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THE VOICES OF Las DIGNAS OF SANTA PATRICIA:
VIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES
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**THE VOICES OF Las DIGNAS OF SANTA PATRICIA:
VIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

BY

JULIA ANN GUEVARA

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

THE VOICES OF Las DIGNAS OF SANTA PATRICIA: VIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

By

Julia Ann Guevara

The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida (Women for Dignity and Life, DIGNAS) of Santa Patricia, El Salvador perceived their involvement in an all female, grassroots economic development project to be related to changes in their self-esteem, personal empowerment, political participation and gender relationships. This research provides some support for the conclusion that a relationship exists between involvement in economic development activities and important changes in women's lives.

This qualitative case study utilized a snowball sampling technique to identify twelve women who were employed in Las DIGNAS economic development projects in the rural community of Santa Patricia. An interview guide was developed and utilized to conduct ethnographic interviews with the twelve study participants. The interviews were conducted in various locations throughout El Salvador, including the women's work sites in Santa Patricia. Axial coding and open-ended strategies were utilized as the primary methods of analysis of the interviews.

Analysis of the data strongly suggested positive changes in the women's self perception, relationships with family, and community as a result of their participation in Las DIGNAS economic development projects. The somewhat restrictive and artificial categories of the original inquiry – that is, self-esteem, empowerment, political participation and gender relationships did not reflect a true understanding of the impact of Las DIGNAS and its economic development projects in the lives of these women. The theme “voices” transcended these categories and in their stead provided a broad and unified perspective within which self-esteem, empowerment, political participation and gender relationships could be understood and interpreted.

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Dedication

To the Las DIGNAS women of Santa Patricia, with my deepest gratitude.

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I have been encouraged by many people who believed in the work that follows, but I especially wish to acknowledge my committee chairperson, Dr. Margaret Nielsen and committee members Dr. Jeffery Riedinger, Dr. Rena Harold, and Dr. Joyce Ladenson. Each has provided me with assistance and respectful guidance throughout this research process.

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The love of my family, and especially my husband David Lehker and our two children Casey and Jesse has helped me achieve completion of my studies with a sense of purpose and centeredness. Though an absent parent for weeks on end, Casey and Jesse remained my loyal supporters. They have generously accepted the sacrifices and changes in our family life with remarkable understanding and love. David has assisted me immensely, and for his love, daily support, humor, and insights, I am deeply grateful.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

There is considerable interest in the changing status of women around the world, but particularly in countries where the social, political, and economic orders have experienced significant upheaval as a result of circumstances such as warfare and natural disaster (Clark, 1991; Cloud, 1989; Sen & Grown, 1987). In the nations in Eastern Europe, South Africa, and the Sudan, the Middle East, Central and South America changes of considerable magnitude in almost every aspect of life have occurred in the past decade. Some of the impacts of these changes have been immediately evident and well-publicized including increased mortality, widespread destruction of public and personal property, increases in contagious diseases, overwhelming famine, collapsing or destabilized monetary systems, and high rates of citizen relocation into makeshift communities. Other impacts of change have been less evident and less widely known. Among these are the impacts of large-scale change on the nature and structure of intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships.

This study proposed to examine these less evident impacts on the lives of women in El Salvador, a small Central American nation which is presently in a period of reconstruction and recovery following a 12-year Civil War which ended

in 1992. The work specifically explored to what extent women in a rural community (referred to as "Santa Patricia" in this study) perceived their involvement in an all-female, grassroots economic development project to be related to changes in self-esteem, personal empowerment and their relationships with others in their families and the community. Particular emphasis was given to subjects' perceptions of changes in their relationships with males in their community. Both previous field visits by the researcher to El Salvador and literature on this topic (Harcourt, 1994; Jelin, 1990) provided support for the conclusion that some relationship did exist between involvement in economic development activities and important changes in women's lives. To date, however, these relationships had not yet been fully described or analyzed. That was the purpose of the study. The actual name of the community studied will not be used in this study so that the women interviewed can be provided an additional measure of anonymity to insure their safety.

Context of the Study

A preliminary study by this researcher (Guevara, 1995) discerned what appeared to be important changes in women's self perceptions related to self-esteem, empowerment, political participation and a decrease in inequities in relationships between the genders in Salvadoran communities where the women's economic development program known as Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida (Women for Dignity and Life, DIGNAS) is active. These changes have been noted not only in the economic and political spheres, but also in social and

personal (domestic) spheres as well. One impression from earlier field visits is that female victimization from aggression and violence is rapidly decreasing and that patterns of male dominance are less tolerated by Las DIGNAS members, particularly those most heavily involved in economic development efforts.

El Salvador: The Study Setting

El Salvador is a Central American republic with a population of approximately 5.4 million (1993). With a predominantly agricultural economy, subsistence farming represents the main source of livelihood: industrial and service sectors account for slightly more than 25 percent of the GNP. The inequitable distribution of wealth and land ownership in the country is striking. Sixty percent of all cultivated lands are owned by two percent of the population; the wealthiest eight percent enjoy more than 50 percent of the national income (Booth & Walker 1993). In 1986, the average annual income for individuals employed full-time was equivalent to 1,044 U.S. dollars; however, this grossly over-represents the income of El Salvador's poor (nearly two-thirds of whom are women and children). In fact, the disposable annual income of the poorer half of the population ranges from \$100 to \$125 U.S. This economic disadvantage is significant, especially considering that the costs of food and clothing are only slightly less than the cost of those same necessities in the United State (Annis, 1992).

This country is, in fact, heavily dependent upon the United States and other countries of "the North," as the developed economies of Canada and the

United States are referred to in the Central American vernacular. El Salvador's historic role as an underdeveloped economy has been to provide raw materials for the countries of the North. This arrangement is one cause of an economic crisis which results in the extreme poverty experienced by the majority of its citizens. This economic pattern has been exacerbated by at least 60 years of militarization, repression, systematic violations of basic human rights, and the institutionalization of oppression and dominance of women by men.

In addition to undergoing significant political and economic upheaval following the recent Civil War, El Salvador is also experiencing social turmoil, much of it related to the changing roles of men and women within their families and communities. Factors related to these changes include increases in the numbers of female-headed household, heightened visibility of women in the political arena, and changes in family law which provide women with more rights (Las DIGNAS, 1993; Madre, 1994).

Rural Salvadoran women are a particularly underprivileged sector of this society. Approximately 59 percent of the country's population lives in rural communities; more than 55 percent of these are females (Booth & Walker, 1993). The disadvantages these women experience are striking: they have the lowest educational rates, higher pregnancy rates (compared to women in urban areas), lowest wages, high underemployment, most acute mental health problems as a result of personal victimization or witnessing acts of violence (Golden, 1991; & Thomson, 1986) and are oppressed and further marginalized by the cultural practice of machismoism which is prevalent throughout the

country but most entrenched in rural communities.

In these respects, El Salvador is not unlike other Central American countries, particularly Nicaragua and Guatemala. All three of these countries evidence similar economic disadvantages and all have experienced recent civil and political turmoil (Booth & Walker, 1993). Although the present study will focus on El Salvador - and, in fact, on a single rural community of that country -- its findings are anticipated to have relevance and applicability to the numerous similar communities in Central America where the economic, political and social circumstances are substantially the same.

Preludes to Las DIGNAS

Las DIGNAS was not the first Salvadoran group to articulate the need for substantial changes in the social structure related to the marginalization and oppression of women. As early as 1978, for example, the political party Resistencia Nacional (RN or National Resistance -- a branch of the Frente Farabundo Marti de Liberation National [FMLN]) -- gave at least some lip service to including the improvement of conditions for Salvadoran women in its party goals. The RN even succeeded in establishing a women's branch of the party. But the emphasis of this earliest group was principally on utilizing women to maximize the military and political resources of the male-dominated and controlled RN, while the self-identified educational, social, economic, political and personal needs and concerns of women were generally ignored (Herrera, 1993).

Current Las DIGNAS coordinator Morena Herrera was active in this early effort as an officer of the RN, but her personal interests were always upon organizing an independent general assembly for Salvadoran women, apart from RN efforts. Sent to Mexico to engage in clandestine work on behalf of the RN, she soon became convinced that her mission was no more than an attempt to prevent her from effectively organizing her countrywomen into a separate, women-focused and women-controlled group. She thereafter spent her time in Mexico establishing contacts with Mexican feminist organizations, and in securing a library on such topics as feminism, popular participation, liberation mental health, and liberation theology. Upon her return to El Salvador she shared these materials with other females within the RN, eventually succeeding in involving many of them in working toward addressing the distinct needs of Salvadoran women through a women-only general assembly.

The Birth of Las DIGNAS

Simultaneously with Herrera's efforts in Mexico, significant connections with other feminist groups were being developed by several RN-affiliated Salvadoran women living in exile in Australia. These connections involved introducing Australian organizations already active in solidarity work to Salvadoran women's issues and concerns, including soliciting funds and staff support for organizing efforts in San Salvador.

In July 1990, the efforts of Herrera and other women came to fruition when some 500 women from throughout El Salvador joined together for the first

time to address their shared concerns regarding the status of and conditions for women in their country. It was at this meeting, now referred to within the organization as "the first assembly," that participants committed themselves to confronting and working to change the gender-biased, socially unjust political, economic and social systems of the country. The organization's name -- Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida (Women for Dignity and Life) -- was selected at this time, and a mission statement was adopted. It reads:

The mission of Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida is to build a strong women's organization which has the capacity both to participate in the national scenario to improve the lives of Salvadoran women, and to design proposals which integrate the construction of peace, reconciliation and democracy while ensuring that women's needs and issues are acknowledged and responded to (DIGNAS 1993, p. 3).

The "Australian connection," developed during years of exile, has subsequently proven extremely important to the Las DIGNAS effort: Since the January 1992 signing of the Peace Accords by government and rebel forces -- formally ending the Civil War -- one exiled Salvadoran woman has returned from Australia to work as staff for Las DIGNAS, and, as of August 1993, two Australian women have journeyed to El Salvador to work for the organization.

Las DIGNAS, founded by and for women, with a basis in feminist principles, developed primarily from self-perceived necessity. The organization early on struggled to achieve complete autonomy from the RN and is no longer affiliated with any political party. As it began its work, the organization quickly determined that economic self-sufficiency was critical to building women's self-esteem and changing patterns of community (and personal) decision-making in which women historically had little voice. The women of rural El Salvador, in

which women historically had little voice. The women of rural El Salvador, in particular, had been allowed very few avenues for participation in the decisions which shaped their lives -- including reproductive decisions, decisions in the domestic realm, economic decisions, social decisions, and political decisions.

Las DIGNAS and Popular Participation

With the appearance of Las DIGNAS in rural communities such as the one in which this study was conducted, women were provided with their first opportunities to participate in projects at all levels as initiators, coordinators, administrators, laborers, and owners of projects. Las DIGNAS represents, for these women the connection between participation in economic development projects, feminism, and changes in the economic, political and social spheres of their lives.

These guiding principles which direct the Las DIGNAS projects are representative of the underlying principles associated with the concept of popular participation. At its best, popular participation means what Paulo Freire (1970) calls "conscientization": development of critical consciousness among the people, unleashing their creative energy, the pursuit of liberating change. It means a shift in power and resources from those who have defined society, controlled wealth and lived comfortable in the system, to those who had previously accepted others' definitions of reality, carried out others' plans, and endured hardships and oppression in the system.

Rationale

El Salvador is not the only country where traditional economic, social and political systems support the domination of females by males. It is also not the only country where such domination has historically resulted not only in more subtle forms of oppression such as limited economic opportunities, but also overt acts of violence and aggression perpetuated by males against females. These forms of oppression certainly affect women's sense of self-esteem, subjective perceptions of empowerment and their ability to participate in the political structure of their community and country. Furthermore, such oppression also promotes a continuation of gender inequities (Andreas, 1985; Carmen, 1994; Carr, 1984).

The circumstances in El Salvador, however, are of considerable current interest since the changes which seem to be occurring in these patterns of oppression and combination are happening in a relatively short period of time, generally in the last 3 years following the country's Civil War.

Previous research (Guevara, 1995) indicated that changes in patterns of gender-based oppression of and violence against women in rural El Salvador may be linked with the emergence of Las DIGNAS, a feminist, women-centered grassroots organization focused on the provision of economic development opportunities for previously oppressed women in rural areas of the country.

The role of feminism and economic development and the impact on women's self perceptions, relationships with family, community and the state is

all but absent in the literature (Clark, 1991; Harcourt, 1994; Sen & Grow, 1987). Any findings related to this relationship are important to social workers who engage in practice with women who have been disempowered, dominated and oppressed. The effects of this relationship are important to the body of knowledge related to economic development and feminist theories because they can help pinpoint a process by which societies make fundamental changes in traditional power structures and in individual, community and societal expectations.

Research Questions

This study was directed toward examining four questions.

1. What is the relationship between membership in Las DIGNAS economic development projects and women's perceptions of self-esteem?
2. What is the relationship between membership in Las DIGNAS economic development projects and women's perceptions of their personal empowerment?
3. What is the relationship between membership in Las DIGNAS economic development projects and women's participation in political processes?
4. What is the relationship between membership in Las DIGNAS economic development projects and women's perceptions of changes in gender relationships?

For the purposes of this research the following key terms were defined as follows:

Self esteem: The positive or negative evaluation of how much a woman likes and approves of her perceived self as a whole. For this research, self-esteem is subjectively measured by whether a women expresses respect for herself, is aware of and appreciative of her own worth, and knows herself (Sandford & Donovan, 1984). This was operationalized by the extent to which the subject described herself and her activities in positive terms.

Empowerment: A process rather than an end state involving specific change steps of: (a) the individual's perception of self; (b) emphasized relationships with others; and (c) social action. Thus, it begins with an individual's view of her/himself and progresses through relations with nearby others to interactions with more distant organizations and institutions (Simon, 1994; Gutierrez & Nurius, 1994). This was operationalized by the extent to which subjects described activities initiated on their own or their family's behalf.

Political participation: "Any voluntary action, successful or unsuccessful, organized or unorganized, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate methods intended to influence the choice of public policies, the administration of public affairs, or the choice of political leaders at any level of government, local or national" (Weiner, 1971, p. 164).

Gender inequality: Male or female domination which denies or severely limits the other gender's access to economic resources and political participation and imposes sexual division of labor that allocates one gender to the most onerous,

labor-intensive, poorly rewarded tasks inside and outside the home, as well as the longest hours of work (Sen & Grow, 1987). For the purpose of this research gender inequalities which advantage males over females was the focus.

Two-thirds World: This term is in reference to the majority world's people, "Third World". The term is synonymous with "developing countries" (Harcourt, 1994) used elsewhere in this writing.

Assumptions of the Study

This study assumed that there was commonality among women living in two-thirds world countries, particularly countries involved in Civil Wars or civil conflicts, for example Guatemala, Nicaragua and Rwanda (Jacobson, 1992; Newsom & Carrell, 1995). It assumed that women, regardless of class, in any of these countries retain a role which is subordinate to that of men. Finally this study was premised in the idea that any findings about the relationship between feminism, economic development and women's perceptions of inter and intrapersonal changes would be useful to the social work profession as well as other related disciplines.

The utilization of ethnographic semi-structured interviews was built upon several assumptions which related to the research process. The basic assumption was that women will provide honest accounts of their experiences, impressions and feelings. The strength of this assumption was bolstered by the knowledge of this community gained by the researcher in three earlier extended visits to Santa Patricia between 1992 and 1994. The researcher had developed

mutually trusting relationships with the women of Santa Patricia in these visits, relationships which facilitated the ethnographic interview process. As Freire (1973) has noted, it is necessary to first learn about the lives of individuals before beginning any systematic formal inquiry process. Earlier visits to Santa Patricia have provided this foundation for the current work.

Finally, this study, as are most studies involving human subjects, was dependent upon volunteers. It was assumed that those who volunteered to participate in the research were representative of Las DIGNAS members in general. Theoretically, this assumption could not be empirically verified since, by definition, comparable information was not available from non-volunteers. As Patton (1990) notes, the issue of "sample bias" is not the same in a qualitative study of this type as it is in a quantitative study. The differences in qualitative and quantitative methods is well illustrated in the different logics that undergird sampling approaches. "Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases ($n=1$), selected purposefully" (p. 169). The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases for in depth study. These cases should be ones from which a great deal can be learned about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, hence the term purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990).

The researcher recognizes this work as "advocacy scholarship". Advocacy scholarship utilizes the ethnographic interview format and is supported by the work of de la Torre and Pesquera (1993) who have provided opportunities for Chicana voices to be documented and heard. This type of methodological

inquiry, "challenges the claims of objectivity and links research to community concerns and social change" (p. 1). Furthermore, the work of Rosaldo (1989) challenges the notion of objectivity in social analysis of culture suggesting that subjectivity in social analysis is unavoidable and objectivity unrealistic.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The issues of economic development, female subordination and feminism have historically been considered by scholars as too broadly based and wide-ranging to be understood within a single unified conceptual framework. Recently, however, new theoretical studies (Harcourt, 1994, Radcliff & Westwood 1994; Sen & Grown, 1987) suggest that these issues may be more closely related to one another than previously thought, although field studies exploring their relationship to one another are still uncommon. Although the literature identifies a relationship between economic development, female subordination and feminism, and in fact includes a few narrative accounts of women's experiences in economic and community development projects related to these issues (eg., Golden, 1991), the relationship between these were not specifically highlighted in these works.

The present research examined the relationships between economic development, female subordination, and feminism from a qualitative perspective. This method of research and analysis was utilized as a means of faithfully capturing Salvadoran women's voices as a form of social and self-revelation. It was also anticipated that this study would contribute to the social work literature base as it relates to community practice based in two-thirds world countries, particularly practice with female-centered economic development organizations.

Equally important was arriving at an understanding of the diverse meanings of “feminism” for specific locales. Any one meaning must reflect the needs and issues of women in different societies, regions and times (Sen & Grow, 1987). Defined in this way, feminism may be best viewed as a political movement which lends credence to and supports the concerns and needs of women. Feminism is not unlike many other political movements which have shared a common core commitment to particular causes, ideology or actions.

Although feminism as a political movement in many different locales may differ in its issues, goals and strategies, “the foundation of feminist belief lies in its core commitment to the dismantling of societal structures that promote and support gender subordination and to a vision for all women to participate as full and equal members of society at all levels” (Sen & Grow, 1987, p. 79). Inherent in feminist ideology is the concept of self-determination, it is therefore a critical ingredient of any relevant economic, political, or social work activity.

The debate over the definition of “true” feminism will be avoided in this research as this futile exercise promotes the creation of false dichotomies (elimination of false dichotomies is a construct of feminist theory) (Nes & Iadicola, 1989; Sands & Nuccio, 1992). Instead this work will incorporate Freire’s (1985) emphasis on conscientization, the “process in which humans, not as recipients or objects, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of the sociological reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform reality” (p. 157).

A feminist perspective of economic development reflects a redressing of

gender and other social and political inequities and the specific issue of economic disparity is grounded in the conviction that, for women in developing countries, the concept of “economic development” itself must be reframed to reflect the real concerns of specific groups of women rather than some generalized set of concerns extrapolated from the experiences of Western democracies (Clark, 1991). Such traditional models define “development” as the achievement of economic growth and its associated improvements in standards of living.

As Booth and Walker (1993) and Knippers-Black (1991) have noted, economic growth itself does not lead to improved standards of living for the majority of people. Moreover, Jacobson (1992) adds, “not only do women not automatically benefit from economic growth, they may even fall further behind” (p. 10).

Empowerment

While the term “empowerment” is relatively new to the profession of social work, the concept of empowerment has been known by many terms over a considerable period of time. In fact, social workers’ commitment to helping marginalized and impoverished people empower themselves serves as the cornerstone of the profession’s mission. Solomon (1976) formally introduced the term to the profession in Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Communities and since then it has come to have numerous contemporary meanings. These meanings are a reflection of the diverse intellectual and

political ideas and movements which date back to at least the 1600's (Gutierrez & Nurius, 1994; Simon, 1994) and which serve as historical referents for the concept. In addition the concept's meaning has varied over time, and has often appeared vague. This is because empowerment theory and practice is rooted in feminist theory, community organization methods, adult education (Freire, 1970) and political psychology. In these disciplines is a belief that humans have the ability to determine their own actions (Gutierrez, 1990; Rappaport, 1987; Simon, 1990; Staples, 1990).

For decades, and certainly in recent years, many feminists invoke an empowerment perspective, which assumes that issues of power and powerlessness are integral to the experience of women and other marginalized individuals. Feminist theorists of social work practice have pointed to the intertwined nature of the private and public spheres of daily life. The phrase "the personal is political" reflects this viewpoint, and stresses the belief that individual realities are reflections of political, social, and economic forces (Gould, 1987).

Such an empowerment philosophy has much in common with the teachings of Freire. Both assert that oppressed people and communities thirst for freedom, justice, and fulfillment. Each addresses the history of disempowered people's "struggle for their lost humanity" against difficult odds (Freire, 1970, p. 28). Personal transformation and social change are necessarily interdependent and mutually reinforcing processes, each insufficient without the other (Gutierrez, 1990; Hanna & Robinson, 1994). Empowerment philosophy is based on the conviction that every human being has strengths and is capable of

critically examining the world in dialogue with others.

Empowerment and Self-Esteem

There are three perspectives of empowerment reflected in the literature.

Carrillo (1986) writes about empowerment of women who participate in collective activities.

One of the main aims of the feminist movement is to challenge and transform existing institutions. But it is not enough for women to become incorporated at decision-making levels. True change requires the creation of alternative institutions whose goals and internal structures [they themselves decide] (Carrillo, 1986, p. 40).

Golden's (1991) work with formal and informal Salvadoran women's groups has uncovered primary activities and knowledge that Salvadoran women pursue: gaining access to health services and reproduction rights, legal aid, psychiatric help, support for victims of rape and domestic violence, and greater knowledge of what other communities dare to do. Golden believes that "the ingenious style of Salvadoran women is not passive but imaginative, a stance made possible through their collective organization. Confronted with impasse or confusion they act, figuring out the next step as they move" (p. 194). Golden suggests that these women gain strength from this group interaction and cohesiveness. It allows them the possibility of changing their situations and recognizing that these changes are in their own hands. These women engage in collective decision-making and task-sharing by which they recognize each other's unique talents and abilities. They exchange knowledge in situations of trust, acting upon the principle of equality among equals. Golden's work does

not represent an isolated or rare instance of women working together to consciously improve their understanding of themselves and the world. Reports (Harcourt, 1994; Radcliffe & Westwood, 1993; Young, 1988) of similarly effective women's organizations and groups come from diverse communities around the globe.

In Chile, Casa Sofia, (1990) a center for education and information for marginalized women, engages in work promoting empowerment and increased self esteem of women. Women from the most marginalized areas of Santiago, Chile are participants of this program. They are taught by women from the shanty town area who themselves have been participants in the Casa Sofia program. These women learn about their bodies, sexuality, the benefits of primary education, leadership formation, law and the family, and violence against women. Their own assessment of the effect of rising self-esteem and control over their lives is that they have become more secure and thus better able to make major decisions that have changed their lives. They take this new sense of security and awareness back to their communities and initiate training courses for other women in their homes and communities.

Empowerment and Political Action

The successes of women's organizations include empowerment in the political realm. In many cases, women's organizations have been responsible for the awakening of women to the actions they can initiate to alleviate situations of discrimination and oppression. Feijoo and Gogna (1990) write of autonomous

1967-1968

1969-1970

women's groups and their growing political influence, evident in their ability to bring about better protection for women in Argentina. Their studies on anti-violence movements trace the extraordinarily fast rise of this issue to national and international attention, based on the persistence of women calling the nation to account for the injustices it condones. Politically oriented women's groups have been active in bringing feminist concerns to the masses and in making discussions of those issues acceptable creating "political" and/or "social space". In addition, women's groups have become acceptable forums for the airing of personal problems and issues concerning safety, health, and personal well-being and growth.

The political empowerment of women has also led to dramatic and forceful actions in particular cases. In the mid 1970's, Salvadoran women (presently known as CoMadres) whose relatives were among the killed, disappeared or jailed organized to protest the horrendous indiscriminate kidnapping, torturing and murdering that took place when the right-wing government was involved in death squad activity (Schirmer, 1993). These women, many of whom endured rape, bombings of their office, and physical and psychological torture, continued their campaign to force the government to acknowledge the terrible and inhumane deeds that were done and to seek justice for the affected families and the nation. Since the signing of the 1992 Peace Accords, the United Nations released a report by "The Truth Commission" that documents the atrocities CoMadres reference. The Salvadoran government has yet to acknowledge or take responsibility for the findings however, indicting

that much work remains to be done by the CoMadres.

At the international conferences around the world, women discuss the issues and successes associated with consciousness-raising as an effective way of enhancing control over their lives. Carr (1984), reporting on a Latin American conference, notes that at workshops rural women who have struggled with these issues are the most valued participants. As Sen and Grow (1987) note, "the particular perspective of poor rural women gives centrality to the fulfillment of basic survival needs as the priority issue; they are therefore the most committed militant, and energetic actors once avenues for action emerge" (p. 89).

It is not uncommon for women to face strong opposition to their political involvement from their partners (Craske, 1993; Las DIGNAS, 1993). In many regions, women's self-help groups have given practical help and support to those who were victims of domestic violence or who wished to separate from their partners. Though confrontation and physical violence may not be the preferred way to solve disputes, women have resorted to force to bring about changes in their conditions.

Empowerment and Gender Inequities

It is imperative for women in any society to discuss, debate and challenge the connections between the social, economic, and political structures and the ultimate vision of gender equality. A recognition of the differing issues and methods supports women's actions to work within existing structures to change or to work to transform those structures.

There is considerable evidence (Clark, 1991; Cloud, 1989; Sen & Grown, 1987) that programs to redress gender inequities in developing countries require a substantive focus on women's economic status within their families, communities, and nations.

For any type of organization in a developing country to have an impact on gender inequity, it must be an organization whose focus includes attention to the economic disparity between males and females which both arises from and further reinforces the unequal distribution of and access to valued work opportunities (Abraham & Abraham, 1988; Jain, 1991).

According to Moser (1993) poor women in Latin America are trying to balance their time and activities between reproductive, productive and community managing roles. Societal expectations place tremendous pressure on women to balance these gender assigned roles.

It is critical to the initiation of any economic development program that the lives of women and children be recognized as inextricable intertwined. There is a lack of awareness that entrance for women into the wage economy does not decrease women's primary responsibility of maintaining the household and children (Dixon, 1978). As is often the case in gender inequity situations, extra demands on women and their time often get shifted to female children in the household. As noted by Lovel and Feuerstein (1985) understanding and acknowledging women's "fifth world of the kitchen, garden, village well and children" (p. 160) is crucial to implementing economic development programs directed toward two-thirds world women.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY

(Social Workers) defining and naming experiences for others reduces people's sense of agency, encouraging reliance on professionals rather than one's own personal voice. Alternative paradigms for research that begin with people's personal theories and address the subjective nature of research include feminist models, case studies, qualitative research and critical ethnography (Brown, 1994, p. 294).

Introduction

The current study used an exploratory, descriptive illustrative case study approach to answer the four principal questions raised in Chapter One, namely:

- 1) What is the relationship between membership in Las DIGNAS economic development projects and women's perceptions of self-esteem?
- 2) What is the relationship between membership in Las DIGNAS economic development projects and women's perceptions of their personal empowerment?
- 3) What is the relationship between membership in Las DIGNAS economic development projects and women's participation in political processes?
- 4) What is the relationship between membership in Las DIGNAS economic development projects and women's perceptions of changes in gender relationships?

The study utilized semi-structured ethnographic interviews with an information-rich, purposive sample of Salvadoran women to further explore the relationship between membership in a woman's organization and its economic development projects and subjects' self-perceptions of changes in self-esteem,

personal empowerment, political participation and gender relationships. Ethnographic methodology was employed as a means of capturing and conveying women subjects' voices and forms of social and self-revelation.

Population

The population which the findings of this research may tell us more about are women involved in women's organizations in Central and South America. Although the conditions in each of these countries are different, conditions for women in terms of economic development, self-esteem, empowerment, political participation and gender subordination share enough similarities to make insights potentially useful. In particular, this study's results may be generally applicable to other rural El Salvadoran communities, of which the research site is but one where Las DIGNAS projects are being implemented.

The experiences of the women in Santa Patricia are similar to those of many women in El Salvador who have survived the Civil War. Some of the women of this community were also among the 500 women throughout the country to establish Las DIGNAS in 1990. It seems of particular value that El Salvador is a country which has only recently reached a peaceful settlement in a long-lasting and violent war.

The experiences of women in Santa Patricia who are involved in economic development projects sponsored by a feminist organization may provide a model for use (or adaptation) by women in similar circumstances. It is the narrative accounts of change which these women tell which can be of

inestimable value for individuals and organizations working with oppressed women worldwide.

Subjects

The subjects for this study were 12 women who work in Santa Patricia, El Salvador, are members of Las DIGNAS, and are involved in some capacity in one of four economic development projects in the community. These projects included the women's store, the bakery, dairy production and basket weaving.

Sampling Procedure

A "typical site" sampling strategy was utilized. This involved providing an in depth qualitative profile of one or more typical cases. Patton (1990) describes the selection process of "typical cases" as a selection process with the cooperation of key informants, such as administrative or program staff, or knowledgeable participants who are able to identify what is typical. The purpose of providing a qualitative profile is to describe and illustrate what is typical rather than making generalized statements about the experiences of the participants. It is important to bear in mind that studies of this type do not permit the use of generalizations in any rigorous sense.

"When the typical site sampling strategy is used, the site [in this study, Santa Patricia] is specifically selected because it is not in any way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual. This strategy is often appropriate in sampling villages for community development studies in Third World countries" (Patton, 1990, p. 173).

The three project coordinators were known to the researcher from three previous visits to the community of Santa Patricia. Each had agreed to participate in some type of future research to be conducted by this researcher. At the time of the previous visits the current study had not be fully conceptualized. Each of these subjects was asked prior to the interview to provide the name of another Las DIGNAS woman involved in any of the four economic development projects who might be a potential research subject. Thereafter, each subject referred other women involved in the projects until all 12 interviews are completed. This technique is known as “snowball sampling” (Yegidis & Weinbach, 1995). An effort was made to secure proportional representation from each of these economic development projects so that no single work group’s experience dominated the study.

Participation in the interviews was strictly voluntary. Neither project coordinators nor other participants were paid for their involvement in this research, which made all participation strictly voluntary . After the purpose of the research was explained, written consent was obtained from each participant. It was anticipated that some of the nine additional respondents recruited by the three original contacts would also be women known to the researcher, and this was the case, as three of the nine were individuals with whom contact had been established prior to July, 1995.

Time frame for the study

Women were interviewed during the month of July, 1995 at their work sites in Las DIGNAS projects and at another site in Santa Patricia where they felt comfortable. Each interview took from two to three hours, depending on the elaboration each respondent provided to the questions. Opportunity was provided for women who wished to talk at greater lengths to schedule a second interview session. The author conducted the interviews in Spanish. However previous field experience had verified the need for technical support in understanding local language usage. An individual from the United States who has lived in El Salvador for eight years and in Santa Patricia for three years served as translator/interpreter to help facilitate the full understanding of the idioms and expressions of this rural community. While there was a risk of interpreter bias, the need for an individual fluent in the local language usage was judged to be stronger than the risk of bias.

Prior to the interview, the women were provided with two opportunities to decline participation in the research. At least one day in advance of scheduling an interview, the purpose of the research was explained to the participant and at that point she could decline participation. On the day of the scheduled interview immediately prior to the interview the participant was asked a second time whether she wished to participate in the research. Again she could have declined. At any time during the interview if a respondent demonstrated any reluctance or hesitancy to disclose information or discuss a specific topic the

researcher offered to end the interview or directed the interview to a different topic.

It was possible that some portions of the information offered by the participants could elicit emotionally painful memories. Every effort was made to minimize any possible negative effects on the participants by: (a) providing at least two opportunities for the participant to decline participation in the research, (b) providing both written and verbal assurance that information from the findings will not identify them by name, (c) providing the participants with a copy of the findings as a way of acknowledging their role as participants and subjects and not as objects of research. Las DIGNAS agreed to have the staff clinical psychologist available to any participant post-interview if the researcher or interviewee requested services. A letter of agreement from Las DIGNAS to the researcher is listed in Appendix D.

Methodology

The primary method utilized in this research was ethnographic semi-structured interviews with each participant. As the U.S. Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1991) has noted, the case study method is a particularly appropriate method of systematically “looking at what is happening, collecting data, analyzing information and reporting the results” (p. 1). Such case studies are especially well suited for generating, rather than testing, hypotheses.

Illustrative case studies are descriptive, utilizing one or two instances to show what a situation is like. This helps interpret other data, especially when there is reason to believe the readers know too little about a program. Illustrative case studies serve to make the unfamiliar familiar, and gives researchers and readers a common language about the topic (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1991).

The interview focused on discovering the relationship between participant's membership in Las DIGNAS, involvement in an economic development project, and perceptions of changes in self-esteem, empowerment, political participation and personal (gender) relationships.

Each interview was tape recorded with the permission of the woman. All interviews were transcribed by the author and interpreter and utilized a participant number and pseudonym in place of a name to protect the woman's right to confidentiality. Pseudonyms were also used for the community's name and geographical areas.

With the participant's permission, the researcher also made field notes about each interview, recorded the participant's affective state, non-verbal messages, and any other salient features of the interview that were not captured through tape recording.

Instrumentation

An Interview Guide with open-ended questions, probes and follow-up questions was used in this project (See Appendix C). In format, this Guide

contained one question related to each of the themes of self-esteem, empowerment, political participation and gender inequity. Each woman was asked about her personal history which included general demographic information, her involvement with Las DIGNAS, her involvement with an economic development project, her idea of feminism, and future projections of her life.

The Interview Guide was developed with women in the community of Santa Patricia as well as other rural communities in El Salvador where Las DIGNAS has a presence. Field work conducted by the researcher on three separate occasions provided evidence which suggested women in Las DIGNAS economic development projects participated in the life of their communities differently following active involvement in the organization. Evidence suggested changes in women's political participation, general relationships, self-esteem and perceptions of personal empowerment were related to Las DIGNAS participation.

In addition to the researcher's field experience, other resources were consulted which contributed to the development of this Guide. These included a questionnaire utilized by Golden (1991), in her work with Salvadoran women and a survey developed by the authors of a United States International Development report written in conjunction with the National Council of Women of Thailand (1977) titled, "The Status of Thai Women in Two Rural Areas".

Questions (1a) through (1h) were intended as relationship and trust building questions so that exploration of information related to the four research questions could be approached in a more direct manner. The data gathered

from these questions was analyzed for the purposes of providing a comprehensive profile of each participant.

The proposed open-ended Interview Guide was employed only as a tool to guide the interviews, not as a questionnaire (Tutty, Rothery & Grinnell, Jr., 1996). The purpose of the Guide was to serve as a springboard for discussion. Slight modifications were necessary as the Guide was used under field conditions.

Data Analysis

A content analysis was utilized to interpret and categorize interview data. In addition, open-ended and axial coding strategies were employed. This researcher analyzed the data independently, identifying, categorizing, and coding individual items of information, differentiating discrete pieces of data and determining their relationship to each other and the whole, identifying general themes. As with most qualitative research the goal of the effort was to identify common themes and primary patterns in the data (Patton, 1990).

Axial Coding

Axial coding is accomplished by the related processes of deconstruction and reconstruction. First, information that has been secured is deconstructed into the smaller units of meaning, such as words or phrases. Once this deconstruction at this level is accomplished, unifying themes across these words

and phrases are sought.

A unifying theme serves as an *axis*, or straight line through the center of a plane, around which similar meanings can revolve. Similar meanings are then collected around each axial theme. In many studies, this deconstruction and reconstruction processes may pass through several phases before all meanings are adequately and appropriately represented. It is not uncommon for the process to include the generation of several *false axes*, or to arrive at initial themes which are later discarded in favor of themes which more accurately represent the information set.

In this study, the plan was to first examine the information secured from the subjects in terms of the four principal questions, that is, in terms of *self-esteem, empowerment, political participation, and gender relationships*. Responses secured from the women were first deconstructed into these general topical areas, then into ever-smaller, more specific meaning units related to the words and phrases that the women used. Then an effort was made to identify or construct themes that emerged across the four broad categories. As themes (*axes*) were constructed, they were used to re-code the information provided by the women, moving toward the creation of themes which summarized the details that women shared, but accurately extracted and represented all of the meanings. These tasks were accomplished by the researcher without use of any computer assisted process.

Limitations

The study had a number of characteristics which impacted the generalizability of the results. The first is that the sample size was relatively small and subjects were not selected for representativeness. The snowball methodology sampling resulted in a sample which was more homogeneous than the population with respect to the characteristics of interest to the study. It was recognized that most subjects referred individuals who were likely to have similar beliefs and attitudes to the research project.

Another limitation of this study was that subjects' responses could not be assumed to be independent of one another. In fact, it was anticipated that in the community setting much information about the research would be shared between potential subjects and actual subjects. In such circumstances, contamination of one subject's responses by the (earlier) responses or project related experiences of another subject could not be controlled for or systematically reduced.

A third limitation was the demand characteristic of research such as this where subjects may have felt an obligation to participate or to provide specific responses they believed the researcher wanted to hear. These demand characteristics may have been exacerbated by strong group cohesiveness among the women of Santa Patricia, all of whom may have felt obligated to confirm the researcher's perspective. It is impossible to assess the full effects of demand characteristics (Orne, 1959; Shaffir, Stebbins & Turowetz, 1980) -- that

is, the intrinsic characteristics which influence participant's involvement in research projects of this type or to fully explain the many implications the demand characteristics may have for these participants. Consideration of demand characteristics at least provided a conceptual framework for speculation on the level of participation, even if it did not provide a definitive answer about why.

There is also the possibility that being a participant in the research itself may have created some measure of change which the study sought to examine. For example, being selected as a research subject may have impacted self-esteem, perceptions of empowerment or the balance between a woman and men in the community.

The research also had limitations in terms of its temporal and spatial exclusivity. It was highly focused on a small community for a very limited period of time. Whether this place or the particular time was truly "typical" will never be completely known. Such limitations should not diminish the importance of keeping in mind that the information secured from this study provides knowledge to social work and other professions on a process by which societies make fundamental changes in traditional power structures and in individual, community, and societal expectations. By documenting the participants' characteristics and interviewing them in person, this study provides a more focused picture of women and their experiences with economic development.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The Community of Santa Patricia 1995

The data of this study were generated in July 1995 in Santa Patricia, a small community located in El Salvador. At the time of the study, Santa Patricia was a rural community located in the department (state) of Cabañas. It was approximately an hour and a half walk from the Salvadoran-Honduran border and approximately six hours via foot and bus from San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador. The nearest larger community was Victoria which is about a one-and-a-half to two hour walk. Victoria serves as the major connection for commerce and travel for residents of Santa Patricia. The road leading from Victoria to Santa Patricia was traversable only by four wheel drive vehicles, and, for them, easily managed only during the dry season, which is approximately six months long. Despite the condition of the road, there were occasional travelers who made this trip on foot. Vehicles that made the trip often stopped for foot travelers. Approximately two years prior to the study, the community of Santa Patricia purchased a used mid-sized pickup truck which was able to make the trip from Victoria to Santa Patricia approximately three times a week with a full cargo of people.

In terms of geography, Santa Patricia is located in a small valley surrounded by low-lying hills. From the tops of these hills the Volcano Chichontepec is visible, one of the many inactive volcanoes that dominate the

landscape. Rich growth of semi-tropical flora cover the hillsides in the vicinity of Santa Patricia, although deforestation was also apparent. Year-round temperatures are summer-like during the day and generally cool during the evenings.

As a rural area, Santa Patricia is dependent upon the harvest of beans and corn for its survival. Additional crops and produce include sugar cane, bananas, and some livestock. Everything produced by the community, with the exception of baked goods from the women's bakery, is consumed within Santa Patricia itself. Some of the baked goods are being sold in some of the small neighboring communities, where baked bread is still considered a novelty.

The community of some 3,000 people is laid out so that the main road leading into the community terminated at the town square. Outside of a few large trees there is little vegetation in the immediate vicinity. Dirt and mud dominate the landscape. The town square is ringed by homes and paths that lead further into the community. Except for a few of the newer structures, all of the homes in the community are simple, one-story structures with an exterior of either mud and stick or adobe and with an interior of dirt floors. The most common home interior consists of a single room, with draped material partitioning off various spaces. Cooking is done over an open fire in an area adjacent to the home. Most homes have electrical power. However, disruptions in service are a daily occurrence with power outages lasting from a few minutes to several hours. These disruptions occur more frequently during the rainy season. The few newer structures, which include a handful of homes, the

Catholic Church and the health clinic, are constructed of cement block and had cement floors.

At the time of the study, no homes in Santa Patricia had running water. Sanitation facilities are provided by individual outhouses. Water is available via three wells, one of which is located at the center of the community in the town square. The other two wells are on the north and south ends of the community. Two of these wells had been developed in the two years preceding this study. In addition to drinking water, these wells also provide space for bathing and the washing of clothes. Until recently (the last two years) a stream which flows around the periphery of the community had been used for these purposes.

No phone service existed with the community in 1995. Radio broadcasts are received from several nearby communities. A handful of the residents have televisions and are able to receive poor quality broadcasts from the major cities in the country.

The dirt paths that run between homes are often rutted and full of holes. During the rainy season these paths and the general area surrounding the community become muddy quagmires. Animals, including chickens, pigs and dogs, range freely within the community, resulting in unhealthy sanitation conditions. Beside the previously described community truck, no privately owned mechanical form of transportation is available.

Institutions within the community include the Catholic Church, a recently constructed health center, and a school. Medical and dental care is available and provided by health care promoters. There are no civilian police in Santa

Patricia, though plans were being made for a post to be established within the next year.

In 1995, there were three general stores operating in Santa Patricia. Two of the stores were run by families and war-wounded individuals while the third (which was actually the first store established in the area) was operated by the women of Las DIGNAS. The stores sold basic staples including food items, thread, candles, soap and various other basic necessities.

At the time the study was undertaken, this was a repopulated and repatriated community which, because of its isolated location, had historically been excluded from many of the economic, social, political and cultural benefits of the structures in El Salvador. In December 1992, the Salvadoran Government officially recognized Santa Patricia as a Cooperative. Prior to this time, the community had no legal right to re-establish itself on the land they had vacated due to strife caused by a twelve-year Civil War.

As recently as 1990, barely half a decade before this study was undertaken, government forces had continued to engage in attacks on the local people in the department of Cabañas and in particular on the village of Santa Patricia. The community of Santa Patricia had a proud history of revolutionary struggle and had been the scene of fierce fighting during the 12-year Civil War against the right wing government.

The residents of the community of Santa Patricia, over a four-year period of time from 1987 to 1991, had returned from the resettlement camps of La Vertude and Mesa Grande in Honduras to rebuild their community. In October

1987, the largest group -- approximately 1,800 people in number -- had returned to Santa Patricia. The second mass return occurred in May 1988, with approximately 800 people making their way home; and about a year later, a third group managed their return. The most recent and final group of repatriates had returned in 1991 (Santa Patricia Directiva, 1993).

Role of the Interpreter

The interpreter was chosen for her knowledge of the language of El Salvador, particularly the colloquialisms of the area, as well as for her long-standing connection to the area and people of Santa Patricia. Although a North American, for the past eight years the interpreter had lived in El Salvador. At the height of the civil war she had lived in Santa Patricia for three years. As a result of this familiarity with the community and its members, the interpreter's role was more substantial than originally conceptualized in the research design.

Because of established and prior relationships that the participants had with the interpreter, it was likely that the women referred for the study were more willing to participate in the lengthy interview process. It is also possible that during the course of the interviews the women were more candid and open due to their comfort with the interpreter.

There were also certain demand characteristics associated with the interpreter's role. Because of the interpreter's prior relationships with the participants she had an emotional investment in the research process and quite possibly felt the need to represent the women and their experiences in ways that

would be beneficial to the research study. The researcher attempted to anticipate and minimize the interpreter's emotional involvement and her need to meet the objectives of the study by acknowledging these characteristics with the interpreter.

Prior to beginning the interviews, the researcher and interpreter discussed the importance of maintaining a clear differentiation between their respective roles and functions during the interview process. This separation of function included defining the role of the interpreter as a conduit of information between the interviewee and researcher. Despite these efforts, roles within the interview process were initially difficult to maintain, due, in no small part, to pre-existing relationships between interpreter and interviewees.

For example, at the beginning of the first participant's interview, the interpreter interjected questions which she had formulated, overstepping the bounds of her interpreter role. This role confusion was heightened by the natural tendency of the interviewee to address herself to the interpreter with whom she had a prior relationship rather than to the principal investigator, as well as by her tendency to look to the interpreter for confirmation of her responses.

Strategies utilized to counteract these issues included stopping the interview and directly addressing these problems with the interpreter, redirecting the flow of the interview back to the researcher's questions, verbal discussions of the issue upon completion of the interview, and non-verbal signs given by the researcher to the interpreter although the demand characteristics from the interpreter could not be totally removed, the researcher remained alert to the

introduction of bias from this source during all interviews.

Despite these occasional difficulties in the first interviews, the investigator found that the benefits of having an interpreter familiar with the area and people far outweighed any possible negative effect of interpreter bias.

Characteristics of the Participants

Twelve female residents of Santa Patricia who were members of the organization known as Las DIGNAS and involved in one of the organization's economic development projects in their community at the time of the study were interviewed.

All of the participants worked in the dairy, bakery, women's store, or basket production projects. Ten of the twelve resided in the community of Santa Patricia and the remaining two lived in the neighboring community of Valle Cristina. Participants were interviewed depending on their availability and work schedule in Santa Patricia, Victoria or the capital of San Salvador. All participants were interviewed at least once in Santa Patricia and portions of three interviews were conducted in the other two sites mentioned above. Interview sites in Santa Patricia included the participants' homes, extended families' homes, and the Las DIGNAS work sites. Interviews conducted in San Salvador took place in the guest house in which the participants were staying for a two night period of time. The House of Women, a recently founded domestic violence shelter operated by Las DIGNAS, served as the interview site in the town of Victoria.

A snowball sampling technique was utilized to secure the participation of the 12 participants. Project coordinators were not available as planned for the initial interviews due to scheduling conflicts. They did however provide the names of three other women who agreed to be interviewed. Each of these women referred other women involved in the projects until all 12 interviews including the project coordinators were complete. A total of 14 women were referred to the researcher for an interview during the month of July 1995, with two of the 14 declining participation. Neither of these participants provided an explanation for their decision.

Those selected to participate met with the researcher and an interpreter for an interview to discuss themes related to the research questions of the study. A copy of the guide is included in the Appendix. All interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and qualitatively analyzed. Each interview lasted approximately two to three hours.

None of the participants required referral to a clinical psychologist during the data-gathering phase of this study as a result of problems resulting from their participation in the interviews. The psychologist remained available to the women in the months which followed; however, as of the end of 1995, no issues requiring such therapeutic intervention had become evident.

Summary Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Demographic data collected from participants included information on personal characteristics such as age, place of birth, marital status, children,

household features, educational level, and sources of income.

Age. The ages of the participants ranged from 23 to 60 years, with a mean of 40.6 years. Most of the participants were in their thirties or forties when surveyed.

Birthplace. The respondents' places of birth demonstrated significant homogeneity: six of the twelve participants were born in Santa Patricia, five were born in communities within a hundred mile radius of Santa Patricia; and one was born in the neighboring country of Honduras.

Marital status. In terms of marital status, four (one-third) of the respondents had been married in a civil and church ceremony. The husband of one of these four women was killed in the war and she now describes herself as widowed.

Two of the women were compañeras. (The term compañera is used in El Salvador to describe a women who is in a relationship with a male without legal recognition or benefit of marriage as recognized in either a civil or church ceremony. This is comparable to what is referred to as cohabitation or, after a specified period of time, common law marriage in other countries.) One of these had a partner killed in the war, and she now considers herself single. After a period of some eight years living as a single woman, the other now has another male partner and considers herself to be a compañera again.

Half of the respondents related that although they had previously been *compañeras*, they considered themselves single at the time of the study.

Children. In terms of number of children, these 12 women had given birth to a total of 65 children. The number of live births to the participants ranged from 1 to 14 per woman, with an average of 5 to 6 children born to each woman. It is worth noting that the number of pregnancies for these women far exceeded the number of live births. One participant, for example, reported that she had been pregnant at least 20 times that she “knew of.” Miscarriages and stillbirths were a painful, but accepted, fact of life among these participants.

Two-thirds of the participants had each given birth to five or fewer children. One-third had given birth to 6 or more children.

Of the 65 live births, one third of the children were no longer alive at the time of this study. Half of the women had at least one child die during the Civil War, either as a combatant or as the result of an act of war. Other children died from a variety of causes, including malnutrition, suicide, or interpersonal violence.

In terms of age, the participant's, forty-four children who were alive at the time of the survey were from four months old to their late thirties.

Household characteristics. Eleven of the participants reported living with members of their extended families at the time of the survey. The other respondent lived alone with two of her three children, while her third child lived

with the respondent's mother. The sizes of households ranged from 3 persons to 11 persons, with a mean of 6.6 persons per household.

Educational characteristics. Educational achievement ranged from matriculation into first grade to completion of ninth grade. Two of the participants began first grade, but did not complete the year. One participant had completed second grade; four had completed third grade; three participants had completed fifth; and one participant completed sixth grade. In addition, one participant had completed ninth grade and had recently begun high school coursework.

Sources of Income. All 12 respondents provided by far the largest portion of their respective family's incomes. For four women, their income was the sole income source of their families; for the other eight families, there were a variety of other sources (all of these described by the women as erratic and tenuous), including possible sale of any grains produced above subsistence needs, and crafting and sale of useful items such as clothing and saddle parts.

The economic contribution of these women to their households from their Las DIGNAS project participation ranged from \$200 to about \$800 per year in U.S. dollars. According to Annis (1992), a per capital income of \$275 per year (U.S. dollars) in El Salvador qualifies individuals as "extremely poor" while an income of \$370 per year per capita qualifies individuals as "poor" (p. 182). With an average household size of 6.6, the average maximum per capita income within these women's households was approximately \$121.00.

Individual Participant Descriptions

For purposes of conveying the individual characteristics of the women who participated in this study, this section provides a brief biographical sketch for each participant. The information included was shared by the women during the interview process. The names of the women and other household members have been fictionalized to afford the agreed-upon anonymity to study participants.

Lupe: At the time of the study, Lupe, a native of the Santa Patricia area, was 49 years old. A reserved and somewhat shy woman, she had a sense of humor which, while not immediately obvious, came through in subtle and indirect ways. This sense of humor combined with her broad smile belied an underlying sense of anxiety which was most evident at the beginning of the interview.

At the onset she expressed concern about her ability to articulate her story in a way that would be helpful to the interviewer. Over the course of the interview, however, she began to relax, as evidenced by increased eye contact and more confident body posture. By the conclusion of the interview she seemed to feel quite proud of participating in the study, communicated by increasingly comfortable smiles and laughter as well as an eager willingness to share names of other possible study participants with the interviewer.

During the interview, Lupe described herself as a *compeñisina*, which, generally translated, means a rural person with little education. She had entered first grade as a young child, but did not complete this year of schooling.

Lupe described herself as being married in both a civil and church ceremony. This has been her only marital relationship.

Lupe had the experience of fleeing from Santa Patricia to Honduras during the Civil War. During the 10 years she spent as a refugee in the Mesa Grande camp in Honduras she gave birth to 4 of her 12 children. Two of these children, both sons, were killed during the war. At least one of these sons was killed by soldiers as a non-combatant -- he had returned to El Salvador to secure food for the family when he was detained by the military and killed. Lupe returned to Santa Patricia with her family in 1990.

Lupe had been active with the bakery project of Las DIGNAS for approximately 18 months. Her daily rate of pay at the time of the study was 10 colones (with the rate of exchange at 8.6 colones per U.S. dollar). This was her first paid employment, and she was the only one in the family employed outside the home. Her husband was engaged in subsistence farming to provide food for the family.

Carmen: At the time of the study, Carmen was 60 years old and married. Carmen was willing to share information about her involvement with the projects, but was more aloof about sharing personal information. She made virtually no eye contact with the interviewer over the course of the interview. A very soft-spoken woman, Carmen had experienced a rather complex relationship with Las DIGNAS. Although very enthusiastic about the organization and its projects, she had been involved in a painful personal dispute with another project participant which had reduced her level of involvement with the projects. Carmen's hurt and

anger in response to this situation was communicated in wistful recollections of her past Las DIGNAS involvement. As a result of this conflict, the interview with Carmen was somewhat difficult for her personally since it required discussion of these circumstances.

Carmen was born in the department of Cabañas, the same department as Santa Patricia. She described herself as having “only six children.” Four of these were alive, the other two died as combatants in the war.

Carmen fled Santa Patricia to Honduras in 1981, returning home in 1987.

This study participant had worked in the store project of Las DIGNAS since 1993, but had been involved with the organization since its beginnings in 1990. She earned approximately \$150 colones per month at the time of the interview. This was usually the sole cash income for the family; however, Carmen and her husband also grew grain and, on the rare occasions when the harvest was good, they sold the excess crop for cash.

Gabriella: Gabriella was 23 years old. The youngest of the interviewees, she was very personable, energetic and excited during the interviews, communicating with a maturity and perspective that belied her youth.

Gabriella seemed pleased to have been chosen for the study and was eager to participate. Little prompting was needed for her to expand on her responses. She seemed quite comfortable and confident in herself during the interview.

A single mother with two children, Gabriella was born in Santa Patricia and was a young child when the civil war began.

Gabriella was formerly a *compañera*, but at the time of the study she did not have a male companion. She lived in a residence with 11 members of her family, including her two children, both parents, and six siblings. Gabriella is the sister of another study participant, Anna.

Gabriella was 9 years old when her family fled to the Mesa Grande camp. She and her family came back to Santa Patricia in the second return.

Gabriella had a fifth grade education and, in her own words, could “read and write a little bit.” At the time of the study, she had worked in the Las DIGNAS store for about a year and received a salary of about \$150 colones per month. Other sources of income for the family came from her father’s occasional sales of grain and her sister’s basket-making.

Evita: Evita was a study participant who, in her words, “had 56 years.” A highly personable individual and easily engaged in conversation, she was expressive and forthcoming in describing her involvement with Las DIGNAS and communicating her life story. In contrast to most of the women in Santa Patricia, Evita presented herself in a very animated fashion, smiling and laughing easily. She was able to address serious issues with an appropriate demeanor. Evita spoke with passion about the important aspects of her life and the lives of other women around her. Within the Santa Patricia/DIGNAS community, Evita was seen as a leader and spokesperson.

This survey participant had been a *compañera* of the same man for 27 years; however, their relationship had been stormy, characterized by his beating her and periods of separation.

Evita was born in Santa Patricia and completed second grade as an adult in the refugee camps in Honduras. The family left El Salvador in 1981 and returned in 1987 during the first return.

Evita had 14 children, but at the time of the survey only six were still living, and only one of these, an adult son, lived at home. A granddaughter, who is the child of one of her children who is not at home, also lived with her.

Evita had worked with Las DIGNAS since its inception. At the time of the study, Evita worked in the bakery project, earning 10 colones a day. Her *compeñaro* made saddle parts and her son who lived at home also made pants for resale to add to the family's income. When excess grain was raised, the family sold it for additional income.

Isabella: Isabella was born 42 years ago in a department near Santa Patricia. She presented herself as confident, at ease and articulate during the interview process. Easily engaged, Isabella had no difficulty expanding on questions and offering a wide range of information on the topics that were addressed. Her desire to relate information and her creativity were reflected in her offer to sing a Salvadoran ballad about the crossing of the Rio Lempa, a tragic and important event in her life, as the interview was conducted. Isabella smiled easily and often and engaged in regular eye contact.

Isabella was married in both the church and a civil ceremony, and, at the time of the study, had five children, ranging in age from 23 to 4 years.

Isabella went to Honduras in 1981 as a refugee and returned to Santa Patricia in 1991. She completed third grade in the refugee camps as an adult and one of her children was born during this time.

Isabella worked in the Las DIGNAS dairy project earning some 320 colones per month, one of the highest paying project jobs. She had been active in Las DIGNAS almost from its inception. Her husband was a subsistence farmer who brought no additional money into the family from his farming activities.

Teresa: Teresa was 39 years old. Very emotional, she was extremely open and forthcoming about her life and a number of traumatic events that she had experienced. Moreover, she was very articulate, easily engaged, and seemed to be quite sensitive and humble. She spoke with both passion and compassion about the pain and suffering of those around her, with concern for her own well-being as a secondary concern.

In addition, Teresa spoke with a powerful conviction about the importance of changing the conditions for women in her community and country. Among the women she was considered a leader in the community and a role model for younger women.

Teresa maintained consistent eye contact throughout the interview and acknowledged the dialogue with the interviewer via a variety of nonverbal indicators.

The single parent of a 15 year old son, Teresa was previously accompanied, but has been single since her son was an infant. At the time of the study, she lived in a household comprised of her mother, her brother, and her son. She had been born in Santa Patricia, but like most of the village, left for Honduran refugee camps, taking with her a 7-month son and her parents in 1981. She returned to Santa Patricia in 1988. During the family's period of exile, her father was killed as a non-combatant by unidentified soldiers in the Mesa Grande, Honduran refugee camp.

At the time of the study, Teresa was working in the bakery project, earning 10 colones per day, the family's only source of income. Teresa was instrumental in starting the Las DIGNAS community store and had been involved in all of the economic development projects, including the bakery and dairy projects.

Aida: Aida was a single 27 year old parent of a 7-year old daughter at the time of the survey. She was very soft-spoken throughout the interview, an affect which tended to mask some of the intensity of her opinions. She was especially outspoken and articulate about issues concerning women's rights and violence in the community, and tearful as she related traumatic experiences in her life. Despite the intensity of the material, Aida maintained a sense of composure and purpose, insuring her ability to complete the interview. Aida was also quite interactive with the interviewer, inquiring about the situation of women in the United States.

Aida was formerly accompanied, but her *compañero* died when her daughter was an infant. She lived with her father, three brothers, and her child.

Aida spent four years in the refugee camp in Mesa Verde between 1984 to 1988. Her mother died during this period of exile. At the time of this study, she supported her family by work in the project store, earning 200 colones a month. The family also brought in a small amount of money from selling grain.

Aida had recently begun high school in the adult education program newly initiated in Santa Patricia.

Alicia: Born in a small town near Santa Patricia, Alicia was 49 years old at the time of the study and had eight children, two of them born in refugee camps. Patient and thorough, Alicia appeared comfortable and at ease during the interview process. She related several tragic events during her life and did so with significant expression of affect. Alicia had been forced to leave El Salvador twice during the war. After her initial refugee experience, she returned, but conditions again worsened and she left again. She returned permanently in 1989. Her willingness to be involved with this research was shown in her perseverance to talk through her tears.

Alicia was widowed: Her husband had been killed as a non-combatant during the war, as was an 11-year old son. She completed third grade in the camps. Alicia spoke with pride about her involvement with the FMLN. She also expressed satisfaction with participating in a research project that would support the advancement of other women.

Alicia worked with the dairy project, earning about 320 colones per month. In addition to this salary, she receives a small amount from the government as a

result of her husband's death. Of the study participants, Alicia is the most financially prosperous because of this government support.

Freida: Freida was 33 years old at the time of the study and was the mother of four children, three of them still living. Her five year old daughter had been killed by a stray bullet approximately a year earlier. She was single, but had previously been accompanied. She lived with two of her children, both sons, and her third son lived with her mother.

Freida was very interactive during the interview. She engaged easily and seemed very willing to share her experiences, including some painful events which had occurred in her family. She spoke with passion about a number of topics and made frequent use of hand gestures and other affirmative nonverbal signals. She was considered a leader within the Santa Patricia Las DIGNAS community.

Freida was born in Santa Patricia and had completed third grade.

Counted among those who had participated with Las DIGNAS from its beginnings, at the time of the study Freida worked in the dairy project and earned about 320 colones a month. This was the family's sole source of income.

Rachael: Rachael was 24 at the time of this study. Somewhat difficult to engage during the interview process, Rachael maintained minimal eye contact and tended to respond to questions with brief and somewhat guarded statements. Rachael's quiet demeanor and closed body posture seemed to indicate minimal self-confidence in the interview process. Although she

continued to smile throughout, her smile was frequently accompanied by a nervous laugh. Despite this apparent discomfort, at the conclusion of her participation, Rachael seemed pleased with herself for taking part in the research study.

Rachael had two children and, at the time of the study, she was not accompanied. Born in Santa Patricia she had been a refugee in Mesa Grande as a child, returning in 1989.

Rachael lived with her parents, children, and her siblings. She had completed third grade in the Mesa Grande refugee camps. She worked in the bakery project, earning 10 colones per day. Other sources of income for the family were sale of corn, beans, and farm animals. Her involvement with Las DIGNAS had been slightly less than a year.

Mercedes: Forty-seven years old, Mercedes was born in nearby Victoria but grew up in Santa Patricia. Extremely verbal and outspoken despite a generally soft-spoken demeanor, she was very forthcoming in relating a range of personal experiences, speaking throughout her interview with an evident sense of confidence and purpose. Once engaged in the interview, Mercedes maintained eye contact and open body language. Her interview felt particularly relaxed and comfortable as evidenced by her willingness to provide refreshments for the interviewer and interpreter.

At the time of the study, Mercedes had five children and was accompanied, but not by the man who was the father of her children. The father of her children had been killed in the war.

Seven people lived in Mercedes' house, one of them was a niece orphaned by the war.

One of the original members of Las DIGNAS, Mercedes had completed the sixth grade and worked at the dairy project earning 320 colones per month. Other sources of household income included a family store which had just been opened to sell soft drinks, essentials, and grains.

Anna: A native of Santa Patricia, Anna was 39 years old. In personality, she was extremely serene and humble. During the entire interview, she held her sick infant in her arms, yet responded to any disruption with self-assured presence. Anna was extremely easy to interview due to her willingness to share and relate her experiences.

This woman spoke with noticeable sadness and conviction about the plight and rights of the poor in her country. While feeling positive about her role in bringing about many of the political and social changes in her community, Anna's humility ruled out any expression of personal pride. Despite this sincerity, her sense of confidence and conviction were apparent.

At the time of the study, she had five children and was not accompanied, although she had been in the past. She lived in a household with 11 persons, including her children and her sister Gabriella who was also a study participant.

Anna left Santa Patricia in 1981, eventually living in three different Honduran refugee camps before returning to the community in 1991.

Anna was working with the basket weaving project, earning a maximum of 300 colones per month. Other sources of family income included her sister Gabriella's Las DIGNAS wages.

Discussion of the Data Analysis Process

After the twelve interviews were completed and the researcher returned to the United States, each interview was translated and transcribed. These transcriptions, on average, were twenty pages in length, providing approximately 250 pages of narrative as basic content for the data analysis process.

This analysis began with the researcher reading all interviews in their entirety, beginning to end, several times. In these initial readings, the greatest attention was directed toward the four central questions relating to *self-esteem*, *empowerment*, *political participation*, and *general relationships*; however, the research became more and more open to identifying any other themes which were also evident in the data. It was at this point that an awareness of two additional themes -- *impacts of the Civil War* and *impacts of the re-location and re-settlement efforts* -- began to emerge.

Slightly later in the processes of ordering the data and devising a coding "map," other themes emerged, including those of *caring for children*, *advice to children*, and *feminism (or feminist thought)*. In addition, it was noted that all women made numerous references to Las DIGNAS and to the economic development projects in their interviews, lending support to a decision to consider them thematically, at least in a first coding effort.

In this way the first coding categories were created. The interviews were then all read again, beginning to end, and all statements within each interview relating to these different colors were used, for example, all references to *war* were coded in red; references to *Las DIGNAS* were coded in brown; to *feminism*, in pink; to *self-esteem*, in purple; to *political participation* in orange; and so on. Each interview was thereby deconstructed into its themes.

Once this coding of the 250 pages of transcripts was complete, the interviews were re-read yet another time, but this time only those portions which had not been highlighted were read to determine if any other themes could be discovered. This reading of the interviews did not produce any new themes, but resulted in some portions of the women's narratives which had not been coded in the first place being understood as representative of one of the existing themes. There remained, however, in almost every interview, some parts which were purely idiosyncratic and not thematic in any sense. For the most part, these were conversational asides or remarks the women had made which did not relate to the interview questions. No attempt was made to create a coding category encompassing these asides and offhand remarks.

When the researcher was satisfied that this phase of coding was complete, the interviews of each woman were literally deconstructed; that is, the themes of each interview were physically separated (cut apart) from one another. Each women's comments about *self-esteem*, *empowerment*, *political participation*, *gender relationships*, *the Civil War*, *Las DIGNAS*, *the economic development projects*, *caring for children*, *advice for children*, and *feminism* were

taken from their interview contexts and assembled together on *theme boards*. The *theme boards* contained each woman's words on the theme, exactly as she had spoken them, along with her name. When each *theme board* was completed, it contained all of the attributed statements of all of the study participants on that topic or theme. In this way, ten theme boards were created, with all of the words from all of the women in the same color code.

Following this step, the theme boards were analyzed as if they were separate and distinct from one another to discern if there were *themes-within-themes* to be found. In addition, the theme boards were also compared to one another to determine if any *themes-across-themes* could be ascertained. From this comparison, the theme of *voices* emerged strongly. The discussion which follows elaborates upon this theme as it relates to the findings of the study.

Once all of the relevant data provided by the women in their interviews had been coded into *main themes*, *themes-within-themes*, and *themes-across-themes*, the process began of reconstructing them into units of meaning which could be communicated as the "findings" of this study. At this point, a decision was made to use, insofar as possible, the actual words of the twelve women of Santa Patricia in this endeavor. Although the researcher exercised judgment in the processes of selecting and arranging these words, they were never edited for style or grammar. Instead, every effort was maintained to record and present these women's voices faithfully.

This coding effort should be viewed as but one of the many ways that this data can be organized and understood. With the data provided, readers are

encouraged to discover or construct other levels and layers of meaning for themselves.

Roles of Women in Santa Patricia

Gender Roles: The Relationship Between Men and Women

The women of Santa Patricia have been raised in a culture in which the domestic, political, social and religious roles of males and females have historically been highly differentiated, structured and inflexible. The participants' descriptions, in their own voices, were unequivocal in underscoring this conclusion.

Machismo. As within many Latin American countries, *machismo* had influenced the interpersonal relationships between the sexes, with females generally expected to assume roles that were subservient to males. Several of the participants provided highly personalized descriptions of *machismo* historically and currently in Santa Patricia during their interviews. Mercedes' story was typical:

Since I was a little girl, I have seen things I didn't like. My father was irresponsible. He didn't recognize me as his daughter. He was a man who dominated, or wanted to dominate, everyone. He had different women and wanted them all under his rule. I saw when I was 8 or 9 years old that my father would grab my mother and make her drink wine, and if she didn't do it, he would pour it on her head. And this made me

indignant because I felt that he was just being macho. I grew up in a house where my uncle was the same way, a macho. He would say that women don't have a soul to be saved. It was like if a hen died, you just throw it out. Women were just like animals, when we die we're not anything. There's no pity, no nothing (Mercedes, 1995).

Division of Labor. The interviews also provided considerable information about the division of labor in the community, a division which was described as typically being drawn along very inflexible lines according to gender, with women bearing responsibility for much of the daily work, including gathering wood, carrying water, harvesting grain and grinding it, as well as cooking housekeeping, laundry, and child-rearing. In the tradition of the community, paid employment outside the home had not been an option for females.

...they divide us, the woman and the man, in the housework. The man's work is given value, but not the woman's even though hers is harder... The woman is the first one to get out of bed in the home and the last one to get in bed (Aida, 1995).

The work in our house is still divided for men and women. Everybody does their own, men for men and girls for girls. In the beginning, my husband said, 'Don't go to work [in the Las DIGNAS project].' He doesn't say this anymore and in this way he's changed some, but if my husband did tell me not to go to work, I wouldn't go (Lupe, 1995).

Men don't respect us as women. A lot of women filled themselves with kids or had a lot of kids, and...men took no responsibility for the kids. They denied that the kids were theirs. Women work and work in the house, but they don't see any money because the men have it...Men say that women don't have the capacity [to earn money by working]. Since I was taking care of the kids and making tortillas and everything, men would say, 'What time are you going to have to do anything else, like being a teacher, or studying for the 9th grade? You have to grind corn or you have to work at home because the man has to be able to come home and eat' (Alicia, 1995).

The thing in the community is to say which woman has more children because a woman feels good to say, 'I have 10 children.' And the men feel good because if they have a woman at home with 10 kids, they're happy. They're at peace to know that a woman with that many kids is not going to leave the house. Men feel good to have a woman with a lot of kids because the women are going to stay in the house and wait on them and take care of their kids (Isabella, 1995).

In a meeting where there are both men and women, if there was washing or some other work to be done, the men would be restful and free. If they wanted to go to work, they would go. But we, as women, don't have daily rest. We would work day and night, if we didn't make the time to lay down to sleep. I asked my brother if he would like to stay home and do the

housework and we would loaf around not working like he does. He said he, too, would leave the house and loaf around. So you see, the woman's work is very difficult, but men always take it as nothing (Teresa, 1995).

Anna, who no longer lived with her longtime *compañero* and father of her children because of his physical abuse of her, provided further illumination on the nature of traditional gender relationships and roles, making it clear that some women had found it necessary to leave relationships in order to participate in work outside of their homes:

I tell [my children] that if your father was in the house he would not allow me to go out. And I say everywhere there if I was with him, I couldn't participate in work. He tells [the children] when they go to visit him 'Your mother doesn't take care of you [because she works outside of the home in a Las DIGNAS project].' He doesn't like it that I work. He is always criticizing me (Anna, 1995).

Sexual roles. Several of the study participants also referred to the sexual aspects of traditional gender roles in this community. The clear impression from the women's comments was that historically men had the right to initiate sexual intercourse with their partners (wives or *compañeras*), while women had the responsibility both to consent to her partner's sexual demands as well as to bear and raise any children born as a consequence. Men were described as assuming few of the responsibilities of parenthood while the women described themselves as feeling responsible to have as many children as possible. A few comments provide support for this conclusion:

I thought to get together with a man meant only to have more children
(Aida, 1995).

Once I didn't know anything. I only knew how to have kids and be in the house with my husband (Alicia, 1995).

In relationships with men, the men would just come and grab you and if you were sick, or tired, or whatever, you would have to do it [have sexual intercourse] (Evita, 1995).

Some people believe that women are for nothing except for working in their home and having a lot of children (Isabella, 1995).

The Maternal Role

As in most cultures around the world, the lives of the women in Santa Patricia, El Salvador, were significantly impacted by their child-rearing responsibilities: The 12 women participating in this research provided evidence of the importance attached to the role of mothers in this culture and to the aspects of their own identity which were inextricably linked to this role. However, the findings pointed to maternal roles which differed somewhat from maternal roles in non two-thirds world countries.

As noted, all of the participants had a least one child, most had many more. During the course of their interviews the women frequently referred to their children, including those who were no longer living, but their comments

often evidenced a certain amount of distance or absence from the type of personal investment that is characteristic of mother-child relationships in non two-thirds world countries. For example, the women seldom used the names of their children during the interviews. In fact, of the 65 children of the participants, only three were referred to by first name. Moreover, the accomplishments and characteristics of specific children were never volunteered, as they are routinely in Western cultures. Most references to children were conveyed in the third person, for example, "my son(s)" or "my daughter(s)", or if referring to specific children, "my oldest boy," "my second daughter," "my daughters who live with me," and so on.

One explanation for this apparent distance appeared to be the high mortality rate for children in this community. Although the women obviously had attachments to their children, almost all described experiences with the death of one or more of their own children, young siblings, and/or the children of a close relative or friend. The prevalence and acceptance of these experiences had served, in effect, to normalize the experience of losing a child to the extent that such deaths were not considered unusual: The death of children was quite simply a fact of life in Santa Patricia. The comments of Evita, Lupe, Carmen, and Alicia are illustrative:

At the moment I have six children with me although I had 14 children born.

Some died from not having enough to eat -- some died in this way. One daughter committed suicide, she killed herself (Evita, 1995).

Two of my children died. One was killed in 1980 when we all crossed the Rio Lempa. My family had already crossed the river and he went back to get corn. When he was coming back, the soldiers were waiting for him, and they killed him. Another son died at 8 months of a high fever (Lupe, 1995).

I only have six children and four are alive. Two boys died in the war. They were combatants (Carmen, 1995).

My youngest child is 17 and my son that they killed, who they shot, would be 27. He was the first, the oldest. The same day they [soldiers] killed my husband, they wounded my son and he lost his foot. Then later, when he was 15, he was killed in the military confrontation (Alicia, 1995).

Freida provided additional insight into the expectations of families and the community for a mother who has experienced the tragic loss of a child. Less than a year prior to the study, Freida's 5-year old daughter had been struck by a random bullet fired outside of the family's home. The child fell, mortally injured, into Freida's lap, and died soon thereafter. Freida recalled:

When my daughter died, my brother would say, 'Why are you crying so much?' He would see me crying and say, 'Don't cry so much because she is not going to come back to life' (Freida, 1995).

Attachments to children were mitigated both by the high child mortality rate, the large family size, as well as by these women's recent experiences with

war and exile -- all factors which had worked against the formation of close interpersonal ties.

The interviews also provided evidence that many of the women had become pregnant under circumstances over which they perceived themselves to have little personal control. Few of these 65 children were "planned."

Although none of the women specifically described any of their children as unwanted or burdensome, this theme could be discerned from comments such as the advice Evita (mother of 14) and Freida (mother of 4) offered for girls and young women in Santa Patricia about parenthood:

A young woman needs to know about herself and what her rights are. My advice would be that she not let herself get covered up with children
(Evita, 1995).

Before, I thought that it was good to have all the children that you could have, that if you had more children you would live better. [I thought] that you should have all of the children that God gives you. But now, the advice I would give girls is that if they are going to get married that they don't fill themselves up with children, that they don't have lots of children ...because if you have a lot of children, then you can't do anything else
(Freida, 1995).

Aida, mother of one child, provided a similar insight in an elaboration about women's work responsibilities:

If women have children her work is even harder because if she has more than one...she doesn't have a second to rest because the children are always on the mother and we feel like we are only for them...We as women live with maternity and it is difficult (Aida, 1995).

The study participants described their roles as mothers as being among the aspects of their lives impacted by membership in Las DIGNAS and participation in economic development projects. Specific themes which emerged included changes in their role as sole or primary person responsible for meeting the needs of their children. Involvement in the economic development projects was seen as providing the opportunity for them to move beyond the traditional roles expected of mothers (e.g., cook, housekeeper, child rearer, etc.) and to encourage or demand others in the home to share some of these responsibilities with them.

I raised my son as an only child, but now that I have this knowledge [from Las DIGNAS] I tell him, 'If you want to tolerate hunger, that is up to you. Otherwise, there are tortillas and your hands are in perfect condition. You can serve yourself' (Teresa, 1995).

The way I control my life now is, for example, Sunday. Sunday is the day for me. I don't go out and wash [laundry]. If I want to go out and do something...I can do that. I leave tortillas and [my family] can just grab their tortillas and eat. It's a calm day for me (Evita, 1995).

I have an uncle [who lives in my house] who cooks. He cooks corn and tortillas. So, I think both boys and girls should learn everything, including the work that women do (Rachael, 1995).

My son used to say, 'When are you going to earn something?' Now I feel I have because he helps in the house, sweeping and doing dishes, I have earned something (Evita, 1995).

Influence of the Civil War on Women's Lives

The study participants openly and frequently conveyed that the Civil War, whose Peace Accords had been signed in January, 1992, approximately four years prior to the study, had made a major impact on their lives. To understand the circumstances of these women during the study period in 1995, it is important to understand these impacts. Together with the physical environment of Santa Patricia and the nature of social and personal roles and relationships in which the women were emeshed, these war experiences of the not-too-distant past provided the immediate context within which Las DIGNAS was introduced to Santa Patricia, and in many ways, influenced their participation in the organization itself and its economic development projects.

Preludes to War

Although the Salvadoran Civil War is officially considered to span the period between 1980 and 1992, the study participants had been active

participants in many events leading up to this conflict. Alicia, for example, discussed her role as a member of the Catholic Church effort which was organizing poor people in rural communities in the mid-1970s.

We were part of the reform of the church and were very religious.

We went to courses [on reform]. The guys that wanted to massacre the people went to these courses, too, and they massacred a lot of religious people. We began to organize ourselves as a religious group of the war because we were repressed and we began to discover that there was a violence that no one really knew about. Since we were poor, we discovered that they were killing five percent of the population every month. That was on a national level...We tried to see how we could repudiate all of this because they were repressing us just because we were poor, were religious, and because at our celebrations we would talk about being poor. The first person that they massacred was a woman, and they killed her daughter, too. She was a very religious person. So we stopped doing celebrations and started to see how we could seriously confront the situation with the military: They were killing us because we were religious (Alicia, 1995).

Personal Participation in the War Effort

Most of the women interviewed in this study who were adults during the period during which the war was waged and had participated to some extent in



the conflict. Anna, for example, was active in the early organizational efforts of the guerrillas, in 1980. She told of a dramatic incident from this period which involved her personal participation in a demonstration (siege) at the Red Cross in San Salvador in support of a 16-year old girl who was being held prisoner by the government.

After being at the siege 10 minutes, the [Salvadoran government] soldiers came...They told us we were in danger, we were surrounded by soldiers...A few minutes later they took us from the Red Cross to the headquarters of the National Guard...They put us in some rooms, men separate from the women. Then the soldiers told us 'What are you doing, subversives?' Then, we were very afraid and stayed quiet because they had some logs, thick sticks. They would hit the men on their backs...If you said something, they would tell us, 'We will kill you...' This happened in 1980, when [the war] began. We were left with fear that they were coming to get us. They told us we were on the paper, easily recognized by the authorities. From there we went to the hills, into the mountains, to sleep. The mosquitoes would bite us in the caves. We had to be out of our houses for two years, living under the storms. It was very dark and we couldn't even see our hands (Anna, 1995).

The roles that the study participants played in the war varied, but most of their involvement was similar to Alicia's and Mercedes'; that is, providing support to the guerrillas, but not participating as a combatant in actual fighting:

We would take the guerrillas medicine and food. When there were military invasions, the women agreed to take them tortillas and other things because they were still hungry (Alicia, 1995).

The National Guard [national police] wouldn't let food come in where we were, or medicine or clothes. They said it was for the FMLN, even if it was for the community. It was the women who were more decided to go out and try to bring things in or make complaints about what was going on the National Guard (Mercedes, 1995).

Some women also were pressed into more dangerous roles in support of the guerrilla forces, for example, purchasing (and smuggling) supplies such as uniforms or other equipment. Teresa's recollection was typical of this subsample:

When it was my turn to go buy boots or green cloth for their uniforms -- a green silk cloth they used for the jackets they would make -- I would go buy it with another guerrilla. Then we would put it in large baskets and buy other things to put over it. But first, I always asked for God's help because I had to bring these things. I would get very scared...In a bread basket, we would put many things, such as a wrench or 3-in-1 Oil to grease things with (Teresa, 1995).

Personal Losses During the War

All of the study participants had experienced the death of at least one family member or close friend during the Civil War, most had experienced many such losses over the 12-year period. Many of these deaths occurred in Santa Patricia or its surrounding countryside. However, some occurred during the period of exile in Honduran camps. All of these deaths were explained as having been caused by either Salvadoran or Honduran government troops. Unlike some war situations where non-combatants neither see nor have to directly deal with the bodies of deceased combatants because the fighting occurs at a distance from their home communities, these women had frequently been exposed first-hand to the personal violence of the war. Most of the family members described as killed in the war were males, either husbands, fathers, brothers or sons of the study participants.

In the beginning of the war, my husband heard that there was this military operation called 'Scorched Earth' and that they were going to try to kill everybody. Some of the religious people were afraid of this repression that was going on and figured that it was better to become a part of a paramilitary group, more to avoid being killed than because they believed in it. My husband was killed in his cornfield the day after he had been working to form the guerrilla army. They killed him and I became a widow (Alicia, 1995).

My father was captured July 29, 1982, by the military, the same day two years previously his son had passed away. It was his first born son and he adored him. My father was in the river, and nobody knew if he was thrown in alive because they had tied him by his arms, hands and feet, and put him in a sack with five stones. He didn't have his eyes (Teresa, 1995).

Several of the women described a phenomenon of the Salvadoran Civil War which was colloquially referred to as *disappearing*. This term was used in the study interviews in the following sense:

We were in Santa Patricia and the National Guard disappeared one of my brothers (Aida, 1995).

We worked as a committee of mothers, an organization that works when people are disappeared (Alicia, 1995).

Individuals who were *disappeared* by government forces seldom reappeared, so the term was invariably used to convey the meaning "kidnapped and killed but the body not recovered." Study participants whose family members had been *disappeared* discussed the missing individuals as if they were deceased.

Geographic Displacement

One of the most significant impacts of the war in the lives of the study participants was that the bitter and extended fighting directed at Santa Patricia

eventually forced almost all residents to take refuge in nearby Honduras for periods of up to a decade. As described earlier, citizens left Santa Patricia en masse during three specific migrations, escaping most often to refugee camps in Honduras.

The migration experience. The escape from El Salvador to the relative safety of refugee camps across the border involved not only traversing the hilly paths between Santa Patricia and Honduras while evading enemy fire, but also, near the end of the journey, it required traversing the Rio Lempa, a river which formed the El Salvadoran-Honduran border. Experiences in crossing the Rio Lempa were indelibly etched into the minds of most citizens of Santa Patricia: Nearly every study participant made reference to crossing the river; and many of them involved dramatic circumstances, which were vividly recalled in the interviews. Teresa's story was an example:

As we were crossing, the troops from Salvador and from Honduras were coming there, to the River Lempa...A man took my [7-month old] son and passed him across the river tied on his shoulder, but all the people were running around in anguish, crying and walking around. A man from Honduras was going back across and he asked me, 'Why do you want to go across where troops from Honduras are coming?' He told me it is better to stay in El Salvador. Then I told him I worried because all my family was already on the other side, especially my son that I was still breast-feeding. I said, 'My son will cry of hunger.' This man was insisting

I stay in El Salvador because they could kill us, we could all die. And I said, 'If we had to die, at least we are going to die together with our families. I'm not going to stay alone on this side.' When I got to the other side, just as I reached the edge of the water, I took my son in my arms. That's when a helicopter came. My son was so nervous from the noise he began to cry and I, because I was nervous, couldn't control myself. An anguish came to me with him in my arms because there was much shooting. I held him to myself so he won't cry, but I was crying harder than him. I said, 'We are all going to die. Bless my son' because I was thinking we were not going to survive that moment. They were saying the helicopter was from the USA (Teresa, 1995).

Some of the study participants had experienced fleeing from Santa Patricia more than once because of the war:

A lot of people fled El Salvador to Honduras from July to December 1980 but then the repression kind of calmed down and a lot of people came back. And they had to flee again, so it was two times (Alicia, 1995).

Experiences in the refugee camps. Although the women uniformly described the conditions in Honduran refugee camps as an improvement over the conditions they were escaping from in El Salvador, their experiences as exiles were generally bleak, with at least some degree of danger and uncertainty always present. Teresa's described her first days in the camp vividly:

The [Honduran] militia made the people that had just arrived enter in a corral where we were watched closely. No one could leave. They gave us a piece of plastic that we could lay on since we came with nothing in our hands. They also gave us clothing, because some people came naked (Teresa, 1995).

The women discussed the differences between life in the camps and the familiar routines of life in Santa Patricia. During her interview, Isabella started singing a song that was written about these experiences:

In another study I would talk about the war and leaving my home...I would like to sing you a song about the crossing of the River Lempa.

...When we left El Salvador, crossed the river, left our homes and were in the camps. On the 17th of March we left our little houses, we left behind our milpas [fields], and our little chickens. The night was shorter and the sun came up sooner (Isabella, 1995).

Isabella did not sing the whole song, which she noted “*has eight stanzas*,” but did add:

I saw that things were different. The work was different. I spent my time in Honduras in workshops...always with the idea that the best things we made would be brought back to El Salvador. Here they would be used by the guerrillas (Isabella, 1995).

Many of the study participants were introduced -- or re-introduced -- to formal education during the years they spent in Honduras. Some took advantage of the opportunity to learn to read and write for the first time, others completed several grades in the camp setting.

...when we were in Honduras I studied more since we had the opportunity there. We would work during the day, and then at night or in the afternoon, we could study. It was necessary to learn how to read and then to be able to write about whatever we were doing. The Committee for Betterment gave us the space to study (Alicia, 1995).

The beginning of women's organizing efforts. It was also during the period of exile in the refugee camps of Honduras that women began to form themselves into women-only organizations. This was, in part, because most of the refugees were women, elderly men, and young children of both genders. Most of the young men from Santa Patricia remained in El Salvador, actively fighting the Salvadoran government as FMLN guerrillas. Initially, the women's organizational efforts were designed to assist these efforts of their male family members and *compañeros* who had remained.

In Mesa Grande [refugee] Camp 5, I was participating in different projects, all of which were directed toward benefiting the FMLN and not the women. We didn't advance much in the organization of women [at this time] because we were always collaborating with the FMLN....(Mercedes, 1995).



Soon, however, the forerunners of women's organizations such as Las **DIGNAS** began to take shape in the refugee camps. These were created **p**rimarily as organizations focused on meeting women's needs.

When we were in Honduras, we organized as women to be part of the coordination [of re-settlement efforts]. The coordination was formed by the Catholic Church, Evangelic Church, the UN High Commission on Refugees, and ourselves as women...This work came out of workshops to see what women could do -- health care, weaving, workshops on such things as embroidery, tin smithing, shoe-making, and other things...And since we had an organization of women, we did vigilance at night. Security. The vigilance consisted of our doing patrols because the Honduran army was all around the outside of the camp, and sometimes they would come and grab someone and take them away. Often they would kill them...So we would do this vigilance with international people who were helping with different projects, like what you do, social services or social work (Alicia, 1995).

[As the war was ending], we started to organize and have a lot of assemblies to organize for the repopulations. In these repopulations the majority -- at least 85 or 90% -- were women coming back. The men who had women [in the camps] stayed behind, but we women went ahead (Mercedes, 1995).

The Research Questions

Against the backdrop of the events and circumstances in the lives of the twelve women outlined above, the organization Las DIGNAS began to make its presence known in Santa Patricia in 1988, almost four years before the Peace Accords were signed to end the bitter Civil War. When Las DIGNAS held its first national assembly in July 1990, nine of the twelve attended as delegates.

Among the first tasks undertaken by the new organization was the establishment of economic development projects, projects designed to provide women with the opportunity to develop their self esteem and change the historical patterns of community and personal decision-making which had given males almost complete power and influence over the lives of females. Santa Patricia eventually became the site for at least six such economic development projects: the community store, the bakery, the dairy, the basket-weaving project, the embroidery project, and the community garden. Except for the embroidery project and community garden, these Las DIGNAS projects were in operation at the time of this study in mid-1995, and all of the women interviewed had participated in at least one of them.

The central focus of this research effort was to discover the nature of the relationship between membership in Las DIGNAS and/or participation in these economic development projects and four specific aspects of women's lives. Aspects examined included those of self-esteem, personal empowerment, participation in political processes, and gender relationships. The study

participants' perceptions of the relationship between Las DIGNAS/economic development project participation and these aspects of their lives are summarized in the sections which follow.

Nature of Participation in Las DIGNAS and Its Economic Development Projects

Although closely connected, Las DIGNAS and the economic development projects were organized as distinct entities with a hierarchical relationship to one another, with Las DIGNAS in effect supervising the projects. From its inception in 1990, Las DIGNAS was conceptualized as a formal membership organization comprised of women from throughout El Salvador. The headquarters of Las DIGNAS was in the capital city of San Salvador.

As a nationwide group, the organization had no chapters or offices within local communities, the members of Las DIGNAS in each geographic area usually had close ties to one another, identifying themselves as a local "DIGNAS group." In Santa Patricia, the local group included slightly more than 70 members.

In addition to holding regular meetings in communities throughout the country, Las DIGNAS also sponsored workshops, political development (municipal) projects, and economic development projects for women. The economic development projects were developed as specific market-driven businesses owned and operated by the women in a specific community for the purpose of providing women with opportunities for employment. Not every member of the Santa Patricia Las DIGNAS group was a participant in one of the community's economic development projects.

Despite numerous differences between the formal organization of Las DIGNAS and the economic development projects it operated, most of the study participants were aware of a significant relationship between the two:

The projects and Las DIGNAS are the same, they mean the same to me. They both speak of the value of women and work. Las DIGNAS and the projects are equally important. They go along together. We need the development of women as much as we need knowing how to make the development happen. These are important so that there can be a general change for women (Evita, 1995).

The projects and Las DIGNAS are both important to me. They have both made a change in my life that I believe has been helpful to me (Isabella, 1995).

I feel that Las DIGNAS and the projects are different things, but they are part of the same thing. They are related because if there weren't any economic production projects, the organization wouldn't advance. Always when there are trainings or workshops, there is some need for economic resources. The projects at least have been able to facilitate those (Freida, 1995).

One participant shared her insight that, although the two entities were not exactly the same, they were both parts of an important whole: The projects

provided women with money to live and Las DIGNAS provided a direction and purpose for their lives.

I feel like [Las DIGNAS and the projects] are different things. You keep on working in Las DIGNAS, but projects and...Survival is always important. But without an orientation, you can't live either. I would say that putting the two together would be the best way (Alicia, 1995).

Almost every participant referenced some type of general gain she had experienced as a result of participation in Las DIGNAS and/or one of the projects. For most, participation was associated with one or more significant life changes. Gabriella's and Evita's remarks were representative:

From the work I have learned new things, it has given me new ideas and a way to be...I used to think only of being with a man, now I think of going to work because working at the store, out of my house, has changed my life (Gabriella, 1995).

Being part of DIGNAS brought about changes in sexual relations and in my relationship with my children, but the projects helped me feel better about contributing in my home. DIGNAS did not give me a salary, but my work [in the project] allows me to bring money into my home (Evita, 1995).

Mercedes shared her belief that, although participation in economic development projects had not been a solution to all of the problems which the

women of Santa Patricia encountered, the projects had at least provided a starting point for change.

The women in production feel good. I've talked to many who work in different projects and they say, 'Well, at least it's something. At least it's a little bit to help the family.' Those that work in production projects get some training in what they are going to do and they can better their life conditions, as much for the family as the woman herself... Their attitudes change, too, because it's not just that they gain a little bit of money to better their condition, but also they learn to do things they didn't know before and develop themselves as women...(Mercedes, 1995).

Relationship Between Participation in Las DIGNAS And/Or The Economic Development Projects and Study Participants' Self-Esteem

In their own voices. In this section the actual Spanish version of each quote is provided to the reader(s) so that they may more clearly experience the voices of the women. Study participants provided considerable information on the impact that participation in Las DIGNAS and/or its economic development projects had on their self-esteem. In this context, evidence of *self-esteem* was defined as verbal information a woman shared during the interview about the feelings or beliefs she had regarding herself; that is, how much she liked or approved of herself, either globally or in specific family, work or community contexts. During the interviews, questions were framed to elicit women's

subjective perceptions of changes in their personal self-esteem which they believed to be a result of participation in Las DIGNAS or the projects. In addition, attention was directed to other statements that women made during the course of the interview to describe themselves and their actions. Positive statements were considered to be representative of high self-esteem; negative statements, of low self-esteem.

It should be noted that in describing the impact of DIGNAS and/or the projects on their perceptions of self-esteem, the study participations seldom used this specific term. Rather a variety of other words, phrases or explanations were utilized, including *self worth, confidence, value, importance, control* and *respect*. Every participant made at least one direct references to self-esteem related changes which she associated with her participation in Las DIGNAS activities. These are conveyed most powerfully in the women's own words:

Before Las DIGNAS, I didn't know the importance I had. I thought I just lived to live. I thought I was only important for other people. When I started to work with the DIGNAS I started to know all the rights and the importance I have...For me to be a woman is to be important. To be important for society (Isabella, 1995).

Porque yo antes de participar con LAS DIGNAS ni sabía la importancia que yo tenía. Vivía solo para vivir, yo creía que solo importaba para los demás. Que yo empecé a trabajar con LAS DIGNAS y empeze a reconocer todos mis derechos que yo tenía, la importancia...Para mi ser

mujer es ser importante. Ser importante para la sociedad (Isabella, 1995).

I have a little more self-esteem because of my work [with Las DIGNAS]. Would that be that one starts recognizing your rights?... Being responsible for finances gave me confidence in myself and because the other women have had confidence in me. That made me feel like I could have more power and control over my life. I now have more confidence (Carmen, 1995).

Si yo tengo un poquito, un poquito más, no mucha, autoestima por mi trabajo [en LAS DIGNAS]... Será que quiere decir que uno va reconociendo sus derechos...Ser responsable por las finanzas me ha dado confianza en mi misma, y porque las otras compañeras me han dado confianza en mi misma. Eso me hizo sentir como que podía tener un poco más de control y poder sobre mi vida. Ahora tengo más confianza (Carmen, 1995).

With my participation the DIGNAS has helped me develop my ability to talk with others. Also I have discovered as women that we are worth something. That is something that I didn't know before. That is why my son now thinks I'm worth something because I tell him I'm capable of doing things. We must tell young women to learn their self worth. Women are important people. We are worth the same as men (Teresa, 1995).

Con mi participación en LAS DIGNAS he logrado desarrollar así un nivel para hablar con otros. También como a descubrir los valores que tenemos como mujeres, que lo que hemos tenido. Eso yo antes, pues, si lo desconocía. Y es por eso que mi hijo ahora me valora , porque le digo que soy una persona muy capaz de hacer cosas. Por eso debemos decirles a las jóvenes que aprendan a valorarse a si mismas. Las mujeres somos importantes como personas. Valemos lo mismo que los hombres (Teresa, 1995).

I have started to value myself more and have good feelings about myself (Evita, 1995).

Me valoro más y tengo más buenos sentimientos acerca de mi misma (Evita, 1995).

I think that, for example a big effect that I consider important is that before my participation with Las DIGNAS I was very shy. I didn't like to talk...I felt embarrassed. I thought what I was going to do or say didn't have much value. I considered my self-esteem very low. I feel now that as a woman and as a person I have every right to do what I want to do or feel like doing (Freida, 1995).

Yo creo que por ejemplo, un efecto bastante, que yo lo considero importate es que yo antes de mi participación con LAS DIGNAS era muy boba para hablar con otros, no me gustaba casi. Me daba mucha pena. Pensaba que lo que iba ha hacer o decir no era valioso. Y yo pues, mi

autoestima yo me lo consideraba muy bajo, verdad. Y entonces yo pienso de que como mujer y como persona yo tengo todo el derecho a decir o hacer lo que yo quiera (Freida, 1995).

Because I can go to work [in the economic development project], I know my capacity, what I can do. What I learned from Las DIGNAS helped me. Before I thought I couldn't do things, now I can. My life has changed (Gabriella, 1995).

Porque puedo ir a trabajar, [en los proyectos de desarrollo económico] conozco mis capacidades, y lo que puedo hacer. Lo que aprendí en LAS DIGNAS me ha ayudado. Antes pensaba que no podía hacer cosas, ahora puedo. Mi vida ha cambiado (Gabriella, 1995).

I think I can have an opinion about what I don't like. I have the right to say it. And now I feel that I have a place to express what I want to express. And if there is someone that doesn't like it, I feel like I can defend what I say because I have a handle on what is not good and what is good. That's why I think I am important to society, even though I am an old woman (Alicia, 1995).

Creo que puedo opinar de lo que a mi no me gusta. Yo tengo el derecho de hablarlo. Y ahora que siento que tengo un lugar de expresión, donde puedo expresar lo que yo siento. Y lo que a otra persona no le parece, yo también puedo defender lo que pienso porque yo manejo lo que no es

bueno y lo que es bueno. Por eso pienso que soy importante para la sociedad, aunque soy una anciana (Alicia, 1995).

The experience of going to those meetings gives me confidence and security about participating more (Lupe, 1995).

Tener la experiencia de ir a esas reuniones me dio la confianza y seguridad para participar aún más (Lupe, 1995).

In DIGNAS I learned many things that help me all the time. When we get to know a woman's situation, it is as if we had bought some glasses to see a woman's reality, and we see it in each space...I feel capable to do what I feel is good for me as a woman (Aida, 1995).

Y en LAS DIGNAS he conocido tantas cosas que me sirven a cada rato. Porque uno cuando conoce la situación de las mujeres como que, como que si se ha comprado unos lentes para ver la realidad de las mujeres, y las ve de cada espacio...me siento capaz de hacer lo que siento que es bueno para mi como mujer (Aida, 1995).

When I started to work [in the bakery project] and leave home, I started talking more than I did at home. When you stay in the house, you feel shy and ashamed to talk. But then you start leaving that behind because you are talking with people while you're working and you gain confidence (Rachael, 1995).

Cuando comencé a trabajar [en el proyecto de la panadería] y salí de casa comencé a hablar más de que hablaba en casa. En la casa me da pena hablar. Pero uno empieza a dejar eso atrás porque al hablar con personas mientras trabaja uno tiene más confianza (Rachael, 1995).

Women working in production projects feel good. I've talked to a lot of them and it happened to me...I feel I am capable of developing myself with the projects. And even though they say that the work has always been done by men, like the cattle project or building a house. The work on these projects helps one morally as well as physically because you can see what you have accomplished just as men do. And us, as women, we can see what we were going to do, a fence here for the cow project. That's what the Las DIGNAS projects do (Mercedes, 1995).

Las mujeres trabajando en proyectos de producción se sienten bien. Yo hablo con varias de ellas y eso me pasó a mi también...Pues yo sentía que sí, que soy capaz de desarrollarme en los proyectos, aunque dicen que esos trabajos siempre los han echo los hombres; como de un proyecto de ganado, de construir una casa. Pues a uno lo ayuda bastante tanto moralmente como físicamente el trabajo de los proyectos porque uno ve lo que se hace igual que los hombres lo ven. Y nosotros como mujeres veíamos que vamos ha hacer, un cerco aquí para el proyecto de las vacas. Eso es lo que los proyectos de LAS DIGNAS hacen (Mercedes, 1995).

I feel different in the sense of being more supported than before...What I see is that people love me and use my name...I have learned this through participating in this organization [Las DIGNAS] because it motivates me to work. It helps me think very different things about myself (Anna, 1995).

Yo me siento diferente, si bueno, diferente en el sentido de que, de sentirme más apoyada que antes...He visto que la gente me da el cariño y usan mi nombre...He aprendido esto a través de mi participación con esta organización [LAS DIGNAS] porque lo hace a uno motivarse a trabajar. Lo ayuda a uno a pensar cosas muy diferentes acerca de uno mismo (Anna, 1995).

Themes. As is evident, all twelve of the study participants had experienced modifications in the way they perceived themselves while they had been involved in Las DIGNAS activities. Without exception, these self perceptions had changed in a positive direction. Although some of the women dated the beginning of these personal changes to the time of exile in the refugee camps, all credited involvement in Las DIGNAS as being the most important influence in promoting and sustaining these new, more positive feelings and beliefs about who they were or what they could do.

An important theme of the women's discussions of self-esteem can be summarized as references to changes in their ability to communicate; that is, finding and learning to use their own voices. The word choices of Teresa (*ability to be in conversations with others*), Freida (*before I was someone who didn't talk*

much). Alicia (*a right to talk...a place to express what I want to express*), Rachael (*I started talking more than I did at home...you are talking with people...and you gain confidence*), and Anna (*people love me and use my name*) were particularly noteworthy in this regard.

Another theme in these reports of self-esteem was the reference to women's issues, in effect positioning their own feeling on self in the context of their feelings about the esteem of all other women. The comments of Isabella (*for me, to be a woman is to be important...for society*), Teresa (*I have discovered as women that we are worth something*), Freida (*I feel now that as a women and as a person, I have every right to do what I want to do...*), Aida (*When we get to know a woman's situation, it is as if we had brought some glasses to see a woman's reality and we see it in each space*), and Mercedes (*Women working in production projects feel good...because you can see what you have accomplished, just as men do*) provided support for this conclusion.

In the twelve narrative sections above provided in the study participant's own voices, the terms *important* or *importance* are used seven times; the term *confidence*, five times; *worth* or *self worth*, four times; the terms *capacity* or *capable*, four times; and *rights*, four times. The terms *value*, *self-esteem*, and *good feeling* (about self) were each used twice; and *power*, *control security*, and *thinking differently* (about self) were each used a single time. In all, the participants used thirty-four terms -- all of them with positive meanings or connotations -- to characterize the modifications in their self-esteem which emanated from their involvement Las DIGNAS activities.

Relationship Between Participation in Las DIGNAS And/Or The Economic Development Projects and Study Participants' Perceptions of Personal Empowerment

In their own voices. As the women described the impact of Las DIGNAS involvement on their lives, they provided verbal evidence of their progress toward a state of being empowered. As noted in the Definition of Terms in Chapter 1 (p. 11), *empowerment* is a process rather than an end state. Responses secured during the study demonstrated that each participants' progress through the empowerment process was at a slightly different stage in the summer of 1995 when the interviews were conducted. These stages were reflected in their own words:

I think that the organization Las DIGNAS has facilitated changes in my life. Especially my work and education because I just barely finished third grade, but my capacity is beyond that...I believe this now about myself, where before Las DIGNAS and my experience in the project I would not have thought this (Freida, 1995).

There have been a lot of things that I have learned. Before [Las DIGNAS] there were things I did not have in my mind or in my head. But now, yes, I do see there are new things. Now that we are adults we have things we can teach the younger women. Because I am learning through Las DIGNAS, there are young women getting trained so that they can also be learning (Anna, 1995).

We are trying to take advantage of the processes that other women around the world have gone through. We are trying to learn from that. People say that we are studying and learning about other women doesn't apply to Santa Patricia. We believe it does...These projects have helped my thinking. For example, before I thought that it was good the way things were – that women were in the house and men did things that were public...That's why I see that the production projects are important. They give women a place to work. It's important to give women places to work (Aida, 1995).

I feel like I have a great ability, a way of responding to men's oppression. I feel satisfied when I respond to a man and defend myself. I speak of all my rights, but it is not to speak against men. I say if a woman speaks of her rights she is not speaking against the rights of men. With the words I have, I try to explain this to men. Before we received Las DIGNAS training, they did whatever they wanted with us. But that was before, that's past now. We received the training and we know our rights...For me, it means that I can participate and that I don't have to be only in my home...I feel good participating. It make me feel good. I have a lot of confidence (Isabella, 1995).

I feel a lot more confident than I did before I worked with the women. I definitely do. If there is something that needs to be done in the house or a decision to make that I know about, I feel I can do it. The fact that I

have more confidence in my self and my capabilities makes my daughters feel their confidence and how capable they are...Being in charge of the finances of a project made me feel like I could have more power and control in my life...At the DIGNAS trainings, they talked about things we didn't know about. We learned to declare ourselves, to say what we want, to speak for our rights. There were many things we didn't know about that we started to learn. A woman has a right to talk about what belongs to her as a woman (Carmen, 1995).

I know we as women have dignity and worth. This is something that Las DIGNAS has taught me. Women who are part of Las DIGNAS helped me learn this...I know what to say, how to talk, I know what isn't good for me. If something isn't good for me, I can say it. So in this way things have changed for me. Now I know what I want, and how to talk about what is and isn't good for me (Gabriella, 1995).

Las DIGNAS had a workshop on sexuality. After this workshop we realized we didn't need people to do things for us, but that we could do things for ourselves...Now I would be capable of organizing other women about what I know and what ideas I have. Before I was trained, I didn't feel capable. I didn't have any knowledge. I was just running around trying to get food. This was before Las DIGNAS and the projects. The word I use now is 'freedom.' Now I can leave the house without fear and I

can go home without fear. That's something! That's what I've been working for and I feel happy (Evita, 1995).

My job [in the bakery project] gives me security in my life even if it's a little bit of money. I have some idea of security and some capacity to control some things...I feel stronger. It's good to learn things. I feel happy to buy things I couldn't buy before. Although sometimes I feel bad and don't have energy, at times I feel stronger, too. Other times I feel like I have more spirit (Lupe, 1995).

I feel more spirit to participate in terms of the planning and social activities to bring women to the city for training. I participate in organizing these training...I tell young women that only women can develop themselves. men aren't going to develop the women, the women have to do it themselves. Las DIGNAS has taught me that, but I'd say it to any woman, whether she is a member of DIGNAS or not (Mercedes, 1995).

Some changes have occurred because, before I was a little shy. I didn't like to talk in meetings, but at least now in the meetings I talk a lot. I feel what has helped me is Las DIGNAS, the organization. My participation in Las DIGNAS has helped to develop more conversation and also helped me discover my worth as a woman, something I didn't know about before. This is why my son thinks I am worth something – because I tell him I am capable of doing many things (Teresa, 1995).

Being a woman means a lot to me. I feel like women are important to society. I feel like I'm important and I have learned a lot from Las DIGNAS. Before the war, I was a shy woman. I didn't know anything. I only knew how to have kids and be in the house with my husband. And that was all right for me. But now, I don't feel okay about it in this society anymore (Alicia, 1995).

Men [in Santa Patricia] sometimes say things about DIGNAS members. But I say to them, we all have dignity, men and women. We all have dignity. One time, a young guy that I was talking to said, 'Why are you working [in the bakery project]?' And I said, 'Because I can work and I can help take care of my kids.' And he said, 'But, why with Las DIGNAS?' And I replied, 'We all have dignity. We are all the same, men and women. Don't make fun. Are you making fun? (Rachael, 1995).

Themes. Many of the responses reflecting the empowerment of Las DIGNAS participants had strong echoes of self-esteem as well. This was not surprising since the first step toward empowerment involves an individual's enhanced sense of self worth or personal value. As previously noted, every women interviewed indicated a heightened sense of self-esteem which she felt resulted directly from her participation in Las DIGNAS or its projects. As the responses in this section demonstrate, all of the women had moved to the second step of empowerment as well – the stage where an individual feels capable of maintaining her self-esteem and asserting herself in social

relationships. And some had moved beyond this step, to the third stage, where an individual engages in social action.

The women provided numerous examples of activities they initiated on behalf of themselves, their families, other women, and their community and country as a whole, only a sampling of which are cited. For individuals whose participation in Las DIGNAS or a project had been relatively brief, the activities initiated tended to be more personal in scope and the women had greater difficulty clearly articulating any social impact these individual actions had.

In addition to the consistent uses of words such as *importance*, *value*, *worth*, and *capability* which women used in describing both themselves (in terms of self-esteem) and their actions in the social realm (in terms of empowerment), there were some additional terms and themes which emerged related to empowerment. The most widely used of these conveyed the women's growing recognition that they could or should take action on their own behalf or on behalf of other women, or instances of actually taking those actions. Evita's comment -- *we realized we could do things for ourselves* -- was representative of this theme, as was Gabriella's, whose statement -- *I know what to say, how to talk* -- provided more substantiation for the conclusion that a major outcome of participation in Las DIGNAS for these women was discovering and using their own voices.

Another theme of empowerment was *recognition and assertion of rights*. In some instances these rights were referred to as women's rights, for example,

Carmen's response -- "*We learned to declare ourselves, to speak for our rights. A woman has a right to talk about what belongs to her as a woman.*"

Participation was another theme related to empowerment, with several women citing specific arenas or activities in which they felt able to participate as a result of their Las DIGNAS participation. These include their homes, project work sites, and within the community at large.

Terms such as *power, control; decision-making; freedom; planning for, training, or organizing others; spirit; and dignity* were also used in ways that conveyed the participants' sense of being able to initiate activities for themselves or others.

Relationship Between Participation in Las DIGNAS And/Or The Economic Development Projects and Study Participants' Perceptions of Their Political Participation

The majority of study participants described a strong relationship between their participation in the Las DIGNAS organization and their own behavior with respect to participation in the public life of the community. Consistent with the definition of *political participation* provided in this study's Definition of Terms, women were considered to be describing "political" activities or behaviors when they told of those that were "voluntary actions, successful or unsuccessful, organized or unorganized, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate methods intended to influence the choice of public policies, the administration of public affairs, or the choice of political leaders at any level of

government, local or national (Weiner, 1971, previously cited in Chapter 1, pg. 11 of this study). Once again, excerpts from their own experiences, as shared in the structured interviews, provided ample foundation for this assertion.

In their voices. In describing their political activities, it was evident that experiences with the war itself (in which many women had actively supported the FMLN guerrilla forces) and the long period of exile in refugee camps – where community organizing and social action activities became a necessity for women's survival – had created fertile soil in which the ideas and principles of Las DIGNAS could take root once the Civil War was over. The women returning to Santa Patricia from the Honduran camps (which included virtually all of the women in the community) had been profoundly changed by their wartime experiences. Those who returned to El Salvador with new knowledge, skills and attitudes from the camps soon had an opportunity to participate in Las DIGNAS, an organization which would provide opportunities to support the growth they had already achieved as well as new avenues for change.

Many of the women spoke at length about how their involvement in Las DIGNAS had been translated into changes in their behavior in the wider political arena of the community and country. For some of the participants, changes were dramatic and very public; for others, changes were more subtle and private. For none of the women did the process of becoming more politically active appear to be complete. All appeared to be moving toward even greater or different types of political participation in the future.

I was not involved in politics or community activities before Las DIGNAS. I did go to community assemblies, but I didn't talk. I still don't feel confident talking because maybe I would say something right, and maybe I would say something wrong. I have participated in meetings with [the FMLN] political party since my time with Las DIGNAS...My training from Las DIGNAS influenced me. One of the changes is that before I was ignorant and did not know about political things. This knowledge has made my life different. It's not like it was before. Before I didn't leave my home very much, there wasn't any place to go. Now there are different places to go -- meetings and assemblies where one hears about things they didn't hear about before (Carmen, 1995).

I participate in community assemblies, but don't talk at them. But I do talk in colonia [neighborhood] assemblies. I speak a lot at colonia assemblies, if it is necessary. If I understand, I'll talk more. I don't have any shyness about talking, and that is what is important. While working in the kindergarten refugee camp, I began to lose my shyness. Since Las DIGNAS, I have lost even more shyness...Before Las DIGNAS, I didn't feel as capable of being involved (Gabriella, 1995).

Involvement with Las DIGNAS has affected my political participation, but I have not been involved as much because of my little girl and because of a personal controversy [with another DIGNAS member]. I continue to support the FMLN because I am in agreement that they should win. That

we can all understand each other and see change in us, the peasants and the poor. We see that our current government is not favoring us, but the contrary. It is making us suffer more...Everyday we are getting worse. This is what makes us denounce the government. I feel more motivated and animated to continue to fight because we the poor are the ones that have the most suffering (Anna, 1995).

My involvement in my community has changed a little bit since I became involved in my project. If I had not been involved in Las DIGNAS, I would have been too shy to do this interview. One of the things I learned is how to communicate, to talk to people. But I do not talk at assemblies, I am still afraid. I go to more assemblies now, but I go to give support. The ones that talk are the ones that make the decisions. They are from San Salvador. It is possible that someday I will say something even though I am afraid to. If somebody thinks something, they shouldn't be afraid to say it. They should just say it. Also, as political activity, I voted in the last election, and I went to take care of the place where ballots are placed. And -- in a certain way that I can't explain -- I think that my work in the bakery is political, too (Rachael, 1995).

Before [Las DIGNAS] I would go to community assemblies, but I wouldn't talk. Before the elections last year [1994], someone came to Las DIGNAS to talk about the elections. I went to these meetings and voted in the 1994 elections. The experience of going to these meetings gives you

more confidence and security. You can participate more. Being involved in the projects gives me more confidence to participate in the community and politically. I can at least ask a question in an assembly. Before, I was too shy. I can also do this in a political meeting. I can ask questions now. [And] I don't feel there is anything wrong with a march to complain about a certain law. I'm not embarrassed to march and demand my rights (Lupe, 1995).

The first time I was called to participate in the community...before we had Las DIGNAS, Carlos Boñilla called me to go. I felt incapable. I said this... Today I would feel capable of doing it and I would organize a group of women about what I know and what ideas I have... The trainings I've received from Las DIGNAS are political, but not in the sense that laws will change because I don't believe there will be changes in the law. Things work very slow. There can be other things that come to change laws, like the women that go and make the denouncement...so that the government responds to the needs of women...There has to be social change, but if we don't struggle there won't be social change for women (Evita, 1995).

[During the Civil War], Raul and Rapael who were leaders of the FMLN said it was good that we [women] were organizing ourselves because we were able to get projects that could help them [the FMLN]. ...When the Peace Accords happened, everything changed. And that's when we decided we should put energy into a national platform. Las DIGNAS is

the only women's organization who is autonomous. The other women's groups depend on [political] parties. We became independent. The positive things about Las DIGNAS is that I can work with other people and participate. A focus was democracy. We say that other women should participate in mixed spaces, like the community directive [town council]. If women aren't in these spaces, then the men make up the agenda and do this to their benefit. We said that on the national level it was really important that women participate. I remember a slogan we used to use that said, 'If a woman stays at home, democracy stays behind' (Alicia, 1995).

Today, everything is political, by that I mean political in favor in women. I consider some of the capacitations [trainings] of Las DIGNAS to be political in this respect. Since my involvement in Las DIGNAS I feel more spirit to participate, but even before I came in contact with the organization, since 1980, I began to work in the community. I began to organize then with the church in Santa Patricia, working with the children. Then we had to leave for Honduras and began to organize women there in 1985. The idea then was to organize so that when we did come back, we could come back all together to our home community...But most of work in the camps did not benefit women [as we intended] because it was directed toward the benefit of the FMLN. I refuse to go on supporting the FMLN because they threatened me, not to kill me. They use a policy of terror which is political violence. They [the FMLN] say as a woman you

are a DIGNA [which they say means 'man hater'] and the work of DIGNAS is bad and evil (Mercedes, 1995).

I was not politically active in my country or community before Las DIGNAS, but I am politically active in the community now. My political work in the community is to participate in meetings with non-governmental organizations. When there are open municipal meetings with the mayor and the municipal council, I participate. Another aspect of political work was the work we did on the municipal platform that we presented the municipal council. The struggle we are involved with now on the municipal level is getting support for the violence against women project. Another thing...is that two other women and myself were elected to the municipal council to represent the FMLN. I felt good about that because we were very clear that women had to participate in decisions that were made. This council doesn't exist any more because the FMLN did not win the election (Aida, 1995).

I would not have participated in the development of the municipal platform if I had not been a part of Las DIGNAS. I would not have done it. I couldn't have achieved it. Because of Las DIGNAS, our platform is now recognized by the government. Now, we invite them and they invite us, and we understand each other. We invited the Mayor to come and see all of the necessities we put into the platform. And he congratulated us, and said that we had done really good work. He said he hoped they could

incorporate and resolve all of these needs. We have a very good relationship in Victoria with this mayor. And this is, as I said, an ARENA [opposition party] mayor...We've won a lot of things, like recognition...I feel good participating. It makes me feel good. I have a lot of confidence (Isabella, 1995).

I became a member of a Board of DIGNAS in 1991 and did political work directly as a part of the DIGNAS organization in 1994. The people of the community nominated me, Mercedes, and Aida to run for the Municipal Council. We had a DIGNAS workshop for community leaders and, seeing that we were nominated for the Municipal Council, we made a Municipal platform. We interviewed women to find out their needs [to be included in the platform]. We planned to present the platform to the new Mayor, whoever he was. If he were from the FMLN, he would be welcome, or if it were another party, we were going to work with him. Unfortunately, we lost because we had felt that if they we were elected they would have to be met. The demands were those of the women (Teresa, 1995).

The projects we are working in are very political because we are working to find out what the needs of women are. Also, so that the women know their own rights. I think that's political. In that way, women are getting organized. And more women are getting involved: The number of women who know what their rights are is getting broader. Also, women are working to better their conditions, for example, for [better drinking] water

or better centers for women's health. All of this is political. From the Las DIGNAS projects we learned a lot, because before we didn't really understand that change is a whole process. You have to get one thing approved from someone, and they go on to another. We thought you just put [an idea] in, and it got approved...Las DIGNAS is different from some organizations, because when we decide to do something, we do it because it's our own decision. That's the difference. Before Las DIGNAS, I didn't even know what it meant to go out and vote, but I voted in the last national election and in the last community election. And last March 8, International Women's Day, we sponsored a public event in Santa Patricia for the first time. They gave me the part of doing the greeting...Because of the training, I feel confident about what I say in meetings and things (Freida, 1995).

Themes. Many of the themes which are evident in study participants discussions of their self-esteem and personal empowerment were reflected again in descriptions of political involvement. The first of these was the theme of increased confidence. The relationship between confidence and political participation for these women appeared to be reciprocal; that is, heightened self-confidence resulted in increased political participation which resulted in further gains in self-confidence. Las DIGNAS was portrayed in most cases as an important vehicle to educate and inform women (via training seminars or *capacitations*), and the projects were portrayed as providing women with spaces

in the community *outside of their homes* where they could perform useful work and secure monetary and other rewards. Once trained and provided with a sense of personal and economic value, some -- but not all of the women -- took opportunities to become active as candidates for public office or party (FMLN) representatives. Even those women who did not seek such active roles, however, engaged in other political activities, including attending political assemblies, informing themselves of political decisions being made, participating in marches, and advocating for the rights of women.

Several of the participants spoke about their involvement in the election of March 1994, the first national election since the Peace Accords of January 1992, and the first election in which the FMLN was allowed to enter a slate of candidates. All of the women had attended Las DIGNAS-sponsored meetings about the candidates; and all of the women had voted. Three of the participants (Teresa, Aida, and Mercedes) had been candidates in this election at the municipal level, but none of them were elected because the FMLN lost. Although the Nationalist Republican Alliance Party, ARENA (the country's right-wing, conservative party) was elected; the Las DIGNAS of Santa Patricia had established a working agreement with the ARENA mayor of Victoria, the elected leader of the municipal government. A theme of several women's interviews about their political activity reflected their perception that women's rights were central to their political vision and to the political, social and economic policies they hoped to have enacted and enforced.

Relationship Between Participation in Las DIGNAS And/Or The Economic Development Projects and Study Participants' Perceptions of Changes in Gender Relationships.

Background: During a visit by the researcher to Santa Patricia in August 1993 to study the economic aspects of the Las DIGNAS dairy production project, Evita volunteered an observation which became the inspiration for much of the current investigation:

Before Las DIGNAS I lived the life of a martyr and a slave. It was not unusual for me to be beaten on a regular basis by my compañero [male companion or domestic partner]. This is the typical life of a woman here (Evita, 1993).

Evita continued her discussion by explaining that her participation with Las DIGNAS and in the dairy project had resulted in a significant change in these life circumstances. Evita's dairy project income had allowed her the economic freedom to separate from her abusive husband and to assume more financial responsibility for herself and children. Participation in Las DIGNAS had provided her with motivation and the support of other women. She said:

I feel like a different woman. Free to be a woman, not a slave. I now have works to participate, and I am supporting myself and my family through my work (Evita, 1993).

The current study had as one of its objectives determining whether Evita's experiences were unique, or whether they were representative of the changes women generally experienced as a result of participation in women-only organizations and/or women-only economic development projects. Evita's comments suggested that changes in the social and personal relationships between women and men could occur as a result of such participation.

In their voices: As the twelve women participants in this study were interviewed, they provided considerable information about how their gender relationship had changed in Santa Patricia. Although it is not possible to credit participation in Las DIGNAS activities as the sole force behind all of the changes which occurred (the war and the refugee experiences certainly had an influence as well), it was evident as they spoke that the information they received from Las DIGNAS and the experiences they had in creating and operating their own small businesses had altered their relationships with the men in their lives, particularly traditional marital relationships in which *machismo* had once played a major role.

Several women spoke about the impact of their Las DIGNAS participation on their relationships with their husbands, *compañeros*, sons, brothers, or other men in the community. Among these was Evita who, when interviewed in 1994, noted that she had let her husband return to the home, but that she had not become a slave or martyr, as in the past. In 1994, Evita described not only the perceptions of some community members about Las DIGNAS members' gender role behaviors, but also changes in the relationship between her and her husband:

To be a woman in society means women can think and decide and not just do what men say. They can contribute. Before I participated with Las DIGNAS and the projects, I did not think this way. I have had problems with my husband because I work with Las DIGNAS. He says, 'What the hell do you think you're doing with them?' Other people say we want to throw men out in the road, and that if Las DIGNAS women want to sleep with somebody, they want someone to pay. They say DIGNAS wants to control men. They say this because DIGNAS talks about family planning and women's sexuality. People say Las DIGNAS eat their children...My husband used to punish me before, but now I don't feel threatened, because I've talked to him. I've said that whatever you do is not going to keep me from working. He's thought about it and reflected on it. And so now I am not afraid of him. Las DIGNAS has given me strength (Evita, 1995).

The experiences of other women in this community were similar. Most had faced community criticism of their relationship in Las DIGNAS which had as its basis a distortion or misperception of the organization's fundamental beliefs about the rights of women. Many of the men in the community had been actively critical of Las DIGNAS' work because of its potential to change the historical patterns of male dominance over women. Several of the women gave a graphic description of male responses to Las DIGNAS and its projects.

If all the women in the community didn't support the DIGNAS in the beginning, it's because there was a whole campaign to discredit them. The FMLN said they had to form a different women's group that was part of the party. The party and the directiva are all men, and they are the ones that said the DIGNAS work is not good (Mercedes, 1995).

Some men say they won't let their women participate with the DIGNAS because DIGNAS wants to run the men. And some women won't say anything, because their men will say, "UGH! The DIGNAS!" (Isabella, 1995).

Men say Las DIGNAS tell you not to be with any one, and not to have a lot of kids. This makes sense to me...Las DIGNAS never said anything I thought was wrong. A lot of men say DIGNAS women don't need men because they have things [indicating a dildo] that will satisfy them. This is what men say about DIGNAS women (Gabriella, 1995).

More than anything, I've had difficulty with the 'machista' man. There are many machistas. It is very difficult to talk with them because they don't understand the situation of women. However, when I see that they are paying attention and they are asking questions, then I feel right. But when I see they are assholes, and that they are not going to understand the woman's situation, I feel that it is best not to answer them (Aida, 1995).

My mother pays a lot of attention to her son, my brother. He said to me, 'What you are learning with the DIGNAS – that men don't have to be served – isn't true.' I tell him that this isn't what Las DIGNAS is teaching us. They are teaching us something natural: You have your hands and they are the same as mine. I won't tell you that I won't serve you. If you come home from work, and I am rested, then I can serve you. And when I come home from work, and you are rested, you are the one who should serve food to me (Teresa, 1995).

If a woman speaks of her rights, it is not to speak against men. And so, with the words I have, I try to explain this to men. Before, they did whatever they wanted with women. But that was before, and that's past now. Now we know our rights. I say, 'If I had known all the things I know now when I was younger, I wouldn't have all the children I have now.' So I talk like that, and the women love to hear it (Isabella, 1995).

A number of the participants referenced changes in their marital relationships or relationships with their *compañero* as a result of Las DIGNAS teachings or experiences in the projects. One major change referenced involved achieving and maintaining a distance in the relationship that was acceptable to the women. For some, this involved permanently moving apart from their partners, for others, this involved freedom to leave the home when they wished:

What I had to do was separate from my compañero. For example, when I was with him, he only wanted to keep me in the house. There was a moment when he left me humiliated because I was afraid he would hit me. What I said was that I needed to learn to speak so he could understand. And a time came when I said I had to lift myself with spirit and not be afraid of him. He used to leave his machete under the pillow because he knew that I was afraid. Then I caught more spirit. I called for a meeting with the community directiva because he was beating me up. He was very angry and did not want to go. But eventually, he came. We talked, but he was very angry and said he did not do the things I accused him of. He left the meeting because he did not want to hear what I had to say. Then he went by the house and called me a bad word and said he was going to give me death [kill me]. But he didn't do it. I say thanks to God. But I feel better now, because when I was with him, I couldn't go out (Anna, 1995).

My husband told me I couldn't go to work if I got home after 8 pm. But sometimes I get home at 9 pm, and he just looks at me in anger. That's all. In the beginning, my husband said, 'Don't go to the bakery project because they don't pay you.' He doesn't say that anymore. In this way, my relationship has changed (Lupe, 1995).

My relationship with my husband has changed a little because now he doesn't try to stop me from going out to meetings. Before Las DIGNAS,

he would. I believe he's changed a little bit. I feel good he respects me. It's better than it was before (Carmen, 1995).

When I was about 15, I began to repudiate my uncle and father's macho attitude. My mother said, 'Why do you put yourself up against the men? You are a woman and you don't have the strength they have.' My mother was very humble. She didn't have a macho attitude. I started seeing how things could be. That women didn't need to be mistreated. Things don't have to be like they were before (Mercedes, 1995).

Other changes were related to physical relationships, including sex and violence. Las DIGNAS provided training to women about sexuality, family planning, domestic violence and other topics related to marital relationships such as communication. These training seminars in conjunction with women's daily discussions in their workplaces at the economic development projects had resulted in several changes:

Most people don't talk about things like sexual relations. Now because of my work and training, I am able to say how I want our sexual relationship to be and my husband accepts this. Sexual relations between a man and a woman should be talked about. People should not be afraid to talk about things that are important. Sex should be a pleasure for women, and not just for men (Isabella, 1995).

There have been big changes, like in sexual relations. Now I and others have learned things. We have learned that sex has to be voluntary. This is a big change for him [husband]. He says, 'Well, maybe I'm going to have other women and I'm going to have someone else.' And I say, 'Go ahead and have them.' I have freed myself a lot from this (Evita, 1995).

About maternity -- women think that this is the way they have to be. That they should have all the children that men want them to. But we discovered that is not the way it has to be. Maternity is one thing. Sexuality is another. We learned that women can have sexual relations and not have children if they don't want to. If we want to have one or 12 children, that should be the decision of the woman. It should always be the decision of the woman, although I'm convinced that women don't want to have 12 children. One of Las DIGNAS platforms was violence -- the idea is that we shouldn't see it as something normal. We should struggle against violence against women. In this society, violence is looked at as normal. A man can grab a woman and use her as property. As property to treat her anyway he wants. If he wants to abuse her or whatever, it's okay with this society (Aida, 1995).

I say to men that they should try to respect and have an understanding of their wives and partners. I say that they should not impose themselves or use violence. If there's an argument or something, they should resolve it by talking and not by forms of violence (Freida, 1995).

The women's thoughts and beliefs about gender relationships were also evident in much of the advice they offered for young people in the community. Most provided advice which suggested they had a vision for altered sexual relationships and gender roles in Santa Patricia's future.

In some of the Las DIGNAS workshops and trainings we learned how to start to resolve problems through dialogue. Dialoguing with our children, with our compañeros, and with other men in the community because we had to prepare ourselves in this aspect (Mercedes, 1995).

Some of my sons are macho, but some understand more. For example, I've had two girlfriends of my sons who have lived in my house. I've tried to share and tell them they shouldn't let my sons -- even though they are my sons --...mistreat them (Isabella, 1995).

My daughter receives violence from her husband. And I've gone to talk to him with very strong words and said, 'You can't do that, there is an organization of women here that can defend her!' (Evita, 1995).

With my oldest son, since he can understand me more, I've talked about not looking at young girls and women as objects. Also sons, when they get a little older, they don't want you to leave the house. They want you to take good care of them. But I've talked to him, and shared with him. He seems to accept and understand my leaving the house [for the dairy project] (Freida, 1995).

My children are learning. I tell them they have to respect women and share the work and they must respect their sisters because they have the same rights. I teach my sons that when they get mad, they have to respect the woman. And if she gets sick, and can't do something, they have to understand this. And they must help her. I talk with my sons and say when they are with the compañeras, it is good to plan your families. It's good to get married (Alicia, 1995).

I haven't made my daughter afraid to speak, or afraid to go out. I allow her to participate in some activities. I try to motivate her. I tell her since she is 14, to be careful. I want her to study, but if she has a boyfriend, she should know how to treat him. I tell her to be very careful because young men are not looking for commitment with them, but just to bother them. There are young men who only want young girls to lose their virginity, but then they won't make a commitment to them. I was 22 years old before I became a compañera. That's what I advise my daughter and her friends (Anna, 1995).

My sons are little now and they don't understand much. But as they grow up, I'll talk to them about good ways to act as boys and ways to act with women, because this is important (Gabriella, 1995).

I would tell girls that if they leave their homes to work, not to worry if people make fun of them...I would say to girls and boys to take more

responsibility for their work. Some men don't work, but they drink. They should not leave women, but they should treat them with respect. For my own children, my sons, I am going to teach them to bake bread (Rachael, 1995).

Feminism: It was tempting to use these responses of the participants to position them among the ardent devotees of feminist thinking; however, only the most basic, fundamental knowledge of feminism was in evidence in these interviews. In fact, five women indicated that they had no knowledge of the term or of any of the principles of feminist thought. Of the seven who did have such knowledge, most used the term in a sense consistent with its foundational commitment to "dismantling of the societal structures that promote and support gender subordination and to the vision for all woman to participate as full and equal members of society at all levels" (Sen & Grow, 1987, p. 79), otherwise little depth of knowledge was reflected. In 1995, the feminist thinking of the women of Santa Patricia was in the beginning stages of acquiring form and substance:

In the United States, you see more women's rights...For example, they know more about women's rights. I am thinking about women's rights now the way women in the U.S. were thinking forty years ago. Some say that the work we are doing -- what some of the DIGNAS know -- doesn't match the reality of the women in a community like Santa Patricia. We are trying to take advantage of the process that other women around the

world have gone through and trying to learn from that. People say that what we are studying and learning doesn't apply to Santa Patricia. We believe it does (Aida, 1995).

To me, feminism means to be a woman. As women we have been living in a system where there are many differences between women and men. We had to assume many things simply because we were women, but now I feel that is changing. Now there are women in meetings and we hear comments about women's lives. Before they were afraid, under men's control, and they did whatever men said. But today, at least, they have the power to complain about things they don't agree with (Teresa, 1995).

A feminist is a woman who speaks well of another woman as a feminist. A woman that defends other women, a woman that is never going to be against another woman. A woman that is not going to fight because another woman is trying to take her husband. There are many elements of feminism. I feel good talking about it (Isabella, 1995).

A feminist is someone who is secure and competent. At the same time she works to change things for women. Feminism is to fight and struggle for your rights. To struggle for your rights, you must know what your rights are...I know feminism talks about women and no matter what class you are, how much money you have, we all have value. It doesn't matter who you are. We are different because some studied more, some are tall,

fat, dark, or white, but we are the same because we have the same value and rights (Evita, 1995).

To me, feminism here today is a woman, maybe she's not liberated, but she's in that process. She has desires to know or get beyond a lot of things. She always has the desire to share or know the experiences of other women...and this is something that is really good, really beautiful. Something beautiful that's also something difficult to bring about (Freida, 1995).

I think that feminism refers to a woman having faith in herself and being sure of herself...I think of myself as somewhat of a feminist, at least a little bit. Before Las DIGNAS, I did things because of the way I saw them. I was ignorant and unconscious. Now I don't feel ignorant and I have consciousness as a woman (Mercedes, 1995).

There are women that use that word feminism. I don't really use it. Some women who do use it feel they should be independent of everything. The thing about some women who say they are going to be totally independent -- I'm not like that because I think the world is made up of men and women. I have sons and daughters and I love my sons and I love my daughters. I am a mother (Alicia, 1995).

Themes. In the responses about sexual roles, gender relationships, and feminism the themes remained consistent. Here, however, was evidence that

gains in personal confidence, self-esteem, and value, a growing sense of power and control, and emerging skills in political action had been translated into fundamental alterations in the way women and men related to one another in their own homes.

Considerable evidence was given that women utilized their self-esteem, power, and negotiating skills to secure changes in their husbands' behaviors. The women were more free to leave their homes and engage in social, economic and political activities. Even if they were not encouraged by their husbands to do so, at least they were no longer prevented from taking advantage of these opportunities.

The participants no longer saw themselves as the property of their husbands, objects to be possessed and manipulated. Nor were they tolerant of physical, emotional or psychological violence. The knowledge they had gained in Las DIGNAS trainings had provided them with the understanding that such violence was inappropriate and that they had a right to safety in their own homes. In addition, the close-knit DIGNAS group in Santa Patricia provided proximate support to women to insure that these rights were respected. Women no longer had to suffer abuse or neglect in silence as long as she was connected to Las DIGNAS or one of the development projects.

The women also spoke openly of the need for family planning as well as the need for women to be educated about the differences between maternity and sexuality. For the first time in this small community, women were beginning to talk to one another and to become experts at Las DIGNAS trainings about

preventing unwanted pregnancies, as well as about engaging in sexual intercourse for reasons other than procreation. In talking about this new information, many participants revealed the extent to which their lives had been negatively impacted by the burden of many children and few resources. Moreover, they spoke frankly of the pain of not being able to meet their existing children's needs because their children were so numerous.

Despite making gains, women recognized that they still had much further to progress to reach an equitable social, political, and economic order. Their advice to young people reflected community problems that they saw continuing, including male irresponsibility and dependency, high birth rates, unplanned pregnancies, high illiteracy rates, and disrespect for and silencing of women.

Some of the women evidenced a beginning grasp of feminist principles, but most had not conceptualized it beyond its narrowest application to their own personal situations. The word appeared to have no consistent meaning to the women in this community. It was interesting that some of the terms from feminist discussions in non two-thirds world countries had found their way to Santa Patricia, for example, *consciousness*, *women's reality*, and *liberation*.

Conclusion

In many ways, the voices of the women in Las DIGNAS and its economic development projects in Santa Patricia, El Salvador, have spoken for themselves. No longer silenced by the historical oppression of women by males, these women have experienced significant positive changes in their self-esteem,

personal empowerment, political participation, and gender relationships. While Las DIGNAS alone cannot take full credit for the number and magnitude of all of these gains in every women's life, the women themselves acknowledged their participation in this single organization as the major influence in promoting and sustaining these changes.

Chapter V will discuss the implications of these findings and provide recommendations for future research on these topics.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

It may be argued that the voices of the women of Las DIGNAS in Santa Patricia, El Salvador, required no further amplification or interpretation. Indeed, their messages were difficult to ignore or misunderstand, even when translated from the colloquial Spanish in which they were originally expressed into the formal English demanded of academic inquiry. Even so, there was reason to hope that something further could be gained through the effort of analyzing these responses in some depth. Such an analysis was not meant to detract from the powerful layers of meaning that readers had already constructed from the women's voices alone, but to add to these layers one voice more -- that of the researcher who was both a participant in and recorder of these conversations.

Discussion of the Study Findings

The "voices" theme

The title of this study was chosen well in advance of conducting the research and was meant primarily to convey that women's perspectives would be sought through person-to-person-interviews as a part of a qualitative research process. "The Voices of Las DIGNAS" was considered an apt, if trivial, way to

convey this emphasis, but the title was not shared with participants or others in the community of Santa Patricia while the study was being conducted.

It was therefore considered of singular note when transcript after transcript of the interviews was translated and the term *voice* made its appearance not once, but dozens of times in the stories these women told about their experiences and the women's organization Las DIGNAS in post-war El Salvador. A theme which had seemed to be trivial was at once transformed into a key concept for understanding the impact of Las DIGNAS in these women's lives. Indeed, if the results of the study were to be summed up in a single statement, it would read: "Las DIGNAS has made the women of Santa Patricia aware of their voice."

Although the study sought specifically to examine the impact of Las DIGNAS and participation in its economic development projects across four broad areas of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and community relationships -- that is, *vis a vis* self-esteem, empowerment, political participation and gender relationships -- the theme of *voices* transcended these somewhat artificial and restrictive categories and in their stead provided a broad and unified perspective within which these other changes could be understood and interpreted.

The self-esteem theme

Although the study was grounded in qualitative methodology, the information provided by the participants led to certain quantitative conclusions, however tentative. For example, women voiced awareness of some changes in their lives much more frequently than they voiced awareness of other changes, even when directly questioned about these areas of change in equal detail: All twelve women discussed changes in their self-esteem which they considered to be significant. Several did so by using phrases related to *gaining* or *discovering* their own voices; but, however expressed, this theme was clear and consistent across all categories of age, marital status, length of participation in Las DIGNAS and other demographic characteristics. These women's views of their personal worth and dignity (words they themselves also used frequently) were fundamentally altered by their involvement in this organization.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this finding was that this result was secured by women's participation in an organization which did not specifically have this as its goal and in the organization's economic development projects which are focused principally on the amelioration of women's economic status. That a political organization could effect such significant changes in such a foundational aspect of women's lives as their self-esteem through provision of opportunities for their participation in economic development activities and training opportunities was of considerable interest.

The empowerment theme

Fewer women articulated an awareness of changes in their perceptions of personal empowerment in the clear and unequivocal terms they had used to describe their awareness of changes in their self-esteem, although anecdotes in which they behaved as empowered individuals were shared and many were observed behaving in ways which reflected an internalized sense of personal power. One of the possible reasons for this difference between described and observed empowerment may have been that the language and culture of Santa Patricia did not have a term which conveyed the same precise meaning (if, indeed, the term has a precise meaning) as the term *empowerment* in English. In responding to questions about *empowerment* therefore, an awareness of linguistic and cultural differences supports the decision to base one's conclusions not merely upon what the women said about this concept, but also upon what they were observed to be doing as well.

Combining both personal observations as well as women's responses, it was apparent that at least some degree of personal empowerment was associated with participation in Las DIGNAS and its economic development projects. At the most personal, basic level, this empowerment took the form of women's recognition of their power to act on their own behalf; at the most general level, this empowerment took the form of women's recognition that they could act on behalf of others, including other women of their community as a whole.

It is indisputable that a variety of other factors -- such as the Civil War and the relocation and resettlement experiences related to the war -- contributed to changes in women's perceptions of themselves as individuals with power to act. (The same factors were recognized as having a significant impact on self-esteem, political participation and gender relationships as well).

The political participation theme

The number of Las DIGNAS women who described adding their voices into political processes was fewer still than the number who appeared to be empowered by participation in the organization and its economic development projects. And yet, here, too, there were powerful stories of changes attributed to membership in this specific group. Three of the women had run for municipal (i.e., county-level) public office; others had sought and held positions of authority in the municipality or local community. In general, an association was seen between the length of time a woman had been involved in Las DIGNAS and the level or extent of her political participation. Women who had been involved longer were more politically involved than those who had been involved for shorter periods of time.

This finding must be evaluated in the context of El Salvador's political history; that is, a history which provided few incentives for individuals in communities like Santa Patricia to become or remain involved in public decisions. Moreover, when local citizens were involved in decisions, the

positions of leadership and control had traditionally been held by men. The overarching cultural tradition of *machismo* which permeated the social and economic spheres had also been highly institutionalized in the political system. It was therefore, not unexpected that women in this community -- whether affiliated with Las DIGNAS or not -- were moving with caution into the political arena.

Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that although the Las DIGNAS women interviewed were active participants in economic development projects, they all continued to have sole or principal responsibility for work within their homes. For women with large families (whose perspectives on women's roles had usually not changed at the same rate or in the same direction as the Las DIGNAS member), there were few incentives and little time to pursue active roles within the political arena at the time this study was conducted.

The gender relationship theme

It may be that the greatest changes in the lives of the Santa Patricia Las DIGNAS women had occurred in their domestic relationships, particularly relationships with their husbands and *compañeros*. Again, these changes were not solely the result of participation in Las DIGNAS, but of a confluence of factors, including activities leading to and during the Civil War and expatriation and relocation experiences. The community life of Santa Patricia itself was interrupted by these large events, in fact, the village was abandoned for nearly a

decade when its young, able-bodied male citizens took to the hills as guerrillas and its women, old men, and children escaped to nearby Honduras.

Change on such a large scale was bound to have a profound impact on interpersonal relationships, including those between married or cohabiting couples. Changes along similar lines have been widely documented in the United States and other more developed countries during periods of war. The experiences of North American women who left their kitchens for factory jobs -- pushed to the status of legend by such figures as "Rosie, the Riveter" -- were not dramatically unlike those of these twelve women who were provided opportunities to fulfill male roles in the re-settlement camps. And, like Rosie, these women had experiences during the war which created at least some reluctance to return to the kitchen once the war had ended.

Because this study was focused on soliciting and analyzing women's perceptions of the changes in gender relationships, it did not explore what role, if any, men's experiences during the war or thereafter have played, but certainly this would also be a fruitful area of further exploration. In the women's words, their husbands and companions frequently did not understand or support the goals and objectives of DIGNAS. Yet, if they were not active partners in the personal, social, and political development of their wives and female companions, many of these men reacted in uncharacteristically passive ways and tolerated the women's early involvement in the organization's efforts.

Exceptions to this tolerance were evident, however. At least two of the women reported being struck by their partners as a result of Las DIGNAS participation. One of these women left her husband, but eventually returned to him. She reported that their relationship has subsequently changed and that he no longer “beats” her. The other woman left her *compañero*, and lives alone with her children. Both of these women were supported by the organization in the choices they made in these domestic relationships.

All twelve women – whether they remained with their partners or made changes in their domestic situation – described significant changes in their relationships with men and attributed much of this change to information and support they had received through Las DIGNAS trainings or participation in economic development projects.

There was ample evidence that simple information itself had a powerful impact, particularly in such areas as family planning and expression of sexual feelings. A consistent theme that echoed throughout the narratives was one of coming to the personal realization that a woman did not have to continue having children if she did not want them – no matter what her husband or *compañero*’s opinion or perspective was. Some women acknowledged that this information had come too late for them to personally benefit, but they indicated this was information they would share with both daughters and sons; making it clear that, at least in this area, the current efforts of Las DIGNAS may impact the gender relationships in Santa Patricia well into future generations.

Of related interest was the women's growing clarity on the differences between sexual intercourse for personal pleasure and intercourse for reproductive purposes. In fact, these women were much more forthright about discussing this topic -- particularly with a foreign researcher -- than women in North America might have been anticipated to be. The development of their senses of self-esteem had reached a point where, uniformly, they had taken (or resumed) ownership of their bodies. This sense of personal ownership and control allowed them to say "no" -- many of them, for the first time -- to men who demanded sex from them.

These women spoke of the seminars on sex, sexuality, and reproductive issues which Las DIGNAS had provided and it was evident that these women's capacities for learning were not handicapped by their generally very limited degree of literacy. From the stories it appeared that they had been forced by the war and circumstances of the migration and relocation to recognize their vulnerability to rape and sexual assaults from men who were in the armed forces of El Salvador or Honduras. As they banded together to protect one another from sexual attacks, the women created systems of support which provided a context in which the teaching on empowerment and sexuality provided by Las DIGNAS could grow and flourish. This learning was applied by the twelve not only to situations of non-consensual sex, where their personal feelings had previously been ignored as well. Las DIGNAS gave them information about their sexual and reproductive rights, created new norms around the sexual

responsibilities of men and women in domestic arrangements, and provided support for women who chose to exercise the rights of which they had become so recently aware.

It was of interest to note that men in the community (and some non DIGNAS) women exhibited certain reflexive reactions to these altered gender relationships. For example, several women related stories in which the term “a *DIGNA*” was used in a pejorative sense to convey the meaning of a man-hating woman. There was also a thinly veiled presumption by some members of the community that members of Las DIGNAS were lesbians, women who did not “need” men.

Another un-flattering portrayal of DIGNAS members by men was that they were women who “*ate their children*,” that is, behaved in non-maternal, manly ways. By the time that this research was conducted, the Las DIGNAS women had grown accustomed to these distorted perceptions and many described such terms as only moderately irritating. For the most part, the twelve women interviewed had quietly gone about their lives with partners and children with an ever-increasing self-confidence and sense of personal control. If at first their partners or children did not understand or like the changes, the women turned to one another for support and continued to attend Las DIGNAS meetings and participate in economic development projects. Eventually their male partners came to recognize that their compliant wives and female companions of the

pre-war years had changed in ways that demanded the creation of new, more equitable relationships.

To be sure, the Las DIGNAS members in Santa Patricia had not achieved full gender equity. As a general rule, they had simply added their roles as Las DIGNAS members to their roles as mothers and partners; but their Las DIGNAS membership also meant that they performed those roles in new, and more personally satisfying ways that had fundamentally changed their relationships with partners.

Other themes

Feminism. Originally it was the intent of this research to explore themes of *feminist thought* in the women's perspectives, but this proved to be a somewhat daunting task, in no small part because the term itself was not one with which these women had a high degree of familiarity or understanding. The women who had been involved with Las DIGNAS for the longest time (and therefore, had the longest exposure to the greatest amount of formal training by the organization) thought of *feminism* primarily in terms of women's empowerment, but few of them could provide examples of how they would use the term to describe their own or Las DIGNAS' activities. At least four of the women professed no knowledge of the term at all and the definition provided by the researcher did not seem to provide much further enlightenment to them on this topic.

Utilizing one generally accepted definition of the word feminism, (as cited in this work on p. 16) it was evident that many of the women interviewed were operationalizing feminist principles in their daily lives. Certainly their ongoing and daily efforts to dismantle the social, economic and political structures of Santa Patricia and El Salvador which had historically supported the subordination of women to men in a *machismo* culture were much in evidence in their stories.

In addition, most respondents provided eloquent evidence that they were singly and jointly creating a new vision for women. This new vision became most clear as they spoke of their children's futures and the future of successive generations of men and women. They saw their daughters and sons as sharing home and work responsibilities more equitably with their future mates; they saw daughters and sons who understood and practiced family planning; daughters, sons and grandchildren who would embrace education; daughters, sons and grandchildren who would form lasting relationships based on love and trust, rather than fear; and they saw a community which would have a place where individuals of both genders shared equally in decision-making processes.

Most of the women of Santa Patricia did not have a word for *feminism*, but its absence had not prevented them from moving toward implementing many of its principles.

The role of other factors in promoting and sustaining changes in self-esteem, empowerment, political participation, and gender relationships. It has already been noted that Las DIGNAS was not the only significant force to which the changes in these women's lives can be related. War, re-settlement in Honduras, and re-location in Santa Patricia also must be examined for their impacts on these women's lives, particularly since all of the women interviewed had similar experiences before and after the Civil War.

Santa Patricia was a community that was as impacted as any in the country by this 12-year conflict, and many women described a lengthy period before the war itself when the political order was rapidly deteriorating and their personal security could not be taken for granted. This meant that many of these women had lived most of their adult lives in circumstances well outside the usual norms for their country. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say no baseline or personal, social, and political conduct really existed by which to accurately assess the magnitude of the changes these women have described since they had limited experience with normal, unexceptional circumstances.

Relocation to Honduras had impelled many of the study participants to assume new roles and responsibilities, both to insure their own welfare and the welfare of their children. Frequently under attack from the soldiers of the country to which they had turned for protection, they mobilized themselves to create a social and political order in the resettlement camps in which they held high positions of authority and responsibility. In addition, they were pressed into

service to insure that their husbands and partners were supplied with food, uniforms and other supplies, and more than half became active smugglers to accomplish these ends. When the Peace Accords were signed and they returned to a country no longer engaged in active warfare, there was no official recognition of their community by the government in power. Although they had returned home, they still had several years of struggle to regain formal ties to their homeland.

A case can be made that these factors alone may have provided sufficient impetus for the changes which the women described in their lives in the four-year period since the war's end; however, it is notable that the women themselves did not tie these changes to their war and resettlement experiences, but to their involvement in Las DIGNAS. Of course, the impact of the research questions on these responses cannot be ignored in this context. The research was primarily interested in discovering patterns of impact from the Las DIGNAS organization and projects and only secondarily interested in exploring other influences such as the war. Probe questions were related to Las DIGNAS, therefore, much that might have been shared by the women about these other factors may have remained unexpressed.

In this context, one returns again to the influence of the demand characteristics of qualitative, interview-based research in which subjects are almost always aware of the interests of the interviewer, in this case, the specific impact of Las DIGNAS. Other research methodologies which approach the

exploration of women's self-esteem, empowerment, political participation, and changes in gender relationships in ways which lessen the impact of these demand characteristics may add additional valuable insights to the findings of this study.

Implications of the Study

This research provided a considerable body of information about the impact of one women's economic development organization and its projects on the lives of twelve specific women and, by extension, on their community in a two-thirds world country. In and of itself, the work only scratched the surface of this community and these lives. Even so, and despite its other limitations, these findings are seen as having a number of implications for ongoing work with women in such fields as international development, social work, political science and women's studies.

For example, although social workers are outsiders to the Las DIGNAS organization and to the issues of the women Santa Patricia they can perform a function by, as a minimum, providing expertise or other support as requested by the organization and/or the women. Such assistance may take the form of funding support, materials, or technical advice, but whatever form it takes such assistance should respect the women's and organization's right to self-determination as well as women's self-sufficiency and independence.

The profession's value base-including the right to self determination is consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of Las DIGNAS organization and its projects. Both value individual perspectives and strive to provide opportunities for individual growth as well as societal changes. Each values community organizations which employ bottom-up rather than top-down approaches.

What can social workers and others committed to economic development efforts which effect social change and personal growth learn from the women of Las DIGNAS, Santa Patricia? Most importantly, in Las DIGNAS, economic development projects the women are in charge. It is the women who come together to analyze their own situations, and decide what needs to be done. It is they who act to change their situations. The role of outside organizers such as social workers or government institutions, is to assist the women in thinking through their situations, identify resources, and carrying through with solutions. The women take responsibility for their lives and the changes in their lives.

One implication for social workers and others committed to promoting social change is that respect for people's ability to analyze situations, for their creativity and resourcefulness in finding solutions, for their determined nature to be agents of change, and for their ability to carry through their solutions are essential.

The responsibility of change agents should, however, move beyond simply identifying resources and providing technical assistance. Improving

women's opportunities requires long-term strategies including policy development and analysis aimed at challenging prevailing structures and building accountability of governments and their policies toward women for its decisions. Pressure must be brought to bear on governments by the entire international community (not only women in the international community) to redress gender inequities and re-examine the status of women. A guiding principle to work by is that the women have the right and responsibility to free themselves and reorganize their social structures. The role of others is to remove the obstacles which prevent women's liberation of themselves.

One of the most important implications of the work is that women clearly have a tremendous potential to communicate important messages about their lives in their own voices. This potential is not restricted in any way by women's lack of formal education or even fundamental literacy skills. The fact that every single woman who participated was able to provide valuable information pertinent to the research focus is seen as evidence that the use of intrusive, highly structured instruments and methods is not always required. The approach of simply asking research questions about a specific topic of interest may appear, on first examination, to lack rigor and constitute something less than a scientific approach to inquiry. However, this work has demonstrated that, in some cases, the most direct, unelaborated approach has merit and can result in an exceptional depth and richness of information for further study.

Another important implication is that economic development projects may have consequences beyond or in addition to those specifically envisioned by their organizers. In the case of the Las DIGNAS economic development projects, these consequences were -- at a minimum -- in areas which included women's sense of self and feelings of empowerment, political participation, and gender relationships. While the organization Las DIGNAS may well be philosophically supportive of the types and directions of these changes in project participants, there is also an implied caution that economic development organizers and organizations should heed, and that is to be aware that the economic status of women is inextricably linked to other important areas of their lives. Organizers are challenged by these findings to anticipate these links and position economic development as only one part of any individual's existence. Only when economic development's connections to other parts of a woman's life are considered in advance should these efforts be undertaken. They cannot be undertaken in a vacuum, assuming that only economic consequences will result. As this study has shown, this may not be the case.

Another implication of the study is that the women of two-thirds world countries are seldom afforded the respect due them from the citizens or government of non-two-thirds world nations. The stories of the twelve women in Santa Patricia should help in laying to rest any misconceptions that these women are helpless victims. Instead, their voices provide narratives of incredible resiliency in the face of overwhelming adversity; of true ingenuity in meeting their

needs and the needs of their families; and of amazing perseverance when confronted with incredible odds. In short, these women should be greatly admired and revered; and their model of economic development should be even more closely scrutinized to see what relevance it has for developed, Western nations -- rather than always considering solely the relevance our models have for them.

If women (and men) in Western nations are listening, the voices of the Las DIGNAS women in Santa Patricia have many useful lessons to teach us all.

Recommendations for Future Research

The need for additional research is amply supported by this study. For example, a productive line of future inquiry would expand the subject pool to include women who had not been involved in Las DIGNAS or its projects. Comparing the stories of non-members with these, it may be possible to ascertain even more clearly how much of the change in women's lives can be attributed to Las DIGNAS membership and how much can be seen as a consequence of factors to which all women were exposed namely the Civil War, re-location, and re-settlement.

Another potentially valuable avenue of exploration may be the inclusion of males in the subject pool, particularly in terms of understanding more completely how gender relationships have changed and how these changes may be related

to Las DIGNAS membership. The addition of husbands and children to the sample could be instructive.

A perspective which is largely lacking in this study is a cross-generational one which could be addressed by including the mothers and daughters of Las DIGNAS women in further studies. A comparison across generations may provide useful information about how rapidly change can progress in a single generation, as well as how intergenerational conflicts and supports promote or impede such change.

Yet another potential fruitful area for expanding the study is across international boundaries. Cross-cultural research with women from different parts of the world whose economic, social and political circumstances vary widely can be helpful in arriving at a better understanding of whether the Santa Patricia results are unique or whether they have characteristics in common with women's economic development project outcomes elsewhere.

Finally, the current study can be used as the basis for generating testable hypotheses about women's economic development projects in two-thirds world countries. These hypotheses could be tested utilizing quantitative methods which do not have some of the limitations of qualitative research (although they introduce different ones). It is anticipated that the most accurate understanding of the economic development projects in Santa Patricia can be gained through the applications of both types of research methodologies, each reinforcing the

other's findings and clarifying areas where further investigation would be productive.

Summary

The power in this research has emanated from the women who were its subjects. It is these voices, in the final analysis, which should speak the loudest and carry the most important message to the reader. Chapter IV, where the women themselves can be most clearly heard, made the unequivocal point that economic development cannot be separated from personal, social and political development. These women have not confused means with ends, correlation with causation, or causes with effects – they have simply incorporated economic development into every aspect of their daily lives and into the life of their community. At a time when Western nations grapple with the meaning and value of work in the human experience, much can be gained by reflecting on what these women have said.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPLICATION AND APPROVAL

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF A PROJECT INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
INITIAL REVIEW

UCRIHS - Michigan State University
David E. Wright, Ph.D., Chair
232 Administration Building
East Lansing, MI 48824-1046
(517) 355-2180 - Telephone . . . (517) 432-1171 - FAX
Office Hours: M-F (8:00 A.M.-Noon & 1:00-5:00 P.M.)

DIRECTIONS: Please complete questions on this application using the instructions and definitions found on the cherry sheets (revised February 1995).

1. **RESPONSIBLE PROJECT INVESTIGATOR(S)**
(Faculty or staff supervisor)
MARGARET NIELSEN
Faculty ID#: 468-50-885-4
(Social Security #)
I believe the research can be safely completed without endangering human subjects. Further, I have read the enclosed proposal and I am willing to supervise any student investigators.
Margaret Nielsen 5-26-95
(Signature)
- ADDITIONAL INVESTIGATOR(S)**
Principal Investigator
Julia A. Guevara
Fac./Stu. ID#: A11760395
Fac./Stu. ID#: _____
Fac./Stu. ID#: _____
Fac./Stu. ID#: _____
2. **ADDRESS**
(for comments/approval letter)
School of Social Work 254
2nd floor Baker Hall
432-3727
Phone #: 432-3727
FAX #: 353-3038
- ADDRESS**
(for comments/approval letter)
1716 Lotus SE
Grand Rapids, Mi.
49506
Phone #: 616-243-1257
FAX #: 616-771-6570
3. **TITLE OF PROPOSAL** The Voices of Las DIGNAS of Santa Marta
Via Economic Development Activities
4. **PROPOSED FUNDING AGENCY** (if any) none
5. **DOES THIS PROJECT UTILIZE AN INVESTIGATIONAL DRUG, DEVICE OR PROCEDURE?**
Yes ☐ No ☒ If yes, is there an IND #? Yes ☐ No ☐
6. **DOES THIS PROJECT INVOLVE THE USE OF MATERIALS OF HUMAN ORIGIN (e.g., human BLOOD OR TISSUE)?** Yes ☐ No ☒
7. **DOES THIS PROPOSAL HAVE AN MSU ORD NUMBER?** Yes ☐ # _____ No ☒
8. **WHEN WOULD YOU PREFER TO BEGIN DATA COLLECTION?** June 20, 1995
Please remember you may not begin data collection without prior UCRIHS approval.
9. **CATEGORY** (Circle A, B or C below. See instructions.)
 - a. This proposal requires review by a full sub-committee.
 - b. This proposal is eligible for expedited review. Specify category or categories _____
 - c. This proposal is exempted from full sub-committee review. Specify category or categories 1-C, 1-D

OFFICE USE ONLY
Subcommittee _____

Agenda _____

This research project will specifically explore to what extent the women of Las DIGNAS (Women for Dignity and Life) in Santa Marta, El Salvador perceive their involvement in an all-female, grassroots economic development project to be related to changes in self-esteem, personal empowerment and their relationships with others in their families and the community. Particular emphasis will be given to subjects' perceptions of changes in their relationship with males in their community. The study utilizes an exploratory descriptive research approach employing semi-structured ethnographic interviews.

11. PROCEDURES

In country fieldwork will involve 12 semi-structured voluntary ethnographic interviews with women involved in three Las DIGNAS economic development projects. The women will not be identified by name or project and interview information will be recorded in with no identifying information of the subject. A snowball, purposive sampling technique will be utilized.

Each subject will be given two opportunities to decline participation in the research and prior to the interview each subject will be asked to sign a consent form. The Principal Investigator will maintain strict confidentiality in all cases.

12. SUBJECT POPULATION

- a. The study population may include (check each category where subjects may be included by design or incidentally):

Minors	☐
Pregnant Women	☐
Women of Childbearing Age	☐
Institutionalized Persons	☐
Students	☐
Low Income Persons	☐
Minorities	☐
Incompetent Persons (or those with diminished capacity)	☐

- b. Number of subjects (including controls) _____

- c. If you are associated with the subjects (e.g., they are your students, employees, patients), please explain the nature of the association.

I have conducted fieldwork in this community on three previous occasions, 1992, 1993, 1994. I have become acquainted with several of the women involved in these projects.

- d. How will the subjects be recruited?

A purposive snowball sampling technique will be utilized. Each of the three projects coordinators will be interviewed. They have agreed to participate, however, should any of the three choose not to participate 12 other potential subjects will be selected until a total of 12 interviews is completed. Each subject will be asked prior to the interview to provide the name of another Las DIGNAS woman involved in any of the three economic development projects who may be a potential research subject. Thereafter, each subject will refer other women involved in the projects until 12 interviews is completed. An effort will be made to secure proportional representation from each of these projects.

- e. If someone will receive payment for recruiting the subjects, please explain the amount of payment, who pays it and who receives it.

No person will receive payment for recruiting the subjects. No person receives payment for consenting to an interview.

- f. Will the research subjects be compensated? ☒ No ☐ Yes. If yes, details concerning payment, including the amount and schedule of payments, must be set forth in the informed consent.
- g. Will the subjects incur additional financial costs, as a result of their participation in this study? ☒ No ☐ Yes. If yes, please include an explanation in the informed consent.
- h. Will you be advertising for research participants. ☒ No ☐ Yes. If yes, attach a copy of the advertisement you will use.
- i. Will this research be conducted with subjects who reside in another country or live in a cultural context different from mainstream US society? ☐ No ☒ Yes.

- (1) If your answer is **yes**, will there be any corresponding complications in your ability to minimize risks to subjects, maintain their confidentiality and/or assure their right to voluntary informed consent as individual? [] No [X] Yes.
- (2) If your answer is I-1 is **yes**, what are these complications and how will you resolve them?

It is possible that some portions of the information offered by the participants will elicit emotionally painful memories. Every effort will be made by the researcher to minimize any possible negative effects on the participants by: (a) providing at least two opportunities for the participant to decline participation in the research, (b) providing both written and verbal assurance that information from the findings will not identify them by name, (c) providing the participants with a copy of the findings, (d) Las DIGNAS has agreed to provide the services of their clinical psychologist, free of charge to any woman who requests this post interview. The researcher agrees to set up the service and provide transportation for the subject.

13. **ANONYMITY/CONFIDENTIALITY**

Confidentiality

All research subjects/interviewees will be voluntary participants. All subjects will be informed verbally that their participation is voluntary and that they will not be identified by name in any phase of this research. Any other identifying information will not be utilized in a final report. Each subject will be asked to sign a consent form with the knowledge that only the researcher and the interpreter will be privileged to the interview.

If a subject asks at any time that the interview not be tape recorded or information not be noted the researcher will discontinue either procedure.

14. **RISK/BENEFIT RATION**

Though the country has recently "resolved" a 12 year civil war and complete political and social freedom in the country is exposed by the democratic government, scholarly examination of the processes of economic development of women associated with the feminist organization may entail some risks of social embarrassment, harassment or bodily harm to certain informants, should their identities be disclosed. The Principal Investigator is extremely sensitive to these risks and will in all cases maintain strict confidentiality. Past experience in this and other settings suggest maintaining a single copy of interview transcripts. tapes

and consent forms in the personal possession of the Principal Investigator, and reporting results without identifying information will preserve the confidentiality of informants at risk.

In general, however, the risks are minimal or nonexistent to individual 14 subjects. Their active involvement in economic development projects sponsored by a feminist organization means their activities and to some extent their beliefs related to gender inequities is publicly known and tolerated, if not accepted. In each case the subject is in the best position to assess her risks and by their voluntary participation in interviews signify her judgment that the risks are in fact minimal.

Scholars and subjects alike will benefit from this effort to illuminate promising efforts and stimulate critical rethinking of a process by which societies make fundamental changes in traditional power structures and in individual, community, and societal expectations. This study may provide a more focused picture of women and their experiences with economic development.

**MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY**

June 5, 1995

TO: Julia A. Guevara
1716 Lotus SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49506

RE: IRB#: 95-311
TITLE: THE VOICES OF LAS DIGNAS OF SANTA VIA
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES
REVISION REQUESTED: N/A
CATEGORY: 1-C, D
APPROVAL DATE: 06/05/95

The University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects' (UCRIHS) review of this project is complete. I am pleased to advise that the rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and methods to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Therefore, the UCRIHS approved this project and any revision listed above.

RENEWAL: UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year, beginning with the approval date shown above. Investigators planning to continue a project beyond one year must use the green renewal form (enclosed with the original approval letter or when a project is renewed) to seek updated certification. There is a maximum of four such expedited renewals possible. Investigators wishing to continue a project beyond that time need to submit it again for complete review.

REVISIONS: UCRIHS must review any changes in procedures involving human subjects, prior to initiation of the change. If this is done at the time of renewal, please use the green renewal form. To revise an approved protocol at any other time during the year, send your written request to the UCRIHS Chair, requesting revised approval and referencing the project's IRB # and title. Include in your request a description of the change and any revised instruments, consent forms or advertisements that are applicable.

PROBLEMS/CHANGES: Should either of the following arise during the course of the work, investigators must notify UCRIHS promptly: (1) problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects or (2) changes in the research environment or new information indicating greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.

If we can be of any future help, please do not hesitate to contact us at (517)355-2180 or FAX (517)432-1171.

Sincerely,

David E. Wright, Ph.D.
UCRIHS Chair

DEW:kaa/lcp

cc: Margaret Nielsen



OFFICE OF
**RESEARCH
AND
GRADUATE
STUDIES**

University Committee on
Research Involving
Human Subjects
(UCRIHS)

Michigan State University
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East Lansing, Michigan
48824-1046

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MSU is an affirmative-action,
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APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, _____, give my consent to participate in the research study of Ms. Julia Guevara. I understand that:

1. This participation is voluntary and without force, and I am free to withdraw from this agreement at any time.
2. This research is for purposes of completing a requirement toward Ms. Guevara's attainment of a doctoral degree.
3. My participation involves a personal interview which will last approximately two (2) to (3) three hours.
4. I am free to ask questions of Ms. Guevara and receive explanations about the research study, and my rights as a subject.
5. I recognize that the information I provide will be known to both Ms. Guevara and the interpreter.
6. I will not be identified by name in this project and all information that might lead to my identification will be disguised.

Ms. Guevara has explained all of the above to me and has informed me that this consent form will remain in a confidential file.

Name of Subject in Print/Signature

Date

Name of Witness in Print/Signature

Date

Julia A. Guevara/Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

Forma Para Otorgar Conocimiento

Yo, _____, doy mi consentimiento para participar en la investigación que la Señora Julia Guevara está llevando a cabo. Yo comprendo que:

1. Mi participación es voluntaria y no ha sido forzada, y que en cualquier momento estoy libre para salirme de este acuerdo.
2. El propósito de este proyecto de investigación es completar un requisito en el programa de doctorado que la Señora Guevara está obteniendo.
3. Mi participación va a consistir en una entrevista personal que durará entre dos (2) y tres (3) horas.
4. Yo tendré la libertad de hacer preguntas y recibir respuestas acerca del proyecto de investigación que está llevando a cabo la Señora Guevara, y también sobre mis derechos como sujeto en el proyecto.
5. Yo entiendo que la información que yo provea será materia de conocimiento de la Señora Guevara y de la intérprete.
6. Mi nombre no será usado en este proyecto, y todo tipo de información que pudiera servir para identificarme será encubierto.

La Señora Guevara me ha explicado todos los puntos enumerados arriba y me ha informado que esta forma de consentimiento se mantendrá en un archivo/expediente confidencial.

Nombre del Sujeto Escrito/Firma

Fecha

Nombre del Sujeto Escrito/Firma

Fecha

Julia A. Guevara/Firma

Fecha

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

The general question in the personal history area is as follows:

1. Por favor hableme sobre su vida antes de entrar en contacto con Las DIGNAS.
1. Please tell me about your life prior to your contact with the DIGNAS.

This question is designed to elicit the participant's personal history which will also include the following demographic information:

- 1a. Cuál es su nombre?
What is your name?
- 1b. Cuantos años tiene usted?
How old are you?
- 1c. Es usted acompañada?
Do you have a companion?
Sí o No
Yes or No

Sí la respuesta es no, es usted:

If no are you:

Viuda (Widow)

Soltera (single)

Separada/Separated (separated/divorce)

- 1d. Donde nació?
Where were you born?
- 1e. Tiene hijos?
Do you have children?
Sí o no
Yes or no
- 1f. Cuántos hijos tiene?
How many children do you have?
- 1g. Quién vive en su casa?
Who lives in your home?

- 1h. Dónde vive?
Where do you live?
- 1i. Qué fuentes de ingreso tiene?
What sources of income do you have?

Las DIGNAS

- 2. Hábleme, por favor, sobre su participación con Las DIGNAS.
Please describe your involvement with Las DIGNAS.

Follow-up questions and probes:

- 2a. Cómo se entero acerca de Las DIGNAS?
How did you first learn about Las DIGNAS?
- 2b. Por qué es usted miembro de Las DIGNAS?
Why are you a member of Las DIGNAS?
- 2c. Hay algún otro miembro de su familia que participe con Las DIGNAS?
Are any other members of your family involved with Las DIGNAS?
- 2d. Qué teine otro organizaciones de mujeres en El Salvador?
Do you know about other women's organizations in El Salvador?
- 2e. De que manera es Las DIGNAS diferente a otras organizaciones de mujeres en El Salvador?
How is Las DIGNAS different than other women's organizations in El Salvador?
- 2f. Qué es el feminismo para usted?
What is your idea of feminism?
- 2g. Ha tenido problemas con su compañero o algún miembro do su familia sobre su participacion con Las DIGNAS?
Por favor describa.
Have you had any problems with your companion or some member of your family due to your participation with Las DIGNAS?
Please describe.
- 2h. Ha tenido problemas con algún miembro de la comunidad sobre su participación en Las DIGNAS?

Por favor describa.

Have you had any problems with any member of the community due to your participation with Las DIGNAS?

Please describe.

- 2i. Cómo ha cambiado su vida con su participación en Las DIGNAS/
Por favor describa.
Has your involvement with Las DIGNAS changed your life in any way?
Please describe.
- 2j. Cree usted que su familia ha cambiado desde que usted participa con Las DIGNAS?
Por favor describa.
Do you believe your family has changed as result of your participation in Las DIGNAS?
Please describe.

Economic Development Project

3. Por favor describa su participación con su proyecto de desarrollo económico.
Please describe your involvement with your economic development project.

Follow-up questions and probes:

- 3a. En que proyecto de desarrollo económico participa usted?
What is the name of your economic development project?
- 3b. Cómo comenzó su participación en este proyecto?
How did you become involved with this project?
- 3c. Cuánto tiempo ha participado en este proyecto?
How long have you been involved in this project?
- 3d. El proyecto, le paga un sueldo regular a usted por el trabajo realizado?
Does the project pay you a regular salary for the work you do?
- 3e. Cuánto recibe usted cada mes como sueldo, más o menos?
How much do you receive each month as a salary more or less?

- 3f. Ha tenido problemas con su compañero o algún otro miembro de su familia sobre su participación en el proyecto?
Have you had any problems with your companion or other family members about your participation in the project? Please describe.
- 3g. Ha tenido problemas con algún miembro de la comunidad sobre su participación en el proyecto?
Por favor describa.
Have you had any problems with any member of the community about your participation in the project. Please describe.
- 3h. Cómo ha cambiado su vida con su participación en este proyecto?
Por favor describa.
Has your involvement with the project changed your life in any way?
Please describe.
- 3i. Cree usted que su familia a cambiado desde que usted participa en el proyecto?
Por favor describa.
Do you believe your family has changed as a result of your participation in the project? Please describe.

Gender Relationships

4. En su relación con hombres, ha habido algún cambio en su vida debido a su participación con Las DIGNAS?
Por favor describa.
Have there been any changes in your relationships with the men in your life due to your involvement with Las DIGNAS?
Please describe.

Self-Esteem and Empowerment

5. Por favor describame como se siente acerca de si misma.
Please describe how you feel about yourself.
- 5a. Hay algo diferente en usted desde que comenzó su participación con Las DIGNAS?
Por favor describa.
Do you feel different about yourself since your involvement with Las DIGNAS?
Please describe.

- 5b. Siente que puede cambiar las cosas que la afectan a usted?
Por favor describa.
Do you feel able to change things that concern you?
Please describe.
- 5c. Siente que tiene control sobre su vida?
Por favor describa.
Do you feel you have control over your life?
Please describe.
- 5d. Están algunos de los cambios en su vida relacionados a su participación con Las DIGNAS?
Por favor describa.
To what extent are any of the changes in your life related to your involvement with Las DIGNAS?
Please describe.
- 5e. Están algunos de los cambios en su vida relacionados a su participación en su proyecto?
Por favor describa.
To what extent are any of the changes in your life related to your involvement with your project and less so with Las DIGNAS?
Please describe.

Political Participation

6. Antes de su participación con Las DIGNAS, participaba usted activamente en la vida política de su país y/o de su comunidad?
Por favor describa.
Were you politically active in the political life of your community and/or country prior to your involvement with Las DIGNAS and your project?
Please describe.
- 6.1 Desde que comenzó su participación con Las DIGNAS, cómo ha cambiado su participación política?
Por favor describa.
Has your political involvement changed since your involvement with Las DIGNAS and your project?
Please describe.

Follow-up questions and probes:

- 6a. Por favor describa su participación en las últimas elecciones nacionales de su país.
Please describe your involvement in your country's last national election.
- 6b. Por favor describa su participación en su comunidad desde las últimas elecciones locales.
Please describe your involvement in your community's last local election.
- 6c. Por favor describa cualquier actividad legal o ilegal en la cual usted ha participado y que usted considere una actividad política.
Please describe any activity legal or illegal you have been involved with that you consider to be a political nature.

Nature Projections

7. Cómo ve su vida en el futuro?
How do you see your life in the future?

Follow-up questions and probes:

- 7a. Tiene algunos planes específicos para el futuro?
Por favor describa.
Do you have any specific plans for the future?
Please describe.
- 7b. Qué proyectos tiene para más adelante?
Por favor describa.
What plans do you have for the future (immediate)?
Please describe.

APPENDIX D

Las DIGNAS LETTER OF SUPPORT

Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida

San Salvador May 24th, 1995

Human Subjects Review Committee
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

Dear Committee Members:

We would like to confirm with this letter our support of Julia Guevara's dissertation project entitled "The Voices of Las DIGNAS of Santa Via Economic Development Activities" ("Las Voces de Las DIGNAS de Santa a Traves de Actividades de Desarrollo Economico").

Ms. Guevara has visited our office on several occasions, the most recent visit was in November 1994. She has been in contact with our office and has explained to us all of the information relating to this dissertation project. Ms. Guevara has requested that our staff psychologist be available to meet with any of the women from Santa either prior to or post-interview should that become necessary.

We are delighted that our organization has been chosen as a means to carry out this important investigation and reiterate that the dissertation project will have our backing and support so that it can be carried out as smoothly as possible.

Thank you in advance for your attention. We hope to have Julia with us some time during the months of June, July, or August 1995.

Sincerely,



Morena Herrera
Coordinadora General
Mujeres por La Dignidad y La Vida



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