Honduran Women:

A Study of Women's Participation in Community Development, Leadership,

and Events in Rural Honduras

Brielle Hibma

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Authors Note:

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Correspondence should be addressed to Brielle Hibma, brielle.hibma11@northwestu.edu

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Personal Background

In July 2014, I went to Honduras to visit a project for a couple of weeks. This project is called The Leadership Center (TLC), which exists to train and equip a new generation of ethical Honduran leaders who will help lift their families, communities, and country out of poverty. TLC is an all-women's college located in the rural mountains of Central Honduras. Before the end of my time there, I knew it would be my new temporary home. I was asked by the director of the project to stay and do some contracted teaching and leadership development. I ended up staying with the project until February 2016, because the young women in the school inspired and challenged me daily. One day, as I was helping a student, Karla Mendoza, plan and prepare a presentation, she said to me: "There are many issues women in our country do not know about. There are taboo subjects that people do not talk about. And we have what is called *machismo*, which is what we call Honduran men who control their wives and don't let them do anything. Women in rural areas are not given a voice" (Mendoza). This is the conversation that sparked my interest in pursuing an understanding of the reasons why women are socially excluded in many parts of Honduras. After working closely with a group of young Honduran women from poor families for the last two years, I have grown to admire and respect their courage, faith, and perseverance. They tell me stories of overcoming struggles, and of their dreams for a better life for themselves and their families. I knew I could not ignore what I was learning about women's exclusion, and I made it my purpose to get to know more women in rural communities. I desired to know their stories and help give them a voice in a place where they are often marginalized.

Historically, Honduras has been known for its patriarchal society that favors the public leadership of men and encourages women to remain in domestic roles. One challenge that

women face when they feel that becoming a housewife is their only option is that they feel completely powerless to use their voices as an alternative way of thinking. The topic itself of women's empowerment is challenging and diverse as scholars and theorists have defined it in multiple ways.

The purpose of this thesis will be to identify and explore the ideas of empowerment in rural Honduran communities. I will examine and explicate several factors that keep women from participating in community development and leadership projects through personal stories, interviews, and theoretical research. I will identify some of the reasons women themselves are hindering their participation in bringing change, and extrapolate on networks of women I helped to form. Drawing from Biblical perspectives of women in leadership, previous literature of women in development, and knowledge of Honduran and Latin culture, my research aim is to provide a better understanding of the reasons women in rural communities of Honduras do or do not participate in the development of their communities through leadership or events. This is an action based research project that aims to establish groups of women in the San Jose de Comayagua area of Honduras who want to work to better their communities.

The context in which most of my research and interviews took place is in the San Jose and Taulabe areas in the department of Comayagua in central Honduras, though additional interviews were conducted in communities outside this geographical region[1]. According to the United Nations Data Report (UNdata), most of the women would be considered economically poor or lower middle class, but none are in the category of extremely poor. The educational level of the women varies from lower elementary school through post high school training courses, but

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[1] Communities from which women I interviewed were from include: Los Mescales, Santa Rosita II, El Chaparral Abajo, El Chaparral Arriba, La Enramada, and the town of San Jose de Comayagua.

the majority of the women had finished middle school or a bachierra (which is high school in the United States).

Most families in this area of Honduras make a living in the sugar or dairy farm industries. Public electricity in the communities is relatively new, and most homes receive water from a well source. Unpaved roads are made of gravel and dirt, and homes typically have unventilated ovens. While some families have a vehicle, most travel on public buses, and a few travel on horseback. Homes have basic plumbing and sewage systems, and bathrooms are located outside the home. Children and adults alike frequently suffer from dehydration, parasites, lice, and dental cavities. Community development in this area involves projects to provide people better access to clean water, educational opportunities for youth, waste disposal projects, and economic development initiatives. Women make up half the community, yet the majority of these project teams consist only of men.

1.2 History of a patriarchal society in Honduras

Though it is small and seemingly insignificant on a map, Honduras is a country rich in culture and history. Religious festivals and cultural merriments are commonly celebrated with folkloric music, dancing, and delicacies. However, beneath the natural and cultural beauty and wonders of this nation lies a prominent patriarchal society, or what Hondurans call *machismo* (Machismo Sexual Identity). *Machismo* refers to a male-dominant society, especially prevalent in rural areas of Honduras. Research on the machismo culture by Rachel Lomot in, "Gender Discrimination: A Problem Stunting Honduras' Entire Economy," further states that the Honduran society is one in which men decide and dictate all the decisions in the household (15). This includes when and how many children the women will bear, and to what level the women

and children in their families will be educated. Lomot declares that, "This leaves the female

population without the confidence to take a stand against the many injustices done to them" (15).

Women are left-out as a result of this deeply rooted practice of patriarchy. They are accustomed

to living in this pattern, but largely unaware that it contributes to a low level of self-esteem and

an isolated lifestyle. Lomot claims that, "Due to the social structure of Honduras's rural

environment, [this] is all women know" (25).

One of the problems with *machismo* is that it has created a cultural cycle and tradition

that does not value women. The results are not simply limited to education and low self-esteem,

but violence against women as well. The 2012 Nobel Women's Right's Initiative (NWRI), a

delegation led by Nobel laureates Jody Williams and Rigoberta Menchu Tum, who spent time in

Honduras and other Latin American countries noted, "Women are increasingly the victims of

violence that reflects the discrimination they suffer in society, viewing them as objects for

manipulation and subjecting them to gender-specific forms of violence that are particularly cruel

and demeaning" (6). Violence is inflicted on women by husbands, fathers, and other close or

non-intimate relationships, as well as through civic authority and state officials. When women

grow up with violence, it is all they know, and they contribute to the cycle through tolerance.

They accept violence and create the same patterns with their own sons and daughters. Both

Lomot and the NWRI found in their studies that violence is not limited to the home – it is a

problem on the governmental and state levels (Lomot, 16 & NWRI, 6). This exemplifies how

Honduras' and other Latin governments, "are directly responsible for the failure to protect

women and women human rights defenders and for the commission of crimes against women.

Their failure is due to an underlying lack of political will at all levels of government" (NWRI, 6).

The delegates of the NWRI found that Honduras, in particular, lacks the tools and legislative

support necessary to take effective action against women's rights offenders. They claim that,

"The war on drugs in…Honduras…has become a war on women. Efforts to improve 'security'

have only led to greater militarization, rampant corruption and abuse within police forces and an

erosion of rule of law. Ultimately, it has resulted in a crisis of security where no one is safe" (3).

However, women often do not speak up or take action on these criminal issues, for multiple

reasons, which I will address below. I asked my students at The Leadership Center what they

thought was the greatest barrier keeping women from participating in and speaking up about

certain issues in Honduras. One hundred percent of them answered with violence and abuse.

Gladys Lanser, a Honduran woman who leads a group dedicated to fighting for the rights of

women and who hopes to stem the rising tide against violence affecting women in Honduras,

claims that ninety-six percent of complaints against domestic abusers are never solved. "That is

the degree of impunity that exists in this country. Since there is no punishment, since there is no

investigation, since the responsible assailants are never found, then there's this permanent

situation of crime and violence in the country. It's a permanent state" (PBS, 2015). Many women

face violence and abuse and they do not know what to do about it, so they settle into a pattern of

social isolation and shame, and do not speak up about issues of violence.

The delegates of the NWRI found that government representatives and officials were able

to present "institutional reforms as proof of progress, despite evidence of the government's role

in the rising of violence" (6), and the 2014 Feminist Organizations Report (FOR) reports that,

"The problem of access to justice for women does not lie in the regulations themselves, but in

their inadequate application by justice operators…there is a failure to acknowledge international

legislation, a lack of gender perspective, and an absence of diligent investigation in these cases

by public officials" (7). Though Honduran government officials do recognize a gap in the justice

system, which includes corruption and a lack of infrastructure, FOR states that, "between 2005 and 2013, the number of violent deaths of women increased by 263.4 percent" (1). One such crime is femicide, which is violent and purposeful murder of women, and takes an average of one woman's life every 13.8 hours in the country (2). The majority of these murders are never solved. If women do find courage to speak up or take a stand, they participate as feminist activists and risk their lives. More often than not though, fear keeps women from speaking, dreading that any word from their mouths will get them into trouble, or worse.

In June of 2009, the Honduran Supreme Court and Army ousted the president at the time, Manuel Zelaya, after he attempted to schedule a referendum to the Honduran constitution. He wanted to amend the law which states the president is only allowed to serve a single four-year term, and outraged citizens and military viewed this as unconstitutional. The president was kidnapped and taken to Costa Rica, and the entire country was in turmoil. Though the coup d'etat of 2009 was not directly related to women, since the event, military unrest has grown and previous progress made toward women's rights has lost much of its momentum. "Women report that achievements in human rights and policy gains of the feminist movement are being systematically wiped out, and [are met] with fierce repression" (NWRI, 10). But in Latin America, this story is not new.

A woman I met in Honduras, Elvia Alvarado, is a *campesino*, or peasant farmer, rights activist, and author of the book *Don't Be Afraid Gringo*, who led the way in Honduras for land revolts and land "take-backs" throughout the 1980's and 1990's. Alvarado started out life as a poor, uneducated peasant girl who left school after the fourth grade. Like most girls from rural Honduras, she found herself unmarried and pregnant as a young teenager. She gave birth to six children from three different men. Alvarado lived with the father of her last three children,

Alberto, for fifteen years before realizing she was better off alone. Years before she left Alberto however, she was recruited by the Catholic Church to organize women's groups in order to educate and help mothers and their children with malnutrition problems in rural communities. Through the process of traveling and meeting people in her region, she developed a political awareness and a deeper understanding of the reality of life as a poor *campesino*. In Honduras and throughout Latin America, the *campesino* movement was closely tied to the Liberation Theology Movement of the mid-1900s.[2] Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, in their book *Introducing Liberation Theology*, explain how during this time, "There were frequent meetings between Catholic theologians and Protestants leading to intensified relationship between faith and poverty, the gospel and social justice, and…they urged personal engagement in the world, backed up by studies of social and liberal sciences, and illustrated by the universal principles of Christianity" (3). Alvarado, working closely with the Catholic Church and within the Liberation Theology Movement, recognized the political injustices in Honduras and decided to begin organizing groups of people for a different purpose. She led groups of poor *campesinos* in a fight against rich land-owners. She found herself harassed and sent to prison on numerous occasions by the Honduran military and police, whose jobs were to protect the citizens of Honduras. The 2012 Nobel Women's Initiative reports this was a wide spread problem: "The armed forces have been deployed across the country with the purpose of confronting organized crime…but they have frequently played a role in supporting prominent business men, large landowners, and investors against local communities…" (16).

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[2] The Populist governments of the 1950s-1960s inspired "nationalistic consciousness" to differing social classes. Boff note how, "The process led to the creation of strong popular movements seeking profound changes in the socio-economic structure of their countries" (1). Alvarado was a known activist in Honduras, among others throughout other Latin American countries who were "listening to the cry of the poor and becoming the interpreter of their anguish" (8).

Alberto threatened Elvia and tried to keep her from being involved in any church leadership or group organizations. She fought and refused, resisting his will, and chose to go because she was passionate about the causes. In her book, she recounts how Alberto told her she should not go to meetings anymore because she was different, she was changed. And she said, "It was true. I wasn't the same. Now when he came home drunk, I'd put up a stink. I was more independent too, since I had my own group of friends. And my work in the club made me feel important; it made me feel like I really had something to contribute to the community" (Alvarado, 12). Alvarado and Catholic priests involved in the Liberation Theology Movement worked alongside the *campesinos* in land take-backs throughout several decades, inspiring people to fight for their own rights.

Alvarado has a brashness and toughness about her that is different from other women. Yet, it is not a mystery why many women do not want to involve themselves as a leader, even in community matters. With San Pedro Sula, one of the country's major cities, ranking in at the world's second most dangerous city and recording the third highest femicide rate in the world, it becomes more and more clear that women are scared (WorldAtlas). And so they do what they know, what their mothers and grandmothers did before them, and they teach their daughters to do the same. They subjugate themselves to men and authority figures, often accepting their low place in society. Many women do not have the boldness or confidence of Alvarado to stand up against men and authority.

The rich culture of Honduras is deeply rooted in patriarchy, which contributes to the ongoing mistreatment of women in society. While fear can keep some women from taking a stand against societal injustices, there are still some women like Alvarado, who will risk everything for a fight they believe in. The *machismo* culture of Honduras has grown and evolved

over time. In the following chapter, I am going to explore Biblical themes that are commonly

misinterpreted as a possible contributing factor of *machismo* and the mistreatment of women.

Chapter 2

2.1 Biblical exegesis of scripture and the roles of women and men according to the Bible

In addition to a traditionally patriarchal society, another causative factor to be considered

in women's empowerment and disempowerment is the contribution of the Church and Biblical

scripture, and the ways in which they are historically interpreted. Not only are women's voices

often suppressed, but they lack opportunities that are more regularly given to men within the

workforce, community, and church, which is one of the results of Biblical misinterpretation. In a

country where approximately eighty-three percent of the population professes the Christian faith

(U.S. Department of State), it is natural to look toward the Bible for a historical record of

patriarchy and what may have led Hondurans to move forward in the *machismo* culture. Philip B.

Payne, specialist in New Testament studies points out that, "Male hierarchy over women is not in

God's original design. The first mention of male rule is in Genesis 3:16, which identifies it as a

direct result of the fall: 'He will rule over you.' Even prominent male hierarchists agree that this

is not a prescription of what should be" (Payne, 3). Through his research, Payne further

discovered the word *rule* here in the original Hebrew text does not mean only bad rule, but any

sort of rule. The same word is frequently used to identify God, which in the very nature of God,

cannot be a bad term. Therefore, we can conclude from the original Hebrew meaning of the

word, that male ruling over women is a result of sin and the fall of humanity.

When we read scripture, it is a given that we will interpret it. The Bible is written for all

people and all times, yet, it was written in a specific and particular culture and over a long

expanse of human history. Therefore, while all people can read the Bible and apply its teachings to their own lives, more careful study examines how specific references were understood by the original readers in a given context. In support of this, authors Deborah M. Gill and Barbara Cavaness, in *God's Women Then and Now* explore two important questions to interpret biblical passages: "What was God saying through the human writers of scripture to the first hearers and readers of the passage? And, what does this passage say to readers today, in this place" (41). Careful interpretation and hermeneutics of scripture are necessary in understanding patriarchy and the mistreatment of women throughout the world; In order to understand why Honduran women are oppressed, we must aim to understand how and why certain scriptural references to male headship and women's leadership are misinterpreted. It is important that Bible readers observe the context and compare similar passages to avoid reading meaning in a text. Additionally, we need to look at literary and historical clues, as well as timeless truths that apply to everyone, and at those specifically for the people located where the writers were. There are vast amounts of literature on historical and textual criticisms of the Bible, and a deep scriptural analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis. My purpose of introducing scriptural themes here is to point out the misuse of a few scriptural references and the impact they have had on the women in my study.

When eighty-three percent of the Honduran population professes the Christian faith, it can be assumed that scriptural teachings and interpretations have contributed to placing women in their current place in society. In the article, "The Biblical Exegesis of Headship: A Challenge to Patriarchal Understanding that Impinges on Women's Rights in the Church and Society," author E. Baloyi explains how, "There are many Biblical passages that have been misused to make people believe that women are inferior creatures to men and they should, as such, be

subjected to abuse" (2). Throughout my time in Honduras, many people have explained to me how they feel society is the way it is because God made it that way. However, this male-dominant ideology is not unique to Honduran culture. Patriarchal values were prominent in the Jewish culture of the Bible. For instance, Matthew, a Jew, explains in Matthew 14:21 how there were 5000 people present the day Jesus feeds the crowd with one fish and two loaves of bread. Pastor and theologian, John MacArthur concludes in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Matthew 8-15*, that this number did not include women and children as scripture denotes, and the total could have been as large as twenty-five thousand (431). "A woman, according to Jewish custom, is on the level of a slave or a heathen and sometimes she is treated as a child" (Baloyi, 3). In looking at the particular reference of women and children not being included in the number counted on that miraculous day, we note that Matthew was the only one of four gospels to record this fact, adhering to Jewish custom.

Another Biblical theme that is commonly misinterpreted and leads to prejudice against women within the Church is that of submission. The Bible begins and ends on a note of equality for all people, yet many people still look to the few verses that support women's submission and seek to compare one with another. Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, author of *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality,* claims that, "Evangelicals disagree concerning which Biblical texts should be considered universally normative and which should be limited in terms of their direct applicability to our religious and cultural situation today" (41). Examples of such Biblical themes can be found in a couple of controversial references. The first illustrates submission in 1 Timothy 2:12, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (NIV). However, taking scripture as a whole corpus, and not broken into parts, we observe a continual theme of submission of both men and women to the Lord

woven throughout both the Old and New Testaments. It cannot be pieced apart and separated to mean that submission, in this verse alone, means the same as subjugate, which is to bring someone under dominion or control. In examining 'submission' as a theme throughout the Bible, we recognize that submission is a term that applies to all Christians, including Jesus Christ, who submitted Himself to the Father. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English states that submission means to *agree* to obey a person, group or set of rules. This is different from subjugate, which is defined as, "to defeat a person or group and make them obey you" (Longman). The Bible often confronts the original culture in which the text was intended, just as it does our contemporary culture. One of the most common cultural clashes is the misinterpretation of the term 'submit' which is interpreted to mean subjugate. This is a common mistake in male dominant cultures around the world, including Honduras. As Christians we choose to submit ourselves to authority out of love and respect, not because we are forced to obey. As Christ submits to the Father, husbands and wives must submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:23).

Another scriptural example that supports the theme of equality is Galatians 3:28. It reads, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (NIV). This text explains how all believers, without distinction of any sort, are God's heirs in salvation, and Jesus is the perfect example of this equal treatment. Payne claims that, "In a society that regarded women as less intelligent and less moral than men, Jesus respected women's intelligence and spiritual capacity, as is evident in the great spiritual truths he originally taught to women" (Payne, 4). Galatians 3:28 has social implications that go beyond salvation to reach gender roles both within the church and family life. Similarly, we can look at Biblical texts and examples of Christ's apostles to find Jesus using women as key leaders. If the women Jesus

chose to lead the Church were not worthy of leadership in God's eyes, He never would have used them.

The Bible is full of examples of women in leadership I turn now to further explore the Biblical account of Deborah, who participated in leadership roles traditionally held by men, but were divinely purposed for these women to fulfill the will of God.

Deborah is a Biblical example of a woman who fulfilled many roles in her society and culture. She was a wife and mother, a judge, and a military leader. I was curious what the story of Deborah meant to women in Honduras and how they see her as a leader, so I sat down with several women in a local rural community, Los Mescales, for a Bible study of Judges 4. Verse 14 includes an example of Deborah leading and advising military commander Barak by saying, "'Go! This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?' So Barak went down Mount Tabor, followed by ten thousand men" (NIV). The women in our Bible study were excited to discuss the strength and bravery of Deborah to lead people the way she did. They admired her leadership and claimed they would like to have the same bravery that she had demonstrated. I asked the women if they personally knew or could think of anyone who had similar leadership qualities as Deborah from this story. Not one woman knew of someone with these leadership qualities, and one group member Senia Valle Padilla claimed, "We do not see leaders like this in Honduras, neither men nor women. There is too much corruption" (Valle Padilla). When we see God using valiant women to lead armies and nations, we can argue that women should be allowed to make decisions or be included in matters that personally pertain to their home, church, or community. Baloyi reflects on Deborah claiming, "Equally important is that, just like in the case of Deborah, there are warnings and teachings which can be better presented by women in the church. Some women are gifted to an extent that

they see things which are still to come and can advise the church and community on that note" (Baloyi, 11). This brief scriptural overview demonstrates that God has a place for women in leadership, as ordained and prepared by God, and exemplified through Jesus Christ's example.

2.2 Empowerment: What does it mean?

The term *empowerment* is frequently used within the development field but does not have a singular definition, especially in relation to women's empowerment. Furthermore, projects and programs around the world frequently aim to empower women, but little evidence exists to quantify how this has been evaluated. Past researchers have defined empowerment conceptually as a power within (Nikkah, et al), resisting power held over oneself (Kesby, 2040), or the need to have been disempowered at some point (Mosedale, 244). Through researching what empowerment means, we see other common themes such as power, the need to include men in empowering women, empowerment being a process, how people empower themselves, and the involvement of consciousness and decision of those being empowered. I believe that women need to be included in the process of defining the term in order to understand what they want from their own empowerment, and this will vary across time and cultural contexts. Culture and tradition are important considerations in examining the question of the empowerment for women. Development scholars and theorists have such vast definitions of the term, that for the context of this thesis, I have decided to create my own meaning as a culmination of previous ideas and concepts. Therefore, I define empowerment as *a process by which people go through that results in a new way of perceiving themselves and acting on their abilities*[3]. Since empowerment is understood as a process, we acknowledge that there is no singular goal of

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[3] Several scholars and theorists whose work I read contributed to my understanding and definition of the term 'empowerment.' These include: Mike Kesby, Sarah Mosedale, Hedayat Allah Nikkhah, Ma'Rof Redzuan, Asnarulkhadi Abu-Samah, Liat Kulik, and Hofit Megidna

becoming empowered. Rather, as Mosedale explains, "One does not arrive at a stage of being empowered in some absolute sense. People are empowered, or disempowered, relative to others or, importantly, relative to themselves at a previous time" (244).

The purpose of my use and definition of the term *empowerment* in my research is to be a basis or measurement on which to understand what is lacking. I also wanted to know what the women in the towns and communities with whom I spoke would need in order to feel empowered as women in their communities. Later, I will discuss the importance of including men in the process of women's empowerment, but for now, I want to focus on the women's perceptions of and relationship to their community.

In *Walking with the Poor,* author Bryant Myers explains David Korten's people-centered development approach which suggests that, "people should decide for themselves what improvements are needed and how they are to be created. The development program must not come from the outside" but instead should be "consistent with their own aspirations" (155). Therefore, in seeking ways to empower women in rural Honduras to participate in development, practitioners need to have an understanding of women's perceptions. This idea is what led me to a better understanding of my role as a researcher and facilitator. It was important for me to create space in this research for women to create their own understanding of empowerment in their rural Honduran context.

2.3 Women in Participation of Empowerment and Development

In my observations of women in rural communities of Honduras, I have seen an overwhelming picture of personal isolation and lack of participation in community projects, events, and leadership. Frequently, many people choose not to participate in community

development projects or events if they cannot see tangible benefits in it for themselves. It has

made me question if the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), churches and

development practitioners have not inadvertently painted an image of dependency in developing

nations through hand-outs and charity, leading people to believe they do not need to work for

change. In other words, why participate if others are willing to do the work? In his book, *A

Guide to Participatory Community Development,* author Guy Bessette outlines a ten step model

for the facilitation of participation through community development. In this model, he explains

the importance of development practitioners to come alongside the community by first

establishing relationships and understanding the community setting, and to communicate with

them about *their* perspectives of needs before beginning work. Additionally, Bessette explains

how as practitioners, we need to communicate short, medium, and long-term goals so that people

can better understand the process and not lose interest. In agreement with this are authors Steve

Corbett and Brian Fikkert of the book, *When Helping Hurts,* who point out how "Researchers

and practitioners have found that meaningful participation of selection, design, implementation,

and evaluation of an intervention increases the likelihood of that intervention's success" (134).

Without including locals in the process, foreign practitioners run the risk of imposing solutions

that are inconsistent with the local culture.

As development practitioners, if we want to garner the participation of community

members in community projects, events, and leadership, we must be cautious of how we

communicate concepts and ideas to the community. Even our word choice in communication

with the community will determine how they perceive the work being done and our presence in

the community. Bessette suggests that, "First, we should try to find substitutes for the word

"project". Whenever researchers or practitioners come to a community to discuss a "project",

many people tend to see an opportunity of great sums of money and material advantages" (43).

In the community projects I have been a part of in Honduras, a common reaction of people in the communities, including those in leadership raised the questions: *Is there money involved? What do I get from this?*

Women frequently commented that youth are the most active in the communities, followed by men. During my interviews, women would often start out questioning the value they could bring as a leader in the community, or to a development project. However, when the conversations shifted away from the idea of community projects and focused on themselves as individuals, their perspectives changed. Many of the women seemed more energized and excited to talk about what they are good at doing, what they are interested in learning, and additionally, were able to make comments regarding what they love about their community. My study led me to conclude that the women in the communities I visited ultimately do believe in their potential and have a desire to share in the development of their communities, but have instead, settled into familiar patterns of not participating or allowing others (men, organizations, professional practitioners) to take the lead. In other words, organizations and men have not been successful in including women in the development process, despite what they have to offer and are willing to give. Bessette supports this conclusion in regard to lack of involvement being a hindrance to women getting involved themselves when he writes:

> In order for people to participate meaningfully in the development process, they must
>
> first develop the perception that they can make a difference, moving from a passive
>
> attitude of waiting for donors to an attitude of self-help. Apart from attitudes,
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> participation also demands that community members develop confidence and skills that

help them participate meaningfully and effectively in research or development initiatives

(43).

Participation in the development process will look differently depending on the cultural context

and the people involved. What I discovered during my research in rural Honduras is that people

felt they could participate or wanted to participate if they were presented the opportunity. There

is an additional necessary element in involving locals in development called social capital, a

concept I will discuss in the subsequent section.

2.4 Building Social Capital

Social capital, which is the "networks of relationships among people who live and work

in a particular society, enabling that society to function properly" (Web), is a necessary

component to consider in our work to include women in community development. In order to

develop a deeper understanding of women's participation in community development projects,

events, and leadership, we must look at what other components are necessary to bring women to

a place of participation. Building social capital is necessary for community development and

allows people's ideas and dreams to be translated into action. When communities are lacking

social and civic connections, it can be harder to share information, reach opportunities, and

eliminate threats. In his book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American

Community*, Robert Putnam suggests that, "In areas where social capital is lacking, the effects of

poverty, adult unemployment, and family breakdown are magnified, making life that much

worse for children and adults alike" (317). It seems that social capital and relationships are

essential factors of community development participation. As practitioners, we must effectively

communicate ideas, and motivate women to participate, by helping them to see the qualities and

strengths that they bring to the development process. In many communities of Honduras I have visited, families are the strongest social system. However, families and individuals are often disconnected from other families and individuals. The need for sustainable social systems is not a new concept. People are not meant to go through life alone, and history shows us how social systems sustain individuals, communities, and organizations.

Both the existing and potential social capital that exists within communities must be taken into account in order for effective community development to take place. Practitioners need to focus on the holistic development of people and communities, by recognizing the connections between the individuals and the community as a whole. I want to examine the social and relational poverty of women in particular, because it gives a holistic and well-rounded view of individuals. Poverty is a widely defined topic that goes beyond financial disparities to include the concept of broken relationships in any realm of life. Community development theorist John Friedmann, a professor of urban planning who has done extensive work in Latin America, "focuses on the powerlessness of the poor and defines poverty as a lack of access to social power" (Myers, 118). In *Walking with the Poor*, Myers explores how different populations of individuals experience poverty, specifically explaining that it includes physical, spiritual, and social aspects. He writes, "Encouraging change only through men leaves enormous amounts of community life untouched…If women are not involved and engaged, any development effort is limited" (275). There is plenty of research contributing to the idea of physical and material poverty throughout the world, but as development practitioners, we should look not only to material poverty, but also to the spiritual and relational poverty that affect individuals and populations. Ignoring the social element of poverty that heavily impacts women can inhibit the progress made toward eradicating other forms of poverty. This is one of the reasons why I chose

to research this topic, because I don't think the social, emotional, material, or spiritual elements of poverty and development can be broken apart. As practitioners, we need to address poverty holistically.

One experience I had in a rural community, El Chaparral Abajo, gave me an impression that people are disconnected from one another. There was an event at the local church with a visiting priest from a neighboring town, including several baptisms, and the celebration of Santa Lucia. The church was hosting guests from neighboring communities, and the celebration after the church service was to continue with food, live music from an out of town band, and dancing. I was told that most of the community would be gathering at the church early in the morning to prepare the church and make the tamales. When my friend Karla and I arrived (both of us did not live in this town at the time), there were only four other women in the church kitchen preparing tamales. Karla and I set to work cleaning the inside and outside of the church, and within the next two hours the tamales were finished and the cooking women left. Aside from the two of us, one other woman remained at the church to continue preparing. For three more hours, we worked to prepare for the community event alone. Twice, we asked neighbors near the church to help, and nobody seemed able. However, when the event began, hundreds of people showed up to enjoy the evening. Behind the scenes, everything was chaos. Nobody knew who was doing what or when it was supposed to be completed, and people were confused and frustrated.

Throughout the day, I kept thinking about how the entire community was going to be enjoying this event, while relying on a small handful to prepare and make sure it happened. I had a hard time wrapping my mind around the idea of how many people were expecting to be served and benefit from the event, without putting in the necessary sweat capital to make it a success for

everyone. At this event, there was clear disconnect and a lack of collective action. This caused

tension and confusion among those who were serving.

> Putnam describes social capital as an effective way to resolve such issues. He says:
> Social scientists have long been concerned about "dilemmas" of social action…People
> might often be better off if they cooperate, with each doing her share. But each individual
> benefits more by shirking her responsibility, hoping that others will do the work for her.
> Moreover, even if she is wrong and the others shirk, too, she is still better off than if she
> had been the only sucker. Obviously if every individual thinks that others will do the
> work, nobody will end up taking part, and all will be worse off than if everyone had
> contributed (288).

I think Putnam's concept not only describes the confusion at the event that evening, but it

explains the importance of individuals working collectively for the common good of society. In

essence, social capital is precisely this: networks of relationships among people that work

together for the common good of society. It is a component that I believe is missing in women's

empowerment and participation in development.

2.5 Relational Leadership

> With the inclusion of social capital as a necessary factor to women's involvement in

community development affairs, we must also recognize the importance of understanding

relational dynamics in leadership. Globally, the idea of leadership has taken on an image of a

heroic, masculine figure whose primary responsibilities are working long hours instead of

spending time with family, and who shows little emotion. History and media have portrayed this

image, which almost exclusively leaves out women and femininity from the concept of heroic

leadership. In "Ethics of Relational Leading: Gender Matters", author Jennifer Binns discusses the concept of female leadership qualities, which she categorizes as relational practices, to include connectedness, emotional sensitivity, vulnerability and empathy (601). She argues that feminine qualities of leadership are necessary for effectiveness and that gender matters in the way people interpret leadership. Binns further explains that, "If power is seen as the property of an individual leader, secured through both formal authority and force of personality, then immoral or unethical behavior involves the abuse of that power" (602). Previously I discussed *machismo* as a common form of unethical abuse of power by men and authority figures in Honduras. This is a form of authoritative and coercive leadership that leaves half the population of Honduras out of leadership.

The relational theory of leadership, as defined by Mary Uhl-Bien, author of, "Relational Leadership Theory: Exploring the social processes of leadership and organizing is", "a process of social construction through which certain understandings of leadership come about and are given privileged ontology" (654). In this article, Uhl-Bien identifies both the entity (individual) and relational (social or group) perspectives of leadership and describes the connections and interdependencies between people and their groups. According to relational constructionists Dachler and Hosking (1995), as cited by Uhl-Bien,

> From this perspective, knowing is always a process of relating; relating is a constructive, ongoing process of meaning making — an actively relational process of creating (common) understandings on the basis of language; meaning can never be finalized, nor has it any ultimate origin, it is always in the process of making; and meanings are limited by socio-cultural contexts (655).

At its core, a culture will provide its own definitions of leadership, poverty, or development. As I mentioned, it is necessary for people within the community to participate in their own development. However, in order for this to happen, development practitioners must have an understanding of a healthy leadership model and how it can and will be applied and interpreted by the particular community in which they are working.

Empowerment and participation merge in a unique understanding of leadership as explained by Myers in *Walking with the Poor*. He writes,

> We need to be concerned with how participation is occurring. For its impact to be significant, the basis of participation must be as genuine partners, even senior partners. The form of participation must be integral and central, not occasional and formalistic. The extent of participation must be complete and without limit. Finally, the effect of participation must be empowerment. Empowerment is, after all, one of the means of transformation (215).

Ideally, relational leadership takes away the worry over titles such as leader or manager. Instead, it is a network of people operating together, within their own strengths, for a common purpose. The focus falls away from who is leading and who is following, and instead pays closer attention to the process. Relational leadership does not mean to completely do away with titles and positions, as these serve a purpose, but the attention is not focused here. Rather than treating people as subjects, relational leaders view and treat people equally. Binns suggests that, "moral practice means treating people as 'concrete' rather than 'generalized' others; that is, as individuals with particular histories, identities and emotions. This would mean that behavior is governed, not by the masculinized norms of formal equality and universal justice, but by the feminized principles of equity, complementary, reciprocity, friendship and care" (602).

Relational leadership is uniquely applicable to Honduran women's involvement in community development, because it would transform the traditionally marginalized status of women. Instead of viewing women as objects, they would be seen as unique individuals. Through my research, I have found that women crave relationship and want to be asked to participate.

Throughout this chapter, I have looked into several different causative factors to women's empowerment and participation in community development. In Honduras, the patriarchal *machismo* culture devalues women, contributing to their beliefs about themselves and their relationships with men and authority. While the *machismo* culture is deeply rooted, it may have a connection with the interpretations and misusage of several scriptural references. Since Honduras is a highly spiritual nation with a large majority of citizens professing the Christian faith, coming alongside locals and leaders for a common understanding and interpretation of scripture will be an important consideration in the empowerment of women. For effective development to happen, locals need to be involved in the process. As I mentioned, getting women to participate in development initiatives will not only benefit the community as a whole, but can contribute to a woman's self-esteem, relational health, and understanding of leadership.

Chapter 3

In the coming chapter, I will discuss the ways in which women perceive themselves in relation to their community, how men and boys perceive women in relation to community, and how these perceptions can be utilized to create change and empower women. I will explore different initiatives that have been tested and suggested by development agencies, as well as the significant role education has on the empowerment and participation of women in development.

3.1 Women's Self-perception in Relation to Community

Women at The Leadership Center have shared some of their frustrations with me regarding their involvement in development. Two frustrations shared are a lack of opportunity for women and the mistreatment or mistrust they receive from men, namely authority figures, when they do try to participate. I was curious to understand more about these dynamics and their root causes, so I inquired about the individual experiences of some students at TLC. One student shared of an experience testifying in court, a requirement for witnessing a crime. Her lawyer regularly sexually harassed her, and the defendant and his family threatened to kill her and her family if she spoke the truth. To protect herself and the lives of her family members, she had to leave the country for an extended period of time. Several other students shared differing experiences of being told they could not participate in the *patronato* – or board of directors, in their community because they were too young, or because they were women. In most spheres of their lives, these young women face challenges in local community governance, simply because of their gender. TLC is a university for women from poor families throughout Honduras whose mission is to train and equip ethical leaders throughout the country. One would assume these are the women who are unafraid to get involved in community affairs because they understand the importance of women's engagement and breaking the status quo. Where does this gender brokenness came from and how deeply rooted are the systemic injustices? If the women in the school can honestly describe the barriers, and believe they lack of opportunity, then do they believe that the mission of TLC is applicable to their own futures?

The definition of women's, as well as men's, gender roles are subject to how culture and society choose to place their norms, beliefs, and customs. Mosedale writes, "People are empowered, or disempowered, relative to others or, importantly, relative to themselves at a

previous time" (Mosedale, 244). This varies across culture and location as well as socio-economic class and education level. With these differences in the definition of roles for men and women over time and space, we must take account of the context when working toward empowerment. In order to get a better understanding of women's perspectives in relation to gender relations and empowerment or disempowerment, I decided to get a broader picture by inquiring of women in rural communities in which several of my students live. I spoke with more than fifty women individually or in small groups from several communities in and around the San Jose de Comayagua area of central Honduras[4]. I was able to spend four weeks and five long weekends in the area and got to know and observe the dynamics of individuals, families and the community.

Aside from observations and informal interviews, I conducted several semi-structured group and individual formal interviews to gain a better understanding of the perspective of women about how they perceive themselves (and other women) in relation to their community. One question I asked was, *what do you think are the reasons Honduran women do not commonly hold positions of leadership within their community or country?* The common responses: fear, shame, and not being accustomed to seeing women leaders.

In her book, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead,* author Brene Brown defines shame as, "The fear of disconnection – it's the fear that something we've done or failed to do, an ideal that we've not lived up to, or a goal that we've not accomplished makes us unworthy of connection" (68). In other words, Brown uses fear and shame synonymously, but ultimately concludes that it leaves people in isolation. While Brown's study was conducted in the North America, I believe it is relevant to

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[4] Communities include: Los Mescales, Santa Rosita II, El Chaparral Abajo, El Chaparral Arriba, La Enramada, and the town of San Jose de Comayagua.

neighboring Latin American nations and to the women in my study. For the first four years of her research, she primarily studies women. In total, she has worked for thirteen years studying shame and has come to the conclusions that shame can be directly correlated with violence, and in order for shame to grow, it requires secrecy, silence, and judgement (Brown, TED). From the interviews of the women in my study, the ingredients of shame are present in their lives and society at large. She explains simply that, "Shame becomes fear. Fear leads to risk aversion. Risk aversion kills innovation" (66). It makes sense then, why the core responses of women to this question of involvement were fear and shame, and one can plainly see the connection of these ideas to their own participation and involvement in the community. Women are not isolated though, and in order to understand how to garner their participation and involvement in development, I am going to discuss including men and boys in the empowerment of women.

3.2 Including Men and Boys in Women's Empowerment

Over the last thirty years, research has been done on the differing roles of men and women in community development work. Such studies I researched that address the issue include: "Working with Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women and Girls," (USAID) "Latino politics: Gender, participation, and leadership" (Montoya et. al.), and "Doing gender and development: understanding empowerment and local gender relations" (Sharp, et. al) Through the process of empowering women, we must also find ways to encourage men to change their own attitudes and views toward women. After all, the cultural and social practices that teach women about their place in the home and community are the same ones from which men have learned their own habits and views toward women. Through evidence noted in the research on Gender and Development (GAD), I have come to the conclusion that women and girls should be

included in every facet of development. The process needs to include coming alongside men in a collaborative learning process. Men and women must learn together in order to develop a new view of gender. According to Myers, "The current discussions on gender and development are focused on how to help women and men understand their current power relationships, both as the one having power and the one who feels disempowered, and then begin to build a new framework for life and living that begins to overcome oppression and marginalization within gendered relationships" (276).

In order to achieve gender equality, we need to identify and openly discuss gender gaps and provide appropriate gender equity. Equality and equity are often used interchangeably, but they have differing meanings. In this discussion, equality is the state of being equal, a set point, and equity is the quality of being fair and equal, or the process of making things so. When it comes to gender equity, are practitioners asking the right questions about gender relations and involvement? Are they working with the same definition of gender equity? If not, will this hinder progress?

Erin Murphy-Graham, author of the book *Opening Minds, Improving Lives: Education and Women's Empowerment in Honduras,* explains how poverty is a major contributing factor to gender gaps, and like education, needs to be addressed at its root. Several factors of poverty affect the disparities between men and women – leaving women statistically lagging behind men (Murphy-Graham, 11). These include: lack of assets (home, land), time poverty (women provide significant unpaid work to families and communities, and thus do not have time for paid work), restrictions to the labor market participation, legal and policy issues, child and early marriages, or forced marriages, gender based violence, and violence against women. When women are actively involved in household economics as well as economic activities outside the home, the

relationships between men and women change considerably (11). In many instances, this threatens men and their feelings of power and authority over women and the home, often resulting in violence.

If women and girls are at a higher risk of violence when they are actively involved in the economy, then how can men and boys be brought into the picture to make economic growth a positive experience? One important element of including men and boys in the process of empowering women is reduced violence. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) conducted research through group-based intervention programs. Their findings suggest that when men participate in all men's educational community groups about women's empowerment, coupled with family group participation (husbands and wives together) in other groups, violence decreased in the home, there was a greater involvement of men sharing household and childcare duties, and more husbands soliciting their wives opinions for decisions (though keeping the ultimate decision making authority) (Alemu, 20). Another important element in including men in the educational process of women's empowerment is providing mentorship and accountability for men through male role-models. While it is important for men and boys to be educated on the process of women's empowerment, it can also be seen that the education of women be addressed as well for empowerment.

3.3 Women's Education

Investing in women's education has become a top priority in international development because of the benefits associated with women's empowerment. The United Nations 2030 sustainable development agenda, known as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) includes educational access for all. The fourth goal, which is to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality

education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" includes that, "By 2030, [to]

eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and

vocational training" ("Sustainable Development Goals"). However, the fact that women's

education is a prominent discussion topic by governments and human rights and development

activists, is evidence that women still lag behind men in many countries of the world. In

Honduras, these gaps are most significant in secondary and post-secondary education. Murphy-

Graham explores these reasons and her evidence suggests that women's education is associated

with:

> Higher wages, faster economic growth, more productive farming, smaller families, lower
>
> infant mortality, increased child immunization, increased education for children, lower
>
> rates of HIV contraction, delayed sexual activity, decreased risky sexual behavior,
>
> reduced domestic violence, decreased female genital cutting, and improved democracy
>
> and political participation (11).

In this section, I will explore ways in which education can empower women, not just through

rote memorization of literacy and numeracy, but as a means of expanding her mind and

imagination, understanding her place in the economy and in democracy, and recognizing her

capabilities and the possibilities available to her.

Education comprises a combination of several components essential to empowerment that

when combined are effective. These components include increased knowledge, self-confidence,

and awareness of gender inequality. It is the combination of these three elements that will

encourage and allow women to have a sense of the personal dignity, worth, and value in working

for change. Awareness of gender inequality is a necessary component to women's education

because it presents opportunities otherwise unavailable to women such as leadership, community

involvement, and employment. In addition to these elements, literacy is another component that expands a woman's ability and opportunity to meet and collaborate with other women, creating a broadened social circle and network. Literacy, in relation to academic and hands-on training, teaches people to read and write in their own language. In the article, "Women's Education: A Global Challenge," Martha C. Nussbaum declares, "Literacy (and education in general) is very much connected to women's ability to form social relationships on a basis of equality with others and to achieve the important social good of self-respect" (335). For a school or institution to genuinely empower women, it must challenge social and gender norms, rather than reinforce them, because the purpose of empowerment is to challenge these structures and trigger a transformation.

Poverty remains a contributing factor to the low education of women and girls, even if it is not culturally taboo. Honduras is the second poorest nation in Central America, and poor families often cannot afford to send daughters to school. Education comes at a price past elementary school, and educating a boy typically has a higher financial return through future employment. Girls are more likely to be kept at home to contribute to responsibilities there. Consequently, women's education is not the only solution to international development, but it is a contributing factor. The poverty factor needs to be addressed in order to adequately address the issue of women and girl's education. Nussbaum argues that, "Action aimed at raising the education level of women and girls has, in turn, several distinct elements. Both nations and states within nations must get involved, and rich nations must support the efforts of poorer nations" (345). Education is a process that involves the participation of governments and institutions to bring women and girls into the development process, thus encouraging them to become empowered and actively contributing to development on different levels.

In order to effectively educate women and transform their ways of thinking and perceiving the world, institutions must do more than merely transmit information and knowledge. They must also utilize the concepts of social action by encouraging students to participate in the learning process, and to challenge social and cultural norms. Murphy-Graham contends that, "to achieve empowerment through education, several concepts must be introduced to students. These include a curriculum that challenges current sexual stereotypes and provides students with alternative visions of society unburdened with gender inequality" (33).

Chapter 4

In the next chapter of this thesis, I will look into two educational institutions in Honduras, Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial and The Leadership Center. Both of which serve women through unique educational approaches supporting the ideals that Murphy-Graham highlights. These approaches include academic curricula, mentorship, and the practice of social action. The purpose of exploring these institutions is to review two models that have been successful in including women in the development process through education, which I later argue should be modeled by other educational initiatives throughout the country.

4.1 Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial-Case Study

Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (Tutorial Learning System or SAT) is an educational learning program in Latin America and Africa, which operates under the umbrella non-profit, Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias (FUNDEAC), a Columbian organization. SAT is a secondary educational program targeted toward youth and adults in rural and marginalized communities in developing nations. Murphy-Graham defines the program goal

of SAT as: "To help students develop capabilities that enable them to take charge of their own intellectual and spiritual growth and at the same time to contribute to the building of better communities and the transformation of society" (4). The SAT program typically takes six years, and graduates receive a secondary education diploma. In Honduras, the completion of a secondary diploma broadens the potential job opportunities for both men and women.

SAT's conceptual framework is inspired by the Baha'i religious principles of oneness of humanity, justice, gender equality, knowledge, and social change. Additionally, the program involves five components including textbooks, tutors, the study group, the communities, and the transformation of society, which when combined, make up the uniqueness of the program's design. Over the last thirty years, FUNDEAC has worked to formalize and produce its own exclusive set of eighty textbooks that make up the general curriculum of the program. SAT is not designed around a typical academic curriculum, but rather focuses on building students "skills and abilities, attitudes, habits, and to provide concise bits of information" (42). With these concepts in mind, the curriculum creators of FUNDEAC divided the concepts, skills, and abilities into the basic categories of mathematics, sciences, language, technology, and service to the community, in order to complete the program texts.

The tutor component of SAT is similar to that of a teacher. However, SAT chooses to use the word "tutor" instead, to connote the idea of guiding a group of students through the learning process, rather than simply giving knowledge from the front, as the word "teacher" implies. Tutors are expected to come alongside students and help them learn and encouraged to be a leader rather than a classroom dictator. "The program attempts to hire and train tutors with the same social and cultural background as the students" (44). The SAT program works with group or class sizes of fifteen to twenty-five. The program is offered to youth and adults who have

completed primary school (through sixth grade). Each group arranges class times and hours with each other and with the tutor, recognizing that most students will have family or work related activities to maintain and attend to. Though typically each group meets between twenty and twenty-five hours a week.

The community component of the program is meant to link classroom learning with what is happening in the community. Students are taught through interactive activities and service to describe, understand, and perceive the community around them. In turn, the community often supports students and the program in a variety of ways, such as donating land or technology to the school for agricultural learning and development of students. SAT works with a variety of partner institutions to help with funding and operational costs, tutor training and salaries, program evaluations, student evaluations, and program promotion. For example, in Honduras, the Ministry of Education, through the institution Association Bayan, supports SAT by providing the teacher's salaries, which is a large recurring cost to the program.

Part of Murphy-Grahams research included conducting extensive studies and interviews with groups of women who had graduated from SAT. In her research, she found that some women went on to study in universities, some got jobs or used their knowledge to expand family agriculture, and others did not do anything different than they had been doing before. Yet all agreed that their lives and minds had been changed as a result of their experience at SAT. In Murphy-Graham's interviews, there are obvious commonalities among the women in how they describe their experiences in SAT and the broadening of their minds. For example, twenty-six-year-old Juanita completed six years of SAT and subsequently opened a *comedor* (small restaurant) with her husband upon graduation. Juanita spoke with Murphy-Graham about how she sees the world differently: "The SAT program has helped me with everything, you know,

because it has opened my mind. Because before I didn't think about anything. I looked at the world as if [it was] nothing. But now after SAT my mind is different" (83). One of the SAT tutors also mentioned a changed mindset as an example of how women have changed from the program: "SAT has made them see the world differently because they have studied that they have potential, that they can continue to grow, and that they can continue to learn" (83). While the term" schooling" generally equates to a growth in knowledge, not all schools also seek to develop students to see themselves differently. The work of international development, should aim to raise questions in order to understand the type of education that institutions are offering women, and to include critical and analytical self-reflection, allowing space for personal change and growth.

4.2 The Leadership Center

The Leadership Center (TLC), is a university level program for women, which operates under the NGO, Leadership Mission International (LMI). It is unique in that it is a single-gender institution. The target population of TLC is young women from poor families throughout Honduras who otherwise would not have an opportunity to continue studying. It is a post-secondary institution, and all students must have a *bachillerato* from *collegio,* or what would be considered a high school diploma in the United States. TLC exists to train and develop a new generation of ethical leaders through rigorous academics and leadership projects and opportunities so that graduates can return to their families and communities to be catalysts of change in the fight against poverty and corruption.

While some development practitioners question the effectiveness of single-gender educational institutions, I agree with Nussbaum that,

Many development thinkers are skeptical about encouraging the segregation of women. I myself believe that, in an era of gross inequalities, single-sex institutions perform a very valuable function, helping women to achieve confidence and to overcome collective action problems that exist in their home settings. I also applaud the choice of the liberal arts format, which will promote an education focused on the needs of citizenship and the whole course of life rather than simply on narrow pre-professional learning. This format, too, permits explicit study of the history and problems of women and a focus on their experience in developing countries (339).

I made the connection of Nussbaum's opinion to TLC because the organization has developed a training format with good potential for success.

TLC is a university that focuses on educating the whole person, recognizing that Honduran citizens must ultimately make the sustainable changes within the country, rather than international staff or volunteers. They believe in enabling the individual to recognize and develop their own leadership strengths and abilities, giving them the space and freedom to make decisions, and to learn and grow from mistakes. While students are only in class for twenty hours per week, they live and work on TLC's campus, developing their skills in organic farming and gardening, and leading student groups through topics such as politics, business, or women's issues. Students at TLC develop more than just knowledge and skills however, they expand their intellectual horizons and learn to recognize their self-worth. Nely Vasquez, a first-year student, said that, "Being at TLC I have learned to socialize with people, to be less shy, now I am more involved in different groups. I feel motivated to participate in activities in my community and everywhere I am" (Vasquez). Two second year students, who will be graduating at the end of a six-month intensive business program in September 2016, and who co-lead the group *Mujeres*

con Proposito (Women with Purpose), a group helping women to recognize their own strengths and worth, shared similar sentiments. Belkis said, "When I was at home, I was not accustomed to work. Being at TLC has helped me to grow personally and professionally; I have learned many things since I got to TLC" (Espino), and Rosa declared, "Before TLC, I just wanted to have possessions for myself. Now my life has changed in many areas. I want to help others, and I want to be better every day" (Hernandez).

Another component of TLC's training is the micro-lending program for small business start-ups. TLC currently operates as a two-year program, though upon completion of the second year, students have the option to apply for a six-month business intensive. If students have expressed and demonstrated business interest and aptitude, coupled with ethical decisions in leadership during their first two years, they are accepted into the program. During these six-months, in addition to structured courses in management, finances, accounting, economics, business law and ethics, students do community market analyses and create a business plan for a small business they agree to start. With the help of business professionals from the United States and Honduras, the students prepare and present the plans to the Executive Director and Board of Directors of LMI. If the board agrees to fund the business, the students are given the start-up capital to begin. One graduate, Karla Mendoza, who is in the process of beginning a chicken farm and organic egg business, said about her experiences at TLC: "Before TLC I did not have goals for my life, but when I got to TLC I started to realize the importance of having goals. At TLC, I learned to communicate" (Mendoza). Now, Karla has proven herself by accepting a loan from TLC to begin the operations of her farm.

TLC is an example of an institution that offers young Honduran women the space for critical thinking and deep, self-reflection. It is a safe environment for them to explore cultural

gender issues, and to practice the leadership skills they plan to bring back to their communities. In relation to what Myers says about the current discussions on gender and development, TLC is beginning to build a new framework for the life of the students, so that they are able to overcome oppression and marginalization in their lives.

4.3 Recommendations for Honduran Communities and Development Practitioners

In the previous sections of the thesis, I have explored several factors which contribute to a Honduran woman's willingness or ability to participate in community leadership, events, or development projects. We have a better understanding of these contributing factors, but what can we do with the information and how can we go about changing the status quo of women in rural Honduras? As development practitioners, it is necessary that we understand the factors contributing to women's current place in society so that we know what to do with the information and can move forward appropriately. In the following closing sections of the thesis, I offer several suggestions for community development practitioners as well as the rural communities as a whole, in hopes of empowering women and to step into their fullest God-given potential.

4.3.1 Understand and Teach Scripture from an Equality Perspective

It is important for those working in development, whether practitioners or locals, to enter and live in a community from a base of humility. Missionaries or Christian international NGOs entering into a foreign culture must not impose their own agenda, but must seek to understand the local culture before beginning dialogue. The lenses through which a specific culture interprets the Bible, specifically scriptural references related to gender roles, are deeply rooted.

Foreign missionaries and Christian NGOs need a culturally informed and historical understanding of scripture. Their goal should be to humbly walk alongside locals in understanding the local scriptural interpretations and understandings.

As a result of sin entering the creation, God placed a curse on humankind that we would work by the sweat of our brow to obtain the resources for sustenance. As humanity has grown further and further from God, we have settled more comfortably into our sin. Man is commissioned by God to protect and serve, but instead, has contributed to the subjugation of women to a point where women are still, worldwide, more likely to be more illiterate, malnourished, poor, or prostituted in relation to men. However, Jesus came with a love for all, one that transcends gender. Looking again at Galatians 3:28, the apostle Paul declares, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (NIV). And Jesus fulfilled this love with unconditional and equal love for both women and men in teaching, healing, and ministry.

As practitioners, Galatians 3:28 is a starting place for understanding our place in missions and cross-cultural work. We need to work alongside locals to come to a mutual understanding and interpretation of scripture. For there is neither "Jew nor Greek," Americans nor Hondurans. The mission should instead be to help local pastors and families, both male and female, to read and understand scripture from an equality perspective, and the love of Christ as humanity's partner. The communities we where work have rich, cultural backgrounds, and their knowledge is valuable. God speaks to all people across culture, time, and space, and we need to encourage understanding and acknowledge how God has directed their biblical understanding.

4.3.2 Foster Participation and Social Capital

I have discussed how relationships and social capital are imperative elements to women's participation. In the Honduran culture where trust is hard to cultivate, and many people do not have deep, trusting relationships with others, building social capital through authentic relationships may come as a challenge. However, through my research, I have discovered that women crave relationships, and personal barriers aside, want to be asked to participate.

My suggestion for community members and development practitioners is to foster the building of authentic relationships and social capital by engaging and including women in the development conversation. We should help women to form groups that allow them to share their thoughts and opinions and ask questions. The community groups should be used to connect women to one another, and as a safe place for women and men to openly communicate without social, emotional, or cultural barriers. Additionally, the women in this study expressed desires to learn new skills such as baking, jewelry making, or music. Community groups are a way for women to gather in pursuit of a common interest, make new friends, and expand their capacities. Most women I interviewed in the communities took pride in their cooking abilities, but desired an outlet to use this strength in contribution to something beyond their homes. One woman, for example, took it upon herself to gather a group of women to cook meals for large community or church events. This group operates both as a way to make extra money and to serve their community. They have set an example of strong women contributing to the greater good of the community.

Though the women expressed a desire to contribute their talents to the community, the concept of women being time poor surfaced multiple times in my study. Time poor is descriptive of women who wake up early to cook breakfast, prepare the children for school, cook lunch, do the laundry, clean the house, and cook dinner. By the time they are through with their daily

responsibilities, it is time to sleep and prepare to do it over again. Unfortunately, at this point, there is no remaining time nor energy for women to participate in either community events and leadership or income-generating work outside the home. One way in which social capital can help alleviate this problem is by providing women with a network of friends who can contribute, help, or share responsibilities. For example, one woman might help free up another's time by helping with laundry. Another example of women helping one another is tortillarillas, small tortilla making shops, which not only contribute to building the local economy, but allow women to purchase their family's tortillas from a neighbor instead of spending hours per day making their own. Building relationships and social capital is necessary for women to find the space to participate in community development. Future research might explore contextual implications of forming groups in rural Honduran communities, and examine the long-term impacts of these groups on a woman's level of participation and social fulfillment. Further research might also prepare workshops and programs that educate males on female inclusion, as well as partner boys and men together with other males for relational accountability.

4.3.3 Education

Earlier I discussed two educational programs in Honduras, Sistema Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT) and The Leadership Center (TLC), which are both working to provide women opportunities and a better future through academics and leadership development. Community leaders, the Ministry of Education, and educational NGOs should look at these two institutions as a model for expanding the learning opportunities of women in Honduras.

Further research in the area of education should include ways to implement similar models in other parts of the country, and how to expand the opportunity for women to be able

study. While SAT currently operates an established program that includes men and youth in the educational process, TLC is much younger and currently only serving women. Additional research might explore the idea of a program such as a TLC program geared toward men. Such a program would teach men about ethical leadership and gender awareness so that male graduates will live, work, and serve collaboratively and ethically among women. It is recommended that community leaders and the government look to broaden the curriculum of community primary and secondary schools to include more hands-on leadership development, community development participation, and gender awareness. Education is a powerful tool in international development and can be a broader focus than it is now to provide opportunities for expanding learning beyond traditional academics.

Chapter 5

Culminating Project

5.1 VOZ 2015 Women's Conference

In reviewing all the research associated with women's empowerment in relation to community development, including the involvement of men and boys, education, social capital, participation, and leadership, I decided to create a practical project to incorporate these elements. It was important for me to include all the students at The Leadership Center, along with the women I had interviewed for my research. It was through a culmination of events and conversations with these women that led me to create VOZ 2015 Honduran Women's Conference.

After spending significant amounts of my time talking to Honduran women about their thoughts on leadership and empowerment in relation to their Honduran culture, I found a

recurring theme: women in rural areas are not given an opportunity to be heard or included in what is happening in the world around them. VOZ, which translates in English as *voice,* was the culmination of many hours of conversation, research, planning and preparation. I began the preparation process by forming a small core team that consisted of three students from TLC, and six women from San Jose de Comayagua and neighboring communities. Together, we planned a one-day event to be hosted in the rural community of El Chaparral Abajo.

The event was held on December 5, 2015. We had Elvia Alvarado as one of our guest speakers, along with Fatima Ortiz, a counseling psychologist who works closely with the Honduran government on women's rights issues. Several TLC students also presented through speech presentations, dramas, and music. Topics covered at the event included *machismo,* using your voice to fight for what you believe in, participating to create lasting change, safe sex, the rights associated with domestic violence, violence against women, and abuse. The day culminated with all the women breaking off into small discussion groups led by TLC students, to discuss the issues I have covered in this paper. They discussed questions such as: *What are you passionate about, and how can you use those passions to serve your community? What are you interested in doing or learning more about, and what resources are needed to help you learn? In what ways are you currently involved in development projects, leadership, or social affairs of this community? How can we (TLC students) help you get to a place where you are able or willing to participate in your community?*

While the conference was specifically designed for women, several men accompanied their wives, participated in the small groups, and were even willing to help with event logistics. A key feature in planning the event was that men would not feel threatened by anything that would be discussed or presented. In other words, we did not want men to feel they *couldn't*

attend, to disallow their wives to attend, or for the women to be put in any danger for their participation. We recognized the need for the inclusion of men in the process of women being empowered in relation to community development participation. Because of this, we were happy to have the men involved, in hopes that it would be a catalyst in transforming cultural gender perceptions and norms.

As a result of the culminating small group discussions, women from the local communities of Taulabe and San Jose were able to network with one another, forming groups around a common goal. One group of women wanted to start a community vegetable garden in their community, so they created a plan to design and implement the garden. Another group wanted to start a baking class to learn how to bake and made plans to hire a baking teacher to come teach weekend classes once per month. Students from TLC made pledges with women in their communities to provide accountability for group sustainability, and help through any resources they may be able to offer or attain. Additionally, TLC students who attended the conference, but did not live close to the venue, were inspired to implement a similar conference in their own communities around the country. Women from the Taulabe and San Jose communities were still talking about the event months later when I was able to visit. We hope to be able to continue the event annually or semi-annually.

5.2 Conclusion

I spent more than a year and half living with a group of women in rural Honduras, and took several multi-week vacations traveling to their homes and communities in order to gain a better understanding of their culture, language, and lifestyle. Most importantly though, I spent this time building trusting and authentic relationships with the women. This time together

provoked questions and a deep desire to uncover what I could about the roles of women in Honduran culture. There remains much more to learn about how empowerment can be encouraged and topics to be researched, but my purpose in writing this thesis was to form a better understanding of the factors that contribute to a woman's willingness and ability to participate in community leadership, events, and development in rural Honduras.

It was from a love for the young women to whom I gave my devotion and time that a seed was planted in me. Through research and long conversations, this seed began to grow into a deep desire to see the status quo of women challenged. This research represents my first formal study in the exploration of how biblical exegesis, patriarchy, relational leadership, social capital, and education contribute to the empowerment of Honduran women, I hope this contribution will be a stepping stone for myself and others as we continue to explore the findings of this thesis. While this research was done entirely in Honduras, therefore containing cultural implications, I contend that the basic assumptions can be attributed to many cultures around the world, with an understanding that cultural contexts will affect the research outcomes.

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