



# And when she comes home? Education and women's empowerment in intimate relationships

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## ABSTRACT

While previous research has focused on the relationship between education and women's empowerment in the public sphere, their empowerment in the private sphere has been less fully developed in empirical studies. Drawing on a theoretical model of change in marital relationships, this article examines how women who participated in an innovative secondary education program in rural Honduran Garifuna communities were able to negotiate more equitable roles in their intimate relationships.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Inita's story<sup>1</sup>

One night in early September of 2003, in a rural coastal village in Northern Honduras, a young woman named Inita sobbed loudly as she listened to her husband sharpen his machete. Inita feared that her husband, Nelson, was going to take her life. Her sister and brother, who lived next door, woke to the sound of Inita's crying and intervened. Her sister later recalled, "he [Nelson] said he was going to cut off her head with the machete. It's a good thing that their kids were there, because who knows what would have happened if they weren't." The following morning Inita decided to move in with her mother, taking the children with her.

Inita explained that leading up to this event, her husband had grown increasingly jealous, controlling, and irrational. Three years earlier, Inita enrolled in an alternative secondary education program, *Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial* (Tutorial Learning System or SAT). Prior to enrolling in SAT, where she ultimately finished lower secondary school or the ninth grade, Inita had few friends and mostly stayed at home. However, as she studied she began to gain confidence and skills. She started going out of the house and became more involved in the community. As Inita grew independent, Nelson got increasingly jealous. During the course of her studies, Inita decided to open a small business to sell

food and other supplies out of her home. At first, her husband was helpful and assisted with the construction. However, eventually he began to take over and Inita became frustrated. As she explained, "he started changing because when we first started he would tell me how much money we got that day, but towards the end I didn't see any money, he was the one that managed the business, and he had me as his worker." Inita's sister explained "he didn't like her going out, going to meetings or anything. He wouldn't even let her smile or laugh in the business with other men. He said she had other husbands." His jealousy and need to control Inita triggered the machete episode that traumatized Inita and convinced her that she had no other choice but to leave her husband for good.

Inita decided to leave Nelson because she did not think he would ever change. In part, she attributes this to their lack of communication. She explained, "There was hardly any communication between us. We were fighting and I decided to leave . . . I thought that the business would change him, but he got even worse . . . I now know that he will never get himself together. For 10 years I stood by his side trying to help him get himself together . . . he won't [change]." A few months after moving to her mother's she decided the best decision for her future and for her children's future was to move to the city (leaving her children in her sister's care). Inita now lives in La Ceiba (Honduras' third largest city) and is studying to be a nurse.

### 1.2. How can education empower women in their intimate relationships?

The story of Inita demonstrates that women's participation in education can facilitate changes in their public lives (e.g. participation in the community, income-generating activities). Changes in their intimate relationships, however, are often more

Abbreviations: FUNDAEC, *Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias* (Foundation for the Application and Teaching of the Sciences); SAT, *Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial* (Tutorial Learning System); USAID, United States Agency for International Development.

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complicated. Inita's participation in the SAT program opened up new options for her, including starting a small business and enrolling in the nursing program. However, her altered participation in public spaces and increased access to material resources did not translate into empowerment at home. As Inita became more independent, her husband became increasingly jealous and controlling. Her choice to terminate the relationship, because she did not believe her husband would change, illustrates that Inita had both the necessary self-esteem and the resources to make this decision. Inita's story suggests that interventions that attempt to empower women must consider the private sphere, and the ways in which men may help foster or impede women's empowerment. For many women, their marriage or domestic partnership is the most difficult place for them to negotiate gender responsibilities (Bruce, 1989; Rowlands, 1997; Adato and Mindek, 2000; Hochschild, 1989; Deutsch, 1999). Intimate relationships are the most salient loci for experiencing power relations, yet they have often been overlooked by research on the role of education in fostering women's empowerment.

In this study, I seek to more fully understand how education can foster women's empowerment in intimate relationships. To achieve empowerment in their intimate relationships, women must develop the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of the relationship and the decisions made within it (Rowlands, 1997). Drawing on a theoretical model of change in marital relationships developed by Benjamin and Sullivan (1999), I address the following question: in what ways do women who participated in SAT describe increased empowerment in their intimate relationships? In addressing this question, this study hopes to clarify the transformation that education can spark in household gender relations.

## 2. Background and research context

### 2.1. Conceptualizing empowerment

The term "empowerment" has been overused, misused, and co-opted (Stromquist, 2002; Stacki and Monkman, 2003). It is commonly deployed as a synonym for enabling, participating, and speaking out. The notion that education leads to women's empowerment has gained popularity, although we still have much to learn about *how* education actually empowers women (Stromquist, 2002; DaCosta, 2008; Murphy-Graham, 2008).

Nevertheless, in the past 10 years, the goal of women's empowerment (often linked with women's education) has received serious attention, as well as funding by donors and international agencies (Unterhalter, 2007; Mosedale, 2005; Malhotra et al., 2002; Papart et al., 2002; Oxaal and Baden, 1997). Despite its widespread use and occasional abuse, there is some agreement (e.g. Kabeer, 1999; Malhotra et al., 2002; Mosedale, 2005) that empowerment:

- Is a multidimensional process of change from a condition of disempowerment.
- Cannot be bestowed by a third party, as individuals are active agents in this process.
- Is shaped by the context, and so indicators of empowerment must be sensitive to the context in which women live.

At the core of the word empowerment is "power." Therefore in conceptualizing empowerment I draw on previous scholarship on the theme, as well as feminist scholarship that views power as capacity (for an excellent summary, see Karlberg, 2005). Hartstock (1983), commenting on the feminist theory of power, describes how "women's stress on power not as domination but as capacity, on power as a capacity of the community as a whole, suggests that women's experience of connection and relation have more

consequences for understandings of power and may hold resources for a more liberatory understanding" (253). The idea of *power as capacity* is at the core of the conceptualization of empowerment in this article, where I view women's empowerment as a process through which women come to recognize their inherent worth, their "power within" (Kabeer, 1994:229), and begin to participate on equal terms with men in efforts to dismantle patriarchy and promote social and economic development.<sup>2</sup> Women's empowerment is not an end in and of itself, but a pivotal step towards establishing gender equality. In part, gender equality is manifest through a just and equitable sharing of responsibilities by men and women. Gender equality is not synonymous with gender parity, and does not mean that men and women are the same or need to split work exactly in half. Rather, it characterizes social conditions and relationships in which a vision of mutuality and cooperation shapes interactions and enables men and women to reach their full potential (hooks, 2000).

### 2.2. Women's empowerment in the household and intimate relationships

The extant theoretical and empirical research stresses the importance of examining women's empowerment in the household and intimate relationships, and highlights that household gender relations are slow to change (Adato and Mindek, 2000; Rowlands, 1997; Sullivan, 2004; Molyneaux, 2007). Several scholars, including Rowlands (1997), Mason (2003), DaCosta (2008), and Kabeer (1999), emphasize the relational nature of empowerment, echoing the work of feminist scholars who highlight the relational nature of gender (Connell, 1995; Jackson, 1999; Lorber, 2000). For example, Mason argues that "the *relational* nature of empowerment is critical. People are not empowered or disempowered in a vacuum. Rather, they are empowered relative to other people or groups whose lives intersect with theirs" (2003:1) (emphasis original). For women to become empowered in their intimate relationships, they must develop the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of the relationship and the decisions made within it (Rowlands, 1997).

Negotiating new roles in the household is important because around the world women spend more time on housework and child-rearing than their male counterparts do (UNDP, 2007). While women's public roles have changed dramatically in recent decades, evidence suggests that there have been fewer changes in gender relations within the private sphere (Hochschild, 1989, 1996; Sullivan, 2004). Previous qualitative studies (e.g. Adato and Mindek, 2000; Rowlands, 1997; both described further below) on similar interventions are consistent with sociological research that points to the persistence of unequal gender relations in the domestic sphere (Hochschild, 1989, 1996; Lorber, 2000; Sullivan, 2004).

A qualitative study on women through Mexico's social welfare program, PROGRESA,<sup>3</sup> found that changes in intrahousehold

<sup>2</sup> Social and economic development is a process whereby the latent capabilities of individuals, cultures, and societies are drawn out and nurtured. According to the United Nations 2005 Human Development Report, development is "about building human capabilities—the range of things that people can do, and what they can be" (18). Development is not something that one does for others, rather it is a process in which "the rich and the poor, the illiterate and the educated are all able to participate in the building of a new civilization that ensures the material and spiritual prosperity of the entire human race" (Arbab, 2000:154).

<sup>3</sup> PROGRESA (now called *Oportunidades*) is a social welfare program that provides cash payments as well as a package of educational, health, and nutritional services to poor families if they meet certain conditions (children must attend school, women must attend health and nutrition classes). Women are the recipients of both the payments and the educational interventions. The premise is that the program will have a greater social impact because it transfers resources to women. Furthermore, targeting women may also empower them by creating more opportunities for women to go out of the house on their own, by increasing access to resources, and through attitudinal changes that may result from educational activities (Adato and Mindek, 2000).

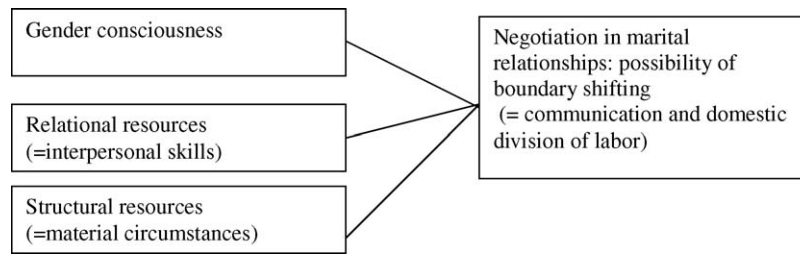


Fig. 1. Benjamin and Sullivan's working model of relationships (1999:800).

relationships, or empowerment in intimate relationships, were subtle or absent altogether (Adato and Mindek, 2000). Furthermore, there was some evidence of greater tension within households because women's time burdens were increased as they managed their PROGRESA requirements and their domestic responsibilities (Adato and Mindek, 2000). These findings are consistent with Rowland's (1997) research on a health promoters' training program and a nonformal education program for women in Honduras. She conducted over 70 h of interviews with participants in these organizations between 1992 and 1993. Rowlands (1997) concludes that empowerment in intimate relationships is the area where change was least visible.

That previous research found little change in the domestic sphere is not surprising. In a study examining changing gender practices within the household, Sullivan (2004) argues for a conception of change that is slow and uneven, in which daily practices and interactions are linked to attitudes and discourse. She argues that incremental change can be slow and piecemeal yet "still in the end effect a radical transformation if we can take the longer perspective" (Sullivan, 2004:209). Sullivan encourages research that focuses on the daily interactive processes of change as described by the actors themselves. Likewise, in her recent article, "Undoing Gender," Deutsch argues that prior scholarship has tended to perpetuate the idea that the gender system of oppression is impervious to real change and to ignore the links between social interaction and structural change (2007). She makes the case that "it is time to put the spotlight squarely on the social processes that underlie resistance against conventional gender relations and on how successful change in power dynamics and inequities between men and women can be accomplished" (2007:107).

In this study I focus on processes of change rather than the persistence of gender inequalities. I examine how women who participated in SAT were able to negotiate in their relationships and to encourage their partners to share work more equitably. My hope is that a richer understanding of how change can be accomplished will allow scholars and practitioners to better tailor interventions, particularly educational interventions, to promote women's empowerment in their intimate relationships.

### 2.3. Theoretical model

In examining the links between education and women's empowerment in intimate relationships, I draw on a theoretical model developed by sociologists Benjamin and Sullivan (1999). They propose that change in marital relationships involves the interplay of gender consciousness,<sup>4</sup> relational resources (the combination of interpersonal and emotional skills and resources

one brings to a relationship), and material circumstances. In their research, they find that a combination of increased gender consciousness and the development of particular interpersonal skills facilitate negotiation and change in the boundaries regulating communication and the domestic division of labor. Fig. 1 illustrates their model:

With regards to the role of material or structural resources, Benjamin and Sullivan (1999) explain that change in structural conditions does not translate in simple ways into the household. In sum, while important, structural factors do not play the most significant role in their conceptual model, they emphasize instead the importance of women's gender consciousness and relational resources. More specifically, they argue that women with exposure to therapeutic discourse (described below) have greater gender consciousness and develop particular interpersonal skills. This in turn facilitates negotiation and change in their communication with their partners and in the domestic division of labor.

According to Benjamin and Sullivan (1999), therapeutic discourse encompasses a range of practices and media including individual therapy and counseling; group or family therapy; self-enhancing workshops; self-help books, tapes, and other programming. Therapeutic discourse often includes the goal of helping individuals develop and improve the interpersonal skills that they use within their relationships. Through therapeutic discourse, people are able to learn how to communicate their feelings; how to change their feelings; and how to manage situations so as to maintain a sense of being in control (Benjamin and Sullivan, 1999). Other interpersonal skills that one may develop through exposure to therapeutic discourse include change-directed negotiating skills, the ability to express thoughts and feelings more clearly, and the controlled use of anger in conflictual situations (Benjamin and Sullivan, 1999).

I hypothesize that participation in SAT may function in a way similar to exposure to therapeutic discourse, particularly in how the program assists women in developing gender consciousness and relational resources. Through the data that I present below, I describe how SAT participants demonstrated interpersonal skills including the ability to talk to their husbands, express their feelings, and use change-directed negotiating skills. My research therefore builds on Benjamin and Sullivan's model by exploring how educational interventions might facilitate negotiation in marital relationships.

### 2.4. Research site

This research was conducted in Honduras, which is one of the poorest countries in Central America, with annual per capita income hovering at around US\$ 2800 and roughly 50% of the population living below the national poverty line (UNDP, 2007). Part of the national poverty reduction strategy is to expand access to education, particularly at the secondary level (grades 7–12, roughly corresponding to ages 13–18). While primary school net enrollment rates are approximately 80% in primary school, few

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin and Sullivan (1999) consider gender consciousness as a continuum along which a generalized gender awareness is succeeded by a consciousness of the rights associated with specific gender locations within a given system (Gerson and Peiss, 1985). I use the term to signify ideological awareness of how gender shapes the lives and fortunes of men and women (Gurin, 1985).

**Table 1**

Net enrollment rates in primary and secondary education in urban and rural Honduras by gender (2007).

	Primary net enrollment (%)	Secondary net enrollment (%)
Urban female	78.5	57.5
Urban male	80.0	54.5
Rural female	78.6	31.0
Rural male	77.3	24.8

Honduran household surveys (EPHPM, 2007).

Note: net enrollment is defined as the number of students enrolled in a level of education who fall within the official school range for that level, as a percentage of the population of the official age range for that education level. For primary school in Honduras, the official age range for primary school is 7–13.

students have the opportunity to continue their studies beyond the sixth grade, particularly those in rural areas, as Table 1 shows:

According to a recent report commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), secondary education in Honduras faces multiple challenges: “First, access to secondary schools must be improved. While more than 11,000 public primary schools operate nationally in Honduras, there are only about 900 upper secondary schools” (Umansky et al., 2008). The report also describes the need for more sufficient learning resources, better infrastructure, and better prepared human resources: “just over half of Honduran secondary institutes have telephones, four out of 10 need science laboratory space, three of 10 need library space, one-quarter of all desks need repair, and more than three out of every 10 teachers are under qualified to teach at the secondary level” (Alas, 2007 cited in Umansky et al., 2008).

The present study was conducted in four poor, rural communities located in the North Coast of Honduras. The communities are located approximately seven driving hours from the third largest city in Honduras, La Ceiba. They do not have electricity or phone lines, and the vast majority of the residents live below the poverty line. Prior to the implementation of the SAT program in the late 1990s, these communities did not have access to secondary schools. Both male and female students from a wide age range (13–48) enrolled in the program.

The four communities where data were collected are inhabited by an ethnic group, the Garifuna, that traces its origins to the Caribbean island of St. Vincent, where intermarriage between Africans and Carib Indians produced a “Black Carib” culture of Garifuna speakers (Sunshine, 1996; Herlihy, 1997). Several ethnographies of the Garifuna that briefly refer to the gender division of labor have been conducted in Honduras and Belize (Kerns, 1983; Gonzalez, 1988; Yuscaran, 1991; McCauley, 1981). All of these describe women as the primary care providers of children, with men earning income for the family. As Kerns describes, “Women bear ultimate responsibility for their children ... On a daily basis, women must see that their children are adequately fed and clothed. They are also responsible for care when their children fall ill” (108). A father’s responsibility towards his children is described primarily in terms of the financial support he provides (Kerns, 1983:116).

In the four study villages, most couples residing together are in common-law marriages.<sup>5</sup> The traditional Garifuna practice of polygyny is less common than at the turn of the 19th century but still exists in the communities where this research was conducted. Three women in the study were involved with men who had more than one common-law wife. This practice has historical roots

<sup>5</sup> Several participants explained that because legal marriage involves a monetary fee, couples often cohabit without legally marrying. In this article I use the term husband, wife, and partner interchangeably.

among the Island Carib that extend back at least to the 17th century, when European observers described it (Helms, 1981). As the ethnohistorian Rebecca B. Bateman explains, “today, some Black Carib men associate with several common-law wives, sometimes concurrently” (1998:210).

Men work primarily in the fishing industry and women in subsistence agriculture. Women (because they do not participate in fishing) have very little access to cash income, and depend largely on the earnings of their male partners or other relatives who live abroad or in Honduran cities. Overall, few formal employment opportunities are available for men and women, with a small percentage working as teachers in the local elementary schools, nurses in the health clinics, or in the municipal offices. Other than these few jobs in the social sector, stable employment opportunities are extremely scarce. Most income is generated in the informal economy, the fishing industry, and from remittances from relatives who live in urban areas or the United States.

While men may earn more money for their work than do women (primarily because of fishing), almost all of the women I interviewed believed that women worked longer hours than men because they had so little leisure time (which is consistent with previous research on the gender division of labor in Garifuna communities) (McCauley, 1981; Kerns, 1983). As one woman described:

What men do is give what little (financial) contribution that they can, and the rest doesn’t interest them. Nothing interests men. That’s at least how I see it ... Many macho guys aren’t interested in any, any kind of housework. As long as they get their food and their clothes washed, they’re happy hanging out. He just arrives, eats and leaves. And then he comes again at night and sleeps, he’ll return to the fishing boats or to the sea, and it’s a routine. Every day. And I don’t think these men will change ... The burden here is on women ... for everything.

This information about the context is essential for understanding changes that can take place in the household.

## 2.5. The SAT program

In these four Garifuna communities, women were the majority of SAT participants (roughly 90% of the enrolled students). Although the program is coeducational, few adolescent and adult men chose to enroll in the program. While I did not thoroughly investigate why this gender pattern emerged, I was told that this was in part due to the labor structure (men who work in the fishing industry are often gone for months at a time) and community gender norms (men did not want to forfeit their leisure time). Some men prohibited their wives from joining the program, because they did not want it to interfere with their ability to work in the household (taking care of children, cooking, etc.).

These communities were among the first Honduran communities in which SAT was implemented, and the sponsoring NGO gained valuable insights from working with this population (see Murphy-Graham et al., 2002). During the last decade, SAT has expanded to other areas of Honduras, and now primarily targets adolescents (ages 13–18). Currently, 51% of students are female. At present the program is jointly sponsored and funded by a Honduran non-governmental organization called *Asociación Bayán* and the Honduran Ministry of Education (which pays the majority of operating costs).

The SAT program had a rich history of operation in Colombia prior to implementation in Honduras. SAT was designed in the early 1980 s by the *Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias* (FUNDAEC), a Colombian nongovernmental organization (NGO). FUNDAEC remains the “parent” organization, assisting over

40 NGOs with training, textbook development, and technical support in the implementation of SAT. The program now operates in several Latin American countries, including Colombia, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Honduras. The program's overall goal is to "help students develop capabilities that enable them to take charge of their own intellectual and spiritual growth and at the same time to contribute to the building of better communities and the transformation of society" (FUNDAEC, 2007).

There are four key components of the SAT program: textbooks, tutors, the study group, and the community. In total, SAT draws upon more than 70 texts written by FUNDAEC specifically for use in SAT classrooms. Each of these books is the fruit of action-investigation efforts carried out with rural communities since the beginning of FUNDAEC's efforts in the 1970s. They are written in the form of a conversation with students, inviting questioning and investigation. The tutor, an educator trained by FUNDAEC and other sponsoring NGOs, guides the students through their study of the texts. The tutor does not lecture or teach the classes in the traditional format, but rather guides and facilitates the group's study, reflection, and discussion. The study group is usually composed of 15–25 people (male, female, youth and adults), who meet a few times a week according to a schedule they design together with their tutor. This permits them to complete all of their study requirements and to attend to their family and economic responsibilities. The methodology of the program encourages students to become the protagonists of their own learning process and, because of its tutorial nature, permits each student to advance at his or her own pace. Finally, SAT students engage extensively in the life of their communities, which, according to program developers, motivates students to interact and share what they are learning with their friends, family and neighbors. After finishing all of the SAT textbooks and activities (in Honduras this takes approximately six years), students receive a secondary school diploma (*Bachillerato*).

Through the combination of the four components described above, the program emphasizes the importance of developing students' abilities to analyze the context in which they live. Dialogue is the means through which this process unfolds. I hypothesize that the program's emphasis on dialogue facilitates the development of relational resources such as self-expression and negotiating skills. According to two of the program developers, "the main instrument of our pedagogy is an ongoing dialogue pursued by the student with us [staff at FUNDAEC], with the tutor, with other students, and increasingly with the community and the institutions of society ... Our textbooks are records of this dialogue" (Arbab and Correa, 2001:8). In short, one innovative component of the program is its emphasis on engaging students in an ongoing dialogue and allowing them to develop their powers of expression. SAT shares common features with critical pedagogy, as described by Freire (1973), and could be classified as problem-posing rather than banking education, where problem-posing education dialogue is "indispensable to the act of cognition and unveils reality" (Freire, 1973:71).

Second, another innovative component of the SAT program that may facilitate women's empowerment in intimate relationships by increasing their gender consciousness is its insistence that the principle of gender equality is integrated into the curriculum (I describe this feature of SAT extensively in Murphy-Graham, *in press*). The textbooks attempt to integrate gender equality in an "explicit way into as many areas as possible rather than isolating the theme in order to address it" (FUNDAEC, 2007:1).<sup>6</sup> This interrelated emphasis is designed to allow students to examine

their assumptions about gender, and to think and act in ways that challenge gender inequality in their own households and communities (FUNDAEC, 2007). While my research design (described in greater detail below) does not allow me to determine the specific programmatic features that may spark women's empowerment in intimate relationships, I hypothesize that the emphases on dialogue and gender play important roles in this process.

### 3. Methodology

In this article I draw upon data collected in a qualitative study that investigated the role of the SAT program in empowering women in Garifuna villages on the North Coast of Honduras. Beginning in 1999, I visited these communities over a period of five years, conducting interviews and observations to investigate the relationship between SAT and women's empowerment in three domains: personal (self-confidence, knowledge, and gender consciousness) public (participation in community organizations and income-generating activities); and in their intimate relationships. Elsewhere (Murphy-Graham, 2005, 2007, 2008) I report the findings from the larger study on women's personal empowerment and their participation in public spaces. This paper focuses specifically on findings that relate to women's empowerment in their intimate relationships, or their ability to negotiate and influence the nature of the relationship and the decisions made within it (Rowlands, 1997).

Data for the study were collected in four Honduran Garifuna villages. To select participants, I randomly chose (drawing names from a hat) 12 women from the original roster of students who had participated in the program in three of the four communities (Light et al., 1990). In the fourth community, I selected a comparison group of six women who participated in SAT for approximately three months, but due to chance circumstances the program was closed in their village. These individuals served as an appropriate comparison group because they shared similar demographic characteristics and they were similarly motivated to enroll in SAT. (All of the women from the three SAT villages that were selected agreed to participate in the study. In the comparison group, one woman declined to participate because her husband would not let her. Furthermore, two women initially selected had moved out of the community. I found replacements for these three women by drawing three additional names from the hat.)

I conducted at least three interviews with each woman. The first interview followed a structured protocol (Fontana and Frey, 2000), and was designed to allow me to get a sense of their beliefs about gender, as well as their perceptions of what (if any) impact the SAT program had on their lives. The second two interviews were unstructured (Fontana and Frey, 2000) and were designed to probe regarding comments they made during the previous interviews. Once better rapport was established, I asked them about their relationships with their husbands. I also conducted interviews with women's husbands, where applicable (only eight of the 12 women in SAT and four of the six in the comparison group were in an intimate relationship at the time of the study). These interviews were designed to explore men's perspectives on whether or not SAT made a difference in women's lives, as well as to ask them to characterize their relationships.

To supplement the interviews I conducted approximately 200 total hours of observation in the four villages, taking extensive field notes (Schensul et al., 1999; Emerson et al., 1995). I spent approximately 10 h with each woman in the study, shadowing them in their daily activities, helping with chores, conversing informally, and observing their household environments. Guiding these observations were questions about how they used their time, particularly who participated in household tasks and child-rearing, and to what extent. I focused on these areas because of their

<sup>6</sup> Examples of how the textbooks mainstream gender are available by request from the author. More information on FUNDAEC and SAT is available at [www.fundaec.org](http://www.fundaec.org).

salience in previous sociological research in studies on household gender relations (Hochschild, 1989; Sullivan, 2004; Deutsch, 1999, 2007). I used these observations to triangulate my data sources, to see whether data from the interviews matched their activities and those of their husbands. For example, if I observed men washing laundry, cooking, cleaning, or taking care of children, this would confirm women's claims that their husbands participated in household chores and childcare.

I conducted and tape-recorded all interviews, which were later transcribed by a Honduran university student. Interviews were conducted in Spanish. I have translated the excerpts included in the findings section [See Appendix VI in Murphy-Graham (2005) for original Spanish quotations]. I developed an initial coding scheme, and then coded the transcripts (in Spanish) using the qualitative data analysis software *AtlasTi* (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Ryan and Bernard, 2000; Weitzman, 2000). After an initial coding I created a case study from each participant in the study, and began to identify crosscutting themes. In order to verify these themes, I returned to the coded transcripts to gather evidence in support of and in contradiction to the initial findings. The themes emerged by contrasting data from women who participated in SAT with those in the comparison group. To help address issues of interpretive validity and researcher bias (Maxwell, 1996), I consulted and carried out peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) with other researchers who read a sample of interview transcripts and case studies.

#### 4. Findings

Here I use case studies to provide enough detail to illustrate the context and circumstances of participants' lives and relationships (Kabeer, 1999; Geertz, 1973), as well as to explain the change process according to the actors themselves (Sullivan, 2004). I draw heavily on interview and observation data for two couples in the study whose experiences speak directly to the question this research seeks to address: their cases spotlight change (Deutsch, 2007) through daily interactive processes. I also describe the relationships of other women (in both the SAT and comparison groups) to provide additional data regarding how education can empower women in their intimate relationships. Because of my study design, I am careful not to make any causal claims about the overall effects of the SAT program on women's empowerment in intimate relationships. Nevertheless, the study participants' experiences and their descriptions of the program's effects provide critical information about relationship between education and women's empowerment in intimate relationships.

My findings suggest that women who participated in SAT demonstrate a combination of gender consciousness, structural resources, and relational resources (including everyday communication, change-directed negotiation skills, and the ability to express their feelings and demonstrate love and care). I concur with Benjamin and Sullivan (1999) that these relational resources together with gender consciousness and material resources play an important role in allowing women to negotiate a more equitable domestic division of labor.

##### 4.1. Juanita and Adan: working together for change

Juanita was 17 years old and three months pregnant when she started her studies in SAT (she was 25 at the time of our interviews). She was the first in her family to complete secondary school. Juanita joined the program reluctantly, under pressure from her mother and brother, who wanted her to continue her education. She explained "I used to say that I was just passing the time in SAT ... but then I liked the program." Finishing her studies

in SAT is one of the things she is most proud of, because she now "feels like a professional."

Shortly after her daughter was born, Juanita began living with her current husband, Adan. Even though he is not the biological father of Juanita's daughter, she says he acts as such. Together Juanita and Adan operate a small *comedor*, or restaurant, that sells hot meals, snacks, and cold drinks.

Juanita told me that her relationship with Adan is not like most in her community: "I don't think we are like others." She emphasized that their roles are *compartidos*, or shared. She gave a specific example that demonstrates their everyday communication: "When I am going over to my mother's, I tell him where I am going, and he will cook and clean. He does whatever I would do and most men wouldn't do this." Adan also described a more equitable division of labor than is typical in the community, echoing Juanita's remarks that they share responsibilities. Adan explained that, "the home is shared." Adan helps Juanita both with the business and in her agricultural work, which is, according to them, uncharacteristic of most men. "When she goes to the fields, I go with her. If she is going to bring back a heavy load, I take the heaviest part. She comes back with a light load (*liviana*), that's what I do with her." Juanita used this same word, *liviana*, to describe her workload. She explained "there are some men who don't help, but he [Adan] helps me with everything." Adan emphasized how much they talk to each other in their daily lives. "Everything that happens to me when I go out I tell her. If a woman comes here to borrow two Lempiras, I tell her that I lent the woman two Lempiras (US\$ 0.10). Everything that happens to me she knows." This everyday talk seemed to be important for their relationship, and was something both of them emphasized.

In my interview with Adan, I asked him about how he and Juanita met. He explained that they grew up in the same village, but that he spent some time in San Pedro Sula (Honduras' second largest city). When he returned to the village, Juanita had been studying in SAT for a few months. Adan explained that for the first few months of their relationship he saw Juanita, "just as any other person." He said that he "saw her just like any other person, she only had a few months of being in SAT. But two, three years afterwards, I saw a big change in her, even in the way she spoke." He said that over time, she started teaching him what he learned in SAT. "She even corrected my speaking."

Adan also explained that at first, he was not thinking about a long-term commitment with Juanita, and in fact harbored thoughts of leaving her:

Erin: Has your relationship with Juanita changed in the six years that she was in SAT, or is it the same?

Adan: At the beginning it wasn't so good ... Maybe because I was young, closed-minded, I used to say, "what am I going to do with her? I am just going to pass the time with her." I thought I would leave her. And, at the end of a few months she behaved herself, she showed a lot of love. She won me over and I couldn't separate myself from her!

Adan explained that Juanita began to "talk and behave like a professional" and he liked this about her. She demonstrated care ("she showed a lot of love"). She could explain things to him and was patient. He realized that he, too, could benefit from what she was learning in SAT. "I like that she has studied because I see that over time she can help me. I am fighting for a better life. I won't get in her way of studying ... if I can't [do something] she can help me."

Juanita's ability to communicate with Adan and the way she interacted with him made him rethink his plan to leave her. His comments that her way of speaking changed, that "she began to talk and behave like a professional," and his description of how

Juanita would explain things to him patiently if he didn't understand implicate Juanita's ability to express her ideas clearly. One way that Juanita expressed her feelings and thoughts with Adan was by explaining the SAT textbooks and what she learned in the program. As she put it, "whatever I learn I share with him . . . I tell him, this is how we can get ahead." Her participation in the program seems to have opened up a window of opportunity for her to talk to him on a regular basis and to explain the material she was studying. Both Adan and Juanita stressed this sharing of the SAT lessons as an important feature of their relationship. As Adan recalled, "There were things that I didn't understand, and whatever word I didn't understand, she would *explain* it to me" (emphasis mine).

When asked how their relationship was different from most in the community, both Juanita and Adan emphasized relational resources, particularly communication skills. I asked Juanita why she thought this was so:

Erin: Why are you able to communicate while others don't?

Juanita: Maybe because of our education, others are less educated.

Her response was interesting because Adan had only finished the sixth grade, and therefore was not more educated than most community members his age. Juanita explained to me that she has shared much of what she learned in SAT with Adan:

Erin: But you are the only one that has studied, he hasn't studied?

Juanita: No, he hasn't.

Erin: So . . .

Juanita: But whatever I learn I share with him. I tell him this is how we can get ahead . . .

Erin: And is he open to learning?

Juanita: Yes, he is open to learning.

In this case, education acts as a structural resource for Juanita, and combined with her relational resources, it seems to have shifted her position within the relationship. Juanita now has power—in this case the power of knowledge, which she shares with Adan. She is also able to apply concrete skills, such as accounting, to improve their material circumstances.

Juanita and Adan plan to invest their money to expand the business, and they talk to each other about what the expansion priorities are. Juanita explained that they invest the money that Adan earns fishing to expand their business: "with this money we built the little building, this is the money we are working with now." However, they don't always agree on how they should spend this money and therefore have to negotiate (change-directed negotiating skills being another relational resource). Adan provided one concrete example of how these conversations go:

Adan: If I want to buy a table (for the kiosk), I will tell her that I think it is important. She might say, "let's not get a table. There are other more important things like getting windows. A window is more important than a table." So, I will start analyzing what I think is more important, to get a table or a window. I'll tell her the table, and she thinks a window! But the most important thing is to come to some sort of agreement. I'll tell her, "sometimes we'll do what you think is important and

other times we'll do what I think is important." Then we'll decide. So, because of this there are fewer problems between us.

When I asked Juanita to relate any general observations about her experience in SAT, she responded that she believed that the program changed the way she relates to others. "I was moody. Someone would walk by me on the street and I wouldn't talk to them—they didn't do anything to me but I wouldn't talk to them. Today I don't do this because I learned those things." Here, Juanita describes improved interpersonal skills, a key component of relational resources. Adan mentioned a similar change in Juanita. He said that prior to her studies, she "didn't respect people very much." Now, he says that she is "social with people, because sometimes people come around and she chats with them and it is good for our business, the way she relates to customers, she can entertain them just with her words!"

Juanita also described improved self-confidence, saying that she now thinks of herself as equal to other professionals in her community. She explained "before I felt like less when I was around professional people. But now I think we are equal." The notion that she feels equal to professionals may also involve gender consciousness. She spoke extensively about gender issues in our interview, stating her opinion that many men in her community were "*machista* . . . they don't help with anything, but the one I am with helps with everything."

The case of Juanita and Adan suggests that the ability to demonstrate love and care for one's partner may be another critical relational resource that can foster change in marital relationships. Previous research on renegotiating gender roles points to love and intimacy as powerful forces for change (Deutsch, 2007; Benjamin and Sullivan, 1999). Deutsch explains that "men sometimes need and want love, and care for women enough to be willing to trade power for it" (2007:121–122), which is consistent with Adan's experience. He was willing to give up a form of men's traditional control over women (the threat of abandonment) in exchange for a loving relationship. Feminist scholar hooks (2000) discusses the role of love in dismantling patriarchy. She argues that we must engage in a visionary feminist discourse on love in order to end relationships based on domination and coercion. In short, these findings hint at the power of love as a transformative force. The role of love and care in relationships supports feminist theories of power as capacity rather than domination (Hartstock, 1983; Karlberg, 2005).

#### 4.2. Ana and Mauro: creating different gender roles

Ana, now 40 years old, began studying in SAT when she was 32. She lives with her husband and six children, who range in age from seven to 25. She and her husband, Mauro, grew up in the village where they currently live. As Mauro tells it, he and Ana were *novios*, or a couple, from the time they were small children. He left the village for a few years when he was a young teen to serve in the Honduran army. A few years later, when Mauro saw Ana again after living outside his village in the capital city, Tegucigalpa, his strong feelings for her returned. He explained, "it was really surprising when I saw her. I felt something in my heart, and I felt the same love for her." Shortly thereafter they resumed their relationship. They have been together for the past 20 years.

Despite Mauro's professed love for Ana, she was not happy in their relationship. When I asked Ana to tell me about the division of labor in their home, she told me that Mauro smokes, drinks, and likes to hang out with his friends and go to parties:

Erin: What are his (Mauro's) responsibilities at home? What does he do?

Ana: His responsibility is to help me with the children, to feed them, but in Garifuna culture men are in charge.

Erin: And what is it like in your case?

Ana: In my case I would say he helps me about 60%. He drinks. He smokes and he likes to hang out with his friends and go to parties. He spends the majority of his money on the street.

I listened to Ana as she told me how she felt about her relationship. I asked her, “So, are you more or less happy about this situation? How do you see it?” Ana replied, “Look, I am not truly happy.” She explained that she has thought of leaving him to go look for work in the city. Yet this option was not appealing to her because she would have to leave her children. “So, I stay here for my children. I go up into the hills and find us something to eat.” While Ana decided against leaving for the city, the mere option of doing so illustrates that education may have improved her structural resources. Prior to enrolling in SAT, with only a primary school degree, her employment options were more limited.

One of the things about Mauro that bothered Ana the most was that he spent more time out with his friends than he did at home with his family. She was also frustrated about the money he spent on his “vices,” such as cigarettes. I asked her whether they talked about these issues:

Erin: Do you talk about these things, or not really?

Ana: Look, before this was my problem. But now I see that everything is changing, because I recently had to talk to him because I couldn't stand it anymore.

She had wanted to discuss her feelings with him for quite some time, but as Ana explained, she didn't have the opportunity to do so because he was home so infrequently.

Ana: The problem was that when he arrived home he would get on his bike and take off for the street. He came back late at night, and well, all day I am working hard and I was tired. I didn't feel like talking with him so late. In the morning I would wake up and he would get up and leave again, so there wasn't an opportunity.

When Ana finally found an opportunity to talk with Mauro about her feelings, she described their conversation as follows:

Ana: I told him that it might be better for us to separate because there was no dialogue or understanding between us. I saw that he spent his money badly on the street and at home we have many needs. I told him this calmly, I said, “you have to decide. If you like being on the street, then it is better that you stay there because it is better for our children to think that they have a father who is on the street who doesn't help than for them to have one who is living with us who doesn't help!”

Ana chose to confront him about the situation, demonstrating relational resources including change-directed negotiating skills, the ability to express her feelings, and control over her anger (“I told him this calmly”). Ana also told Mauro that she wanted him to be at home to set a good example for their children. “I told him that I would like him to be at home during his free time, to see how the kids are doing, so that he can help me educate the children, because education is not just in school but also at home. That is where education begins.” Following this exchange, Mauro told Ana that he did not want to separate and that he would think about what

she had said to him. This conversation provides an example of the slow and piecemeal change that Sullivan (2004) describes. For 20 years Ana and Mauro have been together, and so asking Mauro to change his ways was a potentially radical action within the context of their relationship.

In my interview with Mauro, I did not directly ask him about this exchange with Ana, but he nevertheless indicated that he was aware of his “vices.” Mauro had many good things to say about his wife. He described Ana as a “very caring person,” one who “struggles to accomplish whatever goal she sets for herself.” He finished these complimentary comments about his wife by stating that he was the “weak” one in their home: “I am the one who is sort of weak in our home.” I asked him what he meant by “sort of weak.” He explained that he does not share her religious beliefs, and that he does things she does not approve of.

Mauro: I say I am sort of weak for the simple reason that I do not share her religion. She is Evangelical and I am Catholic. I have my vices but I don't forget about my home. I smoke. I drink. But not in excess. The worst vice that I have is cigarettes, but I am begging God to help me forget them because they are harming me. Just now I came from a *velorio*<sup>7</sup> so my eyes are red . . . so I am the one who is not on the straight path, doing things that I shouldn't.

Although their conversation took place only about a month before I interviewed Ana, she had already seen an improvement in his behavior. She explained that he spends more time at home, although he does still go to parties from time to time. She said “I see a change in him because now when he comes home, he leaves his bicycle and he sits down to think or read. He talks with his kids and before he never did that.”

Ana believes that communication was very important in getting Mauro to change his ways. She explained that the previous lack of communication in their relationship was problematic. “Look, before this was my problem but now I see that everything is changing.” Ana was unhappy in her relationship, and she decided to do something about it. She spoke to Mauro and explained her feelings. Rather than remain unsatisfied with the situation, she took action to try and improve the relationship. She thought things had improved since their conversation, although Mauro himself admitted he was “not on the straight path.” However, Ana's ability to confront Mauro and express her feelings illustrates the application of relational resources.

Like Juanita, Ana also attributes changes in her interpersonal skills to participation in SAT. She explained that she used to fight with people, but SAT taught her to act differently. “I used to fight with people, but now I don't. I have changed my ways.” I asked her why this was so, and she replied, “after [she joined SAT] it made me ashamed.” Ana also believes that she had better communication with her husband and children as a result of her studies. So as to avoid posing a leading question, I asked Ana to tell me what she thought the characteristics of a good communicator were. She replied:

Ana: Talking, knowing what to say to people.

Erin: And do you have these characteristics?

Ana: Yes.

Erin: Have you always had these characteristics?

Ana: No, before no. Before, well, because when I was young my father died, and my mother lived with a man who was a little

<sup>7</sup> The literal translation of *velorio* is a wake. However, he is referring to the Garifuna custom of *dugu*, an ancestral rite to honor the dead which lasts three days and three nights (Cayetano and Cayetano, 1997).



violent. He used to hit me and that had a bad effect on me . . . but then I studied, I became educated, and I started changing, that was what marked my life.

Here Ana describes her belief that her communication skills changed through her exposure to education; in her words it “marked” her life.

Ana was overall quite optimistic about the potential role of education in challenging community gender norms. I asked her to name any problems or challenges in her community, and explained that one of the problems she sees is that men are irresponsible. She explained that sometimes women go up to work in the fields and when they come home their husbands are drunk and they mistreat their wives. I asked her if she had any ideas about resolving these issues:

Erin: Can you think of anything that would resolve these problems?

Ana: Yes, there are ways to resolve them.

Erin: How?

Ana: Through education, raising people’s awareness through workshops, especially for men. I think that we need to talk with men, give them advice and tell them that we are equal. Women have changed but men have not.

Ana seems to have followed her own advice in talking to her husband and asking him to share responsibilities more equally. She is hoping that Mauro will change to become a better husband and father.

Ana’s case demonstrates that education, similar to therapeutic discourse, can improve material resources, gender consciousness and relational resources simultaneously. She had been married for over 20 years at the time of our interview, but she only recently confronted her husband about her frustrations, possibly because she now had another option (moving to the city for work). She demonstrates gender consciousness through her critical examination of the community where she lives, and argues, “we need to talk to men and tell them that we are all equal.”

#### 4.3. Gender consciousness, structural resources, and relational resources in other SAT students and women in the comparison group

While I shared the cases of Ana and Juanita in rich detail, I want to briefly mention how other women in the study spoke about their relationships, particularly the roles of relational resources, structural resources, and gender consciousness. As discussed previously, the findings here emerge from an analysis of the entire dataset, particularly through a comparison of the interviews and observations of SAT students with those in the comparison group. The findings I describe above (in the cases of Ana and Juanita) were echoed in my interviews with other women in the study, including Alejandra, Renata, Sonia, and Susana (all SAT students).

Alejandra, a 20-year-old SAT student, told me that she and her husband are “good communicators”: “we talk about our home, about our children. We talk about the construction of the house, when we were buying materials. These are the things we talk about, how our lives are going.” Renata and Tichi, another couple in the study, also said that they talk to each other often, even though Tichi is a quiet person. Tichi explained that if something seems wrong with one of them they try to work it out. “We get close to each other and we hug, ‘what is the matter?’ If I did something wrong, she tells me, and if she did something wrong, I tell her.”

Sonia, a 30-year-old woman who studied in SAT, described how she began communicating with her husband Ricardo differently after starting the program. Specifically, she spoke with him about taking on more responsibilities in the household:

Sonia: Before, he hardly ever helped. When I said to him, ‘why don’t you help me to do this, for example to go get some water, he would say, ‘ah, people will think that you have me as your mule, as your worker!’ That is what he thought. But I would tell him that no, we had to mutually help each other. So, I saw that he began to reason, and now he helps me.

I asked her why she believed her husband began helping her more, and she thought it had something to do with increased communication.

Erin: Why did he change?

Sonia: I think maybe because I started to dialogue with him . . .

Sonia also decided to talk to her husband about something else she was quite unhappy about. Approximately two years before our interview, her husband began an affair with another woman. She recently confronted him about this situation, telling him that she wanted him to choose between her and the other woman. She explained that she sat him down and calmly explained to him that she could not remain in this situation. “I spoke with him to tell him that he needs to decide, because a person can’t be waiting and waiting . . . the truth is that I am not happy.” Sonia’s husband told her he would leave the other woman, but Sonia was not sure this would happen. Nevertheless, her decision to talk with him about the situation demonstrates relational resources. Similar to Ana’s case, it also illustrates that education acts as a structural resource, providing Sonia with other potential means to support herself. During the course of her studies, Sonia started a *chiclera*, a small store, within her home, where she sold basic foodstuffs such as rice, beans, cooking oil, and candies. Previously, she did not have any access to cash income. Her material circumstances changed, in terms of both the number of years of schooling she completed and her income. This altered her negotiating position within the household. A combination of relational resources, material resources, and gender consciousness prompted her to talk to her husband and to urge him to change his ways. In contrast, neither of the women in the comparison group whose husbands had other wives (discussed below) had this trio of resources and they remained in situations they were unhappy with.

Of the six women in the comparison group, four were currently in an intimate relationship. Of these four, two had husbands who practiced polygyny (Esmeralda’s husband had a wife and children in another town and Dulcinea’s husband had another family in the same community). Both of these women were less critical of this situation than Sonia. For example, Esmeralda explained that what bothers her is that “normally what a man can save is for one woman, but I have to share it with another. Because we are two, he has to share.” She said that there are positive things about her husband that she likes very much. For example, when he had his first child with her, he gave up drinking and smoking altogether. He has consistently supported Esmeralda financially, and as she pointed out, “with three children, who is going to help me more than him?” In short, while she doesn’t like the fact that he has another woman, she plans to remain in her relationship with him. Dulcinea, the other woman in the comparison group whose husband had another wife, also expressed frustration with her situation, but said that, “since I am the first, he helps me a lot,” and that she was “trying to be patient.” Neither woman described confronting their husbands about the situation or trying to negotiate with them.

Maria Josefina, also in the comparison group, is another woman who did not describe dialogue or change-directed negotiation in her relationship. She is the mother of seven children, from three different fathers. She is currently living with a new man, whom she used to do washing for. They began living together recently, and she explained to me that it was a relationship in which she helps him and he helps her. When I ask her what a happy relationship would be she replied that she would like to have someone who “helps” her. Often the term “help” or *ayuda* refers to financial help, although Maria Josefina did not specify exactly what she meant by “help.” She did mention several times that the appropriate role for men is to “help” women. Referring to her last husband, she said, “He hardly helped me at all, he was just bumming around on the street.” I asked her what she thought of her assertion that women work more than men and she replied that it was bad because “men have to work and help women.” She also said “if a man doesn’t help me, I have to look for another one.” Maria Josefina did not mention communication as a strategy to improve her relationships or to encourage her partners to change their behavior. If a man does not help her, she “looks for another one.”

Carolina, one of the women, who is now single, lived with her former husband for several years. When Hurricane Mitch hit in October of 1998, Carolina’s kitchen was destroyed. She was able to acquire new construction materials from donating organizations, and she told her husband to rebuild the kitchen. Weeks went by and he still hadn’t built the kitchen. She couldn’t live without a kitchen, so finally she asked her brother to help. She subsequently threw her husband out, because she realized that he “wasn’t any good” to her. “I came and I said to him ‘daddy’ (*papito*), without fighting or anything, ‘get your stuff and get far away from here.’” She did not describe trying to talk to her partner about her feelings, or to suggest that he change his ways. As she explains, one day she simply told him to “get out.”

Angela, the only woman in the study sample who had a regular source of cash income (she worked in the municipal offices), said that her husband was “a little *machista*.” However, she did not describe trying to negotiate more equitable sharing of domestic duties. She was somewhat critical of men’s behavior, explaining that, “One arrives home from work tired, and has to take care of the kids and the man doesn’t help, doesn’t cooperate.” However, when I asked her what she thought of this situation, she replied, “since the beginning man has been the head of the household. God made man ... he is the head of the household, and the woman follows him.” She concluded one of our interviews by saying, “I have to

conform with my situation, with what I have.” The case of Angela illustrates that material resources alone will not change women’s negotiating position in a relationship. Even though she had access to regular cash income, she did not describe an equitable division of labor in the household or negotiating with her husband. Rather, she used the word “conform” (*conformo*) to explain that she must be content with the status quo.

In short, none of the women in the comparison group described negotiation in their marital relationships or communication about the domestic division of labor. Their experiences contrast with those who participated in SAT, several of whom described frequent communication and negotiation with their partners.

## 5. Conclusion and future research directions

In this article I have presented data that illustrate how women who participated in the SAT program were able to change the way they communicate and negotiate in their marital relationships. The daily interactions and negotiations described here are consistent with Sullivan’s (2004) observation that change in marital relations is slow and uneven. Nevertheless, SAT students described a different way of speaking and negotiating with their partners than did women in the comparison group, and these actions may “in the end effect a radical transformation if we take the longer perspective” (Sullivan, 2004:209). Women in SAT and their husbands were beginning to break with traditional gender norms in their communities in subtle yet significant ways. They used interpersonal skills, including everyday talk, expressing feelings, and using change-directed negotiating skills, to encourage their partners to share household responsibilities more equitably.

Relational resources are a key factor in women’s empowerment in intimate relationship. Interpersonal skills must be combined with women’s gender consciousness and their access to material and or structural resources (Benjamin and Sullivan, 1999; Rowlands, 1997; Kabeer, 1999) to have full effect. Education therefore has the potential to empower women in their intimate relationships if it improves their gender consciousness, relational resources, and material resources. Fig. 2 illustrates how these serve as mediating mechanisms for women’s empowerment in intimate relationships:

Strengthening relational resources (e.g. communication skills, the ability to express feelings and demonstrating care and love) is often overshadowed by goals associated with educational access. However, for education to be genuinely empowering, it must

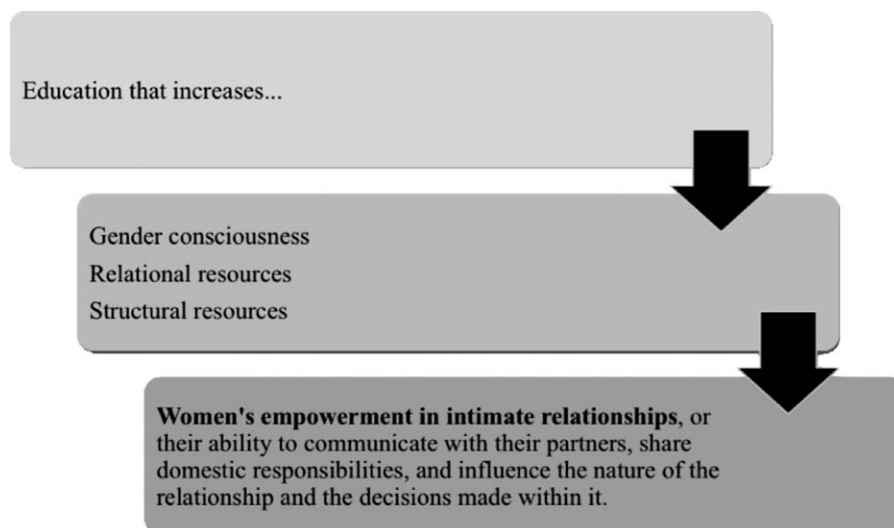


Fig. 2. The relationship between education and women’s empowerment in intimate relationships.

facilitate the transformation of unjust relationships and values. Access to education is often seen as a process by which individuals will gain the skills that will enable them to more successfully participate in the labor force, thereby contributing to a process of poverty alleviation. However, as previous research from industrialized countries confirms, access to material resources (e.g. education and employment) has done little to change women's status when they come home (Hochschild, 1989, 1996). Furthermore, as Bartlett (2009) finds in her study of literacy programs in Brazil, students' social relationships, sociability, and manners helped them secure greater economic opportunity, more so than the direct application of their literacy skills. In sum, ensuring that education enables students to develop friendships, express their ideas clearly, negotiate with others and demonstrate care and concern towards others may help to tap the transformative potential of education, particularly to change household gender relations.

Finally, the findings from this study have implications for how women's empowerment is conceptualized. Again, the feminist notion of power as capacity is important, as women who were able to negotiate with their partners demonstrated the capacity to work for change. However, women's empowerment demands that both women and men change. The case of Inita, whose husband violently resisted change, is a case in point. Her empowerment in the household was severely constrained by his attitudes and behaviors. As one respondent interviewed for this study, Ana, described, "women have changed but men have not."

Women's empowerment is not an end in and of itself, but rather a step towards the establishment of gender equality. As the international community agreed in the Beijing Declaration, "a harmonious partnership between men and women is a critical aspect of ensuring the well-being of families" (Beijing Declaration, paragraph 15).<sup>8</sup> This implies that men will have to give up their traditional power and control over women. Drawing on her experience with women's empowerment programs in South East Asia, scholar/activist Srilatha Batliwala argues that women's empowerment must change the nature of women's relationships with their male partners:

Women's empowerment, if it is a real success, does mean the loss of men's traditional power and control over the women in their households: control of her body and her physical mobility; the right to abdicate from all responsibility for housework and the care of children; the right to physically abuse or violate her; the right to abandon her or take other wives; the right to take unilateral decisions which affect the whole family; and the countless other ways in which poor men – and indeed men of every class – have unjustly confined women (cited in Rowlands, 1997:23–24).

Batliwala goes on to say, however, that the process of women's empowerment will also liberate men, as they will be able to move beyond gender stereotypes. While some men may fervently resist giving up their control over women (such as Nelson), others may be more willing (such as Mauro and Adan). As Connell (2005) describes, there are several reasons why men may embrace the call for gender equality. Among these are men's "relational interests" in gender equality, because the quality of every man's life depends to a large extent on the quality of his relationships (Connell, 2005:1812). In her study of couples in the United States who equally share household and parenting responsibilities, Deutsch (1999) describes how men have "a world to gain" from more equal participation in the household (228). "Equality means some

sacrifices from men, but the men I interviewed told me, each in his own way, that the rewards reaped were well worth it. The bond they forged with their wives, the special relationships with their children, and the development they saw in themselves were priceless" (Deutsch, 1999:230).

Unfortunately, most social programs targeting gender de-emphasize the importance of challenging oppressive expressions of masculinity. Connell (2005) provides a comprehensive overview of gender-equality reform, detailing recent research and policy on men and masculinity. She argues that, in almost all policy discussions, to adopt a gender perspective means to address women's concerns (Connell, 2005). The field of international development education needs to broaden the discussion of gender to examine boys, men and masculinity.<sup>9</sup> In particular, future research should investigate the individual attributes and circumstances that contribute to men's willingness change (Connell, 2005; Benjamin, 1998). A feminist vision of change "where women and men are free to live creative lives" should guide these efforts (Mohanty, 2003:3).

My findings suggest that SAT, by increasing gender consciousness, material resources, and relational resources, has enabled several participants to embrace this vision. Through everyday conversation and action they are creating relationships that redefine gender norms.

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<sup>9</sup> Over 10 years ago, Rowlands (1997) made a similar argument: "If empowerment of women is a gender issue, there is a need to tackle the corresponding task with men that will contribute to reducing the obstacle of *machismo* . . . this work has not had much recognition to date, and is very rare in the design and development of programs" (132). NGOs, particularly *Instituto Promundo* of Brazil, have made progress in this regard. Another promising initiative is the MenEngage Global Alliance, a network of NGOs that seek to engage men and boys in effective ways to reduce gender inequalities (for more information see <http://www.promundo.org.br> and <http://www.menengage.org>).

<sup>8</sup> The Beijing Declaration is the product of the United Nation's Fourth World Conference on Women held in 1995.

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