on communication styles in reference to meaning and understanding, power and speaking styles, and language and the media.

- Gender communication, culture and language are addressed to illuminate the interconnection between linguistics, power, culture, gender, class and their impact on conversational strategies among women, especially in professional workplace environments. The works of Deborah Tannen and Caja Thimm are noted in particular.

Collectively, these focal points of the academic review provide the foundation for the development, implementation and analysis of the independent research and its conclusions.

1. Sex and Gender Identity Defined

In the social sciences, a definition of the terms *sex* and *gender* is critical to interpret and integrate the results of biological, sociological and cultural research, especially regarding their influence and impact on communication style and social interaction among women. Furthermore, the review of the literature and the independent research are focused primarily on sociological and cultural perspectives directly linked to gender issues, communication style and social interaction, so, clearly understanding the use of the term *gender* stands fundamental to this work. Today, the meanings of *sex* and *gender* have become quite blurred since they are often used interchangeably. In the vernacular form of English, and increasingly in research writings, the terms are exchanged as synonyms to stress the currently popular emphasis of social influences on

sexual identity, although the biological perspective has started to reemerge in recent years. Media, advertising and entertainment have influenced and even altered the meaning of sex and gender as well. Such casual use of the terminology confuses genetic vs. social differences that uniquely characterize males and females. Therefore, for this research, the terms are to be understood simply as follows:

SEX (one's biological identity) refers to the anatomical or chromosomal distinctions of men and women.

GENDER (one's social identity) refers to the socially constructed roles assigned to male and female groupings.

2. Gender Identity and Communication: The Biological Dimension

According to Janet Bing of Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, communication research based on sex identity continues to be a popular topic of study and has become a popular area of concentration since the nineties which has been dubbed the *decade of the brain.* Briefly, sex-differentiation researchers have established that the genetic "hardwiring" processes in the brain are not only highly intricate but rather substantially different between males and females. This distinction is evident, for example, in the way the cerebral cortex of the brain, which is divided into the left and right hemispheres, handles sensory perception, motor control and cognitive information that is then transformed into communication styles.

As another example of genetic differences, the female brain interconnects both hemispheres through a thicker nerve cable than that in the male brain. The thicker nerve cable enables the female brain to exchange information between the two hemispheres and process it more rapidly. This pattern proves particularly evident in the direction of information flow from the right to left side, where the verbal side is located. Furthermore, female brains activate speech in both hemispheres, whereas the male brain relies mostly on the left hemisphere to produce communication activity. As a result, women are usually more adept in communication, including

both written and oral language skills. Women can also better link emotional expression to speech patterns, since their brains are developed differently in relation to verbal abilities.

On the other hand, the male brain functions in a compartmentalized fashion drawing on one hemisphere at a time to undertake individual tasks. For example, men are notably more adept in tackling spatial tasks that are solved specifically in the right hemisphere. In contrast, women encounter interference in their brain when undertaking a singular orientation task due to verbal information that continuously crosses over from the left to the right hemisphere, thereby frequently distracting women from focusing on the task at hand.

Some scientists are currently investigating the role of hormones and how they influence the cognitive process of males and females as well. Testosterone, which exists in both males and females, for example, clearly has a higher level in males. One theory suggests that it causes the right brain to dominate in males. This concept would help explain why males excel at nonverbal cognitive abilities, such as road map reading, a classical spatial skill situated in the right hemisphere of the brain, compared to verbal development located in the left hemisphere.

Yet, the expanding research and ensuing discourse on male and female brain differences notes just that– differences, and finings have been quite distorted by media reporting, at least in the United States. In her study *Women and Language,* Bing analyzes how the media influences public attitude concerning the differences between the sexes. She contends that newspapers, magazines and trade books simplify, exaggerate, and even misrepresent research findings on sex differences in the brain. The sometimes gender-biased reporting has indicated that differences between males and females are inherent, categorical and unchangeable. Furthermore, discussion about sex brain differences is often defined as deficiency in the female when compared to the male, and the interpretation is often used as a ploy to limit vocational, political and educational opportunities for women. Bing argues that the feminist perspective should consider avoiding this particular *difference debate* and urges that the discussion focus on equal opportunity, not equal ability, since the latter ultimately leads to gender polarization.

Today, as the pace of research accelerates in this field, the proponents of the brain differential perspective between males and females speak with the loudest voice in the discourse on the sexes. At the core of the topic lies the pervasive belief that the multi-task-oriented female brain approaches stimuli from a relational perspective. The emotional area of the female brain is more closely connected to the verbal and memory components compared to the single-task-oriented male brain that responds to specific situational stimuli. Therefore, women can better interpret the communication cues of relationship through faster recognition of both verbal and nonverbal communication symbols and indicators that convey the emotional state of the individual. Both denote genetically dominant female communication traits. When women communicate with women, the primary subject and communication approach frequently addresses relationship first, usually from an emotional perspective in most social contexts. These biologically determined findings about the functionality of the female brain are taken into consideration in the analysis of the independent research. (Bing 1999)

Biology and culture are also directly linked. Birke (1992) claims that a person's behavior can alter not only one's environment but also one's biology and physiology. She urges feminists, in particular, to move beyond their elementary concept that replaces biological determinism with social constructionism that reinforces the dichotomous view of biology vs. socialization. A proponent of a transformative account of gender development, Birke's research examines how cultural and individual behavior may impact the biology and physiology of males and females and vice versa. According to Wallen (quoted in Blum 1997): "Everything is biologically determined at one level, but its expression is always an interaction with the environment."

Yes, the brain differences of the sexes are becoming increasingly better understood and acknowledged today. Yet, the genetically structural variations between males and females pale in comparison to the social and cultural differences that have evolved throughout the centuries between the genders and among the members of the same gender in accordance with the development and usage of gender communication styles. The rest of the academic literature will discuss multiple aspects and influences of cultural socialization and its impact on female gender

communication styles. This knowledge will be directly linked to UN NGO women representatives, and the impact their culturally learned communication strategies induce on their joint work towards the advancement of women's causes worldwide.

3. Gender Identity and Communication: The Socialization Dimension

The gender system functions as a form of social stratification in which the traits and behaviors of males and females are unequally valued in most cultural societies. Many social institutions still reward and punish its members based on gender, and that principle profoundly affects the lives and opportunities of both males and females. Furthermore, most men and women worldwide live in societies with patriarchal gender systems dominated, of course, by men and what is considered masculine is more highly valued. (United Nations 2002)

To contend that gender identity created through cultural socialization is the dominant influence on communication styles of UN NGO women, and their social interaction to promote women's issues, first requires a comprehensive review of gender identity through the dimension of socialization. The following explanation of gender identity will serve as the principal description for the use of this term throughout the academic review and research sections. Gender identity is defined as a person's perception of the self as male or female. The gender role signifies a social construction that establishes and shapes the behavior and social interaction deemed appropriate for men and women. One's gender identity and role are learned through the socialization process, strongly determined by the dominant influences of one's environment and association, including the family, community and culture, particularly during a child's early formative years. Within these social spheres, people, individually and collectively, learn and develop their primary cultural values, beliefs, attitudes and mores, especially regarding acceptable social interaction and gender communication behavior. These early forces leave a

dominant, often lifelong, imprint on people's behavior, their interpersonal relations skills and

gender communication styles. (Lips 1997) Accordingly, the presentation and interpretation of

masculinity and femininity vary notably, and their definitions, based on a sociological context,

are considered central to the psychology of gender understanding within the framework of a

culture.

Today, social constructionists contend that masculinity and femininity coexist in the same

person, and therefore should not be perceived as natural, polar opposites, but rather as different

and separate dimensions, frequently found in the same person. Furthermore, one's masculine and

feminine behaviors clearly influence one's communication ways, formed through the

socialization of gender categories and distinctive roles through social construction. Cameron

(1998), a specialist in applied linguistics at Roehampton Institute, London, emphasizes that this

sociological perspective of gender communication and culture can be readily applied to woman-

to-woman communication styles. (Wodak 1997)

A core principle of 20th Century feminist thinking is exemplified by de Beauvoir's (1949)

observation that one may be born male or female, but later becomes the social being that society

defines as a man or a woman. Mathieu, an anthropologist, asked just how far gender perspective

could be taken to determine the basis of an ultimately sexual difference. She established three

paradigms to conceptualize the sex/gender relationship. In the first paradigm, she defines

homology gender as a socially determined expression of the biological sex. She concludes that

individuals learn masculine and feminine behavior based on their prior biological categorization

of male or female and argues that sex signifies the foundation on which gender-related behavior

and thereby communication styles are established. This paradigm strongly suggests that sex

overwhelmingly dominates the social behavior of a person's gender status. The second paradigm,

based on the premise that gender symbolizes sex, claims that the collective experience as a

member of a group of "men" or " women," establishes gender roles designed to conform to

cultural expectations and communication ways. It suggests that gender portrays symbolic

behavioral differences rather than an elaboration of biological characteristics. Her third paradigm

emphasizes that *heterogeneity* defines sex and gender as indeed different, and that one should not

assume that the world is divided "naturally" into two groups, men and women. This paradigm

promotes the perspective that socially acquired gender ultimately constructs sex, not vice versa.

(Wodak 1997)

       At the macro level, gender analysis examines external structural elements, called

gendered institutions, by which gender determines major constructs in the organization of social

life. Such institutions would include government, media, world organizations (the United

Nations), educational systems and religious ideologies to mention a few. Gender concepts are

ensconced in the visual and audio images, ideas and language of a society and are used to divide

the work, distribute resources and determine power within a society. Gender stereotypes in most

societies still perceive men as strong, rational, dominant and independent while women are

viewed as weak, emotional, nurturing and dependent. (Kendall 2002)

       To continue the extended definition of gender identity through social construction, Bem

has drawn enlightening conclusions in her study that she labels the *lenses of gender.* She claims

that, in Western Civilization, three fundamental beliefs have been etched into cultural ideology

and underscore the controlling role of religious institutions in cultural development until the

onset of the women's movement in the mid-19th Century. First, Bem explains that men and

women are perceived to possess fundamentally different psychological and sexual natures;

second, men are inherently the dominant, therefore, superior sex; third, both male/female

differences and male dominance are simply natural. Bem then describes the first gender lens,

called *androcentrism* or male-centeredness, as the common perception that men stand inherently

superior to women. Next, she explains that the second gender lens, known as *gender*

polarization, is based on the *fundamentally different principle* between men and women, that for

centuries has resulted in the hierarchal and organizational structure of society, culture and

institutions. Herein, communication styles find their origins and evolution in gender-determined

verbal (cognitive) and nonverbal (emotional) expression. Finally, she contends that the third gender lens, called *biological essentialism*, rationalizes and legitimizes the biased principles that men stand superior, and that gender polarization is inherent to their identity. She believes that to overcome such deeply entrenched, cultural values and beliefs will require revolutionary behavioral change; nevertheless, one can realistically begin to dismantle these sociologically cultural distortions toward "natural characteristics" of men and women by first widening and then eliminating the highly filtered gender lenses. (Bem 1993)

Today, most cultural societies continue to operate and function based on the traditional gender separation principle whereby males and females are categorized into separate "societies" of men and women that have formed and honed their own activities and communication systems since antiquity. This divide remains apparent in most social infrastructures throughout the world to include the gender roles in homes, communities, governments, institutions (media), schools, workplace, etc. This gender divide also stands responsible for the ways in which women communicate with one another.

Recently, however, some sociologists have started to recognize that the differential trend, once unilaterally popular with sociologists and feminists, has started to shift as current researchers recognize that males and females also spend significant amounts of time in gender-integrated settings, these days, e.g., shifts of roles in the family environment, classroom, workplace, institutions, organizations, community service, etc. Professional and private gender roles are being redefined and reinvented in Western Society and elsewhere. In fact, today's newly emerging lifestyles, especially in the developed world, could potentially change the once impenetrable differential beliefs about how society views gender identity and their role in the 21st Century. Such change will continue to alter the way women communicate and socially interact with one another as well. The impact of this unfolding worldview is shared and reinforced in the analysis of the four interviews under the qualitative research findings, as one of the noted influences on UN NGO women's communication styles. Although the hypothesis targets the impact of culture on woman-to-woman communication styles and strategies, other important

factors do exist that shape their social interaction and, respectively, need to be mentioned. Key 20th Century sociological perspectives in addition to feminist theory and perspectives, in particular, have influenced the social dynamics among UN NGO women as well. These topics will now be highlighted.

4. 20th Century Sociological Thinking and Gender Communication

Sociology is defined for this research as the scientific study of human societies, cultures and social behavior, and sociologists conduct their work within the parameters of a particular paradigm: a school of thought that guides the social scientist to select the problems to be studied; to choose methods used for the independent research; and to explain the results. Sociological research is thereby subjective and objective, and the same social phenomenon can be sociologically studied based on multiple paradigms. (Ritzer 1980) Sociological theories and perspectives of gender identity and stratification vary in their views toward analysis of gender roles and power relations in society and the way each gender communicates between and among each other. The main schools of thought of the key 20th Century perspectives are briefly defined here to expand understanding of the numerous influences on woman-to-woman communication styles of the UN NGO women representatives at international UN meetings and sessions who comprise the study group.

The *Structural Functionalist Paradigm* is considered the dominant viewpoint that has influenced gender studies in the 20th Century. It depicts a cultural group as a stable society whereby the majority of members share common values, beliefs and behavioral expectations. Social constructionalists view men and women as different biologically, and gender roles are based on sex identity. Since the culturally based social order is maintained by the social interaction of the operates, then change must come slowly. (DeLaurentis 1986)

The Functionalist Perspective claims that distinct gender roles are vital to survival of the family and society, and the most basic division of labor is biologically determined. According to functional analysts, such as Talcott Parsons of the mid-20th Century, women's roles as nurturers

and caregivers are most pronounced in contemporary industrialized societies where husbands perform the instrumental tasks as the economic provider and decision maker while wives perform the expressive tasks as the emotional and affectionate support system. In today's world, one needs to realize that many cultures find themselves operating as industrial societies and therefore still adhere to this principle.

The Conflict Perspective states that the division of labor within families and the workplace results from male control of and dominance over women and resources. Thus, differentials exist not only in sex and gender differences, but in political, economic, and/or interpersonal power. (Kendall 2000) The early modern era feminists of the sixties and seventies reacted and rebelled boisterously against this paradigm, and as revered senior mentors of the women's movement today, their voices and actions as UN NGO representatives remain strong and persistent at international UN women's conferences.

In the late sixties, the longstanding functionalist perspective no longer served the social times of Western Civilization, especially in North America. A new paradigm emerged (Harding 2002) reflecting more accurately that era of extreme social unrest and activism. Sociologists started to question whether cultures really represented an orderly harmonious system. Feminist sociology and the study of gender were founded then, not as a unified sociological perspective but rather as a plurality of feminisms that influenced social behavior and social and expression among first the rebellious activists that permeated the growing international movement in the seventies. (Delmar 1986)

The feminist movement acknowledges both nature and learning as components of gender identity and recognizes the complexity of establishing the delineation between the two. In general, feminists predominantly believe, however, that gender is socially rather than innately created. So, they characteristically define gender as a set of social expectations reproduced and transmitted through cultural learning that finds its roots in political and economic structure. The feminist paradigm also takes strong issue with sexism that suggests what women, think, say and

do is dismissed as unimportant/uninteresting. (Lorber 1993). Feminist thinking also rejects that the objectivity notion alone can master the understanding of a subject and recognizes the role of feelings in sociological study. They do not believe that the researcher need be unknown to the subjects under study. (Hess & Ferree 1987) This research methodological perspective of the feminist paradigm has been applied to the observatory participation and four interviews of the qualitative independent research.

The modern era feminists have established three categories of feminist theories that that have developed into multiple feminist perspectives.

- *Gender Reform Feminism* emphasizes similarities rather than differences between men and women. The goal seeks equal opportunity for both through securing legal rights to improve work opportunities and education.

- *Gender Resistance Feminism* stresses that law alone cannot overcome gender equality, for male dominance is too ingrained in social relations. It promotes that women's ideas and experiences are fundamentally different, and women need to form women-only organizations. It focuses on sexual exploitation and violence against women.

- *Gender Rebellion Feminism* targets interrelationships and inequalities of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, social class and sexual orientation. It analyzes gender inequality as one part of a complex system of social stratification. Its diverse approach has generated both advancement and problems for the social advancement of women. (Delmar 1986)

The modern era feminist perspectives, derived from the aforementioned theories offer welcomed diversity, although they all seem to adhere to the fundamental principle that men and women are equal and should be valued equally. This collectively interpreted feminist perspective is based on the premise that gender is socially constructed and therefore can be deconstructed and then reconstructed for a new social dictate. More specifically, in *Liberal Feminism*, gender equality is directly linked to equality of opportunity and promotes the position that the oppression of women stems from women's lack of equal rights and educational opportunities.

The proponents of *Liberal Feminism* emphasize gender similarities, the importance of equal opportunity for women, and social acceptance that needs to be acknowledged by the family, in education and throughout the media. *Radical Feminism*, in contrast, rails against male domination that purportedly causes all forms of human oppression and claims that male oppression against women denotes deliberate behavior to establish and sustain subordination. Such subordination is reinforced by the actions of major institutions such as religion and the media. *Socialist Feminism* suggests that women's oppression results from dual roles performed by females as paid and unpaid workers, and that women are exploited by a patriarchal society. A recently emerging feminist perspective, *Multicultural Feminism*, addresses the ethnic and racial experiences of women that create their cultural identity. This viewpoint is based on the assumption that race, class and gender symbolize forces that simultaneously suppress women of select socialized backgrounds. Today's *Multicultural Feminism* calls for a political policy of inclusion and the creation of social structures that foster positive behavior and dialogue to improve social life and reduce gender inequalities derived from one's cultural background. (Kendall 2002)

A forthcoming feminist perspective strongly connected to communication research emphasizes the integration of academic theories of social activism and the implementation of social action to forge change. In this context, the "inner action" perspective of communication and social change promotes dynamic negotiations within the context of social development, e.g., documents that are written with carefully chosen, gender sensitive language as a direct result of the women's movement social agenda, intent to promote change towards gender equality as a key part of their program. An example of integrating academic theory through the "inner action" perspective of communication to foster social change is the universally acknowledged outcome document the **Platform for Action** derived from the Beijing Conference 1995. This document has become the hallmark for creating policy and implementing social change for the worldwide women's movement ever since. This document, among other critical social issues, highlights a

section on women and the media, approaches to ensure positive gender portrayal and ways to incorporate women's issues into hard news coverage.

Concurrently, social action for the advancement of women is also drawing upon multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional approaches. In other words, the present-day, feminist communication style strives to balance theory and practice, research and social action from an integrative perspective rather than from the traditional differential perspective of binary opposite domains such as emotion vs. rationale, body vs. spirit, culture vs. nature, public vs. private, or male vs. female. Imbedded in this multi-faceted orientation of communication research today, the emphasis reinforces social construction of gender and life quality of the individual woman. Such provocative thinking challenges the principles of a male-dominated world and its patriarchal voice and seeks to replace male superiority with a gender-equal society that acknowledges the voice of both genders, respectfully. This latest perspective emphasizes diversity, ethics and the individual. (Lemish, 2001) Such an integrated approach, i.e., to balance theory and practice, research and social action is applied to the three components of the independent research.

These feminist perspectives have influenced women's communication styles throughout the last thirty years and continue to do so in the now advancing 21st Century. This reality becomes particularly evident among UN NGO women representatives who tend to be more aware of the verbal and nonverbal messages being delivered and received in direct alignment with feminist perspectives and joint interpersonal relations. Throughout the independent research, all of the feminist perspectives were considered and incorporated into the quantitative and qualitative approaches that were employed and examined. One can argue that the inter-related feminist perspectives and their impact on UN NGO women have contributed to the development and establishment of a women's activist culture and the construction of its own language and strategies to direct the course of women's issues today.

To date, feminist thought has been focused on and continues to address the following three goals on the next page:

- To redeem what has been devalued in the women's domain.

- To conquer the territory that has been reserved to men.

- To resolve and transcend the opposition between these spheres by reformulating the relationship between them.

Feminist ideology offers a model of change through the omnipotent concept *empowerment*. "Empowerment occurs when individuals recognizing their common oppression mobilize against the exploitation, victimization, marginality, expendability, powerlessness, suppressed rage and degradation that characterize the reality of oppression and the experience of being oppressed." (Radford-Hill 1986)

The central force for social change lies in empowerment, i.e., that the genesis of any social movement struggles to control its own destiny. Feminist ideology provides a structure for negotiation and a set of actions and practices that foster the empowerment of women. Empowerment has long become a universal concept, one that is ensconced in the cultural language of the UN NGO women representatives today. The issue of power and empowerment in conjunction with women's communication styles and language usage will be developed further under topic gender, language and discourse later in this section.

Power relationships include cultural values and constitute a standard by which gender-based ethics are often judged. To consider joint feminist perspectives as a model of change raises issues about cultural values and their impact on women as individuals who work collectively for the advancement of women within global, cultural and local frameworks. Their communication styles and social interaction with one another emphatically direct their course as agents of change. Certainly, women-centered analysis of social, cultural and sexual exploitation, for example, must include shared values that are consistent with social needs and cultural imperatives of all women. (Radford-Hill 1986) Target groups of change must be allowed to participate in specific actions together with women activists and that requires an understanding

of each other's communication styles and language use for effective joint action. Social change demands constructive organization of oppressed groups to link the goals of social actions at the local and cultural levels to allow the recipients of change to experience the success of their own initiatives. Mounting actions for social change require leadership, coherent ideology and multi-faceted modes and practices at all levels of society to mobilize a gender-based agenda for social development. The culmination of these monumental global efforts resulted in the ***Platform for Action*** outcome document at Beijing (1995) which has become the engine driving the current global women's movement.

5. The United Nations: Gender and Gender Equality

The critical subject of culture and its impact on women's communication styles will be discussed shortly; first, however, the sociological premise of the United Nations' position on the topic gender will be described, as the UN is the dominant sociological environment of the independent research. Clearly, the UN setting, as a world institution and workplace that fosters its own culture, communication style and language, indeed, further molds the manner in which UN NGO women representatives communicate with one another.

In sociological discourse on the concept of gender and the advancement of social development for women at the United Nations this past decade, the term gender has referred exclusively to women and mostly in respect to their attainment of gender equality. It has often been defined from a male point of reference, in a still overwhelmingly patriarchal world and male dominated world institution. At UN Headquarters today, due in no small measure to the outspokenness of UN NGO women, gender equality is now perceived as fundamental to the human rights and social development of women. Lately, this discussion has shifted to a broader scope of gender identity and working understanding to include male participation in the dialogue and their promotion of (female) gender equality. In particular, male worldviews of gender and gender equality prove important to the independent research, for the social interaction between men and women is now becoming relevant to UN NGO women's work on the advancement of

women. In fact, at the CSW 2004 Session, one of the two themes highlighted *The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality.* This session denoted the first time that men participated extensively in key roles as speakers and as resource experts at a CSW session, and it marked the first time that they were welcomed by the vast majority of women participants. (Division for the Advancement of Women 2004)

Robert W. Connell presented a comprehensive report on gender issues at the United Nations Expert Group Meeting held in Brasilia, Brazil in October 2003 in preparation for the CSW 2004 Session. His report focuses on *The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality.* He argues that contemporary research indicates that gender inequalities are entrenched in a complex system of relationships, detected at every level of human experience to include gender communication ranging from individual emotions and interpersonal relationships between men and women, among women-to-women, as well as men-to-men within the social construct of society, culture and institutions.

The key areas of gender communication and social systems that he highlights are as follows:

- Gender relations are an interactive system of connections and distinctions among people and groups of people – what happens to one group in this system affects the others and vice versa;

- Gender relations are not superficial, but rather are deeply embedded in organizational routines, religious and legal concepts, and the taken-for-granted arrangements of people's lives, such as the distinction between home and work;

- Gender relations are multi-dimensional, interweaving relationships of power, economic arrangements, emotional relationships, *systems of communication and meaning*, etc.;

- Gender relations are diverse and changing – they arise from different cultural histories from different parts of the world, have changed in the past and are undergoing transformation at present. (Connell 2003)

Men continue to play an enormous role as the gatekeepers for gender equality, and their participation remains crucial to philosophical and practical reforms. Research repeatedly proves that patterns of gender inequality are interwoven into the social and cultural definition, social interaction and communication systems that identify masculinity and male identity in conjunction with femininity and female identity. To attain gender equality will require males and females to change the traditional images steeped in centuries of deeply entrenched practices. Such a transformation would not only alter social interaction and communication ways between genders but among those members of the same gender as well.

6. Gender Identity and Communication: The Cultural Dimension

At the crux of this study lies the impact of culture on gender identity and women's communication styles, so let it start with the following working definition. *Gender identity and communication* refer to the culturally constructed differences between males and females found in the meanings, beliefs and practices associated with masculinity and femininity, and culture reinforces who and what males and females represent. Lorber summarizes gender and culture as follows:

> "Gender is a human invention, like language, kinship, religion and technology; like them, gender organizes social relations in everyday cultural life as well as in the major social structures, such as social class and the hierarchies of bureaucratic organizations."

Femaleness and feminist consciousness are not equivalents, and traditions of female thought, women's culture and female consciousness do exist that are not considered feminist thinking. Feminism is not based on a natural development of women's sexuality and social construction but rather has spawned from controversial political and socio-economic struggles, and more recently, from *cultural relativism* that are not necessarily universal to all women. (DeLaurentis 1986)

At the micro-level of cultural analysis, *gender roles* refer to the values, attitudes, behavior and activities that are culturally defined as appropriate for both men and women. These attributes are learned through the culturalization process, which strongly establishes the gender identity of a person's perception of the self as male or female, typically established between eighteen months and three years of age. An individual perception is first developed through the interaction with others at early school age. (Lips 1997)

At the macro-level of cultural analysis, gender examines structural features external to the individual that constantly perpetuate gender inequality. Cultural structures classified as *gender institutions* emphasize the reality that gender stands as one of the pillars in the organizational construction of all sectors of an established culture. Strong stereotypical gender concepts within the confines of institutions are pervasive in the images, ideas, communication styles and language of a society, and they serve as a basis to divide labor, allocate resources and distribute power. Furthermore, these gender institutions are reinforced by a belief system that legitimizes concepts and ideas regarding masculine and feminine attributes that are deemed appropriate and valid in a cultural society. (Lorber 1993)

Typically gender stereotypes, still promoted in most cultures worldwide to this day, hold steadfast that men and women are inherently different in their attributes, behavior and aspirations. Stereotypes, universally, define men as strong, rational, dominant, independent and less concerned with appearance. In contrast, women are usually described as weak, emotional, nurturing, dependent and anxious about their appearance. Concurrently, many of the gender communication strategies, verbal and nonverbal, used by men and women underscore these perceptions and will be taken into account in the independent research methodologies. (Kendall 2002)

Feminist sociologists Patricia Lengermann and Ruth Wallace agree that sexism, a core derivative of gender stereotyping that is practiced pervasively in all male-dominated cultures, can be defined as the subordination of one sex, most often female, to the assumed superiority of the other sex based on three elementary components: negative attitudes toward women;

stereotypical beliefs that reinforce, complement or justify the prejudice; and blatant discriminatory acts that exclude, distance or keep women separate. Patriarchal (male domination) or matriarchal (female domination) sexism serves as a manipulative and repressive force to control social interaction and communication behavior. Sexism also strongly influences the hierarchical system of social organization of cultural, political, economic and institutional structures. Gender power remains overwhelmingly patriarchal universally and impacts communication styles of men and women.

Gender stratification and its resulting rules of social behavior between the genders, and among those of the same gender, come from centuries of culturally historical and societal development that still dominate the contemporary perspective of gender and respective communication styles throughout the world. For example, from a culturally historical viewpoint, the tasks in that society that determine men's or women's work stem from the gender divisions of labor in a society and its culturally acceptable social interaction, accordingly. In fact, cultural researchers have identified five sociological periods in history and that have dictated and directed the course of stringent communication and social interaction protocol from a gender perspective. These principal historical eras include: hunting and gathering societies, horticultural and pastoral societies, agrarian societies, industrial societies and post-industrial societies.

In the *hunting and gathering societies* of early culturally defined civilization, a relatively equitable relationship between the genders exists, for neither group can provide all the basics necessary for sheer survival. Then, in the *horticultural society*, some 10,000-12,000 years ago, food becomes available through the invention of hand tools. Work that proves compatible with childbearing fosters gender equality to a high degree. In *pastoral societies* that follow, however, the herding of large animals, when crops fail, plummets women to a low-cultural status, for they cannot effectively contribute to the labor force. Their new role becomes primarily that of bearers of offspring to their gender counterparts. Male dominance in such cultures promotes polygamous practices to reinforce the masculine power differential and establishes female taboos to solidify their subordinate role through female segregation. It also develops an economic system of bride-

wealth to transform women into property to be bought and sold. Such repressive and degrading traditions and practices have shaped the communication styles and social interaction of both genders, and such demeaning traditions and practices continue pervasively today. Horticultural and pastoral societies still flourish in parts of Asia, Africa, the Middle East and South America, and their culturally historical legacy on gender identity and communication practices remains prevalent, even, to an extent, among the educated women of these cultural regions of the world.

In *agrarian societies*, 8,000-10,000 years ago, gender inequality and male dominance become institutionalized, especially in cultures that border the Mediterranean Sea. Since farming tasks require heightened physical strength and endurance to produce the labor, men eventually control food production and distribution and assume private ownership of property. This advancement leads to a surplus of food and remuneration that serves male interests and further heightens their power over women. Concurrently, men increasingly choose to protect their inheritance for their offspring through the establishment of controlling cultural traditions. Such repression assumes many forms of cultural behavior, including, for example, the seclusion of women, the appearance of extreme modesty, and the practice of female genital mutilation to force sexual control over women, acts still pervasively practiced today in several regions of the world. Women have learned, therefore, to develop strong nonverbal and indirect communication strategies to offset the extreme deference to be exhibited towards men, especially in public

In *industrial societies*, factories and/or mechanized production replaces agriculture as the major source of economic activity, and the cultural status of women declines even further. This stiff society separates the work force even more drastically into male bread winners and female homemakers and caregivers. Such a system highly increases the economic and political position of men, cements the subordination of women, and deepens gender discrimination as the female voice is intentionally stifled and mollified. Important to mention in today's global order, most of the world's population lives and operates in highly agrarian and/or emerging industrialized societies.

Finally, in present-day, *post-industrial technological cultures*, i.e., societies in which technology supports a service and information-based economy and culture, the division of labor is often determined by whether people can provide or apply information or engage in service/entertainment professions, e.g., the media or health care. In this new sphere of labor opportunities, higher education has become increasing crucial for economic and social success. A reverse of direction for the role of females at last, culturally technological societies can elevate women professionally and to assume head of household/breadwinner positions that often result in doubling the burden of women's work. Today, in post-industrial societies, 60% of women participate in the labor force, and their re-emerged voices the last thirty years forge political, economic and social change towards gender equality. In this capacity, the communication styles of women from geographically varied, advanced cultures are beginning to adapt to present-day Western Civilization's lifestyle. (Kendall 2000)

Yet, the question arises as to whether Western Civilization's construction of gender and roles are really welcomed as a universal paradigm. Research on this issue (Smith-Rosenberg 1986) argues that the answer is no, and to the contrary, a rich assortment of patterns of relations exists in cross-cultural variations of gender responsibility and behavior. As a basic differential premise, the division of labor varies greatly according to cultural norms, for example, providing, building the home and nurturing the family. (Murdoch and Provost 1973) Following cultural traditions, whereas men hold a monopoly on physical violence against women in many societies (Harris 1993), in other cultures, women can behave equally aggressively and competitively and perform far more verbal abuse with their generally more developed linguistic skills.

Studies also show that in some cultures gender relations can be highly egalitarian. The gender division of labor does not necessarily mean gender inequality, but rather it depends on the value placed on the labor of gender within a culture (Sack 1979) Sack also states that: "Many nonclass societies have no problem in seeing differentiation without having to translate it into differential worth." In such societies the communication styles of men and women also reflect the egalitarian nature of the cultures. Finally, the concept of multiple genders exists successfully

in certain cultures. The *berdache*, for example, signifies a third gender in some cultures and is comprised of people who adopt the gender behavior and communication ways ascribed to members of the opposite sex without being considered abnormal or deviant to their cultures' traditions and practices (Martin & Voorhies 1975). Such cultures perceive gender identity as socially acquired – not genetically imbued. So, how did Western Civilization evolve into cultures of strident gender equality? Bonvillain (1998) and Harris (1993) speculate that it occurred through population growth; increased environmental danger – both natural and war; trade that fostered exchanged relations as commodities; transition from nomad to sedentary lifestyle; and technology. These factors have left their strong imprint on women's communication styles today.

Most international NGO women activists, especially at the onset of the modern era women's movement, come from cultures entrenched in the aforementioned gender constructions of inequality. Many of these women have assumed the role of *agents of change* through innovative initiatives and implementation of strategies that differ from the dominant Western Civilization construct prevalent in much of the world to varying degrees today. The communication characteristics of women from conservative and repressive cultures, and the western women's voices calling social change the last three decades become apparent in the analysis of the independent research, based on the survey questionnaire, the participatory observations and four expert interviews.

7. Culture and its Impact on Thought, Behavior and Production

Culture can also be defined as all modes of thought, behavior and production that are passed from generation to generation through multiple means of communication that encompass many aspects of social organization and behavior. In fact, all cultures, regardless how seemingly simple in structure, have developed a complex set of communication behaviors to conduct social interaction. Since the last thirty years, UN NGO women have been developing their own socially constructed organizational and behavioral practices reflecting a composite of female communication styles from their respective cultures and positions toward feminist perspectives.

In Robert Bierstedt's work ***The Social Order,*** he writes that culture can be interpreted through three dimensions: ideas or ways of thinking that organize human consciousness; norms or accepted ways of executing ideas; material culture or patterns of possessing and using the products of a culture. Ideas include theories that determine the operation of the physical world (scientific knowledge); values that develop a base of morality and justice (right and wrong); and beliefs that designate one's traditions and customs (folklore). Values, the socially shared ideas of right and wrong, are of particular importance to people, for they deeply penetrate one's emotions and attitudes as well as cognitive thought. When people are confronted with social change then social conflict can an often does occur. In particular, highly diverse societies, though they share a common culture, can experience conflict among their constituents, often the distinct result of expected behavior from one another that does not always transmit to expected social behavior and communication practices.

The United Nations as a society, for example, has common cultural goals and practices resulting from its chartered principles, yet its international membership, representing 191 nations, is comprised of the most diverse gathering of cultures of any world organization today. Even in even in this international body, designed to produce negotiated resolutions through general consensus for world peace, human rights and social development, *cultural relativism* heavily influences social interaction among the UN staff, governmental officials/diplomats, NGO representatives and civil society. Yet, the extended UN family members are expected to adhere to the "UN cultural communication style." This factor influences and shapes the interaction of NGO woman-to-woman communication strategies practiced at the United Nations.

Bierstedt describes norms, derived from abstract values, as concrete and specific in nature. They emerge from people's beliefs towards behaviors that are considered appropriate for their particular cultural society. Members of a culture often disagree, however, with many of the practiced norms at any given time. Accordingly, when values are questioned and challenged by societal members, the norms become subject to change, as well. For example, since women have started to become a significant professional force in the workplace in progressive and emerging

societies in recent decades, the values of childrearing and the role of motherhood are now in transition. Another example, UN NGO women have established their own code of conduct that they consider appropriate behavior that is expressed in their interpersonal relations to reflect and reinforce their values.

Clearly, as values continue to modify and change concerning the identity and roles of women in the world, so do the norms dictating the communication style, social interaction and behavior of women. Laws are classified as norms, as well, for they entail society's historically written codes of behavior. Many laws practiced today, are still based on ancient, fundamental principles from perennial sources from the Code of Hammurabi of the ancient Babylonian Civilization, to the Ten Commandments and the Codes of Confucius, etc. Ideologies, from a cultural viewpoint, are comprised of values and norms to create viable systems. The rise of Protestant ethics (values) and the spirit of private enterprise (norms), first realized in Europe, were key contributors to the ideology of capitalism. So, laws and fundamental principles have historically wielded a formidable impact, even control, on peoples' rights to communicate as well as their communication styles, especially in the public environment and especially on women.

Bierstedt identifies material culture as all things that a society produces from mundane pots and pans to highly complex technological systems that provide special services. Members of society who place high value on science and efficiency express such values through the production and acquisition of material objects. Universally, all cultures embrace a material culture that stems from the society's most important concepts/ideas and elicit strong nonverbal communication messages. For example, UN NGO women wear indigenous accessories in the form of crafted jewelry and accent pieces of clothing to acknowledge and honor one another's cultural heritage, often from cultures of indigenous peoples, as well as their own heritage. Today, technologies are viewed as the combination of material culture in conjunction with values and norms that direct their use in an advanced society. The Internet serves as one of the main

communication channels to connect UN NGO women from around the globe in preparation for and during international UN conferences.

Crossing cultural lines often causes lasting and far-reaching change, and a culture's communication style, of course, is first developed, then honed, based on the ideas, values and norms of that culture. Acculturation signifies the process by which the members of a civilization incorporate norms and values from other cultures into their own. It occurs through intercultural contact, historically from cultural imperialism of powerful civilizations and the endless migration of groups for varied reasons, e.g., persecution, expulsion, adventure, pursuance of a better life, etc. Rarely a one-way process, acculturation entails the responsibility of the newcomer to learn and adjust to the host culture. Members of the host culture can assist the process by accommodating characteristics and practices of the newcomers that are not harmful to the host culture. Culturally distinctive groups within a larger society, however, also learn to assimilate through the adoption of the language, values and norms of the host civilization and eventually achieve equal status. Yet, not all culturally distinctive groups choose to assimilate, thus forming subcultures within the dominant cultural structure, especially through the retention of their own cultural communication styles and social behavior. When such a subculture eventually challenges the accepted values and norms of the larger society and decides to lead an alternative lifestyle, the group has created a counterculture. Ultimately, confronting groups do seek accommodation that requires the acceptance and tolerance of other communities in a society. (Kornblum 2003)

Since the 1960s, activists of the modern era women's movement, particularly radical feminists, have rebelled against the female gender stereotype and the designated values, norms and beliefs that had been stereotypically attributed to women until that time. Since the 1970s, women activists, especially in the NGO community, have been creating and using select and articulate language and "different" communication styles as autonomous individuals and as a collaborative group in order to work more cohesively towards common goals. Today, the communication styles of UN NGO women still remain highly diverse due to the continuing

influx in numbers of women from various geographical regions and the influences of their cultural backgrounds on their communication approaches. This crucial diversity factor of the UN NGO women's culture simultaneously promotes and impedes progress for the advancement of women.

Having defined and illustrated the role of culture and its impact on gender roles, their communication styles and social interaction, the focus will now shift to the recent renaissance of the role of culture in connection with social development in current literature. Since this original research analyzes the relationship between culture and communication/social interaction among UN NGO women representatives from a position of concern for the successful advancement of women's human rights, fundamental freedoms and social development, the discussion will now link culture to communication and social development.

8. Culture, Communication and Social Development

This part will review select chapters of relevant topics from the book *Culture Matters,* edited by Lawrence C. Harrison (2000), that returns the focus to powerful forces of culture and their impact on social development. These topics were presented as a series of insightful reports that were shared at the international symposium on *Cultural Values and Human Progress*, held at the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies in April 1999. Increasingly, social scientists look to cultural factors, such as communication and social interaction, to explain modernization, antagonism among countries and cultures, political democratization, military strategy, behavior of ethnic groups and gender differences, to name just a few of the critical social issues confronting the 21st Century. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, former US Senator and former Ambassador to the UN, states (Harrison 2002):

"Culture, subjectively defined, is the values, attitudes, beliefs, orientations and underlying assumptions prevalent among people in a society; human progress is the movement toward economic development and material well-being, social-economic entity and political democracy."

 In a majority of the papers presented at the symposium, culture is perceived as an independent and explanatory variable. According to Harrison, however, cultural factors must also be viewed as a dependent variable, for they serve as facilitators or obstacles to human progress as well.

The main issues raised at the symposium include: the link between values and progress; the universality of values and western *cultural imperialism*; geography and culture; the relationship between culture and institutions; and cultural change. Harrison contends that today's world has become a far poorer, far more unjust, and far more authoritarian place to live than most people at the mid-20th Century mark could have imagined. The integration of value and attitudinal change into the advancement of social development has proven to be much more difficult politically and emotionally than assumed fifty years ago when the war on poverty was first launched following World War II. The symposium concludes that a research agenda comprised of six basic elements must be implemented by social scientists to forward the role of culture and the advancement of social development and thereby the improvement of women's human rights. The six proposed elements for further cultural research include:

- A value/attitude typology to identify the values and attitudes that promote progress and establish values/attitudes that influence evolution of democratic political institutions, economic development and social justice.

- The relationship between culture and development to understand the forces that can precipitate development; to trace the impact of traditional values/attitudes when development occurs; to address the question whether democratic institutions, economic development and social justice can be established and sustained in cultural values that do not change significantly.

- Relationships among values/attitudes, policies and institutions to assess the extent policies and institutions reflect values/attitudes; to understand what could happen when policies and values are not compatible; and to establish the degree to which policies and institutions can change values and attitudes.

- Cultural transmission to gain an understanding of the chief factors of value/attitude transmission, e.g., child rearing, schools, religious institutes, the media, peers, the workplace, etc.

- Value/attitude measurement to expand the reach of the international system to measure change by identifying existing instruments for measuring values/attitudes and tailoring them to support change.

- Assessing cultural change initiatives already under way. (Harrison 2000)

The symposium was divided into seven topical areas: culture and economic development; culture and political development; the anthropological debate; *culture and gender*; culture and American minorities; the Asian crisis; and *promoting change*. The following summary will highlight the key findings presented on *culture and gender* and *promoting change*, for they directly address the issues of this research study.

Crossette of the *New York Times* newspaper examines *Culture, Gender and Human Rights* premised on the rekindled interest and reexamination of one's cultural heritage in North America (the United States and Canada) at present and the new age of cultural awareness in Europe as well as elsewhere in the world. Crossette firmly contends that renewed cultural identity has spawned destructive ethnicity in many circumstances, fueled by economic difficulties and political uncertainty. Concurrently, nearly all countries and officially recognized cultural regions of the world are experiencing the effects of significant cultural change, especially through the assertion of women's rights and their long-term impact on traditional social practices and communication styles. Intellectual disputes challenging culture vs. human rights have become more harsh and frequent in recent years, particularly concerning social issues of international dimension. Today, the United Nations and major international human rights organizations provide a major platform for the voices of UN NGO women. The women have established a solid reputation as a direct result of their legal and investigative endeavors to bring long-dormant international policies that support women's development to the center of the public

forum. Through effective lobbying, many women's issues have become part of UN policies and governmental legislation, for women as *agents of change* are slowly generating and adapting collaborative and effective communication approaches and strategies that draw attention to their issues. (Harrison/Crossette 2000)

Crossette emphasizes that, at the Fourth UN World Women's Conference in Beijing (1995), impassioned speeches and papers were presented by both official governmental delegates and NGO women representatives from all cultural regions of the world. This world-altering event marked the first time that regional participants focused on their specific goals to create jointly an agenda for women's issues. Their powerful presentation skills "put the modern era women's movement on the global map," and their efforts resulted in the ***Platform for Action*** outcome document. She further states that they stressed women's rights and social development to acquire, for example, economic and political power; to assume control of their own sexual and reproductive lives, and to establish today's universally acknowledged slogan: *Women's Rights are Human Rights*. Women came to realize that their prevailing cultures and dictated forms of communication from institutions are formidable, often negative, forces that govern and regulate their daily lives. Crossette explains that cultural roles can quickly shift with governmental policy change that is mostly determined by the governance of men throughout the world. Clearly, the complexity and significance of women's lives within the context of culture, that is rapidly emerging, illuminates the reality that to ignore the invaluable role of their women and their socially interactive contributions means to risk the economic and social well being of any cultural society.

In the closing essay of the aforementioned book ***Culture Matters,*** Harrison expounds upon another pertinent issue to the development of this research *Promoting Progressive Cultural Change*, a topic essential to the advancement of women in the 21st Century. He identifies ten characteristics as key differentials of a progressive vs. static society and the cultural influences that dictate the social development in a society:

- **Time Orientation**: progressive cultures emphasize the future; static cultures stress the present or past

- **Work**: essential to the good life in progressive cultures, but a burden in static cultures

- **Frugality**: the mother of investment and financial security in progressive cultures, but a threat to the egalitarian status quo of static cultures

- **Education**: key to advancement in progressive cultures, but of marginal importance (except for the elite) in static cultures

- **Merit**: central to advancement in progressive cultures while connections and family count in static cultures

- **Community**: the radius of identification and trust beyond the family in progressive cultures while the family circumvents community infrastructure in static cultures

- **Ethical Codes**: more rigid in progressive cultures

- **Justice and Fair Play**: universal codes in progressive cultures compared to whom one knows/how much one pays in static cultures

- **Authority**: more dispersed and horizontal in progressive cultures compared to its concentration in vertically static cultures

- **Secularism**: more influential than religious institutes in progressive cultures compared to substantive religious influence in static cultures.

Clearly, these factors that describe key characteristics of progressive and static cultures represent generalizations. In reality, cultural variation is based on a spectrum, not a black and white ideology. Harrison simply argues that a complex interaction of cause and effect between culture and progress indeed exists, and that the extent of progressive or static behavior in a culture directly influences the identity of women as the female gender, and consequently the cultural expectations towards communication styles and social interaction. These ten characteristics also apply to UN NGO women's culture to which individual women have contributed their own cultural and gender traits to the process.

9. Culture, Gender Communication and Social Development: NGO Viewpoints

In the following pages, the connection among women, culture, communication styles and social development will be addressed through the cultural prisms of international NGO women from various cultures who specialize in areas of gender studies and social development. The diverse viewpoints are excerpts from a series of articles by NGO women that have been compiled in ***Women and Culture***, an Oxfam *Focus on Gender and Development* publication edited by Caroline Sweetman. She opens the dialogue with a general consensus perspective derived from NGO women based on the premise that culture determines power relations within society; establishes men's and women's access to economic and political control; and determines a woman's position in the family, community, and society-at-large. Cultural biases influence every element of human existence and shape the views and actions of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions and nations. Developmental interventions simply cannot ignore traditional, social or customary practices that often obstruct human rights, fundamental freedoms and the social development of women. Furthermore, the secondary status of women still stands as one of the universal, i.e., pan-cultural truths, based on the principles of biology as the rationale behind women's subordination to men. In fact, gender ideology is enshrouded in beliefs and social interaction (communication) steeped in customs and traditions which steer men's and women's lives and secure conformity to the norms of society.

A general position of NGO women states that the idealized woman has been created and molded based on the needs and desires of dominant and powerful patriarchal societies. Since recorded history, most societies have felt compelled to enforce severely restrictive behaviors to harness female gender identity such as women's extreme chastity, public modesty and sexual continence. Most cultures define the role of women as primarily care givers to family/children and promoters of societal values. Women are also perceived as the ultimate guardians and teachers of culture to their offspring. In other words, women are expected to further the repressive cultural ways towards their own gender to the next generation of males and females. If women, especially from static/traditional cultures, defy gender assigned norms and practices that

may threaten the stability of a culturally patriarchal society, then they are frequently punished through violence and abuse for assuming unacceptably independent behavior and championing freedom of expression. In fact, this punitive reality towards women is rising, presently, and is pervasive on all levels of socio-economic strata throughout developed and developing societies. This general attitude of the NGO women's world adheres to the Western Civilization disposition towards women and fundamental gender inequality principles, though other paradigms do exist as discussed above.

Sweetman suggests that the media and the arts can and still do perpetuate this pervasive discrimination against women in most cultures today. Women must realize that these expressive and far-reaching resources of information and imagery can challenge the present *status quo* of gender stereotyping. She believes that respect and value of one's cultural heritage stem from the history of a society that is committed to justice and fairness for all its members, so women's views and social behavior can no longer be marginalized. She concludes, nevertheless, that change, to varying degrees and at variable paces, is occurring within the realms of cultural restrictions of most societies around the world. Yet, she cautions against use of cultural sensitivity in all instances if social development and the improvement of women's lives stand to progress in the 21st Century. (Sweetman 1996)

According to another article published in ***Women and Culture*** by spokeswomen from the southern hemisphere, lawyer Seble Dawit and poet Abena Busia (1996) agree that gender relations, developmental practice and culture are intertwined, and that the combination influences social transformation and allocation of resources. How culture and gender roles are viewed can entrench gender inequality still further in a society, or, by contrast, culture can demonstrate that such inequalities are to be tackled and eliminated from the cultural practices of their society. Gender relations rank among the most intimate aspects of cultural traditions and, at best, are undergoing very gradual change within developing societies. The UN NGO women initially join the modern era women's movement steeped in their most intimate cultural traditions

that add to the complexities of the social interaction and understanding of each other's messages and meanings to achieve mutual human rights and social development goals for women.

Dawit and Busia underscore the need for progressive individuals and organizations to consider gender sensitivity and its impact on social issues in traditional/static societies as they seek cultural change. Yet, concurrently, they emphasize that unchallenged deference towards cultural practices can also reinforce the thick shield of *cultural relativism* as legitimate reasons to hinder women's basic needs, desires and advancement through social development. Furthermore, unconditional acceptance of *cultural relativism* and traditional roles of social interaction through prescribed communication styles infers that no universal concepts of human rights and fundamental freedoms exist in the quest to foster an improved worldwide lifestyle for women.

They continue saying that gender discrimination is viewed as a global problem by all social scientists and social workers today. Yet, they are concerned that the north/south dialogue within the international NGO community adheres to the normative thinking of the white liberal northerner who often defines gender repression as the primary cause for social struggle. This viewpoint, promoted globally, is grounded in western ideology that greatly influences the perception of gender issues. It can increase tension when outsiders attempt to dictate to people, using a "culturally foreign language," the need to change their cultural traditions toward the role of women in their society by applying "outside" problem/resolution techniques. Representatives of western organizations and NGO groups must examine and consider the functions and purposes of cultural and linguistic practices of other societies, for culture can only be properly understood in its own political, economic and social context. In this respect, the norms of a culture are described as the rights and responsibilities of individuals towards each other, collectively as well as individually. Culture's *raison d'etre*, in this context, provides for its survival and continuation through the rules of social behavior. Northern cultures tend to encourage individualism in social interaction whereas southern cultures are mostly structured on communal lines. Gender identity, as a social construction, reflects the needs and perceptions of each society. In the UN NGO women's world the concern of white liberal primacy determining

the direction of the women's movement remains strong, even at UN Headquarters New York, and the UN women's divisions are working to integrate the perspectives of all cultural regions of the world into the global dialogue on women's issues.

Dawit and Busia also reinforce the notion that culture, gender and social interaction are interdependent and, in nearly all civilizations, women serve as the guardians of culture. Even when women ardently disagree with the values, norms and behaviors of their own culture, they usually uphold them although not always by personal choice, but rather collective pressure. To change the way people relate to culture and practice their communication styles means to change the way people are culturalized to think and act. For traditional societies, this concept sounds revolutionary. Therefore, differences, not similarities, need to be examined in order to design effective programs for social change. To alter the often-rigid course of culture is by definition a long-term process that must target attitudinal change about gender issues and social development, including the cultural positions towards the status of women among men and boys, and women and girls.

Consequently, collaborative social interaction across cultural borders of NGO women from progressive vs. traditional societies, must be fostered to ensure that the work on women's issues is not marginalized unnecessarily through the negative agendas of *cultural relativism*. To this end, indigenous knowledge and understanding of cultures and their social practices must be first acquired then implemented to create *awareness, advocacy and action* to develop appropriate programs spawned by the communities themselves. This essay reveals the multiple levels of the impact of culture on communication and NGO women, not only at the policy making/action producing levels at UN conferences but also in the implementation of UN policy resolutions and programs that need to be sensitized to *cultural relativism* as well.

Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay (1996), from India, writes about the dilemmas that exist in the spheres of gender and culture and their position in developmental theory and practice, particularly in regard to processes of social transformation. Although she is a cultural insider who focuses on gender equity for her "own culture," many local communities in her own society

have claimed that she threatens their local and societal Indian culture, violates their traditions and, worst of all, attempts to westernize their society. Her hands-on efforts and accumulated experience, with too often negative responses from local communities, reinforce the level of intimacy and sensitivity that exists in concurrence with cultural values and practices of a long-established and male-dominated society. To even question age-old practices can mean to challenge the essence of such a culture's core ideology and social infrastructural workings.

Moreover, Mukhopadhyay also recognizes how adamantly and pervasively traditional societies hold and revere key notions in regard to gender roles including the perception that gender relations are equated to the most intimate elements of society, and such cultural traditions are considered immutable and unchanging. She contends that rigidity in culture, through the reinforcement of the imbalance of power between men and women, severely constrains the creation of an environment for equitable gender relations. She notes that cultures and social dynamics do not static or immutable but rather are uneven in the ways of local communities of her Indian society. To the contrary, cultures are constantly challenged in various, sometimes extraordinarily subtle ways, for culture is perpetually undergoing an evolutionary process that impacts ideology, meaning, values, identities, symbols, ideas, knowledge, language, communication ways, etc. Finally, she claims that cultural sensitivity, i.e., respect for given norms of a culture, sparks flames about the essence of culture itself. Social scientists and practitioners, in the NGO community, readily assert that different aspects of culturally based, social constructs are constantly challenged amidst social interactions and cultural relations. It is, therefore, necessary to identify the social constructs of the local community and work within the framework of such dynamics to create positive change in social interaction and thereby social development for women. This essay shares the realities of the most populous cultures in the world and the formidable power struggle between the genders. Indian NGO women are highly visible and hold senior positions in the UN women's community, and their communication style, verbal and assertive, influences the tone of UN women's conferences.

In another revealing article, gender specialist Colleta Chitsike (1996) describes a Sub-Saharan/Zimbabwean perspective of gender, culture and multiculturalism vs. gender injustice, in the context of the role of the NGO community. She introduces the topic with a startling example: women who challenge gender inequality in mainstream African culture are considered prostitutes and are accused of being the failure in their marriage and thereby become outcasts of their communities. Consequently, many women, even educated ones, still choose to ignore gender injustice and mute their voices. Demeaning attitudes toward women, considering them as inferior human beings, are reinforced directly and indirectly in Sub-Saharan culture. For example, African men often refuse to marry educated women, who are condemned on the premise that they have lost their knowledge of the traditional practices and are admonished for purportedly neither teaching nor adhering to the norms of the local culture. In fact, educated women are demonized as confused and/or psychologically disturbed. Furthermore, local religious leaders cruelly use biblical passages to prevent women from deviating from the repressive norms imposed upon them by religious, cultural and social rules of acceptable female interaction.

Chitsike explains how the very concept of gender makes African women aware of their acute problems in their male-dominated societies. Even today, female gender stereotyping conjures up a strong negative self-image of women as weaker and worthless compared to their male counterparts; moreover, the polarized gender images of both sexes reinforce unequal power relations caused by race, class, tribe and culture. This mentality leads to the subordination and oppression of women by other women, often triggered by petty jealousies and rank in society that create situations of extreme competition and perilous power struggles rather than cooperation and collaboration for the good of the community and women as individuals. Chitsike explains how the oppression of women is maintained through highly controlled social systems, and how the subordination of women is deeply rooted in customs and beliefs that dictate their social interaction.

Cultural change must be approached as a long-term goal that requires sensitive, persuasive, nonthreatening and carefully planned initiatives. In this social context, the framework

for NGO social development of most developing African nations today incorporates a multicultural paradigm, i.e., the adjustment to a particular culture without sacrificing one's own beliefs. This model allows for the dignity of people being helped to remain intact, for the multicultural perspective recognizes the differences in every community through the exploration of the reasons underlying cultural practices. Social development is most successfully founded on positive relations, not solutions to situations. Sometimes, the rules and regulations of a social development program need to be viewed flexibly in order to create a working rapport among people without compromising principles. To achieve such a socially sensitive task, gender activists must be equipped with community knowledge of the language, customs and traditions and be able to discern negative beliefs and behaviors from positive beliefs and behaviors within the culture. At the heart of successful cultural change through multicultural social intervention, the elementary principle of *trust* must be established among the interactants.

Chitsike stresses the urgency to establish positive images of women that must be reinforced by all major institutions of the society, especially the media, government, private training institutes, and community development initiatives and programs. She concludes that to challenge culture, one runs the risk of causing trauma among the members of the community; therefore, to succeed at social change, a broad, multi-faceted, multi-cultural approach must be developed and implemented. Sub-Saharan African UN NGO women are outspoken, articulate and speak with strong emotional appeal at the UN conferences and serve as strong role models for the women and girls back home.

Finally, Adriana Santa Cruz (1996) presents *Fempress* as a communication strategy for women in the form of a Latin American media network that provides a monthly Latin American magazine, a press service on women's issues and a radio program service covering Latin America. This regional approach towards gender, communication and social development recognizes that the media is the most powerful resource to challenge culturally rooted social injustice, and *Fempress* provides women with a unique opportunity to overturn the legendary culture of *machismo* in Latin America. Founded in 1981, *Fempress* requested international

assistance and, through the 1980s, northern countries, especially nonprofit organizations and NGOs, provided considerable assistance to this southern women's movement then in its infancy. In the early stages, Latin American women's groups competed with one another, as they were highly dispersed throughout the continent and had virtually no access to the media. *Fempress* was spawned to empower women's organizations engaged in the daunting undertaking of cultural change aimed at the achievement of gender equality. Launched from a little office in Mexico City, today *Fempress* is located in Santiago, Chile and has permanent correspondents reporting from thirteen Latin American and Caribbean countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela. These correspondents consider themselves communicators and feminist activists, as they strive for gender equality in their own countries and the Latin American and Caribbean cultural region as defined by the United Nations. Today, *Fempress* thrives as an alternative media channel to empower women by raising awareness and stimulating processes for cultural change. It links women's groups and the media to promote the goals and objectives of organizations for the advancement of women in the region.

    Fempress initially identified radio and television programming, as the ideal communication resources to reach and inform women about human rights and pressing social issues for the Latin American/Caribbean agenda. After a successful decade, however, *Fempress* faces mounting challenges as funding experiences a financial crisis. NGO projects, such as *Fempress* itself, must find new monetary resources to sustain the momentum for women to achieve gender equity in Latin America and the Caribbean. Cruz concludes that national and international media networks possess the greatest opportunity to raise awareness of women's struggles; to communicate valid ideas on women's issues; to inspire governments; and to strengthen civil society. It is, therefore, imperative that these media resources remain open and accessible for the pursuit of women's rights and social development in the region. An important area of the UN women's agenda targets the potential power of the media to deliver strong messages on gender inequality, human rights and social development. This essay represents the

usefulness of the media as a far-reaching communication channel for another entire cultural continent in the southern hemisphere. Having offered multi-faceted aspects of the cultural impact on women's communication styles and social interaction towards the advancement of women, the discussion will now turn to the three key subject areas that created the academic foundation and specific focus of the independent research of this study.

10. Social Interaction and Symbolic Interactionism: A Sociological Theory

Sociological research is dualistic in representing objective and subjective dimensions, and research cannot be completely unbiased or value free. Still, research needs to collect the facts and empirically verify them to promote scientific standards. This independent research is based on gender, cultural, and femininist perspectives as well as sound sociological theory and methodology of social interaction and symbolic interactionism presented here. Symbolic interactionism as a sociological theory, and in conjunction with its proven research methodologies, is a principal element to the undertaking of this study. The combination of these perspectives and theory provide the foundation for the independent research strategies, analysis of the findings, and conclusions drawn.

A sociological theory is a researched and developed concept that has been established to determine an element of uniqueness about humans as it pertains to a basic problem about society and the social world. Heralded for most of the 20th Century and beyond, as an important and enduring sociological school of thought and approach to research methodology, symbolic interactionism presents an open-theory viewpoint towards communication and social interaction. It stands relevant to this research, for it incorporates a diffuse collection of interacting elements that help determine communication styles within a society. Its embryonic roots are found in the writings of the pragmatic philosophers Charles Cooley, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead; however, in 1937 sociologist Herbert Blumer (1900-1987), a student protégé of Mead, expanded his early informal concepts and ideas into a systematic sociological theory/perspective of social

interaction. Blumer eventually coined his work *symbolic interactionism* which he simply defines as "the humanizing effect of communication."

Symbolic interactionists investigate the patterns of interaction between/among people based on the premise that actors, themselves, produce the ways of social exchange. Among symbolic interactionists, however, differences of opinion on the formation of interactive patterns do persist and range from the role/behavior of an individualist (Blumer's primary position) to the role/behavior of a collectivist (Goffman's primary position). Regardless of one's specific point of connection on the spectrum of individualism vs. collectivism, the essence of symbolic interactionism is confirmed, nevertheless, through people's behavior/performances as communicators and interpreters of each other's actions. The UN NGO women come from cultures that range from societies that are strongly individualistic to highly collective in nature, which complicates the understanding of messages derived from the social interaction. According to Blumer, Rather than the classical "Stimuli > Response" behavioral phenomenon, the social interaction formula of behavior now entails: "Stimuli > Interpretation > Response."

Blumer's last revised-edition of ***Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*** (1986) is a composite of his earlier and extensive writings and readdresses his two dominant areas of decades of study: symbolic interactionism and methodological problems, topics he considers interconnected. Both of these elementary aspects of his work are incorporated into the independent research presented in Section Four. Blumer also defines *symbolic interactionism* as simply "a distinctive approach to the study of human group life and human conduct." He believes that the nature of symbolic interactionism is found in the meaning of objects (symbols) that are central to life in their own right. Meaning arises from a process of interaction between people, and an individual's use of meaning in action involves an interpretative process. In conjunction with the nature of symbolic interactionism, he explains that the meaning of symbols for an actor occurs through an internalized social process of communication with oneself. The self-communication process creates interpretation through a formative process of the construction of meaning. The communication styles of UN NGO women permeate with highly

defined verbal and nonverbal symbols, and understanding their meaning determines the level of successful interaction to achieve common objectives.

Symbolic interactionism also encompasses groups, objects, individuals (the actors) and their actions, all of whom/which help to form human society and conduct. In group life, people approach action from either an individual or collective perspective, representing oneself or others. In this regard, culture is a derivative concept based on what people do whereby social structure emerges as the dominant feature. At international UN women's conferences, for example, NGO women representatives have developed a culture and social protocol of their own, representing both individual and collective worldviews based on their own distinctive cultural backgrounds.

Blumer then writes about the nature of social interaction, i.e., communication. He asserts that most sociologists define schemes to describe the inherent behavior of people living their lives, and that, typically, such structural schemes include: status, culture, values, roles, social systems, etc. In fact, neither sociologists nor psychologists have focused, for the most part, on the interaction process itself as a separate entity of social interaction. Similar in thinking to most 20th Century sociologists, psychologists also maintain that psychological processes determine group behavior, and social interaction is viewed only as the means to that particular end.

In contrast, Blumer argues that social interaction stems from the interconnectedness between actors, not necessarily from sociological or psychological factors, and, therefore, the social interaction component in group behavior becomes the significant process in its own right. A duel process, social interaction can be called a series of indicators towards oneself and others to determine how to enact and interpret messages. For the process to be communicatively effective, both parties need to partake in the interaction through careful consideration of the other's role and through the use of accurate indicators for society-at-large and groups of people by association, accordingly. This process can be very difficult when the members of the group are so culturally diverse as among the UN NGO women, in spite of their common goals.

Moreover, Blumer explains how Mead categorizes this aspect of social interaction to include two fundamental forms: conversational gestures and use of significant symbols. For Mead, a nonsymbolic act is equated to a direct response to action while a symbolic act involves interpretation, then action. He states that a more characteristic mode of interaction is apparent at the symbolic level, and that ultimately, a person's response is organized through the meaning given to symbols. Mead concludes that a group itself creates a formative process for expression – not an environment to which a group responds. At the UN women's conferences, the main mode of communication is conversational, and the individual and collective interpretations of the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols help determine the results of general consensus on policy making and action strategies.

In this connection, Blumer then discusses the nature of objects and symbolic interactionism and defines an object as anything that can be indicated as a physical, social or abstract entity. The nature of the object refers to the meaning that it has been assigned by the person for whom it is an object, so meanings fundamentally arise in regard to how an object is defined by others with whom one interacts. Gradually, a process of mutual indications of common objects emerges to create social interaction through definition and interpretation. Therefore, he claims that a group engages at a level of symbolic interactionism in which the participants form, sustain and transform objects of their worlds as they formulate meaning for them. This dynamic process, in constant change, also creates, affirms, transforms and/or sidelines objects and their meanings.

Next, Blumer describes a human being as an acting organism who possesses a *self* that can be the object of its own action. *Self* identity also emerges from social interaction processes (communication) where others define a person to oneself as well. He first stresses the importance to see oneself through the eyes of others: individuals equal a staged play; organized groups equal a staged game; communities equal a generalized audience. He contends that the *self* is principally formed through role taking. The s*elf* also enables a person to interact with oneself as a social form of intrapersonal communication, addressing and responding to oneself by making

indications to oneself. To this end, the *self* socially interacts, establishes meaning and applies meaning to determine its action based on interpretation to determine a line of action.

Then, Blumer reveals the nature of human action based on the premise that individuals confront a world that they must interpret in which to act (communicate) instead of an environment to which one only responds. He notes that human conduct is formed and guided by a process of assessments, indications and interpretations, and joint actions become the domain of sociological concern of individuals weaving their lines of interaction together through an interpretative process of individuals who make indications to each other. To succeed at UN women's conferences, the goal of its participants is to create joint actions to pursue agreed upon goals for the advancement of women, and interpreting one another's symbols correctly is core to the process.

He connects the inter-linkage of action and group life by fitting the lines of actions of individuals to a group. The lines of action, synonymous with joint action, determine the character of an action, more than any individual contribution, and they undergo a process of formation. Social interactions are not always pre-established, and a newly joint action phenomenon often occurs. In this case, each repeated joint action is formed to allow participants a chance to build their lines of social interaction and to incorporate them through an interpretative process. Again, the inter-linkage of action of UN NGO women's group action is only as effective as its individual participants are capable of fitting into the lines of actions that transform into an official general consensus policy and action to be rendered. He concludes that an extended and committed connection to social interaction (communication) must exist at heightened, if challenging, levels when people need to function interdependently to achieve important joint actions for successful outcomes. Properly interpreted social interaction is key among the culturally diverse women working interdependently as the UN NGO women community seeking to forge global change. (Blumer 1986)

Sociologist Erving Griffin, a protégé and critic of Blumer's work, expands the definition of *social interactionism* and offers a further analysis on select areas of Blumer's writings. Griffin

notes that symbolic interactionism is structured on three principles: meaning, language, and thought, and that it draws conclusions about the formation of *self* and socialization in a larger community based on these principles. First, in the context of symbolic interactionism, meaning is defined as the construction of social reality. Humans act toward one another based on the meanings, i.e., the subjective perceptions, they assign to symbols. Once a person determines a situation to be authentic then its consequences become equally genuine to that person.

Next, he mentions how Blumer explains that language refers to the source of meaning whereby meaning is derived from the social interaction people experience with one another. Furthermore, meaning is not inherent in objects, so it needs to be negotiated through the use of verbal and nonverbal language. Humans possess the capability to provide linguistic identity through names (symbols), and, through conversation with one another. People ascribe meaning to words that enable them to be engaged in discourse. Symbolic naming, then, becomes the basis of society to express its knowledge and interpretation of messages. In brief, a symbol represents a stimulus that has acquired a meaning and a value for people.

It suggests that the individual thought process explicitly involves the process of assuming the role of the other person when one is engaged in social interaction. An individual's interpretation of symbols is limited to one's personal thought process. Thinking, in this regard, is described as an inner conversation, caused by a reflective need to talk to oneself in order to discern meaning expressed by another and determined by oneself. One's thought process is also first developed in early childhood and influenced by the context of one's culture. The thinking processes of the intercultural UN NGO women's community are broad in scope and impact their interpretation of symbols transmitted by one another. Based on this extended definition of symbolic interactionism, UN NGO women have much to gain through the application of Blumer's "Stimuli > Interpretation > Response" of the communication process in contrast to the more commonly understood formula of social interaction derived from the communication dynamics of "Stimuli > Response." The achievement of successful social interaction among UN

NGO women requires the constant incorporation of the symbolic interactionism principles that reinforce the need for interpretation of an action (a message) before exhibiting a reaction.

Derived from these three established principles of symbolic interactionism, i.e., meaning, language and thought, Griffin (2000) describes Blumer's all-important concept of *self* as one's reflection in a looking glass, i.e., *self* is defined through the inner-connection of meaning, language and thought as Goffman states. *Self* cannot be found through introspection alone, but rather through assuming the role of others as well. This mental image called the *looking-glass self* is mostly *self-constructed*. *Self* is also determined through the function of language, and one needs to be a member of a community before consciousness can be awakened. In this context, UN NGO women representatives do constitute a community whereby their consciousness of the human rights and social development and their role in the process are awakened. *Self* represents an ongoing process combining the "I" and "ME" in the context of a group. The "I" indicates all that is unpredictable and unorganized about the *self*, while the "ME" assumes the image of *self* portrayed through the looking glass of other people's reactions toward self within a community.

The mental image a person creates of *self* is very much constructed by communal expectations and responses in order to form a depiction of the generalized other, or "ME," which shapes how one thinks and interacts within the community. Consequently, the "ME" is formed through continual symbolic interactionism. Griffin summarizes key characteristics of symbolic interactionism as follows:

- Human beings have a *self* and can be the objects of their own actions.
- Others construct the self through communication and social interaction.
- Symbols are an integral part of communication and social interaction.
- Social context matters; action is always socially situated; and group action occurs by aligning individual actions.
- Communication and social interaction are flexible and adjustable social processes.

(Griffin 2000)

A clear concept of *self* and community, i.e., the NGO women's world in the context of the United Nations, is essential for the women representatives to learn to convey their messages effectively to attain mutual goals.

According to C.D. Harris, who wrote about *Symbolic Interactionism for the Society for More Creative Speech*, Blumer earns the high regard attributed to him for his exemplary contribution to social theory and methodology that spans six decades of the 20th Century. Harris lauds Blumer for his development and expansion of the significance of meaning to the individual who is engaged in social interaction. He also praises him for establishing the premise of direct empirical observations by participatory observers as credible research methodology to define and analyze social interaction. Blumer's direct empirical observation approach is the key research methodology and has been applied to examine the impact of culture on communication styles among NGO women at UN conferences/sessions.

Harris notes that philosophy is often utilized as a cornerstone to the understanding of an academic discipline, and Blumer, being no exception, is influenced by John Dewey's belief that humans are best understood in relation to their environment. Dewey expounds upon the dynamic interaction between humans and the natural world and the need for people to adjust to their environment. Expanding upon Dewey's worldview perspective, Mead, Blumer's mentor, labels Dewey's approach *social behaviorism*, and he concentrates on the conscious mind and self-regulation of an individual's action as a social actor. In fact, Blumer's *self* concept of "I" and "ME" stems from Mead's sociological view of social behaviorism. Although both Mead and Blumer believe in human nature as part of evolution, Blumer argues that the development of language and symbolic communication frees human social interaction. Harris comments on the premises of Blumer's symbolic interactionism accordingly:

- Humans act in accordance to the meaning objects have for them.
- Meanings are derived from social interaction (communication) among individuals.

Blumer believes that little attention has been accorded his first premise: "*Humans act in accordance to the meaning objects have for them,*" and, that at best, this concept has been minimized by his contemporaries. They suggest that meaning serves as a mere transmission link that holds little credence in contrast to other factors of social interaction. Blumer, however, claims that meaning itself holds the central role in human behavior, though it has been considered an incidental factor by psychologists and sociologists throughout much of the 20th Century. The meaning of objects, both tangible and intangible, are critically important to the UN NGO women's community and sense of common understanding and unity, that thereby supports Blumer's first premise

In conjunction with the second premise, *"Meanings are derived from the interaction of the individual with others,"* Blumer identifies two methods that determine the derivation of meaning: first, meaning is given to an object, and no process is involved to form an understanding of it, but rather one needs only to recognize it. Secondly, meaning is derived from a person's perception in relation to an individual's cognitive mind set and psychological organization. A cumulative perception connotes all the sensory and attitudinal data that a person attributes to formulate meaning. The UN NGO women universally understand certain symbols and slogans unique to the international women's movement community such as the UN women's world slogan towards social development that calls for *Awareness Advocacy Action* without having to analyze further the meaning.

In accordance with the third premise, *"An interpretive process is used each time based on the elements of the environment,"* Blumer distinguishes his thinking in that he emphasizes the notions of interpretation and context as the key factors to the formation of meaning of a message. He believes that meaning results from a two-step process: first, a person perceives a meaning; then, the person selects, checks, regroups and transforms meaning in connection with the situation. In other words, interpretation proves pivotal as the elementary process of formulation, reconsideration and revision of meaning. This premise is practiced to varying degrees of success at UN NGO women's meetings as they present points and positions, listen and question one

another's perspectives, revise and meld individual positions into a collective document that then receives general consensus.

Harris then explains that the application of these three premises enables Blumer to develop further his broad-based ideas that he refers to as root images. Drawing from Blumer's hallmark work, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method,* Harris summarizes the three premises that help define the concepts of interactionist theory and its connection to woman-to-woman communication as it reads below:

- *"**Human groups or societies** are composed of human beings engaged in all the varied actions that they perform as they encounter one another and the many situations that confront them. Action occurs individually, collectively, on behalf of others, or as the representative of another person or group. Throughout, the action remains the property of the individual in the context of the situation. That human society is comprised foremost of people engaging in action is essential to symbolic interactionism.

- **Social interaction** means group life. It consists of interaction between/among members of a group/society and the interactions between people signify the process whereby the formation of meanings underlies human behavior. Therefore, actions of others become paramount to the decision-making process of the individual, reinforcing the concept that the interaction denotes the most determinant factor of individual behavior.

- **Objects** possess their own empirical reality removed from the social interaction process; however, their meaning and relationship regarding human behavior are derived from interaction with others."

Harris further says that Blumer classifies objects into physical objects, social objects and abstract objects and holds that a person's environment is perceived through the meaning that the individual connects to the objects. Consequently, two persons, who co-exist in a fundamentally similar physical environment, can and do experience their "real" environments differently. (Harris 2001)

Successful social interaction among NGO women at UN conferences/sessions is at the very heart of their ability to find a general consensus to establish policies, write outcome documents, and determine social development actions for the advancement of women. Understanding the concepts and premises of Symbolic Interactionism was instrumental to the implementation of the main methodological strategies applied to the independent research based on the methodological principles described next.

11. Symbolic Interactionism: A Methodological Research Approach

Blumer refers to symbolic interactionism as a sociological perspective in empirical social terminology and considers it neither a sociological theory nor a philosophical doctrine. He stresses that the empirical world exists for observation, study, and analysis, and that the central point of concern involves the testing group. He claims that *realism*, in regard to empirical science, exists only in the empirical world, and idealism and its reality is revealed through human experience and one's perception of "seeing" the world as cast in the form of human imagery. To indicate anything at all, people must view it from their perception. In contrast, the empirical world can provide feedback although it is subjectively impacted by opinion and feeling. Empirical research seeks to develop images and concepts that challenge, question and/or accommodate a particular empirical world under study, i.e., the reality of the empirical world in the here and now. To define empirical science in accordance with symbolic interactionism entails the creation of images of *idealism* and the testing of such images through critical scrutiny. UN NGO women attending international and annual UN CSW sessions in New York serve as my main testing group for the empirical research observation, study and analysis of the premise that claims culture impacts UN NGO woman-to-woman communication styles in spite of their common goals to advance women's causes. The independent study encompasses both research through the prisms of *realism* applied to the quantitative questionnaire and the prisms of *idealism* applied to the participatory observations and interviews.

Next, Blumer describes methodology as the principles that underlie and guide the full process of studying the unyielding character of the empirical world. For him, methodology must include the entire scientific quest, not merely a selected portion; therefore, each part of the quest needs to fit the *obdurate character*, which is *culture* in this independent study, while the empirical world provides the ultimate and decisive answer to the testing. His research methodology, both quantitative and qualitative in nature, first involves the study of variables to establish mathematical and statistical relationships to research design, and the questionnaire serves this purpose. Yet, he realizes that, alone, this approach does not offer enough breadth to analyze the conduct of a society in an original study through just the discernment of dependent variables by asking questions of the empirical world and then converting the questions into problem/solution analysis. The collected data requires constant examination, revision, rejection, and reexamination of a problem. In his methodological approach, the data results help to determine connections and relations to interpret the findings without the interference of a rigid sociological or psychological theory, concept and/or perspective.

He contends that these methods serve as instruments to identify and analyze the obdurate world. His methodological strategies strive to determine if problems are genuine and to consider the premises, problems, data, relations, interpretations and concepts with the willingness to revisit them, since studies are undertaken based on fundamental hypotheses and specific operational procedures. The quantitative research of this study is revisited through the participatory observations and interviews. Blumer acknowledges that in today's classical view of the empirical world, one usually starts with a hypothesis developed from a theory or perspective. Then assertions are made when the hypothesis genuinely represents the theory from which it is extracted and tested. Furthermore, the operational procedure must cover the empirical world through its direct examination. Direct examination of a targeted group of an empirical social world requires interlaced activities, best approached when both quantitative and qualitative studies are undertaken to examine and reexamine the merit of the hypothesis. This research, premised on direct examination, combines both methodologies, without the interference of a

sociological theory/perspective to prove that UN NGO woman-to-woman communication styles in spite of their common goals to advance women's causes, are indeed determined by culture.

To employ direct examination of a sociological/cultural community effectively, a researcher needs to become engaged in a large variety of relations with the participants in order to experience the everyday realities of the others through direct and extended action with them. Researchers are seldom firsthand members of the sphere they study, and as outsiders looking inward, frequently stereotype the images they study, i.e., images embedded in theories, often in regard to the chosen academic worldview of the researcher. In fact, Blumer contends that most research inquiry is not designed to be familiar with the group under scrutiny. Yet, the empirical social world consists of dynamic and ongoing group life interaction, and the researcher must be close to the group to identify its intricate and complex modes of action. No pre-determined, theorizing protocol can replace this approach to empirical research of group life and its social interaction. So, the question becomes how does a researcher, determined to apply this qualitative methodology, gain inside access to a chosen group to enable such direct examination? As a UN NGO women's representative for human rights and the status of women at UN Headquarters in New York City for several years, I have been directly and deeply involved with our platform and am quite familiar with the intricate and complex modes of action of the study group under scrutiny. Therefore, Blumer's perspective is most appropriate for the methodological approaches I have designed and implemented for the independent research. Blumer believes that exploration and interpretation connote legitimate qualitative research techniques to develop a comprehensive and accurate profile of social interaction within a specific environmental context. From such a position, the research can be based on a foundation of fact, not speculation, to determine if the prepared study questions prove meaningful or if the projected problems actually exist. A full-descriptive account of qualitative empirical research can often eliminate the need even to start with a theory to undergo accurate and revealing research. He also explains how the connection between direct examination and the use of inspection can combine intimate accounts with

statistical analysis. The independent research has considered this approach in an effort to accomplish the following:

- To create a theoretical form
- To find generic relations
- To provide connotative definitions of concept
- To formulate theoretical propositions.

Furthermore, he emphasizes the importance of studying the obdurate empirical field through a variety of methods that allow for flexible, imaginative and creative inspection of various perspectives of a study group. Important to note, inspection does not start with any particular analytical elements rigidly established in advance; rather, the inspection evolves and develops through the direct examination process itself. Concurrently, this approach helps to isolate relations to be scrutinized in the process. The independent research includes multiple research methodologies and various perspectives in addition to symbolic interactionism that revolve around: NGO socio-cultural influences on gender identity; 20th Century sociological perspectives – especially the numerous feminist schools of thought; the concept *cultural relativism*; language use and joint interaction; media as a cultural institute and its power to shape gender profiling and association; and the discourse on gender communication and strategies.

Blumer classifies this direct examination of the variable character of a testing group in is normal context as naturalistic inquiry. He used his methodological orientation for decades to develop and interpret his own studies to formulate the theory of symbolic interactionism. In fact, his own concepts and propositions are specifically derived from the direct examination of a select social environment as well. He summarizes the implications of symbolic interaction research methodology based on his four original principles. Briefly stated, they contend:

- People, individually and collectively, act on the meanings of objects of their world.
- The association of people is necessary as a process to make indications and interpretations to one another.

- Social acts are both constructed through a process that actors note, interpret and assess.

- Complex linkages of acts of institutions, division of labor, networks, etc. are dynamic, not static affairs. (Blumer 1986)

This work's hypothesis has also been derived from direct and close examination of the select world of the UN NGO women and their social interaction for the advancement of women based on the *obdurate character* of the empirical study, i.e., the impact of culture on communication. This section has defined symbolic interactionism through the lengthy examination of Blumer and his primary focus on the power of symbols and their associated meaning, individualism and social interaction. One of his prominent successors, Goffman, offers another interpretation of symbolic interactionism and his emphasis on meaning, language, thought, and cultural collectivism. Although many UN NGO women come from the ideology of individualism drawn heavily from US American culture, still many others stem from cultural backgrounds that practice collectivism as the appropriate and most effective approach to social interaction. Therefore, Goffman's viewpoints are relevant to the research and will now be reviewed.

12. Symbolic Interactionism and the Actor

One of Goffman's classic works, ***The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,*** is considered a major contribution to the understanding of oneself. It covers the theme of human behavior in social situations and the way in which one appears to another. He uses the metaphor of a theatrical performance as a framework to depict how one, in everyday social interaction, presents oneself and activities to others; attempts to guide and control the impressions one forms; and employs certain techniques of dramaturgy. This work presents social techniques commonly used, based on his extensive research and observation of social customs in many cultural regions of the world. Of course, the UN NGO women represent all cultural regions of the world.

Goffman opens his discourse with an illustration of an individual's need to seek information when in the presence of others in order to define the situation and to know how to

act to achieve a desired response from the other. He describes the two categories of expressiveness used by an individual to reach that goal as: (1) the expression a person "gives" and (2) the expression a person "gives off." The first involves verbal symbols, or their substitutes, to convey information that others will also attach to the symbols being expressed. This approach is considered a style of social interaction in the traditional and narrow meaning of the term. The second entails a wide range of actions viewed as symptomatic by others in which the actions are performed for other reasons than the message being conveyed in the first instance. This second approach encompasses the realities and intricacies of social interaction in a much broader scope of the term.

Of the two kinds of expressive communication, Goffman's work is primarily concerned with the latter, i.e., the theatrical, contextual, nonverbal and mostly unintentional style of communication. Furthermore, he seeks to reveal the distinctive moral character of a projected definition of a situation, by contending that society is organized on the principle: any individual who possesses certain social characteristics holds the moral right to expect that others will value and treat another person in an appropriate way. In conjunction with this principle, an individual who implicitly and/or explicitly signals certain social traits ought to behave as claimed, for the person automatically asserts that moral command on the other participant. Goffman defines the key terminology he exercises in his writings on dramaturgy as follows:

- **Interaction (face-to-face)** is the reciprocal influence of others upon one's actions when in one another's immediate physical presence.
- **Performance** is all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion, which serves to influence any of the participants in any given way.
- **Part or Routine** is the pre-established pattern of action which unfolds during a performance and which may be presented and played through on other occasions, whereby a social relationship is likely to arise.
- **Social Role** is the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status presented on a series of occasions. (Goffman 1959)

This terminology applies in large measure to the dominant face-to-face communication style among UN NGO women at UN conferences as they assume all of these roles of Goffman's dramaturgical perspective of social interaction.

To summarize briefly, Blumer focuses on the role of *self* and an individual's interpretive communication reaction in social interaction whereas Goffman targets the collective group influence on a person's response that strongly shapes an individual's character. Goffman also contends that people frequently communicate out-of-character to suppress a candid view of oneself in exchange for a conception acceptable to others, and that this technique enables communication to flow through the adherence to culturally established social rules. These two social science giants of the 20th Century on social interaction provide invaluable insight into the communication styles of UN NGO women. The next topic connects the significance of language use to complexities of communication styles and social interaction.

13. Language Use and Joint Interaction

For UN NGO women representatives to achieve their common goals for the advancement of women, an understanding of *language use and joint interaction* is paramount. The ability to comprehend and apply this aspect of communication dynamics becomes especially important at international UN conferences/sessions, where language use is so important. Face-to-face communication, speaker to listener, represents the most dominant and vital means of communication among the women. Nevertheless, the written documents also have a formidable impact on the success of such meetings, so an examination of language use and social interaction proves significant to this study. The use of language, spoken and written, is presented in various ways in the survey questionnaire. Language use of the study group was also noted during the participatory observations and was discussed as a key subject during the interviews.

Herbert H. Clark is renown for his work in psychology and language at Stanford University. His major work, ***Using Language***, promotes his thesis that language use represents

a form of joint interaction created by an ensemble of people acting in coordination with one another. Consequently, language use denotes more than the sum of the speaker speaking and the listener listening; rather, it refers to the joint interaction that results when individuals undertake their speaking and listening roles. Furthermore, Clark strongly argues that language use encompasses both individual and social processes in a human and social context. He believes that language use today belongs to the studies of the cognitive sciences: psychology, linguistics, philosophy and computer science, as well as to the studies of the social sciences: social psychology, sociology, socio-linguistics and anthropology.

Clark believes that face-to-face conversation represents the primary use of language, and that other forms are best described as derivatives of that base. The face-to-face approach requires no special training and represents the only universal joint interaction to all human societies. Clark also explains that the speaker and the listener who share a common background and common ground such as knowledge, beliefs, suppositions, etc., direct the arenas of language. The common background and common ground often stem from a mutual cultural perspective of the speaker and listener. In this environmental/cultural context, the use of language in any social interaction creates meaning and understanding while it expands and extends the mutual level of understanding of language use. The speaker elicits the meaning through signals during social interaction; the listener provides the understanding and identification that are determined through conventional and nonconventional signals. Concurrently, meaning and understanding are coordinated through the common ground that serves as the foundation for all joint action. UN NGO women function through common ground goals and aspirations for the advancement of women worldwide, though they come from clearly diverse cultural backgrounds.

Common ground can be divided into three parts: (1) initial common ground, often culturally based, including background facts, assumptions, beliefs and presupposed notions; (2) current state activity, including the external state of representation and message interpretation, etc.; and (3) public events including the participants' perception of the event.

Common ground factors, through cultural connection, current state of activities and perception of public events need to be established quickly to enable successful social interaction among NGO women at international UN conferences/sessions that are held in a condensed timeframe. As a rule, such meetings last between two days and two weeks, replete with exhaustive programs. The common ground for NGO women in the UN conference environment becomes the goals and objectives to formulate a general consensus among the participants in conjunction with the purpose and context of any given conference.

Clark claims that people interact socially in the arenas of language use at low and high levels. At the primary layer of language use, one coordinates actions at the low end to produce sounds to utterances, to form words to sentences, to establish requests and promises, till at the high end, to hold deliberations and negotiations for general consensus and votes of confidence. The UN NGO women interact at all levels of the spectrum, sometimes simultaneously. Speaking and listening are best executed from a participatory position, and here he mentions the perspective of Goffman who stresses that speaking assumes three levels of action: meaning, formulating and vocalizing. In face-to-face communication, the speaker performs all three roles. Concurrently, the listener also performs three levels of action: attending to the vocalization, identifying words/phrases and sentences, and responding through exhibiting understanding of the meaning. Clearly, when one takes action, consequences occur which impact on the individual, the group they represent and the joint interaction they aim to achieve for attaining common ground and goals.

Clark concludes his introductory comments about joint interaction by offering six propositions as follows:

- Language use is applied fundamentally for social purposes to do things.
- Language use represents a series of joint action that requires at least two agents and coordination of individual acts.
- Language use always involves a speaker's meaning and a listener's understanding.

- Intentions are recognized as central to communication through signaling and identifying.
- The basic setting for language use is face-to-face conversation.
- Language use often engages multiple layers of activity in more than one domain.
- The study of language use combines both a cognitive and social science. (Clark 1986)

Clark focuses on the foundation of *language use and joint activity* through communication initiatives, claiming that they are inseparable for understanding of transmitted messages. He believes that language dominates in joint activities. Such joint activities can assume communication strategies and styles that are scripted (prepared) vs. unscripted (impromptu); formal vs. informal; verbal vs. nonverbal; cooperative vs. competitive; and egalitarian vs. autocratic. These strategies and styles are all revealed in the social interaction among UN NGO women at conferences/sessions.

Such social interaction, often dominated by one person, emerges based on the goals to be accomplished. Participants in joint activity usually strive for procedural goals, interpersonal goals and/or private agenda goals. The UN NGO women's community, however, interacts in a way that does not allow one individual to dominate, but rather to interact in fair exchanges of their messages. Effective joint action, Clark explains, follows a process to achieve goals through the establishment and development of common ground to which the participants contribute their knowledge, values, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, etc. Their pre-suppositions can be created or crushed in conversation, and their assessments can lead to change and to potentially common ground accumulation in order to elevate the level of social interaction towards common goals. Here, UN NGO women not only follow a common universal mandate, but also propose and defend culturally relative positions as well as individual thought to the interaction, offering their knowledge, values, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, etc., to varying degrees.

Clark argues that joint activities advance through joint action based on coordination of the content. Joint actions involve understanding the interplay between the content and the process. Language itself provides a means of coordination for participatory joint actions, and language use attempts to solve coordination problems. Situations exist calling for people's interdependent action to achieve identical interests and goals. The divergence of interests, goals and communication styles determines the complexity of coordination required to achieve common goals. This situation certainly mirrors the social interaction at the UN NGO women's meetings, and much emphasis is placed on creating a positive interdependent environment among the constituencies to coordinate efforts and to solve problems and determine solutions.

In discourse, participants advance their interests through the creation of joint actions as solutions to coordination problems; speakers and listeners need to assume limits, and speakers need to examine unique answers that they believe their counterparts will embrace. The use of language serves as the conventional signaling system of messages, and it is created, foremost, by cultures. Language possesses conventional meaning, but also much ambiguity in conjunction with contextual and common ground meanings, again mostly derived from culture. The coordination processes can be balanced, unbalanced or alternating, and are often divided into phases for specific coordination. Precision timing proves critical to effective language use, and most cultures commonly accept the fact that mental processes require time. (Clark 1986)

Cultural communities are identified by their expertise and the extent of their common ground identity, particularly their use of language. Clark notes main areas of expertise and common ground identity as follows: nationality, residence, education, occupation, employment, hobby, language, religion, politics, ethnicity, subculture, cohort and gender. Furthermore, the contents of cultural common ground involve the human nature (folk psychology) of each group. A culture's communal lexicon can only be translated through the conventional meaning attached to words by the community, and every community, including UN NGO women, has created its own specialized lexicon that contains the following elements:

- **Residence** is regional or local dialects, provincialisms, localisms, regionalisms, colloquialisms, idioms, nationalisms, etc.

- **Occupation** is jargon, shoptalk, parlance, technical terminology, acadamese, legalese, medicalese, UNese, etc.

- **Subculture** is slang, lingo, vernacular, code, etc.

Cultures, he continues, also rely on common background facts about their history, knowledge learned in their educational systems, prominent people in their society, etc. Conventions and norms pertaining to social interaction and common ground procedures for joint activities also help to identify cultures. Finally, common ground does not inherently exist; rather, it must be established with each person by finding and establishing an appropriate base to share, determined by sound evidence. Moreover, each new piece of common ground is built upon a previously established piece of mutual belief. Then, it becomes vital to discern how common ground information is applied.

Clark explains communication acts in terms of meaning, understanding and signaling as do Blumer and Goffman. He claims that joint actions denote communication acts that enable others to understand the meaning being conveyed. The traditional psychological view strongly suggests that communication acts occur autonomously through a speaker. Yet, this perspective actually causes its own destruction, for the receiver determines the notion of a speaker's meaning, and all communication acts symbolize in actuality joint acts of social interaction. At the core of communication, he declares, lies meaning. (Clark 1986)

Herbert Paul Grice, author of ***Meaning, Theory and Language*** (1957), distinguishes meaning as either natural (derived from natural events indicated by symptoms) or nonnatural (extracted from deliberate human acts indicated by signals). Grice contends that the speaker's meaning and the signal meaning equals *Gemeintes Bedeutung*, i.e., the combination of the two elements, creates the expressed meaning. The speaker's meaning to convince others to act is considered an intention, highly dependent on the recognition of the signals. In face-to-face

communication, in particular, words and sentences are dominant, nonnatural signals. For meaning to occur and forge intention forward, signaling and recognizing messages must involve participatory communication acts; the joint act of one person signaling another and the recipient recognizing what the first person means results in a communication act.

Overwhelmingly, the ultimate intent of UN NGO women is to cause others to act, i.e., to take action, and their dominant approach, again, is face-to-face communication. As such, speakers and listeners become partners as participants in a joint act. Signals become the source to reach a speaker's goals, and the speaker provides a signal to establish common ground to move the discourse and intentions forward. According to Grice, speakers motivate their addressees to recognize their meaning through actions, i.e., people act through signaling, and certain actions are performed to make the listener/audience respond based on their understanding of the meaning expressed. Communication acts assume various forms including telling, asserting, requesting, ordering, asking, promising and thanking, to mention a few. Most communication acts belong to these five basic categories:

- **Assertions** convince the audience to form and/or advocate the same belief as the speaker does.
- **Directives** make the audience take action, e.g., requests for action and/or requests for information.
- **Commissives** commit to a future action.
- **Expressives** relay certain feelings toward the listener/audience.
- **Declarations** base performance on the parameters of institutions and their codified conventions. They fall into two categories as well.
  - **Effectives** change an institutional state of affairs based on the power given by the institute.
  - **Verdictives** determine the outcome of a case within the power of the institution.

NGO women at UN conferences/sessions constantly employ the above-mentioned communication acts to motivate their listeners in order to achieve their set goals. The questionnaire incorporated theses categories; moreover, they were examined during the participatory observations and were discussed during the interviews as well.

Grice also argues that each participant expects the other to adhere to the cooperative principle and states:

"Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged."

Notably, he believes that implications are based on what is said (the literal meaning of the sentence or the expression), and listeners need to understand "what is said" to determine the meaning of implications through direct or indirect reference. The topic of direct and indirect communication styles is included in the questionnaire. In other words, what is said is highly defined by "how it is said." Grice offers four maxims for listeners to discern implications:

- **Quantity** makes a contribution as informative as required, but not more informative than required.
- **Quality** does not repeat believed falsehoods or make contributions that lack evidence.
- **Relation** is relevant.
- **Manner** avoids obscurity and ambiguity, and is brief and orderly.

. Today, Grice's cooperative principle and its four maxims are still widely accepted. (Grice 1957) The articulate use of language and cooperation among UN NGO women is crucial to develop and implement their work. In fact, no other international organization so

carefully and cautiously belabors language usage to pursue equity and to honor "face" principles of all cultures to accomplish their goals.

14. Language, Culture and Expression

The various forms that language assume, i.e., word choice, grammar, dialect, literary tradition, vernacular, metaphor, gender, political and cultural, reflect the social location and relative power of the speakers. Language also expresses experiences, not just thoughts, and language, like socio-cultural class, never remains static but rather socio-ideological, professional, social and generational in nature. In fact, linguistic unification comprises an essential part of socio-political and cultural centralization as well. (Smith-Rosenberg 1986) UN NGO women, in this context, come with broad individual and cultural experience by virtue of having acquired the position of NGO representative to the UN on behalf of their members, and work diligently for the causes their group represents. Most of these women strive to achieve and sustain a viable level of linguistic unification, especially at official UN meetings, a challenging effort considering their culturally diverse backgrounds and often culturally sensitive positions on global women's issues.

In reality, much of the face-to-face interaction among the UN NGO women reflects asymmetrical interaction rather than symmetrical unity in language and otherwise. These circumstances often occur in dyad situations, a common interaction situation among NGO women. Reasons that can create symmetrical interaction between two NGO women include their positions of status, power, experience, etc. The UN environment and their NGO affiliations, respectively, connote their workplace and status.

The Heidelberg/Mannheim Collaborative Research Group undertook a research project, *Speech and Situation* (1992), that focused on social identity and partner hypotheses in conversations that targeted verbal communication and communication behaviors in dyads. Among other topics, they investigated "standard situations" whereby the listener willingly replies vs. "reactant situations" whereby the speaker poses a topic of high risk and is uncertain

about the listener's reaction and level of willingness to respond. (Thimm & Kruz 1994) Strategic interaction then becomes crucial to potentially reactant situations. The Group defines strategy as: "a sequence of speech patterns serving the purpose of reaching the interaction goal of the speaker in a situation of actual or perceived reactance." According to Thimm, the strategy and speech style are then based on the particular goal at hand; for example, avoidance strategies, relationship securing strategies, cooperative strategies and power strategies. These areas of communication strategy, often employed by UN NGO women, are included in the questionnaire under the topic *Women, Interpersonal Relations and Communication Styles* to help determine the impact of culture on such communication strategies. The Collaborative Communication Model for International Negotiation (Raider 2001) underscores the research findings of the Heidelberg/Mannheim Collaborative Research Group and offers similar strategic interaction approaches to achieve goals in asymmetrical situations as well. The Collaborative Communication Model has been incorporated into the questionnaire and is described in detail under the same women and interpersonal relations topic.

15. Language Use and the Media

As an institution, the mass media wields exponential power and far-reaching global, cultural and local influence. Today, it provides information and entertainment and represents a critical part of life in both developed and developing cultures. In this capacity, it shapes images and stereotypes of gender-based characteristics of men and women in their respective cultures. These impressions are especially created through the use of language in the media as a strong medium of cultural socialization that forms and reinforces gender association towards one another. The semantics of words associated with men or women can have substantially different connotations. Historically, male words, for example, have been connected to authority and power while female words have been associated with sex and relationship. This perception of the meaning of words occurs even when the same root word is applied to both genders. Semantics are then superceded by semantic derogation, the debasing of the meaning of words

when they become affiliated with women, that results in stereotyping and devaluating women as a group. (Smith 1995) A base word applied to men usually connotes a positive meaning while the same word applied to women often connotes a negative meaning. The most derogatory language in most cultures is directed at older women. (Nilsen 1991)

An example of gender denotative and connotative meaning for the same root word reads as follows:

> SHREWD: (man) clever, discerning awareness
>
> SHREW: (woman) small vicious animal, ill tempered woman.

Globally, the media continues to choose semantically derogative language in their coverage, which influences the images and roles of males and females of cultural societies. Moreover, since it has been established in this study that women teach predominantly culture and communication styles to the next generation, then women continue to educate their offspring (boys and girls) to communicate with derogatory semantics in their verbal language, even though it is degrading. UN NGO women attending UN meetings are not immune to the impact of their media's choice of gender profile through language, and it molds the way they perceive one another both culturally and as women regardless of their joint actions to achieve mutual goals.

The *Reflection Hypothesis* claims that the media mirrors the behaviors and relationships as well as the values and norms most prevalent in cultural society. Yet, one can argue that the media, far from passively reflecting culture, actively shapes and creates cultural norms and gender identity as well. According to Baehr (1980), the media select items for attention and ranks what is/is not important. They set an agenda for public opinion, and they influence the audience through their thematic choices and structured dialogue – a process that involves crucial omissions (manipulation of truth) to increase their influence regarding their selected messages and chosen portrayals.

Media also represents the chief sources of information for the majority of a society, and in many cultures becomes a main focus of their leisure activity. The populace-at-large tends to accept media content as fact, although this phenomenon is eroding more and more of late around the world. Understandably, feminist researchers have been especially concerned for a long time with media portrayals of the female gender. Already in the seventies, they charged that the media's treatment of women practiced symbolic annihilation, i.e., in their coverage women are ignored, trivialized or condemned. The ability of the media and its language use to create gender images, define gender roles in society and form/reinforce stereotypes and influences the portrayal of women in the minds of both males and females. Therefore, the survey questionnaire targets several issues revolving around women and the media and the latter's role as an ubiquitous institution that influences communication styles and strategies of UN NGO women universally, today.

The Media Report to Women [MRTW] (1997) substantiates that gender messages and the written word in newspapers and magazines are normally presented as *soft news* and relegated to a secondary *non-news* section of media publications. Quite telling is the manner in which *hard news* treats women. A woman's appearance, marital status and parenthood status are usually mentioned, for example, to reinforce her traditional gender role whereas strong and outspoken women, e.g., US Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton as well as numerous feminist activists the past thirty years, have often been rebuked as behaving severely and aggressively. (Thorson and Mendelson 1996) The questionnaire addresses the subject of *soft news* vs. *hard news* coverage of women in the media from a global perspective.

Television, the oral communication socializer, is considered the most important media in most cultures today. It requires minimal skills to watch and everybody, regardless of gender, culture, power, status and geographical environment, receives the same message. (Goodstein and Connelly 1998) TV wields the power to transmit strong messages, and a prominent message that has been projected underscores that women are less important than men (MRTW 1999). Some change in gender portrayal has occurred in recent years, and female characters

now also depict strength, independence, achievement and heroism without condemnation. (Steinhauer 2000) New themes in the media promote women's rights and gender equality that subliminally suggest feminist perspectives of the last thirty years. (Dow 1996) Television can serve as a teaching tool to produce pro-social content and reduce the stigma of negative gender stereotyping and other forms of prejudice against women. (Mares 1996) The questionnaire queried the portrayal of women in the media to establish a women's viewpoint rather than individual cultural worldviews. The interview with Lemish focused primarily on the role of the media and the explicit portrayal of women through language use and visual imagery; the lengthy conversation covered many of the points revealed in this brief examination on language use and the media. The results of the first interview are found under qualitative research in the independent research section.

16. Gender Communication and Discourse

Clearly, understanding the significance of language use and its impact on social and joint interaction are rudimentary to effective gender communication. Equally critical is understanding the role of culture on gender communication and language use in this context. As established, UN NGO women frequently encounter critical face-to-face contact with culturally diverse peers during long and intensive engagements at UN women's conferences/sessions. In this environment, they are confronted with numerous variations of communication styles during formal and informal meetings that commence early mornings and close late evenings. These women deliberate, debate then seek to compromise and collaborate at caucuses, for example, to establish general consensus worldviews on issues and to write reports and documents in which verbiage proves crucial to convey joint messages and to forge joint actions. Therefore, the following will introduce important perspectives and elements about gender, language use and discourse to broaden understanding of the cultural impact on communication styles and social interaction toward universal, regional and local goals for the advancement of women.

Gender/linguist Deborah Tannen, author of **Gender and Discourse** (1996), presented views on gender communication that remain popular today. A detailed examination of this work will profile the importance and power of gender linguistic communication from a cultural and status perspective. This particular book, one of many volumes that she has published on sociological and cultural variations of communication, is comprised of six essays exclusively addressing gender and language. In this volume, her principal contention stresses that gender-based patterns of language use are sex-class linked rather than simply sex-linked. Since UN NGO women represent a vast range of social classes within the context of their own and others' cultures, her premise underscores the complexity and sometimes difficulty of the social interaction among UN NGO women.

Tannen presents conversational strategies and the balance of power achieved through cultural variations and ethnic style in connection with gender conversation. The themes and main points of the following four essays will be discussed in the context of woman-to-woman communication and female gender linguistics:

Essay I *The Relativity of Linguistic Strategies: Rethinking Power and Solidarity in Gender and Dominance*

Essay II *Conversational Strategy and Metastrategy in a Pragmatic Theory*

Essay III *Ethnic Style in Male–Female Conversation*

Essay IV *The Sex–Class Linked Framing of Talk at Work.*

Tannen contends that the interdisciplinary dynamics of gender and language of women find their roots in divergent academic disciplines including sociology, education, anthropology, psychology, speech communication, linguistics and literature. As such, it requires flexibility and patience to understand the context of gender language and discourse. She defines *discourse analysis* as: "The connected language beyond the sentence at the intersection of language and social phenomena." She views the underpinnings of conversational style in social interaction

from a linguistic perspective and adheres to the principle that misunderstandings readily occur due to culture and the bestowed role of gender.

Primarily, Tannen approaches this research by linking gender linguistics to differential cultural influences on men and women. In this realm, she first discusses the role of dominance and power, particularly during face-to-face contact. She argues that both dominance and subordination are constructed in social interaction, that these roles are not assigned, but rather are created by acts of social interaction. She thinks that context is not given, but rather is constituted by conversation and action, and she also agrees with Clark that social interaction symbolizes a joint production of an individual's approach to speaking to another. Her view also supports Blumer's principles of symbolic interactionism.

Tannen states that socialization represents the dominant influence that shapes communication styles and patterns of behavior, though she acknowledges genetic predisposition and its impact on an individual's communication style as well. She does not, however, polarize gender differences in linguistics as nature vs. nurture. Instead, she stresses the importance of understanding the ways of communication through an appreciation of the complexity of social interaction and respect for one another's distinctive conversational styles, albeit derived through cultural socialization. Based on these introductory comments, the following review highlights her four essays most relevant to the hypothesis of this research.

In Essay I, Tannen explains *The Relativity of Linguistic Strategies: Rethinking Power and Solidarity in Gender and Dominance* and claims that all linguistic strategies of a dominant communicator can also reveal solidarity with the other participant/s in the same social interaction. She believes that many aspects of social interaction can only be properly understood to the extent that cultural backgrounds are shared. The domination of men over women is not questioned, and, equally, women may dominate other women. Yet, strategies that appear to dominate may indeed be an attempt to connect rather than to dominate. The dynamics of power and solidarity are fundamental to socio-linguistic theory: power promotes asymmetrical

relationships that establish superior and subordinate roles. Thimm, as previously mentioned under language use, has analyzed effective strategic interaction to overcome asymmetrical social interaction circumstances, especially reactant situations, and her research readily applies to gender communication strategies and social exchanges.

On the other hand, language use can create solidarity that fosters symmetrical relationships and similarity. The exhibition of power entails solidarity from the underlings just as the exhibition of solidarity exemplifies power from a group of equals. Ambiguity can emerge in trying to interpret people's intentions to mean *one thing or another*. Power, as an asymmetrical relationship, can be interpreted as the ability of one person to control the behavior of another. Solidarity, on the other hand, asserts its traits of power through the sense of closeness, which can stem from a horizontal or hierarchic relationship, predominantly determined by the norms of culture. In contrast to ambiguity, the *polysemy phenomena* proposes that a communicated message can mean one thing *and* another. UN NGO women often seek to communicate a sense of solidarity through the already mentioned dyad and group relationships based on common ground to achieve joint interaction towards mutual goals. This assessment is underscored further in the third interview with Richter and her focus on language use and symbols.

Tannen emphasizes that potential ambiguity of linguistic strategies to establish power and solidarity are complex between the genders and also among members of the same gender. She examines the following approaches: indirectness, interruption, silence vs. volubility, topic raising and adversity (verbal conflict), all communication strategies directly related to distance vs. closeness and/or dominance vs. subordination. She further reveals that the meaning underlying such strategies can vary according to the context, social interaction, conversational styles and strategies of participants. Several of these communication strategies, e.g., indirectness, interruption and topic raising, are included in the questionnaire and are noted in the participatory observations to determine cultural variation concerning these strategic traits.

According to linguist Robin Lakoff, indirect strategies can beneficially create defense systems. Many socio-linguists contend that women tend to communicate indirectly based on the

presumption that they are not entitled to issue demands. On the other hand, people empowered to make demands may also select indirectness to save face for both sides by allowing the subordinate to make a seemingly apparent choice. Indirectness is deeply lodged in cultural communication practices, and the American perspective that indirectness is associated with female communication, and thereby is less significant, does not represent a universal viewpoint. Tannen claims that indirectness need not denote a subordinate communication strategy, but rather that its inferred meaning depends on the setting, the individuals, the status, and the relationship to each other, framed within the cultural context.

Interruption as a linguistic strategy has long been viewed as a conventional strategy to signal dominance. Though extensive gender and language studies suggest that interruption is asserted in conversation by men to dominate the conversation with women, socio-linguists James and Clark (1993) discovered that in all female conversations, women interrupt one another even more than in all male exchanges. Interruptions, also termed overlaps, can be interpreted to mean support for the speaker or a desire to contradict or change the topic, which represents another paradigm of linguistic ambiguity or polysemy. A participant engaged in social interaction may interrupt persistently to dominate for power or, more positively, to express solidarity. To determine the meaning of the interruption beyond gender inference for power of man over woman, or woman over woman, one must consider the context, a speaker's habitual styles and the interaction of the communication styles involved. Notably, when people's cultural styles of conversation differ, then more interruption usually happens, for one cannot readily discern if an interruption has taken place or if a pause was interpreted as a cue to assume the speaker's role.

Next, Tannen analyzes the linguistic strategies of silence vs. volubility that covers the popular belief that men, perceived as the oppressors, intentionally silence women and/or children to dominate, based on the principle that powerful people do the talking. Yet, silence does not necessarily indicate a lack of power. In fact, taciturnity can emphatically serve as a weapon of power, and silence can be equally exercised by men and women to subjugate one another. Silence, when practiced by both parties, need not produce negative responses. When one

participant feels compelled to speak and the other chooses silence, however, the polarized conversational styles can produce devastating results, regardless of gender. Furthermore, volubility and silence as linguistic strategies are strongly connected to cultural practices and can be linked to either power or solidarity intentions-or both.

Finally, Tannen examines adversity, i.e., conflict and verbal aggression, and contends that this linguistic strategy serves as a universal phenomenon to direct social interaction. Male speakers usually exhibit much more competitiveness through argumentation, demands, commands, and opposite stands; whereas, women tend to cooperate and avoid conflict through seeking agreement, support and suggestions rather that asserting commands/orders. Though male traits tend to be associated with dominance, once again, one's cultural perspective determines the intent of argumentativeness. For example, Tannen mentions that German and East European cultures often find argumentation pleasurable, especially pertaining to politics, while Americans refrain from political discussion and react to such conversations as emotionally distasteful. Consequently, Europeans often find Americans to be ill informed and ignorant on the issues, and Americans may feel that Europeans behave belligerently and/or arrogantly through their assertive approach to initiate discussion about current political and/or social issues. In the UN NGO women's world, however, many women, especially those influenced by the rebellious phase of the women's movement, tend to be direct and exhibit classical male communication traits. Directness is also covered in the questionnaire, in the interview with Lear and in the observations. Finally, the polysemy perspective of socio-linguistic strategies in regard to power vs. solidarity can definitely be related to the complexity of culturally diverse communication styles of UN NGO women.

In Essay II, Tannen examines *Conversational Strategy and Metastrategy in a Pragmatic Theory*. She introduces the communication competence theory that is based on the premise that speakers participate in conversation in relation to their knowledge level on the topic of discussion. She refers to Lakoff's four principal foci of communication competence, with the

realization that in every culture an idealized social interaction exists between genders and within the same gender. The four specified points include: *distance*: the aim to inspire separateness and privacy, unobtrusiveness; *deference*: the aim to avoid imposition; *camaraderie*: the aim to acknowledge interrelationship whereby participants express their equality and feeling toward one another; *clarity*: the expression of factual information about an issue, found for example in media broadcasters and lecturers. Lakoff's concepts on deference, camaraderie and clarity are inferred in the questionnaire and are taken into consideration in the participatory observations.

In Essay III, Tannen focuses on *Ethnic Styles in Male-Female Communication* and the use of indirectness in gender discourse as a common characteristic of conversational style. She also investigates social differences in the context of conversation. Indirectness as a linguistic strategy frequently perpetuates misunderstanding among people within a culture, and this reality is further exacerbated through the vast diversity of communication styles between/among cultures. Yet, the sharing of communication strategies often fosters feelings of satisfaction following successful conversations; conversely, the lack of congruity in conversational strategies foments contradictory feelings of dissonance, misunderstanding, exclusion, and lack of common identity. The range of social strategies to which a speaker adapts is socially/culturally determined, and an individual can exhibit a unique range of strategies within the framework of social confinement. Tannen, as do many others in her field, concludes that conversational style is learned through communication experiences that are acquired, first and foremost, within the family and/or cultural context during the formative years of early childhood. Conversational style entails both what and how meaning is expressed, and a person staunchly resists change to conversational style and communication strategies/patterns unless compelled to do so. One could argue that the UN NGO women are compelled to adapt to the greater goals of the advancement of women, and accordingly some choose to change their communication strategies to this end.

In Essay IV, Tannen introduces the topic *The Sex-Class Linked Framing of Talk at Work,* a subject she presented at the Third Berkeley Women and Language Conference in April 1994. Inspired by Goffman's research on the relationship between language and gender in the framework of display, not identity, she explains that a speaker's relative status affects social interactions, i.e., linguistic strategies that the speaker chooses and linguistic strategies the listener applies for interpretation. She develops her perspective to prove that sex-class linked linguistic strategies are utilized to balance, simultaneously, the dimension of status and connection among people that expand upon her position on power and solidarity in Essay I. She is also concerned with hierarchical relations and their impact on communication in a professional environment in conjunction with gender patterns and social interaction. She strives to disprove two earlier perceptions of gender and language in current linguistic literature: status and connection as well as cultural differences and dominance are polarized positions. She argues, instead, that status and connection and cultural differences and dominance dovetail during every moment of social interaction. This point is of particular importance, for the majority of international UN NGO women representatives often come from the high end of the social strata, though by no means exclusively, and this cultural factor strongly influences their social interaction and communication styles.

Based on her distinction between sex-linked vs. sex-class linked social interaction, Tannen asserts that certain behaviors in cultures are specifically affiliated with each gender within a class. This viewpoint, however, is challenged in the United States where identity is overwhelmingly recognized at the individual level and is seldom based on one's collective connection. Yet, a person's communication behavior is created to a great extent from one's culturally based social identity, and people learn to interact within the parameters of a framework of status and connection derived from one's sex-linked class. She agrees with Goffman's determination that interaction symbolizes a ceremony comprised of rituals that he defines as "perfunctory, conventionalized acts through which one individual portrays his regard for another to that other." She concludes that culture, the main framework for communication behavior, can,

through the sex-class linked perspective, provide the venue to negotiate relationships of status dimension, i.e., hierarchy/equality and connection dimension, or more simply stated, distance/closeness. Tannen's exhaustive work on sex-linked class and communication strategies supports this study's hypothesis, for class is defined and developed through culturally based social construction.

In the nineties, other researchers delved into equally important aspects of gender language and have provided significant contributions to gender speaking strategies intended to achieve common goals. *Durchsetzungsstrategien* (successfully executed strategies) (Thimm 1995) are linked, for example, to a person's verbal communication to reach positive end results. Thimm investigates this issue to establish spoken differences and stereotypical expectations of male and female strategies. She recognizes that the *Durchsetzungsstrategien* of goals represent an important component in establishing positions of power in politics, the sciences, professions, family and institutions, such as the media or the United Nations. Thimm poses this question: *What effects do gender stereotypes impose on women's Durchsetzungsstrategien?* She notes that individuals of the same gender seem less sensitive to one another in social interaction than they do of persons of the opposite gender. Men appear to be more intensive, direct and verbal in their communication ways whereas women often behave less intensely and express themselves in more tentative language. She states, however, that the effectiveness of verbal communication produced by both men and women is filtered through the listener's perception of the meaning of the message based on the source and not necessarily through the use of gender language styles. She also stresses that not only societal norms, but also the *workplace* and its rules dictate the gender language styles. The UN and its international conferences, when viewed as workplaces, represent complex environments that are steeped in "communication rules." UN NGO women must adapt to these situations to achieve their ultimate goals. To that end, they often use multiple *Durchsetzungsstrategien* such as face-saving strategies, relationship-securing strategies, co-operative strategies and power strategies that are normally learned in their formative cultural

environment. These strategies are all taken into account in the three independent research areas of this independent study. (Thimm & Ehmer 1997)

In ***Gender and Discourse***, edited by Ruth Wodak, the essays substantiate further the connection among culture, linguistics and gender communication. In the introduction, Wodak spans the breadth of research that has been undertaken on gender and sex in socio-linguistics and discourse since 1972, and highlights speech behavior in the context of a social environment and conversational styles. She suggests that studies concerned with gender language behavior have often contradicted one another, and that *female language* has been reported to reflect women's conservatism, prestige, consciousness, upward mobility, insecurity, deference, nurturance, emotional expressiveness, connectedness, solidarity and sensitivity towards others.

From a social construction perspective, gender needs to be viewed as a socially developed status with separate dimensions, with both genders assuming behavioral traits from the other. Furthermore, social groups can discern themselves, in part, through their common language that fosters gender and cultural identity, while subcultures often promote their language to differentiate themselves from the outside world. Women consistently define themselves in comparison to other women, as do men with other men, both within and outside their culture, and an individual's language use is directly connected to the structure of one's societal environment. (Wodak 1997) UN NGO women do define themselves as their own socially constructed culture these days and have established their own speech community in the process in spite of their universally diverse backgrounds. As more men become involved with women's issues, e.g., gender equality and violence against women, women have become more aware of their need to interact effectively with these new participants as well. Therefore, the questionnaire addresses the topic of communication styles women-to-men and persuasion for this reason and to determine the cultural influence on persuasive behaviors of UN NGO women towards men and other women.

In the other pertinent essay, *Gender, Power and Practice: Putting Your Money Where Your Mouth I*s by Victoria DeFrancisco, the author addresses communication, language and

gender in conjunction with the two predominant frameworks through which they are commonly studied: the *Difference Perspective* and the *Dominance Principle*. For DeFrancisco, the *Difference Perspective* indicates that communication problems among men, between men and women, and among women, are deemed as significant as the problems encountered through intercultural social interaction. Such problems in understanding one another can directly result from "innocent socialization" in unfamiliar environments. The misunderstandings that systemically develop from communication gender differences are not particularly grounded in psychological perspectives, power issues, and/or social variants, a point that corroborates Tannen's research and position. In contrast, the *Dominance Principle*, also referred to as the social power approach, connects the interpretative communication problems that exist among men, between men and women, or among women, to unequal hierarchical positions one assumes in society. Today, feminist socio-linguistic thinking is drawing attention to a pluralistic and integral direction toward gender studies that is also steeped in an agenda to address political as well as gender inequality.

DeFrancisco agrees with Wodak's view on women bonding and friendship that they both conceive as the construction and maintenance of close and equal relationships. She suggests that predominant feminine socialization tendencies, especially communication behaviors, enable a woman to appreciate a model for social interaction from a nonpower-based approach. She further suggests that power has been inherently understood for centuries as a commodity that people possess in various amounts that is directly connected to economic strength.

The feminist movement, however, has conceptualized power by developing and promoting *empowerment*, which places emphasis on resistance to oppression rather than exertion of power over others. She believes that the source of strength comes from within the person and from one's personal identity as an individual and as a member of society. In international, developmental work, implementation of empowerment and gender communication, equally, have many connotations from a *cultural relativism* worldview. Western culture, for example, emphasizes individual empowerment while nonwestern cultures practice a communal approach.

Empowerment could even suggest that one fight power with power. The semantics of empowerment accurately apply to UN NGO women, for the term empowerment is understood universally today as a fundamental concept to the modern era women's movement and to the women's world at the UN, to be discussed in detail in the next section.

DeFrancisco prefers the term emancipation to empowerment and claims it remains more consistent with human rights and social development. She contends that emancipation and its objectives enable people to decide for themselves what is viewed as oppressive in their culture vs. what is valued. To be sure, such a re-conceptualization and application of gender and power would require a long-term process that would meet with resistance. One of her conclusions regarding the struggle of women to gain a respected voice in society, stresses: "When women view their behaviors as neither irrational nor insane but rather as realistic responses to others' attempts to control them, they *are* experiencing emancipation." (DeFrancisco 1997) The concept of empowerment was created by the UN NGO women's movement and offers multiple variations of interpretation based on *cultural relativism* and numerous ways to communicate this action. Today, this concept of empowerment, that has been considered a hallmark approach to the improvement of women's lives the last two decades, is being reviewed by some factions of the women's movement.

17. Closing Statement

In Section II, *The Academic Review*, several critical topics have been covered to establish the relevant social and cultural perspectives: socio-cultural gender identity; 20th Century sociological and feminists perspectives, symbolic interacationism and research methodologies; language use and joint interaction; the media, language and gender profiling; and gender language and strategies . They provide the substantive academic background, premises and connections for conducting the independent research for three years to prove the hypothesis of this study. It reads once again:

To confirm that culture determines the foundation for shaping one's communication style and social interaction. A multitude of communication styles strongly impacts woman-to-woman interaction among UN NGO representatives. As a result, progress on the advancement of women involves an enormous amount of effort and energy in the never-ending challenge to communicate effectively with one another.

In summary, the topics listed below have been specifically studied in preparation for the independent research and have contributed to the drawn conclusions of this study:

- Gender and Communication: The Biological and Socialization Dimensions

- Gender and Communication: The Cultural Dimension

- Social Interaction and Symbolic Interactionism: The Sociological Dimension

- Language Use and Joint Interaction

- Media, Gender Profiling and Association

- Gender Communication, and Discourse

The environmental setting of most of the independent research, United Nations Headquarters New York, will be now be explained in detail to connect the academic review and the independent research to the context of the crucial environment of this original study.

SECTION III

THE UNITED NATIONS AND ITS WORLD OF WOMEN

United Nations Headquarters in New York City provided the socio-cultural environment for the independent research of this dissertation from winter 2002 to spring 2004, so it is important to understand the chartered principles of the UN and its infrastructure, especially as it pertains to work for the advancement of women. The description offers an overview of the background and purpose of the United Nations, its major organs and their functions, the women's divisions and their mandates, the four UN women's world conferences, and the role of NGO women with official UN status. This section describes the involvement and initiatives of NGO women associated with the UN since 1946 and the women's movement in conjunction with the world organization the last three decades. Since the inception of the UN, the efforts of NGO women representatives have influenced policy making and spurred action for women's human rights, fundamental freedoms, social development and gender equality within the institution's major organs and all its women's divisions. To illustrate the critical and complex role of NGO women at the UN, this section will trace the historical and significant part played by NGO women and their focus on social issues from the UN's founding in 1945 to the present day. Throughout this examination, the role of UN NGO women representatives (the study group) receives special attention, including their contributions to human rights, fundamental freedoms and social development within the context of the UN; and their impact on the advancement of women worldwide for nearly six decades. This section will also introduce Soroptimist International as a case study that typifies a major international women's NGO mission, structure, goals and objectives and how they interact with the platforms and programs of the UN.

The individual and collective communication capabilities, as speakers and writers, of UN NGO women representatives have assumed a pivotal role in order to assert and achieve their position and goals from the formative years of the institution in the mid-forties till today. These women needed to learn and adapt to the UN's rigid structure and its protocol of social interaction among member-state representatives and UN staff who were far more familiar with diplomatic culture, its language and protocol, as well as strategies to foster formal deliberations and negotiations. These women needed to develop their own NGO culture and language use and learn how to interact properly with the diplomatic missions and the UN staff in their roles as activists, lobbyists, policy makers and program implementers. These women needed to learn how to communicate with one another in dyads, small groups and large gatherings to forge women's social issues forward. Today, they still strive to communicate effectively with each other to create joint interaction to establish policy that will converge into action for the advancement of women. A long struggle to achieve recognition, at last, the international UN NGO community is highly regarded by all organs and divisions of this world institution today. Now, this section will examine the UN and Its World of Women as the workplace for UN NGO women representatives and as the environmental context of the independent research.

1. An Historical Perspective of the UN and the Role of Women

From a historical perspective, women's engagement in international human rights and social development actually precedes the establishment of the United Nations. In the 1920s and 1930s, newly forming women's organizations stood ready and eager to collaborate with the League of Nations, the precursor of the United Nations, that was created in 1918 under the auspices of the Versailles Treaty that ended World War I. Yearning for world peace, the early 20th Century women's movement quickly recognized the merit of this first intergovernmental organization that aimed to end violent war as the means to settle disputes and to replace force with international cooperation and peaceful negotiation. Furthermore, women leaders, then, firmly believed that the advancement of women throughout the world required democratic

opportunities sanctioned by governmental action. Initial social issues of concern focused on universal education and health care, and international women's organizations started to succeed with their agendas for international development in these social development areas.

Women activists launched a working model of cooperation and interaction between nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations and established that women's social issues become a part of the official agenda for international cooperation. No longer were women's matters considered topics just for domestic attention. Although the short-lived League of Nations ultimately collapsed at the beginning of World War II, it left a legacy model for international cooperation among governments and nongovernmental organizations. Moreover, it provided an opportunity for NGO women to participate in the creation of the United Nations and to champion human rights and fundamental freedoms for the individual, men and women, worldwide. (Pietila 2002)

The founding conference of the United Nations was held in San Francisco in the fall of 1945. To this hallmark meeting, several participating nations sent women as members of their official delegation. Eleanor Roosevelt, the formidable wife of the late President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, served on the United States delegation. Already a living legend as a leader of the worldwide effort to improve social conditions of men and women during the first half of the 20th Century, she became the most outspoken female proponent on behalf of the formation of the United Nations. She used her broad-based network and strong communication skills to rally support for a strong human rights statement, far-reaching social development programs, and active nongovernmental organization (NGO) participation. The United Nations charter was written at that first convention, and it incorporates carefully defined purposes and principles that apply to all member states. The core purposes intend to maintain international peace and security; develop friendly relations among member states; achieve international cooperation in solving problems of an economic, social, cultural and humanitarian nature; promote human rights and fundamental freedoms; and serve as a center to harmonize the action of nations.

Actually, decades before the birth of the United Nations, these universal principles had already served as a blueprint for the work of international NGO women's groups. Consequently, during early deliberations at the charter conference, Eleanor Roosevelt insisted that the NGO community (especially women) be entitled to an active voice through visible participation in the main organs of the United Nations. To this end and with the welcomed support of other women governmental delegates from Europe, they succeeded in changing the original wording of the preamble from "the dignity and worth of the human person" to "equal rights of men and women." This simple yet profound alteration of the text suddenly imbued women with a status equal to men in international dialogue and deliberation. Finally, women delegates resoundingly influenced the formation of Article 8 of the Charter, considered a hallmark turning point by women activists at that time. Today, it still reads (Charter of the United Nations 1945):

> "The United Nations shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs."

2. The Six Main Organs at the United Nations

Based on excerpts from the Charter of the United Nations, the following abstract presents a summary of the structure and principles of the six main organs of the United Nations. They are important to explain in order to understand the capacity in which women's social issues at the UN are incorporated and to appreciate the complexity of the interaction between the UN's main organs and its NGO women representatives.

2.1. The United Nations General Assembly signifies the international governmental branch based on a one vote per nation principle, cast by the ambassador of the country's mission to the United Nations. The General Assembly is primarily concerned with international cooperation for peace and security; economic, social, cultural, educational and health issues as well as human rights and fundamental freedoms. The member states discuss and debate these

topics to determine resolutions that require a two-thirds majority vote. Six committees determine the issues to be brought to the floor for further deliberation and ultimate vote by the General Assembly. These committees cover the following areas:

- First Committee: Disarmament and International Security
- Second Committee: Economic and Financial Issues
- **Third Committee: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Development**
- Fourth Committee: Special Political Issues and De-colonization
- Fifth Committee: Administration and Budgetary Matters
- Sixth Committee: Legal Affairs

Passed resolutions, designed to induce UN, governmental, NGO and civil society action, are not officially binding agreements for the national governments of the UN members. They do shape world opinion, however, and help nations form important domestic policy. Particularly significant to women is the internationally acclaimed Resolution #1325 that commands the incorporation of "Gender Perspective and Gender Mainstreaming" into high-level UN positions and all international decision-making processes. This policy has been actualized in recent years. For example, in December 2001 in Bonn, Germany, when the UN initiated the critical conference to re-establish a governmental structure for Afghanistan, two Afghan women held high-profile positions and successfully forged the implementation of gender perspective into the official documents. Today, NGO representatives with official UN status are allowed to observe General Assembly sessions, and most women's organizations take this opportunity to lobby governmental representatives on specific women's issues. (United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues 2002)

2.2. The United Nations Security Council, comprised of 15 member states, promotes and maintains international peace and security; determines international breaches; and decides measures to be taken accordingly. The Council also considers recommendations from the Secretary General, submitted for further discussion, debate and resolution by the Secretariat and

the General Assembly. In the past decade, acts of violence against women and children have been taken into serious account in connection with breaches of international peace and security and are now considered criminal acts of war. To pass a resolution in the Security Council requires the vote of nine members that must include each vote of the five permanent members: China, France, Great Britain, Russia, and the United States of America.

2.3. The Economic Social Council (ECOSOC) handles economically sustainable and viable social development, generated by the work and cooperation of 54 UN member states that are elected by the General Assembly for a 3-year term. The member states are required to initiate thorough studies and draft comprehensive reports that focus on the international perspective of economic, social, cultural, educational, and health issues, all of which signify women's issues as well. In addition, they offer recommendations related to human rights and fundamental freedoms; prepare international conventions and conferences; work closely with UN agencies; communicate concerns to the General Assembly and Security Council; and oversee all commissions, e.g., the Commission on the Status of Women, to be described in-depth later in this section. The NGO community holds its official representative status in conjunction with ECOSOC and interacts with its members in areas of social development, also to be discussed in detail later. In recent years, ECOSOC sessions have provided a powerful venue to promote women's issues and forward-moving strategies.

2.4. The International Trustee Council provides administrative and supervisory assistance, including gender equality initiatives and gender mainstreaming, for territories not yet operating as self-governing systems.

2.5. The International Court of Justice is located in Den Haag of the Netherlands. It is composed of 15 judges from different member states and serves as the principal UN judicial organ. Today, hate crimes against human rights and fundamental freedoms of women are

scrutinized, especially following the atrocities against women during the recent Yugoslav War that resulted in the still ongoing tribunal against the perpetrators.

2.6. The Secretariat functions as the administrative branch for the entire United Nations system under the current leadership of Secretary General Kofi Annan. The Secretary General is selected by the General Assembly and attends all important meetings of the Security Council, General Assembly, ECOSOC and the Trustee Council. Secretary General Annan, an active proponent of the gender perspective at all professional levels and opportunities throughout the United Nations system, continues to integrate women into visible and powerful positions as well as policy-making positions through his recognition and implementation of women's rights and (Charter of the United Nation 1945)

3. Women's Divisions at the United Nations

3.1. The Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) serves under the Secretariat, and the NGO women's community constantly interacts and collaborates with them. Today, women administer several highly recognized women's divisions at United Nations Headquarters, and their key roles and responsibilities make them a visible and heard force. Each office, agency or commission offers a unique contribution to the social development of women, as they interact with each other to further the global goals of the modern era women's movement. DAW is the oldest established UN office to undertake women's issues, and it thrives as an integral part of the Secretariat since 1946. DAW's mission statement and agenda reads as follows:

- DAW fundamentally seeks the improvement of the status of women and the ultimate achievement of equality with men.
- DAW strives to pursue this policy through social development as equal partners, participants and beneficiaries in the familiar international themes of sustainable development, peace and security, governance and human rights.

- DAW promotes a mainstream gender perspective inside and outside the UN; researches and develops specific policy on behalf of women's needs and rights; fosters interaction between governments, the NGO community and civil society concerning gender issues; strengthens *communication* between policy-making processes with women internationally, nationally and locally; and promotes programs based on the Beijing women's world conference.

- DAW extends valuable assistance to the Commission on the Status of Women and The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (explained later).

    3.2. **The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM***)* functions as an autonomous UN agency under the directive of ECOSOC. Founded in 1976 in response to the overwhelming demand for a woman's agency at the first UN women's world conference in Mexico 1975, UNIFEM was created to strengthen the institutional structures devoted to women within the UN system. Initially, it functioned as the Voluntary Fund for the Decade of the Woman (1976-1985) to aid the poorest nations/least developed countries of the world.

    Today, UNIFEM provides financial and technical assistance to some 100 countries through its far-reaching network of 14 regional UNIFEM offices that are operated by field directors and staff. It mainly launches and supports innovative programs and integrative strategies that foster women's human rights, their political participation and economic security within their cultural society. The promotion of gender equality within the UN is viewed as equally important to UNIFEM's mission. They further this goal by linking women's issues to international, national and local agendas and through collaborative negotiation to position women in mainstream social development initiatives at all societal levels. Like all UN agencies, UNIFEM tackles its streamlined strategies in order to expand its impact on the social advancement of women. This platform implements micro and macro financial and training programs designed to be culturally sensitive. UNIFEM's main strategies read as follows:

- To strengthen the capacity/leadership of women's organizations.

- To leverage political and financial support for women's issues.

- To forge partnerships with the UN, national governments, women's organizations, women's NGO groups and the private sector.

- To establish pilot work projects for gender mainstreaming. (www.un/unifem.org)

3.3. The International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW*)*, established by ECOSOC in 1976 as a direct result of the women's conference in Mexico 1975, operates as an autonomous UN institution. Its activities engage all UN member states, and it relies on contributions from UN member states, foundations and private sources. Its agenda facilitates the advancement of women through research, training, collection and dissemination of information. Currently, its research targets gender studies and the cultural perspective in the modern-day evolution and development of women. At present, INSTRAW assumes a strategic role within the UN as the first institution to utilize information and communication technologies (ICTs). To date, they have developed the Gender Awareness Information and Networking System (GAINS), an integrated knowledge and information system available through the Internet. GAINS seeks to establish an effective network of individual, national and international research institutions and resource experts to facilitate the availability of gender related topics and information to advance gender equality and mainstreaming efforts at the UN and other international institutions. It serves as an expedient resource on gender issues for the NGO community and civil society as well. (Pietila 2002)

3.4. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW*),** first established in 1946, represents a fully functional commission under the umbrella of ECOSOC. It has since expanded its role to deliberate and direct the course of women's development exponentially. The CSW is comprised of 45 ECOSOC members who are elected for a 4-year term. Each year a different member state serves as chair. Its women's rights mandate emphasizes women's engagement in politics, economics, civil society, social development and education. Furthermore, the CSW

makes recommendations to ECOSOC on urgent matters in these critical areas promoting the advancement of women.

Since the fourth UN Women's World Conference (Beijing 1995), the CSW pursues a follow-up process to the implementation of the ***Platform for Action*** outcome document. The CSW also seeks the further development of a female gender perspective in all UN related work. Each year in March, the CSW organizes and conducts an annual two-week session on women's social issues. Since Beijing, the CSW sessions discuss and offer recommendations on two of the *Twelve Critical Areas of Concern* presented in the ***Platform for Action*** outcome document.

Note: The UN CSW 2003 and 2004 Sessions served as the primary "cultural environment" for the independent research of the study group comprised of UN NGO women representatives who attended the 47th and 48th Annual CSW Sessions from around the world. The process to plan, prepare and execute the research methodologies at each CSW session will be described in detail in the independent research section.

4. United Nations Women's World Conferences

In the last thirty years, the UN has sponsored four women's world conferences that have welcomed governmental delegations and NGO women representatives who attended in vast numbers. Each conference established an agenda to match the then political and social times of the modern era women's movement as follows (Pietila 2000):

1975	Mexico City	The Organization of the Grassroots Women's Movement
1980	Copenhagen	The Determination of the Social Issues
1985	Nairobi	The Establishment of Forward Moving Strategies
1995	Beijing	The Creation of the ***Platform for Action*** Document

The *Twelve Critical Areas of Concern*, comprehensively outlined in the **Platform for Action** outcome document, call for awareness, advocacy and action to improve human rights, fundamental freedoms and social development of women, worldwide, for the 21st Century in regard to the following issues:

- Women in Poverty

- Education and Training of Women

- Women and Health

- Violence against Women

- Women and Armed Conflict

- Women and the Economy

- Women in Power and Decision-making

- Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

- Human Rights of Women

- **Women in the Media**

- Women and the Environment

- The Girl Child.

The far-reaching movement has awarded the social issue *Women and the Media* top priority, worldwide, as one of the *Twelve Critical Areas of Concern.* As such, it reinforces the significance to the UN and its NGO women's community of messages transmitted through the media institution and its impact on profiling and stereotyping women as discussed under language use and the media in the academic review section, and will be described in the independent research section.

In 2000, The Beijing Plus Five Meeting held at UN Headquarters New York produced the *Political Declaration and Outcome Document*. Governmental delegations and NGO representatives attended this special session of the General Assembly to review and reaffirm

their commitment to the Beijing Declaration and the ***Platform for Action***. (UN Platform for Action 2001)

An equally important UN outcome document, **The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, is considered a major contribution to the advancement of women's human rights and fundamental freedoms. Informally dubbed *The International Bill of Human Rights for Women*, this proclamation consists of a powerful preamble and 30 articles that clearly define discrimination and offer an agenda for action to end discrimination at national levels. CEDAW describes discrimination to mean:

> "Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex with the effect or purpose to impair or nullify the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of marital status, of equality of human rights and fundamental freedoms concerning the political, economic, social, cultural and civil areas of society."

When a member state ratifies CEDAW through a vote of approval by its government, the state is then committed to undertake specific measures to eliminate discrimination in its country as follows:

- To incorporate the principle of equality into the legal system
- To establish tribunes/public institutions to protect women
- To eliminate all acts against individuals, organizations or enterprises
- To ensure equal access roles in political and public life regarding: education, health, employment, nationality rights, trafficking policy and the vote.

To date, 172 countries have ratified CEDAW since its adoption in 1979; thus, these governments are legally bound to the CEDAW principles and are required to submit and defend quadrennial progress reports to ECOSOC on the elimination of discrimination against women in

their societies/cultures. NGO representatives with general consultative status participate in the review of each country's progress report presentations at annual sessions held at United Nations Headquarters. In addition, NGO representatives continue to lobby the few governments who have yet to sign, including the United States of America. (www.un/cedaw.org)

Having highlighted the important divisions and agencies of the women's world at UN Headquarters, one begins to recognize the breadth of the role of women at the United Nations and the significance of the interaction among the women's agencies, divisions, offices, commissions and the UN NGO women's community. Although the study specifically focuses on woman-to-woman communication styles among UN NGO women, still they must be able to communicate effectively with the members of the various UN branches that are especially designated to promote the advancement of women. UN officials and governmental representatives, from all cultural regions of the world, also participate in the UN international women's conferences and strongly sessions that are attended by the NGO community.

The discussion will now shift to the NGO world of women, the study group of the independent research, and explain its important working relationship with the United Nations.

5. United Nations Conference of Nongovernmental Organizations (CONGO) was established in 1946 on behalf of NGO representatives at the United Nations. In particular, they assist the NGO community, in conjunction with ECOSOC, as well as the commissions and agencies under its jurisdiction. The CONGO office adheres to the following mandate:

- To safeguard the rights of NGO representatives to speak and be heard at the UN
- To assist members to access/participate within the UN legislative process
- To facilitate dialogue with the UN and NGO representatives
- To strengthen NGO activities through CONGO NGO committees
- To create NGO partnerships and networks within and among regions of the world.

Today, approximately 2200 NGO representatives are officially registered with the United

Nations through the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) or ECOSOC. Three categories

of NGO status exist according to ECOSOC Resolution #31, adopted July 1996. This resolution

defines an NGO as any international organization not established by a governmental entity or

intergovernmental agreement. The "organization" refers to an NGO at national, sub-regional,

regional and international levels, except when expressly indicated otherwise. It also specifies

certain principles that an NGO is to maintain in connection with its consultative status with

ECOSOC.

When an NGO applies for official association with the UN and fulfills the mandated

criteria, it is then granted either *consultative status*, *general consultative status* or *consultation on

the roster.* The last category is designated on a temporary basis for contributions that are highly

specific in nature. An NGO that represents one specialized interest, such as the reconstruction of

civil society in post-conflict regions of the world, education of the girl child or HIV-AIDS in

Sub-Sahara Africa, receives *consultative status* and the right to observe when ECOSOC is in

session. A major international NGO that fosters worldwide membership and administers

outreach projects and programs in multiple areas of social development under the jurisdiction of

ECOSOC receives the coveted *general consultative status* that avails their representatives of

multiple privileges and rights within the UN system. Most important, they can speak on the

record at designated ECOSOC sessions and attend the General Assembly as observers. Presently,

negotiations are underway to enable general consultative NGO representatives to speak on the

record at General Assembly sessions as well. Currently, UN NGO representatives with general

consultative status enjoy the following rights:

- To submit oral statements during deliberations in ECOSOC
- To submit statements for UN documentation and distribution to delegates
- To access and lobby delegates from all UN member states

- To acquire press releases of all major meetings at all UN centers

- To present items for consideration by ECOSOC

- To make interventions at ECOSOC sessions.

Currently, approximately 100 international NGO groups *possess general consultative status*, and 17 with *general consultative status* are elected to serve on the CONGO Board for a 3-year term. Presently, the board concentrates on two outreach goals on behalf of the NGO worldwide community (www.un/congo.org):

- To expand the principles of the UN Millennium Forum Declaration (explained later)

- To strengthen NGO voices in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Nongovernmental organizations stem from the private sector and strive to improve the conditions of civil society in one or more areas of human rights and social service. They operate as nonprofit organizations, and most of the membership serves on a voluntary basis to achieve their designated goal/s. They vary in size, stature and purpose, but all such organizations are motivated by a collective mission to improve the conditions in a sorely needed area of social development, often steeped in the principles of universally established human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Sometimes, NGOs are founded spontaneously and sometimes they gradually emerge from grassroots movements concerned with pressing social issues, e.g., the state of the natural environment or post-conflict society building. Still many others are established with lofty goals and a deliberate organizational structure. Literally, thousands of NGO groups exist in every cultural region of the world, and they seek to meet the elementary and entitled needs of civil society at local, national, regional and international levels. They range in size from ten to a million members, and each NGO stands unique in its purpose and approach to help assuage the plight of civil society.

Since UN NGO women representatives are the focal study group of the independent research to determine the impact of culture on their communication styles and social interaction with each other, it is essential, at this juncture, to provide an example of an internationally engaged NGO and its subsequent interaction with the United Nations and its NGO women counterparts. To that end, Soroptimist International, a major international women's NGO with *general consultative status* at the UN, will be presented as a case study.

6. United Nations NGO Soroptimist International

Soroptimist International symbolizes an international women's NGO with *general consultative status* at the United Nations. Founded in California 1921, today it represents the largest "worldwide organization for women in management and the professions working through service projects to advance human rights and the status of women." In its mission statement, it seeks to:

- Maintain high ethical standards in business and professional life
- Strive for human rights for all people and, in particular, to advance the status of women around the world
- Develop interest in community, national and international affairs
- Contribute to international understanding and universal friendship
- Develop the highest concept of patriotism.

A six-pronged, service program targets the following areas of concern: economic and social development, education, environment, health, human rights and the status of women, and international goodwill and understanding. Soroptimist International also participates jointly in Project 5-0 in partnership with four other international NGO groups: The International Federation of University Women, The International Council of Women, The International

Federation of Business and Professional Women, and Zonta International. These four organizations also hold general consultative status at the United Nations. This Project 5-0 coalition provides desperately needed vocational training for women in developing countries.

Soroptimist International, with headquarters located in Cambridge, England, consists of an international board that includes its UN representatives and three federations: Soroptimist International of the Americas, Europe and the South West Pacific. A fourth federation is in the process of formation for the African clubs that are currently under the administrative jurisdiction of the European Federation. In addition, each federation is divided into regions, districts and individual clubs at the local community level. Currently, Soroptimist International has approximately 92,000 active members operating in 125 countries. Officers at all levels are elected for a two-year term, and an international conference, open to all members-at-large, is held in alternating federations every four years. At that several-day world meeting, the international projects, in conjunction with the six-pronged service areas, are determined for the next quadrennial period. Soroptimist International calls upon its federations to co-operate with international and national organizations, governments, other nongovernmental organizations, commissions and civil society-at-large, to support policies, programs and projects of Soroptimist International.

Soroptimist International has maintained accredited consultative status to the Economic Social Council since 1951. It also stands among the first to acquire the elevated *general consultative status* established by ECOSOC resolution in July 1996, which increases select NGO rights of engagement at the UN. Soroptimist International has always recognized that the promotion of its goals and objectives, defined by its six-prong program areas, are best achieved through direct involvement with the United Nations, social interaction with ECOSOC and UN agencies, such as UNIFEM and UNICEF, and close affiliation with other UN NGO women representatives. Soroptimist International initiatives directly interface with the work of parallel NGO constituents as well as with key UN doctrines and outcome documents on behalf of human rights and social development. They include the following:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW, 1979

- The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, 1985

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

- The Beijing Declaration and *Platform for Action* adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995

- The Outcome Document by the United Nations General Assembly *Women 2000: Gender Equality Development and Peace for the 21st Century*, 2000.

Concurrently, Soroptimist International determines and implements programs/projects that underscore the purpose and importance of United Nations Proclamations. United Nations year and decade proclamations that are established and promoted to heighten world awareness on behalf of specific social concerns in recent years include:

- International Year for the Culture of Peace

- International Year of Volunteers

- International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for Children of the World

- International Year of Mountains

- International Year of Eco Tourism.

Soroptimist International is also accredited to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Geneva, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Environment Program in New York City. In addition, *general consultative* status with ECOSOC ensures Soroptimist International representatives the opportunity to enjoy official relations with the following UN agencies that approach pressing social issues from a global perspective:

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

- International Labor Organization (ILO)

- World Health Organization (WHO)

- UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

- Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

The Soroptimist International UN representatives, appointed by the international president and approved by the international board of directors, serve in New York, Geneva, Vienna, Paris (UNESCO) and Rome (FAO). The board also assigns representatives to five of the seven UN world regions: Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Europe and Western Asia. These representatives work autonomously and as members of NGO committees to United Nations agencies, commissions and in partnership with other NGOs to collaborate on inter-related areas of women's issues cited below:

- Persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women

- Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training

- Violence against women

- Effects of armed and other kinds of conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation

- Inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities in access to resources

- Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision making at all levels

- Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women

- Lack of respect for inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women

- Stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media

- Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment

- Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child.

In accordance with today's global women's movement and the United Nations women's divisions, agencies, offices and commissions that strive to establish *Awareness Advocacy Action* on current women's social issues, the Soroptimist International Program Director serves as a consultant for the Soroptimist International Federation Program Directors. Below are listed strategic goals derived from multiple UN doctrines and social agendas in which Soroptimist clubs are encouraged to become engaged.

Human Rights

- Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls
- Eliminate trafficking of human beings, especially women and girls
- Reduce the harmful effects of conflict and war on women and girls

Education

- Work for universal primary education and access to quality education and training opportunities for women and girls in technology and nontraditional occupations
- Facilitate the role and contribution of men and boys to achieve gender equality

Economic and Social Development

- Develop programs and partnerships to eradicate the extreme poverty and hunger of women and girls
- Improve societal and workplace conditions to enable women to achieve their potential
- Increase women's involvement in management and decision making

Health

- Promote awareness of women's needs and their role in combating HIV/AIDs
- Improve nutrition and access to health care and medical needs for women and children
- Decrease maternal and infant mortality rates
- Eliminate drug and substance abuse

Environment

- Improve and increase access to safe drinking water as a basic human right

- Support sustainable development that includes improved protection of ecosystems

- Increase fair distribution of food resources to those in need

- Enhance respect for all cultures and halt all forms of discrimination through increased tolerance and mutual understanding

- Advocate for the banning of landmines and rehabilitation of the land.

- Advocate women's participation in the peace process, to include reconciliation, reconstruction and the humane resettlement of refugees. (*International Soroptimist 2003)*

The breadth of the mission, goals and objectives of this international NGO offers no exception when compared to other international NGOs and their equally aggressive agendas for international human rights and social development. Members expect/anticipate that their UN NGO representatives succeed at promoting their perspective and programs, and that requires strong communication capabilities. Cultural understanding of one another is crucial to manifest successful social interaction to acquire general consensus on important social issues to promote human rights, social development and the advancement of women.

7. The Millennium Development Goals

Looking to define the future direction of the UN and its NGO community, the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent an cornerstone UN resolution of global significance for social development. During the last decade of the 20th Century and early years of the 21st Century, a multitude of United Nations world summits and conferences have been hosted to mobilize the global community in an effort to tackle the social issues of the times. NGO women have been present and visible, and have applied vocal pressure on behalf of the female

gender perspective regarding each agenda and resolution outcome document at every UN-sponsored global gathering.

In September 2000, the United Nations Millennium Summit summoned the largest ever assembly of world leaders, 147 heads of state and government, and senior representatives from all remaining member states (then 189). On this monumental occasion, all UN member states agreed upon the MDGs that are specifically aimed to overcome poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. The Summit's Millennium Declaration also covers a broad scope of commitments toward human rights, good governance and democracy. The Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015 are:

Goal 1. To halve extreme poverty and hunger

Goal 2. To achieve universal primary education

Goal 3. To empower women and promote equality between men and women

Goal 4. To reduce under-five mortality by two thirds

Goal 5. To reduce maternal mortality by three quarters

Goal 6. To reverse the spread of diseases, especially HIV/AIDS and malaria

Goal 7. To ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 8. To create a global partnership for development of aid, trade and debt relief

Goal 3. above focuses on the areas of education, employment and women as governmental policy makers and decision makers. It has already transitioned to cornerstone Resolution #1325 in the women's world, i.e., calling explicitly for gender equality and mainstreaming with the United Nations system and in all UN sponsored initiatives. Secretary General Annan firmly established the vital role of women at the UN and worldwide for the 21st Century when he stated: " In our work to reach these eight goals, as the Millennium Declaration made clear, gender equality is not only a goal in its own right; it is critical to our ability to reach all the others." (United Nations 2002)

A key theme of the CSW 2005 Session will cover the five-year review of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals thus far, including the *cultural relativism* perspective of the UN's seven cultural regions. The other theme will honor the thirty-year anniversary of the modern era women's movement and its memorable moments, and will introduce emerging social issues today. Cooperative and collaborative UN NGO women's communication styles and strategies that foster consensus are critical to reach these challenging MDG goals by the target date 2015. Achievement of the MDGs will certainly depend on the expanding roles and responsibilities of nongovernmental organizations and civil society as well as the contributions of the private sector now working in partnership with the United Nations and its NGO community. (United Nations Millennium Development Goals Declaration 2000)

SECTION IV

THE INDEPENDENT RESEARCH AND RESULTS

The independent research was designed to determine the role and influence of a woman's cultural background on the communication styles that she uses in social interaction with other women in her capacity as a UN NGO representative at international conferences/sessions to advance women's social development. The quantitative and qualitative research data was acquired through the distribution of a survey questionnaire at the 47th Commission on the Status of Women 2003 Session, participatory observations at both the CSW 2003 and 2004 Sessions, and four interviews with UN NGO women representatives to CSW sessions for the past several years. The CSW sessions are held annually during the first two weeks in March at UN Headquarters New York. This research was officially welcomed by the NY NGO Committee on the Status of Women, where I have been a member since 2001, and the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW). These two groups work together to coordinate the participation and programs for the UN NGO women who attend from all cultural regions of the world each year. The purpose, preparation and process of the annual CSW 2003 Session will be described in detail in this section as it represents the core environmental setting for most of the research. The three main elements of the independent research will then be introduced, explained and analyzed to prove the impact of culture on the communication styles that influence the social interaction of the study group in their joint actions to advance women's causes and social development in the 21st Century.

1. The Commission on the Status of Women: Critical Background

The Commission on the Status of Women held its 47th Annual Session on *Violence Against Women* and *Women and the Media* in March 2003. In preparation for and during that session, numerous pundits on the subjects, governmental officials, UN staff and NGO men and

women representatives participated as speakers, facilitators, contributors and listeners at preliminary meetings, the CSW ECOSOC plenary sessions and NGO parallel events. They gave keynote addresses and presentations; lead panel discussions and breakout sessions; and conducted workshops, caucus meetings, networking activities and social activities. The CSW 2003 Session revolved around the achievement of a UN sanctioned outcome document to determine policy on each of these social issues and the establishment of a *best practices* slate to form guidelines for governmental delegates and NGO representatives. Reinforced with the UN approach to a global perspective for local adaptation of the issues, they, in turn, promote awareness, advocacy and action initiatives upon returning to their countries and cultures. A current universal UN principle of human rights and social development states:

Think Global/Act Local.

CSW planning entails a two-year ongoing process. Two themes for each CSW session are determined years in advance by the ECOSOC CSW Committee that is comprised of 45 member states and spearheaded by an Executive Board. Since the UN Women's World Conference in Beijing (1995), the topics have been selected from the *Twelve Critical Areas of Concern* found in the outcome document **The Platform for Action** established at Beijing. To promote international discussion and development of the themes in the ensuing months, the next year's topics are officially introduced at the end of the ongoing CSW session. For example, at the end of the 2003 session, the two themes for 2004 were announced: **Women and War: Prevention, Post Conflict and Reconstruction** and **The Role of Men and Boys in the Achievement of Gender Equality.**

Two Expert Group Meetings, one on each subject, are organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and are hosted in different cultural regions of the world. UN officials, NGOs and invited experts on the issues, often from the academic field, as well as practitioners, convene for several days to present their research, papers, concepts and concrete ideas, etc. They offered recommendations to be incorporated into the next CSW session. For example, the **Women and the Media** Expert Group Meeting, held in Beirut, Lebanon in November 2002, collaborated to develop premises that were then integrated into the general

discussion at the CSW 2003 Session. This Expert Group Meeting was especially important to the independent research since the media as a cultural institution is a critical component of the quantitative and qualitative research. The premises are as follows:

- Media, in all their forms, are central to women's advancement and empowerment. Women's right to freedom of expression and to information is fundamental to the realization of all their rights and freedoms. These rights include the right to speak and be heard, as well as to enter and participate in media professions.

- The process of globalization, including the spread of transnational media, towards concentration of media ownership, under-funding of public service broadcasting, and commercialization of the new information and communication technologies, are undermining the ability of nation states to pursue media systems and restricting the diversity of views and public expression.

The Expert Group recommended that the following actions be taken by the United Nations, intergovernmental organizations, governments, media organizations, NGOs and women's advocacy groups to help establish policy to be incorporated into the outcome document of the CSW 2003 Session:

- Institute policies that protect and promote freedom of expression and information, affirm women's right to these freedoms, ensure women's access to communication as an increasingly recognized right, and create an enabling environment for women in media.

- Ensure that media regulatory bodies are independent of state control.

- Provide appropriate and sustained levels of resource support to NGOs to enable them to undertake activities necessary to influence policies that allow women's voices to be heard.

- Analyze communication policies from a gender perspective through ongoing dialogue with all interested parties, including gender specialists.

- Address challenges presented by language, cost, connectivity, lack of infrastructure and censorship, which undermine the benefit of Information Communication Technologies to women, through the development of legal and policy frameworks that take gender into account and enable these media to be established and flourish.

- Address the problem of media content that is harmful or degrading to women, with special reference to the Internet and in collaboration with NGOs.

- Create among students and young people an awareness of professional codes and guidelines relating to gender equality.

The Expert Group also presented recommendations for access to employment and decision-making based on the following premise:

"Access to employment and decision-making in media and communication is central to women's human rights. Although more women are entering and using the media, concerns about women's access, employment and decision-making remain. With this in mind, media enterprises, organizations, professional associations, educational institutions and other social factors including governments, the UN and other intergovernmental organizations should share the responsibility for increasing women's access and participation."

The Expert Group then called for the following actions:

- Set goals for the achievement of gender balance among media personnel in different categories and levels of media employment.

- Conduct research to examine evidence of a global trend of women leaving media professions at different stages in their careers; publicize the findings and implement measures to ensure that women are enabled and encouraged to stay within the media.

- Recognize the existence of negative, gender-based attitudes and behaviors within media enterprises and organizations, and institute measures and mechanisms to create a gender-friendly work environment.

- Support women's media initiatives as a vital aspect of democratization of media and society.

The Expert Group next addressed women's representation and their portrayal in the media. Again, the impact of women's portrayal by this institution has been extensively described in the academic review under feminist perspectives and language use and in the independent research. The position of this Expert Group Meeting further substantiates the significance of this topic and its influence on woman-to-woman communication styles of the study group. The Expert Group established the following premise for the CSW 2003 Session:

"Research shows that little progress has been made in the transformation of media content from a gender perspective since the Beijing Conference. Yet, the right to communicate is increasingly recognized as central to democracy, citizenship and good governance. The *de facto* censorship of women's views and the stereotyping of male and female roles in the media must therefore receive even greater prominence than in the past. This calls for a more strategic and targeted approach that engages those who own the media and create its content in finding solutions that enhance the professionalism of the media, while at the same time opening the door to more diverse content. Only when such win-win solutions are found will transformation of media content start to be realized."

Finally, the Expert Group recommended the following actions to promote gender equality as intrinsic to freedom of expression and information and to recognize the responsibility of media practitioners to provide an equal voice to men and women:

- Pay greater attention to the content of entertainment and advertising media, which often target youth and women.

- Oversee the guidelines and codes of ethics that set standards such as balance, fairness and sensitivity, to ensure that they include a gender perspective.

- Support community media, which are among the most accessible forms of media available to women.

- Ensure that public-funded media organizations fulfill their public interest obligations by achieving gender sensitivity and parity in their content. (UN Expert Group Report 2002)

The premises and recommendations of Expert Group meetings are then distributed electronically through the Internet for the NGO community-at-large and in print to all UN officials, governmental delegates, and NY NGO CSW committee members. This resource information helps the participants to become better versed on the social issues in discussion from a global worldview in addition to their cultural and individual positions. (Cabrera-Balleza 2003)

The next official UN preparatory event is called The Roundtable. Two events are organized by the NY NGO CSW and hosted just a few weeks prior to the CSW session. Held in the ECOSOC Chambers at UN Headquarters New York, several invited speakers who are experienced in various aspects of the two issues and who come from diverse cultural backgrounds take part in a panel discussion. They present and promote provocative, interactive question/answer dialogue about their specialized areas and regional concerns. Governmental representatives from the diplomatic missions, select UN senior staff, NGO representatives with official UN status and special guests are invited to participate in the discussion.

 At the ***Women and the Media*** Roundtable held on January 16, 2003, the speakers first addressed the controversial topic: *Information Communication Technologies* (ICTs). They highlighted the North/South Divide and the need for women to gain broader access to and gender equality in ICTs. The experts also introduced the Global Information System (GIS) as a powerful

information gathering and decision-making tool that is potentially beneficial to women, especially those located in rural and remote communities. They then spoke of the advantages and challenges of ICTs from a cultural standpoint. For example, in Africa, problems range from the exorbitant costs of equipment to the availability of appropriate and relevant information to be disseminated. An extensive and penetrating question and answer period followed and focused primarily on the current implementation and potential future of the GIS in order to assist women from the southern hemisphere and the least-developed nations of the world.

As a preparatory final step just prior to the session, the UN CSW Bureau Executive Board presented the final draft of its version of a proposed outcome document on the two thematic issues to the 45-member commission for approval. On February 18, 2003, this recommended draft was approved by the ECOSOC CSW members which then became the working outcome document reflecting the results of the year-long dialogue and international preparation. This draft document is then deliberated, edited, modified, changed, refined, etc. by all in attendance for nearly the entire two weeks of the CSW session until general consensus can be obtained by ECOSOC.

At CSW sessions, the NY NGO Committee on the Status of Women, together with DAW, provides far-reaching opportunities for interactive participation of the official UN NGO representatives, stationed at Headquarters and those attending from around the world. Programming starts the weekend prior to the opening session at UN Headquarters, usually the first Monday in March. For many years, the NY NGO CSW Committee has conducted an annual Consultation Day that is organized at weekly general planning and task force meetings starting the previous September. The main purpose of the Consultation Day is to present representatives with a cohesive NGO perspective of the two thematic issues on the UN CSW agenda and to provide participants, especially the far-traveled, an opportunity to contribute their viewpoints to the dialogue, i.e., their cultural, organizational, professional and personal thoughts and positions on the two issues.

During the six-month preparatory period of the NY NGO CSW forum, I served as co-chair of the task force responsible for the NGO programming on *Women and the Media,* including the Consultation Day proceedings described here. At the Consultation Day of the 47th CSW Session, March 2, 2003, His Excellency Othman Jerandi of Tunisia, Chair of the UN Commission on the Status of Women 2003 and the first male to hold this position, opened the morning program. His introductory remarks in French were translated into English and Spanish by interpreters through the use of listening devices. Then Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, presented the keynote address connecting violence against women and the girl-child to the UNICEF agenda on HIV/AIDs. Next, an expert panel comprised of four women from different cultural regions, spoke at length on the two themes *Violence Against Women* and *Women and the Media* and participated in the afternoon breakout sessions that were led by facilitators and resource experts in each group. Of particular interest was the dramatic presentation by Dr. Dafna Lemish from Israel, an outspoken academic on media issues and women and author of numerous publications published internationally. Her presentation covered *The Profiling of Women in the Media: The Madonna/Whore Phenomena.* (I interviewed her at length later that week at which time she further explained her research and views on the topic; her comments will be presented in the qualitative research section under interviews.)

The afternoon breakout sessions on *Women and the Media* were grouped into two categories, each with three sub-sections: *The Participation in and Access of Women to the Media: Equality, Education, and Empowerment* and *Information Communication Technologies: Equality, Education, and Empowerment.* At the end of the Consultation Day, 250 women convened for the closing general plenary, and a spokesperson shared the results and recommendations derived from the mentioned six breakout sessions on *Women and the Media.* At the same closing plenary, an oral summary was presented on the results and recommendations on *Violence Against Women.* That evening an executive summary report on both topics was written to highlight the NGO position on the issues. This outcome document resulting from

Consultation Day deliberations was distributed the next day, the official UN opening of the CSW, at the information center located inside UN Headquarters.

On opening day of the CSW session, Monday, March 3, 2003, first-time UN NGO representatives were invited to an afternoon orientation program that explained their roles and responsibilities during the course of the coming two weeks. They were introduced to the fundamental principles and skills of lobbying, an essential communication practice to be employed when speaking with their own and other governmental delegates and upon returning to their countries and communities to lobby and promote the issues at home. Throughout the session, officially registered NGO representatives could attend designated open meetings of the CSW deliberations in the ECOSOC Chambers and contribute official interventions. An *intervention* is the right and opportunity to voice their NGO viewpoints and to question the position of governments, on the record, during the meetings of the nation-state representatives to the CSW session. They could also lobby the 45 CSW member states and participate in more than 100 scheduled parallel events planned specifically for the official NGO participants.

The UN NGO women representatives had access to a mountain of informational materials on vast and relevant topics connected to the thematic issues and made available at the UN NGO Information Center. They could also network and lobby at the numerous evening (networking) affairs. At the end of the two weeks, the outcome document for ***Women and the Media*** was accepted through a general consensus vote of the governments, but the ***Violence Against Women*** outcome document failed, creating a grave sense of disappointment in the NGO community. The topic proved to be culturally explosive and divisive and therefore marked the first time that a CSW outcome document on one of the designated themes had not achieved general consensus from ECOSOC. Nevertheless, NGO women representatives traveled home, invigorated and equipped with the knowledge and skill to promote the policies and best practices of the adopted ***Women and the Media*** outcome document and to continue to overcome obstacles that still prevent a worldwide official statement on ***Violence Against Women.***

Having explained the environmental setting and context of the quantitative and qualitative independent research, the next part will now present the quantitative research of the independent study.

2. The Independent Research and Its Methodologies

The quantitative and qualitative elements of this independent study to research culture and communication styles draw especially from Blumer's social interaction and symbolic interactionism methodologies; the empowerment of feminist perspectives on the modern era women's movement the last thirty years; language use, joint interaction and the role of the media, and gender communication and strategies. These key topics all were examined at length under the academic review section. To reiterate, Blumer emphasizes that social science research is best executed through observation, study and analysis, and the central point of concern is the testing group.. He explains that research methodology in accordance with symbolic interactionism entails the creation of images and the testing of such images through critical scrutiny. He stresses that the most effective strategy requires studying the group and *its obdurate character* within their own environment and context. He expounds upon the realms of *realism* and *idealism* as points of methodological reference. This independent study encompasses research based both on *realism*, as defined by the empirical world (quantitative research), and *idealism*, where reality is ensconced in human experience and one's perception (qualitative research).

3. The Quantitative Research

The quantitative research is based on the findings of a comprehensive survey questionnaire that can be found in Appendix A. This questionnaire targeted specific areas of the impact of culture on communication styles of the study group of UN NGO women representatives who attended the above described Commission on the Status of Women 2003 Session. The questions were designed to establish cultural communication traits of these UN NGO women

representatives, to investigate their views on the role of women and the media, and to learn communication issues that they consider problematic among one another. The geographical regions that the women represent were determined from the official UN cultural regions of the world. The study's survey questions focus primarily on UN NGO woman-to-woman communication styles in the following categories:

- Oral and Written Communication

- Women's Social Issues: Informational Research and Dissemination

- Women and Men, Social Issues and Persuasion

- Women and Interpersonal Relations

- Women and the Media

- Woman-to-Woman Communication: Problems and Suggestions.

In preparing the survey questionnaire, ten women from academic, business and NGO backgrounds, coming from nine countries and multiple cultures, reviewed and critiqued the questionnaire for language, content, clarity, choice of categories, formulation of questions and articulation of instructions. The reviewers represented the following nations: Bulgaria, China, Colombia, Germany, Great Britain, Poland, Russia, the United States of America and Uzbekistan. Many of their insightful comments and suggestions were incorporated into the final version. These survey questionnaires were then distributed the morning of the NY NGO CSW Consultation Day on Sunday, March 2, 2003 and collected at day's end. The results were statistically analyzed and transformed into quantitative data to be discussed in depth later in this section.

Of the 300 attendees who appeared at the CSW 2003 Session, about 25% of them completed the survey questionnaire. Several mitigating factors contributed to this moderate return. First, the questionnaire, placed in the information packet made available to each UN NGO representative at Consultation Day, was to have been mentioned at the morning plenary by the Chair of the NY NGO CSW Committee. Unfortunately, the Chair simply forgot to do so as

promised and apologized profusely afterwards. Next, the questionnaire was written in English, and many in attendance did not speak English as a first language and thus felt too inadequate to participate. Although the questions were composed in painstakingly clear and simple language, some of the women told me that it was too much of a challenge for them to complete. Then, in retrospect, the questionnaire was apparently too lengthy given that most UN surveys do not exceed two pages. This questionnaire filled four pages and was dense in content. Also, due to the political climate, with the imminent Iraq War being debated at the UN at that exact same time, Arab UN NGO women representatives from the Middle East who usually participate did not attend. They were either not allowed to take part by their governments or else the US government did not approve the necessary visa to enter the country. So, except for a guest NGO speaker from Israel, this cultural region of the world was not represented for the first time at a CSW session, thereby creating a void of that main cultural region in the results. In recent years, funding has become scarce for African women to attend due to extreme financial hardships in many African countries, so only a handful possessed the financial capacity to participate that year. Latin American women have yet to organize effectively as an NGO community, so their presence was barely visible at the CSW 2003 Session. Consequently, the quantative data was primarily collected from European and North American UN NGO women representatives with samplings from two other official UN cultural regions. Still, significant results were derived from this portion of the study to support the premise that culturally distinctive communication styles exist and impact woman-to-woman social interaction in the UN NGO community.

The following findings of the survey questionnaire incorporate many elements from the writings of Blumer on symbolic interactionism (through an individualism perspective) and social science research methodologies; Goffman on social interaction as performing actors (through a collectivism perspective); Clark on language use and joint interaction; Tannen and Thimm on gender communication and goal-oriented strategies; and Lemish on the negative portrayal of women in the media. Several passages that have further explained the quantitative research premises and data represent my 25 years of acquired academic knowledge and professional

experience in cultural communication, interpersonal relations, international affairs, the United Nations and women's social issues.

Certain colors employed in the graphics were specifically chosen to symbolize cultural characteristics of the four regions in the study group. They are depicted in the illustrations that visually highlight the findings of the quantitative data derived from the questionnaire responses. The North American region is represented by blue that symbolizes logic/common sense and a color most often used in national symbols. The European/Central Asian region is represented by yellow that symbolizes vision, as dreams of the European Union and Eastern European nations edge forward, and a color often used in EU symbols. The Latin American/Caribbean region is represented by red that symbolizes emotion and a color often used in national symbols. The East Asian/Pacific region is represented by green that symbolizes reality/pragmatism and harmony with nature and a color often used in national symbols. To provide continuity, all other figures were illustrated in combinations of these four colors except the portrayal of women images and women's social issues presented in the media that required several more than four selections.

3.1. Survey Questionnaire Findings

From the 300 survey questionnaires that were distributed on NGO Consultation Day preceding the CSW 2003 Session, a total of 75 forms (25%) were returned at the end of the day. The responses were then separated into the 7 UN designated cultural regions for a compare/contrast examination and analysis of the responses. There were too few responses from three regions, Sub-Sahara Africa, the Middle East/North Africa and South Asia. Therefore, they were not incorporated into this quantitative component of the study, but the Sub-Saharan and South Asian (mostly from India) cultural regions were examined in the qualitative research, as explained later. Consequently, this section will present sampling results from respondents who demographically represent these four UN culturally designated regions:

- North America

- Europe and Central Asia

- Latin America and the Caribbean

- East Asia and the Pacific.
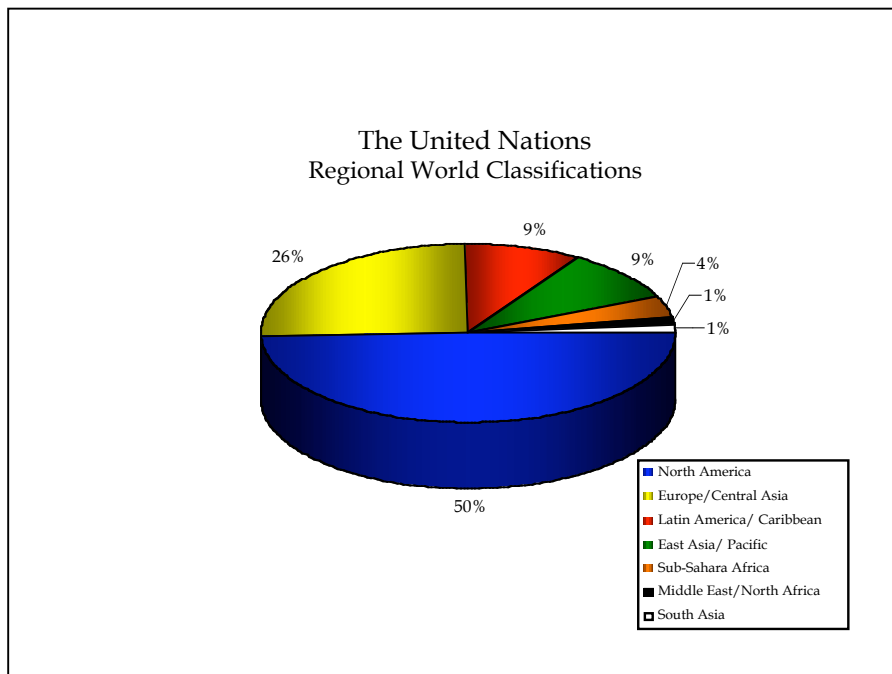
Figure 1

The quantitative results are based solely on the responses to this survey questionnaire. Each group of questions has been examined and visually illustrated to substantiate the premise that culture, indeed, impacts the communication styles of UN NGO woman-to-woman social interaction. The results show that this phenomenon does exist regardless of the common ground goals of the UN NGO women's community working to make a difference in human rights, fundamental freedoms and social development. The significant role and impact of the media regarding its portrayal of women and women's social issues in the news have also been analyzed as an inclusive component of this study. Clearly, the media marks a cornerstone institution today

in nearly all societies with the potential to influence positively the image of women and to further their cause. ***Women and the Media*** represented, after all, one of the two themes at the CSW 2003 Session, so the subject was very much on the mind of the NGO women representatives when they answered the questionnaire.

This quantitative analysis begins with a brief demographical description of the respondents based on the information they provided at the end of the questionnaire. Most respondents hold a university degree, and many have earned multiple advanced degrees. Advanced education is as a common trait among UN NGO women representatives who are often internationally recognized and asked to speak at international UN meetings. So, this sampling, reinforced by my participatory observations, matches the general UN NGO women's academic background portrayal. The four NGO women who were interviewed also hold numerous advanced degrees. Then, although not necessarily their native language, English is overwhelmingly the bridge used to cross linguistic borders. Nevertheless, the NY NGO CSW Committee provided/s simultaneous translation service in French and Spanish for all plenaries at the annual CSW Consultation Day. The Committee also arranges for individual *shadow interpreters* to assist those who speak other languages. They quietly sit next to them and translate the panelists' presentations and key points noted at the plenaries. In recent years these languages have included Italian, Russian, Arabic and Chinese.

The survey questionnaire starts with introductory queries concerning the experience level of the NGO women representatives in conjunction with the United Nations; the results indicate the following:

62% of the respondents have accumulated less than 5 years experience.

9% have assumed more than 20 years experience.

29 % have acquired 5 to 20 years experience.

NGO Women Representatives
Years of United Nations Involvement
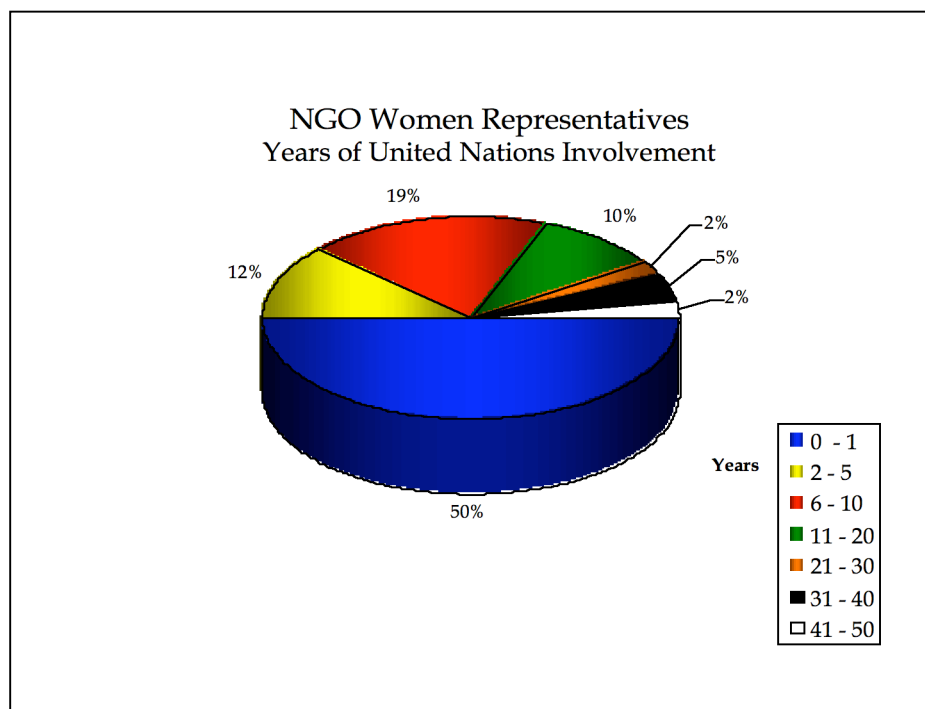
Figure 2

Nearly 40% of the respondents have at least 5 years experience with the UN system and, therefore, have accumulated at least some woman-to-woman communication skills and within the context of the United Nations and its international women's meetings. UN NGO women communicate with each other and exchange ideas, knowledge and experiences on women's social issues with other NGO women-at-large from a range of 5 to 20 plus hours a week. Although the sampling results appear statistically moderate, the extent of the respondents' involvement with one another reinforces the high level of interaction that exists on a weekly basis. My personal involvement as an NGO representative located at UN Headquarters substantiates the validity of this background data.

Further results of the introductory questions show that the most common forms of communication among NGO women in general today have become, in order of preference and

Communication Among NGO Women
Topic: Women's Social Issues

Communication Among NGO Women
Topic: Women's Social Issues

Communication with NGO Women
at the United Nations
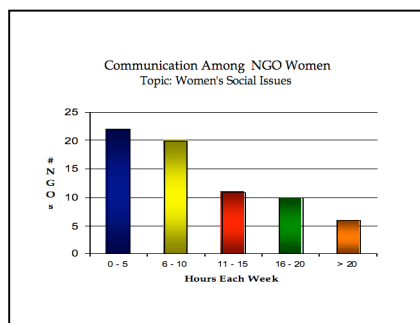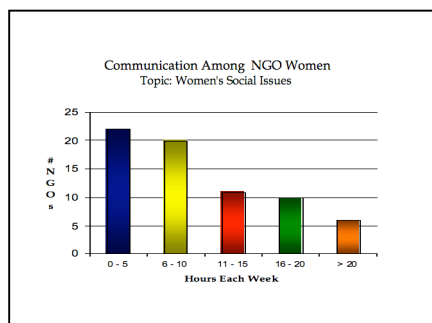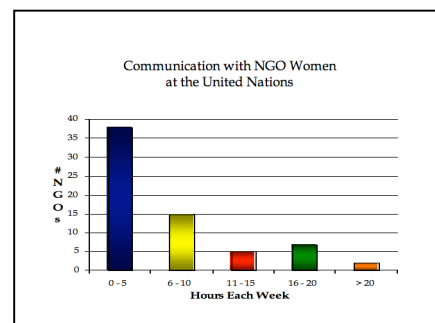
Figure 3   **Figure 4**   **Figure 5**

expediency: email, face-to-face social interaction and telephone. North American, European/Central Asian and East Asian/Pacific UN NGO women all have affirmed this preferential order of communication methods. Only Latin American/Caribbean UN NGO women choose face-to-face communication above email as the preferred method of contact among one another these days. At UN CSW sessions, however, face-to-face communication dominates as the main method and denotes, therefore, a key element of both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of this independent study. Nevertheless, personal experience underscores that NGO peers often communicate with each other by email, as well, even while jointly attending UN conferences/sessions. Cell phones are frowned upon in UN environments during formal and informal social interaction settings, for they are considered a distraction and disturbance more than a help and benefit.

Preferred Communication Methods
United Nations NGO Women

23%   7%
      3%
      2%

27%

38%

- ■ E-Mail
- ■ Faced to Face
- ■ Telephone
- ■ Regular Mail
- ■ Fax
- ■ Internet Chat Lines
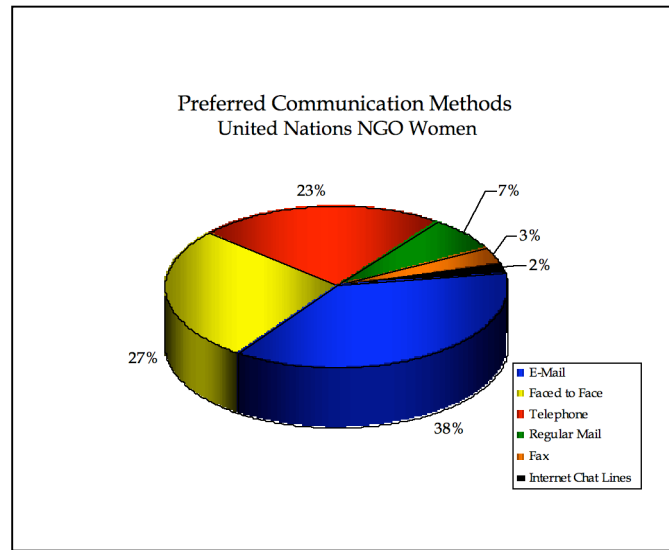
Figure 6

The body of this survey questionnaire is divided into five main subject areas, and their results

provide pertinent quantitative data to defend the study's hypothesis.

- Woman-to-Woman Oral and Written Communication

- Women's Issues and Persuasion

- Women, Interpersonal Relations and Communication Styles

- Women and the Media

- Woman-to-Woman Communication Problems and Suggestions.

The questions and answers to each subject area have been examined and highlighted with

adjacent statistical illustrations to present a clear analysis of the impact of culture on

communication styles and strategies of NGO women representatives at international UN events.

These women primarily communicate with one another in their culturally learned style to share

information, resources and ideas, and to promote social development for women. The *concept*

culturally learned style assumes an extended definition in the qualitative research segment. To

achieve forward moving results to help women globally, they invest time to establish and build

interpersonal relationships, a prevalent female-gender communication style that will be discussed in the participatory observations later in this section.

3.2. Woman-to-Woman Oral and Written Communication Styles: Language Use

Culturally viewed, communication styles can be divided into low-context and high-context approaches that are learned during early childhood development in the primary environmental setting of one's formative years. Low-context communicators rely mostly on the significance and use of verbal language, and they translate messages through the literal meaning of words. In other words, they are sensitive to the semantics of words, grammar and syntax of sentences and thoughts, and they decipher messages accordingly. They listen more carefully to what is said, read the lines and are perceived as more "direct" in their verbalized approach to social interaction.

In contrast, high-context communicators infer messages through word choice and rely heavily on nonverbal language to decipher messages. In other words, they listen more carefully to what is not said, read between the lines and are perceived as more "indirect" in their social interaction. They are more attuned to the use of tone, inflection, pitch, volubility, pauses, etc., of the voice, which relays the emotionality of the speaker. They are also more aware of body language, i.e., appearance, eye contact, facial expressions and bodily gestures, which indicate the attitude of the speaker.

Few people speak and/or write directly or indirectly exclusively as totally low-context or high-context communicators. Their approach can also depend, though not always, on the intensity and sensitivity of the subject matter, context and environmental setting of the social interaction. Cultural societies usually do adhere predominantly to either low-context or high-context patterns that define their commonly practiced communication style. People are not aware of the depth of the cultural foundation that first forms their communication styles or that their inherent approach can lead to frustration and even conflict when they are communicating with each other using distinctly different styles. For example, North America (in cultural transition

due to current immigration trends from the former Soviet Union, Latin America/Caribbean and Asia at present) and several countries located in Northern/Central Europe are considered low-context cultural regions in contrast to Southern and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, Africa and Asia that are viewed as high-context cultural regions.

Words (language use) are selected, nevertheless, to communicate ideas, describe feelings, establish reason, and transform ideas and experiences by both low-context and high-context communicators. People create the reality of their personal world to understand themselves and others through their perceptions and choice of words. For this study, perception, in conjunction with communication and social interaction, extends beyond attaching meaning to information based on a UN NGO woman's knowledge and life experiences that form her subjective truth or perception of human rights and social development. One's perception directly transforms into meaning through word choice, keeping in mind that reality is created through perceptions and language use.

Listening signifies an equally important component of communication and social interaction. At its best, it connotes a commitment and compliment to the speaker. As a commitment, listening exhibits an act of caring about how other people feel and express their worldview by putting aside personal thinking to respect the perspective of others. As a compliment, it means that one cares about what is happening to the other. Listening comprises attention, understanding and evaluation, and active listening helps to ensure positive face-to-face communication encounters and contributes to the success of international UN women's meetings. (Cooper & Stewart 2003)

3.3. Direct vs. Indirect Oral and Written Communication

The first series of questions, ***Woman-to-Woman: Oral and Written Communication,*** examine direct vs. indirect styles of UN NGO women from the four cultural regions of this study. When asked whether UN NGO women ***listen to the words and/or tone***, respondents replied by region as shown in figures 7, 8, 9 and 10 on the next page:
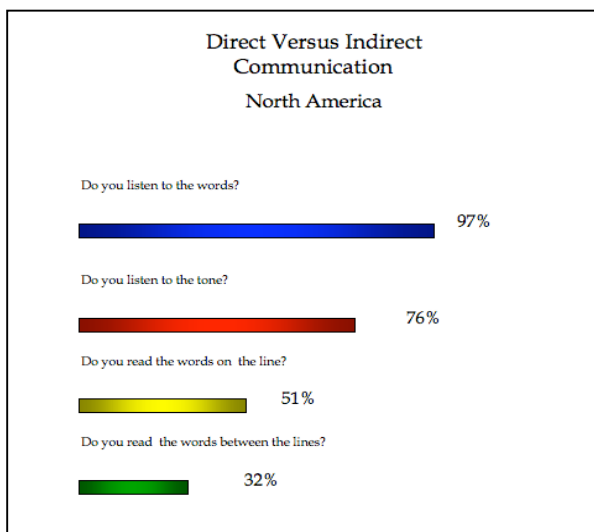
Figure 7
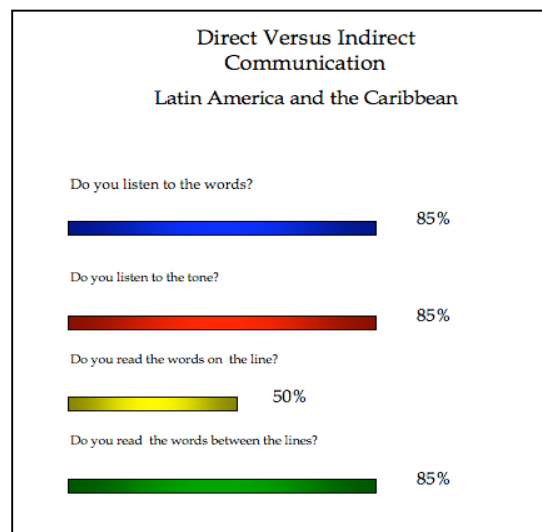
Figure 8
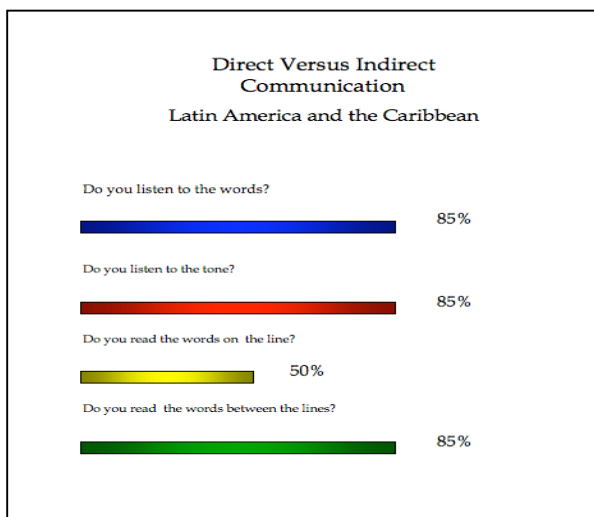
Figure 9
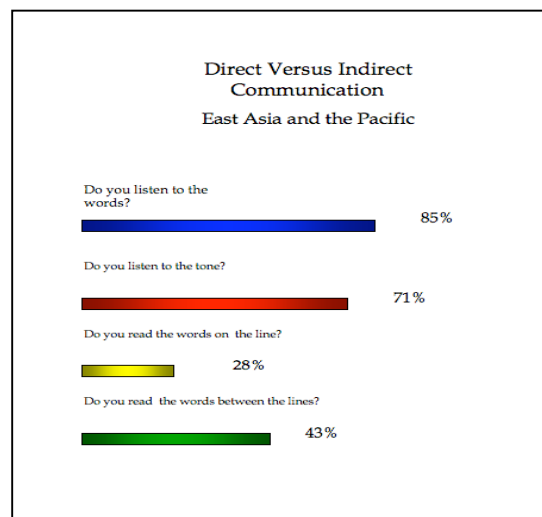
Figure 10

These percentages initially seem to indicate that regardless of cultural background, NGO women representatives in face-to-face communication situations focus strongly on both verbal and nonverbal communication to interpret messages. This response can be attributed to their significant years of experience in communicating with each other in an environmental setting that demands strong communication skills. In this regard, it seems that they seek to adapt to one another's direct/low-context and indirect/high-context oral communication styles. Still, the UN NGO women from low-context regions of North America and Europe/Central Asia place high

emphasis on word meaning while UN NGO women from Latin America/Caribbean listen to words and tone at exactly the same percentile.

East Asian/Pacific women listen to words at the same level as the regional Latin America/Caribbean women, but pay least attention to the tone of the four cultural groups under study. North American respondents appear to have the greatest gap between listening to words vs. tone, while Asian/Pacific respondents rank second in this disparity. European/Central Asian respondents have the highest combined results of listening to both words and tone. Latin American/Caribbean respondents listen to words and tone equally.

Since English is the common denominator language of UN NGO women worldwide and English is either indigenous or learned in most low-context cultures, NGO women from high-context cultures need to adapt more strenuously to low-context cultural communication in addition to using the English language. The UN participants from the staff, member states and NGO community react sensitively to word use in connection with expected protocol in official social interaction. The emphasis on precise language use (direct communication) dictates the success of UN conferences/sessions in order to obtain general consensus from the member states on outcome documents. These sanctioned documents then become global policy and often offer best-practice actions for national governments and NGO representatives to use as a blueprint to further women's social issues in their countries, cultures and communities. Yet, the majority of cultures practice indirect communication styles, which complicates (even confuses) the NGO women's ability to translate directly the low-context information and pointed purpose of these outcome documents when home. When asked whether NGO women representatives *read the words on the lines and/or between the lines*, they responded by region as shown in figures 7, 8, 9 and 10 on the previous page.

These results vary considerably and every region, other than North America, practices a more indirect approach of reading between the lines rather than extracting the message from words on the lines. European/Central Asian NGO women, from a mixed cultural region of low-context and high-context communication styles, rank highest for reading the lines while East

Asian/Pacific NGO women rank lowest. In contrast, Latin American/Caribbean NGO women rank highest in reading between the lines while North American NGO women rank lowest. Since a plethora of information today is generated through Internet and email, a preferred communication style of North American NGO women who provide an enormous amount of written information for the global NGO community, then most of that information is presented by a culture that reads the lines. Yet, their messages can be easily misread by other cultural societies that are inclined to read between the lines. On the other hand, cultures that write more indirectly and send implied written messages can and do confuse low-context cultural readers and thereby are misunderstood as well. These sampling results underscore the culturally diverse interpretation of written messages that can easily lead to misunderstandings and frustration, as NGO women seek to achieve mutual goals to improve the lives of women.

3.4. Characteristics of Oral Communication Styles

This first segment of the survey questionnaire also examines important elements of the respondents' oral communication styles that address the following traits: ***initiate conversations; lead discussions; interrupt others; and ask question***s. These topics deal specifically with characteristics of oral communication, and Tannen's work on gender communication influenced the formation of these four questions. These responses are rated on a scale of: "Always/Often/Sometimes/Seldom/Never."

To the question ***Do you initiate conversations?***, the answers range between "Always" and "Often" in the highest to lowest sequence, and the following results are tightly grouped.

Europe/Central Asia	Always
North America	Nearly Always
Latin America/Caribbean	Very Often
East Asia/Pacific	Often

To the question ***Do you lead discussions?***, the answers range between "Often" and "Sometimes" in the highest to lowest sequence. The following results are loosely grouped.

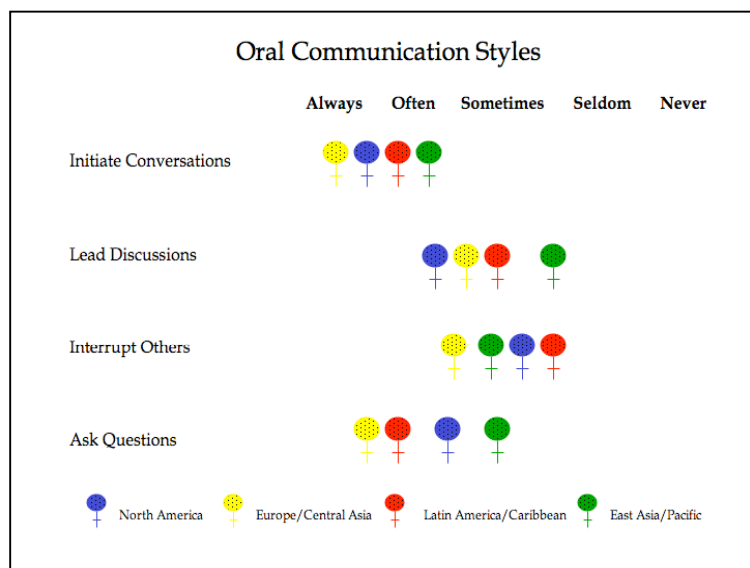|	
North America	Often
Europe/Central Asia	Between Sometimes and Often
Latin America/Caribbean	Sometimes
East Asia/Pacific.	Between Seldom and Sometimes

Figure 11

To the question ***Do you interrupt others?***, answers range between barely "Often" to barely "Sometimes" in the most to least sequence, and the following results are evenly distributed.

Europe/Central Asia	Close to Often
East Asia/Pacific	Sometimes
North America	Sometimes
Latin America/Caribbean.	Close to Sometimes

To the question ***Do you ask questions?***, answers range from "Always" to "Sometimes" in the following most to least sequence, and the following results are unevenly distributed.

Europe/Central Asia   Nearly Always

Latin America/Caribbean   Close to Always

North America   Barely Often

East Asia/Pacific.   Sometimes

These initial results indicate that European/Central Asian NGO women assert the most active oral communication behavior as their answers range from "Often" to "Always" to the four questions; second are North American NGO women as their answers range from "Sometimes to "Always" to the four questions, although they rank first in leading discussions; third are Latin American/Caribbean NGO women as their answers range from "Close to Sometimes" to "Close to Always" to the four questions; and last are East Asian/Pacific women as their answers range from "Seldom" to "Sometimes" to the four questions. In addition, each set of responses to these four questions determines a different pattern of results among the four cultural regions, further reinforcing the premise that culture impacts communication styles and complicates understanding among UN NGO women. Assertive/aggressive communicators tend to dominate the direction of social interaction. The European/Central Asian NGO women not only exhibit the strongest command of both direct and indirect communication styles but also appear to be the most assertive oral communicators.

In response to oral communication styles to the question ***Do you address important issues directly?***, all four groups answer uniformly "Mostly;" to the question ***Do you address important issues indirectly?***, all four groups answer uniformly "Sometimes." Here, one recognizes symmetry in their patterns of directness and indirectness when they converse on social issues with one another. It suggests that, in the discourse on important women's social issues, they are highly motivated to "speak out" directly, although they also "speak out" indirectly at times. Cultural background does not appear to influence their face-to-face

exchanges on social issues in general, but rather the significance or sensitivity of an issue itself could be the cause for the level of directness or deference applied to a discussion. The point is further developed under participatory observations.

3.5. Characteristics of Written Communication Styles

In regard to written communication ways, the responses to each question, using the same scale "Always/Often/Sometimes/Seldom/Never" were less clustered than the oral communication styles just analyzed.

To the question **_Do you initiate contact?_**, the answers offer a range from "Often" to "Seldom" in the following most to least sequence.

North America	Often
Europe/Central Asia	Between Often and Sometimes
East Asia/Pacific	More than Sometimes
Latin America/Caribbean.	Between Seldom and Sometimes
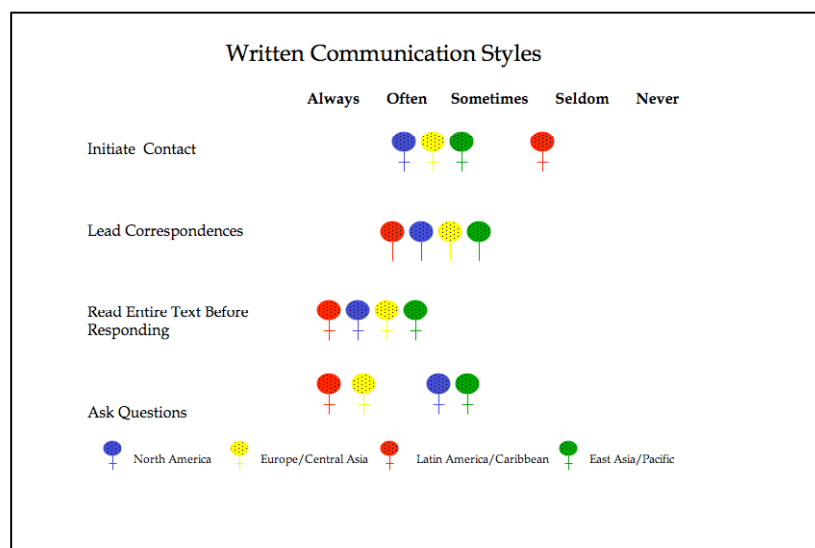
Figure 12

To the question ***Do you lead correspondences?****,* the answers vary between "Often" and "Sometimes" in the following most to least sequence.

Latin America/Caribbean	More than Often
North America	Often
Europe/Central Asia	More than Sometimes
East Asia/Pacific	Sometimes

To the question ***Do you read the entire text before responding?****,* the answers range from "Always" to "Often" in the following most to least sequence.

Latin America/Caribbean	Always
North America	Nearly Always
Europe/Central Asia	Between Sometimes and Often
East Asia/Pacific	More than Sometimes

To the question ***Do you ask questions?****,* the answers show a split in the range from "Always" to between "Often" and "Sometimes" in the following most to least sequence.

Latin America/Caribbean	Nearly Always
Europe/Central Asia	Almost Always
North America	Between Sometimes and Often
East Asia/Pacific	More than Sometimes

These sampling results on written communication ways, in contrast to oral communication styles, reveal that Latin American/Caribbean NGO women exhibit the strongest written communication ways as their answers range from about "Sometimes" (one time) and around "Always" (three times). Precisely for this reason, the NGO women in Latin America/Caribbean rallied some twenty years ago to form *Fempress* (mentioned in the academic

review) as a written communication network to organize and mobilize the women's movement in this cultural region of the world. Second ranked, are North American NGO women whose answers range from "Sometimes" to "More than Often"; third, European/Central Asian NGO women whose answers range from about "Sometimes" to "Often"; and last, East Asian/Pacific NGO women whose answers all fall into the "Sometimes" range.

These sample conclusions on oral and written communication styles indicate that European/Central Asian NGO women rank first as pronounced oral communicators while Latin American/Caribbean NGO rank first as written communicators. North American NGO women rank second as effective oral and written communicators while East Asian/Pacific NGO women rank last in both categories. This data supports the hypothesis that culture impacts one's communication style and social interaction both in oral and written form. Such clear differences in these communication styles suggest that European/Central Asian and North American NGO women dominate in oral and written communication strengths among their global peers from other cultures. Consequently, their positions and influence are penetrating and far-reaching on the focus and direction of the pursuance of women's social issues. This conclusion is further substantiated under participatory observations.

3.6. Communication and Informational Resources on Social Issues

The second group of questions addressed the various oral and written communication resources UN NGO women use to research important social issues for the purpose of official presentations, discussions on policy making, and development of suitable actions as an activist, lobbyist, presenter at international UN meetings, etc. The results were evenly distributed between 95% to 100% in response to each of the following four questions on oral and written information resources:

Do you use information from your personal research?

Do you use information from your NGO research?

Do you use information from other sources?

Do you use personal experiences for emotional impact?

 In this respect, UN NGO women representatives universally rely on a multitude of resources to research information on important social issues and therefore replied with a near unanimous "yes" to all the questions. It also suggests that the knowledge level of the NGO women is expansive since they refer to their own research frequently in accumulating information to present, share and disseminate. They also apply pronounced emotion to their delivery style as a mainstay approach, and the emotional connection, it has been established, helps to establish relationships that UN NGO women commonly seek with their peers.

3.7. The Art of Persuasion and the Advancement of Women's Issues

Persuasion reigns as one of the most omnipresent and powerful communication strategies in social interaction. For this study, I have defined persuasion as the ability and art to convert an individual or a group to the speaker's point of view on a particular topic. To this end, three principal types of persuasion, in conjunction with emotional appeal, can be utilized.

(1) Persuasion based on fact relies on information available that is reinforced with one's personal conviction to prove a position or prediction.

(2) Persuasion based on a value combines fact and personal judgment determined by one's ethics, values and beliefs that are reinforced with a strong emotional undertone.

(3) Persuasion based on policy presents a principle on which a specific course of action should be pursued to induce agreement and to implement action. (Larson 2000)

Then effective approaches of persuasion integrate, among other strategies, credibility, evidence, reason and emotional appeal.

The most effective persuasive approach is *usually* linked to values and attitudes. That knowledge best helps the listener understand the base of the speaker's thinking. Values determine a person's behavior that is reflected in both verbal and nonverbal communication

styles. Attitudes, on the other hand, stem from a person's personal opinions that are developed from professional and personal experiences. Together, they establish how one feels about other people and topics, and their intensity determines the depth of one's belief. UN NGO women attend CSW sessions steeped in their own values and attitudes in part derived from the institutions of their cultural background combined with their life experiences that have shaped and honed their persuasive capabilities and strategies to promote women's causes.

Persuasion can be viewed as a formidable strategy that people constantly employ to achieve their needs and satisfy their desires. Negotiation represents another dominant form of persuasion, and this important strategy is discussed a little later in conjunction with the collaborative model, interpersonal relations and communication styles. The ethics of persuasive strategies must be stringent, for one is asking another to establish or change a position on topics that may touch the core of one's essence and/or belief system. Persuasive strategies can be classified under *ethical dialogue* or *unethical monologue*. Most people combine strategies from both categories to gain immediate bargaining position, but to achieve long-term positive results, one needs to develop communication skills that foster *ethical dialogue* behavior during social interaction.

In the formative years, one learns persuasive communication strategies and techniques from familial, cultural, social, political, institutional, religious/spiritual (morality), institutional and organizational spheres of life, to mention main sources. Ethical principles are a necessary precondition for the existence and cohesiveness of a cultural community. Basic ethical perspectives include religious/spiritual points of view that serve as moral guidelines; political points of view that establish the values and procedures accepted as crucial to the health and growth of a particular political governmental system; legal points of view that determine structural law and order and the role of institutions; and situational points of view that determine appropriateness for specific settings in which the context factors count. Typical characteristics of *ethical dialogue* include: compassion, sympathy, empathy, morality, honesty, sincerity, respect, reason, logic, patience, openness, listening, tolerance, flexibility, humility, etc. Typical

characteristics of *unethical monologue* include: deception, control, manipulation, dishonesty, close-mindedness, insincerity, omission, rigidity, fear, pressure, arrogance, superiority, disrespect, propaganda, demagogy, etc. Most people practice a combination of ethical and unethical dialogue to achieve their goals through persuasive strategies. (Larson 2000) Such communication strategies certainly can be classified under *Durchsetzungsstrategien* (Thimm 1995), that was presented under gender communication and women in the academic review.

The next series of questions asked the NGO women to consider four fundamental persuasive methods that they may employ to inspire first women, then men, so others will listen to their views and positions. Based on the scale, "Always/Often/Sometimes/Seldom/Never," the respondents affirmed their use of the following persuasive methods: ***Reason/Logic; Emotion/Sympathy; Fear/Pressure; Personal Identity/Empathy; Ethics/Morality***. In one unanticipated result, respondents indicated that virtually no significant differential exists in the persuasive approaches and strategies that UN NGO women engage from a cultural perspective to communicate with one another woman-to-woman. The breakdown by percentile for the combined results of the respondents is shown here in Figure 13.
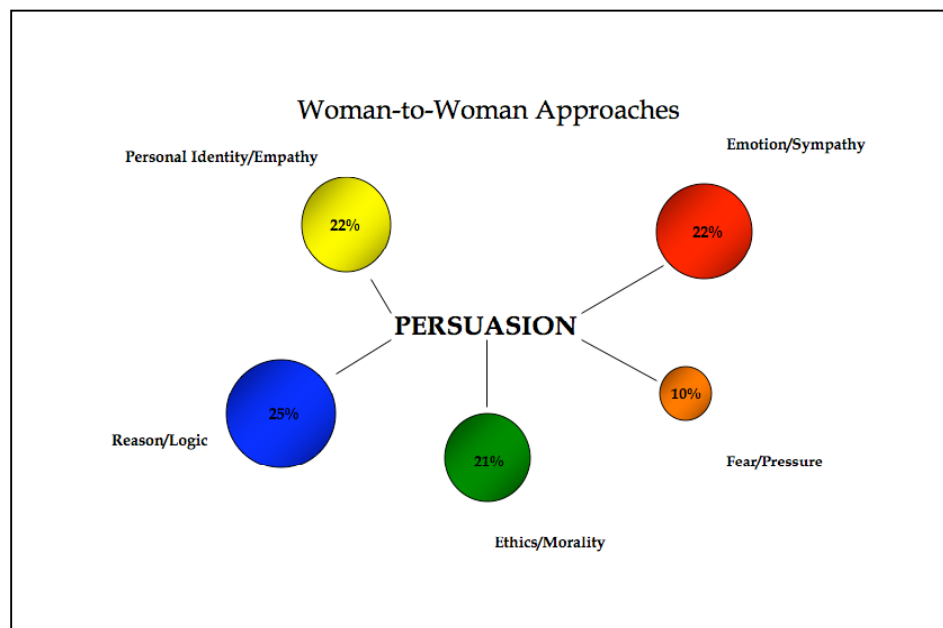
Figure 13

In comparison, the NGO women also revealed that virtually no cultural differential exists in the persuasive ways that they apply to communicate woman-to-man. The breakdown by percentile for the combined results of the respondents is shown here in Figure 14.
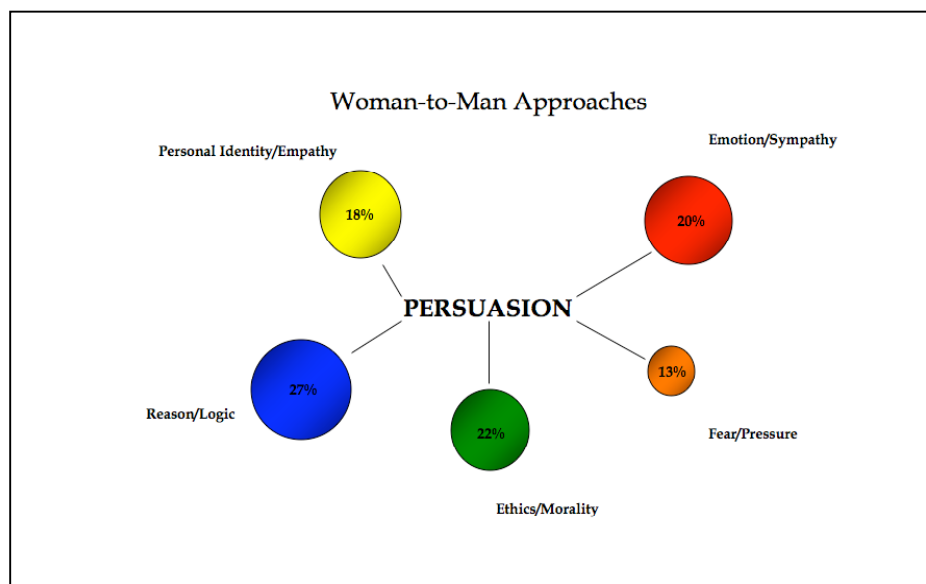
Figure 14

Some difference does occur, however, in the manner in which women seek to persuade women as contrasted to how they strive to persuade men. The percentiles suggest that women express more *Reason/Logic*; *Ethics/Morality*; *Fear/Pressure* and less *Personal Identity/Empathy* and *Emotion/Sympathy* in their effort to persuade men. While this study focuses primarily on woman-to-woman communication, still UN NGO women frequently need to lobby male UN member-state representatives, work with UN male staff, and today interact with an increasing number of UN NGO men representatives who attend women's conferences and CSW sessions. This reality became quite apparent at the CSW 2004 Session and the involvement of male participants in regard to both issues ***The Role of Men and Boys in the Achievement of Gender Equality*** and ***Women and War***. A breakdown by region offers further insight into the persuasive approaches and strategies of the four cultural groups as presented in order of most to least used methods employed.

North America: Woman-to-Woman Persuasive Ways

> Reason/Logic
>
> Emotion/Sympathy
>
> Personal Identity/Empathy
>
> Ethics/Morality
>
> Fear/Pressure

North America: Woman-to-Man Persuasive Ways

> Reason/Logic
>
> Personal Identity/Empathy
>
> Ethics/Morality
>
> Emotion/Empathy
>
> Fear/Pressure

When North American NGO women communicate to persuade women, as opposed to persuading men, the significant difference in approach lies in the use of emotion/empathy which is applied much more to women than to men. Their most often used approach to men is through ethics and morality.

Europe/Central Asia: Woman-to-Woman Persuasive Ways

> Reason/Logic
>
> Emotion/Sympathy
>
> Personal Identity/Empathy
>
> Ethics/Morality
>
> Fear/Pressure

Europe/Central Asia: Woman-to-Man Persuasive Ways

Reason/Logic

Emotion/Sympathy

Personal Identity/Empathy

Ethics/Morality

Fear/Pressure

European/Central Asian NGO women use identical persuasive strategies to influence both men and women in contrast to North American, Latin American/Caribbean and East Asia/Pacific women who alter their persuasive approaches.

Latin America/Caribbean: Woman-to-Woman Persuasive Ways

Reason/Logic

Emotion/Sympathy and Ethics/Morality (the same)

Personal Identity/Empathy

Fear/Pressure

Latin America/Caribbean: Woman-to-Man Persuasive Ways

Reason/Logic

Ethics/Morality

Personal Identity/Empathy

Emotion/Sympathy

Fear/Pressure

Latin American/Caribbean NGO women hint at nuance differences in their use of the emotion/sympathy approach toward women and men. They tend to utilize it slightly more

towards women, while applying the personal identity/empathy approach slightly more towards men. Their use of ethics ranks second in both instances.

East Asia/Pacific: Woman-to-Woman Persuasive Ways

Reason/Logic

Emotion/Sympathy

Ethics/Morality

Personal Identity/Empathy

Fear/Pressure

East Asia/Pacific: Woman-to-Man Persuasive Ways

Reason/Logic

Ethics/Morality

Emotion/Sympathy

Personal Identity/Empathy and Fear/Pressure (the same)

The different persuasive methods of East Asian/Pacific NGO women appear minimal between men and women although once again they, like the others, use more ethics/morality when speaking with men.

Analyzed at the individual cultural level, the results from all four cultural regions suggest that women place a different emphasis on persuasive ways toward women as opposed to men in each regional group. Cultural impact on the communication styles used to persuade others is not

as apparent since so much similarity exists. All four groups stress that they pursue reason/logic as the main means of persuasive communication towards men and women, while fear denotes the least employed persuasive strategy used towards both. At UN Headquarters, the communication mode fosters logic/reason as a fundamental approach to their endeavors. Since the respondents have accumulated significant experience in social interaction with the protocol ways of the UN then, understandably, they would adapt to this cultural communication style etched into the UN environment. Worth noting, UN NGO women still pay more attention overall to ethics/morality as a persuasive strategy with men than with women, and Latin American/Caribbean and East Asian/Pacific NGO women seem to engage in this practice more often with men than their North American and European/Central Asian NGO women counterparts. Ethical and effective persuasive strategies can promote social change, and understanding one another's culturally persuasive approaches elevates the opportunities for UN NGO women to improve the lives of women worldwide.

3.8. Interpersonal Relations and Communication Styles

For this especially important part of the survey questionnaire, I define interpersonal communication to mean "the social interaction that leads to a relationship between two or more people that develops with time based on the interactant's cultural, sociological and psychological dispositions." Each relationship is unique, and the social interaction between/among them is influenced by the past, present and future. Interpersonal communication assumes many forms, and classic face-to-face still remains the most effective, and certainly for this study and for the all important face-to-face contact that occurs at annual UN CSW sessions. Interpersonal communication also involves feedback, need not be intentional, produces an effect, and entails verbal and nonverbal (also symbols) messages. In all aspects of the independent study, specific areas of both verbal and nonverbal communication styles have been examined. Interpersonal communication is also affected by the context and environmental surroundings of the social interaction. It can be disturbed by distracting external and internal interferences that trigger the

senses and thoughts of especially the listener, but also speaker. The common knowledge, ten principles of interpersonal communication are as follows:

(1) We cannot not communicate.

(2) Communication can be verbal and nonverbal.

(3) Every communication contains information and defines relationships through *what* is said and *how* it is said. (Richter refers to this principle in her interview.)

(4) Interpersonal communication relationships can be equal or unequal.

(5) Interpersonal relations develop over time.

(6) Interpersonal communication is a process.

(7) Interpersonal communication is circular.

(8) Interpersonal communication is complex.

(9) Interpersonal communication is irreversible and unrepeatable.

(10) Interpersonal communication is transactional, i.e., social interaction.

(Lumsden & Lumsden 2003)

This important line of questioning addressed major aspects of ***Women, Interpersonal Relations and Communication Styles***. Based on a scale of 1-7 (with 7 ranked highest), the respondents answered several questions that were sub-divided into ***Interpersonal Relations*** and ***Communication Styles***. Under ***Interpersonal Relations***, the responses to the four questions revealed significant variation in the culturally defined regions' answers based on the following sequence of strongest to weakest on the rating scale.

To the question: ***Are you a leader?***	**Scale Rating**
Europe/Central Asia	5.8
Latin America/Caribbean	5.1
North America	5.0
East Asia/Pacific.	3.0

To the question: *Are you a follower?*	Scale Rating
East Asia/Pacific	4.2
Latin America/Caribbean	3.8
North America	3.6
Europe/Central Asia	3.4

To the question: *Are you a controller?*	Scale Rating
East Asia/Pacific	4.6
Europe/Central Asia	3.6
North America and Latin America/Caribbean.	2.8

To the question: *Are you a facilitator?*	Scale Rating
Latin America/Caribbean	5.7
Europe/Central Asia	5.2
North America	5.0
East Asia/Pacific.	4.5
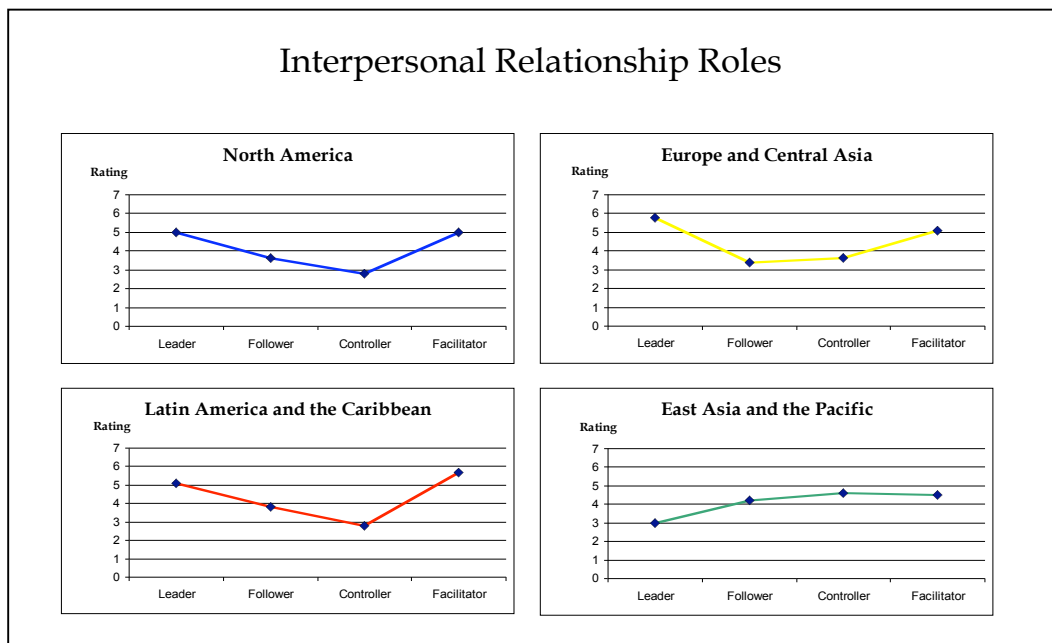
Figure 15

Interestingly, no pattern emerges among the four cultural groups in their answers to these questions, but rather a different order of results is indicated by region to each question. European/Central Asian NGO women consider themselves leaders, yet North American NGO women rank first at leading discussions. The East Asian/Pacific NGO women rank first as followers and last as assertive oral and written communicators. Concurrently, they hold the first position as controllers, which may suggest their strategy to attain power in their own culture, since most of their communication skills appear weaker than the rest of the groups. Once again, cultural differences in communication styles are being established. Latin American/Caribbean NGO women rank first as facilitators. In this frame, they find North American and European/Central Asian NGO women too assertive in their communication styles as noted in the last section of the questionnaire that reveals communication problems recognized by the NGO women among each other.

3.9. Collaborative Communication Model and Communication Styles

The articulate skill and sensitive art of successful negotiation will certainly move the advancement of women forward in the 21st Century. At international UN meetings, UN NGO women are constantly immersed in a negotiative environment to determine policy and to establish best practices action. Each woman in attendance offers a particular worldview on the issues at hand and normally participates in negotiation, at one level or another, armed with a competitive or collaborative perspective and strategy. Competitive environments are often infested with anger, tension, stress, defensiveness, and even hostility, while collaborative environments usually foster friendliness, curiosity, reflection, sympathy, empathy and hope.

The series of questions under *Interpersonal Relations and Communication Styles* was derived in part from the *Collaborative Communication Model for International Negotiation* by Ellen Raider (2001). Raider works as an international consultant who has designed cross-cultural resolution training programs for UNICEF and the US/USSR Trade Negotiation Project among others. In Spring 2002, I attended her 40-hour seminar that carefully examined culture and

negotiation and then incorporated some of her principles into the questionnaire. Consciously and/or subconsciously, UN NGO women representatives are constantly negotiating at UN women's conferences and CSW sessions. In fact, women with strong negotiation skills are the most revered communicators in the NGO community at such international meetings. Raider defines culture for negotiation purposes to mean:

"The shared patterns of daily communication and behavior that are characteristic of all members of a group. Regardless of the size of a group, its members need to share many patterns of communication and behavior in order to be able to understand each other and interact with each other relatively smoothly."

Raider refers to this definition as *deep culture* in contrast to *high culture* which she considers to be the fine arts and humanities. To her, *deep culture* is connected to the citizens of one nation; however, it also applies to members of regional or ethnic groups that spread across national borders, and who often become bicultural. She characterizes culture as one's nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, language, family status, physical condition, religion, class, sexual orientation and profession. Cultural dimensions include monochromic (task oriented) vs. polychromic (people oriented), collectivism vs. individualism, power vs. subordination, feminine vs. masculine sex role division and its impact on quality of life.

She believes: "Culture is to a group what personality is to an individual."

Raider has created and uses the ***Collaborative Communication Model for International Negotiation*** as a training tool based on her experience and participatory observations of cultural behavior in international negotiation environments. She has identified six behaviors that she has incorporated into the acronym A/E/I/O/U/Y:

A is attack: To pose threats, show hostile tones and gestures, make insults, be defensiveness, stereotype, blame and interrupt.

E is evade: To ignore, change subject, withdraw, postpone, confer, think, etc.

I is inform: To state wishes and wants; justify position with facts/opinions; reveal underlying needs/feelings.

O is open: To ask nonjudgmental question about other's positions, needs and feelings; listen then paraphrase; test understanding; summarize without necessarily agreeing, etc.

U is unite: To build rapport, highlight common ground, reframe the issue including the need of both sides and link bargaining offers to satisfy each other's needs.

Y is yes: To split the difference; form an agreement that meets both sides' needs.

Raider has established and adheres to four fundamental principles of negotiation for her work as follows:

(1) Separate the people from the problem.

(2) Focus on needs and interests rather than positions.

(3) Generate a variety of opinions.

(4) Insist that agreement is grounded on objective criteria. (Coleman-Raider 2002)

Based on my three years as an active NGO representative at the United Nations Headquarters and participant at numerous UN conferences and CSW sessions, I have slightly modified Raider's rendition of the ***Collaborative Communication Model for International Negotiation*** to reflect more appropriately the most common negotiating behaviors among UN NGO women. I contend that assertiveness is the key element to effective interpersonal communication and successful negotiation. For this study then, I define assertiveness as a communication style that firmly indicates who one is and what one wants without harming others and their rights. Assertiveness is characterized by directness, appropriateness and honesty during social interaction encounters. A person's interpersonal communication style can be categorized generally as non-assertive, aggressive or assertive. Non-assertive people do not convey their thoughts and feelings fully or to the extent that the listener can interpret how to respond effectively. In contrast, aggressive people exhibit lack of respect and sensitivity for the listener

and the message transmitted. Assertive people share their thoughts and feelings with respect, neither apologetically nor defensively, to set the stage for an objective and open exchange. My *Collaborative Communication Model* is visually illustrated here.
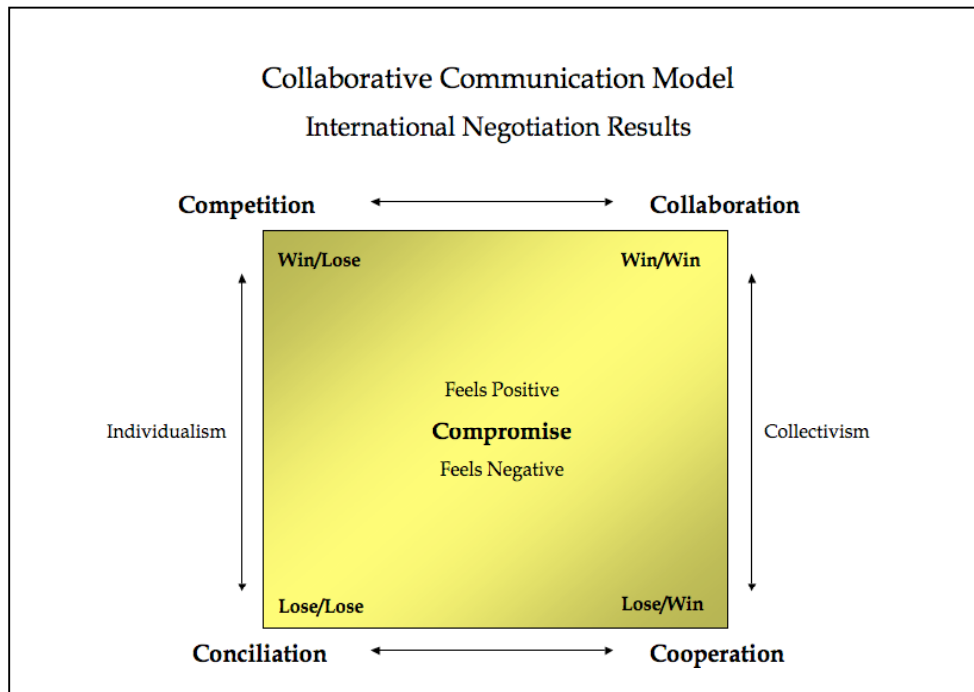
Figure 16

The respondents were asked to rate their interpersonal communication capabilities according to this *Collaborative Communication Model* based on Raider's original version. The results of the following five *Interpersonal Communication Styles* are also based on a scale of 1-7 (with 7 ranked highest). After each result, each interpersonal communication style is briefly reviewed according to the *Conflict Mode Instrument* by Thomas and Kilman (1974) that Raider incorporated into her negotiation and mediation seminars.

Are you conciliatory?	**Scale Rating**
Latin America/Caribbean	4.8
North America	4.3

East Asia/Pacific	4.2
Europe/Central Asia.	3.3

Conciliation (avoidance) is best used when an issue appears trivial; when no perceived opportunity to satisfy one's needs exists; when potential danger of conflict outweighs any benefits of its resolution; when tensions need to be reduced to regain perspective and composure; when gathering more information outweighs advantages of immediate decisions.

Are you compromising?	**Scale Rating**
Europe/Central Asia	5.9
Latin America/Caribbean	5.0
North America	4.5
East Asia/Pacific.	4.3

Compromise is best used when goals are important, but potentially disruptive; when opponents of equal power are committed to mutually exclusive goals; when temporary settlements of complex issues must be achieved; when collaboration or competition fail to offer a viable back up solution.

Are you competitive?	**Scale Rating**
Latin America/Caribbean	5.2
Europe/Central Asia	4.2
North America	3.7
East Asia/Pacific.	3.2

Competition is best used when quick, decisive action is vital; when courses of action on important issues need implementation; when issues are vital to one's welfare and one is certain to be right; when one must protect oneself against people who take advantage of noncompetitive behavior.

Are you cooperative?	**Scale Rating**
Latin America/Caribbean	6.5
Europe/Central Asia	5.2
North America	4.9
East Asia/Pacific.	4.5

Cooperation (accommodation) is best used when one realizes that one is wrong; when the issue stands more important to the other person than to oneself; when social credits for later issues become important; when continued competition damages one's cause; when preserving harmony and avoiding disruption prove especially important.

Are you collaborative?	**Scale Rating**
Latin America/Caribbean	6.6
Europe/Central Asia	6.0
North America	5.6
East Asia/Pacific.	4.5

Collaboration is best used when an integrative solution serves both concerns too important to be compromised; when one's objective is to learn; when testing one's own assumptions and to understand the worldview of others; when merging insights from people with different perspectives on an issue; when commitment needs to be gained by incorporating other's concerns into a consensual decision; when necessary to work through hard feelings interfering with an interpersonal relationship. (Kilman and Thomas 1974)
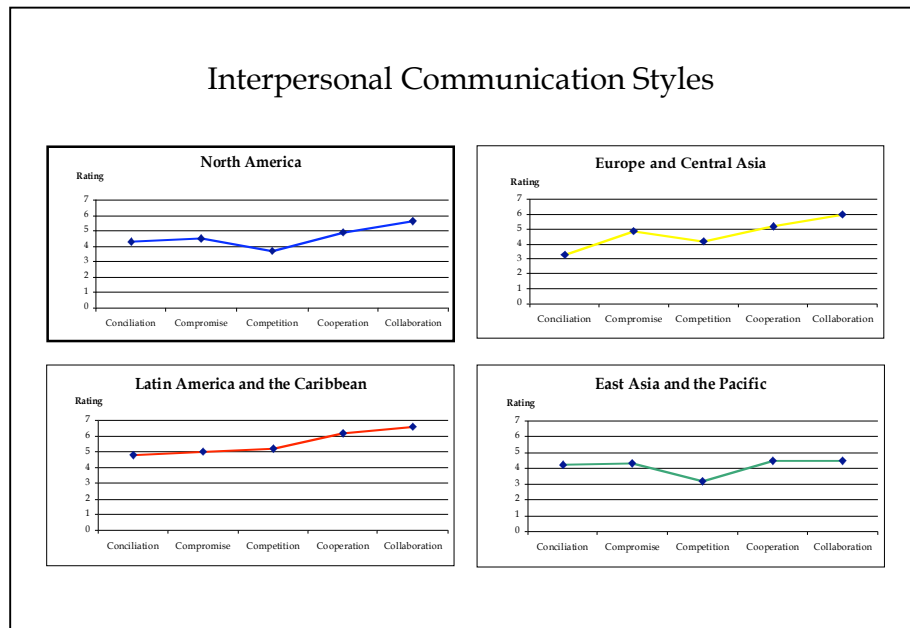
Figure 17

The application of these interpersonal communication styles indicate cultural variation. The compare/contrast results are listed in order of most to least use of interpersonal communication strategies as follows.

North America	Europe/Central Asia
Collaborative	Collaborative
Cooperative	Cooperative
Compromising	Compromising
Conciliatory	Competitive
Competitive	Conciliatory

Latin America/Caribbean	East Asia/Pacific
Cooperative	Cooperative
Collaborative	Collaborative

Competitive	Compromising
Compromising	Conciliatory
Conciliatory	Competitive

These four cultural groups adhere primarily to collaborative and cooperative interpersonal relationship communication styles, but they vary greatly in their ranking of the latter three approaches, i.e., compromising, conciliatory and competitive strategies. Once again, these sampling results suggest the influence of culture on communication styles in a crucial area of social interaction among UN NGO women, especially at the UN CSW sessions each year. All regions but Latin America/Caribbean rank compromising as the third alternative. Europe/Central Asia and Latin America/Caribbean NGO women claim to be the least conciliatory while North American and East Asian/Pacific NGO women exhibit competitive behavior the least. In the sphere of negotiation, critical to resolution results in the UN environment, the interpersonal communication styles, clearly, vary culturally and impact deliberation and negotiation on social development.

3.10. Women and the Media

The deep culture media is perceived as an omnipotent institution, worldwide, that shapes and reinforces one's worldview of daily life. In particular, the media reflects and influences cultures and their members through its projection of cultural values and images of one another. As a cultural institution, it wields the power to form, reinforce and dismantle gender ideologies that I define here as: the belief that a set of traits and abilities is more likely to be found among members of one gender than the other. The media has not only shaped and honed gender perception, but also has established a standard of cultural socialization, globally, regionally and locally. In this capacity it manifests stereotyping that reduces real individual differences of males or females to generalities, often damaging to a cultural group image.

In fact, the media constitutes its own communication style and consumes much of peoples' time today, often at the cost of face-to-face social interaction. Much of popular media in the United States, an institution transported around the world, functions as a business, and as such the owners are not so concerned with gender portrayal, but rather with making money. This approach to media is also spreading to other cultures of late. Business media tends to be operated by conservative males who adhere to fundamental corporate formulas. They target the largest possible audience and rely on the lowest common denominator rule of intelligence and interest of the broadest audience to create programming. For example, though improvement has occurred in recent years, women continue to be portrayed as the sexually weaker and intellectually less powerful gender and are placed in lower status roles in media gender portrayal as a rule. Such female gender profiling is considered appropriate and remains steadfast in the perception of most cultures, even in progressive countries. So the business media reinforces this comfort zone of female imagery and determines language use, accordingly, in its programming. On the other hand, the media as an institution, everywhere, harbors vast resources and opportunities to elevate the portrayal and quality of life of women if it so chooses.

The last series of questions focused on key areas of ***Women and the Media***. As an all-powerful institution today, the media can provide immeasurable assistance to promote the causes of women, but background information provided under the academic review, the topics discussed on the theme ***Women and the Media*** at the CSW 2003 Session, and the interview conducted with Lemish, strongly underscore that the media-at-large cares little about illuminating and advancing women's human rights and social issues. The first set of media questions were initially analyzed as a consensus response of the four cultural groups, before the results were divided into cultural regions for statistical examination. Three significant questions posed in this segment offer the following answers on the next two pages.

Are women's social issues presented as factual (logical) hard news?
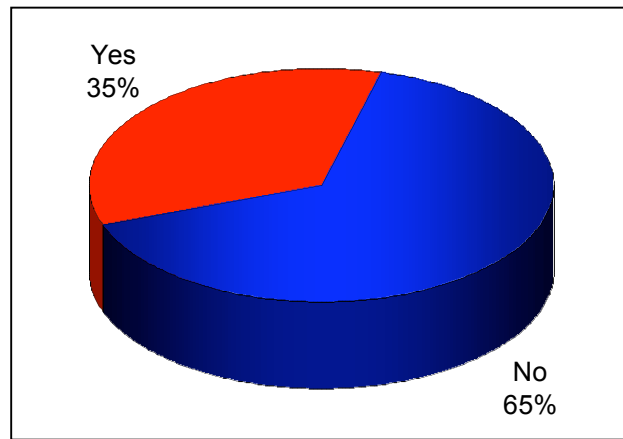
Figure 18

Are women's social issues presented as emotional (sympathetic) soft news?
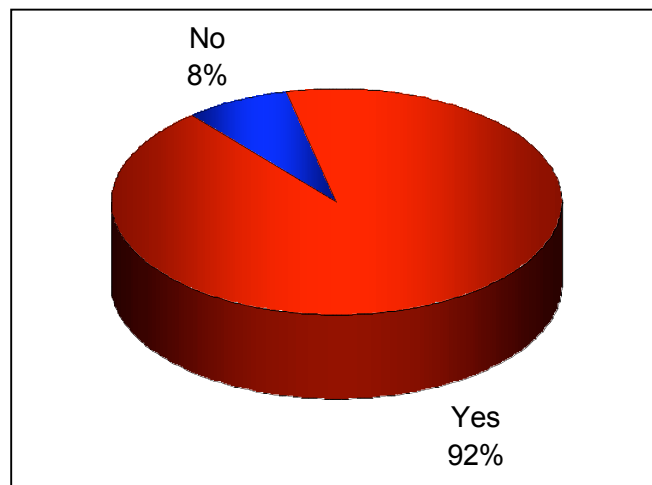
Figure 19

These significant percentage differences suggest that women's issues are not reported as hard news by two-thirds of the respondents, and nearly all respondents claim that women's issues are presented as soft news. These findings substantiate the position shared by Lemish that is described later under the interviews of the qualitative research portion. One of the grave

concerns expressed about the CSW sessions continues to focus on the lack of news media coverage each year. I have noted that in the last three years organizers have allocated little time to promote press participation, based on the discouraging reality that press coverage (interest) has been negligible, if at all, for so many years. International women's conferences, CSW sessions, etc., held at UN Headquarters, are rarely even mentioned in the New York City media. In the United States these days, news coverage of the UN mostly revolves around the Security Council which only handles human rights and social issues in the context of conflict and post/conflict resolution. Minimal media coverage of hard-news women's issues seems to be the same situation around the world. When the respondents were asked:

Do NGO women have access to the media?
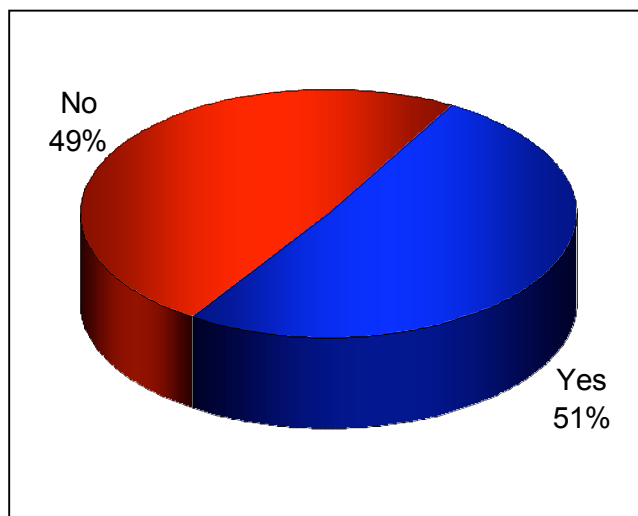
Figure 20

The results show an evenly split response when analyzed from a global perspective. Examined more closely, North American and European/Central Asian NGO women believe that they have much less opportunity to access their media than do their counterparts from developing regions of the world. The NGO women from Latin America/Caribbean and East Asia/Pacific

often come from affluent and high-level social backgrounds and thus are more apt to obtain access to the media in their cultures. In North America and Europe/Central Asia, NGO women come from diverse social strata backgrounds and do not necessarily exert the same influence in their societies as do their counterparts from other cultural regions. Still, overall, NGO women report that little serious coverage is provided on women's issues whether they have connections to their local/national media or not. The following illustration provides a statistical table of the three questions just discussed.

Women and the Media
Statistical Table

	North America		Europe Central Asia		Latin America Caribbean		Sub-Sahara Africa		Middle East North Africa		East Asia Pacific		South Asia	
	Yes	No		No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Women's Issues Hard News (Reason/Logic)	11	22	5	13	2	3	0	2	1	0	3	3	1	0
Women's Issues Soft News (Emotion/Sympathy)	31	2	17	0	3	2	2	0	1	0	5	1	1	0
Do NGO woman have access to the media?	10	17	8	8	4	2	1	0	1	0	6	0	1	0

Figure 21

Then the survey question asked: ***What are the main media used in your region?*** The NGO women responded in order of general importance as follows on the next page.

North America

        TV, Internet, Newspapers, Radio

Europe/Central Asia

        TV, Newspapers, Radio, Internet

Latin America/Caribbean

        Newspapers, TV, Radio (Internet not mentioned)

East Asia/Pacific

        Newspapers, TV, Radio, Internet.

The results clearly indicate that the Internet has gained a foothold only in North America as a main source of media communication while, as a news resource, the other three regions rank the Internet last or not at all, as in the case of Latin America/Caribbean. TV remains the most utilized media resource for North America and Europe/Central Asia while newspapers represent the leading media resource for Latin America/Caribbean and East Asia/Pacific.

Next the questionnaire asked: ***How does your media impact women in your cities/countryside?*** The few women who responded from each region generally agreed that, in their society, media penetrates nearly everywhere geographically, and each region suggests a slightly different interpretation of the media's main impact:

North America

    The women stated that the capitalist market creates the societal norms for women rather than women themselves establishing their own norms in society. Negative images portray women as victims of violence and characterize them in passive roles (listening and/or supporting) in contrast to men in actively professional leadership roles.

Europe/Central Asia

The women stated that labels, stereotypes and negative female images concern them most, and media in general presents mostly negative news on all issues that leaves lasting impressions on people's perception and disposition towards others.

Latin America/Caribbean

The women stated that they are viewed in a dual role: predominantly, for sexual exploitation, but also in conjunction with important social issues.

East Asia/Pacific

The women stated that attractive young women and affluent lifestyles dominate the portrayal of female images.

Unfortunately, the media seldom portrays women as agents of change in today's political atmosphere, at least in the United States, that sidelines human rights and social development as hard news coverage at present. To the contrary, more than ever, women are depicted and viewed as sexual objects, victims, or supporters of strong men in society, and when presented as public leaders, the imagery is often derogatory. The respondents were then asked to note the prevalent images of women portrayed in their media today. The responses to the following six categories were ranked from most to least amount of image portrayal by the four testing groups: *Wife, Mother, Victim, Sex Object, Professional* and *Volunteer*.

North America

1. Sex Object 2. Victim 3. Mother 4. Wife/Volunteer 5. Professional.

Europe/Central Asia

1. Sex Object 2. Mother 3. Wife/Professional 4.Victim 5.Volunteer.

Latin America/Caribbean:

1. Sex Object/Victim 2. Mother/Volunteer, 3. Wife 4. Professional.

East Asia/Pacific

1.Victim 2. Sex Object/Professional 3. Mother 4. Volunteer 5.Wife.

Women Images in the Media
Madonna/Whore Phenomena

Volunteer — 12%
Professional — 12%
Wife — 13%
Mother — 18%
Victim — 21%
Sex Objects — 24%
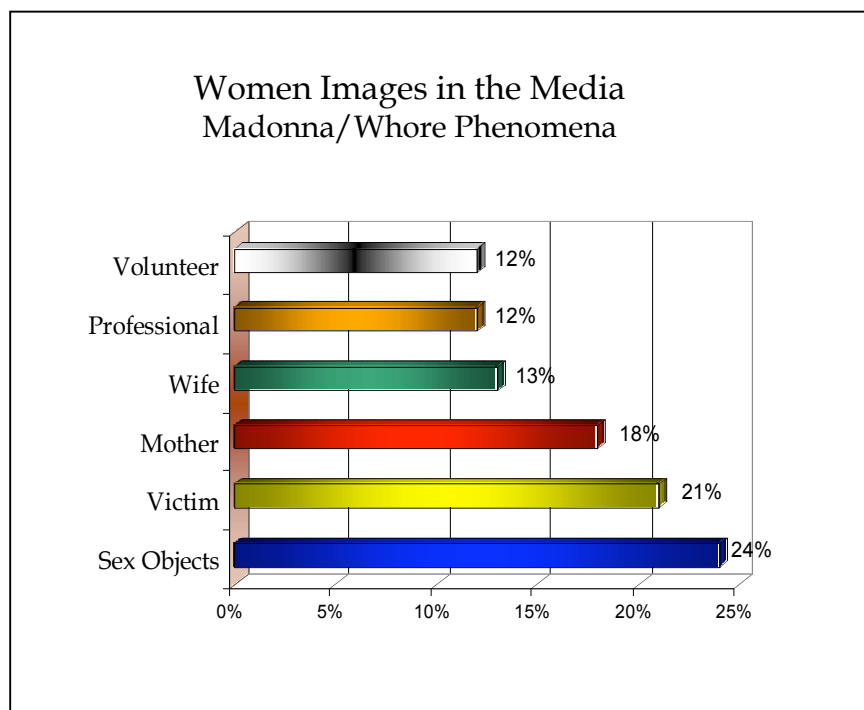
Figure 22

The Madonna/Whore dual image of women remains prevalent in the media throughout the world today. Collectively, the four regional groups consider the sex object and victim images the most frequently portrayed in the media, and this reality substantiates the Madonna/Whore phenomenon. (Lemish 2002) The female image of professional and/or volunteer women is depicted as much less significant in the media, yet NGO women work relentlessly as career (paid) and volunteer professionals to foster social development in so many areas and deserve proper recognition. One can conclude that the media provides minimal coverage of their achievements in any of the four regions, and when it occurs, media coverage on women's topics is presented as emotional soft-news stories.

Nonetheless, the media stands not entirely void of coverage of women's issues, and the respondents note some significance given to various topics as depicted by their regional media. The social issues they rank from most to least here do mirror United Nations social development

concerns as well. The five leading issues of each region include: ***Education, Economic Sustainability, Environment, Health, Family, Culture, Human Rights, Violence, War/Post Conflict,*** and ***Politics***

North America

      1. Health 2. Family 3. Violence 4. War/Post Conflict 5. Politics.

Europe/Central Asia

      1. Education 2. Health 3. Family 4.Violence 5. Human Rights.

Latin America/Caribbean

      1. Violence 2. Family 3. Health 4.War/Post Conflict 5. Education.

East Asia/Pacific

      1. Violence 2. Health 3. Family 4. Education 5. Human Rights.
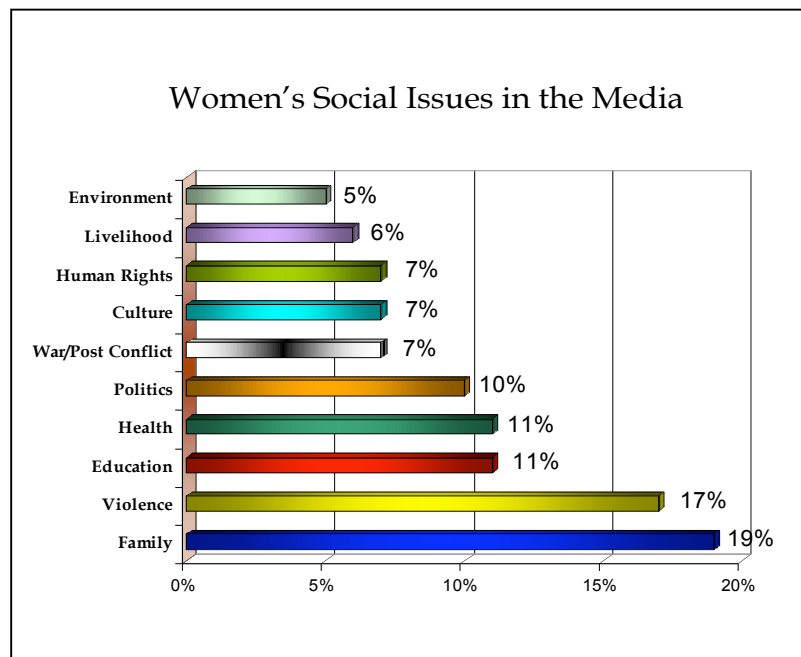
Figure 23

The results drawn from the answers to the media questions indicate that each region prioritizes social issues according to specific cultural needs. Concurrently, these UN NGO women also seek to find common ground from a global perspective on these same issues. Health, family and violence are the most important social issues among the four study groups, and all five of these topics are covered at length in the ***Platform for Action*** and its *Twelve Critical Areas of Concern*, the outcome document established at Beijing 1995.

3.11. Woman-to-Woman Communication Problems and Suggestions

In the final portion of the survey questionnaire, the respondents commented on the communication problems that they have encountered with each other. Their various experiences have been summarized according to the four study-group regions that suggest significant differences in the manner in which communication difficulties are experienced. Although they were also asked to provide suggestions to improve communication and social interaction with one another, nothing substantive was forthcoming. So, the following summary highlights the problems they illuminate, not solutions.

The North American UN NGO women representatives show a strong concern about the usage of email and the Internet. On the one hand, they claim that too much information is generated about women's issues and people's experiences that is then widely distributed at UN conferences/sessions. In fact they receive so many informational emails from list servers in addition to individual correspondence that they simply cannot allocate the time necessary to respond appropriately and adequately. Then, not everybody can relate to each other's particular social issues and the senders' level of knowledge and experience. On the other hand, in developing nations, not all communities have access to email (NGO academic review section) or can even afford the technology, so an uneven distribution of information occurs due to the digital north/south divide. This point was discussed at length in the academic review under NGO

women's viewpoints on gender based *cultural relativism* and the global divide. In many cases, NGO women-at-large need to acquire more skills to use the Internet efficiently and to overcome their anxiety to work with this informational communication technologies (ICTs).

The North American respondents then describe their discontent with the media. They have witnessed that media women compete fiercely with each other for attention as professionals in the media and too infrequently champion the rights and roles of women in society in their news casting. They vie for their own notoriety, as do the male newscasters, or challenge the men at the expense of promoting social issues of gender equality.

They expound on cultural differences and communication styles and feel that, in general, NGO women are either too strong willed or too shy in their demeanor. Both behavioral approaches can negatively impact discussion and the achievement of common goals. In general, they find that NGO women do not exhibit sufficient emotional restraint in their conversational styles. They experience that NGO women often seem insensitive to one another's speaking ways while subconsciously and subtly competing with one another. They note that the tone and body actions of women appear to overly emphasize matters of importance and such gestures interfere with the verbal message. Then, NGO women do not listen to each other's words carefully enough, for too much emotionality is expressed in their voices which can supercede the verbal message. Six of the North American respondents consider language barriers to be a serious problem. English remains the dominant language of NGO women, and many North Americans struggle to understand English spoken with a multitude of strong accents and inaccurate pronunciation and unfamiliar English vocabulary.

The North American respondents recognize that the majority of UN NGO women think and perform as multi-taskers, and this behavioral pattern can detract from needed focus on the social issues at hand at international UN conferences. Today's approach to deliberation of social issues has also become more academic in nature than action oriented, and the focus leans toward regional *cultural relativism* rather than internationally oriented problems that foster common ground. Another complaint argues that NGO women representatives are not handling the issues

substantively enough and sometimes fail to process, intellectually, the reality of today's contemporary issues. Many older NGO women, in particular, maintain their strong cultural and religious values and/or continue to follow the early mindset of the modern era feminist movement. Such dispositions can deter their acceptance of forward moving concepts and actions needed in today's social development environment.

The European/Central Asian UN NGO women representatives confer with several of the problematic issues revealed by the North American women, and at the same time they add new dimensions to cultural communication problems that they perceive. They begin with their cultural differences in connection with speaking and listening styles, and underscore their frustration with indirect communication. They stress that listening problems are related to the generational divide, i.e., that the younger adults need to adhere more to the wisdom of their elders. Then, language barriers remain a difficult issue and debilitate free-flowing discourse on social issues at UN conferences/sessions. Too much time needs to be invested to find common ground language and joint objectives to advance common goals. They realize that the differences in the language use of American vs. British English sometimes hinders otherwise effective discussions and deliberations.

The European/Central Asian respondents then focus on psychological and behavioral communication matters, an area not addressed by the North American women. They contend that most NGO women behave too democratically and too deferentially towards one another in an effort to achieve strong outcome documents under the pretense that they do not wish to harm anybody. They perceive a lack of discretion between professional and personal behavior, and find that many of the women do not separate professional and personal issues at the international UN meetings. They claim that negative behavioral traits of the NGO women, that prove detrimental to effective social interaction and impede positive results, encompass jealousy, stubbornness, arrogance, inflexibility, assumptions, while others suffer from self-esteem problems when speaking. In fact they find few NGO women to be balanced in this regard.

They view the presence of the age divide, digital divide, and racial divide as fostering a disparity of interests in the same manner that *cultural relativism* splinters solidarity on pressing social issues today. In addition, they note that religious and political perspectives interfere with establishing common ground, and too much attention is focused on petty issues. They mention that the international women's agenda has become too voluminous at official UN gatherings, and the lack of time to discuss the important issues substantively frustrates them even more.

The Latin American/Caribbean NGO women representatives discern the differences between verbal and nonverbal communication and the meaning of eye contact. They consider the direct North American and European/Central Asian NGO women's "take charge" attitude and competitive communication approaches difficult in social interaction, in contrast to their deferential and cooperative demeanor for the most part. On the other hand, they realize that they still feel psychologically dominated by the traditional Latin male mentality that demands women's submissiveness. They conclude that their perspective on and approach towards women's social issues remain hindered by this cultural background conditioning. They are concerned that their knowledge of human rights and fundamental freedoms is lacking in contrast to other NGO women, for their education level, they sensitively realize, does not match many of their peers. Finally, they often struggle with language use in English, not so pervasively spoken in their region, and sometimes feel less competent and confident to contribute to the discourse.

The East Asian/Pacific UN NGO women representatives concern themselves with language misunderstandings as well. They view the reaction of their NGO peers as too emotional when positions on concepts and issues clash. Culturally, they find the right to personal privacy invaded and that often occurring situation produces an uncomfortable environment for them. Yet, at the same time, they consider cultural diversity among the NGO women to be a strength rather than a problem.

These four culturally regional summaries reveal some similarities in their comments, but more differences are mentioned in the way these UN NGO women representatives perceive and react to communication problems among one another. All four express concern that the emotionality factor interferes with the meaning of a verbal message. European/Central Asian NGO women are frustrated with the use of indirect communication while Latin American/Caribbean NGO women feel uncomfortable with the directness of North American and European/Central Asian NGO women. Then, North American, European/Central Asian and East Asian/Pacific NGO women voice concern about language barriers; Europe/Central Asia NGO women further note the difference between British and American English language use; and North American NGO women interject that multiple accents in spoken English interfere with understanding the meaning of the transmitted speaker's message. North American and Europe/Central Asia NGO women refer to the digital divide and discrepancies in the dissemination of information that give richer regions advantageous access to information. Only North American respondents refer to the media and the unhelpful role of media women themselves in their weak support for women's issues. Only European/Central Asian respondents concern themselves with attitudinal behaviors that they consider annoying and interfering.

These perceived communication problems that were revealed by various regional respondents underscore the cultural variety of numerous communication concerns among UN NGO women. Their insight and comments reinforce the impact of culture on communication styles among UN NGO women representatives, especially during face-to-face engagements.

4. The Qualitative Research

The independent qualitative research is comprised of two equally important components that draw upon several elements of the academic review and substantiate multiple findings from the survey questionnaire:

- Personal participatory observations that I conducted during the 47th Annual CSW Session in March 2003 and again during the 48th Annual CSW Session in March 2004.

- Four individual and lengthy interviews that I conducted with UN NGO women on the following topics pertinent to culture, communication styles and social interaction:

    o Women in the media and gender profiling

    o The modern era women's movement and multiple feminist perspectives

    o Women's language use, social interaction and the power of symbols

    o Culture: an extended definition.

These four topics greatly contributed to the research guidelines established to record and examine communication styles and strategies of the testing group in the context of the United Nations working environment, as an "inside" participatory observer at the CSW 2003 and 2004 Sessions and as an interviewer of professional peers on communication and culture throughout the year 2003.

4.1. Observatory Participation at the CSW 2003 and 2004 Sessions

On the morning of 9/11, while swiftly walking to the UN, I witnessed the second World Trade Tower struck by an airplane and disintegrate into carnage. My brief stay at the UN lasted a mere 40 minutes. Everybody inside official UN buildings was evacuated due to simultaneous bomb threats, as, stunned, we watched the catastrophic news on TV monitors in disbelief and silence. That fateful morning marked only my second day as an official UN NGO representative for Soroptimist International. Due to emergency security measures that were enforced overnight, official UN NGO representatives were immediately barred from entering UN premises until

Winter 2002. The UN was suddenly closed to the public and barricaded with military and police protection for several months. So started my career at the United Nations as an NGO activist for human rights and the status of women.

4.1.1. Preliminary Observations

In the introduction section, I explained that as a new member of the NY NGO CSW Committee in Fall 2001, I had first noticed differences in communication styles among UN NGO women representatives that appeared to cause difficulties and stymie collaboration towards achieving advancement in human rights and social development goals for women. The first meeting of the NY NGO CSW took place as scheduled Friday, September 14th, 2001, three days following the terror attack. Those early weekly NGO meetings continued to be held at the Baha'i International Community NGO Office located in the UN Plaza close to UN Headquarters where we still meet three years later. The mood at those planning meetings that Fall 2001-Winter 2002 was subdued, as CONGO lobbied to restore the NGO representatives their official UN rights. As a newcomer to the committee, I realized that these unusual circumstances gravely disrupted "business as usual" meetings before recognizing that the difficulties interfering with positive social interaction among UN NGO representatives resulted from other elementary causes at well.

These initial observations of the NY NGO CSW galvanized my motivation to undertake a substantive study concerning a cultural communication issue at the United Nations. In January 2002, I discussed this preliminary premise with Thimm at Bonn University and first proposed the premise that diverse communication styles of UN NGO women seem to harm interpersonal relations and hinder progress on women's social issues. At the CSW NGO Consultation Day and the ensuing two weeks in March 2002, it became increasing apparent that the NGO women's cultural backgrounds not only influenced their communication styles, but also impeded the sought-after UN general consensus on outcome documents on the policies and implementation of the thematic issues under deliberation at the CSW session. Frequent difficulties in understanding

each other often resulted in frustration and disputes among the participants even though these NGO women representatives had convened from around the globe in an effort to promote UN sanctioned and internationally determined common goals for the advancement of women. At the end of the CSW 2002 Session, I determined that the title of the dissertation would read:

Culture and Communication

A Study of NGO Woman-to-Woman Communication Styles at the United Nations

4.2. UN NGO Women's Communication Styles and the Role of Culture

The following participatory observations closely adhere to the principles of Blumer's research methodology that emphasizes the significance of undertaking study group research in social interaction within the environment and context of the study group. I applied this methodological approach to study the UN NGO women representatives at CSW sessions for two years in addition to the preliminary observations. Through the observations, I sought cultural indicators among the women's social interaction based on topics presented in the questionnaire:

- Direct and Indirect Communication
- Oral and Written Communication Styles
- Women's Issues and Persuasion
- Interpersonal Relations

The works of Clark and language use, Thimm on *Durchsetzungsstrategien* and Tannen on gender-class based communication strategies, and the NGO women's essays on cultural relativism, gender communication and women's issues, provide sound academic viewpoints on which to base these findings. This narrative of the participatory observations will present a "compare and contrast" analysis of two major annual events organized and conducted by the NY NGO CSW for the CSW 2003 and 2004 Sessions: the UN NGO Consultation Day held on the Sunday before the official opening of the CSW session by the member-state representatives at UN Headquarters the following Monday morning, and the UN NGO Awards Reception held on

Wednesday evening of the first week of the session when most representatives are still in attendance. Whereas in 2003 about 300 NGO representatives attended each of the two events, in 2004 approximately 500 people attended the Consultation Day and about 400 attended the awards reception. The participatory observations also revolved around the entire 2003-2004 planning and programming of the NY NGO CSW where I was chair of the theme *The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality* in 2004. As such, the responsibilities entailed, in conjunction with this social issue, the preparation and execution of the Roundtable, the panel for the Consultation Day, the breakout sessions on Consultation Day, and thematic caucus meetings throughout the two-week CSW 2004 Session.

4.3. NY NGO CSW Consultation Day 2003

At the Consultation Day on March 2, 2003, I served as co-chair of the task force for the *Women and the Media* social issue. As noted, the questionnaire was distributed and collected on that occasion. The task force responsibilities entailed determining topics and soliciting speakers for The Roundtable 2003 discussion held at UN Headquarters a month before the CSW session. Then, the task force arranged for Lemish to participate, among other speakers, in the Consultation Day's morning "panel of experts" as a main presenter. For the afternoon, the task force coordinated the aforementioned six breakout sessions on *Women and the Media* which included: *The Participation in and Access of Women and the Media: Equality, Education, and Empowerment* and *Information Communication Technologies: Equality, Education, and Empowerment.* The task force not only determined the topics, but also invited the facilitators to guide each of the 90-minute breakout sessions with the assistance of an expert resource person and an assigned university student scribe/rapporteur to record the dialogue. Each breakout session was to submit three summarized recommendations on their topic to be presented by a spokesperson at the late afternoon closing plenary followed by a networking coffee hour.

In the ubiquitous role of task force co-chair, I had the opportunity to observe the social interaction taking place among UN NGO women in various situations throughout the day while

awaiting the results of the questionnaire. A cold, rainy and gray day, the early morning mood of many of the women proved contentious and impatient due to travel exhaustion and long lines at registration tables. The attendees were concerned about the ominous political climate as the US government and the UN Security Council were deep in deliberation and at loggerheads on the then imminent Iraqi invasion issue. Many NGO women were distressed that many of their peers, who normally partake, could not attend the 47th Annual CSW Session due to political restrictions from their respective countries or visa restrictions imposed by the United States government on certain countries, mostly located in the Middle East. By definition, UN NGO representatives work to resolve world issues and conflict through peaceful compromise and collaboration, and therefore so many affiliated with the UN in various capacities were strongly opposed to the pending war. This uncomfortable atmosphere affected the overall mood and at times resulted in a conservative and distant attitude towards Americans in attendance. Yet, the majority of the American UN NGO representatives were not in political alignment with the position of the American government at the time.

At the start of the opening plenary in the morning, the freely provided translation equipment proved faulty, and the Chair Ambassador, for the first time a man and from Tunisia who spoke in French, was disconcerting in his aloof manner. Although totally unprepared, Paravazian, one of the four women interviewed, volunteered to translate to the mostly non-French speaking audience. Only at the end of his opening remarks, did the Chair Ambassador switch to eloquent English. The audience was irritated that he had continued in French when he could speak very fluent English and knew that the majority in the audience could not understand him in French. The mood among the listeners remained disgruntled. The keynote speaker, Executive Director of UNICEF Carol Bellamy, arrived two hours late, so the panel members commenced with their presentations to enable the plenary to continue.

One panel speaker addressed *Violence Against Women,* a culturally sensitive topic even among the UN NGO women representatives in their efforts to end all acts of violence harming women. To acknowledge such truths about the realities of one's cultural practices can be an

emotionally and psychologically distressful experience. Instead of asking an expert to address the audience from an academic/intellectual viewpoint, the ***Violence Against Violence*** task force invited a young Eastern European woman who bravely told of her travails of having been bought as an Internet bride believing she had responded to an advertisement to work as a domestic for an American family. Her heart-rendering experience of sex slavery and her harrowing escape to a shelter in the state of New Jersey, next to New York City, stunned the audience to silence. The topic ***Violence Against Women*** represents a powerful example of Richter's interview comments about how culture influences not only what women say, but also what women are willing to say, found under the interviews later in this section. In this case, the young Eastern European victim broke with her tradition, she explained, to share her story in a soft-spoken style that visibly moved the audience emotionally. This communication strategy is used by UN NGO women, too, when presenting social issues, as was determined by the questionnaire.

Lemish next spoke with deliberate emotionality on ***Women and the Media*** and elicited the first positive reaction of the day through her ability to combine humor and pathos in her provocative presentation. In other words, in accordance with Goffman's thinking, she performed enthusiastically and eloquently on stage and drew strong applause. Furthermore, everybody in the audience seemed to relate to her Madonna/Whore phenomenon and the polarized portrayals of women in the media. Although she enhanced her presentation with explicit erotic examples of the portrayal of women in the media that challenged the imagination, the audience did not appear uncomfortable by the extremism of her remarks. She used her own country and culture as a prime example of blasphemous portrayal of women in the media which put the audience at ease to comment about their own media and portrayal of women in the breakout sessions in the afternoon. Since the questionnaire was distributed that day, it helped the women to think about the topic before offering their responses.

At the end of the morning plenary, Bellamy finally appeared, ignored the theme of her keynote speech, made available in print instead, and proceeded to speak on one of UNICEF's main goals at present, violence against mothers and children that results in the HIV-Aids

affliction of the victims. She spoke passionately and articulately without a script, and as activists often do, used the setting first to advance her professional agenda, then integrate her remarks into the theme of the program.

This panel of women speakers confirmed that the ability to emotionalize a presentation on social issues through the use of narratives and personal experiences resonates positively with UN NGO women audiences. This observation supports the questionnaire results concerning the unanimous use of emotion when speaking on women's issues to an audience of NGO women activists. Nevertheless, not every culture raises its members to be skilled or to feel comfortable with making emotive presentations. Women who master an emotive speaking style possess an advantage to capture and influence UN NGO women audiences.

In the afternoon, I attended the breakout session on *Education and the Media* for several reasons. As a cultural and gender communication educator, I listened to a lively multi-cultural discussion about an important aspect of my professional field; as co-chair of the ***Women and the Media*** task force, I observed the organizational approach used by the group's leaders and its effectiveness on the breakout session; and as a participatory observer for this research portion of the study, I noted the communication styles, strategies and social interaction of the forty participants from at least two-dozen cultural backgrounds represented in this particular breakout session group.

The facilitator opened the meeting by asking the participants which specific topics they chose to discuss under the theme *Education and the Media.* After a time-consuming brainstorming period, the group came to agreement on a few key points and proceeded to discuss them at will. The facilitator had difficulty maintaining control of the discussion under this minimal organizational approach. UN NGO women from Europe/Central Asia and East/Pacific spoke adamantly when expressing their individual opinions from a cultural viewpoint, and tended to interrupt each other constantly. Drawing from Tannen's research on interruption, this strategy was employed for control of conversation, not to show solidarity with the others. The questionnaire results also suggested that European/Central Asian women interrupt the most.

They projected an emotional tone and raised their voices to gain attention and control of the floor. North American NGO women appeared distraught at the lack of structure and direction of the discussion and interjected comments tinged with frustration and slight disapproval in their tone regarding the social behavior of many participants in the group. Unfortunately, at the end of the designated 90-minute period, the group was rushed to find a proper general consensus on three recommendations to further the discourse on *Education and the Media.* The exclusively facilitative approach used to conduct the breakout session, comprised of culturally diverse and powerful personalities, only partially succeeded in fulfilling its task to establish three meaningful recommendations. So, I incorporated the lessons learned in 2003 to revise the organizational structure to conduct breakout sessions at the CSW 2004 Session.

At the Consultation Day's closing plenary, each breakout session's spokesperson on behalf of ***Violence Against Women*** and ***Women and the Media*** was allocated three minutes to share their group's recommendations. The participants in the ***Women and the Media*** breakout sessions spoke more concretely and optimistically about solutions to tackle the problems of negative portrayal of women and better access to the media to promote the advancement of women and gender equality. The participants in the ***Violence Against Women*** breakout sessions struggled to assert many viable solutions, for the topic triggered emotional reactions among their breakout groups, and they were unable to establish much consensus on joint recommendations.

The drawn conclusions and projected recommendations for both issues were then incorporated into a summarized outcome document of the CSW NGO Consultation Day results. The chairs of the two task force committees, who were more familiar with appropriate UNese wording, assumed the responsibility, with the consensus of the remaining participants attending Consultation Day. The summaries were immediately scripted for distribution the next morning at the NGO information center located within UN Headquarters, in time for the official UN ECOSOC opening of the CSW session. Following the concluding plenary, the remaining women, about 200, convened for a social networking gathering whereby the tone softened and the mood became more congenial towards one another. This observation suggests that the

environment and context, i.e., subject matter, in which UN NGO women's social interaction occurs, assumes an important role, as the attendees, regardless of their cultural orientation, continued to discuss and debate more amicably the social issues and positions presented throughout the day. The Consultation Day represents one the most important contributions of the NY NGO CSW to the CSW two-week session each year.

4.4. NY NGO CSW Awards Reception 2003

On Wednesday evening, March 5, 2003, the NY NGO Committee on the Status of Women hosted a reception for 300 NGO representatives, the executive board of the ECOSOC CSW member states and invited guests at the Turkish Cultural Center located directly across from UN Headquarters. An annual event that is well attended, the guests employ their diplomatic communication skills to meet and mingle with as many in attendance as possible during the two-hour social affair. The women utilize this networking opportunity to reconnect with old acquaintances and longtime friends, to establish new alliances and to discuss and lobby their positions with all whom are willing to listen. North American and European/Central Asian women usually wear dark conservative colors and styles while women from developing nations proudly don their often dramatic national dress. The atmosphere in the large hall shimmers like a tapestry of colorfully clad people of all races and creeds moving slowly forward in a circular direction as they hungrily eat international delicacies and sip wines donated by UN missions.

The mood remained subdued, however, as deliberations in the Security Council to find a peaceful solution for the Iraq situation disintegrated that same week. Since most UN NGO women today are politically as well as civically minded, and since the UN is an international organization founded to sustain world peace, then, understandably, nearly everybody at the CSW 2003 Session was worried about the pending war; its long-term ramifications for world peace; and the credible role of the UN in successfully negotiating conflict in the future. Yet, few chose to discuss the impending situation that evening. Rather, they were concerned about the cultural divisiveness emerging among UN NGO women and between the NGO community and UN

governmental officials in regard to the wording of the outcome document on *Violence Against Women.* An unusual political coalition, the US government, the Vatican and several Middle Eastern countries were voicing strong opposition to the language to define violence and were rallying against a proposed outcome document drafted by ECOSOC CSW members. The coalition was also challenging moderate UN NGO positions, intent to reduce the alarming rise of violence towards women in virtually every culture in recent years.

After an hour of informal mingling, the chair of the NY NGO CSW made a brief, but emotionally charged welcoming speech and presented the achievement award to Executive Director of UNIFEM Noeleen Heyzer, an international woman activist who, for decades, has *made a difference* for the sustainable economic development of women worldwide. The chair also individually acknowledged the committee members with a single yellow rose, the symbol of international friendship and in several countries the symbol for International Women's Day celebrated on March 8th each year. The recipients and audience welcomed this gesture alike. Just as Richter had described the procedure and purpose of such social gatherings in her interview, the NY NGO CSW 2003 awards reception filled the intrinsically understood requirements to be a successful NGO networking event.

At the close of the two-week CSW 2003 Session, the UN NGO representatives were gravely disappointed with the end results, for the outcome document on *Violence Against Women* did not receive the necessary general consensus approval by the governments. It marked the first time in 47 CSW sessions that such an outcome document had been rejected, and the NGO women were worried that this action could set a precedent for negating further outcome documents on other equally important women's issues in years to come. Nevertheless, the *Women and the Media* outcome document did pass and became a guideline for policies and best practices for governmental officials and NGO representatives to use as a blueprint to improve the portrayal and role of women in the media in their native countries and local communities.

4.5. Preparation for the CSW 2004 Session: *The Role of Men and Boys* Task Force

During Summer 2003 and under the direction of a new chair, the NY NGO CSW Executive Committee reviewed the lessons learned from the at times inefficient organizational structure of the CSW 2003 Consultation Day and discussed reasons why the *Violence Against Women* outcome document failed. One repeated complaint, several in attendance expressed their dismay that all main speakers and many of the facilitators were not only Caucasian, but exclusively represented western society as well. When the full NY NGO CSW reconvened in September, we worked to correct the organizational and structural weaknesses of the previous CSW programming problems, in particular, to help guarantee positive results for the CSW 2004 Session. The two thematic issues this time involved: *The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality* and *Women at War.* As an educator of communication, gender studies and intercultural relations, I agreed, when asked, to chair the task force on the *The Role of Men and Boys.* For the CSW 2003 Session, the four-person task force for *Women and the Media* met on an as needed basis; in contrast, the twelve-person CSW 2004 task force convened each Monday morning for two hours from mid-October 2003 until the end of February 2004. The new NY NGO CSW chair had increased the responsibilities of each task force and widened the team's autonomy at the same time, so we needed to meet on a regular schedule to achieve that end.

In forming the task force, I wanted to invite UN NGO men representatives who were showing interest in the theme, and, ultimately, three participated actively in the group. It should be noted that this marked the first time that men assumed an important role in the NGO planning of a CSW session. Equally important to the task force, we argued that men should be invited as main speakers at the Roundtable scheduled to be held in February 2004 and asked to participate in the Consultation Day panels of expert speakers on both issues. Rarely, if ever, had men been asked to speak in keynote roles before the NGO constituency at Consultation Day and other important NGO parallel events. Nevertheless, I felt strongly that it was impossible to address properly the issue of incorporating men into the women's movement in order to achieve gender

equality without including the men in the CSW planning process to establish and lobby for a mutual position on *The Role of Men and Boys* by NGO men and women, alike.

The member states of the ECOSOC CSW had determined that the two areas of concentration that *The Role of Men and Boys* task force should focus on were gender equality in the *workplace* and its role in the causes and prevention of *HIV-AIDS*. The NGO task force was displeased with the limited range of subjects to be presented and countered with a much broader mission statement that recognized that *The Role of Men and Boys in the Achievement of Gender Equality* must start in the socialization and educational process of one's local cultural environment. We also included violence and sexual harassment as critical sub-themes to keep the issue of women and violence in the forefront. Many returning UN NGO women were still distressed that the *Violence Against Women* issue had failed to produce an outcome document and took advantage of every opportunity to bring the issue to the attention of UN governmental officials at the CSW 2004 Session. The task force established its own mission statement on behalf of the NY NGO CSW on *The Role of Men and Boys*, and the team took three weeks to discuss each premise and consider every word to be written in the one-page statement. True to gender communication style differences, the women stressed the relational elements of the short statement, and the men focused on the situational elements. In the questionnaire, the questions on women's social issues and persuasion queried the types of persuasive communication strategies (*Durchsetzungsstrategien*) that women apply to woman-to-woman and woman-to-man social interaction. Throughout this six-month meeting period of the task force, both men and women communicated mainly using reason and logic using a low-context approach. When women task force members wanted to bond through relational experiences that they would share, the men would patiently listen although one could notice that they could not connect emotionally to the social interaction among the women at such times and remained quiet. They never offered a personal relational experience either to reinforce a point or to build a rapport among the task force members; they never stayed after meetings to continue conversation informally. After the situational tasks of the meeting were completed, then they would depart, immediately. The men,

however, operated efficiently and effectively using email, and they corresponded with me much more than their women counterparts. The following four paragraphs are the result of a collaborative communication effort of NGO men and women to write this mission statement:

Mission Statement of the Preparation Task Force for the CSW Session on the

Role of Men-Boys in Achieving Gender Equality

"The Beijing Declaration, adopted by the 4th World Conference on Women in 1995, expressed the determination of 'all governments to encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards gender equality' (para 25). Indeed, gender equality cannot be realized without the active participation of all. Gender justice is not a 'women's issue' but a concern for all of humanity. Despite the current imbalance through which men control resources needed for gender equality and despite the continuance of men in dominant roles, men have much to gain through and much to contribute towards the empowerment of women.

"In preparation for the 2004 CSW theme 'The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality,' the task-committee of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, will approach the themes from a holistic view encompassing the sub-themes: Workplace and Economy; Health and HIV/AIDS; Education and Socialization; Family Roles; Violence and Harassment; Role of the Media.

"We will adopt a 'Best Practices' approach to each subtopic in the manner that will stimulate grass-roots actions as well as guide national and international advocacy efforts to draft effective policy. We envision the work leading to CSW statements (NGOs and Governmental) of policy goals that will be used for lobbying initiatives during the CSW meetings and advocacy/lobby efforts when NGOs return home.

"All of the themes and topics will be addressed through the frame of universal human rights, specifically through the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), Women 2000 (Beijing +5), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The topics will be

reviewed systemically so as to acknowledge and understand the existing pattern of gender inequality and the deeply embedded, multi-dimensional structural components that have historically denied women equality and maintained male dominance, thus denying all of humanity a full expression of human rights. Dealing with the themes will result in strategies for men and boys' participation in changing institutional structures, reforming gender concepts, reshaping traditional gender relationships, and challenging traditional gender models."

The task force presented the statement to the NY NGO CSW communication secretary for editorial review and finally to the chair for approval. Each time the task force invited potential speakers, group facilitators or expert resource people to participate in the CSW 2004 Consultation Day, they received a copy of the NGO mission statement to provide them with a framework for their contributions to the issues. It marked the first time that NY NGO CSW committed itself to write its own mission statement on a specific issue covered a CSW Session. The task force was sensitive to include speakers from multi-cultural and multi-racial backgrounds who would represent diverse expert positions and opinions on the issues. The mission statement was distributed to the 200 invited participants who attended the Roundtable on Thursday, February 19, 2004 and at Consultation Day on Sunday, February 29, 2004. They were also made available at the NGO Information Center inside UN Headquarters and were distributed at the thematic caucus sessions that were held every two days throughout the two-week period. The intensive social interaction that occurred at caucus meetings will be explained later in the participatory observations analysis.

4.6. The Roundtable 2004 *The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality*

The task force then organized the *panel of experts* of men and women for the two-hour Roundtable, and that once again we changed the format to become more interactive between the panelists and the audience. Held in one of the UN's lower chamber rooms, many male member-

state officials attended for the first time since it became known in the UN community that the CSW 2004 Session welcomed the input of men. The last half hour enabled the audience to partake in a lively dialogue following the panelists' presentations. Once again, women often introduced their questions through a personal experiential narrative and used emotional appeal while men simply asked direct questions with no lead-in background information. Still, men on the panel and younger men in the audience showed sensitivity with their language use towards their responsibility to educate their own gender as valid role models in contributing to a more gender balanced society. Many men mentioned the need "to listen" to one another and in conjunction with Blumer's thinking, it translates to: listen first > interpret next > react only then.

4.7. Joint Task Force Consultation Day Preparation: Winter 2004

Throughout January and February 2004, both task force teams collaborated at joint meetings to restructure and improve the CSW 2004 Consultation Day in order to utilize the resources and time optimally. The prior year, the two task force teams interacted competitively, even combatively, as they prepared for the CSW 2003 Session. Many of the members engaged in the *Violence Against Women* task force were older women, and the chair adhered to the radical feminist perspective popular in the seventies, which resulted in dissension within and between teams. In contrast, the *Women and the Media* task force was comprised of multigenerational women, predominantly from professional academic backgrounds and a much smaller group in numbers. We approached the discourse on the media topic and consequent preparation for the CSW 2003 Consultation Day through the worldview of recent multi-cultural feminist thinking that promotes an integrative approach to social interaction. In winter 2003 no joint task force meeting occurred to collaborate on the organizational structure for that year's Consultation Day.

To organize Consultation Day 2004, the members of the *Women and War* task force comprised young women professionals in their twenties and thirties who were mostly working for nonprofit organizations, rather than participating as professional volunteers. During these joint action, planning sessions, one could explicitly note the different communication styles that

were in action. The members of *The Role of Men and Boys* task force composed of men and women, who were more senior in age and experience, struggled to follow the inductive thinking process and strictly facilitative approach that the other task force and its young women's team used to plan its portion of the Consultation Day program. As a result, I became the ad hoc intergenerational communication interpreter for both sides at these semi-monthly meetings. We finally agreed to approach Consultation Day implementing a combination of directive and facilitative communication strategies for the plenaries in the morning and afternoon. Each task force was then autonomously responsible for the organization of the breakout sessions for their theme according to their preferential approaches to conduct discussions.

The joint task force teams further changed the organizational structure of Consultation Day so that the attendees could participate in breakout sessions on both topics, rather than having to choose one, as in years past. The morning plenary would welcome UN dignitaries before the panel presented its viewpoints on *The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality.* Following their remarks, the audience would have the opportunity to comment briefly and ask questions for half an hour, a new format for the plenary portion of the gathering. Then, everybody would attend a morning breakout session and draw recommendations on the issue. In the afternoon, the second panel would present its viewpoints on *Women's Equal Participation in Conflict Prevention, Conflict Management and Conflict Resolution and in Post-Conflict Peace-Building,* the official UN title that the NGO task force had dubbed *Women at War* for working purposes. This long title denotes typical UNese verbiage to ensure that all key aspects of an issue are articulated and expressed in the proper use of UN cultural language. The joint task forces agreed to choose one speaker for each thematic topic who would present a joint summary of recommendations from their set of breakout sessions at the final plenary gathering in late afternoon. At the closing plenary of Consultation Day 2003, too many speakers, with little presentation experience before such an audience, diluted the impact of the conclusions drawn and recommendations offered on each theme.

4.8. NY NGO CSW Consultation Day 2004

Throughout the CSW 2004 Consultation Day on Sunday, February 29th, 2004, a mild sunny Spring-like day, in contrast to the dreary rainy late-winter atmosphere in 2003, the mood felt genial and optimistic. The impact of 9/11 and the Iraq War no longer interfered or competed for the attention of the UN NGO community. More than five-hundred NGO representatives attended, an increase of 200 from the prior year. NGO women from the Middle East/North African region returned, and more women from Sub-Sahara Africa were present, quite visibly. This situation provided the opportunity to observe communication styles from UN designated cultural regions that could not participate in the survey questionnaire distributed at Consultation Day 2003. For the first time, many UN NGO men (including 30 university students from my *Gender Communication and the United Nations* course who assisted at Consultation Day) filled the audience for both plenaries and contributed to the breakout sessions.

Men and women speakers from the two panels spoke passionately on both topics, and one male presenter on gender equality issues from the Caribbean used a relational viewpoint to tell his story, a communication style normally attributed to women. Another male speaker who addressed women and war issues from the Middle East employed humor to overcome stereotypical thinking about the treatment of women in that region, a challenging approach for such a sensitive topic. Both were well received. The women speakers used an academic approach and employed more logic in their presentation styles in contrast to the women's emotional appeals on the issues at the 2003 Consultation Day. One could suggest that the presence of men on the panel and in the audience changed the women's speaking manner to incorporate more logic/reason to sway the audience. The men's speaking manner used more emotional appeal and personal narrative to influence the mostly female audience. These observations can be directly linked to the questionnaire conclusions and the methods women use to influence one another vs. men, as they used mostly emotional appeal at the 2003 Consultation Day that was exclusively attended by women in contrast to a mostly reason/logic approach with little emotional drama in their presentations to a male/female audience at the 2004 Consultation Day. My observations

during the 2004 Roundtable and Consultation Day conclude that the male speakers selected a communication style to entertain (relational approach) as well as inform (situational approach) while the female speakers selected communication styles that strove, this time, to be highly informative with minimal sharing of personal experiences in deference to the male attendees.

From the audience, numerous women, but notably no men, posed provocative questions following the presentations by the panel members in the morning and afternoon plenaries. Cultural communication patterns seemed to emerge. Confident-speaking African women all projected heightened passion into their words and tone and thereby gained audience attention. European/Central Asian women asked the most direct and penetrating questions, critical in nature. Senior North American women, often from New York City, challenged the speakers' remarks the most, the tone at times inferring hostility. In contrast, the Latin American/Caribbean and East Asian/Pacific women posed no questions at all to the panels. These participatory observations reflect several of the results of the questionnaire on oral communication approaches, interpersonal relations and communication styles.

During the morning breakout sessions on **The Role of Men and Boys**, I served as an impromptu facilitator for the topic *Education and Socialization* when the designated facilitator was suddenly needed elsewhere. My resource expert, whom I knew from his Roundtable presentation two weeks earlier, had just participated as a plenary panel speaker. Carl Breeveld established the organization "Man mit Man" to provide a safe haven in Suriname for 2000 men and boys to speak openly about problematic gender issues and malehood. The men and boys task force had decided to open each of its breakout session with a basic statement and three main points on the subject and then ask participants to contribute other important points to be integrated into the exchange. The men and women depicted a lively well-attended multi-cultural group, and Breeveld easily fielded many challenging questions throughout the meeting.

Breeveld and I were given no opportunity to prepare and coordinate our directive and facilitative roles, so we conducted our breakout session in tag-team fashion through subtle word and body language cues towards each other. In this manner, we managed to keep the group

focused on the main points, thus enabling many participants the opportunity to voice their views. We were careful to call upon men and women from diverse cultural backgrounds in order that representatives from every culture in attendance could contribute. Nevertheless, a few women from India tried to dominate the discussion with lengthy comments and detailed personal experiences to express their opinions adamantly. India is geographically located in South Asia and in 2003 representatives from the region were few. They were not included in the survey questionnaire as a result, so personal observations of their communication style and social interaction throughout the CSW 2004 Session helped to fill this missing quantitative data on that cultural region as well as from Sub-Sahara Africa. Breeveld and I allocated ample time for the group to decide upon the three recommendations through general consensus. My university students served as rapporteurs/scribes in all morning and afternoon breakout sessions and assisted the facilitators and resource experts through note taking and writing recommendation summaries. Highly occupied writing the recommendation summary report for the final plenary and responsible for the actions of the 30 students assisting, I did not have the opportunity to attend a breakout session on *Women and War* following the afternoon panel presentations.

For the closing plenary in 2004 each task force team was required to design a Power Point presentation on the two themes for each spokesperson, and the men and younger women readily volunteered to create them directly following the breakout sessions. Meanwhile the senior women wrote and edited the summary text for *The Role of Men and Boys* from the collected recommendations of all of the morning breakout sessions. This division of labor of the communication contributions also represented generational and gender differentials among the NGO NY CSW committee members. Older UN NGO women, as mentioned in the questionnaire results, still shy away from the use of informational communication technologies (ICTs) and deferred that portion of the summary preparation to the younger female as well as male members of the morning's task force team. On the other hand, as witnessed on several occasions throughout the CSW 2003, through participatory observations, the older women proved to be much more adept at articulating the proper language for the document and were skilled at writing

it jointly. Therefore, the ***The Role of Men and Boys*** task force recommendation summary, written by experienced women, was clearly and concisely expressed by the spokesperson. In contrast, the ***Women and War*** team, who did not have experienced writers as part of their group, appeared disorganized and less focused in their day's end presentation. In fairness, the latter group had little time to prepare for the final presentation since their topic was covered in the afternoon, and the other theme was discussed in the morning. That provided ample time for their summary to be skillfully written. At the close of Consultation Day 2004, most attendees remained for the networking reception, in contrast to 2003 when nearly half had departed by the end of the closing plenary. The 2004 participants voiced their approval of the new organizational structure and the broadened opportunities accorded them to interact with main speakers and experts and to be heard as individuals throughout the entire Consultation Day.

4.9. NY NGO CSW Awards Reception 2004

The 2004 NY NGO CSW awards reception again took place at the Turkish Cultural Center on Wednesday, March 3rd, 2004. Attendance reached brimming capacity at 400 and many men participated for the first time. In keeping with one of the thematic issues, ***The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality,*** the chair of NY NGO CSW presented a special award for exemplary service in advancing women's causes to Stephen Lewis, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for HIV-AIDS in Africa, and to Catherine Bertini the UN Under-Secretary-General for Management. Breaking with tradition, however, the NY NGO CSW members were not awarded their symbolic yellow rose, and one could sense the disappointment among the awaiting recipients when their brief moment of recognition was dashed. This *faux pas* underscored, again, the significance of public praise and symbolic gestures that are viewed as a coveted reward for the exhaustive endeavors of most NGO professional volunteers. Richter, in her interview, had stressed at length the importance of symbols and acknowledgement, especially to the professional volunteers.

4.10. NY NGO CSW Thematic Caucus Meetings 2004

As mentioned, the NY NGO CSW chair assigned an additional responsibility to the 2004 task force teams that required cultural sensitivity in its execution. Throughout the two-week CSW session each year, UN NGO representatives convene as caucus groups to review the governmental deliberations and the continual changes that are being proposed for the two outcome documents, especially during the first week. The NGO caucus groups would write their own versions and responses to each circulated edition and used them to lobby governmental delegates. At these ad hoc meetings, command of the English and UN languages proves critical as each line of the document is scrutinized and critiqued word by word. Yet, as many NGO participants speak English as a second language, this process often leads to heated debate and sometimes ineffective compromise on choice of points and language use. NY NGO CSW members who live in New York City and interact often with the UN system are usually fluent in English and UNese. Other NGO participants sometimes feel dominated by the knowledge and experience level of NGO women representatives who work at UN Headquarters throughout the year and who know UN officials and protocol well. One of the reasons the ***Violence Against Women*** outcome document failed in 2003 was the fact that the NGO thematic caucus group took the original 3-page proposal, drafted by the ECOSOC CSW Executive Board and sanctioned by their 45 member-state Committee, and expanded it into a 14-page document that far exceeded the guideline of the official working document. It became impossible for the governmental delegates to deliberate each phrase, even word, of the strong language demanded by the NGO constituency on the issue. Furthermore, the NGO community stood divided on the pivotal point revolving around a woman's right to governance over her own body. For political and religious conservatives from diverse cultures, including the United States, the NGO position translated to many as a "pro-choice" vs. "pro-life" statement. This ongoing contentious issue reinforces not only the cultural differences that impact communication strategies and the advancement of women, but also the culture positions on the issues, even among women, that hinder women's

social development. Hence, for cultural, communicative and political reasons, the ***Violence Against Women*** outcome document ultimately failed to gain general consensus of the UN.

During the CSW 2004 Session, NGO thematic caucus meetings were officially scheduled for every other day, were structurally organized and thereby proved more productive in the negotiating process between governmental delegates and NGO representatives in regard to the revisions of the two outcome documents. On the other hand, the NGO task force chairs were instructed not to interfere with the caucus groups' sense of autonomy or provide any input into this tedious and sensitive process. Grave concern grew the first week of the CSW session when it became apparent that the United States delegation was displeased with deliberations and the wording of ***The Role of Men and Boys*** draft thus far. Consequently, the NGO community became wary that yet another outcome document could be vetoed by the formidable United States government's position, and they elevated their voices and lobbying strategies to counter potential failure again.

Europeans NGO women responded the strongest and started to control caucus discussions, but the most outspoken women did not exude enough command of the English language to understand UNese nuances at times. Nevertheless, they promoted radical changes to the outcome document which mirrored the mistake made in 2003. The more experienced New York based NGO women negotiated with the others to avoid a second outcome document rejection through compromise and collaborative communication strategies, as discussed in the quantitative research under Raider's communication model for negotiation and presented in Thimm's research on cooperation. These negotiating *Durchsetzungsstrategien* were employed again and again at the caucus meetings visited by 40 to 60 participants on average. It was crucial to the process to keep the edited concepts, main points and wording proposed by the NGO constituency within the framework and length of the official ECOSOC CSW governmental draft on ***The Role of Men and Boys.***

From the outset, the interaction surrounding this issue at these scheduled caucus meetings was contentious and competitive over the wording of several passages that governmental

delegates had supported, and friction continued throughout the deliberations. Many NGO constituents were frustrated and felt confined to only editing and not freely contributing new concepts and language to the text. At that first week's Friday afternoon caucus, the women started to exchange volatile remarks and personal accusations as they continued to rework yet again the NGO outcome document version. The New York task force team needed to assume control and reassert order to the meeting twice that afternoon; much of the frustration was targeted at the US government's delegation and seeming lack of cooperation.

At that Friday caucus meeting, a small group of women, relentlessly pushing the *Violence Against Women* agenda from 2003, entered the meeting room and tried to redirect the already emotionally charged discussion to include the violence issue into the nearly agreed upon NGO version of the outcome document. When intruders became verbally abusive, task force members called for executive order to reduce tension and move the final phase of the outcome document process forward. This meeting marked the last opportunity for the NGO constituency to contribute officially their input into the final document. The male members of the task force were visibly stunned by such emotional eruptions and did not participate in the heated exchanges. Once the group calmed itself, the men became instrumental, however, in restoring logic, reason and a sense of neutrality to help break the dead lock over controversial and divisive wording that had been preventing the caucus group from achieving the general consensus that finally occurred. One young man from the task force offered to format the final NGO draft that was ultimately used as the NGO position to lobby further governmental delegates early the second week. At the end of the CSW 2004 Session, both outcome documents were adopted to the greater satisfaction of the UN governmental delegates and the NGO community.

4.11. Participatory Observation Findings on the CSW 2003 and 2004 Sessions and Culture's Impact on Communication Styles of UN NGO Women Representatives

Upon examination of the participatory observations of social interaction among UN NGO women (and men) representatives at the CSW 2003 and 2004 Sessions, I discovered additional

areas of influence on communication styles and found commonalities that substantiate most of the questionnaire results and several of the interviewees' contributions to the discourse. The political climate among governmental delegates towards current international human rights and social development issues directly impacts on the mood and policy making towards issues which, at first glance, seem unrelated. *Cultural relativism* and the position of member-states on social issues can equally sway the vote for general consensus. The best example becomes the ***Violence Against Women*** outcome document that failed due to divisiveness regarding the passage on a woman's right to governance over her own body. Arab nations were distressed by the pending Iraqi War and conflicting positions of the US government and the UN Security Council. They were attuned to dominant North American NGO positions and their abhorrence of violence, sanctioned by culture, in the Middle East, for example. Some NGO women felt that the rejection of this outcome document was in retaliation to the looming Iraqi invasion and to sustain their cultural view of acceptable male treatment toward women as sanctioned in their societies. Divisive political issues as well as cultural issues can create discord among UN NGO women, thereby, diverting attention and energy from the advancement of women, worldwide, to personally-focused agendas being promoted.

In fact, controversial social issues are often viewed through the prism of cultural sensitivity today that often obscures the reality of wrongful harm done to women under the shroud of *cultural relativism*. Women are still individuals and come to UN conferences/sessions with unique experiences that do shape their worldview on social issues as was illustrated by the disruptive women at the 2004 Friday afternoon caucus session who demanded that the violence issue be inserted into the NGO draft on ***The Role of Men and Boys***, thereby revealing emotionally that they had been victims themselves. Their personal experiences on this issue clearly superceded otherwise logical and reasonable behavior of social interaction among peers. At the end of the disruption and after sharing their experiences with the caucus group, many women could and did identify sympathetically/empathetically with their trauma and reaction. This relationally oriented response enabled the caucus group to move forward, so the NGO

version of the outcome document could meet its deadline. The use of forceful interruption by these North American women, who come from an individualistic culture and attempted to take control of the environment, can be contrasted to women raised in collective/tribal cultures. In fact, an Indian woman (from a collective culture) countered the American women and their questionable behavior when she quietly explained that she also had been violently abused. She, preferred, however, to assist the common cause to establish collaboratively the NGO final position on *The Role of Men and Boys* to further gender equality, and not pursue her personal plight with violence. Her approach proved to be much more powerful in order to return the caucus meeting to finish its purpose and the participants responsibility to agree upon a final draft outcome document.

Further participatory observations, viewed from within the study group's environment, indicate that the significance of an appropriate organizational structure reinforced by a mix of communication strategies according to the context of the situation and impromptu circumstances, jointly result in successful participation by NGO women representatives at UN sponsored international women's conferences/sessions. At the 2003 Consultation Day, the organizational structure proved to be too hierarchal in style at the plenary sessions while too facilitative in style during the breakout sessions, and the attendees voiced their frustration and displeasure on both accounts. In contrast, at the 2004 Consultation Day, the participants expressed their satisfaction with the organizational structure that apparently found the right balance between directive leadership and facilitative guidance to provide enough focus and autonomy for men and women to interact in the dialogue at all sessions. As a result, most participants stayed the entire 8-hour program and remained for the networking reception.

Two more significant subjects under participatory observation that underscore the impact of culture on woman-to-woman communication styles are as follows:

(1) The omnipotent role of language usage

(2) The significance of symbolism.

Throughout the two CSW sessions, the omnipotent role of language use was pervasive in every action at every meeting and event. At the Consultation Days, language use established the mandate and direction of the day from warmly welcoming the participants at registration, to articulating the thematic issues and their main points at the plenaries, to fostering positive social interaction at the breakout sessions, and to determining the quality of the written recommendation summary documents on the issues, also orally presented at the programs' closing. Language use assured the success of the social networking hour. Language use at the rudimentary level is culturally learned, even though layers of education and experience in one's life further develop and shape a person's language use.

At the two NY NGO CSW award receptions, language use and the power of symbols determined the success of these important social events to honor exemplary recipients of the UN community who dedicate themselves to the common goals of the UN NGO world of women (and men today). In review, the two receptions resulted in different experiences for varied reasons. In 2003, the political climate tempered the social interaction and dampened a normally jovial atmosphere. The award presentations, in words and symbols, became the most important moment of the evening, for they offered a sense of connection and harmony among the guests. In contrast, at the 2004 reception, the social atmosphere sparkled with optimism and conviviality among the male and female guests and the social interaction signified the high point of the evening. During the awards ceremony, the mood suddenly changed as the people showed disappointment, especially the NY NGO CSW Committee, when the chair kept her remarks brief and professional in her recognition of only the two award recipients that evening, in contrast to the emotionally motivational presentation of her predecessor the prior year. Culturally viewed, women enjoy honoring each other, especially within the UN NGO community, for verbal recognition and nonverbal symbolic gestures in public are the rewards for their voluntary efforts.

These participatory observations that spanned the period from Fall 2001 until Spring 2004 not only spawned the hypothesis, but have further substantiated the findings of the other

research results to prove the premise that, indeed, culture impacts NGO women's communication styles, social interaction and the advancement of women's causes in the 21st Century.

4.12. Four Interviews with UN NGO Women Representatives

During and following the CSW 2003 Session, I conducted four lengthy interviews with UN women representatives who had attended that year's session. These women offered broad knowledge and experience in pertinent areas of communication and culture to this study. The backgrounds of the interviewees are presented in executive summary form preceding each interview rather than as *curriculum vitae* in order to connect closely each woman's role as an NGO representative to their academic/professional credentials and activist experiences. Together, they contribute invaluable knowledge to this segment of the independent qualitative research. The information provided during each dialogue further substantiates critical aspects of culture's impact on communication styles and strategies. Each interviewee provided unique insight into their specialized areas of communication and culture as strong influences on UN NGO woman-to-woman relations and the ongoing advancement of women's social development. Each interview was tailored to the expertise and personality of the interviewee, and each was encouraged to speak with unbridled freedom of expression.

The four comprehensive interviews have been paraphrased, extensively quoted and examined for commonalities and differences. Their examination will primarily connect communication styles to key aspects of the academic review section to further substantiate the premise that culture impacts woman-to-woman communication styles and social interaction. The analysis of the interviewees knowledge, experiences and perceptions will also compare and contrast findings of the survey questionnaire and participatory observations. The four interviews covered focused on the following subjects:

- *The Portrayal of Women in the Media*
- *The Modern Era Women's Movement and Its impact on Women's Communication Styles*

- *Language Use, Symbols and NGO Women's Communication Styles*

- *Culture's Extended Definition and Its Impact on the Social Interaction of UN NGO*

  Women Representatives

As interviewer and UN NGO Soroptimist International representative for human rights

and the status of women, my knowledge of this field of study in its UN environmental context

allowed us to speak comfortably and in the vernacular of "NGO and UNese cultural languages"

that, consequently, induced a high level of candor in the lively interviews. In addition to sharing

their knowledge and experiences, they mentioned concerns and offered suggestions to improve

communication among NGO women and thereby the advancement of women. The open-ended

social interaction format was individually adapted to each interviewee. The four interviewed

women attended the CSW 2003 Session and were involved as organizers, guest speakers and

group facilitators; all four have been engaged in women's issues and social development for

decades and, consequently, have provided insightful and substantive contributions to the

qualitative research of this independent study.

4.12.1. Interview One: *The Portrayal of Women in the Media* with Dafna Lemish, Ph.D.

The first interview was conducted with Dafna Lemish Ph.D. who holds the Chair of the

Department of Communication at Tel Aviv University and specializes mostly in women and the

media issues. Her research, teaching and social activism agenda are characterized by two major

areas of interest. Her first concentration focuses on the complex relationships between media

content, production and consumption, and questions of identity and gender. She has examined

ideological aspects of gender representation in a variety of media genres such as news,

advertising, political campaigns, popular music, etc. Within this framework, she examines

questions such as women and peace efforts; the responsibility of the media in coverage of

domestic and sexual violence; media's contribution to attitudes toward women and immigration,

pornography and global trafficking of women and girls. She collaborated with colleagues in two

international media-monitoring projects on portrayals of women and women's issues in news around the world.

Lemish's second area of expertise examines the media's impact on the lives of children and youth. She has researched issues such as television's effects on children's perceptions of violent behavior, young viewers' socialization through television, the development of understanding and critical perceptions of television, and media's role in globalization of children and young people's culture, to mention a few. The combination of these interests resulted in her participation in a series of projects on the role of media in the construction of gender identity in children and adolescents. She has been involved in several cross-cultural research projects and is frequently invited to give talks at conferences around the world.

Lemish is committed to social change and regularly applies her academic work to a wide range of social activism in media literacy in the school system, peace-seeking activism, the struggle for women's equal rights in Israeli society, and media usage as a catalyst for empowerment and change. She was director of an NGO concerned with developing critical viewing skills and monitoring women's representation in the media and has served as chair of the Feminist Scholarship Division of the International Communication Association; was board member of the Israel Women Network; founding board member of the Israel Association for Feminist Studies and Gender Research; founding board member of the Israeli Communication Association; and member of the steering committee of the Program for Gender Studies at Tel Aviv University. She was founding Chair of the National Advisory Committee of Media Education in the Israeli School System for the Ministry of Education and is the author of several textbooks on developing critical viewing skills. She is frequently interviewed in the Israeli media and in these efforts contributes to public education and debate through the dissemination of academic knowledge.

4.12.1.1. Interview One: Highlights and Insights

The interview with Dafna Lemish was held during the first week of the 47th CSW Session in March 2003. As a cutting-edge researcher on women and the media, Lemish was officially invited by the NY NGO CSW to be a speaker. In addition to giving a major presentation at Consultation Day, she also spoke and assisted as an expert resource person at panel discussions and workshops during the first week of the session. During the interview, she primarily discussed her current position and personal research methods on the profile of women in the media. Rather than conduct the meeting from a predetermined list of questions, I directed an interactive conversation, by her preference, where she could expound more freely on her pointed views on *Women and the Media* as she requested.

Lemish opened the discussion with her position on the academic feminist theory that she defines as:

> "…..a commitment not only to contribute to research and social theory, but also to serve as a catalyst for deep social change through the integration of knowledge and social action."

She contends that feminist media research forms an inherent alliance with social action approaches based on the principle that "knowledge is subjective and socially aligned." Furthermore, feminist research can be viewed as both highly political and ideological in nature to obtain, disseminate and integrate knowledge for social change. She explained that feminist research concerns itself with social construction of gender, gender equality and the present conditions of women of every race, class, sexual orientation, religion, disability, etc. She believes that ethical orientation of feminist research is particularly sensitive to individuality and diversity, and that feminist action strives to achieve change against universal oppression. She says that much of feminist criticism in media studies focuses on the media's socializing role and its reinforcement of patriarchal dominance through the "symbolic annihilation of women" and by their depiction in society as marginal. She also claims that the press reinforces the normalization

and legitimization of women's oppression and inequalities. In contrast, she suggests how the media is to be valued for their potential to expose injustice, voice feminist viewpoints and offer alternative options for action. Lemish then described the portrayal of women in the media as follows:

"Women are still framed in traditional settings and social roles, and in lower professional status roles that manifest stereotypical traits such as dependency, emotionality, subordination and vulnerability."

She stressed that the sexual objectification of women in advertisement looms as the most harmful portrayal of women and describes in detail how the female anatomy is constantly displayed in provocative body movement, enticing facial expressions, tantalizing glances, sensual finger movement, self-caressing, etc. Her research and analysis of advertising content in the nineties show that the objectification of women frequently reduces them to lustful objects such as fruits: colorful, juicy and tempting to eat; or as animals: untamed, natural, impulsive and uncivilized. She believes, moreover, that this kind of sexual representation suggests that women stand available for exploitation, mistreatment and abandonment. Based on the results of her media studies, Lemish explained that her elevated, now incensed, awareness of the objectification of women in the media has changed her content/analysis research approach to an action-research approach. Once a traditional lecturer, she now states that:

"My role of facilitator is a more valid method to explore the relationship between women's realities and their representation in the media."

In her findings about Israeli media, she discusses the blatant interconnectedness between female objectification and violence as an interwoven theme that is constantly portrayed through the nonverbal presentation of the fragmentation of the human body. Her powerful examples include: body parts disconnected from the whole, visual images of bondage, forced physical contact, and symbolic and potential violence. Lemish elaborated on the portrayal of women as

victims, underscoring that women are placed in a high-risk category because of their lower and often vulnerable status in society. The media role and the victimization of women she views as a double-edged sword. On the one side, the media are lauded for contributing positively when they bring women's issues to the forefront of public awareness and place issues resulting in victimization on the agenda of society. On the other hand, she says that the media should be criticized for eroticizing and sensationalizing stories that emphasize the individual struggles of unfortunate female victims rather than focusing on the systemic social problems of women who strive for equality and change.

Lemish outlined her practice-oriented, educational process to promote the social development of women. Her approach strives to close the gap between theoretical research and action-oriented research in order to foster fundamental change of behavior and attitude towards the role of women, especially in highly patriarchal societies. She cited her following four goals for a change-oriented educational process and later quoted excerpts from her research publications. She has been implementing this approach in her lectures and actions in an effort to change the portrayal of women in the media, and thereby society which she presents directly from her research as follows:

- "Conscientiousness: The development of a critical understanding of social life.
- Empowerment: The establishment of a participants' understanding of their rights, power and responsibility to become active agents in social change processes.
- Moral Judgment: The facilitation of participants to evaluate and judge social acts according to moral criteria.
- Social Involvement: The advancement of the involvement of participants in social life and change efforts."

She stated that practice-oriented educational processes involve:

"Assistance for participants in the unveiling of social life, the development of structural understanding of issues and problems, the application of moral criteria to critique these

phenomena, an examination of intervention alternatives, and the selection and implementation of intervention."

Lemish believes that she is fully aware of the limitations and constraints that can block ambitious endeavors. She described social-action research as "a challenging, long-term investment of time that is demanding of physical, financial and emotional resources." She emphasized the point that social-action research requires the renunciation or limitation of hierarchical power privileges, exclusive discourse language and self-consideration. The inter-relationship between academia and activism is too complicated to achieve a balance between personal involvement and academic objectivity. She explained that critics of this approach find feminist research to be "soft and too political" and threatening to good scientific practice. To counter that unfair accusation, she stresses how feminist researchers today have developed a survival strategy known as *Doing it all!*, namely performing and producing academically according to the normative expectations, yet concurrently retaining and advancing a social-active research agenda dictated by conscience. She subscribes to the concept that feminist social-active researchers have learned to live a "schizophrenic" life of two intertwined characters that she labels the normative woman and the active feminist.

In her closing remarks, Lemish returned to the role of the media as a formidable and institutional part of society that defines and shapes the social images of people, especially women, through their provocative advertising, powerful news reporting, and vast access to the public-at-large. From her social-active research she concludes:

"Universally, women are highly portrayed in the media today as eroticized, sensationalized, trivialized and victimized creatures of a lesser status and most often characterized as either the Madonna or the Whore!"

4.12.2. Interview Two: *The Modern Era Women's Movement and Its impact on Women's Communication Styles* **with Judith Lear**

The second interview was conducted with Judith Lear who has been engaged as an activist at the local, national (American) and international level throughout her adulthood. According to her autobiographical background, Lear's personal motto reads: "If it's going to be, it's up to me!" and she acts on her words. Her special focus revolves around aging and women's issues. Lear represents the *Gray Panthers* at the United Nations and has been active in the UN NGO community for a decade. Based in the United States, the *Gray Panthers* work as an advocacy organization that Lear represents at CSW sessions. Their mission statement reads: *Gray Panthers includes people of all ages organized to fight everywhere the injustices of ageism, sexism and racism, and to promote peace, and social and economic justice.*

Currently, Lear serves as the Communication Secretary for the NY NGO Committee on the Status of Women. We have closely worked to prepare the Roundtables and Consultation Days for the CSW sessions for three years. She also participates in the UN Sub-Committee on Older Women (SCOW). Other NGO activities include serving on the board of the International Council of Jewish Women. She is a member of the UN NGO Committee on Aging and serves on the executive board. As the co-chair of the UN International Day of Older Persons on October 2, 2003, she organized and coordinated the program "Mainstreaming Aging: Forging Links Between the Madrid Plan of Action on Aging and the Millennium Development Goals."

In a private setting, I held the second interview with Lear in August 2003. During the three-hour meeting, we covered four subjects that I had asked her to consider for several weeks beforehand. The line of discussion was tailored to her knowledge, experience and areas of civic concern. They included the following topics:

- The Conflict Theory Generation and Communication
- Culture's Impact on the Modern Era Women's Movement

- Communication Styles and Today's Women's Movement

- Older Women and Information Communication Technologies (ICTs)

4.12.2.1. Interview Two: Highlights and Insights

Lear began her broad-based description of the evolution of the modern era women's movement and the significance of communication approaches from the general viewpoint of a prototypical US American woman activist. She believes the *Conflict Theory* to be the catalyst for today's women's movement and defines it as "groups in society who are engaged in a continuous power struggle for control of limited resources." She boldly commented:

> "The modern era women's movement arising in the sixties came about when educated,
>
> intelligent women found the old roles of spouse and mother too confined. We believe we
>
> were as smart as men and could do any job that took brains as well, if not better than
>
> men. However, the pay scale was incredibly unequal. And so the slogan *Equal Pay for*
>
> *Equal Work* became a chant in the demonstrations."

Lear clarified her concept of feminism today, however, to mean "equal opportunity" as she continued:

> "I do not believe that elevating women in the work environment demeans or reduces their
>
> male counterparts in the process."

Involved with the official women's world movement since its inception in the mid-seventies, she recalls the reverberating voices of feminist giants Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem and Bella Abzug, who were instrumental in launching grassroots movements by connecting women's rights to freedoms and equalities to such explosive issues as equal professional opportunity for equal pay and pro-life vs. pro-choice. She remembers that these *radical feminists* effectively used both written and oral communication modes to create awareness, promote

dialogue and establish a woman's agenda; their public speaking engagements were replete with provocative and penetrating messages that fomented action among fledgling women activists.

Lear described her recollection of this first wave of the women's movement as politically oriented, whose grassroots agendas were first established among myriads of small group organizations fostering informal discussions in friendship environments. She recalled that:

"All of the women's organizations were having 'sensitivity training.' These small groups were no more than 30 women and then were divided into even smaller conversational sub-groups of no more than 10 participants. Everyone had a chance to talk and was encouraged to express their feelings. Usually, there were 'no judgment rules.' That meant no criticism– just listening. This made for a very creative atmosphere where participants could express ideas without stigma or labeling."

This early stage, face-to-face communication among intimate groups in private settings expanded to involve the voice and action of major national and international NGO women's associations with large constituencies. They included Zonta International, Soroptimist International, the National Council of Jewish Women, the National Organization of Women (NOW), and American University Women (AUW), to mention a few. Informal group gatherings transformed into formalized seminars, symposiums and conventions initially organized at local, then district, then national levels before blossoming into an international phenomenon. Meetings at all levels attracted large-scale attendance, and women started to focus, exclusively, on women's issues.

She described how several-term US Congresswoman Abzug of New York, known for her hell-raising speeches and courageous statements, had worked relentlessly to spearhead the increasingly dynamic and expanding women's movement to the United Nations. By the mid-seventies major women's organizations that had traditionally focused on general social development issues, and not necessarily from a gender perspective, started to coordinate and strategize as coalitions to foster a unified and strategic power force through sheer numbers. They

formed networks, utilized public speaking forums and produced widely distributed written publications that most frequently were newsletters. Lear remembered that their exuberant tone resonated with excitement and enthusiasm, spiced with spontaneity "to make a difference and change the world."

Lear recalled, however, that in the eighties the rise of political agendas from other cultural regions of the world started to interfere with the initially unified movement's voice of the prior decade. Culturally driven friction among women's factions derailed some of the hard-earned momentum of the budding global movement. Strong regional caucuses came to the fore, especially from Europe and the Middle East, and demanded that the early leaders listen to unfamiliar and little understood women's issues from "other" cultural perspectives. The pivotal political changes in Latin American and Eastern European countries at the end of the eighties resulted in a reevaluation and redirection of the women's movement. She then explained that in the early nineties, the focus of the still emerging international women's movement was entirely devoted to the preparation of the fourth UN women's world summit at Beijing in 1995. The slogan *Women's Rights are Human Rights* became the mantra worldwide; European activists primarily pursued economic equality issues while American activists pushed for pro-choice positions and older women's issues. In preparation for the Beijing Conference, regional meetings were held in five UN officially designated, cultural regions. As an American activist, she adamantly remembered that:

> "I personally saw invisibility of older women's issues and became determined to inject verbiage into the Platform that reflected the spectrum of 'women of all ages.' Our Older Women's Caucus was only moderately successful. The phrase was used primarily in the Health Section of the Platform."

According to Lear, the other regions introduced concerns specifically important to their own areas. She shared that Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands presented the shocking realities of sex trafficking. The Latin American and Caribbean Region were concerned with violence

against women. The African Regions Region actually added a new plank to the Platform on the *Girl Child.* Lear further clarified:

> "This did not mean that the social issues were not recognized on a world-wide basis.
> Rather, each region seemed to take the responsibility of being the loudest voice on those
> particular issues. This brought everyone together in support. The tone of the NGO
> coalitions became collaborative, and NGO women activists successfully lobbied UN
> governmental representatives to expand their right and role to speak officially during the
> deliberations at Beijing. It exemplified the pinnacle of a unified women's movement in
> this modern era of feminism."

Lear freely expressed her position on the role of culture and its impact on the women's movement. She believes that the once-ensconced, ethno-centric cultural position of women's views towards women's issues are slowly evolving towards a pluralistic perspective today. She finds that the importance of *cultural relativism* is slowly diminishing among NGO women, and tolerance toward each other's cultures is transforming into respect for differences as well as commonalities. As an example, the issue of female genital mutilation as a cultural practice in a modern world needed to have global pressure applied to force any change in the practice. Today, women actively support each other's need to change negative traditions within their respective cultures. Since women around the world are responsible for practicing and teaching tradition to the family, they possess a unique opportunity to communicate and foster necessary change from within the confines of their own cultural structure. She suggests that NGO women are creating their own cultural movement language that is best exemplified by the frequently used term for lobbying purposes: the *empowerment* of women towards gender equality. She said:

> "I remember having a conversation with a French speaking colleague who said there was
> no word in French that could be used to describe that empowerment. Well they have
> devised the word now!"

Lear commented on the communication strengths and weaknesses of UN NGO women representatives based on her years of observation and direct interaction with thousands of these women at international UN summits, conferences and sessions. As oral communicators, she thinks that experienced NGO women representatives, today, excel at listening, compromising and collaborating. As written communicators, they can collaborate in writing articulate documents and reports in task forces through general consensus of the group, a tedious task. On occasion, volatile debate can occur in the collaborative paradigm and final wording is deferred to more senior, experienced women most familiar with the verbiage and nuance of the UN language. Newcomers to the social interaction, however, initially struggle, for they often first attend UN events with narrow and emotional focus on the specific mandate of their organizations and their own personal agendas. They tend to be competitive, emotionally charged and even combative in their communication approach until they learn to interact more appropriately and harmoniously within the parameters of UN protocol. She explained:

> "There is a level of frustration that new representatives seem to feel because most attend looking for action. Unfortunately, the UN activity includes jaws talking a lot! Please do not misinterpret this as a criticism. In order to change the world, ideas need to be shared both verbally and written. It is the only forum in the world for States to engage in this exchange. The other aspect that NGO representatives often forget is that this is not a democracy. The majority does not rule. The UN is built on the consensus of 191 countries. In this it is quite an accomplishment that so many issues actually do receive positive affirmation."

She also addressed the communication problems confronting UN NGO representatives, with regard to older women and information communication technologies (ICTs). She finds that older women react far more reluctantly, even fearfully, to adapt to ICTs, and this drawback limits their ability to stay abreast of the ever-increasing informational material available to the NGO

world community through this channel. On the other hand, she feels strongly that many people overuse and even abuse ICTs.

Lear expressed concern that the NGO women's world is currently being challenged by the professionally paid opportunities that are increasingly available to educated women. Clearly, women who hold demanding career positions no longer possess the same time and/or devotion for community service work as compared to previous generations. Ending on a positive note, she has noticed of late that young women in their thirties, who are salaried NGO professionals, are starting to appear in the movement, energized and motivated to drive women's causes forward. They currently undertake such social development areas as economic and legal issues, women and war, and women and violence, in contrast to feeding the hungry, providing health care or enabling education, the topics that were embraced by previous generations. She hopes that the different generations can learn to integrate their causes through better communication to advance all women's human rights and social development issues.

4.12.3. Interview Three: *Language Use, Symbols and NGO Women's Communication Styles with Eva Richter*

The third interview was conducted with Eva Richter, an internationally popular speaker on the subject of English language use and comparative literature. Upon retirement in 2002, she became an engaged activist at the UN as the NGO representative for the International Federation of Business and Professional Women. As a world citizen, Richter's diverse life highlights a vast cultural background and command of languages including: American English, British English, Chinese, Dutch, French and German. Born in Germany, she attended primary and secondary school in China and did her university studies in English and Comparative Literature at the University of Chicago and New York University. She retired after nearly fifty years in the classroom at the University of Nebraska, Rutgers University, the City University of New York, Heibe Teacher's University (China) and several others where she taught as a visiting professor.

Richter's published works include: *The Writing Center Journal, Studies of Medievalism, The Knights of the Roundtable* (translated in German), and *Video-Audio-Oral English* for the TV University of China. She edited and translated from German to English *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People*. She has also delivered numerous papers at international educational conferences and has organized and chaired several of the conferences herself.

As a UN NGO representative, she serves on the NY NGO Committee on the Status of Women as Secretary of the Executive Committee. At the CSW 2003 Session, she and I chaired the task force on ***Women and the Media***, and at the CSW 2004 Session we worked closely together on the task force on ***The Role of Men and Boys in the Achievement of Gender Equality*** that I chaired. We organized events, served as speakers and collaboratively wrote official reports on the issues, including the 2004 Consultation Day summary on gender equality. In addition, she serves on the NGO Committee for UNIFEM, the Department of Public Information NGO Planning Committee and the Sub-Committee on Immigrants and Refugees.

4.12.3.1. Interview III: Highlights and Insights

I conducted this third interview that continued for several hours, in a private setting in August 2003. Given the option a month earlier, Richter chose to concentrate on UN NGO women, language and culture with emphasis placed on meaning and understanding, social interaction and symbols. She opened the discussion by exclaiming that within each culture, women speak differently, i.e., not regarding what they say, but rather what women are "willing to say" to each other. In other words, subject matter is culturally gendered, and the way people form messages originates from culturally gendered socialization and that society's use of language. For example, she commented:

> "In the United States women are comfortable expressing emotions to one another, telling
>
> one another all about their amorous entanglements, their emotional problems and
>
> triumphs, the intimacies of their family lives in ways they would never express to a man.
>
> Conversations between women intimates and friends, unless carried on in a public space

or in the context of a professional communication, tend not to be about politics, public policy, etc. Even in the context of an office or professional place, personal, non-professional conversation between women will focus on relationships and the emotions these generate, rather than, say, on sporting events or national politics, though it might become quite intense around matters of office politics."

Richter observed that UN NGO women representatives use language emphatically to fill a multitude of professional and personal needs. They constantly articulate emotional expressiveness towards one another, both verbally and nonverbally. The predominant way that they communicate emotional support for their peers involves constant praise, recognition, compliments, reassurance, deference, cooperation and collaboration. She explained at length:

"Birthdays are noted, applauded and marked with some ceremony. Cards are circulated for signatures and messages of support and good wishes when members are ill or have suffered some loss. Participation in special committees, attendance, speeches and presentations at conferences are regularly noted and complimented at subsequent meetings. Copious photographs are taken at special occasions, luncheons, receptions, and there is a celebratory air about all of these events. Organizers take a great deal of care in selecting gifts, flowers and plaques for special award presentations and carefully hone the language of their official appreciation to show respect, admiration and, whenever possible, personal affection. Awards to women are often presented with a kiss. Even though serious networking and political maneuvering may take place on these occasions, at some point conversation is very likely to come around to compliments on hair, clothes, general appearance, etc."

In contrast, they usually seek to avoid overly assertive and competitive debate, and when it does inevitably occur, every effort is made first to neutralize the conflict and then to harmonize the atmospheric environment. She firmly stated:

"The sense of Sisterhood is emphasized, together with a commitment to common goals. Generally some gratitude is expressed for the work the members have already contributed, and someone will invariably praise the contentious members' generosity in terms of the time and hard work they have put in for the good of the group."

Richter discussed the social interaction of UN NGO volunteers and stressed the significance placed on actively listening to one another in their NGO context. In such exchanges, the style in which a message is delivered and received stands paramount to the process in order to achieve a favorable reaction. She contends that resolution not always means the end result sought, for conversational approaches strive, foremost, to establish and sustain harmonious interaction. Rather, resolution can often be derived from "whom one knows" and is capable of manifesting a desired result. She then added:

"But the willingness of the members to think of and approach these 'important contacts' for help is actively fostered by the supportive and appreciative atmosphere. When a member outlines a strategy, promises to contact someone nobody else has thought of asking for help, or comes up with an idea, murmurs can be heard of 'That's a great idea,' 'That's terrific,' or even 'Well, why aren't you running for President? I'd support you!' followed by thanks."

Mutually understood that their work is neither mandatory nor salaried for the most part, UN NGO representatives diligently practice tolerance and patience towards each other and articulate mutually positive language in their interaction.

Richter described small talk engagement as essential to reinforcing the other's sense of importance, and she categorized such exchanges as diplomatic communication art rather than academic communication skill. Such small talk engagement mostly occurs at the numerous networking opportunities available to the UN NGO community to acquire information and to exchange/develop ideas. In fact, she labeled such receptions and social events "professional

show time" at which point the performers carefully choose their culturally oriented language to achieve their always purpose-driven discussions. Concurrently, UN NGO representatives are often well versed on the social issues that are promoted by their respective organizations. Usually fortified with advanced academic credentials and vast professional experience, they can relentlessly lobby (a formalized style of small talk) for their causes and are known to present their positions with impunity, especially when some of their personalities suggest strong egos and power play.

The interview then shifted to the cultural communication styles used to discuss women's issues by NGO women of different generations and from various geographic regions of the world. She explained, for example, that Anglo-Saxon (North America as well as certain countries of Western and Northern Europe) female language characteristically resonates as objective, pragmatic and emotionally detached from the social issues. She emphatically explained:

> "Personal anecdotes and illustrations supplement generalizations, but these latter are invariably supported with statistics, research models and bibliographies."

In contrast, African women activists present their social issues with spirited emotion and elevated verbal usage, direct and outspoken in nature. As listeners, UN NGO women need to adjust and adapt, simultaneously, to multiple cultural communication styles that are frequently interacting at the same time. Richter then said:

> "They draw on a variety of personal experiences, anecdotes, and references to cultural practices and contexts. References abound to food and the cultural centrality of its preparation and consumption, dress, and the importance of traditional arts and crafts to the functioning of the society. They project a passionate personal involvement with their society, and the social positions they adopt are always rooted in personal experience."

Richter continued by adding that cultural communication differentials exist adjacent to generational variables that impact on the complicated dynamics of the social interaction among

UN NGO women. She described the language usage of young female professionals as more direct, less emotionally nurturing and androgynous, i.e., drawing upon male and female communication characteristics. In contrast, older women activists of today were first motivated to join the resurgence of the modern era women's movement under the auspices of radical feminism and the highly emotional appeal of the early spokeswomen. Consequently, these NGO representatives are emotionally attached to the social issues and often present their points in the framework of their worldview towards life based on autobiographical experience. As an example, the discerning approaches being applied to address women and mental health issues can be divided into generational and cultural positions. Culturally, European and North American women tend to direct the mental health discussions from a psychological focus as compared to Asian and African cultures that tend to turn to a spiritual perspective for direction and solutions.

The interview concluded with Richter's insightful comments on the sensitive use of language (as symbols) of UN NGO women that are steeped in culturally female traditions. They often express strong emotionality through word choice and material objects. Terminology is carefully and characteristically chosen, for example, by North American and Western and Northern European women to articulate gratitude and emotion as the primary source of recognition and reward for the dedication and work of the professional NGO woman volunteer. In contrast, emotional appeal is expressed more emphatically through tonality and nonverbal communication by Northern and Sub-Saharan African and Latin American women. Oral recognition ensconced in testimonial speeches at a reception/dinner venue is viewed as the highest coveted honor in the social structure of the UN NGO community. So, the communication style of recognition proves paramount to the UN NGO women's culture and protocol.

Written recognition is also embraced as proper protocol and reward and is presented to the recipient in the form of plaques, salutations, letters and cards. She closed by explaining that cultural language use transcends several spheres of NGO social interaction among the UN sub-cultures of peer NGO representatives, member-state diplomats and UN staff. She believes that a

skillful ability to use appropriate language and symbols to collaborate for the advancement of women effectively in this challenging and complex, socially interactive environment reveals in itself a success story in the art and style of communication.

4.12.4. Interview Four: *Culture's Extended Definition and Its Impact on the Social Interaction of UN NGO Women* **with Diane Paravazian**

The fourth interview took place with Diane Paravazian who concentrates on modern languages and culture, in particular the French language and culture. Paravazian also specializes in advanced English as a second and world culture language. She has developed multiple academic courses in both disciplines for St. John's University in New York City where she works as a full-time professor.

As a consultant, Paravazian has developed and executed cross-cultural communication programs and business communication seminars, and has undertaken advanced translation projects for major international corporations. In addition, she has interfaced professionally with the large Russian-speaking population and the Japanese corporate community in New York City.

A graduate of New York University, Paravazian is the recipient of numerous academic honors including Phi Beta Kappa French Honors Society; *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Palmes Academiques* (2001); French Government Scholarships (1990-1993); and Outstanding Young Woman of America (1973), to mention a few. She has also presented her work at various conferences, panels and workshops, especially in conjunction with the American Association of Teachers of French.

In her capacity as an activist, Paravazian has served as the UN NGO representative for the Armenian Assembly of America for several years and has been particularly active in the women's movement. Currently, she belongs to the UN NGO Committees for Human Rights, the Commission on the Status of Women, and the Commission on Sustainable Development. She has also participated in several UN conferences and sessions in recent years.

4.12.4.1. Interview IV: Highlights and Insights

This interview was conducted with Paravazian in a private environment in September 2003. She, by personal preference, chose to elaborate on an extended definition of culture and multi-faceted influences on communication styles of UN NGO women. She requested to converse inductively on the topics rather than subscribe to a question and answer format. Her definition of culture expands far beyond typically ethnocentric characteristics of a group of people from a particular geographical society. She stated:

> "NGO women representatives come to the United Nations wrapped in complex layers of professional and social cultures that strongly influence their communication styles."

She recognizes the dynamics of the dyad between women entering the UN NGO environment from the workplace vs. lifelong professional volunteers representing nonprofit and charitable organizations. Women from the workplace come to the UN community, oriented toward end-result solutions based on group dynamics that adhere to a hierarchical organizational structure to discuss and resolve situations and problems; the latter group functions from a lateral organizational structure to interact socially with deference and utmost personal respect towards one another. The strategies of the professional volunteer often slow progress towards problem solving and end results. Paravazian continued:

> "The communication approaches of women from the private vs. nonprofit sectors are further complicated by the rising number of academic professionals who are now deeply engaged in the women's NGO world; older academic professionals often provide advanced levels of expertise on social issues and usually present their knowledge in traditionally deductive lecture style. Younger academic professionals, on the other hand, approach substantive discussions on social development issues as facilitators and apply an inductive communication style. Then, to add to the matrix, emerging NGO representation from religious denominations and independent spiritual communities has

rapidly increased in active presence since 2000. They actively promote the inclusion of their expert leaders as NGO spokespeople at UN programs, conferences, summits, etc."

She also noted that UN NGO women representatives do not communicate exclusively in a homogenous and insular environment of just NGO representatives. They also interact with UN staff at all levels and with governmental officials of the member states from the UN missions, i.e., the diplomats, who often gravitate to serve the NGO community upon retirement from foreign service careers.

Paravazian stressed that NGO women must quickly learn and adapt to essential United Nations principles and become familiar with major UN documents that shape and direct NGO interaction with the various UN divisions and agencies. They must also learn the UN cultural language and protocol, informally dubbed "UNese," that is deemed essential to successful social interaction. Seasoned international NGO representatives often have long-established mission statements, goals and objectives that either uniformly parallel those of the United Nations or are written in the proper language of acceptability. In contrast, newly arrived representatives with specialized agendas communicate their positions, goals and objectives, primarily based on the principles of their own agendas. They are not always in alignment with the positions and best practice approaches of the United Nations and/or of other leading members of the UN NGO community. Consequently, such groups often do not grasp the core of international social issues and sometimes seek prestige over purpose.

Paravazian then covered aspects of the role of work ethics and behavioral ways of woman-to-woman communication of the UN NGO community, based on her experiences with various professional cultures. She suggested that professional volunteers, compared to paid professionals, devote much more time and energy to their NGO causes. The significance and approach to discussion differ considerably, since time, to the professional volunteer, does not translate into money in their paradigm of professional ethics. Furthermore, friendships are sought and coveted as part of the reward/compensation policy for contributions. On the other hand,

newly active religious/spiritual group representatives behave similarly to paid professionals, who in their narrow focus towards resolving social issues, are "situationally oriented" rather than "relationally oriented." By inherent definition, the work of religious organizations is devoted to human rights and social development within a particular realm of ethics comprised of their designated morals, values, beliefs, etc. Their work can be readily synchronized and integrated into positions, goals and objectives that parallel UN development policies and programs. Unlike secular leaders from civil society, religious leaders are primarily motivated by intrinsic gain for their services rather than monetary remuneration for their efforts.

Paravazian emphasized again that academic leaders working with the UN NGO sector often possess expertise in human rights and social issues, and thereby especially conscious of the realities involved to foster awareness, recognition and change in society to improve the social status of women. She stressed that UN NGO female academic professionals, who are often research oriented, can think and analyze from both a theoretical and practical perspective. Their often strong oral and written presentation skills stem directly from extensive hands-on experience in the field; consequently, they are appreciated as keynote speakers, panelists, workshop facilitators, etc. She maintains that academically oriented, theoretical perspectives can heighten these experts' impact as advocates, and their practical perspective can reinforce their influence on the development of *best practices* for implementing action.

She recognizes, however, that the private sector has finally started to mobilize and solidify collaborative positions as they gradually gain their voice as a sector within the UN system. Furthermore, they are slowly being acknowledged and accepted for their contributions to civil society, derived from their often global worldview through their unique experiences and thereby their international perspective and approach toward social issues of the times. In this era of *best practices* and limited financial resources, the private sector understands balancing budgets, streamlining project plans and instituting efficient structures. This emerging trend constitutes a potentially far-reaching shift in the dynamics of communication and social interaction for men and women alike at the United Nations these days.

Closing with a strong statement on power and effective communication, Paravazian reaffirmed the role of culture in the development of a woman's communication style that she also finds traditionally entrenched in the minds and social interaction of women and in its influence on so-called appropriate female behavior. For her, this phenomenon is particularly noticeable among European representatives who attend international conferences and project adamant and resolute messages. Since birth, she has lived and studied in various cultures throughout Eastern and Western Europe and recognizes these characteristic cultural traits of NGO women, in particular, from this region of the world. At the same time, she abhors the characterization of women as victims; as subordinate members of society, and the popular belief of an inherent "woman's way." She believes that strong stereotyping drastically hinders a woman's fundamental right of freedom of expression and stymies her social development. She believes that this pervasive mentality, that thrives in most cultures still, must be changed.

4.13. Interview Results in Review

The four interviews deepen the dimension of the main subjects covered in the academic review section and reinforce the results in several areas of the survey questionnaire. Jointly, these four UN NGO women helped to expand the definition of culture, the variable characteristic under study, beyond the UN designated, geographical cultural regions that have been analyzed and examined, thus far, to prove this dissertation's hypothesis addressing culture and communication.

Lemish targets the culture of the media as a formidable and far-reaching universal institution as well as a cultural force that creates and mirrors gender portrayal and influences gender communication. Her reference to "symbolic annihilation of women" by the media reinforces the same topic mentioned under language use and media in the academic review section. Although she comes from a socially collective oriented culture, in the Middle East, today, she appreciates the values of individuality and diversity to establish a more respectful and

meaningful language towards female gender portrayal in the media and to be used among women activists in their pursuit to elevate the quality of women's lives in the 21st Century.

Lear speaks extensively about older women as a special cultural group and the challenges they face to communicate effectively in today's UN NGO women's world. She explained that most older/senior women were motivated by radical feminism and influenced by the emotional impetus behind the messages on the social issues of the early outspoken proponents of the modern era women's movement. She then mentioned how many of them remain reluctant and uncomfortable communicating through ICTs and consequently are no longer as privy to informational material that, more and more, is provided exclusively through technological resources.

According to Richter, on the other hand, the younger cultural generation approaches the women's movement less emotionally and communicates more pragmatically and directly with their use of language. Whereas older women communicate first from a relational basis, the younger group communicates more often from a situational/solution premise. She also notes that older NGO women, many of whom held academic careers and are now retired, tend to assume a lecture style and organize their thoughts deductively when addressing, for example, the NY NGO CSW groups at Headquarters and international UN meetings. Their younger NGO counterparts, who come from diverse professional careers in the workplace, tend to assume a facilitative style when they address UN NGO women peers.

Paravazian referred to still other cultural group dynamics that include the traditional nonprofit/professional volunteer UN NGO women vs. the emerging private sector/paid professional NGO women who are rapidly positioning themselves influentially within the UN NGO community. The main communication difference lies in their organizational approach towards one another to establish common ground and achieve mutual goals as described by Clark's work on language use in the academic review. The private-sector-oriented cultural group applies a hierarchical organizational structure to social interaction in order to reach end results while the nonprofit-oriented cultural group assumes a lateral organizational approach. A great

sense of deference and respect are shown to one another in the nonprofit NGO community which slows the process to attain mutual end results. Richter and Paravazian both mentioned the dualism of unpaid professional NGO women vs. paid professional NGO women who work on the same issues and committees to organize and oversee the role of NGO women at international UN women's conferences and CSW sessions. Reward for the professional NGO volunteer, often presented to an older woman, is communicated through peer recognition while reward for the younger and professionally paid NGO employee is, first, financial remuneration, then recognition.

Finally, Lear, Richter and Paravazian stressed the need to learn UN culture as well as the responsibility to become fluent in the "UNese" spoken and written language. In addition to attending UN international meetings, these three women serve on several UN NGO committees at senior levels at UN Headquarters. They understand, firsthand, the importance of knowing and practicing UN culture. These additional dynamics that further define culture and consequent affects on woman-to-woman communication, as revealed through the interviews, continue to substantiate the already broad scope of cultural characteristics on communication styles that impact the study group's social interaction. These interviews have underscored that an extended definition of culture must be taken into account when considering the cultural impact on UN NGO woman-to-woman communication styles.

Based on her own personal experience, Lear gave a detailed historical account of the evolution of feminist theory in the women's movement during the last three decades, and her stories reflect the impact of the feminist perspectives of each decade on the communication styles UN NGO women employed. She started with radicalism in the mid-seventies and highlighted reasons why NGO women sometimes exhibited shocking revolutionary social behavior in their public appearances. Back then, women activists defined social development from a gender perspective for the first time, and the specific focus on women's issues released anguish and a surge of empowerment that fostered collaboration among the activists. Collaborative communication ranked first in the questionnaire as the most pervasive strategy to

establish and sustain strong interpersonal relations, and this reality is surely connected to the attitude of the activists in the early stages of the modern era women's movement. They used various forms of self-produced written communication, especially the newsletter, to circulate information and to build coalitions. The women were emotionally charged, and leaders would vent their anger at public rallies and demonstrations as they worked together in growing unison in western societies in the seventies. Today, women from the radical feminist period continue to express their positions emotionally when discussing women's human rights and social issues at international UN meetings. Still, she recognizes that a multi-cultural approach is being asserted by many activists seeking to integrate commonalities and differences more logically into discussion today.

Lear discusses the rise of *cultural relativism* and the emergence of women's voices from other major cultural regions who dominated and reshaped feminist discourse in the eighties. Many of these newcomers to the movement countered that feminist leaders from progressive western societies seemed insensitive to the needs of their cultures, and they personally attacked western feminist leaders and their platforms that caused the unified momentum of the young women's movement to stumble. The mood became acrimonious and the behavior competitive which was evident at the second UN women's world conference at Copenhagen in 1980. A negative emotional tone and emphasis on a powerful political platform changed the positive dynamics of social interaction experienced in the seventies. She stresses that today UN NGO women still exert competitive behavior, especially representatives from Europe/Central Asia as determined in the questionnaire and observed at the caucus meetings of the CWS 2004 Session.

Lear recalled that in the nineties social interaction resumed a collaborative style as the NGO women prepared to create jointly the ***Platform for Action*** outcome document for Beijing 1995. Lear attended and could personally attest to the elevated enthusiasm and synergy of the thousands of women from all walks of life who were determined to partake in the summit. The movement was unified once again. Its participants became more culturally aware and sensitive to diverse women's issues from all regions of the world, and they interacted with elevated patience

and heightened tolerance towards one another. Today, feminist activists are implementing the *Multicultural Feminist Perspective* and returning to a strong political focus as part of their agenda to advance established and emerging women issues in the 21st Century.

Lear noted that during these past three decades of the women's movement, UN NGO activists have learned to listen respectfully and appreciatively to diverse communicate styles that have ranged from combative to collaborative strategies, often emotional, when debating the social issues of the times. Raider's work on collaborative communication and negotiation was inspired in part by her attendance at Beijing and recognition that new communication models must be developed for successful negotiation to occur in an increasingly interdependent world. Tannen's discussion on polysemy, i.e., a "this and this" inclusive solution rather than an "either/or" consequence supports the collaborative school of thought. Thimm's position on various cooperative *Durchsetzungsstrategien* are valid, when dealing with culturally diverse communication styles, to achieve positive social interaction and obtain goals.

One can conclude that the manner in which UN NGO women view their personal ideology and perceive their role in today's women's movement influence their communication towards one another. Their perspective also depends upon the timeframe in which they became involved and how they absorbed feminist discourse and language use at that particular time. Lear's comments reinforce that a UN NGO woman's cultural background and chronological entry point into the movement jointly affect her social interaction and behavior toward other women activists in spite of their pursuit towards common universal goals that they seek to adapt to their cultures.

Lemish's research and contribution to the evolution of feminist theories correlate with the direction of the discourse on the women's social movement in these early years of the 21st Century. Her integrated approach to combine academic theory with social action emulates the current *Multi-Cultural Feminist Perspective* that embraces the thinking of divergent cultures to move forward women's human rights and social development through social change. She believes that practice-oriented educational theories and processes help members of society unveil

repressive layers of social life to achieve such social development goals for women, even in the challenged regional cultures of the Middle East.

Just as Lemish explains the need for social action to substantiate and validate academic research, the UN NGO women's community presently emphasizes implementing culturally realistic action and best practices based on the UN's *Think Global/Act Local* motto for the advancement of women in these early years of the 21st Century. In this regard, the cultural language and social interaction of UN NGO women at regional levels remain important, as the NGO community at-large seeks to establish and employ international policy, acknowledged by general consensus by the UN member states, in order to benefit local (cultural) communities. Paravazian concurs with Lemish's position about the critical role of UN NGO leaders with academic professions, especially in human rights, for educators are trained to think critically about their subjects to foster provocative discussion within the framework of an emotional balance. Their knowledge can contribute exponentially to action-oriented endeavors in the pursuance common social development goals.

Some of Richter's comments relate to Blumer's work on social interaction and symbolic interactionism which emphasizes the significance of individual perception to interpret symbols, including language use. Richter supports Blumer's view that the understanding of transmitted messages lies predominantly within the interpretation of the message by the listener. She mentions how verbal and nonverbal messages of praise, for example, are important to the NGO community and therefore on such occasions of public recognition honoring leaders of the women's world speakers use highly articulate language to pay tribute, accordingly.

Richter's remarks particularly underscore Goffman's offshoot position on symbolic interactionism from a collective, rather than individualistic, social setting that views life as a stage and all the people as its performers. In this regard, she refers to networking receptions as the preeminent stage filled with skilled actors from multicultural backgrounds who are trained in their cultures on how to perform at show time. She labels the scenes "small talk," and the mood depicts a diplomatic atmosphere as the actors roam the room in search of people they know, or

want to know to lobby, negotiate and collaborate on current or perennial social issues. To be adept in this performing role, one must be knowledgeable in the multi-faceted, communication strategies of the other players. Seasoned NGO women with years of performance experience can become quite skilled whereby newcomers to the stage, who often focus on highly specific agendas, can be intimidated, even overwhelmed, by the voracity and complexity of such interaction among highly diverse personalities. She realizes that the goal of these performers is to seek positive relational interaction, first, and, then, successful situational results.

Richter supports Clark's research on language use and the importance of developing common ground in joint interaction in order to achieve common goals. Since language use is steeped in culture, actually created by culture, the meaning of word choice and language use differ among the various UN regional groups under study as they strive to achieve common goals. Common goals signify, in fact, the conduit to develop common ground, so the UN NGO representatives constantly seek to find mutually understandable and acceptable, verbal (and nonverbal) language just for that purpose.

Richter notes that cultural use of language refers not only to what UN NGO women say, but to what NGO women "are willing" to say. She has discovered that they often choose their words intentionally to reinforce the emotionality in their delivery tone. In fact, the importance of emotionality and communication, that she stressed throughout the interview, became apparent in the results of the questionnaire as well. Richter believes that the importance of language use also becomes apparent in the written form at UN international gatherings in the form of drafts and final outcome documents.

Richter and Paravazian both agree with Tannen's and Bem's viewpoint that communication styles originate from culturally gendered/class socialization. Richter recognizes that European and North American women often express their opinions on issues from academic and psychological perspectives whereas African women draw upon their spiritual realm to discuss the same issue. Paravazian claims that the people, most men, who wield the power in a culture still negatively control female behavior, and they promote a stereotypical gender agenda

which has created the myth that a "woman's way" is inherently a part of a woman's being. Such thinking and actions reinforce the sex/gender differential factor discussed in detail under gender and socialization in the academic review section.

Vivid negative female imagery continues to thrive in developing as well as progressive cultures today. One only needs to glance at media advertising and their portrayal of women to prove the point. Lemish spoke extensively and emphatically on the Madonna/Whore phenomenon which she describes as the eroticization and victimization of women. Her research substantiates the survey-questionnaire results on media portrayal of women, whereby women as sex objects received the highest ranking and women as victims obtained the second highest. Though Middle East UN NGO representatives were not included in the survey-questionnaire due to their absence at the CSW 2003 Session, Lemish's work proves that an extremely negative portrayal of women runs rampant at least in Israeli media. Furthermore, she stresses that little attention is given to the seriousness of women's social issues in international, regional and local media. The power of the media as an institution worldwide, with enormous potential to foster gender equality, actually persists at negating a positive profile of women, with limited exceptions, and thereby hinders the social advancement of women.

The four interviewed women have not only been UN NGO representatives with invaluable academic backgrounds in relevant areas of communication and culture as well as human rights and social issues, but also have acquired vast experiences by attending international UN women's events for years. The knowledge and insight gained from the four interviews have confirmed the power of the media as an institution in shaping gender profiling and communication styles; has underscored the influence of the multiple feminist perspectives the last thirty years on women activist communication strategies; has shown the significance and effect of articulate language use and symbols; and has expanded the crucial definition of culture to be multi-dimensional in accordance to its impact on NGO women's social interaction. The composition of culture, today, is no longer limited to a geographical region, but rather involves other numerous demographics of a person's professional and private identity. The four UN NGO

women interviewees also concur that the United Nations as a world institution, wields its own influence on UN NGO women in dialogue within the UN environment and with each other. In that capacity. They agree that it is a wonder that the women all understand each other as well as they do and attribute it to fundamentally common goals derived from the ***Platform for Action*** for the common good of all women everywhere in the 21st Century.

Then, the four expert interviewees, themselves, come from three UN-designated, cultural regions as follows: Lemish: The Middle East and Northern Africa; Lear: North America, Richter: Europe (western)/Central Asia; Paravazian: Europe/Central Asia. Only Lear is a born English speaker from the Midwest/USA (Minnesota,) while the others grew up speaking multiple languages. Richter used the most direct language during the interviews, whereas Lear and Paravazian used a mix of direct and indirect language, whereas Lemish frequently applied indirect language. Their specific use of these direct and indirect oral styles supports, in itself, the findings of portions of the questionnaire, with the exception that the Middle East/Northern African regions was not included in the study group due to aforementioned political reasons that transpired in 2003.

Lear used the strongest relational style through sharing a variety personal experiences to stress her points. As an avid women's since the inception in the late sixties, she presented her experiences as a chronological narrative that wove in numerous feminist perspectives in the process. Having been strongly influenced by the early radical feminist leaders in the seventies, she still exudes an impassioned energy when she speaks about the evolution of the movement and progression of women's issues that remain steadfast to her work, particularly the plight of older women. In contrast, Richter employed a more topical and informational communication style to offer her knowledge and experiences with little emphasis on personal stories. Paravazian and Lemish, both in part representing Eastern European and Middle Eastern cultural backgrounds, incorporated informational and narrative approaches.

Their different communication styles can also be attributed to the four women's geographical cultural backgrounds, cultural careers, status and experience with the UN, as NGO

activists. Their communication strategies are also influenced by the personal point and time of entry at which they became engaged in women's international social issues, together with other UN NGO representatives. Each interview was a unique experience in cultural communication as we continue to work together to establish common ground through joint interaction to achieve common goals. As Richter says so serenely: "It is a miracle we can even communicate!"

SECTION V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has been a three-year expedition to examine and prove the impact of culture on UN NGO women's communication styles and their social interaction at official international UN meetings to advance women's human rights, fundamental freedoms and social development in the 21st Century. This final section first will provide a brief summary of the highlights of *Section II: The Academic Review*; *Section III: The United Nations and Its World of Women* and *Section IV: The Independent Research and Its Results*. It will then present the overall conclusions to prove the hypothesis of this independent study. Finally it will offer insight into the reality of change, which lies at the core of the advancement of women today, and how to establish change. To begin, again, the hypothesis reads as follows:

> **This dissertation represents an original study that will confirm that culture determines the foundation for shaping one's communication style. A multitude of communication styles strongly impacts woman-to-woman social interaction among UN NGO representatives. As a result, progress on the advancement of women involves an enormous amount of effort and energy in the never-ending challenge to communicate effectively with one another.**

1. Highlights of Section II: Summary of the Academic Review

The academic review connected multi-faceted areas of study in the social sciences that directly relate to culture's influence on gender identity, communication styles and social interaction. The work of numerous social and cultural pundits in 20th Century sociological theories, feminist perspectives, culture and gender issues, language use and joint interaction, the media's role, and gender communication formed the foundation for the hypothesis and provided the methodological strategies to conduct the independent quantitative and qualitative research.

The academic review first defined men and women through sex identity: the anatomical or chromosomal distinctions of men and women, and the socially constructed gender identity assigned to male and female groupings. It introduced the gender communication concept from a biological dimension of gender identity and then developed the dominant socialization dimension as the core foundation of gender communication styles. The socialization process encompasses multiple elements of society and culture that develop, shape and reinforce gender identity. The research scanned several sociological theories/ perspectives on gender identity and their influence on determining women's communication styles and social behavior. The *Functionalist Perspective* claims that distinct gender roles are vital to survival of the family and society and that the basic division of labor is biologically determined. The *Conflict Perspective* states that the division of labor based on gender within families and the *workplace* results from male control of and dominance over women and resources. Such differentials exist not only in sex and gender identity and roles, but also in political, physical and interpersonal power.

Then it discussed in detail the evolution of feminist perspectives, based on the premise that gender is socially constructed, and that these perspectives directly influence UN NGO women's communication styles and strategies used with each other. They include: *Liberal Feminism* that links gender equality to gender similarities and the importance of equal opportunity; *Radical Feminism* that rails against male domination that purportedly causes all forms of human oppression including the deliberate oppression against women; *Socialist Feminism* that suggests that women's oppression results from dual roles performed by females as paid and unpaid workers who are exploited and controlled by a patriarchal society; *Multiculturalism Feminism* that addresses the ethnic and racial experiences of women that create the cultural identity of women based on the premise that race, class and gender symbolize forces that simultaneously suppress women into select socialized backgrounds. These various feminist perspectives have influenced the thinking, communication styles and social interaction of UN NGO women and add to the complexity of the diverse communication styles of the study group as promote women's causes.

The academic review covered gender identity from a cultural dimension that started with an historical overview of societal development and briefly looked at culture and gender from various viewpoints. Biersted, for example, writes that culture's impact on gender-based social behavior can be interpreted through three dimensions: ideas or ways of thinking that organize human consciousness; norms or accepted ways of executing ideas; and material culture or patterns of possessing and using products of culture.

It summarized relevant topics on the roles of culture, gender and change in international social development that were presented at the symposium on **Cultural Values and Human Progress** at Harvard University in 1999. The social scientists in attendance looked to cultural factors, such as cultural relativism and social interaction, to explain present-day antagonisms among countries, political democratization, military strategy, behavior of ethnic groups, gender differences, etc.. In particular on the topic *Culture, Gender and Human Rights*, it was established that nearly all countries and officially recognized cultural regions of the world are experiencing significant cultural change, especially through the assertion of women's rights and their long-term impact on traditional social practices including gender communication styles and social interaction. Then Harrison expounded upon the relevant issue *Promoting Progressive Cultural Change* and identified the key differentials of a progressive vs. static society and the cultural influences that dictate the social development in a society.

Culture, gender communication and social development were addressed through multi-faceted cultural prisms of several international NGO women from different regions of the world who specialize in gender and social development. Their essays were based on the premise that culture (1) determines power relations within society; (2) establishes men's and women's access to economic and political control; (3) determines a woman's position in the family, community and society-at-large. NGO women from the southern hemisphere, for example, believe that gender relations, developmental practice and the role of cultural values and traditions are closely intertwined. They contend that the combination influences a culture's attitude towards women's

issues and allocation of resources which can further entrench gender inequality in a culture or transform the thinking and actions to improve women's lives.

The academic review examined Blumer's sociological theory on social interaction and symbolic interactionism that states that people's behavior/performance are attributed to patterns of interaction as communicators who "interpret" each other's actions and use of symbols. He defined symbolic interactionism as simply a distinctive approach to the study of human group life and human conduct based on the premise that social interaction stems from the interconnectedness between people through the use of conversational gestures and significant symbols. He referred to symbolic interactionism as a sociological perspective in empirical social terminology. Blumer's research methodologies guided the independent research strategies that were employed. He stressed that the empirical world exists for observation, study and analysis and that the central point of concern involves the testing group, which, for this study, was the UN NGO women representatives in attendance at annual UN CSW sessions to further women's social issues. Then, it mentioned Goffman's contribution to symbolic interactionism and how to understand one's self through meaning, language and thought in the roles one plays in social settings.

The academic review examined Clark's work on language use and joint action to build common ground and to establish and achieve common goals through joint activities. His premise states that language use predominantly contributes to joint interaction created by an ensemble of people acting in coordination with one another to achieve mutual goals, and it encompasses both individual and social processes in a human and social context. Then, the media as a cultural institution pointedly creates and shapes accepted cultural practices and gender images, and in this capacity influences social interaction through its strong stereotypical portrayal of women. Next, it covered language use by the media as a strong medium to dictate cultural socialization, including quite negative gender profiling of women, especially older women. It noted, among other precepts, the reflection hypothesis that states that media content mirrors the behaviors and relationships, values and norms deemed most prevalent in a culture. This ***Women and the Media***

issue was not only covered as a thematic topic at the CSW 2003 Session, but was also a main topic of inquiry in the questionnaire, and one of the interview themes.

Finally, the academic review presented Tannen's and Thimm's research, respectively, on gender communication and conversational strategies and concluded with brief excerpts from other experts on gender discourse and the concept of women's "empowerment." Tannen's principal contention claims that cultural gender-based patterns of language are sex-class linked rather than simply sex-linked. She describes conversational strategies and balance of power through cultural variations and ethnic style in connection with gender conversation, especially in face-to-face contact — the primary communication approach of UN NGO women at the CSW sessions. The themes of the four essays that were highlighted and applied to the independent research revolved around: *The Relativity of Linguistic Strategies: Rethinking Power and Solidarity in Gender and Dominance; Conversational Strategy and Metastrategy in a Pragmatic Theory; Ethnic Style in Male-Female Conversation; The Sex-Class Linked Framing of Talk at Work.*

Thimm's research investigated the *Durchsetzungsstrategien* to distinguish spoken differences and stereotypical expectations of male and female strategies. She raises the question: *Which effects do gender stereotypes impose on women's Durchsetzungsstrategien*? Such strategies greatly help to establish positions of power between the genders, in politics, in the professions, in family and in the media. Her work in part supports the *Collaborative Communication Model of Negotiation* that appeared in the findings of the questionnaire under interpersonal communication styles.

2. Highlights of Section III: Summary of the United Nations and Its World of Women

The in-depth description of the United Nations, the institution's infrastructure, its world of women, and the role of the UN NGO community provided necessary background information on the research study group in the context of its all encompassing environment. According to Blumer's methodological research strategies, the study group must be observed in its natural

environment on numerous occasions in the context of the purpose of the social interaction. Therefore, a broad understanding of the UN and its key divisions for the global promotion of women's human rights and social development deserved and received special attention. The UN, a complex international organization, was chartered to establish world policies for peace and social development and to further international human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is comprised of several divisions and sub-divisions that undertake complicated, often culturally sensitive, international issues. This section described key areas of the UN infrastructure viewed as pertinent to women's social issues and relevant to the environmental context of the independent research. The main organs that promote women's issues include the General Assembly, the Economic Social Council (ECOSOC), the Secretariat, and the Security Council. The Commission on the Status of Women answers to ECOSOC. The women's divisions and offices within the UN system as well as UNIFEM and INSTRAW are mentioned not only as important contributors to women's causes but to the work of the NGO women's community. The UN CONGO office assists the 2200 members of the official NGO community as their liaison to official UN divisions and support their efforts to work collaboratively within the UN system. Next, the nongovernmental organizations with official UN status are discussed and a NGO case study of Soroptimist International and its relationship and work with the UN is presented This extensive explanation of the inner workings of the UN serves to bring clarity to its complex system in order to comprehend better the omnipotent environment of the independent research.

3. Highlights of Section IV: Summary of the Independent Research and Results

This independent research mostly took place within the environment and context of United Nations Headquarters just reviewed above in the summary of Section III. It combined quantitative and qualitative methodologies that incorporated Blumer's participatory observation and interpretive analysis strategies of the *obdurate character* of a test group to prove the role of an independent variable in social interaction. The three research methodologies involved: (1) the survey questionnaire that was distributed to the study group of UN NGO women representatives

who attended the NGO CSW Consultation Day 2003; (2) my participatory observations at various meetings and events at the CSW 2003 and 2004 Sessions in the capacity of the active member the NY NGO CSW throughout both sessions; and (3) four lengthy interviews with UN NGO women representatives who have attended multiple CSW sessions and numerous international UN conferences on behalf of NGO groups and the cause/s they represent. These three resources provided quantitative data through the questionnaire; ample qualitative information through the insight gained conducting extensive participatory observations; and substantive knowledge provided by the interviews of four experienced UN NGO women representatives. Together, these findings prove the dissertation's hypothesis: the cultural impact on UN NGO women's communication styles and strategies.

The survey questionnaire collected quantitative data about communication styles of UN NGO women from four cultural regions. This was analyzed to verify the influence of culture on the following aspects of communication styles: low- and high-context/direct and indirect communication patterns; oral and written communication styles; informational resources on social issues; interpersonal relations and styles; persuasion and women's social issues; negotiation strategies; women and the media; and UN NGO woman-to-woman communication problems and suggestions.

The quantitative results substantiate that UN NGO women from the four studied cultural regions North America, Europe/Central Asia, Latin America/Caribbean and East Asia/Pacific use diverse communication styles in many aspects of woman-to-woman social interaction when working on women's issues in the environment and context of the United Nations. Face-to-face communication clearly appears to be the most prevalent and powerful, though not exclusive, method of social interaction at UN sponsored international meetings. The findings demonstrate statistically that cultural differences exist in several of the series of questions of topics posed in the questionnaire. This cultural differential premise holds true for UN NGO woman-to-woman oral and written communication styles; women, interpersonal relations and communication styles; women and the media; and woman-to-woman communication problems. UN NGO

women from North America and Europe/Central Asia listen more to the words and practice low-context communication while East Asia/Pacific and Latin America/Caribbean listen more to the tone and practice high-context communication. Women from North America tend to read the words on the line in contrast to Latin America/Caribbean where the women tend to read between the lines. Yet, interestingly, European/Central Asian women score highly in both categories, reflecting the vast diversity among the members of cultures in this region who have apparently adapted to both styles. On the other hand, women from each culture mostly use logic/reason persuasive strategies towards one another and with men. In contrast, women apply more ethical/moral persuasive strategies with men than women. Then again, towards both men and women, women tend not to employ fear tactics in their approaches.

The participatory observations found numerous examples of culture's direct influence on NGO women's communication styles and social behavior. They revealed that not only an NGO woman's cultural background, but also her individual experiences with social issues impact her communication style and social interaction, as reported in the episode at a 2004 CSW thematic caucus meeting. Furthermore, in the presence of men, NGO women appeared to have modified their face-to-face contact to become more objective and logical, and thereby less emotional when presenting their positions on women's social issues.

4. Survey Questionnaire Conclusions

The most frequent initiators of oral communication seemed to be the European/Central Asian NGO women while the strongest initiators of written communication appeared to be the North American NGO women. The Latin American/Caribbean and East Asian/Pacific NGO women seldom initiated communication in either form. Next North American women ranked first in leading discussion in contrast to European/Central Asian women who disrupted and asked more questions more often than the other three groups. East Asian/Pacific women ranked last in disruption and in posing questions. Overall, European/Central Asian women exhibited the most

assertive, at times, aggressive, oral communication patterns in contrast to Latin American/Caribbean women who expressed the most assertive written communication.

In the series of questions that refer to UN NGO women, communication and social development, the members of the four regions were unified in their approach to research and presentation of social issues. They also emphasized the need to use direct communication, and one can surmise that a researcher's closeness to a social issue helps determine the oratorical strategy that would be utilized. Seasoned UN NGO women are, notably, more aware of UN protocol that stresses the exactitude of language use in oral presentation and written documents.

Then, the interpersonal communication styles of the NGO women determine the social interaction that particularly revolves around the deliberations and negotiations to produce final outcome documents at the end of international UN meetings, and for this study that means the CSW sessions. Therefore, the analysis of this segment of the questionnaire becomes especially important to prove this study's hypothesis and to identify the test group's leaders, followers, controllers and facilitators. As leaders European/Central Asian ranked first in contrast to East/Asian/Pacific women who ranked last. In a mirror reversal East Asian/Pacific women ranked first as followers while European/Central Asian women ranked last. Then as controllers (which does not necessarily mean leaders) the East Asian/Pacific held the first position, then came European/Central Asian women while North American and Latin American/Caribbean women tied for last place. Finally, in the role of facilitator (by definition non-controllers) Latin American/Caribbean women held the first ranking while European/Central Asian women placed last. These critical responses to communication styles that affect the success of UN NGO women at international UN meetings show the most variation in their strategies as leaders, followers, controllers and facilitators. Three years of participatory observations at the CSW sessions substantiate these conclusions.

In an equally critical series of questions on interpersonal relations and communication styles, the results showed strong similarities as well as contrasts in a women's approaches to collaboration, cooperation, competition, compromise and conciliation. Each region placed

collaboration and cooperation in the top two positions, respectively. Here, collaborative and cooperative interpersonal relations strategies create different kinds of results. Collaborative communicators seek a win/win solution through the integration of needs on all sides. A collaborative strategy often results in more effective solutions than one person alone could have promoted. In contrast, cooperative communicators defer to the needs of others first, an action that can produce a lose/win result for the parties involved. The remaining three interpersonal relations styles, i.e., competitive, compromising and conciliatory strategies, varied greatly in their placement in contrast to one another as cultural groups. In competitive situations, one side invariably wins; in compromise solutions the no side either wins or loses, but rather fills and sacrifices a portion of needs; in conciliatory circumstances where avoidance occurs, then neither side achieves their needs. The following negotiation outcomes in interpersonal relations and communication strategies is derived from the collaborative communication model presented in the quantitative analysis under the independent research and results section:

Style	Results
Collaborative Communicators	Win/Win
Cooperative Communicators	Lose/Win
Competitive Communicators	Win/Lose
Compromising Communicators	Neither Win/Lose
Conciliatory Communicators	Lose/Lose

The most effective and satisfying strategy is collaboration, and thee regional groups indicated this fact in the questionnaires. Yet in practice, as observed at numerous meetings and events sponsored at CSW sessions for two years, the results of their interpersonal communication strategies proved to be quite different. UN NGO women associated with UN Headquarters through the years exhibited the most collaborative behavior. This result is discussed further under the participatory observation conclusions that follow.

Finally, responses to the most pertinent questions on women and the media provided valuable data that further support the academic review regarding women, language use and the media's negative stereotypical portrayal of women in cultures so much of the time. They also substantiate the "expert position" outcome document of the CSW Expert Meeting on ***Women and the Media*** presented in detail at the beginning of the independent research and results section. The responses also verify Lemish's presentation on the Madonna/Whore phenomenon at the NY NGO CSW Consultation Day 2003 and her further comments that were shared in the ensuing interview during the first week of the CSW 2003 Session.

The final series of questions targeted the issue concerning women and the media. The most relevant questions to the study asked: *Are women's social issues presented as factual hard-news stories? Are women's social issues presented as emotional soft-news stories? Do women have access to the media?* The academic research and independent examination presented in this study proves that the media, as an institution, forms, shapes and reinforces negative gender profiling and determines language use accordingly. Therefore, the responses to these questions were analyzed collectively, rather than by culturally regional categories. It was no surprise that conclusions clearly indicate that most coverage of women's social issues is presented as soft-news stories. One interesting result, however, found that the group responded evenly concerning access to the media: 51% said NO compared to 49% who said YES. Nevertheless, this positive point does not seem to translate to women's social issues receiving hard-news story attention.

The questions on women's images in the media were based on Lemish's Madonna/Whore phenomenon that classifies the portrayal of women into perceived polarized categories. The respondents indicated which images appear from the following categories: wife, mother, victim, sex object, professional and service volunteer. Women portrayed as sex objects (the whore) received the highest number of responses followed by victimization portrayal (violence against women as the weaker sex to be protected). The high score given to the portrayal of women as victims could be in response to their special awareness of this social issue at that time, since one of the two themes of the CSW 2003 Session covered ***Violence Against Women*** and the subject

matter was very much on their minds. Next, women were most often presented as mothers and wives (Madonna), and least often portrayed as professionals and volunteers, although these two images present contrasting stereotypical portrayals. The professional woman, who signifies power and independence, receives minimal attention in the media as does the woman volunteer, though it reflects the traditional role of the woman as caretaker. The professional woman vs. the traditional caretaker as portrayed in the media, worldwide, underscores the writings in several essays by the NGO women on *cultural relativism* in developing regions of the world as presented in the academic review section under the cultural dimension and communication styles. The woman's role as either professional or caretaker is simply not respected in many cultures, and this reality influences acceptable language use and symbols that perpetrate and sustain this low image. Since women traditionally teach cultural traditions to their offspring, they promote the same language use and social interaction to both the girl and boy children.

The final media question asked the study group to note the social issues covered in their own media. The topics included education, economic sustainability, environment, health, family, culture, human rights, violence, war/post conflict and politics. Family, health and education issues ranked among the leading four topics presented in the news as social issues stressing the female image as caretaker. Once again the respondents placed the coverage of violence against women as a key social issue in second place, barely behind family coverage. Then came social issues revolving around politics, war/post conflict and human rights. Repeatedly, in contrast to women as caretakers and social workers, the importance of women and their livelihoods ranked near the bottom, only slightly ahead of women and environmental social issues.

The questionnaire closed with a request that respondents describe any problems in communication styles and social interaction that they perceived and encountered among one another. Their answers were analyzed in-depth at the end of the quantitative research findings. That analysis revealed that the UN NGO women are not only quite aware of their cultural differences and communication difficulties, but are also aware that their contradictory styles can and do interfere with the complicated UN process on the advancement of women. The evidence

presented and the conclusions derived from the quantitative research affirm, once again, that culture impacts UN NGO woman-to-woman communication styles and their social interaction when working with peers to elevate quality of life of women universally.

5. Participatory Observation Conclusions

The participatory observations frequently, though not exclusively, substantiated the findings of the survey questionnaire and interview results. They also provided new evidence to support the hypothesis and showed that communication styles and interpersonal relations strategies both promoted and impeded the proceedings of CSW sessions. Most evident at the CSW Consultation Day 2003, the breakout sessions lacked organizational structure due to the various communication styles used in contrast to Consultation Day 2004.

At the first Consultation Day the task force members on the issue *Violence Against Women* came mostly from the *Radical Feminist Perspective* that promotes rebellious and reactionary behavior and control of discussion on burning social issues. This behavior was evident throughout the Consultation Day and the ensuing two weeks of the CSW 2003 Session. In contrast, task force members on the other issue of *Women and the Media* conducted their part of the programming using a highly facilitative approach that was not readily appreciated by the attendees. These task force members worked mostly in professional academics and applied the advanced-education interactive seminar strategy that is often used in North American universities. Participants at the breakout sessions complained that this interpersonal relations style lacked formal structure, so the approach was viewed by many participants from other cultural regions to be disorganized and ineffective. In this setting it proved difficult for the moderators to control dominant personalities who unfairly monopolized the limited time, and the situation resulted in an uneven participation.

Having learned the lessons from Consultation Day 2003, the returning NY NGO CSW members sought to change communication styles and strategies to conduct their NGO programs and initiatives to optimize the NGO voice in the deliberations and negotiations of the CSW 2004

Session. On their minds, pressed the failure of the *Violence Against Women* outcome document at the close of the CSW 2003 Session, and their concern that it could set a precedent.

In preparation for the CSW 2004 Consultation Day, several of the seasoned members of the NY NGO CSW joined the *Role of Men and Boys* task force. They were determined to integrate directive leadership into their facilitative role to perform their responsibilities successfully at the CSW 2004 Session. The members of the *Women and War* task force were new to the UN and the CSW process. A younger generation, mostly in their thirties, many were professionally paid NGO representatives in contrast to traditional NGO professional volunteers assuming the similar workloads. They developed exclusively facilitative and inductive strategies to conduct their initiatives throughout the CSW 2004 Session. They focused on a situational and end-result approach to conduct their programs vs. the familiar relational approach typically administered at such events, and usually more popular with women. At the Consultation Day 2004, they, unfortunately, encountered serious organizational difficulties, which resulted in writing less articulate summary recommendations after the breakout sessions in contrast to their counterparts in the other task force. This example shows the importance of finding the right balance of communication styles and strategies to harmonize the efforts among UN NGO women at an international gathering. NGO women located in New York and who constantly interact with UN Headquarters hold a clear advantage in the ways of the UNese language and protocol, and the *Role of Men and Boys* capitalized on this resource. In contrast, women new the UN or who attend such meetings infrequently, tend to communicate and execute strategies that reflect the social interaction of their cultural region and individual experiences. Their behavior and approaches can inadvertently impair rather than promote the process to achieve common goals.

Then, the participatory observations revealed that the political factor proved to have more clout than anticipated. Clearly, political agendas at a national or regional level usually exist and are expressed, directly and indirectly, during deliberations and negotiations, but the extent to which this occurs came as a surprise. The already cited case of the failure of the *Violence Against Women* outcome document in 2003 highlights the cold reality of political power.

In addition to communication styles and interpersonal relations strategies, the participatory observations focused on language use and cultural gender approaches. These topics are discussed at length in the dissertation's academic review and under all three components of the independent research. In brief, UN NGO woman-to-woman communication emphasizes the significance of direct language use, although in many cultures indirect communication dominates as the commonly used style. Articulate word choice became evident in the introductions to speakers, formal presentations of issues, official testimonials honoring members of the UN community, and even during brief but appreciated comments directed at NGO peers. The most common language use at such occasions infers motivation, encouragement and high decorum, and women who interact with the UN frequently and or/from North America appeared more comfortable in offering such messages of praise. Humor, however, is seldom interjected at these international gatherings, not even at social networking affairs or receptions, meant to foster informal contact.

Observing NGO women during the deliberations and negotiations to form the final draft of two CSW outcome documents, oral communication styles appeared similar in many instances to the results extracted from the questionnaire findings. In addition, opportunities arose to observe the social interaction of NGO women representing cultures not recorded in the analysis of the questionnaire. Again, these women either chose not to participate in the survey by choice or were unable to attend Consultation Day 2003 when it was distributed.

The NGO women representing the Sub-Saharan UN cultural region exuded a high profile at the CSW 2004 Session. As oratorical communicators, they projected a powerful and motivational speaking style that combined eloquent language with passionate tonality and emotionally charged, nonverbal gestures that made their presentations memorable. On the other hand, NGO women from Pakistan (the region of South Asia, also not included in the questionnaire) often spoke in monologue mode and their style felt abrasive at times. They frequently referred to themselves in their lengthy narrative that were often interjected as bold

examples to support a main point. These additional cultural styles brought further variety to social interaction among the NGO women representatives.

As a cultural group, the official European Women's Lobby seem to be the most assertive orators, and their members having aggressively attended CSW sessions for years. They lobby hard to influence the wording of statements, draft reports and outcome documents. They usually argued to insert radical change into the final NGO version of documents in contrast to North American women who have learned to assume a more editorial approach in an effort to guarantee passage by the General Assembly. At such caucus meetings women from other regions often stand at a disadvantage as culturally less assertive communicators. Often, they are less adept in sophisticated English and shy to speak. Newcomers suffer from lack of knowledge of UNese protocol and language , e.g., unfamiliarity with endless acronyms frequently used.

Persuasive and interpersonal relations strategies were also intently observed. North American NGO women often assumed strategies that reflected feminist perspectives. This observation reinforces Lear's experiences and the viewpoint she expressed in her interview. Seasoned North American women seemed to project an emotionally charged, authoritative leadership style, while the region's younger generation projected a logical persuasive and emotionally detached persuasive approach. Newcomers, regardless of cultural orientation, seemed attuned to the *Multicultural Feminist Perspective*, and adjusted quickly to the diverse environment by incorporating cooperative and collaborative strategies. European/Central Asian women behaved competitively and frequently challenged their peers' positions on social issues. These various persuasive strategies became pronounced at the CSW caucus meetings where NGO representatives worked together on the wording of the outcome documents. Finally, in contrast to the questionnaire findings, North American women appeared to be the strongest facilitators and collaborators in practice, traits positively viewed by their peers. So, they were often invited to assume assertive leadership roles to direct discussions towards agreeable results. These conclusions, drawn from the participatory observations, paralleled many of the determined research results and contributed new evidence that supported the dissertation's hypothesis.

6. Interview Conclusions

  The four interviews reinforced key topics presented in the academic review, substantiated numerous results and conclusions derived from the findings of the survey questionnaire and participatory observations, and offered important new dimensions to the independent study. Under the qualitative research segment, each interview was described in detail, before the findings were integrated into an joint analysis. The themes of the four interviews targeted crucial topics of the independent study: *The Portrayal of Women in the Media; The Modern Era Women's Movement and Its impact on Women's Communication Styles; Language Use, Symbols and NGO Women's Communication Styles; Culture's Extended Definition and Its Impact on the Social Interaction of UN NGO Women.* The conclusions of each interview will be highlighted here in brief.

  In the first interview with Lemish on *The Portrayal of Women in the Media*, she held the media accountable as an omnipotent institution for the stereotypically negative portrayal of women in the media. Her position reflected the writings on language use and the media in the academic review and closely paralleled the results determined by the line of questioning on women and the media in the questionnaire. She also contributed two strong perspectives to this independent study: the Madonna/Whore phenomenon and the negative portrayal of women in the media; and the academic feminist perspective that promotes the need for women researchers who focus on gender equality and women's issues to connect their theoretical work to social activism to advance women's causes. This current feminist perspective is evident among many UN NGO women these days who stem from the academic work place. They often serve on numerous UN NGO committees that address a multitude of social issues in addition to the women's world.

  In the second interview with Lear on *The Modern Era Women's Movement and Its Impact on Women's Communication Styles*, she emphasized the influence of the multiple feminist perspectives that emerged during the last three decades and powerfully influenced and transformed communication styles of women activists everywhere. She stressed that the women's movement has created its own cultural language use and has developed its own

effective communication strategies, often through an integrative approach of diverse cultural contribution in order to relate better to one another in international settings. Her viewpoints broadened the cultural scope through which the independent study was conducted and examined.

In the third interview with Richter on *Language Use, Symbols and NGO Women's Communication Styles*, she expounded on similar principles of language use as the foundation of joint interaction expressed by Clark in the academic review. She agreed with Blumer's viewpoint emphasizing the significance of the use and interpretation of the meaning of symbols, including language, in the dynamics of social interaction. She identified specific language use and symbols considered important to the UN NGO women's community that contribute to the composition of their own "cultural" communication styles and strategies. Her pointed comments supported several aspects of the participatory observation findings addressing the omnipotent role of language use, culture and the NGO community.

In the fourth interview with Paravazian on *Culture's Extended Definition and Its Impact on the Social Interaction of UN NGO Women*, she expanded the definition of culture and its impact on communication to incorporate the influences of multi-dimensional layers: professional career cultures including the private sector vs. the non-profit sector; social service culture; professional volunteer culture; generational cultures; and the UN culture, to mention a few, in addition to geographically cultural backgrounds. She explained that such cultural dimensions, and more, certainly exist within the UN NGO community and influence their communication styles emphatically. Her insight extended the scope of the meaning of culture, the fundamental concept to this study. Her perspective was taken into account, especially during the second year of participatory observations at the CSW 2004 Session. This extended definition of culture in conjunction with the NGO women's community helped to shape the research conclusions.

The comprehensive and inter-related evidence determined and examined throughout this original independent study conclusively supports the dissertation's hypothesis on the omnipresence of culture in woman-to-woman communication styles and social interaction among UN NGO women.

7. Closing Statement

It would benefit the UN NGO women's community to be aware of the impact of culture on their communication styles to become even more effective leaders to further women's social issues, based on the Beijing **Platform for Action** and its *Twelve Critical Areas of Concern.* Women leaders today need to seek win/win solutions by encouraging, informing, persuading and empowering others. Women leaders today need to energize and enhance the state of self worth in other women to elevate the quality of their lives, families and communities.

The UN NGO world of women welcomes and promotes such leadership today to promote women's human rights, social development and gender equality through sustainable change. Enlightened women, as *agents of change*, recognize necessary closure to harmful practices; welcome exploration of new options and opportunities; create new beginnings; command commitment to policies move forward; establish practical action; develop new alliances; and apply effective communication styles and strategies -- to that end.

How does an appreciation of cultural communication styles among UN NGO women promote women's social issues globally through change? The impact of positive social interaction enables collaborative negotiation to develop and flourish. It fosters consensus in policy-making and best-practice programs to create awareness, advocacy and action to improve women rights worldwide. Therefore, it is imperative that UN NGO women representatives better learn to understand and embrace each other's cultural communication styles and strategies. The UN NGO women's community has also developed its own culture and communication, and newcomers are wise to learn their effective ways of social interaction to serve women.

Since Beijing1995, two mottos have inspired the women's movement: *Women's Rights are Human Rights* and from a Chinese proverb*: Women Hold Up Half the Sky*. The NY NGO CSW task force on *The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality* created another motto: *Holding Up the Sky Together*. Effective woman-to-woman communication empowers UN NGO women to "make a difference" in human rights, fundamental freedoms, social development and to guarantee the advancement of women's causes globally in the 21st Century.

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