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Constructivist Theory and Overcoming the Gender Gap in Education in Latin America

by Kristen Staib

Education is “universally acknowledged to benefit individuals and promote national development” (“Women in Development,” 2011). Historically, there has been a noticeable discrepancy between the number of boys and girls afforded the opportunity to receive an education. While the gender gap in education has greatly decreased in recent decades, there are still great disparities between males’ and females’ access to and participation in education across the globe, especially in the developing world. Latin America has done surprisingly well in narrowing the gender gap in education, especially in comparison to other developing regions in Africa and Asia.

In fact, most of Latin America’s accomplishments are comparable to what North America, Europe, and northern Asia have achieved in providing fair education for both boys and girls.

As demonstrated by Figure 1, all of North America, Europe, and Australia has less than 5 percent difference between men and women’s education levels, and no cultural or legal restrictions on females’ education. Likewise, much of Latin America—including Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Argentina—has achieved equity in education comparable to that in the West. Those Latin American states that have not achieved less than 5 percent difference between men and women’s secondary education all fall between 5-10 percent difference in education rates, except for Paraguay.

According to the International Monetary Fund, most Latin American countries (except Chile and Argentina) fall within the category of “developing countries,” sharing this category with many African and Asian countries. While Latin America has, in general, fared better economically than much of Africa and Asia, it is still puzzling that Latin America should have such a slight gender gap when compared with the
Discrepancy In Education

Figure 1. Source: http://womanstats.org/data/images/map3.7education_discrepancy_compressed.jpg.

rest of the developing world. Many theories of international relations seek to explain the reasons behind such occurrences. Such theories may illuminate why some Latin American states have effectively narrowed the gender gap in education.

One Approach to Explaining International Cooperation

One well-known theory of international cooperation that may explain much of states' behavior is the constructivist theory, a subset of the cognitivist theory. This school of thought is based on the assumption that states are not the sole actors on the international scene. International organizations, including nongovernmental organizations, may also play formative roles. Constructivism emphasizes social standards between states and organizations, and the perception of what is socially acceptable (Bream and Stiles 2010, p. 16). Actors' preferences may change due to outside forces or what is perceived to be permissible on the international scene.

Many rationalist models of international cooperation would argue that state behavior should be explained in terms of utility-maximizing (Hasenclever 1997). However, constructivists take a different approach, citing that state behavior can better be summarized as the "logic of appropriateness" rather than the utilitarian "logic of consequentiality" (March and Johan 1989). Rather than calculate their own self-interested goals and calculate which choices would yield maximum benefits, actors who act based on the logic of appropriateness are driven by the rules that "define relationships
among roles," basing decisions upon what one actor "owes" other actors (Hasenclever 1997, p. 156). Actors are more likely motivated by a desire to conform to social norms and to develop a positive reputation among peers than achieving their own material gains (Brem and Stiles, 16). States prefer to adhere to social norms of duty and obligation, fairness and conformity—even to the detriment of other immediate self-interests.

Constructivism lends itself to a more malleable framework of ideas: Not only can self-interests change, but also actors' identities and roles on the international stage as rules and ideas shift and evolve over time. Once self-interests are developed, decisions will naturally follow a rational pattern; however, these preferences may change at any time. Because the rules of the game are apt to change, so are actors' own roles (and their identities and preferences). When faced with which rules to follow or which regime to take its cues from, actors ultimately choose between which international institutions appear to be the most legitimate.

Ian Hurd defines legitimacy as an actor's beliefs that a specific rule or institution ought to be obeyed (2007, p. 7). Legitimacy is inherently subjective, as it depends on relations between actors and institutions. Furthermore, this belief is "defined by the actor's perception of the institution. The actor's perception may come from the substance of the rule or from the procedure or source by which it was constituted." These perceptions affect an actor's behavior, as they are internalized and "[come] to help define how the actor sees its interests" (Hurd 2007, p. 7). States each make decisions based on a number of factors, and a major factor in a state's decision-making process is whether or not its choices will adhere to international norms.

One may ask, does one theory best describe states' behavior in international relations? Does one theory of international relations best explain Latin American states' ability to improve the gender gap in education? This paper considers the cases of two different case studies mainly through the lens of one international theory: constructivism. As with other theories of international relations, constructivist theory may successfully account for some states' behavior. However, due to varying circumstances and contexts from country to country, constructivism cannot satisfactorily explain all state behavior all of the time. While students of international relations may seek for the most parsimonious theory, it seems that no one single theory of international relations cannot adequately explain all state behavior.

Constructivists would hypothesize that Latin American states would follow the policies of organizations or rules that they perceive to be legitimate. Specifically, then, constructivists would estimate that Latin American states would form their own education policies after legitimate leaders' education policies.

In this case, consistent with constructivist theory, Latin American states that view the UN's international treaty CEDAW as a legitimate treaty that shaped and diffused the norms and ideas of women's right to equality of education would align their policies with these international norms.
Indeed, scholars agree that such shifts in education can be traced to these social interactions. Gray, Kittlison, and Sandholtz (2005) say that international interactions hinge on norms and ideas to the extent that a “country internalizes norms and ideas,” which are “diffused through cross-national interactions” (p. 299, emphasis added). This international interaction directly relates to the a country’s level of integration “and social condition of its women” (Ibid.).

**Limitations**

Inherent in the study of legitimacy is a recognition that the term legitimacy is, itself, a subjective concept. Therefore, gauging a state’s or organization’s legitimacy can be difficult. Additionally, legitimacy is relative, and largely lies within the understanding and preferences of the actors within states’ governments and institutions. While one state might perceive an organization to be legitimate, another state might not.

This paper will examine the qualitative data from the United Nations and from various states’ governments, considering all of the evidences in what contributes to an actor’s legitimacy.

For instance, does the state do anything to react to the organization that would suggest the state supports its cause or recognizes its importance? This may be evidenced verbally, as in a speech from a government official; legally, as the signing, ratifying, or passing legislature; or may include any other cues from states, verbal or of another nature.

Also, as constructivism asserts that states desire to adhere to social norms, it is worth noting then, that a legitimate organization or leader must have some kind of support or following from a number of states or organizations. In order to create social norms, an actor (whether it be a state, organization, or other unit of measurement) has to believe there is some sort of pressure to adhere to regulations or behaviors that others are adhering to. I will look for evidence that other states or organizations respect and/or have adhered to the policies or practices asserted by the legitimate leader.

Culture, language, history, leaders’ personalities, and other factors may all contribute to determining an organization or leader’s legitimacy. Admittedly, it is impossible to correctly infer states’ motivations in every instance when one can look only at the outcomes or policies made by any given state. As such, this paper will focus on an analysis as to whether Latin American governments responded to legitimate actors. Whether or not these policies were or were not effective is another matter altogether; for the purposes of this paper, the outcomes of those policies are not as relevant as the policies and their creation.

Knowing what motivated individuals’, governments’, and states’ behaviors is difficult—to a large extent, we simply cannot infer causality based on what we know.
The United Nations: A Legitimate Leader On the Global Stage?

The United Nations has emphasized the rights of women since its inception in 1945. One of its main tenets reaffirms “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women” (“Short History of CEDAW Convention,” n.d.). Historically, a woman’s humanity alone did not prove sufficient for her to gain rights that were presumed to be natural for men.

The 1960s saw an awakening to the realities of the patterns of discrimination against women. In response, many organizations were created in opposition to these social injustices. In 1964, seven years after the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had been adopted, the CSW decided create a “single, comprehensive, and internationally binding instrument to eliminate discrimination against women” (Ibid.). Thus began the process for the writing of the text of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (or CEDAW) from 1976 to 1979.

CEDAW was passed by the UN General Assembly in December 1979. Also known as the Treaty for the Rights of Women or the International Bill of Rights for Women, CEDAW explicitly defined and established women’s rights. In summary, states who agree to abide by the convention committed themselves to take measures against discriminating women in all forms (CEDAW: Text of the Convention, n.d.).

As one of the major and preliminary actions taken to define and establish equality for women, CEDAW became a major factor in influencing Latin American states’ shifts toward greater gender equity in their education policies.

Countries that have ratified the convention are “legally bound to put its provisions into practice” and must submit national reports at least every four years regarding the measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations (CEDAW: Text of the Convention, n.d.).

On 1 March 1980, the convention opened for signature at the United Nations Headquarters. That year, the following Latin American countries were all signatories of the convention: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, The Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Venezuela. Brazil, Guatemala, Peru, and Uruguay followed in 1981, and Belize did not sign the convention until 1990 (CEDAW Ratification, 1979).

As is demonstrated by Chart 1, most states signed the treaty within the first one or two years. To date, CEDAW has been ratified by 186 nations (Chapter IV, Human Rights, 1979). Granted, a number of those states had ratifications, accessions, and successions, but the sheer number of states who signed (and even more who later ratified the treaty) is noteworthy.

For a visual image of the number of states that have participated in CEDAW since its approval in 1979, refer to Figure 2.
## Chart 1: Signing and Ratification of CEDAW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Signed</th>
<th>Ratified</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Signed</th>
<th>Ratified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>July 1980</td>
<td>Dec. 1989</td>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>Apr 1987</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data taken from "CEDAW Ratification Table," 1979. I included Latin American states to demonstrate how Latin American states, as neighbors, possibly took cues of what would be social norms by observing how its neighbors reacted to the treaty. Additionally, I included a number of influential countries that might be perceived as legitimate leaders and by example could influence how Latin America states act or how they perceived CEDAW and its legitimacy.

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Participation in the CEDAW

- Signed and Ratified
- Only signed
- Acceded or succeeded
- Non-signatory
- Unrecognized state, abiding by treaty

Figure 2. Source: "CEDAW Participation and Map." Citizens for Global Solutions, Inc http://globalsolutions.org/human-rights/cedaw. 20 November 2011.
Again, an international organization or regime’s legitimacy may be defined as actors’ beliefs that a specific rule or institution should be obeyed (Hurd 2007, 7). While the idea of legitimacy in international cooperation is implicitly subjective, the sheer number of signatories and states who went on to ratify the treaty seems a sufficient cause to assume that many state actors would view CEDAW as a legitimate treaty, and therefore its rules ought to be obeyed.

Article 10 in Part Three of the Treaty specifically discusses the importance of equality between men and women in receiving an education. The specific education policies that this article discusses are that states should first take all measures to eliminate discrimination against women and grant them equal rights in education (CEDAW: Full Text of the Convention, n.d.). Next, it states that women should have access to the same quality of education as men.

Among other initiatives included in Article 10 is the statement that female drop-outs would be reduced on all levels. CEDAW states, “The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely” (Ibid., n.d.).

Note the language used in this article, and the specific aims to achieve greater parity in education worldwide. These objectives were later adopted by Latin American states as their own, demonstrating how their policies mirrored UN international policy. This paper focuses on two case studies from Latin America: Peru and Bolivia. These cases were chosen largely due to the availability of information in regards to data from CEDAW and states’ education policies.

**Peru**

Historically, Peru has experienced a large gender gap in education, like many other Latin American countries. Though this gap has not been completely overcome, Peru has made large strides in eliminating the disparity in men’s and women’s education. In fact, Peru had already been implementing some policies that improved the situation of women preceding the creation of CEDAW.

Peru had a great disparity between the number of men and women enrolled in school. As demonstrated in Table 4, 43 percent of the women birth cohort between 1925 and 1939 had not received schooling. Compared to the percent of males of the same birth cohort who had received no schooling (15.2 percent), this means that there were almost three times as many females than males who had not received any schooling. However, this number dramatically increased over the next several decades. The proportion of women who never attended school fell dramatically over the next several decades, from 43 percent to just 8 percent in the 1960s (King 1991, p. 17).
### Table 4: Highest Level of Education, by Birth Cohort and Sex (percentage of sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No School</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postsecondary</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average years attended</strong></td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No School</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>54.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postsecondary</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average years attended</strong></td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: King 1991, p. 18

### Table 1: Education of Males and Females, Aged 15 and Over, 1940–81

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>1972</th>
<th>1981</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent Literate</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean Years of Schooling</strong></td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Level of Education Attended (percentage)</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>1972</th>
<th>1981</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No School</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postsecondary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Literacy Rates: Government of Peru 1981, Fernandez 1986

Source: King 1991, p. 2
Tremendous changes began around the 1940s and 50s due to major economic changes in education policy reforms (King, p. 5). Over the next several decades, the Peruvian government focused specifically on “expanding and improving the quality of public education . . . to accelerate economic development and redistribute income” (Ibid., p. 4). Between 1955 and 1970, enrollment ratios for girls rose from 65 percent to 99 percent, narrowing the large differences in enrollment between males and females. Boys born between 1955 and 1964 also showed the largest enrollment increases, but since males began the 1950s with relatively high rates of enrollment, their gains were much less dramatic than gains for females (Ibid., p. 4). Refer to Table 1 to see some of the major changes in the literacy rates between boys and girls from the 1940s to 1980.

In short, Peru had made strides to improve the gender gap in education decades before CEDAW came into being. While the enrollment and amount of school completed increased significantly for both genders, Peruvian education policy especially helped females to enroll in and stay in school.

Peru and CEDAW

Peru signed CEDAW in July 1981 and ratified the treaty in September 1982, making it one of the first Latin American states to ratify the treaty. However, its prompt signing and ratifying of the treaty may reflect Peru’s approbation for and desire to comply with CEDAW’s tenets. We cannot infer with certainty that the Peruvian government’s perception of CEDAW’s legitimacy as an international treaty. However, its immediate signing and prompt ratification appear to be strong indicators that CEDAW established a social logic of appropriateness or international norm the Peruvian government felt ought to be followed.

In its first report to CEDAW in 1991, the Peruvian government reported that CEDAW’s Article 2 “accords with our Constitution as expressed in article 2 of title 1, chapter 1.2, on the person: every person shall have an equal right to ‘opportunities and responsibilities’ regardless of gender. Additionally, the law recognized that women’s rights ‘are not inferior to those for men’” (CEDAW/C/13/Add.29 1991: 5).

From its first report, the Peruvian government acknowledged CEDAW’s tenets were already in alignment with its own 1979 constitution. Both sought for equality of opportunity and treatment between men and women.

Also worth mentioning is that in Peru’s first report to the CEDAW committee, the government stated: “In the event of dispute between [an international] treaty and the law,” treaties prevail. “Hence, the Convention (CEDAW) has a binding force which protects and supports women against any discrimination” (Ibid., p. 5, emphasis added).

This statement illustrates how the Peruvian government signed and ratified CEDAW, knowing it would be bound by its tenets—even insomuch that CEDAW might supercede its own national laws. Again, this demonstrates evidence that Peru
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was willing to sacrifice a portion of its own autonomy in order to adhere to the international norms established by CEDAW.

Additionally, the Peruvian government further stated that CEDAW repealed and replaced part of its own legislation: “As a consequence of CEDAW, the Peruvian Civil Code of 1936 has been repealed and replaced by a new Civil Code promulgated in July 1984, in which there is amendment of the obsolete and marginal provisions contained in the former Code with respect to women. . .” (Ibid.).

Indeed, in its report to CEDAW, the Peruvian government indicated it has adopted facets of its laws as its own, even replacing some of its own legislature. The Peruvian government must have viewed CEDAW with some sense of legitimacy in order to make such a bold move to adopt its tenets into their own national policy.

In its first government report to the CEDAW Committee (1991), Peru reported on a new educational system that was enforced in 1982. This system “cover[ed] male and female pupils at all levels, grades and modalities of instruction” and was so successful that “its mean annual growth rate exceeds the average for Latin America and the Caribbean (according to UNESCO)” (CEDAW/C/1998/11/L.1/Add.7, 1997). The same year that Peru ratified the convention (1982), it enforced a new educational system meant to improve the status of women in education. It is important to recognize the timeline and the proximity of Peru’s ratification with the new educational system, as this supports a constructivist hypothesis that state governments mirror the policies of legitimate international actors like the UN.

In reply to Peru’s report to the CEDAW Committee in 1998, the CEDAW Committee responded the Peruvian government had made efforts to comply with its commitment to the convention, “notwithstanding the difficult situation” Peru faced due to the “economic crisis and terrorist violence” (Ibid.).

Constructivism posits that states will act in accordance with social norms and the “logic of appropriateness,” even if it may not be the most utilitarian choice. While the CEDAW Committee acknowledged the state of Peru had many other crises, including the economy and terrorism, the government made a concerted effort to comply with its commitment to the convention. This may be an indication that (consistent with constructivism) states would choose to conform to social norms and maintain their reputation among their contemporaries, even if it is inconvenient or to their own detriment.

Furthermore, the gender gap in education improved despite the increase in poverty. Poverty posed a major threat to fully implementing the convention, as it 44 percent of Peruvian women in 1998, with 18 percent of women living in extreme poverty (Netherlands Institute of Human Rights, 1998). Despite these abnormally high poverty rates, the gender gap continually improved in education during these years in regards to the percentage of primary and secondary level students but actually worsened in regards to the number of females enrolled in primary education. Refer to Chart 2.
The percentage of women without formal education decreased from 23.1 to 18.0 from 1981 to 1993. This indicates that despite economic and terrorist challenges, the Peruvian government maintained its emphasis on education and the gender gap. Additionally, the number of women who received a secondary education during increased by 4 percent during this time period.

However, it is extremely noteworthy that the percentage of women in primary education actually decreased from 40.9 in 1981 to 31.9 in 1993—nearly a 10 percent decrease. As the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights reported that long-term poverty “led to serious deterioration in the quality of life of millions of women, who [had] no access to education, medical and hospital services, employment and the basic resources needed for subsistence.” Despite the overall national strategy to alleviate poverty, women’s situation worsened even more—especially in rural and indigenous areas (1998).

Although the situation did worsen for women in regard to primary education during this time period, according to this source, this is largely attributed to the long-term conditions of extreme national poverty. Despite the government’s progress and
its policies to combat the issue of poverty, it continued to pervade and took a heavy toll on the primary education rates for women.

Despite the dramatic drop in women's primary education due to poverty—especially in rural areas—we must note the number of men to receive a primary education in this time also decreased but by an even larger margin. While the situation worsened for women, it worsened by a larger margin for men, which actually closed the gender gap more (relatively speaking).

Since that time, Peru has created more programs, policies, laws, and plans for the advancement of women. These programs include the Educational Development of Rural Girls and Adolescents Act in 2001 and a number of other acts meant to change the status of women in the family (CEDAW/C/SR.583 and 584, 2002).

In 2002, the CEDAW Committee noted, “With concern that, notwithstanding the introduction of significant legal changes for implementation of the provisions of the Convention, inequality between men and women is still a reality in Peru (Ibid.). Furthermore, the convention's committee suggested that despite improvements, it was still concerned at the alarmingly high rate of female illiteracy—especially in rural areas. Also of concern were the high numbers of girls and adolescents dropping out of school in rural areas (Ibid.). Despite these critiques from the committee, Peru's continued dedication to narrow the gender gap verifies the perceived legitimacy. Evidently, gender inequality still exists in Peru. However, the country is making great strides, particularly in education.

In its report to CEDAW in 2004, the Peruvian government mentioned a number of new programs and initiatives it had begun in order to more effectively close the gender gap. In fact, it explicitly mentioned a program it began in conjunction with UNICEF in 2003, la Campaña de Matrícula Oportuna por el Derecho a la Educación. This measure works "to eliminate segregation through education and reduce the school dropout rate, which is particularly high among girls and female adolescents" (Consideration of Reports... Convention 2004, p. 20). The program sought this by "[encouraging] girls to enroll in school, [reducing] their dropout rate, and [ensuring] that they progress through the grades at the appropriate age, so as to give full effect to their right to education" (Ibid., p. 40).

In 2002, Peru's Ministry of Education also partnered with the UN Children's Fund and UNICEF in a cooperation agreement called "Building Citizenship among Adolescents Returning to Primary Education," a program that encourages girls to stay in school rather than abandon their studies (Ibid., p. 67).

In addition to a number of other policies, programs, and initiatives Peru created in order to better help women enroll in and stay in school, these two programs are particularly noteworthy, because they focus on dropout prevention programs. Only a few years earlier (in 1994), the CEDAW Committee made the exact recommenda-
tions for Peru to do just that; or, in the committee’s own words, “The Committee requests the State party to set up programmes specially designed . . . to keep girls in school” (CEDAW/C/1998/II/L.1/Add.7, 1998). It is significant that these initiatives took place soon after the committee’s recommendations to create such programs, and they were done in conjunction with UN organizations.

As discussed, a constructivist view of states’ behavior would conjecture that Peru would make educational reforms as a reaction to a legitimate authority’s example or leadership (in this case, CEDAW). Before CEDAW’s inception, equity in women’s education was not necessarily an international priority. Despite societal influences such as economic crises, terrorist violence, and social prejudices, it is noteworthy that Peru’s government has prioritized the Convention’s tenets above their own national law, meaning that some aspects of their own constitution are overridden by CEDAW’s “binding force” (CEDAW/C/13/Add.29 1991, p. 5).

While history reveals these changes were already well under way before CEDAW came about, Peru’s policy changes appear to be consistent with constructivist theory. Thus, one may conclude the constructivist theory provides a fairly accurate explanation as to the education policy trends in Peru.

Bolivia

Historically, Bolivia has also had a wide gender gap in education. Bolivian education policy largely followed along the same vein as revolutionary nationalism (P. Rivera 1992, p. 23) from the 1950s until the 80s, when the government suddenly took a more neoliberal approach to education.

In 1952, the Bolivian people raised up in a nationalist movement and the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR) party took power. Before the era of CEDAW, Bolivia had adhered to the Bolivian Education Code of 1956 (P. Rivera, p. 23–24). This code established basic principles for national education, including “free, compulsory, democratic, and unified” education (Ibid., p. 25). The structure of the education system and the government’s abrupt end six years later meant teachers’ unions largely dominated the education system. To this day, “teachers still believe that the educational system must be completely under their control, including the appointment of the minister of education” (Ibid., p. 25). This strong desire for internal power may dictate teachers’ and the government’s perceptions of international legitimacy for CEDAW.

The code was the most important legislation for the mass education of peasants, whereas before, education had been largely an elitist tradition. However, over the course of the next few decades, Bolivia’s government experienced several military overthrows. The 1972 military coup of General Hugo Banzer yielded yet another change in education policy, especially as Banzer “was more concerned with the ideological control of education than with the pedagogical improvement of the system” (Ibid., p. 26). After twenty years of military control of the state, Bolivia finally had its
first freely elected government in 1982. The new ruling party, the Democratic Popular Unity, "faced a country in political and economic crisis." It sought to re-establish the Bolivian Educational Code, and set several goals to accomplish by the year 2000. These goals are to eradicate illiteracy, provide primary schooling for all children, and improve educational quality and efficiency. Of these goals, however, literacy was the main priority (ibid., p. 27). These were the circumstances which Bolivia found itself around the time that the CEDAW came into being.

**Bolivia and CEDAW**

In May 1980, Bolivia was among the first group of states to sign CEDAW. However, Bolivia did not ratify the treaty until June 1990. It was difficult to find any data that might hint as to why Bolivia waited to ratify the treaty. Though it waited ten years to ratify the treaty after signing, Bolivia spoke out in strong support of CEDAW in its first report to the committee: "Bolivia wishes to express its support for the Convention and calls on all the world's countries to ratify it as quickly as possible."

Also, in the introduction of this first report, the government made this admission: "The Government does not have sufficient budgetary resources to meet basic infrastructural needs and requirements, especially in the rural areas. Thus, 86 percent of the rural population is without drinking water and 64 per cent without health services" ("Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties" 1991, p. 9).

The second statement concedes the Bolivian government values an international organization's legitimacy, and they wish to endorse CEDAW's legitimacy by encouraging other states to ratify it as well. As one author said earlier, "To the extent that a country internalizes norms and ideas diffused through cross-national interactions, it incorporates those norms and ideas into its domestic policies, laws, and institutions." As Bolivia internalized international norms and ideas, it recognized that it could have an influence upon other states by further diffusing and endorsing those norms and ideas. This is precisely what constructivists would predict to happen: Because norms and interactions matter, states' social interactions can have an influence on other states' preferences and interests.

Additionally, the government asserted that it did not have sufficient funds to meet its citizens' basic needs. Constructivists argue that more important than meeting its own basic economic needs at times, states act in accordance with a "logic of appropriateness." In other words, states will conform to international social norms, even if it is to their detriment. This statement regarding Bolivia's need to address poverty and basic needs demonstrates more of a rational choice model of international theory rather than constructivist theory. More important to Bolivia than adhering to social norms were its people's own basic needs. In this case, rational choice theory may provide a better explanation of the Bolivian government's behavior than constructivism.

Around the time Bolivia ratified the treaty, the average national illiteracy rate was 27 per cent, being 31 percent in rural areas and 7.8 percent in urban areas. Ad-
ditionally, there are 4.7 and 2.25 illiterate women for every illiterate man in urban and rural areas, respectively. In general, the illiteracy rate for women was 2.5 times higher than that for men (Ibid., p. 25). Bolivia had a large margin for improvement in regards to equity between the genders in literacy.

In a report from the CEDAW Committee to Bolivia in 1995, the committee’s comments were full of praise for Bolivia’s efforts since ratifying the treaty, stating that Bolivia had undergone major efforts to promote gender policies to advance the status of women. The committee praised Bolivia for overcoming its formerly gender-neutral policies that reiterated gender stereotypes (CEDAW/C/BOL/1 1995). Thus, the Bolivian government acted almost immediately after ratifying (they only ratified the convention in 1990) by introducing gender-specific policies.

The committee also highlighted another act of legislation that was of particular importance: Bolivia mandated that grass-roots organizations pursue gender perspectives in their policies. Indeed, soon after its ratification of the convention, Bolivia began to take seemingly enormous strides in its policies towards greater gender equity.

This also held true in Bolivian education policy. The CEDAW Committee “commended the educational reforms, which were aimed at providing bilingual education, favouring thereby the education of girls, and the development of a multicultural society crossing gender barriers” (Ibid.).

Bolivia took immediate action in efforts to overcome gender inequalities with policies and initiatives. In its report to CEDAW over a decade later (in 2006), Bolivia reported that CEDAW’s convention “[has] made it possible for the country to promote policies favourable to women,” (CEDAW/C/BOL/2-4 2006, p. 2). Indeed, Bolivia partly gave credit to CEDAW as a factor that made it possible to make more gender-specific legislation, programs, and policies. This immediate implementation of gender-specific policies and credit given to CEDAW as a basis for promoting such policies is consistent with constructivist theory. Based on the government’s language regarding the convention and its immediate compliance with its agreement, Bolivia’s shift in education policy may have been in response to the CEDAW’s tenets and Bolivia’s ratification of the treaty.

Furthermore, the government attributed its strengthened resolve to comply with CEDAW tenets “by subsequent ratifications of international conventions and declarations such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention of Belem Do Par and others, that have been the primary basis for the consolidation of laws and regulations which grant women equal rights” (“Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 18 of the Convention, Combined Second, Third, and Fourth Reports of States Parties, Bolivia 2006, p. 2).

The Bolivian government itself cited legitimate international organizations and initiatives as relevant factors that catalyzed change and reformation. Just as constructivism would predict, Bolivia internalized the logic of appropriateness in furthering gender policies, even attributing its motivation partly to these conventions and treaties.
ties. In fact, the government acknowledged that while progress had been made, it was not yet sufficient, but “the advances made [would] need to receive a fresh impetus. Additionally, the Government of Bolivia faces many shortcomings and new challenges” (Ibid., p. 12). Apparently the government sought further CEDAW Committee support and suggestions as legitimization for their own policies.

While Bolivia did see many improvements in its illiteracy rates, the differences between men and women are still astounding. In 2006, Bolivia reported that while “the overall figures for illiteracy have gone down from 37 to 14 percent, the difference in the rate as between men and women in rural areas exceeds 23 percent” (Ibid., p. 3). Unlike its report in 2006, the CEDAW Committee presented Bolivia with a report that was scathing in comparison to the prior report.

While the Bolivian government had stated in its 2006 report that the gender difference is “shrinking,” even in rural areas, the committee came back with the suggestion for the state to approach poverty alleviation programs with a gender perspective, paying particular attention to women in rural areas (CEDAW/C/BOL/CO/4 2008).

The committee added the stinging statement, “The Committee is concerned that the most recent educational reform has not dealt with these subjects in depth,” and invited the state party to “adopt all necessary measures” in order to improve illiteracy and dropout rates for women in Bolivia (Ibid., p. 2008). In short, the committee’s assessment of Bolivia’s reforms in 2008 since its last report to Bolivia in 1998 reflected much more disappointment that Bolivia had not taken greater measures to improve the status of its women.

This is not to say that Bolivia has not made strides in improving the education gap between men and women. However, the committee’s change from one report to another provides a stark contrast. The first report praised Bolivia for its initiatives and policies that focused on a gender perspective. However, the second report from the committee in 2008 expressed disappointment in Bolivia’s failure to help its women gain greater access to education.

Bolivia has lessened the gender gap, but the disparity between genders is still large. The gap between those living in urban areas and those living in rural areas is even larger. Initially, Bolivia took a number of measures to address the gender gap, but it seems that women’s education is considered a less-important initiative in recent years.

It is noteworthy that Bolivia waited ten years to ratify the treaty after it had signed. This delay may reflect Bolivia’s attitude towards CEDAW as a legitimate leader. If Bolivia had viewed CEDAW a legitimate leader, or if it had felt more pressure to conform to societal norms, Bolivia might have ratified the convention much earlier. However, Bolivia was one of the later Latin American states to ratify the treaty, and in recent years, women’s issues in education seem to have been prioritized lower on its agenda.

Interestingly, the Bolivian government verbalized that some of its main reasons for paying heed to gender issues are due to international treaties and conventions,
including CEDAW. In its first report to CEDAW, the government also mentioned that its basic infrastructural needs exceeded the its budget—in 1991, “86 percent of the rural population [was] without drinking water and 64 per cent without health services” (“Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 18 of the Convention, Initial Reports of States Parties, Bolivia 1991, p. 9). In such dire circumstances, basic needs for survival such as drinking water and health services may (understandably) take precedence over the initiatives for greater equity in education. When confronted with how to spend the government budget too small to fund basic infrastructural needs, one can see why these funds would not be allocated to priorities such as girls’ education programs.

Thus, constructivism might provide some insight into shifts in Bolivian policy. Bolivia signed and ratified the convention, though it delayed more than most Latin American states. Bolivia has made changes its legislation to improve girls’ education. However, its policies have largely focused on closing the economic gap between rural and urban.

Ultimately, Bolivia’s lack of attention and allocation of resources to girls’ education may simply be related to its larger, more pressing needs, such as the eradication of poverty and providing access to water and healthcare. Without such basic needs in place, it may not matter how legitimate a world leader is, how strong social norms are, or how appropriate it seems to comply with a commitment made by ratifying an international treaty. Constructivism does not fully explain Bolivia’s behavior in regards to its policies on education. In cases such as Bolivia’s, a rational choice theory of international relations seems much more applicable.

Conclusion

While a gender gap in education still exists, many states have made great strides in overcoming the gender gap. Latin America is an example of this. In spite of poverty, economic, terrorist and other challenges, states have continued to make progress and espouse the principles of the convention. There are many theories of international relations that seek to describe states’ behavior, including constructivism.

Consistent with constructivist theory, some Latin American states seem to follow the example of CEDAW’s education policies towards women. Peru, which signed and ratified CEDAW almost immediately, had already implemented a number of education initiatives to improve education for women, and continued to adhere to the committee’s requirements and suggestions. Despite the economic and terrorist issues in Peru, women’s equity in education continued to receive attention from its government. These evidences suggest Peru has sought to behave according to the “logic of appropriateness" established by CEDAW and comply with international norms.

However, some states’ behavior is inconsistent with constructivist theory. Bolivia, for example, has acknowledged the relevance and importance of CEDAW and has verbally recognized the importance of the treaty. However, Bolivia seems to have
largely failed to adopt many gender-specific policies. This could be due to the fact that Bolivia has many other internal needs that supercede the issue of equity in women’s education. Rational choice models of international relations theory seems a better fit for Bolivia’s actions. Ultimately, Bolivia’s choice not to follow social norms seems to be one of utility rather than a logic of appropriateness.

In regard to Latin American education policy, constructivism may explain some states’ behavior in cases where states view CEDAW as a legitimate leader, where it is also part of the states’ interests to allocate resources to education reforms, and where states have internalized international norms and ideas. However, constructivism may fail to explain cases where states’ own infrastructural needs take precedence over international norms and ideas, such as with Bolivia. Although international relations theories may be useful in describing some cases, circumstances within states vary widely enough that no single theory can sufficiently explain all states’ behavior.

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Salcedo, Carmen Apaza. 2009. “Diálogos en Educación.” Internationale Weiterbildung und Entwicklung gGmbH. 10 October 2011. <http://www.dialogos-en-educacion.org/actualidades/educaci%C3%B3n-y-g%C3%A9nero-en-el-per%C3%BA-avances-y-permanencias> This article, while not an official government statement, discusses the advances and current issues in Peruvian education policy.

