Where youths are, whom they are with, and what they are doing are general concerns for most members of society. Society raises these general concerns in debates over violence, high unemployment, exploitive work conditions, lack of opportunities for advancement, and an array of consumer goods tauntingly out of reach. In other words, when people talk about social problems, they invoke the status of youth as a diagnostic sign of where a society may be headed.

-Wolseth, p. 5

INTRODUCTION

The youth of Honduras are caught in a narrative of hopelessness. “They lack opportunity.” “They lack support.” “They lack motivation.” “They lack vision.” And “They think that they cannot change anything.” These were the refrains used by Hondurans to explain the state of youth and the problems facing their country. The youth themselves tell a similar story but with a different emphasis. These understandings are created, reinterpreted, and critiqued by youth as their experiences constitute the actual basis of this broader narrative. Caught in a narrative of hopelessness the youth of Honduras, youth find other ways to understand themselves by building relationships with social institutions in their communities (Wolseth 6).

I had come to Honduras with the idea that I would be studying how the “core values” and developmental goals of A Ganar, a sports-for-development (SPD) program, related to the values used by youth to survive in impoverished communities. The A Ganar program uses sport to provide “at-risk youth” with with the employability and technical skills needed to gain employment.
I planned to investigate the extent that the A Ganar program fit “an implicit
deficit model of participant [where] deprived communities produce deficient
individuals” that has been found in other SPD programs (Coalter 92). I was planning
on studying the values of these communities that were presumably preventing the
youth from finding employment but were also helping them to survive in the face of
extreme structural pressures. However, I quickly found that neither “community”
nor “values” were the welcoming analytical concepts I had planned on finding.

The participants of the A Ganar program came from diverse communities
across San Pedro Sula, and my accessibility to these communities was far more
restricted by the threat of violence than I had anticipated. This last year San Pedro
Sula was ranked as the city with the highest murder rates in the world at 159
murders per 100,000 inhabitants, according to Mexico’s Civic Council on Public
Security and Criminal Justice
could understand this violence theoretically, but I did not really understand how it
shaped everyday life, how it had become normalized, how it conditioned
interactions, in short--how it became embodied—until I was told personal stories of
slain family members, until I was bombarded daily with graphic images of death on
the news, until I came across dead bodies on the side of the road, until, in short, I
was living it (Pine 74). Given my relatively short stay in Honduras, it was
challenging to establish enough safe connections in the community to conduct my
research. I decided to stick to the safety of the schools and organizations that the program was being implemented in.

My short stay of two months in Honduras further limited my research as I found the study of values to be more akin to “fishing” than the “farming” I had hoped it would be. I could sow interview after interview looking for people’s values to sprout up, but I would usually reap nothing more than a well-practiced rhetoric: “The youth have respect.” “They are honest.” “They are responsible.” It was the events, the incidents, the unusual circumstances that seemed to better expose the values that appeared to be really shaping people’s attitudes towards youth. Had I more time, I would have continued along my line of values analysis, but the time span of my study demanded a variable that could be more reliably exposed in interviews. I looked to translate my study into what was more clearly, safely, and reliably accessible: “community” became the youth participants and the implementation staff and “values” became understandings and attitudes about youth culture and the A Ganar program.

My research questions became refocused: How were the youth understanding themselves in these “deficient” communities, and how were they being understood by those who implemented the program? How were these multiple understandings affecting the way the program was being implemented and the way the youth were relating to the program and the implementation staff? My previous interest in how the A Ganar program was conceptualizing its youth participants in terms of values was rooted in investigating the goals of the program, but as I interacted more with those who were implementing and receiving the
program I found the program’s goals being reworked, intermixed, and supplemented by personal, positional, institutional, and cultural understandings of youth in both the minds of the implementing staff and the youth participants themselves. These understandings affected the approaches used by the implementing staff in delivery of the A Ganar curriculum, but more importantly, they determined the types of relationships that the program was being delivered through.

Youth benefit from the A Ganar program through the relationships that the program makes possible. These relationships are informed by the multiple understandings of both youth culture and the program which are assigned, negotiated, and asserted by the implementation staff and the youth participants themselves. The commonalities and differences between these understandings are based on their proximity to the actual experiences of youth. Implementation staff understand the problems of youth culture and goals of the A Ganar program through broad explanations that I will be calling, the narrative of hopelessness, which situates the status of youth in larger structural forces and informs the staff's implementation approaches. While youth understandings often confirm this broader narrative, they are also expressed in more personal terms. For the youth, the narrative of hopelessness is not only structural forces, but also lived experiences that can felt in the relationships with their peers, friends, and the implementation staff. While the experiences of youth with the A Ganar program are often understood through a broad narrative of hopelessness, it is through the youth's
more personal understanding of this narratives that implementation strategies are being translated to affect change in the lives of youth participants.

This paper will be organized into 3 basic sections. I will first offer an introduction to my research. This will include background information on Honduras, the basic structure of the A Ganar program, and pictures of two sites where I conducted the bulk of my study. Next I will be a section on the methodology that I implemented in this project, with a special emphasis put on capturing youth voice and positioning myself in the program.

The next section will be focused on implementing staff's understandings of youth and the program. This section will be broken up into the narrative of hopelessness as it was described to me by implementing staff, and from this description, I will present the three styles of strategies used by implementing staff to combat this narrative. This section will be concluded by a breakdown of the importance that implementing staff put on the relationship between themselves and youth.

The third section will be focused on youth understandings of themselves and the program. I will be splitting up this section into the lived experiences that lie at the root of the narrative hopelessness, and the way the youth are understanding the program as challenging this narrative. The final subsection will focus on the importance that youth were putting on the relationship between themselves and implementing staff as the conduit that change happens through.

A Ganar in Honduras
HONDURAS AND ITS YOUTH

Lack of opportunities for young men translates into increased joblessness and apparent aimlessness. Finding themselves more and more outside traditional institutions of support such as school, work, and family, young men are also outside of acceptable society. This places them in harm's way. Out-of-bounds, they are emblematic of the ills befalling Honduran society.

-Wolseth, p. 134

“Violence and death are familiar to Hondurans,” claims Pine in her fittingly titled ethnography on Honduran identity and subjectivity, Working Hard, Drinking Hard: On Violence and Survival in Honduras (Pine 26). With a little over 8 million people, a recent United Nations report on global homicide rates ranked Honduras as the country with the highest murder rates per capita with 82 murders per 100,000 people (2011 UN Global Study on Homicide). Within this climate of violence it is often the youth, and specifically young men, that bear the brunt of its casualties (Pine; Wolseth; UN Global Study on Homicide). The victims of this violence are also transformed into its perpetrators as Hondurans “have come to equate young and poor men with ‘delinquents’” (Pine 58). Combined with a youth unemployment rates of 7% compared to an average unemployment rate of 4.8% and an education often on the fritz with frequent teacher strikes, it takes no stretch of the imagination to understand why Honduran youth are often described as being “at-risk” (https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ho.html).

A GANAR: PROGRESSION and STRUCTURE

A Ganar (Spanish “To Win”) is a youth workforce development program, led by Partners of the Americas and funded through USAID, which uses soccer to motivate at-risk youth from economically disadvantaged households to participate in vocational training and personal skills development. The A Ganar curriculum is
centered around the practice, understanding, and promotion of six “core values”
learned on the field and in the classroom: respect, teamwork, discipline,
communication, focus on results, and continued self-improvement. Fundamentally,
A Ganar believes these values are important “employability skills” and more
significantly “life skills.” (http://www.partners.net/partners/History1.as).

The A Ganar curriculum is the product of thousands of hours of research and
implementation is broken down into four phases (A Ganar Program Manual). Phase
1 is made up a series of lesson plans focused on teaching A Ganar’s six values by
making drawing connections between the values learned in sport and the
program’s 6 important employability skills. Phase 2 is focused on helping the youth
to acquire technical training and entrepreneurship skills needed for them to find
employment. Phase 3 provides real-world experience by offering apprenticeships
and internships for youth participants. Phase 4 is the open-ended conclusion to the
program that provides continued support and potential links to employment.
Throughout all four of these stages youth are also completing a service learning
project and being mentored.

This progression is generally implemented by local NGO’s, deemed
“implementing organizations” (IO’s) that have been selected based on their capacity
to execute the A Ganar curriculum and their past experience working with youth.
IO’s are composed of facilitators who are actually implementing the lesson plans
and coordinators who are managing and administrating the program. These
implementing staff are the “face” that youth participants come to associate with A
Ganar.
Above the IO’s are “coordinating organizations” that manage, coordinate, and communicate between IO’s and the larger administrative structure of A Ganar in Partners of the Americas. These coordinating organizations are involved in the process of researching and selecting potential IO’s, interviewing potential A Ganar participants, and making sure that the IO’s are staying on pace with the implementation of the program. The coordinating staff have limited interactions with students and are primarily involved in the administrative work of the program.

A Ganar in Honduras is currently only a pilot program that is serving two groups of 25 youth in San Pedro Sula and 2 groups of 25 youth in Tegucigalpa. An extensive study funded by USAID is currently being conducted to investigate it’s the program’s overall effectiveness at combating youth employment. My study was conducted over a period of six weeks while phase 1 and part of phase 2 of the program were being implemented. To go without saying, my research is in no position to judge the effectiveness of either one of these IO’s. This report is meant to only to demonstrate how different understandings of the program, and more broadly youth culture, were being expressed by implementing staff and youth participants.

Implementing Organizations

FUNADEH: Community Center

FUNADEH (National Foundation for the Development of Honduras) is a private non-profit institution that was started in 1983 and is focused on Honduras’s economic and social development. While many of their services are targeted at the
professional development of other organizations, it is their project office in Chamelecon, that acts as the implementing organization for A Ganar. The project office is in Chamelecón is a center for “educative, cultural and technological resources that offers its services to the community, with particular attention to children and youngsters” (http://www.funadeh.org/english-version/community-development/). The project office acts as a space where youth in the community can come to hang out, read books, use computers, or receive trainings in topics ranging from acting, to video animation, to basic computer skills, to soccer.

Implementation staff were either currently employed or had previous experience providing programming at FUNADEH. Similarly, many of the youth had either heard of FUNADEH, had previously been there, and would regularly hang out there before and after the program. By providing these resources for youth FUNADEH hopes that youth are able to “significantly contribute to the socioeconomic development of their community and country” (http://www.funadeh.org/informacion/instalaciones/).

It is important to note that FUNADEH’s location in Chamelecón had been strategically selected to provide support for youth who were considered to be especially at-risk. Hondurans were repeatedly surprised to hear that I was working in Chamelecón and seemed to perceive it as being one of the more dangerous parts of the city, as made evident in the constant reference to a tragic gang-related bus massacre that happened there in 2009 (http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-202_162-662966.html).

MARIO UGARTE: Technical School
Mario Ugarte Vocational Center is a technical school located just outside the city center of Choloma which is about 45 minutes north of San Pedro Sula. Choloma is the third largest city in Honduras and has experienced massive growth as people flock to the city to obtain employment in its many maquiladoras. Working in conjunction with the Advisory Centre for Human Resource Development of Honduras (CADERH), Mario Ugarte looks to “train youth for technical careers so that they can get work” (Emmanuel). According to the school director, Emmanuel, Mario Ugarte is surrounded by a “conflict zone” (zona conflictive) full of “gangs and drugs.”

Mario Ugarte accomplishes it’s goal of youth employment by offering technical training for careers ranging from hair stylist, to electrician, to automechanic, to sewing machine repair technician. The implementation of A Ganar fits into the school as another class within a traditional school environment. Bells, breaks, and teachers, which dictate the flow of normal schooling also control the implementation of A Ganar. For all 25 young men that were part of the A Ganar program, all but two of them were also active students in Mario Ugarte’s technical training. All of the facilitators of the program were teachers at the school, and many of whom the students had previously had as instructors.

The respective characters of these implementing organizations greatly influenced how the program was being implemented. I will go into greater depth on these institutional idiosyncracies, their respective positions in the surrounding

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1 All names have been changed in an attempt to obscure identities. Although when one is working with institutions with few roles and clear hierarchies this obscurity can be rather transparent.
community, and their stance on youth at a later point in the paper. Throughout this report the data collected from these two sites will be compared and contrasted at times and integrated at other times. I was able to collect a richer data set from FUNADEH because it was more loosely structure than Mario Ugarte, and my research could more easily become part of the flow of class. There was more time that youth and implementing staff were free to be interviewed before and after the program, but it is important to note that both organizations were incredibly accomadating to my research and made my research a priority whenever they could.

Methodology

DATA

My research consisted of 19 in-depth semi-structured interviews with facilitators, coordinators, and youth participants, participant observation of the daily routines of the program, countless informal interviews and with youth participants and implementing staff, 2 focus groups, and 4 student journal assignments. It was in the weeks before the program officially got started that I began to formulate many of the questions I would later asked my informants. During these first three weeks I familiarized myself with the program, the area, and discourse surrounding youth. The staff and students at the school I was staying at, Instituto Politechnico Centroamericano played an invaluable role in my research as a resource that taught me what issues were pertinent to discuss, what types of questions would yield rich responses, and the general patterns that shaped youth
life in Honduras. I developed my first round of interview questions with the help of a group of students here.

I conducted interviews with 10 youth participants: 5 males at Mario Ugarte (who’s program was completely made up of men) and 3 males and 2 females at FUNADEH. I also interviewed 9 implementing staff: 2 facilitators, 1 teacher, and 1 coordinator at Mario Ugarte, 1 facilitator and 1 coordinator at FUNADEH, and 2 facilitators and 1 coordinator at two other IO’s in Tegucigalpa (this was the extent of my research at these sites). Interviews ranged in time from 15 minutes to 3 hours. Two were in English, but the rest were in Spanish. Interviews were recorded when possible after obtaining verbal consent. In the cases where a tape recorder was not used, I took notes that I shared with the informants during and after the interview to look over.

In an attempt to “provide mechanism[s] for the expression of local understandings and knowledge that are crucial to the assessment of the social impact of sport in development contexts” in order to “subvert enduring ‘colonial’ power relationships” I employed a variety of methodological considerations (Spaaij 1113-1114). During the interviews I encouraged the informants to take control of the way their voice was being captured by encouraging them to draw diagrams, pictures, and concept maps to help explain things to me. Following Darnell’s use of “self-evaluations” to assess the impact of sport on youth, youth voice was directly drawn out of 4 journal assignments where youth were encouraged to express themselves, however they wanted, from picture to essay to poetry, on issues that were important in their lives (Darnell 191). These assignments were meant to
provide a space for expression where youth could speak about how they see themselves and how they prioritize their lives. I told them that these exercises were an opportunity for them to expressive themselves to the outside world through the voice-piece of my report. At times they were funny and other times they were serious. At times they were tragic, other times they were ecstatic, but most of the time they talked about the youth’s everyday understandings of their life.

As my research unfolded, I tweaked interview questions to more deeply probe emerging themes such as the relationship between youth and implementation staff, trust, and the narrative of hopelessness. I re-interviewed the informants in order to build a deeper understanding of their stories and crosscheck findings between informants. To anchor and give resistance to the in-depth interviews and youth, I also conducted observations in the program as a participant, an occasional fill-in teacher, and an out-of-place American (Wikan 221).

SELF-POSITIONING

During my field research, my position in the program and in relation to the youth and implementing staff could change radically in the matter of a few minutes. I could bounce between playing in pickup soccer games with students during lunch breaks to meeting with school directors, program coordinators, and international sponsors in the afternoon. I belonged in neither of these places, but my presence in both of them could be validated by the multiple roles that were being assigned to me. In the eyes of the Hondurans, I was both a youth and an “important” American who was representing their lives to “the outside world,” and just as I moved
between assigned identities, so too did I find myself viewing the youth through a mix of lenses.

At times I saw the youth as the narrative of hopelessness presented them, a generation of “lost ones.” Other times they appeared the hope for a country in despair. They could be expert guides in a landscape I found alien, but they could also be naïve children in a world that I found familiar. Their idealistic “what-is-the-US-like” questions were sharply juxtaposed against the pain, violence, and danger that were part of their lived experiences that I questioned them about. At times there were frictions, misunderstandings, and aversion between us, and at times we were friends. Through the assignment, negotiation, and fluctuation of these various identities I came to realize the importance that the depth and trust in these relationships played in the data I collected (Pine 6). By building relationships with youth I was able to not only gather information on the importance of relationships in their lives, but also experience this through our interactions.

THE NARRATIVE of HOPELESSNESS

After I give an initial breakdown of these institutions, I will show how both of them thought about youth culture and the problems of youth in very similar terms. This part of the paper will include an integrated data analysis, I will be drawing from interviews and field notes with facilitators and implementing staff from the 2 IO's previously mentioned as well as interviews with facilitators from two other IO's in Tegucigalpa (This was the extent of my data collection in these sites). I will show
the concepts and basic logic behind why they present the youth with a hopeless story. These concepts include social risk, disintegrating families, gangs, and lack of support. This will show how the implementing staff were actually understanding the youth. For example, disintegrating families lead to a lack of social support which leads to youth in the streets. All of these problems produce the affect that youth think that they are unable to change anything. They lead the youth to think that they can't do anything. I will call this section a narrative of hopelessness.

RESPONDING TO HOPELESSNESS: Mental Change, Motivation, and Empowerment

After this section of hopelessness I will talk about how this narrative affects the types of responses that the implementing staff (IS) were actually implementing to help the youth. They all thought that this narrative of hopelessness was the point that the program grew from. All of the IS tried to teach the youth that “I can,” but they all used different strategies to achieve this goal. These strategies included like empowerment, motivational lectures, thinking about the future. I’ll give a basic breakdown of how three implementing staff tried to tell the youth that “You can.” I will call this section Mental Change, Motivation, and Empowerment.

After breaking down these three different approaches I will talk about how these three different IS are translated into actual relationships. I could also talk about how the IS are dealing with youth problems that are far outside of their control (or I could just include this in NOA's section)

THE RELATIONSHIP of the FACILITATOR

I will talk about how important the facilitators said forming relationships with the students were in all three of these different strategies. I will discuss what
the relationship between facilitator and youth is supposed to look like. This would be a good place to put in that quote about what the facilitators is supposed to do in the A Ganar program or maybe the quote from the Jamaica A Ganar (or I might save this quote for bit later).

YOUTH on YOUTH: THEIR STORIES AND EXPERIENCES

While it is one thing to look at the importance of this relationship in terms of the IS it is another thing to look at how the youth are understanding these relationships that A Ganar and the facilitators find so important. I will talk about how the actual problems of youth that the narrative of hopelessness referred to, were expressed by the youth themselves.

It would also be a good idea to talk about how important to compare how the youth were understanding themselves in relation to the narrative of hopelessness presented by the facilitators. I will talk about how their experiences came through in my interviews that carried more weight then how the facilitators described their problems. I think that the next move that I want to make is to start talking about how the youth are understanding their lives not so much through a narrative of hopelessness as they are through their own experiences. I will talk about how this theoretical approach makes youth into agents while the other approaches looks at them as being passive pawns in bigger structural forces. I will transition by saying the youth are understanding their problems with a very similar narrative as the IS, but I will also show how the youth put a greater focus on the relational deficiency that they are exposed to. I will talk about how important it is to look at how youth voice is structuring this larger narrative. I will also talk about how the abstract
concepts of narrative of hopelessness are made more real through the personal stories that the youth tell. This section will also be integrated data wise. Eddie will talk about how he was lost to the street for a while. Kevin will tell his story of being beaten by a gang, and I will note how he was unaware of what social risk meant. Fabricio will talk about his general hopelessness before A Ganar. This section will show how the narrative of hopelessness is being structured in personal terms.

YOUTH UNDERSTANDING of the PROGRAM: The Importance of relationships

After having established that the youth's understanding of their own problems put a greater focus on the importance of social supports. I will talk about how these personal relationships allow their problems to be better understood, as far as potential implementation strategies go. I will also talk about how important it is that these more relational aspects are understood. I will talk about how it's one thing to give the youth motivation and it's another thing to get to know them.

I will let the youth talk about how important these relationships are in changing and helping them in their lives. I will also show how part of how the youth are understanding their own problems is structured by a larger achievement ideology that Pine talks so much about (THIS LARGER UNDERSTANDING MIGHT BE CHALLENGING TO CONSTRUCT). I will talk about the strength that this can give students and also about some of the symbolic violence that it constitutes (THIS COULD CERTAINLY BE LEFT OUT). I will also talk about how the youth are understanding the program in more relational terms. I will also discuss how Wolseth has shown youth can connect with churches (THIS IS GOING TO TAKE
SOME DOING or I COULD JUST USE THE QUOTE ABOUT INSTITUTIONAL PERCEPTION on PAGE 7). I will talk about what they are drawing from these organizations. And how the youth’s understandings of societal change are based on a one-on-one model. This will be an examination of their understandings of social change. This will mean telling the stories of Isabel, Eddie, Ramon, RESPECT and TRUST and THE CASE of the BEAT BOYS

What types of things are actually happening in these relationships that the youth desire, the program aims for, and the IS think exist? I will then split things up again to finish things off. I will talk simply about how the institutions affects on these relationships conditioned the types of changes that the youth were experiencing. I will also talk about the difference between trust and respect when helping with youth based on what the youth have said helped them. The youth need to learn respect, but it seems that it is much more important that they receive support. What was getting in the way of this type of relationship forming at MU and what allowed it to be so successful in the case of the Beat Boys? I will talk about the beat boys last though. I will offer this type of model as something that could be followed in the future. I will talk about what allowed this group to be so empowered.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I will talk about how important it is to listen to youth understandings and probe for youth experiences when implementing this program. It is one thing to understand the problems of the youth through overarching narratives and it is another thing to understand them through relationships that
people share with the youth. I will talk about how these personal relationships are what is most important. I will say that they're important because of all the stuff the youth have said and all of the stuff that the IO’s say that they want to do and also the bigger goals of the A Ganar program. I will talk about the danger of subsuming employment beneath the actual problems of youth.