Title

Empowerment, mobilization, and transformation: Assessing social psychological processes of feminist social change in rural Nicaragua

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/914372d7

Author

Dutt, Anjali

Publication Date

2016

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

EMPOWERMENT, MOBILIZATION, AND TRANSFORMATION: ASSESSING SOCIAL PSYCHOLOCIAL PROCESSES OF FEMINIST SOCIAL CHANGE IN RURAL NICARAGUA

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

PSYCHOLOGY
With an emphasis in LATIN AMERICAN AND LATINO STUDIES

by

Anjali Dutt

September 2016

The Dissertation of Anjali Dutt is approved:

_____

Dr. Shelly Grabe, Chair

_____

Dr. Phillip Hammack

_____

Dr. Regina Langhout

_____

Dr. Jessica Taft

_____
Tyrus Miller
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Abstract

Empowerment, Mobilization, and Transformation: Exploring Social Psychological

Processes of Feminist Social Change in Rural Nicaragua

Anjali Dutt

This dissertation examined the social psychological processes through which women

in rural Nicaragua resist exclusion and seek to create equitable change in their

communities. Specifically, using mixed methods analyses, I assessed if women's

involvement in a grassroots feminist organization in rural Nicaragua was associated

with individual empowerment and, in turn, women's efforts to transform their

communities with the aim of promoting justice and equality. Data collected and

analyzed for this research were 298 quantitative surveys and 24 qualitative interviews

conducted with two groups of women living in rural Nicaragua. One group of women

(approximately half) were members of a grassroots feminist organization, and the

other group lived in nearby communities where the organization did not offer

programs. Analyses of the quantitative data provided support for two models: one

outlining a psychological process through which involvement in the organization

related to women's increased involvement in reproductive decision-making with their

husbands and higher levels of educational aspiration, and a second that linked

involvement in the organization to women's increased engagement in community

support activities. Findings from the qualitative data provide insight into three

themes: (1) how specific features of the organization impacted women; (2) how

participation in a feminist empowering setting impacted women's sense of identity,

and (3) how involvement in the organization related to women's goals for their communities and ability to create change consistent with these goals. Overall findings from this research are valuable to both social psychological researchers and groups seeking to enhance social justice and uphold feminist values of equity and community well-being.

Introduction

"[Grassroots activism] creates space in civic life for ideas and actions that exist nowhere else, encouraging people to envision how the world can be transformed into something better. It reinvigorates the sense that what ordinary citizens do matters." – Kathleen Blee, 2012, p. 134

"Before men would say, 'I'm the one who has control here of things'…and that was how we lived… Now we know our rights. As women we have the right to decide and to share the control… For me this is about sharing this knowledge [with other women], it's about loving other people, relating to other people, lending a hand … it's the way we move forward."
> – Xochilt Acalt participant, on her involvement in a grassroots feminist organization

In 1979 Anastacio Somoza was overthrown by the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN; Sandinista National Liberation Front), ending a period of dictatorship in Nicaragua that had lasted more than 40 years. Central to the success of the FSLN were the efforts of women, who made up approximately 30% of combat forces, held leadership positions in the movement, and were appointed to senior positions in the established ministries after the FSLN converted to a political party post revolution (Kampwirth, 1996; Molyneux, 1985). Upon gaining political authority the party promised to work towards enhancing justice and equality for all Nicaraguan citizens, and set about enacting a socialist agenda over the next ten years. Nearly 40 years after the revolution, the FSLN again holds the presidency. However, the predominant feminist movement in the country, the *Movimiento Autonomo de Mujeres* (MAM; Women's Autonomous Movement), initially formed by several women who were leaders of the revolution, has long severed ties with the party (Grabe & Dutt, 2015). Despite the promises of the revolution, feminist activists in

Nicaragua were frustrated with the FSLN's refusal to work towards addressing violations of women's rights (Grabe, forthcoming, Jubb, 2014). Within this context, MAM has developed and supported grassroots initiatives to enhance the status and well-being of women by working to transform structures and practices that contribute to women's marginalization.

Complicating grassroots efforts to address violations of women's rights in Nicaragua, however, are the effects of neoliberal globalization that now dominate the global economy. Neoliberalism is characterized as a set of Western driven economic policies that prioritize privatization and deregulation of markets to promote free trade, industrialization, and foreign investment (Fernandes, 2010). In 1990 conservative candidate Violeta Chamorro was elected president of Nicaragua and introduced a number of structural adjustment policies that are consistent with neoliberal priorities. Neoliberal trends continue to spread in the country, in part because adherence to neoliberal logics can be used to maintain existing power structures (Burbach, 2009). Indeed, it has been overwhelmingly demonstrated that neoliberal policies afford groups and individuals with more preexisting power (i.e., ability to exert influence) structural advantages to gain ever more power, while those with less preexisting power become increasingly marginalized (Basu, 2006; Peet, 2003; Wade, 2004).

Outcomes of neoliberal policies that can be observed in Nicaragua are consistent with the impact of these policies on groups and individuals in many countries in the Global South. For example, individuals living in rural communities in the Global South have witnessed an extraction of both resources and people who are

central to supporting community well-being, due to the pressure at national and local levels to promote urban industrialization (Kay, 2008; Loker, 1999). It is also well documented that women have borne an unequal burden of the detriments associated with neoliberalism, evidenced through the increased feminization of poverty and the persistent marginalization of women's voices and rights in political domains (Chant, 2008; Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Naples & Desai, 2002; Kabeer, 2004). There is thus considerable need to identify pathways that aid in transforming power dynamics and increase the ability of marginalized groups to address their concerns in this precarious sociopolitical climate.

Those who bear the harshest consequences in a neoliberal context, however, often are not merely passive or immobilized participants in a stagnantly inequitable system (Grabe, Dutt & Dworkin, 2014; Lugones, 2010; Moghadam, 2000; Naples & Desai, 2002). For example, in response to experienced injustices the world over, networks of grassroots activists have encouraged individuals' efforts to enact social change by developing opportunities to collectively organize, resist, and transform oppressive structures (Grabe, Grose & Dutt, 2015; Naples & Desai, 2002; Sitrin, 2012; Taft, 2010). As exemplified by the members of MAM, women in the Global South have united through the formation of social movements to support women's rights and well-being by employing strategies ranging from lobbying for policy changes at the national level and developing community organizations to support women locally (Alvarez, 2010; Grabe & Dutt, 2015; Kampwirth, 2004; Molyneux, 1985; Naples & Desai, 2002). Through these efforts, movement actors aim to support

the empowerment of groups and individuals who have been disenfranchised by existing social circumstances. Furthermore, by supporting processes of empowerment, movement efforts can disrupt structures that maintain oppression by reallocating social power to those underserved in the current social system (Grabe & Dutt, 2015; Moghadam, 2000; Naples & Desai, 2002).

The purpose of the current dissertation was to explore if and how one organization that was founded through the grassroots efforts of MAM impacts the capacity for women in rural Nicaragua to create equitable change in their homes and communities. In particular, I examined if and how women's involvement in a grassroots feminist organization was associated with facilitating empowering processes for individual women and, in turn, participants' efforts to transform their communities with the aim of promoting justice and equality. Taking into consideration the history and context described above, an overarching goal of this research was to gain deeper understanding of how individuals in marginalized communities can resist, address, and transform the inequitable outcomes associated with neoliberalism. Thus one specific goal was to examine the mechanisms through which participation in the organization directly impacted the well-being of those who engaged, specifically assessing outcomes related to improvements in individuals' capacities to voice their concerns and participate equitably in their homes and communities. Furthermore, researchers in psychology have noted that neoliberal policy trends are associated with decreasing concern for community well-being and growing individualism (Nafstad et al., 2007; 2009). This dissertation thus also aimed

to contribute to research on social change and psychological empowerment in the context of neoliberalism by examining specifically if, why, and how engagement in a feminist organization was associated with strengthening participants' interest in and efforts to create transformative change towards greater equity in their own communities.

In the following sections I review literatures on psychological processes associated with social change that contribute to understanding how involvement in a feminist organization might impact women's experiences and capacity to engage in their homes and communities. In the first section I discuss how research stemming from empowerment theory and liberation psychology shed light on some of the necessary components for creating social change. Next, I discuss insights gained from research conducted on empowering settings and specifically explore how relationships and perceptions fostered within these spaces may engender more comprehensive and transformative abilities to create change. This section includes rational for two models of empowerment, potentially catalyzed by involvement in an empowering setting: one describing a process that leads to improvements in individual women's status and well-being, and another describing a process that equips women with tools and ability to promote equitable change for women more broadly in their communities. Lastly, I discuss theories stemming from activist identity development and ethics of care literatures that can contribute to understanding values and perspectives that influence women's beliefs regarding how societies should be structured.

Empowerment and Liberation Psychology

Identifying avenues to enhance social equality and well-being has long been a goal of social science researchers. Since the 1980s, substantial theoretical and applied work aimed at transforming social relations and increasing equality has developed within the theoretical paradigm of empowerment (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Rappaport, 1995). Within psychology, empowerment theory has been used to demonstrate the psychosocial processes through which marginalized individuals gain mastery and control over their environment and have greater ability to make decisions that affect their lives (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010; Grabe, 2012; Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 1995). From this perspective, researchers have demonstrated numerous positive outcomes associated with engagement in empowering processes among populations living on six different continents, in domains including education, employment, physical and sexual health, and political participation (Anwar McHenry, 2011; Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000; Dutt, Grabe & Castro, 2015; Dworkin, et al., 2014; Dworski-Riggs & Langhout, 2010; García-Ramírez et al., 2011; Grabe, 2012; 2015; Langhout, Collins & Ellison, 2014; Maton & Brodsky, 2011; Peterson, 2010). Indeed, discussion and ideas regarding how to facilitate the empowerment of marginalized groups has become common within academic, international development, and lay discourses.

It should be noted that empowerment has also become a buzzword within many policy-making circles where the term is employed to suggest that certain policies or interventions will enable marginalized groups to achieve better

opportunities and status (Haase, 2012; Mayoux, 2001). However, ways of defining

the supposed better opportunities may be based upon the beliefs and expectations of

the policy makers or interventionists, and may fail to include the desires and

perspectives of those who serve to be empowered (Cornwall, 2003). Examples of the

misuse and misapplication of empowerment discourses are well documented

(Cattaneo, Calton & Brodsky, 2014). One of the most notable examples is the World

Bank's support for the implementation of structural adjustment policies as

mechanisms to empower individuals in less economically developed regions, when in

practice these policies are associated with exacerbating economic inequality

(Wieringa, 1994). Thus, in response to growing misuse, empowerment theorists have

asserted that "empowerment that does not have sufficient grounding in the values of

the people on whose behalf it is applied is not empowerment at all" (Cattaneo, Calton

& Brodsky, 2014; p. 436).

Attending to the possibilities of misuse and cooptation, theories developed

within the framework of liberation psychology become particularly relevant for

understanding processes of empowerment when the ultimate aim is social

transformation in the service of social justice (Burton & Kagan, 2005; Lykes, 2000;

Moane, 2006; 2010; Montero, 2009). Liberation psychologists assert that a central

component of empowerment processes is the need to de-construct ideologies that

foster injustice (Burton & Kagan, 2005; Grabe & Dutt, 2014; Martín-Baró, 1994;

Montero, 2012). More specifically, through processes of problemitization and de-

ideologizing individuals develop a critical understanding of existing social conditions

and reject dominant ideologies that justify social oppression (Montero, 2007; 2009). Rather than remaining complicit with inequitable policies, structures, and practices, this experience can facilitate a mobilizing process with the aim of seeing both concrete and ideological transformations within societies (Montero, 2009).

Along similar lines, Freire's (1972) concept of *conscientización* refers to a process in which individuals work to create bottom-up social change, and can be used to examine individuals' responses and actions as they learn more about the political situations in their communities. Through a process of *conscientización* individuals develop a critical consciousness surrounding their social and political realities and through multiple iterations, evoke both analysis and action to repeatedly seek more just realities (Burton & Kagan, 2005; Freire, 1972; Martín-Baro, 1994). Researchers have demonstrated across diverse samples how a process of *conscientización* is associated with increasing an awareness and intolerance of injustice and engaging in efforts to see these injustices rectified (Brodsky et al., 2012; Grabe, Dutt, & Dworkin, 2014; Hammack, 2010; Moane, 2011; Montero, 2009). For example, recent investigation among a group of Afghan women mobilized within a revolutionary organization (i.e., the Revolutionary Association of Women in Afghanistan) found that processes involving conscious awareness, intention, and action all contributed to forming a community supportive of women's rights and well-being (Brodsky et al., 2012). In a different context, Moane (2010; 2012) demonstrated how Irish students enrolled in courses on women and social class developed greater ability to identify patterns and sources of oppression in society, gained greater understanding of how

8

structural oppression impacted their own lives, and developed a desire to make changes in their lives to avoid the perpetuation of oppressions. Additionally, Grabe, Dutt and Dworkin (2014) demonstrated that women in Nicaragua and Tanzania participated in processes through which individual resistance was channeled into collective mobilization and attempts to create social change via creating opportunities for women to own land. Collectively, these findings suggest that processes of *conscientización* can play an integral role in facilitating individuals' awareness and actions related to creating justice-oriented social change in their own lives and more broadly in their communities.

Although most research on processes of *conscientización* focuses on the intellectual, interpretive, and action-oriented responses of individuals, the catalyzing and continuing efforts to create change often occur in collective spaces and involve both relational antecedents and outcomes. Additionally, the ability to create meaningful change typically involves developing skills to effectively actualize the desired changes. Therefore, increased understanding of the relationships and skills that form and support commitment to change, along with the ideological shifts that occur, may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how progressive social change is enacted within communities. Consequently, the next section will explore the role of empowering settings in equipping individuals with relationships and tools that enhance participants' capacities to create social change.

Empowering Settings and Mechanisms to Promote Change

9

Psychologists studying processes that facilitate sustainable, justice-oriented social change note the importance of supporting pathways for both individual and structural change (Dutt & Grabe, 2014; Grabe, 2010; Maton, 2008; Rappaport, 1987). Community psychologists, in particular, have noted the role of empowering settings in catalyzing change towards both individual and societal ends (Case & Hunter, 2012; Maton, 2008; Rappaport, 1995). Empowering settings are organized spaces developed with the intention of increasing the ability of marginalized individuals and groups to gain greater control over their lives, resources, and their environment (Maton & Salem, 1995). In order to be considered an empowering setting, the space must promote both empowering processes and outcomes for those who participate (Maton, 2008; Mowbray et al., 2006; Neal, 2014). In other words, the setting must both support the active and sustained involvement of individuals as they gain awareness over time, and provide individuals with greater control, influence, and capacity to participate in various domains of social life (Maton, 2008; Neal, 2014). Through the provision of a support system, space, and a culture that promotes societal equality, empowering settings can support individuals in believing that more equitable realities are possible and something they are capable of working towards (Freire, 1972; Maton & Salem, 1995; Watts et al., 2003). Additionally, by equipping individuals with the efficacy, tools, and knowledge to identify and transform the root sources of inequity within communities, these settings can play a key role in facilitating broader social change (Freire, 1972; Maton, 2008).

Though a relatively young area of study, previous research assessing the role of empowering settings in individuals' lives has demonstrated that involvement in the settings can positively influence participants' lives in a number of domains (Maton, 2008). Specifically, findings on the impact of participating in empowering settings range from demonstrating that involvement is associated with enhancing self-efficacy among individuals diagnosed with severe mental illness, to supporting individuals' beliefs that they are capable of overcoming addiction, and enhancing marginalized communities sense of agency in defining their collective identity (Gone, 2011; Kurtz & Fisher, 2003; Salem, 2011). When pairing these findings with insights gained from liberation psychology it is reasonable to suggest that involvement in empowering settings could facilitate a process of *conscientización* by enhancing the ability of those involved to identify and create change in areas previously deemed too difficult, or not possible at all. Furthermore, when focused upon increasing the realization of women's rights within communities of marginalized women, involvement in an empowering setting may be associated with empowering processes and outcomes in public and private domains, for both individuals and communities.

Individual empowerment process for women

According to Maton & Salem (1995) a key feature of empowering settings is that they have an organizational culture that inspires growth and fosters both individual and collective strength. At an individual level, involvement in an empowering setting that is centered upon enhancing the status and well-being of women will likely be associated with identifying and transforming practices and

barriers that subordinate women. Numerous scholars have demonstrated that

normalized ideologies of male dominance and female submission are evident in most

cultures worldwide and create inequitable relationships between women and men

(Caldwell, Swan & Woddbrown, 2012; Dutt & Grabe, in preparation; Grabe, 2010;

Korabik, McElwain & Chappell, 2008; Yllo & Strauss, 1984). For example, women

are relegated more frequently to the unpaid domestic sphere, often resulting in

financial dependence on male partners and a higher susceptibility to intimate partner

violence (Yllo & Straus, 1990). Fostering growth and individual strength among

marginalized women therefore may involve expanding perceptions around the sense

of self-worth and capabilities of women.

Within a feminist empowering setting, cooperative discussions that are

centered upon asserting and affirming that women and men have equal value and the

same rights may play an important role in transforming women's self-perception.

Previous research with women demonstrates links between identifying as a member

of a socially devalued group and lower levels of self-esteem (Katz, Joiner & Kwon,

2002). However, being critically aware of, and consciously rejecting discourses and

practices that subordinate women is correlated with reporting higher levels of self-

esteem (Smith, 1999). Thus, being involved in an organization with a culture

committed to creating opportunities for women's equal participation in societies may

equip members with an awareness to critique and reconstruct community values

around the worth and abilities of women, thereby increasing women's self-esteem.

Somewhat similarly, participating in an environment that upholds and showcases the capabilities of women can lead members to feel that they have greater control over their lives and ability to impact their surroundings. In previous research, Moane (2010) found that upon completing classes on social constructions of gender and sexuality, the Irish women who participated reported greater desire and willingness to work towards creating change in their own lives and communities to affirm the equal value of women. Additionally, surveys conducted with Israeli women reveal links between women's comfort breaking expectations of their gender (e.g., by being more assertive, decisive, or competitive) and feeling less of a sense of powerlessness in their lives (Moore, 2007). Involvement in a feminist empowering setting could therefore allow women to feel more comfortable expressing a broader range of individual attributes, thereby decreasing feelings of powerlessness. Certainly, comprehensive transformation in the manner in which women are treated requires shifts in men's perceptions of gender and related actions as well. Nonetheless an organizational culture that increases women's sense of self-esteem and decreases participants' sense of powerlessness may facilitate positive improvements in individual women's well-being.

Individual empowerment outcomes

One way that shifts in self-esteem and sense of powerlessness may impact women's well-being is in women's ability to negotiate needs and desires in their relationships with their husbands. It has been demonstrated that women's limited ability to exercise agency over their lives is related to the suppression of sexual rights,

including the inability to refuse unwanted sex or assert the desire to use birth control and protection (Sanchez, Crocker, & Boike, 2005; Sternberg, 2000). If women do not feel they have the right to voice their opinions, nor a sense of control over their environment, it may be difficult to engage in reproductive decision-making with their male partners. A growing area of inquiry has produced promising results suggesting that interventions that focus on supporting women's sense of control over their lives relates to a decrease in women's experiences of intimate partner violence and likelihood of having unprotected sex (Dworkin, Beckford & Ehrhardt, 2007; Pronyk, et al., 2006). Thus, participating in an organization that supports women's ability to assert their own needs and desires may help women to challenge gender norms and, in turn, increase women's role in reproductive decision-making.

Involvement in a feminist empowering setting may also increase women's abilities to participate in the public sphere. Neoliberal policies often effectively exclude the participation of marginalized community members from the public sphere by making it more difficult for oppressed groups to gain access to education and training which can be considered either implicit or explicit requirements for greater societal participation (Brine, 2006; Lauder, Brown, Dillabough & Halsey, 2006). Thus one way to support women's ability to influence societies is to increase their ability to participate in educational opportunities. An increased sense of self-esteem, as well as a decreased sense of powerlessness, may support women's beliefs that they are capable of enhancing their education and furthering their career prospects. It should be noted that these psychological experiences likely are not sufficient to

address the numerous structural barriers that can prohibit women's involvement in formal education and careers outside the home (e.g., need for childcare and transportation; ability to pay for education and career training; Lauder et al., 2006). However, involvement in an empowering setting may provide space for women to strategize ways to address some of these barriers, supporting women's ability to aspire to complete higher levels of education or gain training for more lucrative occupations. Although, increased aspiration does not necessarily reflect actual shifts in the ability for women to participate in educational opportunities, it can demonstrate the 'seeds of resistance' that are necessary to transform systems of inequity, particularly when existing barriers stifle more expansive forms of empowerment (Brodsky et al., 2011; Grabe, Dutt & Dworkin, 2014). Ultimately, with higher levels of educational aspiration women may be better situated to gain skills and training that support their ability to assert their desires for their community and ensure their needs are met.

Taken together, the components described above suggest a pathway through which involvement in a feminist empowering setting may facilitate empowering processes and outcomes for individual women (see Figure 1). The two outcomes discussed thus far, reproductive decision-making and educational aspiration, point to potential transformation in individual women's experiences that are of growing interest to communities, organizations, and policy makers seeking to improve women's well-being. Moreover, they point to possible changes that can arise from

participating in an empowering setting that can contribute to creating more equitable experiences for individual women, in both private and public domains.

In order to understand pathways towards more comprehensive shifts away from exclusive power dynamics, it is also important to explore ways in which involvement in an empowering setting can support women's involvement in avenues to create desired changes in their communities, in addition to their personal lives. In other words, transforming oppressive systems of power requires that individuals whose voices and concerns have been excluded from public decision-making have the opportunity to engage in practices to have their concerns and values influence their communities. Additionally, a more thorough shift towards creating an empowering context for women will support practices that improve the experiences of women broadly, rather than just the women who participate in the organization. In one of the only psychological studies exploring the impact of neoliberal policies on individual and community values, Nafstad and colleagues (2007; 2009) mapped a shift in language in two countries after the implantation of neoliberal policies, noting a significant decrease in words that reflected connectivity and concern for others, and an increase in words that reflected individualism. Evidence of resistance to neoliberalism therefore should also involve evidence that collective well-being and supporting others who experience marginalization is a priority. Consequently, the next section will explore how engagement in an empowering setting may support participants' capacities to transform their communities with the intent of creating a more broadly equitable environment for women.

Figure 1. Hypothesized model linking participation in a feminist empowering setting

to an individual empowerment process and outcomes.
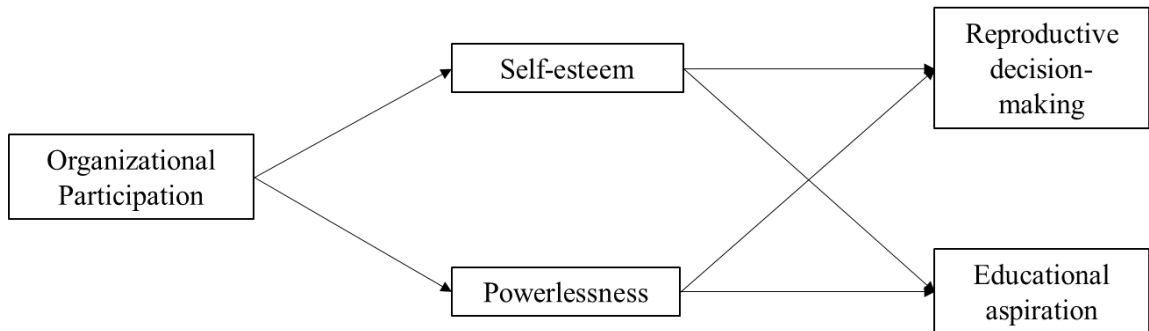
Empowered community support

In addition to inspiring strength and growth, empowering community settings also have an organizational structure that allows for members' active participation and a peer-based support system that provides a sense of community to participants (Maton & Salem, 1995). These features can play a critical role in supporting the sociopolitical development of participants (Watts, Williams & Jagers, 2003). According to the theory of sociopolitical development, developing the capacity to create social change involves acquiring knowledge, analytical skills, and emotional capacities to interpret and resist oppression (Moane, 2010; Watts, Griffith & Abdul-Adil, 1999; Watts, Williams & Jagers, 2003). Empowering settings are structured to enable the active participation of members, providing opportunities for participants to identify and test out ways of effectively organizing, influencing, and supporting other people (Maton, 2008). Consequently, involvement in an empowering setting may facilitate a sociopolitical development process for the individuals involved that ultimately enables women to create broader change in their communities.

The ultimate outcome of a sociopolitical development process is for individuals who have been marginalized or excluded from political spheres to gain greater capacity to exert influence over how communities are structured (Watts, Williams & Jagers, 2003). Supporting the development of individuals' leadership skills is thus an important component of the sociopolitical process. In particular, developing leadership skills can support individuals' ability to express their beliefs and attempt to see their perspectives realized in society (Zimmerman, 1990). Previous

research demonstrates that involvement in participatory community organizations enhanced the development of leadership skills and facilitated efforts to create change among poor, White, rural mothers, and young, African American men (Bond, Belenky & Weinstock, 2000; Watts, Williams & Jagers, 2003). Empowering settings' ability to develop and hone leadership skills may thus support the change-making capabilities of individuals from marginalized communities.

Although leadership skills are a valuable tool for members of marginalized groups to possess, when paired with a sense of connection to others who have similarly experienced marginalization, efforts to seek change may take on new meaning. Being a part of a group where individuals discuss issues that arise in their personal lives and communities may support the development of a sense of community with individuals who can relate and sympathize with one's experience (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). Additionally, the opportunity to develop knowledge of the shared consequences of existing inequalities within one's community may better equip individuals with tools and incentive to work towards change that is collectively transformative. Several scholars have noted the value of having supportive relationships in facilitating a sense of empowerment and desire to create change (Brodsky, 2003; Maton & Brodsky, 2011; Ohmer, 2007; Peterson, Speer & McMillan, 2008; Prilleltensky, 2008). For example, one study found that individuals who were members of a specific church group reported feeling less like "outsiders" in society thus feeling encouraged to participate in events within their community (Maton & Salem, 1995). Additionally, Brodsky (2009) found that Afghan women and

male supporters who were members of a resistance organization experienced a positive psychological sense of community as a result of involvement that contributed to their commitment to work for change. The ability of organizations to provide participants with opportunities to develop supportive relationships may further the transformative potential for those involved both because of the expanded potential to experience personal encouragement, and the increased incentives that may arise from realizing the breadth of shared subordination.

As women gain leadership skills and develop supportive relationships with other women who share similar experiences and perspectives, women may also experience ideological shifts in their perceptions regarding women's worth and capabilities. As previously discussed, liberation psychologists have theorized and demonstrated that justice-oriented empowerment processes involve de-constructing ideologies that foster injustice and developing an ideological stance that reflects an awareness of inequity and commitment to work for change (Burton & Kagan, 2005; Freire, 1972; Grabe & Dutt, 2015; Martín-Baró, 1994; Montero, 2012). Thus, a central component of empowering settings frequently involves transforming participants' ideological beliefs about the value and capabilities of marginalized groups and individuals (Maton & Hrabowski, 2004; Mowbray et al., 2006; Weinstein, 2002). This feature has been documented in research assessing the outcomes of participating in a variety of empowering settings including efforts to reject imposed pathologizing discourses regarding mental health and identity within a Native American community group, and in organizations that assert the capabilities of adults

diagnosed with serious mental illness to make decisions over their lives (Gone, 2011; Mowbray et al., 2006). Based on these findings, progressive ideological beliefs about gender are likely a necessary and driving component of individuals' desire and willingness to work for social change directed towards improving women's status and well-being. Where involvement in an organization with a culture that emphasizes the worth and capabilities of women may encourage initial shifts in ideological beliefs, actual experience gaining leadership skills and observing the capacity of other women in the organization may further lead to progressive gender ideology.

Developing leadership skills and a sense of community may also contribute to decreasing a sense of powerlessness among participants. As within the individual empowerment model, women must both believe that change is possible, and that it is something they can contribute to achieving, in order to have the motivation to employ the skills and perspectives they gain towards seeking desired outcomes (Itzhaky & York, 2003). Developing leadership skills, however, and utilizing them overtime may contribute to a reduction in a sense of powerlessness. Indeed, researchers have noted that a lower sense of powerlessness is associated with individuals' ability to create change in their own lives, and in society more broadly (Pardo, 1990; Peterson, Grippo & Tantleff-Dunn, 2008). Additionally, because members of marginalized communities are literally or symbolically excluded from various aspects of society (e.g., undocumented individuals in the US are not permitted to vote; women and racial/ethnic minorities are not adequately represented in the political sphere), being a part of a community where members actively seek to transform how their group is

portrayed may support broader conceptualizations about what one's self or one's group is capable of achieving. Taken together, reducing individuals' sense of powerlessness is likely an important component of a process to increase marginalized women's ability to create desired changes in their communities.

Finally, developing a sense of community with individuals who have had similar life experiences may influence specific psychological shifts for participants that encourage engagement in efforts to create transformative change for all those who experience the same forms of marginalization. Specifically, experiencing these relationships may lead individuals to become more empathetic to the hardships of others. Several scholars have noted that consciousness raising through peer group forums can be a mechanism where individuals increase their awareness of inequality and become encouraged to change unjust social realities (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Freire, 1972; hooks, 1989; Prilleltensky, 2008). These collective experiences may increase the sense of empathy individual's feel towards one another, supporting an interest in transforming society to seek betterment for others who are similarly marginalized. Furthermore, experiencing empathic distress has been linked to individuals' perceptions that injustice is occurring, and willingness to participate in actions to reduce injustice (Hoffman, 1990; Skitka & Wisneski, 2011).

Empowered community support outcomes

As previously noted, empowering settings must facilitate both empowering processes *and* outcomes (Maton, 2008). The outcomes that occur will reflect the expanding capacities of those involved to affect multiple levels of society. Returning

to the outset of this writing, a specific aim of this dissertation is to identify how empowering settings can transform inequitable power dynamics associated with neoliberalism, namely as they relate to the exclusion of marginalized groups (i.e., women living in rural communities in the Global South) in determining how communities are structured. In other words, because neoliberal policies disproportionately harm rural communities and women in the Global South by hindering their ability to effectively voice their concerns and desires for society (Chant, 2008; Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Naples & Desai, 2002; Kabeer, 2004), empowering settings that aim to support women in the Global South must work to transform these dynamics. Possible outcomes that could reflect changes associated with attempts to transform power relations may involve increased involvement in solidarity activities and holding leadership positions in the community that are directed towards enhancing women's well-being.

It has been noted that liberatory processes often take place in communal spaces where individuals have the opportunity to reflect and strategize with one another (Freire, 1972; Moane, 2010). Previous research highlights processes through which individuals deepen their understanding of how their well-being is connected to others with shared identities, thus compelling individuals to support the groups' goals and well-being (Deaux et al., 2006; Drury & Reicher, 2005; 2009; Thomas & Louis, 2013). For example, Deaux et al., (2006) demonstrated that Black, Latino and White immigrants in the United States were more likely to participate in collective action on behalf of their group when they felt both a sense of connections to others in their

group, as well as an ideological conviction about the value their group added to society. Several authors have also noted the importance of feeling capable of contributing to social change in influencing participation in different forms of solidarity activities (Klandermans, 2014; Klandermans, Sabucedo & Rodriguez, 2004; Moane, 2010; Thomas & McGarty, 2009). Taking these findings into consideration, it appears likely that women's experiences within empowering settings will increase their desire and ability to support other women in their community through involvement in solidarity activities.

Women may also seek to create changes more broadly within their communities by taking on positions as community leaders and working to create and strengthen support structures for women. Analysis of oral histories of women involved in social movements demonstrates that ideological beliefs regarding the capabilities of marginalized groups, as well as feelings of concern for those who had less status, contributed to why women sought to become leaders within specific movements (Dutt & Grabe, 2014). Duncan (2010) also examined the life histories of three political leaders in the United States and Germany, noting the connections between group consciousness and ideological conviction in shaping the trajectory of their leadership. Thus the values, perspectives, and examples that individuals confront in an empowering community setting may compel women to actively resist and transform ideologies and practices that have created and sustained inequality in their communities. By taking on positions as community leaders women can gain greater

24

capacity to implement and support structures that can facilitate widespread equality and enhanced well-being within their communities.

Overall, the components described in this section outline a pathway through which involvement in a feminist empowering setting may facilitate a process in which women gain the capacity to create transformative change in their communities (see Figure 2). Specifically, they illustrate a trajectory through which participation in an empowering community setting may lead women to engage in solidarity activities to enhance the status and well-being of all women, and hold positions of leadership that are grounded in supporting women. The development of leadership skills and a sense of community that occur through organizational participation may lead women to develop more progressive beliefs about the worth and capabilities of women, a decreased sense that individuals cannot affect their sociopolitical environment, and a greater sense of empathic concern for others. As a result, women may not only seek to have greater involvement and influence in their communities, but may use their knowledge and position to support greater justice for all women. The empowering processes that occur within settings will not address all of the structural barriers that reduce women's abilities to participate in political domains. Nevertheless, an enhanced sense of psychological empowerment will likely support women's capacity to demand structural change in their communities, contributing to transformative and increasingly inclusive community change.

Figure 2. Hypothesized pathways linking participation in a feminist empowering

setting to empowered community support outcomes.
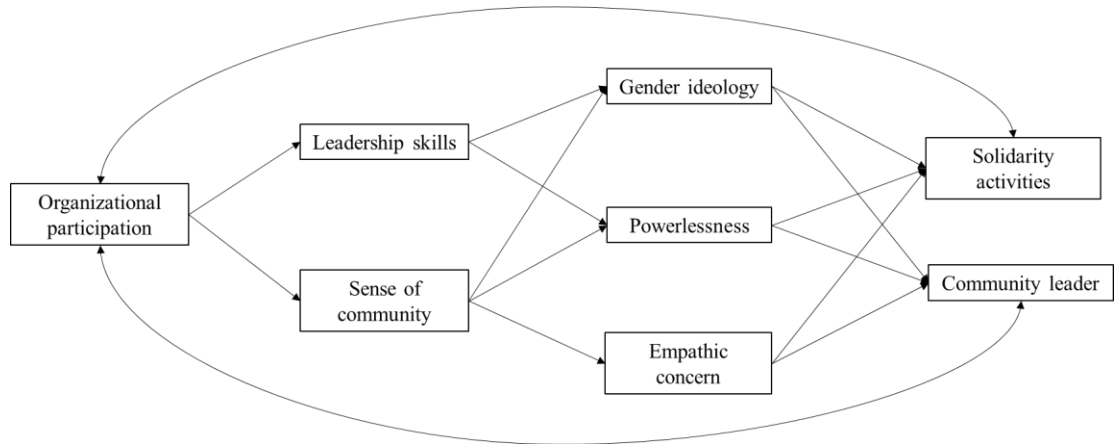
Both of the pathways described above are intended to shed light on the possible experiences of individuals as they engage in an empowering setting and increase their capacity to create social change. Although the processes detailed in these pathways likely occur simultaneously and influence one another, by documenting them as distinct pathways, we have better opportunity to understand the impact specific features of settings have on different aspects of empowerment. Furthermore, exploring the possible manifestations of separate pathways allows for a more focused examination of how empowering setting may, overtime, enhance individuals' capacity to challenge the status quo in a more comprehensive and transformative manner. As individuals' expand their awareness through continued participation in an organization, awareness of the necessity to change social structures, as opposed to merely individuals, may develop more acutely. This transformation and deepening of members' perceptions and abilities is essential in order for empowering settings to produce change that enters into the realm of liberatory.

Values, Goals and Actualizing Social Change

Each of the processes and outcomes listed above provide insight into how participation in an empowering setting may facilitate empowering processes and outcomes for women. However, knowledge regarding the components of these processes does not fully enable us to understand the vision women may be working towards as they engage in efforts to create change, nor the factors that might influence women's vision. As articulated by Freire (1972), "one cannot expect

positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect

the particular view of the world held by the people" (p. 129). Thus understanding

women's own goals for their communities is essential for promoting change that is

truly equitable and justice-oriented (Grabe, Dutt & Dworkin, 2014). Identifying

sources and values that influence and support women in this process may provide

deeper insight into the meaning and vision women associate with realizing social

change. Two bodies of research may aide in understanding the formation and

expression of women's values: research on feminist and activist identity development

and research on ethics of care.

Feminist and activist identity development

A central aim of a feminist empowering settings is supporting values of

gender equity and social justice. As a result of participating in a feminist-oriented

empowering setting, individuals may become increasingly committed to spreading

feminist values more broadly throughout a community. Many researchers have

demonstrated how involvement in specific social movements supports the

development of a feminist identity and a commitment to see feminist values realized

in societies (Andrews, 1991; Duncan & Stewart, 2000; Dutt & Grabe, 2014; Grabe &

Dutt; 2015; McGuire, Stewart & Curtain, 2010). Relationships fostered within these

spaces can specifically support the development of a feminist identity, and as a result

support sustained effort to create change in the face of hardship (Downing & Roush,

1985; McGuire, Stewart & Curtain, 2010; Zucker & Stewart, 2007). Furthermore,

these experiences can aid in shaping the vision women have for creating equitable change for their communities.

Downing and Roush (1985) first proposed a model of feminist identity development to explain the process through which women "first acknowledge, then struggle with, and repeatedly work through their feelings about the prejudice and discrimination they experience as women in order to achieve authentic and positive feminist identity" (p. 695). A positive feminist identity can thus be distinguished from holding a positive image about one's gender identity because a feminist identity inherently involves grappling with the sociopolitical inequities women (and any non-male gender) face (Bargad & Hyde, 1991; Downing & Roush, 1985; Zucker & Stewart, 2007). Importantly, the final stages of feminist identity development are associated with expressing an active commitment to engaging in meaningful and effective action to transform notions of gender and the related valuing and treatment of individuals based on their gender identity (Bargad & Hyde, 1991; Downing & Roush, 1985). Consequently, the development of a feminist identity typically involves increasingly holding values associated with support for greater gender equity and seeking to actualize these values in societies.

Recent theorizing calls for increased sophistication and greater attention to social context when assessing how a feminist identity develops within individuals living in diverse settings (Fischer et al., 2000; McGuire, Stewart & Curtain, 2010). It may be useful then to examine processes of identity development among members of marginalized communities more broadly, in order to gain better understanding of the

manner in which identities are constructed, transformed, and expressed in different social context. Political psychologist Stephen Reicher suggests that it is within social groups that individuals have the agency to define how their group is viewed by society and gain greater control over their own fate (Reicher, 2004; Drury & Reicher, 2009). Through empirical investigation of crowd events including riots, protests, and mass pilgrimages in diverse social context, Reicher and colleagues unravel processes through which participants deepen their understanding of how their well-being is connected to others who share their identity and thus become further compelled to support the groups' goals and well-being (Reicher, 1984; Drury & Reicher, 2000; 2005; Tewari, Khan, Hopkins, Srinivasan, & Reicher; 2012). For example, Drury and Reicher (2005) demonstrate this process through interviews with low-income individuals in London who collectively protested unfair evictions. The interviews highlighted how a sense of empowerment developed during the protests through both the collective construction of a sense of possibility, and through the realization that the tasks and burdens involved with achieving a goal could be shared with others. Involvement in the activities of a feminist empowering setting could hold the potential to impact women in a similar manner. Uniting and strategizing with other women who have had similar experiences could foster as sense of identity grounded in individual and collective efficacy and committed to creating change.

Indeed, a large body of research demonstrates that individuals' social and political identities are significant predictors of willingness to participate in political action (Andrews, 1991; 2007; Cole & Stewart, 1996; Duncan & Stewart, 2000; Dutt

& Grabe, 2015; Hammack, 2010; White & Rastogi, 2009; Wiley, Deaux, &

Hagelskamp, 2012). Feeling a sense of connection to others who are similarly

affected by specific issues can support one's desire to create change, as well as a

willingness to remain committed when confronted with personal and societal

obstacles (Reicher, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears,

2008). Researchers focusing on identity processes have demonstrated that

participation in collective activities to support specific rights can facilitate a collective

identity among members, leading to a shared commitment to improve social

conditions (Duncan, 1999; Melucci, 1992; Vindhya, 2012). Moreover, in a study

comparing the outcomes of three different meta-analyses on reasons for collective

action (perceived injustice, efficacy, and identity), researchers found that social

identity played the strongest role in predicting and mediating reasons for activist

involvement (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Thus, understanding how

women's own sense of identity is impacted by involvement in an empowering setting

likely will aid in discerning how women's goals for their communities develop and

manifest in their perspectives and actions.

Although processes of identity development likely run parallel to the

empowerment processes described in the previous sections, they differ from the

others because identity development focuses on the value and meaning individuals

attach to why they seek change, rather than an expanding capacity to create change.

Furthermore, it highlights an internalization of the ideological shifts that may occur as

a result of participating in an empowering setting. Whereas the knowledge regarding

societal inequalities gained within a setting may equip individuals with reason to seek change, the development of a feminist and/or activist identity highlights a deeper understanding of the connection between the self and society. The development of this identity may thus compel individuals to identify alternative ways of structuring society based on their own lived experience. Moreover, assessing how women express an understanding of their own identity and goals for their community may shed light on the links between individuals' identity, values, and actions directed towards change in a specific social context.

Politicizing Ethics of Care

A second lens through which to interpret the vision and related efforts of women as they seek to create change is the politization of the ethics of care. Gilligan (1982) first identified the ethics of care as a moral orientation that focuses on maintaining relationships, responding to the needs of others, and a responsibility not to cause harm. Importantly, ethics of care attend to the relational realities in which individuals are embedded, rather than construing societies as made up of isolated individuals (Robinson, 2005; 2006a; Tronto, 1995). In contrast to discourses of individual rights that typically pervade discussion of social justice and related policies, ethics of care employs "a recognition of the need for social and economic policies which allow all persons the capacities, time and resources to maintain and nurture their relationships in order that they may lead truly human, flourishing lives" (Robinson, 2005, p. 115). This recognition has led scholars to argue that care is a

precondition for justice and should be woven into considerations related to social justice (Tronto, 1987; Sevenhuijsen, 1998).

During the 1980s and early 1990s much of the theorizing around ethics of care centered upon situating work that was typically gendered as feminine (e.g., taking care of children; tending to those who are aging or ill) as philosophically and morally rigorous and arduous, and deserving of greater societal valuing and compensation (Fine & Glendinning, 2005). Furthermore, both Gilligan and many of her contemporaries argued that the ethics of care was a moral orientation typically held by women, and that it was for this reason that care related behavior was devalued (French & Weis, 2000; Gilligan, 1982). Although Gilligan's work has been critiqued because of its emphasis on highlighting gender differences that have not been empirically substantiated (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000), an ethics of care may still reflect the moral orientation of individuals (not just women) who seek to create social justice in societies (Tronto, 1987). More recently scholars have begun to assert that an ethics of care orientation is helpful for encouraging greater environmental stewardship, and should thus be promoted within societies (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Sevenhuijsen, 2003). Additionally, others have theorized that addressing social issues, specifically those that relate to protecting labor rights, might be more adequate if approached from an ethics of care, rather than solely a rights orientation (Robinson, 2006b). As such, scholars have begun to discuss the need for a *politicized* ethics of care so as to ensure that these values and moral orientation are reflected in social institutions and the culture at large (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Tronto, 1995; Sevenhuijsen, 2003).

33

Although, as noted, empirical studies have not demonstrated evidence of inherent gender differences in care orientation (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000), researchers have suggested that individuals from marginalized communities may have greater awareness of the need for care to sustain human well-being (Fine, 2007). This is because marginalized communities are less likely to have their care-related needs met by the state, a process which can invisiblize the importance of care (for example, when dominant/affluent communities are more likely to be able to rely on fair treatment from institutions such as hospitals or the police when ill or experiencing violence). Additionally, members of marginalized communities are more likely to have roles or professions that involve caregiving (e.g., childrearing, work in the service sector), increasing salience of the necessity of care. Thus, though their experience with these areas of life may be devalued frequently, marginalized women may possess critical insight into the importance of ensuring that a caring capacity exists and is maintained within communities.

Within a feminist empowering setting, the organizational culture around valuing care-related contributions and simultaneously asserting the capacity for women to participate in the public sphere may create a perfect storm for developing a culture around politicizing an ethics of care. The visions and goals women develop regarding how they would like to see their communities structured may involve ensuring that institutions within their community support the well-being of people. Thus as women collectively organize, their strategies and goals may be grounded in creating or changing community structures to ensure that the well-being of

individuals in the community is ensured. Similarly, women may work to see care-based values spread and sustained within societies by working to ensure more equitable realities for younger generations. Overall, analyzing women's actions and beliefs about their communities through an ethics of care may support our understanding of how women transfer the values supported within a feminist organization into their lives and communities. Furthermore, analysis through the lens of an ethics of care may enhance our knowledge and perceptions regarding how to create equitable and meaningful social change in societies.

Study Setting

Although efforts to enhance women's empowerment and well-being are not unique to any part of the globe, organizations involved in the *Movimiento Autonomo de Mujeres* in Nicaragua provide an ideal context for examining community mobilizing efforts to enhance women's status and well-being. As described at the outset of this paper, the women's movement in Nicaragua emerged in the context of a dictatorial regime as a marginalized and restricted movement (Molyneux, 2001). However, despite women's critical and committed involvement during the insurrection, concerns regarding women's rights were largely marginalized by male leaders during the Revolution (Kampwirth, 2004; Molyneux, 1985). As a result, women began to separate from the FSLN and formulate their own political agendas based on the rights of women (Randall, 1994). By 1992 Nicaragua had the largest, most pluralistic, and most autonomous feminist movement in Latin America (Grabe, forthcoming; Kampwirth, 1996). Since its conception, the movement has strategically

organized to advance women's rights, and specifically has focused on promoting women's organizations that address violations of women's rights and that are locally and contextually relevant (Kampwirth, 2008; Molyneux, 1985).

The specific organization of focus in the current study, *Centro de Mujeres Xochilt Acalt* (Xochilt Acalt Women's Center), emerged out of MAM as an effort to support women in the rural sector. The center formed shortly after a conservative shift in presidential power in 1990 introduced several neoliberal structural adjustment policies that yielded severe cutbacks to public sector commitments. These policies were associated with weakening the already precarious governmental support for women's rights. Consequently, within this context of decreasing social support from the national government, Xochitl Acalt was founded by a self-mobilized group of women in 1992 specifically to address high levels of ovarian cancer in the remote area in which they lived. Over the past two decades, the organization has expanded to address additional problems and demands from women that were arising within the community including: lack of food, illiteracy, lack of resources for family planning, high levels of gender-based violence, high rates of male migration for work, and a need to improve unequal power relations between women and men (Montenegro & Cuadra, 2004). To date, the region remains one of the most impoverished areas in the country.

Among the programs developed to enhance women's rights are various educational and justice-oriented workshops developed to increase women's knowledge about their rights and the availability of community and legal resources.

The workshops were developed in the tradition of Freire's theories of social change, and aim to enhance women's knowledge about rights and ability to contribute to social change through a consciousness raising process. Within the workshops women communally discuss and reflect upon topics including gender roles and identity, sources and consequences of poverty, violence, and gender inequality, and issues that arise within the community (Montenegro & Cuadra, 2004). Additionally, information about opportunities for women to participate in political decision-making, reproductive rights, economic rights, and traditional academic topics such as literacy, etc. are shared and discussed. The workshops are led by women who have previously completed the workshops and have received training on facilitation.

Current Study

Overall the purpose of this research is to gain greater understanding of how justice-oriented social change is supported and enacted through involvement in an empowering setting among marginalized women in rural Nicaragua. To do so I used both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of women's experiences. Design and analysis were guided by the following research questions:

1) Does participating in a feminist empowering setting relate to positive outcomes for women in rural Nicaragua? And, if so, what is the psychological process through which involvement in the setting relates to these outcomes? As described, a goal of this dissertation was to understand how traditional power structures are transformed and members of marginalized communities gain greater

37

ability to participate in both the public and private sphere. Additionally, a goal was to gain greater understanding of the psychological mechanisms that are involved in facilitating these outcomes. It was hypothesized that shifts in self-esteem and sense of powerlessness would contribute to explaining how it is that women's involvement in the organization is linked to having a greater role in reproductive decision-making with their partner, and higher levels of educational aspirations.

2) Does participating in a feminist empowering setting relate to women's engagement in efforts to create transformative change for other women in their communities? If so, what is the psychological processes through which this occurs? In addition to outcomes that are related to improvement in individual women's well-being, it was also a goal of this dissertation to determine the psychological process through with women gain the capacity to contribute to broader change for other women in their communities. It was hypothesized that involvement in the organization would be linked to reporting more leadership skills and a greater sense of community with other women. In turn, women would report more progressive gender ideology, less of a sense of sociopolitical powerlessness, and a greater sense of empathy. Ultimately these psychological experiences will contribute to explaining how involvement in the organization relates to women's involvement in solidarity activities and holding leadership positions in their communities.

3) How does involvement in Xochilt Acalt impact women's sense of identity? And, how do women formulate, express, share, and enact their vision for social change in their communities? Ensuring that the goals and mechanisms to

38

create change are driven by the visions, belief systems, and perspectives of those who have experienced the harshest consequences of oppression is an important component of justice-oriented social change. Additionally, once women have tools to create social change there are myriad ways in which women can enact their skills and seek social transformation. Thus, employing a constructivist epistemological framework, the purpose of these questions were to gain deeper understanding of the women's vision for their community and how this impacts, and is impacted by women's lived experience. Because these questions are intended to be primarily inductive, specific hypotheses have not been identified. However, based on a review of previous literatures it is possible that the relationships and experiences women have within the organization will support values associated with having a feminist activist identity and goals associated with politicizing an ethics of care. Qualitative interviews will be used to gain deeper insight into strategies women employ and their ultimate vision for their community.

The questions asked and methods that are utilized in this dissertation cross epistemological boundaries of both positivism and constructivism (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The first portion aims to understand different empowering processes and outcomes individuals experience in association with participating in a feminist organization, and is situated within positivistic notions that objective realities can be observed and understood. The second portion focuses on understanding how women construct their identities, values, and visions for their community, and stems from a constructivist perspective, noting that these experiences are both socially constructed

and filtered through individuals. As a whole, this dissertation embraces a pragmatist orientation and a mixed-methods approach with the aim of achieving a more comprehensive understanding of feminist-oriented social change in rural Nicaragua (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

Ultimately, this dissertation aims to contribute to both social psychological theory and supporting women's rights and well-being in the following ways: (1) by examining multiple ways in which a community organization supports psychological processes that enhance women's abilities to participate in their communities, (2) by combining these components into two pathways to social change that can be statistically tested, thus providing the ability to assess the magnitude of various components in producing change, (3) by identifying the specific visions and goals women have for their community that influence why and how they seek to create change in their community, and (4) by diversifying the voices and standpoints that are considered in psychological research by centering analysis on the experiences and perspectives of multiply marginalized women in Nicaragua.

Chapter 2: Quantitative Design and Procedure

Research Relationships and my Positionality

Data were collected during February and March of 2015 in the municipality of Malpaisillo-Larreynaga in the department of León, Nicaragua, through collaboration with the *Centro de Mujeres Xochilt Acalt.* My relationship with Xochilt Acalt was initially facilitated by my faculty advisor who had been conducting research with the organization since 2007. I first visited the organization in the summer of 2011 with my advisor while she was completing a research project on the feminist movement in Nicaragua. During this visit I spoke with and observed interviews with several women who had participated in Xochilt Acalt programs, I observed workshops developed by the organization, and I attended meetings with members of the Coordinating Council (i.e., the board of directors). I returned to Xochilt Acalt independently in the Summer of 2014 to hold meetings with the Coordinating Council, as well as directors of the education and civic participation programs, to discuss the purpose and structure of the workshops in preparation for the current research. Additionally, in the two weeks prior to beginning data collection for the current study I participated in a meeting with the directors of the education and civic participation programs, and visited each of the control communities to meet with community leaders. The purpose of these meetings was to learn more about life within the communities in Malpaisillo, to explain the research procedure, and to

confirm permission to proceed.[1] During each of these trips I lived in dorms onsite which allowed for in depth observation of, and my own integration into, the organizational culture of Xochilt Acalt and allowed me to engage in daily conversations with both Xochilt Acalt employees and program participants.

Despite concerted effort to gain broad and deep understandings of women's experiences and perceptions in Malpaisillo, my interpretation of these factors is undeniably filtered through the lens of my own positionality. As a middle class woman from the United States, of mixed racial/ethnic heritage (Indian and Caucasian), who has completed graduate level academic training, my identity and life experiences vary quite drastically from the women who participated in this study. I remain aware that my social location and identity, and related power and privilege, influence this research project at each phase. With the limitations of own positionality in mind, I have sought to maintain rigorous standards of research integrity by conducting research while living in the community, utilizing a mixed methods approach, and by engaging in ongoing dialog regarding the design and analysis of this research with individuals either living in or familiar with the specific social context. Additionally, while conducting this research I was frequently accompanied by my translator, a bi-cultural Nicaraguan woman (who previously spent several years living in the United States), who played an integral role in my interpretive process of both the language and culture.

---

[1] Permission was requested from community leaders to demonstrate our intent to proceed in a collaborative manner. We explained that we would be conducting social science research on women's lives, experiences, and involvement in their communities, though specific study hypotheses were not shared. All community leaders granted permission to proceed without hesitation.

Quantitative Participants

Participants in this study are 298 women ranging from 18 to 77 years of age, who were living in Malpaisillo-Larreynaga at the time of data collection. Half of the women (n = 149) had participated in programs facilitated by Xochilt Acalt, and the other half (n = 149) were women residing in nearby communities, but where Xochilt Acalt did not offer programs. Xochilt Acalt participants were identified and selected to be interviewed from a list of all women who had participated in the center's education and/or civic participation workshops (N = 626). Based on previous research conducted in this region I anticipated a 30% nonresponse rate for quantitative sampling due to migration, illness, and death (Grabe, 2010). Consequently, 195 women were randomly selected from the complete list in order to reach a target sample of 150 women. At the time of the data collection 11 women had either migrated or were currently residing in another municipality for work, 17 women were not home or unavailable, two women were ill, and one woman had passed away. An additional 15 women were removed from the list because they were under the age of 18 (n = 12) or had appeared on the list twice with different names (i.e., married and maiden names; n = 3).

To construct a comparison sample, surveys were conducted with women from five neighboring communities where there were similar levels of poverty and access to education, but where Xochilt Acalt does not currently offer programs. Women residing in communities where Xochilt Acalt did offer programs, but who are not members of the organization, were not selected to be interviewed because it is

possible that merely living in close proximity to the organization and participating members could have exposed women to the values, resources, and mission of organization. In order to identify women to be interviewed in the five comparison communities, systematic sampling procedures for remote rural areas were employed with the assistance of community leaders. We initially intended for a member of the research team to identify a community structure (e.g., church) and choose every nth household in order to arrive at 30 women in each community. If an eligible woman was not present in the household, the research assistant would use the first non-selected home starting again from the community structure. However, during our initial meetings with the community leaders I learned that in one community there were only 24 women eligible to complete the survey. Consequently, in this community all eligible women were targeted, though only 18 were available at the time of data collection (the remaining six were not home). To make up for the 12 interviews we could not complete in the first community, 33 women were targeted to be interviewed in the remaining four communities using the systemic sampling procedure described above.[2] However, in another community only 26 women were available (1 woman declined participation, 13 were not home), and the remaining interviews were solicited in the final community. Thus, in the each of the five control communities we obtained the following number of surveys: Community A: 18;

---

[2] An alternative method of constructing a control sample would have been to identify the total number of women living in each community and proportionally determine how many women to interview. However, census data in the region is unreliable due to the high rates of temporary migration to other regions of the country and internationally for work. In three of the communities for this research community leaders could not reliably estimate how many eligible women lived in the community.

Community B: 33; Community C: 33; Community D: 26; Community E: 43, for a total of 153 surveys in all comparison communities combined. Responses from four women were excluded from analysis because they reported that they had actually, at some point, participated in Xochilt Acalt programs.

Quantitative Procedure

Prior to data collection, a research team which consisted of my advisor, a bicultural Colombian consultant who has been studying social issues in Nicaragua for over 10 years and had been living in the United States since the early 2000s, a bicultural Nicaraguan translator who had attended university in the United States, five female Nicaraguan interviewers and their supervisor hired to administer the quantitative survey, and myself, engaged in a week long process of verifying the accuracy and adequacy of the survey's translation. Each item was translated into Spanish, evaluated in partnership with the research team, and then back-translated to ensure the meanings were conveyed properly. After completing this process, the survey was piloted with women living in Malpaisillo and additional modifications (described below) were made to ensure the meaning of questions were properly conveyed and understood in this specific rural location. In total this process lasted approximately 40 hours.

Quantitative surveys were administered orally by five, trained female interviewers. Each of the interviewers were local to Nicaragua, but residents of the capital city, Managua, which is located approximately 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Malpaisillo. The geographic distance in residence between the interviewer and

interviewee was intended to support a sense of anonymity for the interviewee, decreasing the likelihood of social desirability bias within responses, while simultaneously facilitating comfortable communication in Spanish with another woman native to Nicaragua.

To administer the survey, the interviewers arrived at women's homes and explained that they were surveying women about life in Malpaisillo-Larreynaga, and would specifically be asking women questions about their opinions, interests, relationships, and activities they are involved with in their community. The interviewers also explained that they were working with researchers from a university in the United States who were not formally associated with Xochilt Acalt. Once a woman agreed to participate, the interviewers read the informed consent which explained that all their responses would be kept confidential, that their names would not be attached to their responses on the surveys, and that only an aggregate of women's responses would be shared. Surveys were conducted in private spaces in the interviewees' homes and the interviewer administered the survey using a structured questionnaire. As part of the interview protocol, women were assured that they could skip any question they did not wish to answer. All of the interviews lasted between 35 minutes and one hour.

Quantitative measures

The survey consisted of a combination of demographic questions, questions regarding participation in Xochilt Acalt programs, and a number of established, psychometrically sound scales to assess psychological experiences associated with

empowerment and well-being. Additionally, two scales developed by the researchers, in consultation with the research team, were included to gauge outcomes related to educational aspiration and community leadership. Consistent with previous research conducted in remote areas where literacy rates are low, including research conducted in this region, items involving Likert responses were converted to be asked dichotomously, as indicated below (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005; Grabe, 2010).

Demographic information. Sociodemographic items included questions about women's age, number of children, education level, occupation, earnings, employment status, relationship status, and duration of their relationship. These questions were asked to provide both contextual background information about the participants and to include as possible covariates in analyses.

Organizational participation. Participants were asked whether or not they had participated in the organization Xochilt Acalt. Women were also asked when their initial participation in the organization began, how frequently they participated in any Xochilt Acalt related activity, when they last participated in Xochilt Acalt related activities, and, if applicable, reasons why they stopped participating. Additionally, women were asked if they had attended specific workshops the organization offered (e.g., health rights workshops, gender and reproductive rights workshops). Women who reported that they had attended one of the workshops were asked follow-up questions regarding how many workshops on that particular topic they attended, what year they began attending the workshop, and if they ever led workshops on the same topic. The research questions of interest in the current study

47

focused on involvement in the organization broadly, as opposed to length of involvement, or specific type of involvement. Thus, for the purposes of this research organizational participation was coded as (1) if the woman had ever been involved in any aspect of the organization, and (0) if she had not.

Empowering process variables

Self-esteem. The 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was used to assess participants' sense of self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). Sample items included whether or not participants agreed or disagreed with items such as "At times, I think I am no good at all", and "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others." Mean scores were calculated, and higher scores reflected higher levels of self-esteem. Internal consistency for this scale was .69.

Sociopolitical powerlessness. Four items selected from Neal and Groat's (1974) powerlessness scale were used to measure individuals' beliefs that it is possible to change political structures in society. These items were selected based on relevance to a sense of powerlessness in sociopolitical matters. Mean scores were calculated. Lower scores reflect less of a sense of powerlessness. Sample items included whether women agreed or disagreed with items such as "The average citizen can have an influence on government decisions," and "It is only an illusion to believe that one can really influence what happens in society at large." Internal consistency for this scale was .60.

Leadership skills. Seven items from the Leadership Competence subscale of Zimmerman and Zahniser's (1991) Sociopolitical Control Scale were used to measure

women's beliefs about their aptitude in leadership roles. Sample items include whether women agree or disagree with statements such as: "I would prefer to be a leader rather than a follower," and "I can usually organize people to get things done." Mean scores were calculated and higher scores reflect a greater sense of competence in leadership positions. Internal consistency for this scale was .69.

Sense of community. Eight items from the Neighborhood Cohesion Instrument, modified to assess relationships among women (rather than people in one's neighborhood more broadly), were used to assess participants' sense of connection to other women in their community (Buckner, 1988). Sample items included whether women agreed or disagreed with items such as: "A feeling of fellowship runs deep between me and other women in my local neighborhood," and "I feel loyal to the women in my local neighborhood." Mean scores were calculated and higher scores reflected a deeper sense of community with other women. Internal consistency for this scale was .69.

Gender ideology. Eight items selected from the 25-item short version of the Attitudes Towards Women (ATW) scale (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973) were used to measure gender ideology that were selected based on cultural relevance and had previously been used in research with this population (Grabe, 2010). Mean scores were calculated and lower scores reflect more subordinate views of women (i.e., more conservative gender ideology). Sample items included whether women agreed or disagreed with items such as "Men should share in household tasks such as washing dishes and doing the laundry," and "A woman should not expect to go to exactly the

same places or to have quite the same freedom of action as a man." Internal

consistence for this scale was .58.

Empathy. Five items form the Empathic Concern subscale of the

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980) were used to assess levels of empathy.

Sample items included whether participants agreed or disagreed with statements such

as: "I often have sympathy and concern for people less fortunate than me" and "When

I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them."

Mean scores were calculated and higher scores reflected greater levels of empathic

concern. Internal consistency for this scale was .55.

Individual empowerment outcome variables.

Reproductive decision-making. Respondents completed a reproductive

decision-making scale designed by the International Center for Research on Women

(2006). Women reported whether her partner (coded as 1), both she and her partner

equally (coded as 2), or she (coded as 3) made the final decision on four items of

reproductive health. Examples included, "use of contraception" and "to have or not

have sex." Responses to the four items were summed with higher scores reflecting

more autonomy in decision-making for the respondent. Internal consistence for this

scale was .63.

Educational aspiration. Three items were used to assess ambition and desire

to complete additional formal education. These included "If you had the means, is

going to university something that you would like to do?," "Have you taken steps to

further your education?," and a reverse coded item, "Would you be satisfied if you

did not complete any more schooling?" A sum of affirmative answers was taken as an index of educational aspiration. Because this scale was conceptualized as a manifest count score, internal consistency was not computed.

Empowered community support process variables.

Engagement in solidarity activities. Engagement in activities to support other women was measured using the 13 items from the Collective Acculturation Orientation Scale (CAOS) with several items reworded for cultural relevance (Lalonde & Cameron, 1993). The CAOS measures the extent to which individuals engage in efforts to support collective well-being of a particular group and has been used successfully with diverse populations. Sample items included whether or not women agreed with the following items: "I would give up some of my personal time in order to help women in my community," and "It is important for women to work as a group in order to improve their economic position." Mean scores were calculated and higher scores reflected greater proclivity to engage in solidary activities on behalf of women in the community. Internal consistency for this scale was .69.

Community leadership. Three questions were used to assess if women held positions of leadership in their communities that were directed towards supporting other women in their community. Participants were specifically asked whether or not they held the following positions in their community: heath promoter, community defender, environmental promoter. These three positions are established opportunities

that exist in many communities[3] for women to participate in the respective capacities:

Health promoters are responsible for sharing information about the availability of

services offered through local clinics, spreading awareness of the importance and

availability of women's health precautions such as having regular pap smears, and

offering basic health care to others in the community. Community defenders are

advocates for women during instances of domestic violence or other violations of

women's rights. And, environmental promoters are responsible for sharing

knowledge and encouraging practices related to environmental sustainability, as well

as emphasizing the links to human well-being. Women who responded that they held

any of these three positions, even if they held multiple, were coded as leaders (1) and

women who did not hold any of these positions were coded as not (0). This is because

the goal was to determine if someone held a position of leadership, rather than the

number of leadership positions she held. Due to the dichotomized scoring, internal

consistency was not computed.

Plan for analyses

First, group difference tests were conducted on all demographic variables

based upon whether or not women had participated in Xochilt Acalt, to both

contextualize participants and identify potential covariates. Next, multivariate

---

[3] These three positions emerged out of Xochilt Acalt programs, and are thus available in all communities where Xochilt Acalt participants were surveyed. The position of health promoter also exists in many communities where Xochilt Acalt does not currently operate, however I do not have data on which communities have these opportunities. It is therefore quite obvious that far more women who have participated in Xochilt Acalt will have had the opportunity to hold one of the three community leadership positions. Nevertheless, this outcome remains an area of interest due to the focus on psychological processes that lead to particular outcomes.

analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were then conducted to determine mean differences in the proposed process and outcome variables based upon involvement in Xochilt Acalt. Pearson correlations among all hypothesized predictor and outcome variables were then run and assessed.

Next, the two hypothesized models were tested using SPSS Amos. Additionally, to further assess the theorized psychological models, multiple mediation and indirect effect analyses were conducted for each model using a bootstrapping method (Preacher & Hayes, 2004; 2008). Bootstrapping was used to test for mediation and indirect effects for several reasons. First, unlike other tests of mediation (e.g. Sobel, 1982, 1986), this approach does not assume a normal sampling distribution of the total and specific indirect effects. Rather, bootstrapping is a nonparametric resampling procedure particularly suitable for smaller samples where normal sampling distribution is less likely to be attained (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Specifically, bootstrapping involves repeatedly sampling from a particular dataset and creating estimates of the indirect effects for each specified resampling. This produces a distribution that approximates the sampling distribution of the indirect effects, that is then used to construct confidence intervals based on the actual distribution derived from the bootstrapping. Bootstrapping is also useful for multiple mediator models, such as the proposed process variables being assessed in the hypothesized individual empowerment and empowered community support models (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). In this method the total indirect effect (of multiple mediators) is calculated, as well as the indirect effect of each mediator, each controlling for the effect of the other.

<center>**Chapter 3: Quantitative Results**</center>

Findings from the analyses are presented in the following order: First demographic information about participants is presented. Next are results from group differences comparing Xochilt Acalt members and non-members on all process and outcome variables of interest, followed by correlational findings highlighting relationships between the process and outcome variables. Fourth are the findings from tests of the hypothesized process for the individual empowerment model, and last are the tests of the hypothesized process for the empowered community support model.

Participant demographics

Demographic statistics broken down by membership in Xochilt Acalt are presented in Table 1. The average age of the respondents was approximately 40 and about three-quarters of the women were in partnered relationships. The majority of the sample had three or more children. Most of the women had completed at least some formal schooling (87.2%) and were literate (87.8%). Additionally, about one third of women interviewed had some type of employment outside of their home. Because there were no identified differences between members of Xochilt Acalt and nonmembers in demographic variables, no variables were included as covariates in subsequent analyses.

Table 1: Demographics

	Xochilt members (*n* = 149)	Non-members (*n* = 149)	*p*
Age (Mean, SD)	40.56 (14.06)	39.97 (13.37)	n.s.
Relationship status (% partnered)	71.8	77.9	n.s.
Age difference between woman and her partner (Mean, SD)	4.87 (6.23)	4.5 (8.41)	n.s.
Number of children (Mean, SD)	3.16 (2.03)	3.5 (2.48)	n.s.
Education (% at levels)			n.s.
Completed primary	38.3	47.4	
Completed secondary	31.5	22.1	
Additional schooling (e.g., technical or university)	15.4	10.7	
Literacy (% literate)	90.6	85.2	n.s.
Employment (% employed outside the home)	30.3	27.6	n.s.

Participants who were members of Xochilt Acalt ranged in their length of involvement in the organization from one to more than 20 years, though most (67.1%) reported being involved in Xochilt Acalt for at least 5 years. Additionally, the majority of participants (58.4%) reported that they participated in activities related to Xochilt about one time each month. Nineteen women (12.8%) were at one point members of Xochilt Acalt, but had previously discontinued their involvement. Six women reported that they stopped participating because they did not have the time, two because they felt uncomfortable when participating, and 11 women stopped for other (unspecified) reasons.

Group difference tests.

A multivariate analysis of variance test was run to compare differences between Xochilt Acalt members and non-members across all of the proposed process and outcome variables: self-esteem, powerlessness, leadership skills, sense of community, gender ideology, empathic concern, reproductive decision-making, educational aspiration, engagement in solidarity activities, and community leadership. The omnibus test was significant, $F(10, 287) = 9.40\ p < .00$. Results of univariate tests can be found in Table 2. As can be seen in the table, significant differences between members and non-members on nearly all of the variables were significant, and in the expected direction. Women who were members of Xochilt Acalt reported higher levels of self-esteem, less sense of powerlessness when considering the ability of individuals to affect political change, a greater sense of possessing leadership skills, a deeper sense of community with other women in their locality, and more

progressive gender ideology. Additionally, members of Xochilt Acalt also reported

having greater voice in reproductive decision-making with their partners, higher

levels of educational aspiration, greater involvement in solidarity activities to support

other women, and greater involvement in community leadership positions. Moreover,

the effect sizes for several of the variables, namely leadership skills, gender ideology,

and involvement in both solidarity activities and community leadership are quite

substantial, and atypically high for psychological research, suggesting that

involvement in Xochilt Acalt is linked to rather robust differences in women's

experiences.

Table 2: Group differences on proposed process and outcome variables.

	Xochilt Acalt members $n = 149$ M (SD)	Non-members $n = 149$ M (SD)	p	d
Process Variables				
Self-esteem	.85 (.14)	.80 (.17)	<.00	.32
Powerlessness	.36 (.20)	.43 (.16)	<.00	-.39
Leadership skills	.74 (.21)	.58 (.26)	<.00	.68
Sense of community	.84 (.19)	.74 (.22)	<.00	.49
Gender ideology	.85 (.17)	.72 (.20)	<.00	.70
Empathic concern	.93 (.15)	.92 (.16)	.67	.06
Outcome Variables				
Reproductive decision-making	6.36 (1.98)	5.50 (1.84)	<.00	.45
Educational aspiration	1.75 (.98)	1.51 (.93)	.04	.25
Solidarity activities	.91 (.13)	.83 (.17)	<.00	.53
Community leadership	.30 (.46)	.04 (.20)	<.00	.73

Note. Mean differences are indicated along with the d = effect size. Effect sizes are calculated as the difference between two means divided by the standardized deviation (d = [M1−M2/s]). Effect sizes are computed to assess the magnitude of the difference between groups. According to Cohen (1988), an effect size of 0.2 might be considered "small" (although still a notable difference), whereas values around 0.5 are "medium" effects, and values of 0.8 or higher considered "large" effects. A negative d for powerlessness indicates that member of Xochilt Acalt reported lower levels of a sense of powerlessness.

Correlations between process and outcome variables.

Because a major aim of this dissertation is to assess the psychological processes linking involvement in a community organization to both individual empowering outcomes and empowered community support outcomes, correlation analyses were run to identify links between the outcome variables of interest and the hypothesized process variables. Table 3 displays the correlations among these variables. The two individual empowerment outcomes of interest are reproductive decision-making, which was positively correlated with gender ideology, self-esteem, and leadership skills, and educational aspiration, which was only correlated powerlessness. For the empowered community support outcomes, engagement in solidarity activities was linked to all six process variables, and holding a community leadership position was associated with every process variable except for empathic concern.

Table 3. Correlations between hypothesized process and outcome variables.

	Gender ideology	Self-esteem	Sense of community	Leadership skills	Powerlessness	Empathic concern
Individual empowerment outcomes						
Reproductive decision-making	.15*	.23**	.08	.20**	-.09	.01
Educational aspiration	.10	.09	-.03	.11	-.14*	.01
Empowered community support outcomes						
Solidarity activities	.19**	.18**	.20**	.47**	-.30**	.19**
Community leadership	.25**	.17**	.13*	.25**	-.13*	.11

* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .00. *Note.* Outcome variables of interest are listed as the rows, and hypothesized process variables are listed as the columns.

Testing the individual empowerment model.

As described in the introduction, the hypothesized individual empowerment model predicts that involvement in Xochilt Acalt will be linked to having greater involvement in reproductive decision-making with one's partner and having higher levels of educational aspiration, due to the mediational effects of self-esteem and decreased powerlessness. The full hypothesized model was tested that linked organizational participation to reproductive decision-making and educational aspiration via self-esteem and sense of powerlessness. The model was estimated using AMOS 4.0 structural equation modeling software (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999). Multiple fit indices were used as guides to evaluate goodness-of model fit: Chi square goodness-of-fit statistics, the normed fit index (NFI; Bentler & Bonett, 1980), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA). A satisfactory fit is indicated by a non-significant chi-square or a chi-square lower than double the degrees of freedom, NFI and CFI values greater than .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), and an RMSEA value lower than .08 (Steiger, 1990).

Model fit of the hypothesized path model suggest the model provided excellent fit to the data (i.e., $x^2 = .161$, df = 1, p = .688, NFI = .99, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00). However, the following hypothesized relationships were not found to be significant: levels of self-esteem did not predict educational aspiration, and sense of powerlessness did not predict reproductive decision-making. Additionally, self-esteem and powerlessness were not correlated with one another. This was consistent

with the correlational analyses previously presented. Consequently, a new model was constructed and tested that took into account these non-significant pathways.

As shown in Figure 3, involvement in Xochilt Acalt was related to having a greater role in reproductive decision-making, in part, due to the role of increased self-esteem. Additionally, involvement in Xochilt Acalt was related to higher levels of educational aspiration via decreases in sense of powerlessness. Results of the path model demonstrated that this model provided an excellent fit to the data (i.e., $x^2 =$ 1.88, $df = 3$, $p = .60$, NFI = .97, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00). Moreover, tests of mediation using bootstrapping analyses with 5000 resamples were used to test for mediation, as recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008). Bootstrapping analyses demonstrated that increased levels of self-esteem partially mediated the relationship between participation in Xochilt Acalt and reproductive decision-making and self-esteem (B = .12, 95% CI [.03, .28]). Results of the bootstrapping analysis also confirmed the mediating role of powerlessness in the relation between participation in Xochilt Acalt and educational aspiration (B = .04; 95% CI = [.01 to .11]). Furthermore, results indicated that the direct effect of Xochilt Acalt participation on educational aspiration became non-significant when controlling for sense of powerlessness, thus suggesting full mediation.

Figure 3. Model demonstrating significant pathways linking participation in Xochilt

Acalt to individual empowerment outcome variables. Values are standardized beta

weights. *$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, and *** $p < .001$.
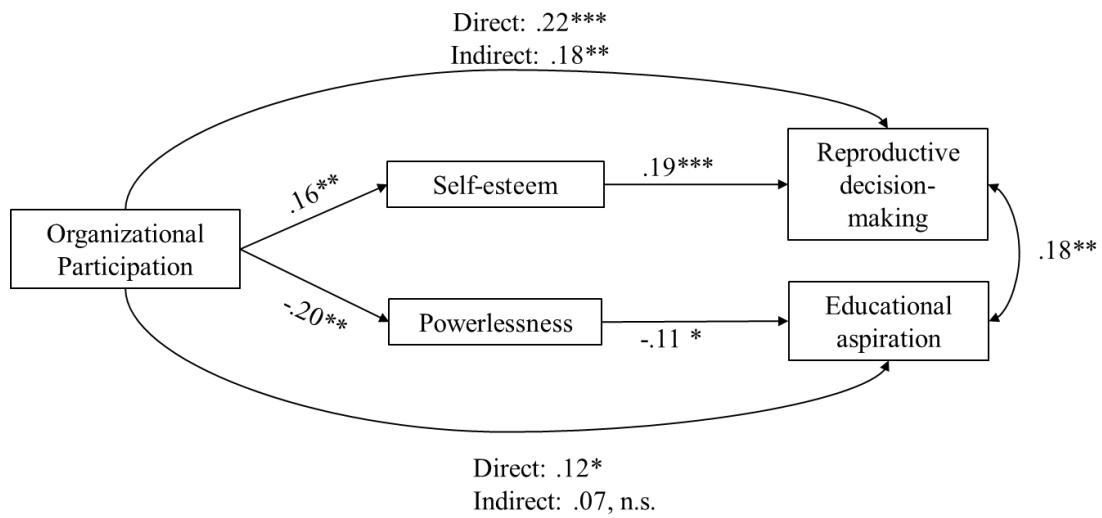
Finally, because it was plausible that both higher self-esteem and a decreased sense of powerlessness could arise as outcomes from having a greater role in reproductive decision-making and from developing higher levels of educational aspiration, alternative models were tested reversing the order of the data. This model did not provide adequate fit to the data (i.e., $x^2 = 14.97$, $df = 4$, $p < .00$, NFI = .78, CFI = .81, RMSEA = .10). Overall analyses of the individual empowerment model suggest that participation in Xochilt Acalt is related to positive outcomes for individual women, namely greater ability to assert one's desires in reproductive decision-making due, in part, to increases in women's sense of self-esteem, and greater ambition in educational domains as a result of decreased feelings of powerlessness.

Testing the empowered community support

The hypothesized empowered community support model predicted that involvement in Xochilt Acalt would be linked to greater involvement in solidarity activities and holding leadership positions directed toward improving women's well-being in the community. More specifically, it was hypothesized that involvement in the organization would be linked to higher levels of reported leadership skills and a deeper sense of community with other women. These variables, in turn, would be linked to more progressive gender ideology, a decreased sense of powerlessness, and higher levels of empathic concern, and ultimately engagement in community support activities.

64

The hypothesized model tested did not provide an adequate fit to the data (i.e., $x^2 = 93.56$, $df = 13$, $p < .00$, NFI = .70, CFI = .72, RMSEA = .14). Additionally, a number of non-significant pathways were identified. In particular, sense of community did not predict levels of powerlessness, neither powerlessness nor empathic concern predicted community leadership, and gender ideology did not predict engagement in solidarity activities. Furthermore, modification indices recommended including links between leadership skills and sense of community, as well as sense of powerlessness and empathic concern. Consequently, a new model was constructed that accounted for these non-significant pathways and identified relationships.

Results of the new path model provided adequate fit to the data (i.e., $x^2 = 26.94$, $df = 13$, $p = .01$, NFI = .91, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .06; see Figure 4). Participation in Xochilt Acalt was linked to engagement in solidarity activities and holding positions of leadership associated with supporting women's well-being at a community level, due, in part, to a number of associated variables. These findings are further described below, and again bootstrapping analyses were used to identify mediating and in-direct effects.

First, involvement in Xochilt Acalt was directly related to reporting a greater sense of aptitude in leadership skills and a greater sense of community with women in their neighborhood. Higher levels of reported leadership skills, in turn, were related to holding more progressive beliefs regarding appropriate rights and roles for women, as well as a decreased sense of powerlessness. Leadership skills was also directly related

to engagement in solidarity activities and holding leadership positions in the community. Sense of community was related to more empathic concern towards others and more progressive gender ideology. Finally, gender ideology predicted community leadership, and both sense of powerlessness and empathic concern predicted engagement in solidarity activities.

Figure 4. Model demonstrating significant pathways linking participation in Xochilt

Acalt to empowered community support outcome variables. Values are standardized

beta weights. *p < .05, ** *p* < .01, and *** *p* < .001.
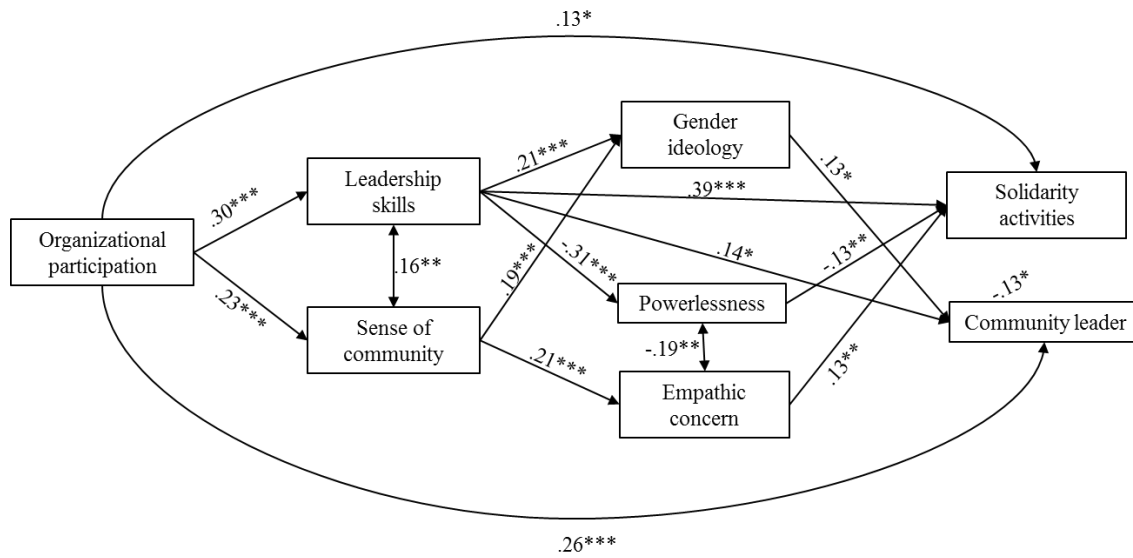
The positive relationship between leadership skills and engagement in solidarity activities was partially mediated though a lower sense of powerlessness (B = .03; 95% CI = [.02 to .06]). Additionally, the positive relationship between leadership skills and actually holding positions of leadership was partially mediated though higher levels of gender ideology (B = .78; 95% CI = [.22 to 1.62]). In both cases the relationships between leadership skills and the outcome variables of interest (solidarity activities and leadership positions) were reduced, though remained significant in the presence of the respective meditating variables indicating partial, rather than full, mediation. More specifically, the relationship between leadership skills and solidarity activities reduced from $B = .42$, $p < .00$ to $B = .39$, $p < .00$, when powerlessness was included, and the relationship between leadership skills and leadership positions reduced from $B = .16$, $p < .00$ to $B = .14$ $p < .05$, when gender ideology was included. These findings suggest that the leadership skills that are linked to involvement in Xochilt Acalt are related to greater involvement in efforts to support the well-being of women within the community at large both because women hold more progressive beliefs about the rights and roles of women, and because they feel that individual women are actually capable of affecting change in society.

The link between sense of community and both engagement in solidarity activities and holding community support leadership positions occurs through the in-direct, rather than mediating, relations of gender ideology and empathic concern. In particular, a greater sense of community with other women relates to greater likelihood of holding a leadership position through the indirect role of gender

ideology (B = 1.00; 95% CI = [.41 to 1.93]). Sense of community also was linked

with engagement in solidarity activities through the indirect relation of empathic

concern (B = .02; 95% CI = [.00 to .07]). This suggests that sense of connection to

other women that participants gain through involvement in Xochilt Acalt facilitates a

context where women gain deeper understanding of other women's lived experience.

This context is then linked to a heightened sense of empathy towards others and the

belief that women in general should have the same rights and opportunities as men,

and ultimately is linked to involvement in activities to support women.

Quantitative Results Discussion

Throughout the past several decades, numerous empirical studies have been

conducted that have significantly contributed to our understanding of the root causes

and consequences of gendered inequities (e.g., Caldwell, Swan, & Woddbrown, 2012;

Glick & Fiske, 2001; Hamby, 2011). Nevertheless, women continue to experience

marginalization in all cultures and countries throughout the globe (WHO, 2005).

Furthermore, the present neoliberal global context is associated with further

exacerbating inequalities between men and women, making it so that individuals who

are most marginalized have the least opportunity to voice their concerns and demand

change (Naples & Desai, 2002). In seeking to promote research that contributes to

equitable change, researchers have encouraged an analysis that goes beyond

understanding why inequities exist by suggesting a shift to a focus on processes that

might disrupt their continuation (e.g., Campbell & Murray, 2004; Grabe, in press).

The findings from the present analyses aim to assist in understanding processes that

reduce or eliminate oppressive contexts for women by examining the role of participation in an empowering community setting on outcomes related to decreasing gender inequities and engagement in efforts to enhance the well-being of other women.

To summarize, analyses of the quantitative data yielded support for two models, one that demonstrated a psychological process through which involvement in Xochilt Acalt related to empowering outcomes for individual women, and another that linked involvement in the organization to increased engagement in community support activities. Thus as a whole, Xochilt Acalt appears to play a valuable role in facilitating an empowering process for women in multiple and important ways. In the individual empowerment model, it was found that involvement in Xochilt Acalt was associated with women's increased ability to voice their concerns and actualize their desires in matters related to reproductive decision-making with their partners, due, in part, to increases in self-esteem. Additionally, women reported higher levels of educational aspiration due to decreases in a sense of powerlessness. These findings are useful for identifying pathways towards enhancing women's status and well-being, both privately and publicly.

Given the history and persistence of gendered oppression worldwide, findings that illuminate pathways towards improving equity in matters related to sexual rights and educational access for women are of critical importance. Moreover, as activists and researchers have long attested, improving women's lives in areas related to reproductive health and educational attainment can spark cyclical changes yielding

profound improvement in women's quality of life. Thus the findings identified that connect participation in the organization to increases in women's participation in reproductive decision-making and educational aspiration provide powerful insight into pathways to support social justice for women.

These identified relationships, however, should be considered carefully, and in connection to the sociopolitical context that exists for women in the communities where this research was conducted. Previous research conducted in Nicaragua illustrates a patriarchal context in the region in which women are considered subordinate to men, rates of domestic violence are high, national discourses emphasize adherence to traditional gender roles, and all forms of abortion were outlawed in 2006 (Grabe, Dutt & Dworkin, 2014; Grabe, 2010; Jubb, 2014). In contrast, Xochilt Acalt provides an alternative setting for women grounded in asserting that women and men have equal rights and the same capabilities and worth. Involvement in a setting that expands women's beliefs about what is possible for their gender and their own lives is related to increases in women's self-esteem and decreases in sense of powerlessness, in turn increasing the likelihood that women will seek to create changes in their lives that parallel a more empowered vision of what is possible for women. Thus what should be inferred from these findings is not simply that interventions should be put in place to increase individual women's sense of self-esteem and reduce feelings of powerlessness. Rather the findings illuminate that when structures are put in place to affirm women's rights, capabilities, and worth, women gain opportunity and incentive to transform sources of inequity in their own lives.

Expanding upon the notion that women will seek to create change to address inequity, the empowered community support model offers insight into the process through which women become increasingly capable of participating in their communities, and in particular, engaging in their communities in a manner intended to improve the status and well-being of other women in the community. Participation in Xochilt Acalt did relate to engagement in solidarity activities to support other women, and holding positions of leadership that are associated with enhancing community well-being. Furthermore, the model sheds light on how this process occurs: First, participation in Xochilt Acalt was related to both increases in leadership skills and sense of community. Both of these increases then related to reporting more progressive gender ideology. This suggests that being involved in an organization where women are afforded opportunities to learn about and get experience organizing others, while also building community with other women doing the same, leads women to hold more progressive beliefs about the right and roles that should be available to women.

The findings that gaining leadership skills was related to women reporting feeling more capable of impacting their surroundings, and that building community with other women related to greater feelings of concern for others are not particularly surprising. However, they do play an important role in elucidating the overarching process. In particular, shifts in gender ideology partially mediated the relationship between leadership skills and holding community leadership positions, and sense of powerlessness indirectly linked leadership skills to engagement in solidarity

72

activities. Similarly, sense of community was indirectly related to community leadership positions via gender ideology, and engagement in solidarity activities via empathic concern. Thus overall, Xochilt Acalt's ability to equip the women who participate with leadership skills and a sense of community with other women increases women's engagement in efforts to improve the lives of other women because of psychological shifts related to ideological beliefs about what women are capable of, perceptions about their ability to impact their surroundings, and feelings of concern for others. These findings illustrate how Xochilt Acalt fosters a model of empowerment that extends beyond improving the lives of those directly involved. In other words, they point to a process that moves beyond individual empowerment, which as previously discussed is vulnerable to cooptation, to a more widely transformative process to create empowered solidarity. Within a neoliberal context where individualistic values are becoming increasingly commonplace, this model is important for understanding and developing pathways to foster collective concern, enhanced community well-being, and move towards social justice.

Despite the contributions of the quantitative portion of this study, significant limitations remain. First, the moderately low internal consistencies for the scales used in the survey are of potential concern. However, debate exists over the utility of measures such as Cronbach's alpha to capture reliability (Lance, Butts & Michels, 2006; Sijtsma, 2009). Additionally, the scales had strong face validity in pretesting and the demonstrated relations were as predicted. Nonetheless, future research should aim to construct measures that will more accurately capture these constructs among

73

diverse groups. Secondly, as with most survey research, response bias among participants is a valid concern; the sensitive topics addressed in this study may increase this possibility. However, researchers have noted that interviewing women on sensitive topics can be experienced as an appreciated feminist intervention by providing the opportunity to discuss experiences and perspectives that are frequently silenced (Tolman & Szalacha, 1999). Additionally, without a longitudinal or random assignment design, the causality of the demonstrated relationships cannot be confirmed. However, as illustrated, there were no group differences on any of the demographic variables, suggesting that aside from the existence of the organization, women's lives appear to be relatively similar regardless of which community in the region they resided. Additionally, the qualitative analyses that follow will be used, in part, to triangulate causal finds.

Chapter 4: Qualitative Design and Procedure

For the qualitative portion of the study a subset of 24 women were interviewed who were randomly selected from among those who had completed the survey and indicated that they were willing to be contacted again for follow-up interviews. Following guidelines for achieving saturation, interviewing ceased when a minimum of ten interviews had been conducted with each group (i.e., Xochilt Acalt members and nonmembers), and three consecutive interviews had been completed with no new topics or themes emerging (Francis et al., 2010). Fourteen interviews were conducted with women who were members of Xochilt Acalt, and ten were conducted with women who were living in nearby communities where Xochilt Acalt does not offer programs. All interviews were administered in Spanish via simultaneous translation with the aid of a bi-cultural female interpreter from Nicaragua, and occurred privately in women's homes.

Qualitative interviews took place between one and four days after the respondent completed the survey portion of the study. Because all of the women interviewed had already completed the quantitative portion, I first explained that the purpose of the interview was to ask more about women's experiences and opinions about their lives and community, and their relationships with other people in their community, but with the ability for them to share more about themselves and expand upon answers with more depth. I also reiterated that I did not work for Xochilt Acalt, and though I would share the findings with the organization, everything they shared as individuals would be anonymous. See Appendix A for semi-structured interview

protocol. All interviews lasted between 35 and 60 minutes. See Table 4 for demographic information about the women interviewed.

Qualitative analysis

As previously described, the qualitative analysis of this research operates from a distinct epistemological paradigm, and affords greater attention to the contextual factors and interpretive processes through which identities, values, and visions regarding social change are constructed. Additionally, the purpose of the qualitative analysis was both to triangulate quantitative findings, and to gain deeper understanding of how women formulate, express, share, and enact their visions for social change in their communities. Inductive, line-by-line coding was employed to identify codes and themes that emerged within the interviews. These codes were then compared with the quantitative findings with the intent of determining similarity and connection, and/or lack thereof, between the two sets of findings.

Thematic analysis was employed for both inductive and deductive analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with an overarching goal of identifying patterns in how women construct their identities, values, and visions for their community within the context of the interviews. I first read, re-read, and took detailed notes about the interviews in their entirety, noting overarching patterns, as well as incongruences, to develop a comprehensive framework that accounts for inconsistencies and differences in both the individual and collective narratives (Josselson, 2011). I then randomly selected five interviews from each group to complete line-by-line coding, and develop initial coding categories. Extensive notes were taken throughout, and a list of 33

76

initial codes were developed. Next, along with two trained undergraduate research assistants, we applied these codes to an additional ten interviews (five from each group). Through discussion and refinement, we ended up with a final list of 18 codes.

Upon developing the final coding scheme, consensus coding was used to analyze all the interviews (Ahrens, 2006). This involved myself and both research assistants independently coding each of the interviews and then meeting to compare results. Any disagreements were discussed until consensus was reached. Once this process was complete, using a mind mapping technique in which codes are grouped together to capture relationships and processes among them (Davies, 2011; Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009), three overarching themes were developed that related to: (a) features of Xochilt Acalt that supported women's empowerment, (b) identity shifts women experienced related to involvement in Xochilt Acalt, and (c) politization of ethics of care. Further validity of findings was sought via ongoing conversations regarding the fit of the interpretation to the research questions and interviews (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999; Madill, Jordan & Shirley, 2000) with members of my dissertation committee and research assistants.

Table 4. Sample Profile of Qualitative Participants

ID	Age	Village	Xochilt Acalt Paricipant?	Years in Xochilt Acalt
39	18	El Espino #2	Yes	5
40	19	El Espino #2	Yes	4
64	38	Larreynaga	Yes	5
68	23	Larreynaga	Yes	5
113	27	Portobanco	Yes	3
114	39	Portobanco	Yes	5
116	52	Puente de Oro	Yes	15
135	39	San Claudio	Yes	13
139	40	San Claudio	Yes	15
146	43	San Idelfonso	Yes	9
149	37	San Idelfonso	Yes	9
187	40	Valle de las Zapatas	Yes	3
191	27	Valle de las Zapatas	Yes	3
194	30	Valle de las Zapatas	Yes	3
709	35	Las Ramadas	No	n/a
801	38	Terrero #2	No	n/a
804	54	Terrero #2	No	n/a
809	43	Terrero #2	No	n/a
918	28	Calle Real	No	n/a
939	50	Calle Real	No	n/a
1003	32	Los Cerritos	No	n/a
1017	34	Los Cerritos	No	n/a
1102	25	Minvha	No	n/a
1105	56	Minvha	No	n/a

Chapter 5: Qualitative Results and Discussion

In this chapter I present findings from the analysis of the qualitative interviews I conducted, broken down by theme, followed by brief discussions on the meaning and implications of each theme. Because the specific research questions for the current study centered on understanding the goals, values, and actions of women involved in Xochilt Acalt, the bulk of the excerpts and findings presented below are taken from interviews conducted with women involved in the organization. However, interpretation of all coded data involved comparing Xochilt member's explanations with the aggregate described perspectives and experiences of non-members.

Theme 1: Xochilt Acalt supporting women to "move forward"

Repeatedly, members of Xochilt Acalt used the words "moving forward" to describe how they had been impacted by participating in Xochilt Acalt. In these instances, women made clear that they felt being involved in Xochilt Acalt facilitated improvements in their own lives, their families, and their communities in a manner that enabled them to address barriers to their well-being and progress towards achieving their goals. The manner by which this was accomplished was not "one-size-fits-all." Rather, women identified different features of the organization, and often a combination of several features, that enhanced their ability to overcome several adversities in their lives and communities. What follows is a description of the four features that were described most frequently in the interviews and related to why involvement in Xochilt Acalt was experienced as an empowering setting by the women involved.

Knowledge about women's rights

In every interview with Xochilt Acalt participants, women discussed how involvement in the organization led to gaining knowledge about rights that women have, and ways of ensuring that those rights are actualized. Women often explained that prior to involvement in the organization they had little awareness of the notion of women's rights, and had little reason to believe that their lives could be organized in a manner that reflected valuing women's worth and perspectives on equal par with men. Through discussions that occurred in Xochilt Acalt, women gained knowledge that they were entitled to equal treatment, and moreover, that there were sources of support they could turn to when their rights were not upheld. For example, when asked what she gained from being involved in Xochilt Acalt, one woman replied:

> 40: We learned how to identify our rights, how to speak without fear. When you are a person who is going through difficult times, when you are being mistreated, that you don't have to go through that difficulty on your own, that there is help they [people at Xochilt Acalt] can provide.

As this quote exemplifies, through involvement in the organization women learned that equitable treatment is not something simply to be hoped for, but rather was a right that could be demanded. Furthermore, if experiencing mistreatment, women learned that they could pursue avenues to authenticate their rights, and that others were available to provide help. Thus, the knowledge women gained could disrupt a sense of isolation women experienced both through validation that they are worthy of just treatment, and through the availability of an organization committed to actualizing women's rights.

A conversation with another woman specifically emphasizes the transitions she and other women in her community experienced, as a result of the knowledge they gained from being involved in Xochilt Acalt:

> 39: Now we think differently, a better way, of who we are as women. We think that we should value ourselves…Before I thought that men were the ones who were bosses in the house, that they were the ones to make decisions about everything…Now I know that both men and women can make decisions, that we have the same rights, that we are both free to express ourselves.
> Anjali: What happens if a husband doesn't agree, if he still thinks that he is in charge?
> 39: For example, if one is being mistreated, they tell them that they can go to *la comisaría* [local law enforcement offices, specifically for women], or if their partner is not helping them with their children financially.

The knowledge women gain about their rights extends beyond definitions of rights to include expectations of treatment that would imply the rejection or upholding of rights. Knowledge that women's rights exist appears to facilitate a transformation in women's understanding of their value, self-image, and capabilities. Importantly, women do not naïvely believe that upon developing an understanding of their own rights, their husbands or others in the community will be in agreement and alter their treatment to show support for women's rights. Instead, knowledge of structures that are available to ensure women's rights are upheld are shared and increase the likelihood that women's rights are actually lived. Thus, gaining knowledge about women's rights through involvement in Xochilt Acalt is a critical element in supporting women's empowerment because it serves as a springboard for beliefs and actions among participants associated with improving women's status and well-being.

Community

A second feature women frequently discussed that contributed to their ability to "move forward" was belonging to a community with other women for comradery, and practical and emotional support. Although women in the comparison communities often shared that they had family members, or occasionally another woman nearby whom they could turn to if they needed support, they did not express a deep sense of connection or unity with other women in the communities where they lived. In contrast, women who were involved in Xochilt Acalt often explained that the organization facilitated a space for women to develop connections and realize shared experiences with other women. As a result, members of Xochilt Acalt felt more united with one another, and through this sense of connectedness, felt encouraged and supported in seeking to create empowering changes in their lives. For example, one woman shared:

> 149: I must say, before we didn't really do anything together, but since we began to organize with [Xochilt Acalt], now we have unity among the women in the community here.
> Anjali: What were your relationships like with your neighbors before you were organized with Xochilt?
> 149: Before we didn't really relate to each other that much. Everyone was in their individual homes, and we didn't have much of a relationship with each other. But now we have relationships with each other, and we meet more also, to have all of us in the community move forward.

Realizing a sense of shared experience, and fate, with other women through discussions that occurred in the organization encouraged women to feel as though they could rely on each other, reducing feelings of isolation. Although both women in comparison communities, as well as Xochilt Acalt members reflecting on their lives prior to being involved in the organization, could cite individuals they could talk to in

times of hardship, the shared experience of consciousness raising that occurred in the organization deepened women's sense of connection to each other. Hardships were then less likely to be seen as individual problems, but rather as areas of collective concern to be addressed in order to improve the well-being of everyone in the community.

Having a sense of community also facilitated an understanding that women could unite with other women, and in doing so, could collectively position themselves as more powerful and agentic than the way in which individual women were traditionally perceived. For example, another woman made it clear that the benefits of having a community extended beyond personal feelings, but also had practical implications when it came to ensuring that women's rights were upheld:

> Anjali: So you earlier said that men respect women more when they're involved in Xochilt--
> 194: Yes, because there are some men that are machista, and I imagine they must be thinking, she is a woman who is a member of [Xochilt], she is a woman who maybe has support… they feel more fearful.

Belonging to a community signals to men that women are not alone and vulnerable. In this case a woman who is organized through involvement in Xochilt Acalt has others who can support and defend her if needed. In fact, most women responded that their husbands eventually began to express more respect toward their wives when they were involved in Xochilt Acalt. Consistent with previous literature, having a sense of community can contribute to an empowering process because it reduces isolation and creates a context where women experience emotional and motivating support to seek change in their lives (Brodsky, Campo, & Aronson, 1999). Among

the women interviewed for this study, belonging to an empowering feminist community also provided a form of protection and respect when interacting with men who may otherwise have posed as a barrier to women's well-being.

Space for community mobilization

A third feature women described they gained from being involved in Xochilt Acalt was a space and opportunity to discuss issues that existed in the community, along with opportunity to explore ways to collaboratively address the problems. This feature allowed women, and often men as well, to share their perspectives on problems in the community and strategize to address the problems. This feature is distinct from a "sense" of community because it involves a focus on setting aside time and space specifically to plan and execute community mobilization. Having this setting for discussion plays an important role in facilitating an empowering context because it affords individuals opportunity to take charge in gaining resources and creating change for their community. When asked what she talked about at Xochilt Acalt workshops, one woman shared:

> 187: Sometimes we talk about how there are things that are missing in these communities. For example, we talk about having a water tank, because the one that we have is small. And we talk about the needs of the community.

Shared discussion about the needs of the community is an essential component of working toward the empowerment of both individuals and communities because it allows people to come together and determine the goals they would like to achieve collectively, and deliberate how they would like to see their own communities structured in the future.

Several women living in the comparison communities also described having space to discuss issues that arose in the communities. However, the contrast in experiences demonstrates the empowering potential of involvement in a women's rights-based organization, in particular. For example, women residing in control communities were less likely to attend community meetings, or believe their contributions would be valued if they sought to create change in their communities. One woman who had attended both community meetings that were unaffiliated with Xochilt Acalt, and meetings organized through Xochilt Acalt described what she felt was different about the two meetings: "39: [unlike other community meetings] in Xochilt meetings they try to make sure that women's vote has some value, and they care for all of the problems of the community." Additionally, other women emphasized the strategizing and collective mobilization that occurred through discussions at Xochilt Acalt meetings. For example, one woman explained some of the outcomes of collective resistance when she and other women who were organized through Xochilt pressured the mayor of the municipality to bring electricity into their community:

> Anjali: What do you think the mayor's office thought when they saw a
> bunch of women coming in asking for electricity?
> 149: At the beginning they would close the doors. They changed the
> place where they were having their sessions in the municipality, but
> we knocked on their doors until they answered us… That's the way we
> did it, and we worked together on it until we got it. Eventually the
> engineer came and started measuring [in preparation to set up
> electricity] and we said, "wow we got it".
> Anjali: How did you keep each other motivated?
> 149: In previous years we gave up, really, but that year we said we are
> going to do it, we are not going to give up…before we would have this
> knowledge but we just kept it as knowledge. But eventually we said,

we have this knowledge, but if we don't exercise this knowledge we
are not going to get anything. We had rights as citizens.

The space provided for collective strategizing at Xochilt Acalt allows women in the

community to deliberate collaboratively and work as agents of change. Women learn

strategies for enacting change, a sense of collective efficacy, and skills for

perseverance. As demonstrated in the example above, the space can catalyze a

process of *conscientización*. Thus, the space created by Xochilt Acalt to discuss

community issues extends well beyond mere physical location and a list of topics to

discuss. More, the organization facilitates a space for reflection and action that

facilitates collective action and equitable change in the community.

Material resources

The fourth feature women consistently connected to involvement in Xochilt

Acalt, and facilitating positive changes in their lived experience, was gaining material

resources (e.g., livestock, seeds for planting) and training on how to use these

materials. Gaining the resources through the organization frequently made it more

possible for women to support themselves and their families, despite the very

impoverished conditions in which women lived. For example, when asked why she

became involved in Xochilt Acalt, one women explained:

> 139: I liked the project and the way they were doing things here in
> Nicaragua…They teach that it is important that we love ourselves, that
> we be self-sustainable. That we do not depend only on the men and on
> husbands. They supported us with a couple of cows, sheep and goats.
> It was like a revolving fund so that then we can support other women.
> And they supported us with fences for the animals, with infrastructure
> like wire, silos so that we can also store the harvests... What we put is
> the willingness to the commitment, to go and do the process.

The organizational culture of Xochilt Acalt was grounded in an understanding that the goal was to increase the self-sufficiency and self-determination of women in the communities. Thus, although the organization provides material resources, they are careful to do so without promoting the idea of the organization as benefactor, nor fostering a sense of dependency among women who receive the materials. For example, as illustrated, the revolving fund referenced means that women breed the animals they receive and subsequently return one to the organization. This allows women to have an explicit role in contributing to the organization and supporting other women. To do otherwise would prevent a comprehensive restructuring of power relations, and would not serve as an empowering setting for women. However, with resources and training on how to use these resources, women gain greater understanding of their own capabilities and capacities to create change. Moreover, pairing the resources with the ideological values that are shared through education on women's rights and increasing a sense of efficacy creates a more comprehensively transformative context for the women involved. Women are not merely the recipients of resources, but rather are actively engaged in a process of transforming their own lives, and promoting the opportunity for others to do the same.

Theme 1 Discussion

In summary, consistent with the expectations of an empowering community setting, women involved in Xochilt Acalt described gaining greater control over their lives, resources, and their environment (Maton, 2008). The four features described – knowledge about women's right, sense of community, space for community

87

mobilization, and material resources – all contribute to equipping women with tools and the capacity to create desired changes in their own lives and their communities. Furthermore, analysis of the interviews revealed that being involved in Xochilt Acalt provided both tangible and intangible resources to support community change towards increasing the realization of women's rights.

Having a space for discussion and features to promote collective mobilization that are provided through involvement in Xochilt Acalt is particularly meaningful in light of the historic failure to include members of marginalized communities in public decision-making. As described in the introduction, women's voices, and in particular the voices of women in rural or impoverished communities within Nicaragua, have been marginalized in matters related to setting the public agenda at both the community and national level. Given the histories of colonial and neoliberal exploitation, facilitating a context for bottom-up priority setting where women's concerns and perspectives are encouraged represents a noteworthy shift in deliberative processes. Moreover, fostering and promoting collective engagement and concern strengthens the capacity for resistance to individualistic neoliberal policies and ideologies that have served as barriers to women's equal status and well-being.

The findings documented in theme one are also useful for contributing empirical groundwork to theory development on empowering community settings. As described in the introduction, previous researchers working to identify different components of an empowering setting have noted four features: 1) an organizational belief system or culture that inspires growth, 2) an opportunity role structure allowing

members to become actively involved in the organization, 3) a peer-based support system, and 4) the existence of inspiring leaders (Maton & Salem, 1995). In several ways the findings from the current study are consistent with Maton and Salem's features. Specifically, having a space for community mobilization reflects an opportunity role structure allowing for active participation, and a peer-based support system maps on to the value afforded within belonging to a community. Furthermore, an organizational culture that inspires growth is implicit and evident within all four of the features identified in the current study. However, these findings also add to theory development on empowering community settings by highlighting a path for conceptualizing empowering settings in the context of the global push for neoliberal policies. More specifically, the findings yield insights that are particularly relevant to consider when seeking to identify empowering pathways in communities that have had less access to formal education and are economically impoverished. Based on the findings described, both providing knowledge about rights and material resources are manifestations of an organizational culture that inspires growth of particular importance to disenfranchised women. Thus, when considering the marginalization and disempowerment that occurs in the context of expanding neoliberalism, an empowering setting committed to rectifying related injustice should seek to create reparations in areas identified as root sources of inequity. Additionally, although having leadership that is inspiring was not a recurrent theme evident in the current interviews, there is no reason to suspect that this feature is not a meaningful component of an empowering setting in the current context.

Finally, the qualitative findings discussed thus far also offer additional support to the pathways identified in the quantitative models - that involvement in Xochilt Acalt facilitates both empowering processes and outcomes for women. The qualitative findings suggested that involvement relates to individual empowerment in that it provides women with resources, encouragement, and community support to seek positive changes in their own lives and relationships. Additionally, these findings suggest that involvement increases women's capacity to support the well-being of others in their community due to the consciousness raising environment that encourages women to utilize the knowledge, skills, relationships, and resources they gain to seek collective change towards greater realization of women's rights.

Theme 2: The organized woman.

The second theme identified through analysis of the interviews shifts the focus away from the setting, and instead centers on women's understanding of their own identity, and specifically how involvement in Xochilt Acalt leads women to view themselves as "organized women." As evidenced in the interviews, an "organized woman" is one who views herself as capable of offering valuable contributions to their homes and communities, as part of an organization working to create social change. Women who were organized through Xochilt Acalt expressed a sense of self-understanding characterized by personal satisfaction and individual agency. This was demonstrated through the expression of three features: (1) a commitment to asserting the worth of women, (2) a belief in one's own capacity to contribute to change, and

(3) the idea of one's self as a *promotora* – a person who can and does carry out

knowledge and support to women in the community.

Asserting women's worth

      All of the women interviewed for this study, both those who were members of

Xochilt Acalt and those who lived in the comparison communities, expressed a belief

that women deserved to be treated well and have the opportunity to live without

violence or harassment. Consistent with previous research, women do not need

involvement in an intervention to experience and express dissatisfaction with the

inequitable treatment they face as women and wish for alternatives (Grabe, Dutt &

Dworkin, 2014). However, women involved in Xochilt Acalt expressed greater

commitment to asserting women's worth by demonstrating that ensuring the

realization of women's rights and worth were an unwavering priority. A conversation

with one woman about why she initially became a member of Xochilt Acalt illustrates

this commitment:

      Anjali: Why did you first join Xochilt Acalt?
      113: Because I like the way they show you how to treat yourself.
      Sometimes, it's like, they help you, awaken yourself. You learn about
      how you should be treated by your partner…There are men that hit
      women, but now we have less machismo, and I like it.
      Anjali: You said 'awaken yourself'… what do you mean by that?
      113: You know my husband has never hit me, but in other ways he
      wouldn't treat me well. In my case now, he doesn't say those things
      anymore… if you allow them to humiliate you all your life, then it will
      not go away.

This woman, like several others, initially joined the organization because she was

interested in being involved in a space that was working to authenticate the worth of

women. Actual involvement in the organization then shifted her initial dissatisfaction

with inequality into a consciousness that emphasized deconstructing the sources of inequality and working towards their transformation. Discussing women's rights to equitable treatment in their homes at the organization further infused a commitment to authenticating the self-worth of women into her identity, and equipped her with a confidence to work towards ensuring this belief was upheld in her relationships.

Though most women spoke of the importance of speaking up for oneself or others when women's rights were being violated, most interviewees also possessed an acute awareness of the limit situations that exist due to men's controlling behavior. Rather than blaming women for the violence or other inequitable hardships they faced, women remained adamant about transforming beliefs about women's value in their communities. For example, another woman involved in Xochilt Acalt explained the process through which men came to realize the importance of respecting and valuing women:

> Anjali: Do you think that men respect women now because they fear
> them or do you think that they respect women more for other reasons?
> 139: I think now they realize that women also have an equal value to
> them. Because before they used to always think they were more
> valuable than women, and now they see that we are just as capable as
> them to do things… That as well is why they value us a bit more.
> Because they see we have equal capacity to them.

Several women involved in Xochilt Acalt similarly expressed an understanding that creating a context where women would be treated equitably required shifting the consciousness of men as well as women in order to achieve viable transformation. The extent to which Xochilt Acalt members understand that women have the same worth and capacities as men necessitates that changing beliefs about women's value

92

is an unwavering priority.

Capacity to create change

In addition to self-worth, women who were organized in Xochilt Acalt also expressed a belief that they were capable of accomplishing their goals and contributing to their homes and communities in a meaningful way. In doing so, women demonstrated a sense of personal efficacy by actively seeking changes in their lives and asserting their capabilities. Rather than deferring to their husbands, women in Xochilt viewed themselves as equally capable agents in their homes. For example, one woman described how her relationships with her husband and children changed after she became involved in the organization:

> 114: [Now] I see and I decide what is good for me. If there is work that is convenient for me, that is good for me, or that is not good for me, I decide. And I also make decisions about the kids. Because before the father made the decisions about the kids…he would say 'no the kid can't go out' and now, if I think it is normal and fine, I say it's not bad for him to go out…When I was growing up my mom would say that it was not good for an adult to talk about intimate things of woman… now I talked to [my daughter] about the good things and the bad thing that can happen to a woman. And when I entered Xochilt I was always very quiet, very reserved. I was shy, to talk about of those things. But not anymore.

As this quote demonstrates, women involved in Xochilt come to view themselves as active agents in their relationships. Women become increasingly able to assert their perspectives and impact the dynamics of their families, in addition to making decisions about their own lives. In doing so, women express and internalize a sense that they have the capacity to contribute equally and meaningfully in their homes.

In addition to disrupting norms that silence and marginalize women in the household, being involved in Xochilt Acalt also encourages women to assert their opinions and perspectives in community spaces. For example, one woman described how she came to feel more capable of using her voicing within the community from seeing other women do the same:

> Anjali: Can you tell me a bit about what your life was like before you were involved in Xochilt Acalt?
> 146: I was very timid, very shy
> Anjali: What changed for you?
> 146: I said to myself, if they [other women organized in Xochilt] can do it, I can do it. I can do it the same way. I have not been able to study beyond the fifth year of school. But my words, they also can do something. The others used to say that I could not speak… and they said 'wow you were very quiet', so I said, 'things change'.

This woman goes on to discuss her participation in community mobilization with others through Xochilt Acalt to secure electricity for her village. The organizational culture within Xochilt Acalt around prioritizing women's participation encouraged women to view themselves as individuals with perspectives capable of being shared. Furthermore, women felt as though they were capable of using their voice to create desired change in their communities. Overall, being members of Xochilt Acalt involved an internalization of the belief that woman can participate in all social domains, in the same capacity as men, and that there is value to the individual, her family, and her community when women demonstrate their capacity to engage.

Promotora

The third aspect involved in developing an identity as "an organized woman" was viewing oneself as a *prometora* -- a person who can and does carry out

94

knowledge and support to other women. Engaging in activities that increase the well-being of women in the community becomes a primary goal for Xochilt Acalt participants, as they become carriers of the values that are shared in the organization. Various examples of these efforts were shared in all of the interviews with Xochilt members and covered a range of activities and situations. For example, several women described situations where they worked to help women who were experiencing violence:

> 40: There was this couple who were dating, but then the man started talking really badly about the woman, saying really bad things to her. So, we went to the community defender, and she helped them to go through a mediation and improve things for her.

Additionally, other Xochilt Acalt members described engaging in activities to create more systemic change for women in the community. For example, another woman shared her experience mobilizing as part of a health campaign through Xochilt Acalt to address issues related to women's health in her community:

> 187: There was a concern about health in this area. We went house by house asking about the diseases, asking about some of the illnesses, we recorded everything... And it was very important because [as a result] a lot of the women went to the clinic, the health clinic, and were given free council.

The sense of capability and personal efficacy women gain and have validated through participation in Xochilt Acalt grows to become a belief about the capacity of women more broadly. Working to promote women's rights and well-being thus becomes an important part of women's identity because it is an expression of a deeply felt belief that women have the same capacities as men, deserve to be treated with respect and dignity, and should be given full opportunity to participate equitably in public spaces.

Theme 2 Discussion

Overall, throughout the interviews it was evident that becoming involved in the organization was not simply an activity in which women participated. Rather, it involved a personal transformation into developing an identity as "an organized woman". The culmination of developing a commitment to asserting women's worth, a belief that one could contribute to creating change, and viewing oneself as a *prometora,* reflects the development of *autoconocimiento* – a sense of self understanding, untainted by the systems of power that devalue women. Woman are changed, inspired, and hopeful because of what they gain from the organization. What women inherit though participation is a sense that they are cable of creating and promoting change in their own lives and communities, rather than a sense of dependency. This is particularly important because it brings to light a path towards transformations in conceptualizations of power, that can lead to actual changes in resource allocation and social relations. When women view themselves as having individual and collective power to create change, rather than feeling powerless in an oppressive system, they do mobilize to demand desired changes and become involved in efforts to improve well-being.

The findings identified in this theme also add to theory on feminist and activist identity development because they showcase how changes in one's sense of identity manifest, within this particular context, as a result of participation in a feminist empowering setting. Previous research emphasizes that identity is a strong predictor of engagement in activism and social movements, however far less research

is available on transformations in sense of identity, as they relate to a sense of capability to create change. The current findings provide deeper insight into why it is that individuals feel compelled and capable of participating in social change among a particularly marginalized community, by identifying various components of this identity process.

Furthermore, in explicating different components of the development of *autoconocimiento* these findings contribute to theory on identity development from the paradigm of liberation psychology because they provide evidence for positive changes that emerge within the self through liberatory praxis. Previous research has explained that processes to produce social transformation (e.g., *conscientización*) require iterations of both reflection and action in working for community change (Brodsky et al., 2012; Grabe, Dutt, & Dworkin, 2014; Hammack, 2010a; 2010b; Hammack, Mayers & Windell, 2013; Montero, 2009). These findings demonstrate that the reflective and active processes women engage in, catalyzed through organizational participation, lead to a reconstruction and empowered understanding of self. Consequently, they provide a bridge between theories on identity development with research stemming from within liberation psychology. Finally, they lend support to the findings from the quantitative models because they demonstrate that involvement in the organization is linked to positive changes for individual women, and women's involvement in activities to support other women, through active and reflective processes.

Theme 3: Politicizing ethics of care.

The final theme explores women's actions as they seek to create equitable changes in their homes and communities, specifically focusing on how a politicized ethics of care informs these efforts. As described in the introduction chapter, an ethics of care refers to an orientation that focuses on maintaining relationships, responding to the needs of others, and a responsibility not to cause harm (Gilligan, 1982). Importantly, these orientations and values run in direct contrast to the values embedded within neoliberal policies and ideologies which prioritize individual needs, freedom from responsibility, and efficiency over collective concerns. Thus efforts to politicize ethics of care and establish community practices grounded in collective involvement and concern for one another demonstrate bottom-up processes of resistance to neoliberal ideology.

Across all of the interviews, women described responsibilities and activities they participated in that were centered around maintaining the well-being of others. The frequency with which these examples appear is rather unsurprising given that women throughout the world traditionally are socialized to be caregivers. However, within the interviews, women who were members of Xochilt Acalt described instances where they sought to create sustainable change in their communities that was directed towards disrupting the status-quo and improving the extension of care-giving capacity available in their communities. Thus the following two subthemes are considered efforts to politicize ethics of care because they involve making a conscious effort to disrupt systems of inequity and create social change that would lead to enhancing realization of rights and well-being of others. Furthermore, they

98

illustrate how women utilize the skills and sense of agency they gained from involvement in the organization to ensure an ethics of care was integrated into community practices and structures.

Generativity

The first subtheme, generativity, captures actions where women are working to socialize the next generation with an awareness and acceptance of women's rights. Oftentimes this was evident in values that women described they were teaching their children, which involved efforts to disrupt the status quo regarding women's treatment:

> 187: With my son, I tell him he has to respect women's rights a lot. That he cannot offend them in any way. Because, you are the son of a woman. You have to respect women. To my daughter I say, she has to gain respect and value herself as a woman. That she can't take into account what men say, rather she has to say that she has rights as a woman.

Similarly, many women would describe encouraging younger women and girls in the community to become involved in Xochilt Acalt, so that they could experience the benefits of being organized: "194: We always go to the young girls…we explain that if she participates, she will see that…it's really beautiful to learn more about the rights that we have." In these examples women demonstrate a relational understanding of methods for change, as well as a willingness to dedicate time and energy to foster more equitable and empowered relationships among future generations.

Women who were veteran members of Xochilt Acalt also expressed a sense of generativity by sharing their knowledge regarding how to address abuses of women

and children. One woman who had been involved in the organization for more than 15 years described a strategy several women employed in order to stop the sexual abuse of a young girl in the community by her stepfather:

> I encouraged the women to go and report him. He was very violent so in order to prevent also any additional harm we kind of kept it hidden, underground…We involved women from other communities so that [familiar women from the community] were not seen there reporting it by the stepfather. But the purpose was to save the young girl…And it was a success, because now the man is still in jail…And she's now studying. And well, she's safe, she's safe from that type of violence [139].

Though varying in scope and depth, efforts such as these reflect a sense of generativity because they involve women using their time and energy to work towards creating a better life for future generations. Furthermore, they demonstrate a politicization of an ethics of care because they demonstrate ways in which women utilize a relational understanding to create change. Specifically, if women who resided in the community where the abuse was occurring were spotted at the reporting offices their goals might be compromised. Consequently, women living in other communities were recruited to carry out the reporting. By employing a strategy that takes into account how existing community relationships might impact potential outcomes and the well-being of community members, women exercise a politicized ethics of care by circumventing dangerous power dynamics via relational networks.

Solidarity

The final subtheme demonstrates instances where women express an awareness of shared fate with other women that is linked to their effort to create change in a collaborative manner. More specifically, these are instances where

women are determined to seek changes that would improve well-being in the

communities, and cooperatively mobilize with others to ensure progress is made

towards these efforts. These examples underscore how valuing relationships can both

incentivize and sustain efforts to create community change. Another example of a

women discussing working together with others to bring electricity into their

community demonstrates this process:

> Anjali: What other things have you learned since you were organized?
> 146: First of all, to get along with the others in my community, and to
> have good relationships with other women in the community, because
> together we can do a lot. When we want something that benefits the
> community, because they give benefits elsewhere, we can defend
> ourselves. For example, we submitted a letter to a person in Managua
> about bringing electricity…We took that letter to the [government
> official] of the community. Then we went to visit the mayor. But they
> would not let us enter, because they said they were in the municipal
> session, they said that the people from the community could not enter.
> Then we said, if they do not allow us to enter, we will form a
> commission of people. And by force we entered...We were not scared
> to speak because we were prepared…We said, we are citizens of this
> community and the government has to take into account
> everyone…they let us in and they heard us.

In this example the woman illustrates how working in solidarity with other women in

the community she was able to pressure the local government to bring electricity into

her community. In several interviews conducted with women who lived in

communities where electricity was not available (roughly a quarter), women

described the importance of having electricity and how this could improve

community well-being. This was a considerable challenge because the local

government often did not want to expend the resources to bring electricity into

communities. However, as this excerpt demonstrates, women united the knowledge

that they had the right and capacity to demand this benefit for their community, with a

relational lens focused on collaboration and mutual encouragement. Ultimately,

working in relationship with other women allowed dialog to emerge that encouraged

continued participation, despite obstacles, and eventual success.

Another woman described organizing with others in her community to provide

education about protecting the environment:

> Anjali: Can you tell me more about the environmental organizing you
> are doing?
> 114: It's to protect what still exists, the very little that still exist. In
> those mountains that you see, there were always forest fires. The
> people would slash and burn. Now, we try not to do that. We have
> people who are part of assemblies. And we explain the effect that that
> has, that it is the problem. Also, the river had dried out because there
> are no trees, everything has been cut. But people are in a process and
> they are changing.

In this example, the woman discusses her involvement in community organizing to

encourage greater environmental stewardship. The goal is to seek greater well-being

in the community by improving environmental health. In collaborating with others

and organizing the assemblies that spread awareness about these issues and encourage

more sustainable practices she is working in solidarity to politicize care. In both

examples there is an emphasis on the need to work together collaboratively to bring

about change in the community that will improve the well-being of residents.

As members of communities who have been denied rights historically, a

strong commitment to working for changed that is linked a sense of collective

responsibility was evident across all of the interviews with Xochilt Acalt members.

Additionally, the women interviewed held an acute understanding of a shared fate

with others in the community, and need to work collaboratively and on behalf of each other. As one woman explained, "64: if at some point in my life I have that same case happen to me, that I need help, then they won't close the doors to me, they are going to be open." An ethics of care appears to become an implicit road map utilized in political mobilization, guiding women's efforts as they seek to create transformative and equitable change in their communities.

Theme 3 Discussion

The findings from this theme are particularly useful for gaining greater insight into women's goals and the methods of strategizing they employ in seeking to create community change. As discussed, all of the participants interviewed were clear that they wanted to see improvements in well-being for their community as a whole, not just in their individual lives or families. Additionally, all women demonstrated ways in which providing care and fostering relationships played an integral role in their day to day activities. Women who were involved in Xochilt Acalt, however, had gained knowledge, skills, and encouragement to increase their capacity for community engagement. Thus, for women involved in Xochilt Acalt, the combination of care orientation and capacity for active community engagement lead women to work towards politicizing an ethics of care. In other words, when coupled with the skills and consciousness that give rise to community mobilization, the norms and socialization processes that frequently position women as caregivers can shape incentives towards strategizing for enhanced community well-being.

These findings have valuable implications for psychologists considering the possible contributions of ethics of care research in their work. Although much psychological research

on ethics of care research has focused on whether or not an ethics of care can be explained via gender differences, the findings from this study illustrate that there may be alternative benefits to studying the existence, manifestations, and utility of this moral orientation among individuals and communities. In recent years most research on ethics of care has been picked up by theorists in philosophy and political science who use the framework to study questions of morality and public policy. The findings from the current study provide an example of a way in which psychologists could study topics related to mobilization around care ethics in social justice research. Furthermore, according to political theorist Fiona Robinson, "a critical feminist political ethic of care can provide a framework not only for rethinking the basic values of social justice, but also for reshaping our political and economic priorities at local, state and global levels" (Robinson, 2006. P. 22). Taken together, these findings point to a way in which psychologists could contribute to discussion and analysis that have macro-level implications, from a justice-oriented perspective.

Qualitative limitations and suggestions for future research

As with the quantitative findings, there are several limitations to the analyses presented. First, a number of my questions involved asking women to reflect on past experiences, or consider their desires and goals for the future. Although I do not doubt the authenticity of women's responses, these are perhaps questions that should be given ahead of time, so as to afford women more time for reflection and consideration. Along similar lines, given my interest in understanding women's goals for their communities, asking these questions in a focus group setting, rather than individual interviews, may yield a more deliberative process with collectively

formulated responses. Additionally, because the qualitative interviews were

conducted by myself there is no doubt that my own positionality relative to the

women I was interviewing impacted the responses and stories women shared.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

As neoliberal policies and values increasingly infiltrate various aspects of social and political life, inequities in the ability to shape societies are ever more intensified. There is thus growing need to identify, develop, and support pathways towards justice-oriented social change. Activists and social theorists have long argued for the need to increase community mobilization among marginalized populations in order to enhance justice, equality, and well-being; however, psychological research has insufficiently responded to these calls (Campbell, 2014; Freire, 1972). In seeking to contribute to these goals, this dissertation has aimed to provide theoretical and empirical insights, grounded within social psychological theory and methodology, that may aid in understanding community mobilization directed towards justice-oriented social change.

The findings from this research may be valuable to both social psychological researchers and groups seeking to enhance social justice and uphold feminist values of equity and community well-being. Specifically, the identified pathways contribute to knowledge on the psychological processes that are associated with facilitating greater equity for women in multiple and important way. As identified in the quantitative models, participation in an empowering community setting is associated with promoting both positive experiences for individual women that directly impacts their own daily lives, as well as engagement in efforts to support greater equity for women in their communities. Additionally, the qualitative findings demonstrate how features of the organization can profoundly influence women's own sense of self

understanding, and equip women with tools to work towards actualizing their collective values in their own communities. Taken together, these findings are particularly valuable in the current sociopolitical context of expanding neoliberalism, because the processes shed light on ways to resists the oppressive ideological and material consequences that have been liked to neoliberal policies. Furthermore, the knowledge gained regarding the visions women have for their community expands our ability to create needed changes in society that reflect the values, concerns, and realities of individuals who have been afforded less sociopolitical power in the current system.

Although this study focused on the perceptions and lived experiences of women, the aim is not to suggest that the responsibility to improve women's lives rests solely on the backs of women. In order to disrupt and change systems of gender inequity, everyone involved in the injustice must be included. The research described in this dissertation provides valuable and important insights into the capabilities and goals of women rarely included in mainstream psychological work. Future research should continue to explore mechanisms through which male's perceptions of gender shift, and how this impacts their treatment of women. Nevertheless, because psychologists argue that wellness must come, in part, from one's own sense of empowerment to address oppression, the importance of changing the cultural ideology surrounding women's rights at large should not be understated (Prilleltensky, 2008). The grassroots organization evaluated in the present study provides an example of how, at an individual and community level, women might be

107

supported in seeking changes that reduce their marginalization and increase their

capacity to participate equitably in their homes and communities. This is critical

because often social science research, in addition to mainstream media and political

discourses, portray marginalized women in the Global South as passive and helpless,

and in need of external interventions. The current research is particularly important in

shifting limiting narratives about the capabilities of marginalized groups because it

provides empirical demonstration that despite the realities of very inequitable

structures, multiply marginalized women are capable of creating transformative and

desired social change.

     In addition to research implications, the findings from this research may also

have valuable implications for social policy, development interventionists, and

community organizations. Awareness of women's marginalized status across the

globe and the detrimental consequences of this reality have sparked much interest

among activists, policy makers, and researchers in a variety of fields. Indeed, the

sustainability of creating substantial changes in the way women are treated and

perceived would be unlikely without the involvement of states, legal changes, and

interventions for men and boys, in addition to the work of women's organizations.

The findings from the present study illustrate that policies and interventions that

increase women's awareness of their rights and the availability of support, as well as

provide space for discussion of these issues, can facilitate positive outcomes for

women. Indeed, gaining knowledge that women's rights exist was identified as a

critical element in catalyzing change that led to improvements in women's status,

well-being, and involvement in solidarity efforts to support other women. Efforts to spread knowledge about rights, however, should be done so in a contextually responsible manner. The organization of focus in the current study was developed by women familiar with the unique experiences and specific barriers faced by women in this particular community. Consequently, policies and organizations seeking to enhance women's rights should follow a similar model so as to most accurately, holistically and justly address the needs and desires of women in specific communities.

Another important finding particularly relevant to policy makers and social organizations is that women who participated in the organization did not appear to develop dependent relationships with the organization. Rather, through participation in Xochilt Acalt women gained a greater sense of agency over their own lives that facilitated their own ability to create desired and meaningful change in their lives and communities. A particularly important criticism of neoliberalism is that it denies marginalized individuals and groups the right to agency over their own lives because the policies provide only one path, market participation, to potential survival. On the other hand, politicians who have sought or claim to resist neoliberal policies and increase social security measures have been critiqued for employing clientelistic practices that again inhibit agency because of the developed dependent relationships upon the state, a particular political party, or in some cases, particular politician (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2012). The findings from the current research, however,

point to paths toward equipping citizens with greater capacity to be actual agents in a democratic society.

There are two important critiques about the implications of promoting citizen democracy and addressing gendered inequities through the work of community organizations for women that should be addressed. First, Latin American theorists have noted a trend in many Latin American countries in which feminist NGOs have been forced to address gendered concerns in areas where the state was lacking (Alvarez, 1999). In turn, this reduces the state's obligation and willingness to address gendered inequities at the level of political structure because the work has already been taken up by the NGOs. Secondly, feminist researchers have also noted that an emphasis on women's community participation and obligation to support others via community development adds substantial burden to the already inequitable distribution of labor women the world over endure (Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2004; Grabe, 2015; Kalinic, 2014). The current research thus does not suggest that feminist organizations should replace state responsibility of governments to address gender inequities and violations of women's rights in their own borders, nor does it intend to imply that this work should be additional labor added to the backs of women. Rather, the findings are meant to underscore the value of asserting women's capabilities and the insights for community change that can be gained when women are included in the decision-making and strategizing processes.

Finally, although there have been significant contributions to understanding gendered inequalities in a variety of fields, psychology, in particular, is equipped with

the tools to assess the processes of social change, and examine how such changes impact individual lives. Consequently, the present study is not only an elucidation of the mechanisms involved in reducing inequity, but also an example of how psychological research can contribute to enhancing women's rights and well-being around the globe. Just as individuals residing in different regions of the globe are becoming more interconnected, so to should the collaborations of activists and researchers across disciplines in order to more completely and holistically improve the lives of all individuals.

References

Ahrens, C. E. (2006). Being silenced: The impact of negative social relations on the disclosure of rape. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 38*, 263–274.

Alvarez, S. E. (2000). Translating the global effects of transnational organizing on local feminist discourses and practices in Latin America. *Meridians*, *1*, 29-67.

Alvarez, S. E. (1999). Advocating feminism: The Latin American feminist NGO Boom. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *1*(2), 181-209.

Andrews, M. (2007). *Shaping history: Narratives of political change*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Andrews, M. (1991). *Lifetimes of commitment: Aging, politics, psychology*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Anwar McHenry, J. (2011). Rural empowerment through the arts: The role of the arts in civic and social participation in the Mid-West region of Western Australia. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *27*(3), 245-253.

Arbuckle, J. L., & Wothke, W. (1999). *Amos 4.0.* Chicago, IL: Smallwaters.

Bargad, A., & Hyde, J. S. (1991). Women's studies: A study of feminist identity development in women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *15*(2), 181-201.

Basu, K. (2006). Globalization, poverty, and inequality: What is the relationship? What can be done?. *World Development, 34*(8), 1361-1373.

Batliwala, S., & Dhanraj, D. (2004). Gender myths that instrumentalise women: A view from the Indian frontline. *IDS Bulletin*, *35*(4), 11-18.

Bentler, P. M. & Bonnett, D. G. (1980). Significance tests and goodness of fit in the

analysis of covariance structures. *Psychological Bulletin, 88*(3)*,* 588–606.

Blee, K. M. (2012). *Democracy in the making: How activist groups form*. New York,

NY: Oxford Uuniversity Press USA.

Bond, L. A., Belenky, M. F., & Weinstock, J. S. (2000). The Listening Partners

Program: An initiative toward feminist community psychology in action.

American Journal of Community Psychology, *28*(5), 697-730.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative

Research in Psychology, 3,* 71-101.

Brine, J. (2006). Lifelong learning and the knowledge economy: those that know and

those that do not—the discourse of the European Union. *British Educational

Research Journal*, *32*(5), 649-665.

Brodsky, A. E., Portnoy, G. A., Scheibler, J. E., Welsh, E. A., Talwar, G., & Carrillo,

A. (2012). Beyond (the ABCs): Education, community, and feminism in

Afghanistan. *Journal of Community Psychology, 40*(1), 159-181.

Brodsky, A. E., Welsh, E., Carrillo, A., Talwar, G., Scheibler, J., & Butler, T. (2011).

Between synergy and conflict: Balancing the processes of organizational and

individual resilience in an Afghan women's community. *American Journal of

Community Psychology*, *47*(3-4), 217-235.

Brodsky, A. E. (2009). Multiple psychological senses of community in Afghan

context: Exploring commitment and sacrifice in an underground resistance

community. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *44*(3-4), 176-187.

Brodsky, A. E. (2003). With all our strength: The revolutionary association of the

women of Afghanistan. New York, NY: Routledge.

Buckner, J. C. (1988). The development of an instrument to measure neighborhood

cohesion. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *16*(6), 771-791.

Burbach, R. (2009). Et Tu, Daniel? The Sandinista revolution betrayed. *NACLA*

Report on the Americas, *42*(2), 33-43.

Burton, M., & Kagan, C. (2005). Liberation social psychology: Learning from Latin

America. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *15*(1), 63-78.

Caldwell, J. E., Swan, S. C., & Woodbrown, V. D. (2012). Gender difference in

intimate partner violence outcomes. *Psychology of Violence, 2,* 42-57.

Campbell, C. (2014). Community mobilisation in the 21st century: Updating our

theory of social change?. *Journal of Health Psychology*, *19*(1), 46-59.

Campbell, C., & Murray, M. (2004). Community health psychology: Promoting

analysis and action for social change. *Journal of Health Psychology*, *9*(2),

187-195.

Campbell, C., & Jovchelovitch, S. (2000). Health, community and development:

Towards a social psychology of participation. *Journal of Community &*

Applied Social Psychology, *10*(4), 255-270.

Case, A. D., & Hunter, C. D. (2012). Counterspaces: A unit of analysis for

understanding the role of settings in marginalized individuals' adaptive

responses to oppression. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *50*(1-

2), 257-270.

Cattaneo, L. B., Calton, J. M., & Brodsky, A. E. (2014). Status quo versus status

quake: Putting the power back in empowerment. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *42*(4), 433-446.

Cattaneo, L. B., & Chapman, A. R. (2010). The process of empowerment: A model

for use in research and practice. *American Psychologist, 65*(7), 646-659.

Chant, S. (2008). The 'feminisation of poverty' and the 'feminisation' of anti-poverty

programmes: Room for revision?. *The Journal of Development Studies, 44*(2), 165-197.

Chavis, D. M., & Wandersman, A. (1990). Sense of community in the urban

environment: A catalyst for participation and community development. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 18*(1), 55-81.

Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.).

Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Cole, E. R., & Stewart, A. J. (1996). Meanings of political participation among black

and white women: political identity and social responsibility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *71*(1), 130-140.

Cornwall, A., & Coelho, V. S. (Eds.). (2007). *Spaces for change?: The politics of

citizen participation in new democratic arenas.* London, UK: Zed Books.

Cornwall, A. (2003). Whose voices? Whose choices? Reflections on gender and

participatory development. *World Development, 31*(8), 1325-1342.

Deaux, K., Reid, A., Martin, D., & Bikmen, N. (2006). Ideologies of diversity and

    inequality: Predicting collective action in groups varying in ethnicity and

    immigrant status. *Political Psychology*, *27*(1), 123-146.

Davies, M. (2011). Concept mapping, mind mapping and argument mapping: What

    are the differences and do they matter?. *Higher Education*, *62*(3), 279-301.

Davis, M. H. (1980). A multidimensional approach to individual differences in

    empathy. *JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology, 10,* 85-103.

Downing, N. E., & Roush, K. L. (1985). From passive acceptance to active

    commitment: A model of feminist identity development for women. *The*

    Counseling Psychologist, *13*(4), 695-709.

Drury, J., & Reicher, S. (2009). Collective psychological empowerment as a model of

    social change: Researching crowds and power. *Journal of Social Issues, 65*(4),

    707-725.

Drury, J., & Reicher, S. (2005). Explaining enduring empowerment: A comparative

    study of collective action and psychological outcomes. *European Journal of*

    Social Psychology, *35*(1), 35-58.

Duncan, L. E. (2010). Using group consciousness theories to understand political

    activism: Case studies of Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Ingo

    Hasselbach. *Journal of Personality*, *78*(6), 1601-1636.

Duncan, L. E., & Stewart, A. J. (2000). A generational analysis of women's rights

    activists. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 24,* 297-308.

Duncan, L. E. (1999). Motivation for collective action: Group consciousness as

    mediator of personality, life experiences, and women's rights activism.

    Political Psychology, 20, 611– 635.

Dutt, A. & Grabe S., (in preparation). Gender ideology and social transformation:

    Using multi methods to explore the role of deideologization in promotion of

    women's human rights in Tanzania

Dutt, A., Grabe, S., & Castro, M. (2015). Exploring Links between Women's

    Business Ownership and Empowerment among Maasai Women in Tanzania.

    Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy. DOI: 10.1111/asap.12091

Dutt, A. & Grabe, S., (2014). Activism, marginality and psychology: Narratives of

    three women committed to social change. *Qualitative Psychology, 1,* 107-122.

Dworkin, S. L., Beckford, S. T., & Ehrhardt, A. (2007). A longitudinal analysis of

    sexual scripts for women who participated in a gender-specific HIV/STD

    prevention intervention. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 36,* 269-279.

Dworkin, S. L., Lu, T., Grabe, S., Kwena, Z., Mwaura-Muiru, E., & Bukusi, E.

    (2014). What community-level strategies are needed to secure women's

    property rights in Western Kenya? Laying the groundwork for a future

    structural HIV prevention intervention. *AIDS Care*, *26*(6), 754-757.

Dworski-Riggs, D., & Langhout, R. D. (2010). Elucidating the power in

    empowerment and the participation in participatory action research: A story

    about research team and elementary school change. *American Journal of*

    Community Psychology, *45*, 215-230.

Elliott, R., Fischer, C. T., & Rennie, D. L. (1999). Evolving guidelines for publication

    of qualitative research studies in psychology and related fields. *British*

    Journal of Clinical Psychology, *38*(3), 215-229.

Ellsberg, M., & Heise, L. (2005). Researching violence against women: A practical

    guide or researchers and activists. Washington, DC, United States: World

    Health Organization, PATH.

Fernandes, S. (2010). *Who can stop the drums?: Urban social movements in Chávez's*

    Venezuela. Duke University Press.

Fine, M. (2007). The social division of care. *Australian Journal of Social*

    Issues, *42*(2), 137.

Fine, M., & Glendinning, C. (2005). Dependence, independence or inter-dependence?

    Revisiting the concepts of 'care' and 'dependency'. *Ageing and*

    society, *25*(04), 601-621.

Fischer, A. R., Tokar, D. M., Mergl, M. M., Good, G. E., Hill, M. S., & Blum, S. A.

    (2000). Assessing women's feminist identity development: Studies of

    convergent, discriminant, and structural validity. *Psychology of Women*

    Quarterly, 24(1), 15-29.

Francis, J. J., Johnston, M., Robertson, C., Glidewell, L., Entwistle, V., Eccles, M. P.,

    & Grimshaw, J. M. (2010). What is an adequate sample size?

    Operationalizing data saturation for theory-based interview studies.

    Psychology and Health, 25, 1229-1245.

Freire, P. (1972). *Cultural action for freedom*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.

French, W., & Weis, A. (2000). An ethics of care or an ethics of justice. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *27*(1-2), 125-136.

García-Ramírez, M., Manuel, L., Paloma, V., & Hernández-Plaza, S. (2011). A liberation psychology approach to acculturative integration of migrant populations. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *47*(1-2), 86-97.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (2001). An ambivalent alliance: Hostile and benevolent sexism as complementary justifications for gender inequality. *American Psychologist*, *56*(2), 109-118.

Gone, J. P. (2011). "I came to tell you of my life": Narrative expositions of "mental health" in an American Indian community. In M. S. Aber, K. I. Maton, & E. Seidman (Eds.), *Empowering settings and voices for social change* (pp. 134-156). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Gonzalez-Ocantos, E., De Jonge, C. K., Meléndez, C., Osorio, J., & Nickerson, D. W. (2012). Vote buying and social desirability bias: Experimental evidence from Nicaragua. *American Journal of Political Science*, *56*(1), 202-217.

Grabe, S. (forthcoming). *Narrating a psychology of resistance: Voices of the Companeras in Nicaragua.* Oxford University Press.

Grabe, S. (in press). Transnational feminism in psychology: Moving beyond difference to investigate processes of power at the intersection of the global and local. In N. Curtain, T. Roberts, L. Cortina, & L. Duncan (Eds.), *Best*

Practices in Feminist Psychological Science: Gender Beyond Difference.
New York, NY: Springer

Grabe, S. (2015). Participation: Structural and relational power and Maasai women's
political subjectivity in Tanzania. *Feminism & Psychology*, DOI
0959353515591369.

Grabe, S. & Dutt, A. (2015). Counter narratives, the psychology of liberation and the
evolution of the Women's Movement in Nicaragua. *Peace & Conflict:
Journal of Peace Psychology, 21,* 89-105.

Grabe, S., Dutt, A., & Dworkin, S. L. (2014). Women's community mobilization and
well-being: Local resistance to gendered social inequities in Nicaragua and
Tanzania. *Journal of Community Psychology, 42*(4), 379-397.

Grabe, S., Grose, R. G., & Dutt, A. (2015). Women's land ownership and relationship
power: A mixed methods approach to understanding structural inequities and
violence against women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly,* 39, 7-19.

Grabe, S. (2012). An empirical examination of women's empowerment and
transformative change in the context of international development. *American
Journal of Community Psychology*, *49*, 233-245.

Grabe, S. (2010). Promoting gender equality: The role of ideology, power, and
control in the link between land ownership and violence in
Nicaragua. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy, 10,* 146-170.

Gray, M. P., & O'Brien, K. M. (2007). Advancing the assessment of women's career

    choices: The Career Aspiration Scale. *Journal of Career Assessment*, *15*(3),

    317-337.

Haase, D. (2012). Revolution, interrupted: Gender and microfinance in Nicaragua.

    Critical Sociology, *38,* 221-240.

Hamby, S. (2011). The second wave of violence scholarship: Integrating and

    broadening theories of violence. *Psychology of Violence*, *1*(3), 163-165.

Hammack, P. L. (2010a). The political psychology of personal narrative: The case of

    Barrack Obama. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy, 10,* 182-206.

Hammack, P. L. (2010b). Identity as burden or benefit? Youth, historical narrative,

    and the legacy of political conflict. *Human Development, 53*(4), 173-201.

Hammack, P. L., Mayers, L., & Windell, E. P. (2013). Narrative, psychology and the

    politics of sexual identity in the United States: From 'sickness' to 'species' to

    'subject'. *Psychology & Sexuality, 4*(3), 219-243.

hooks, b. (1989). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking Black*. Boston, MA: South

    End Press.

Hoffman, M. L. (1990). Empathy and justice motivation. *Motivation and Emotion*,

    14(2), 151-172.

Hu, L. T. & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cut-off criteria for fit indexes in covariance

    structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural*

    Equation Modeling, 6, 1–55.

ICRW. (2006). *Property ownership and inheritance rights of women for social protection: The South Asia experience.* Washington, D.C.: International Center for Research on Women.

Itzhaky, H., & York, A. S. (2003). Leadership competence and political control: The influential factors. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *31*(4), 371-381.

Jaffee, S., & Hyde, J. S. (2000). Gender differences in moral orientation: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, *126*(5), 703-726.

Josselson, R. (2011). Narrative research: Constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing story. In K. Charmaz, L. McMullen, R. Josselson, R. Anderson, & E. McSpadden (Eds.*). Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis* (pp. 224-242). New York, NY: The Guildford Press.

Kabeer, N. (2004). Globalization, labor standards, and women's rights: Dilemmas of collective (in) action in an interdependent world. *Feminist Economics, 10*(1), 3-35.

Kalinic, A. (2014). *Women and development: The good, the bad, and the possible*. (Doctoral dissertation).

Kampwirth, K. (2008). Abortion, antifeminism, and the return of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, leftist politics?. *Latin American Perspectives, 35,* 122-136.

Kampwirth, K. (2004). *Feminism and the legacy of revolution: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas*. Cincinnati, OH: Ohio University Press.

Kampwirth, K. (1996). The mother of the Nicaraguans: Doña Violeta and the UNO's gender agenda. *Latin American Perspectives, 23,* 67-86.

122

Kay, C. (2008). Reflections on Latin American rural studies in the neoliberal

    globalization period: A new rurality?. *Development and Change, 39*(6), 915-

    943.

Katz, J., Joiner Jr, T. E., & Kwon, P. (2002). Membership in a devalued social group

    and emotional well-being: Developing a model of personal self-esteem,

    collective self-esteem, and group socialization. *Sex Roles, 47*(9-10), 419-431.

Klandermans, P. G. (2014). Identity politics and politicized identities: Identity

    processes and the dynamics of protest. *Political Psychology*, *35*(1), 1-22.

Klandermans, B., Sabucedo, J. M., & Rodriguez, M. (2004). Inclusiveness of

    identification among farmers in The Netherlands and Galicia

    (Spain). *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *34*(3), 279-295.

Korabik, K., McElwain, A., & Chappell, D. B. (2008). Integrating gender-related

    issues into research on work and family. *Handbook of Work-Family

    Integration*, 215-232.

Kurtz, L. F., & Fisher, M. (2003). Twelve-step recovery and community service.

    Health & Social Work, *28*(2), 137-145.

Jubb, N. (2014). Feminists and Sandinistas in Nicaragua: Then and now. *Bulletin of

    Latin American Research*, *33*(3), 257-258.

Lalonde, R. N., & Cameron, J. E. (1993). An intergroup perspective on immigrant

    acculturation with a focus on collective strategies. *International Journal of

    Psychology*, *28*(1), 57-74.

Lance, C. E., Butts, M. M., & Michels, L. C. (2006). The sources of four commonly

    reported cutoff criteria what did they really say?. Organizational research

    methods, 9(2), 202-220.

Langhout, R. D., Collins, C., & Ellison, E. R. (2014). Examining relational

    empowerment for elementary school students in a yPAR program. *American*

    Journal of Community Psychology, *53*(3-4), 369-381.

Lauder, H., Brown, P., Dillabough, J. A. & Halsey, A. H. (Eds.). (2006). *Education,*

    globalization, and social change. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Lawrence, T. B., & Maitlis, S. (2012). Care and possibility: Enacting an ethic of care

    through narrative practice. *Academy of Management Review*, *37*(4), 641-663.

Loker, W. M. (Ed.). (1999). *Globalization and the rural poor in Latin America.*

    Boulder, CO: Routledge.

Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia, 25,* 742-759.

Lykes, M. B. (2000). Possible contributions of a psychology of liberation: Whither

    health and human rights? *Journal of Health Psychology, 5,* 383-397.

Madill, A., Jordan, A., & Shirley, C. (2000). Objectivity and reliability in qualitative

    analysis: Realist, contextualist and radical constructionist

    epistemologies. *British Journal of Psychology*, *91*(1), 1-20.

Martín-Baró, I. (1994). *Writings for a liberation psychology.* Cambridge, MA:

    Harvard University Press.

Maton, K. I. (2008). Empowering community settings: Agents of individual

   development, community betterment, and positive social change. *American*

   Journal of Community Psychology, 41(1-2), 4-21.

Maton, K. I., & Brodsky, A. E. (2011). Empowering community settings: Theory,

   research, and action. In M. S. Aber, K. I. Maton, & E. Seidman (Eds.),

   Empowering settings and voices for social change (pp. 38-64). Oxford, UK:

   Oxford University Press.

Maton, K. I., & Hrabowski III, F. A. (2004). Increasing the number of African

   American PhDs in the sciences and engineering: A strengths-based

   approach. *American Psychologist*, *59*(6), 547-556.

Maton, K. I., & Salem, D. A. (1995). Organizational characteristics of empowering

   community settings: A multiple case study approach. *American Journal of*

   Community Psychology, *23*(5), 631-656.

Mayoux, L. (2001). Tackling the down side: Social capital, women's empowerment

   and micro-finance in Cameroon. *Development and Change*, *32*(3), 435-464.

McGuire, K., Stewart A. J., & Curtin, N. (2010). Becoming feminist activists:

   Comparing narratives. *Feminist Studies*, *36*(1), 99-129.

Melucci, A. (1992). Liberation or meaning? Social movements, culture and

   democracy. *Development and Change, 23*(3), 43-77.

Moane, G. (2006). Exploring activism and change: Feminist psychology, liberation

   psychology, political psychology. *Feminism & Psychology, 16(1),* 73-78.

Moane, G. (2010). Sociopolitical development and political activism: Synergies between feminist and liberation psychology. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 34,* 521-529.

Moane, G. (2011). *Gender and colonialism. A psychological analysis of oppression and liberation*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Moane, G., & Quilty, A. (2012). Feminist education and feminist community psychology: Experiences from an Irish context. *Journal of Community Psychology, 40,* 145-158.

Moghadam, V. M. (2000). Transnational feminist networks collective action in an era of globalization. *International Sociology, 15*(1), 57-85.

Molyneux, M. (2001). *Women's movements in international perspective: Latin America and beyond*. London, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.

Molyneux, M. (1985). Mobilization without emancipation? Women's interests, the state, and revolution in Nicaragua. *Feminist studies*, 227-254.

Montenegro, S., & Cuadra, E. (2004). *The keys to empowerment: Ten years of experiences at the Xochilt-Acalt Women's Center in Malpiasillo, Nicaragua.* Madison, WI: Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua (WCCN).

Montero, M. (2012). From complexity and social justice to consciousness: Ideas that have built a community psychology. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice, 3*(1), 1-13.

Montero, M. (2009). Community action and research as citizenship construction. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 43*(1-2), 149-161.

Montero, M. (2007). The political psychology of liberation: From politics to ethics and back. *Political Psychology*, *28*(5), 517-533.

Moore, D. (2007). Self perceptions and social misconceptions: The implications of gender traits for locus of control and life satisfaction. *Sex Roles, 56*, 767-780.

Mowbray, C. T., Lewandowski, L., Holter, M., & Bybee, D. (2006). The clubhouse as an empowering setting. *Health & Social Work*, *31*(3), 167-179.

Nafstad, H. E., Blakar, R. M., Botchway, A., & Rand-Hendriksen, K. (2009). Globalization, ideologies and well-being: A study of a West African and a North European society. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *4*(4), 305-315.

Nafstad, H. E., Blakar, R. M., Carlquist, E., Phelps, J. M., & Rand-Hendriksen, K. (2007). Ideology and power: The influence of current neo-liberalism in society. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *17*(4), 313-327.

Naples, N. A., & Desai, M. (Eds.). (2002). *Women's activism and globalization: Linking local struggles and global politics.* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Neal, J. W. (2014). Exploring empowerment in settings: Mapping distributions of network power. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *53*(3-4), 394-406.

Neal, A. G., & Groat, H. T. (1974). Social class correlates of stability and change in levels of alienation: A longitudinal study. *The Sociological Quarterly*, *15*(4), 548-558.

Ohmer, M. L. (2007). Citizen participation in neighborhood organizations and its

relationship to volunteers' self-and collective efficacy and sense of

community. *Social Work Research, 31*(2), 109-120.

Pardo, M. (1990). Mexican American women grassroots community activists:

Mothers of East Los Angeles. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies,11,* 1-7.

Peet, R. (Ed.). (2003). *Unholy Trinity: The IMF, World Bank and WTO.* London, UK:

Zed Books.

Peterson, Z. D. (2010). What is sexual empowerment? A multidimensional and

process-oriented approach to adolescent girls' sexual empowerment. *Sex

Roles*, *62*(5-6), 307-313.

Peterson, N. A., Speer, P. W., & McMillan, D. W. (2008). Validation of a brief sense

of community scale: Confirmation of the principal theory of sense of

community. *Journal of Community Psychology, 36*(1), 61-73.

Peterson, R. D., Grippo, K. P., & Tantleff-Dunn, S. (2008). Empowerment and

powerlessness: A closer look at the relationship between feminism, body

image and eating disturbance. *Sex Roles*, *58*(9-10), 639-648.

Perkins, D. D., & Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Empowerment theory, research, and

application. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 23*(5), 569-579.

Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for

assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator

models. *Behavior Research Methods*, *40*(3), 879-891.

Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2004). SPSS and SAS procedures for estimating indirect effects in simple mediation models. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers*, *36*(4), 717-731.

Prilleltensky, I. (2008). The role of power in wellness, oppression, and liberation: The promise of psychopolitical validity. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *36*(2), 116-136.

Pronyk, P. M., Hargreaves, J. R., Kim, J. C., Morison, L. A., Phetla, G., Watts, C., ... & Porter, J. D. (2006). Effect of a structural intervention for the prevention of intimate-partner violence and HIV in rural South Africa: a cluster randomised trial. *The Lancet*, *368*(9551), 1973-1983.

Randall, M. (1994). *Sandino's daughters revisited: Feminism in Nicaragua*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Rappaport, J. (1995). Empowerment meets narrative: Listening to stories and creating settings. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *23*(5), 795-807.

Rappaport, J. (1987). Terms of empowerment/exemplars of prevention: Toward a theory for community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 15*(2), 121-148.

Reicher, S. (2004). The context of social identity: Domination, resistance, and change. *Political Psychology*, *25*(6), 921-945.

Reicher, S. D. (1984). The St. Pauls' riot: An explanation of the limits of crowd action in terms of a social identity model. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 14*(1), 1-21.

Robinson, F. (2006a). Care, gender and global social justice: Rethinking 'ethical globalization'. *Journal of Global Ethics*, *2*(1), 5-25.

Robinson, F. (2006b). Beyond labour rights: The ethics of care and women's work in the global economy. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *8*(3), 321-342.

Rosenberg, M. (1965). Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSE). *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: Measures Package*, 61-159.

Salem, D. (2011). Voices from the ground up: The use of narrative in understanding recovery from serious mental illness. In M. S. Aber, K. I. Maton, & E. Seidman (Eds.), *Empowering settings and voices for social change* (pp. 107-133). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Sanchez, D.T., Crocker, J., & Boike, K.R. (2005). Doing gender in the bedroom: Investing in gender norms and the sexual experience. *Personality Social Psychology Bulletin, 31,* 1445–55.

Sevenhuijsen, S. (2003). The place of care: The relevance of the feminist ethic of care for social policy. *Feminist Theory*, *4*(2), 179-197.

Shrout, P. E., & Bolger, N. (2002). Mediation in experimental and nonexperimental studies: New procedures and recommendations. *Psychological Methods*, *7*(4), 422.

Sijtsma, K. (2009). Reliability beyond theory and into practice. Psychometrika, 74(1), 169-173.

Sitrin, M. A. (2012). *Everyday revolutions: Horizontalism and autonomy in Argentina*. London, UK: Zed Books.

Smith, C. A. (1999). I enjoy being a girl: Collective self-esteem, feminism, and
    attitudes toward women. *Sex Roles, 40*(3-4), 281-293.

Skitka, L. J., & Wisneski, D. C. (2011). Moral conviction and emotion. *Emotion
    Review, 3*(3), 328-330.

Sobel, M. E. (1986). Some new results on indirect effects and their standard errors in
    covariance structure models. *Sociological methodology*, *16*, 159-186.

Sobel, M. E. (1982). Asymptotic confidence intervals for indirect effects in structural
    equation models. *Sociological Methodology*, *13*(1982), 290-312.

Spence, J. T., Helmreich, R., & Stapp, J. (1973). A short version of the attitudes
    towards women scale (AWS). *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society, 2*, 219–
    220.

Steiger, J. H. (1990). Structural model evaluation and modification: An interval
    estimation approach. *Multivariate Behavioral Research, 25*(2), 173-180.

Sternberg, P. (2000). Challenging machismo: Promoting sexual and reproductive
    health with Nicaraguan men. *Gender & Development*, *8*(1), 89-99.

Taft, J. K. (2010). *Rebel girls: Youth activism and social change across the Americas*.
    New York, NY: NYU Press.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior.
    In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.) *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp.
    7-24). Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall.

Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (1998). *Mixed methodology: Combining qualitative
    and quantitative approaches* (Vol. 46). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tewari, S., Khan, S., Hopkins, N., Srinivasan, N., & Reicher, S. (2012). Participation in mass gatherings can benefit well-being: Longitudinal and control data from a North Indian Hindu pilgrimage event. *Public Library of Science.* DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0047291

Thomas, E. F., & Louis, W. R. (2013). Doing democracy: The social psychological mobilization and consequences of collective action. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, *7*(1), 173-200.

Thomas, E. F., & McGarty, C. A. (2009). The role of efficacy and moral outrage norms in creating the potential for international development activism through group-based interaction. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *48*(1), 115-134.

Tolman, D. L., & Szalacha, L. A. (1999). Dimensions of desire. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *23*(1), 7-39.

Tronto, J. C. (1995). Care as a basis for radical political judgments. *Hypatia*,*10*(2), 141-149.

Tronto, J. C. (1987). Beyond gender difference to a theory of care. *Signs*, *12,* 644-663.

van Zomeren, M., Postmes, T., & Spears, R. (2008). Toward an integrative social identity model of collective action: A quantitative research synthesis of three socio-psychological perspectives. *Psychological Bulletin*, *134*, 504-535.

Vindhya, U. (2012). Guns and roses: Collective identity processes of women activists in India. *Feminism & Psychology, 22,* 183-203.

Wade, R. H. (2004). Is globalization reducing poverty and inequality?. *World Development, 32*(4), 567-589.

Watts, R. J., Griffith, D. M., & Abdul-Adil, J. (1999). Sociopolitical development as an antidote for oppression—theory and action. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *27*(2), 255-271.

Watts, R. J., Williams, N. C., & Jagers, R. J. (2003). Sociopolitical development. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 31*,185–194.

Weinstein, R. (2002). *Reaching higher: The power of expectations in schooling*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wheeldon, J., & Faubert, J. (2009). Framing experience: Concept maps, mind maps, and data collection in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *8*(3), 68-83.

White, A., & Rastogi, S. (2009). Justice by any means necessary: Vigilantism among Indian women. *Feminism & Psychology*, *19*(3), 313-327.

World Health Organization. (2005). *WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women: Summary report of initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses.* Geneva, Switzerland: Author.

Wieringa, S. (1994). Women's interests and empowerment: Gender planning reconsidered. *Development and Change, 25,* 829–848.

Wiley, S., Deaux, K., & Hagelskamp, C. (2012). Born in the USA: How immigrant

    generation shapes meritocracy and its relation to ethnic identity and collective

    action. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*,*18*(2), 171-180.

Yllo, K. A. & Straus, M. A. (1984). The impact of structural inequality and sexist

    family norms   on rates of wife-beating. *Journal of International and*

    Comparative Social Welfare, *1*, 16-29.

Yllo, K., & Straus, M. A. (1990). Patriarchy and violence against wives: The impact

    of structural and normative factors. *Physical Violence in American Families:*

    Risk factors and Adaptations to Violence, *8*(145), 383-399.

Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Psychological empowerment: Issues and illustrations.

    American Journal of Community Psychology. Special Issue: Empowerment

    Theory, Research, and Application, 23(5), 581-599.

Zimmerman, M. A., & Zahniser, J. H. (1991). Refinements of sphere-specific

    measures of perceived control: Development of a sociopolitical control scale.

    Journal of Community Psychology, *19*(2), 189-204.

Zimmerman, M. A. (1990). Toward a theory of learned hopefulness: A structural

    model analysis of participation and empowerment. *Journal of Research in*

    Personality, 24(1), 71-86.

Zucker, A. N., & Stewart, A. J. (2007). Growing up and growing older: Feminism as

    a context for women's lives. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*,*31*(2), 137-145.

Appendix A

Semi-structured qualitative interview protocol (italicized questions are only asked if relevant, or included for probing purposes)

General/Contextual Information

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your life in this community? *How long have you been living here? What is your family like? Do you work outside the home? What type of work do you do?*
2. What are some of the things you like about your community? Why do you like these things?
3. What are some of the hardships you and other women in your community face?

Vision for Community

4. What do you think are the causes of these hardships? *Do you have any ideas for how women might be able to address these problems? Who do you think is responsible for addressing these problems? Do you think anyone is adequately working to address these problems? Who, and what are they doing?*
5. What sorts of goals do you have for your community? Why?
6. How are decisions made in this community? *How do you think decisions should be made in your community? Would you like to be more involved in decision-making in your community? Why or why not? What sorts of things would you like to see changed in your community?*

Feminist/Activist Identity

7. In what ways do you support other women? Can you tell me about a time you worked to support other women?
8. Do you know what women's rights are? What do women's rights mean to you?
9. Do you know what solidarity is? What does solidarity mean to you? Can you think of a time you felt as though you acted in solidarity with other people?
10. Do you know of any women in your community who do not share your values (about women's right, or do not like the work that Xochilt Acalt is doing?) *If yes, why do you think they feel this way?*
11. Do you think it is important to support women who do not have the same values as you? Why or why not? How might you support them?

12. (Depending on previous answers) If you weren't spending time working to support other women, you might have more time to focus on your own goals. Why do you choose to spend time supporting other women?

Personal Support and Goals

13. Who do you turn to when hardships or challenges in your community seem too big to handle alone? Who do you go to for support? [*For XA members only* -Is there someone at XA who you would go to for support?] What sorts of things do they do for you?
14. What sorts of goals do you have for your own future? Why are these your goals? What else do you need to do in order to achieve these goals?

Experience in Xochilt Acalt (for Xochilt members only)

1. Are you a member of the organization Xochilt-Acalt? How did you learn about XA and become involved? Before you were involved, what sorts of things had you heard about XA?
2. What sorts of things have you learned since becoming involved with Xochilt Acalt? *How did you learn this information? In workshops? From talking with other women? If it doesn't come up, have you learned anything about women's rights? If yes, what? And how?*
3. What programs are you involved with? What sorts of things do you do in the program(s)? Are there other programs that you would like to be involved in?
4. Did learning this information lead you to want to make any changes in your life? *If yes, what sorts of changes? Were you able to do so? How?*