LOCAL VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES:
A Study on the Contextualisation of Women’s Empowerment in Lima, Peru

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Sometimes I get frustrated when we are told to do this and that to improve women’s role and to empower them. I get frustrated because people do not understand that what works somewhere else might not work here in Peru. Empowerment is, of course, important, but there can be no universal model that works perfectly everywhere. Empowering women in the United States or in Europe or even in Brazil is different from empowering women here in Peru. You need to know the context, the situation. You need to know what works here and what doesn’t, what needs more attention, what is more easily attainable and what is not.”

These were the words passionately told to me by feminist activist and director of Estudio para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer (DEMUS), Jeanette Llaja, in Lima, Peru, in August 2012, after I had asked her what she thought about women’s empowerment. A few days earlier, I had started my fellowship at the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (IEP), a Peruvian think tank in the field of social studies, and begun conducting exploratory interviews with prominent scholars on the topic of women’s empowerment. Over the next few weeks, I would be told several variations of Llaja’s remarks. No matter whether the narrator was a university professor, a government minister, or a grassroots feminist activist, the principal message was always the same: empowerment is a complex process whose implementation requires thorough contextual knowledge that takes into account the particularities of the local setting. Encouraged by these interviews, I decided to delve further into investigating how one should go about empowering Peruvian women in the Peruvian context. Having arrived at IEP with the intention of gaining an understanding of Peruvian gender equality or lack thereof, I now had a more refined focus: to understand women’s empowerment in the particular context of Peru.

In the rising global quest for gender equality, empowerment has indeed become a widely adopted concept and tool for undoing the marginalisation of women. Nowadays, it is very common to hear this concept in discussions of
grassroots projects, government programmes, and policy debates related to poverty alleviation, welfare, upliftment, and community activism.\(^2\) Peru is no exception when it comes to the popularity of empowerment as a concept. In addition to national and international development agencies, the Government of Peru has adopted the concept in its rhetoric on the need to improve the situation of women. The National Plan for Strategic Development emphasises that empowerment of women is fundamental for the country’s determined effort to move towards more equal gender relations.\(^3\) Likewise, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has identified empowerment of women as one of its seven programmatic priorities in Peru.\(^4\) Therefore, as empowerment is becoming an increasingly oft-used term both internationally and locally in Peru, the plea made by Llaja and other scholars for its contextualisation ought to be taken seriously. In other words, are there aspects of the scholarly concept of empowerment that need tailoring when the general concept is taken to local, idiosyncratic contexts?

To address the concern that the concept of empowerment fails to take the local environment into account, the present study sets forth to contextualise empowerment to the Peruvian setting by asking Peruvian women themselves to identify what women’s empowerment should entail in their view. More specifically, this academic project, on the one hand, attempts to examine how prominent scholars conceptualise empowerment and, on the other hand, analyse to what extent Peruvian women’s own understanding of the concept is similar and to what extent it is different from the scholarly conceptualisation. This study thus undertakes the challenge of comparing Peruvian women’s conceptualisation of empowerment with that of the current academia and thereby examines how the broad concept ought to be contextualised to the Peruvian setting. The ultimate goal, then, is to tailor the scholarly concept to meet the needs, opportunities, and challenges particular to the Peruvian society. In doing so, this study wishes to address the following broad research questions:

- How do scholars conceptualise empowerment?
- How do Peruvian women feel empowerment should be contextualised to
the Peruvian context?

- Do Peruvian women conceptualise empowerment in a similar way to academic scholars?
- When the generic concept of empowerment is taken to the Peruvian context, which of its aspects ought to be emphasised and which deemphasised?

In essence, by answering the above questions, the present study will identify those aspects that make empowering women in the Peruvian context different from empowering women elsewhere in the world.

The topic chosen for this study – the contextualisation of empowerment to the Peruvian society – is important and justified for several reasons. First and foremost, contextualising empowerment can make empowerment programmes in Peru more effective and able to yield more sustainable outcomes. As this study hopes to bring the universal theory of empowerment closer to the Peruvian reality, it hopes to find idiosyncratic features of empowering women in the Peruvian context that can be helpful in informing and better targeting programmes aimed at women’s emancipation. For example, there may be parts in the scholarly conceptualisation that need special attention if Peruvian women are to be empowered or, conversely, there may be aspects that are not particularly suitable, appropriate, or relevant in the Peruvian setting. Hence, these insights gained by contextualising empowerment will be of pivotal importance to public and private practitioners working towards gender equality in Peru. The contextualisation can also contribute to empowerment programmes by increasing their legitimacy and local ownership. If Peruvian women feel that programmes designed to empower them are in line with their own priorities, they are more likely to consider these programmes benign and legitimate. They are also more likely to support and participate in these programmes, thereby improving the programmes’ reception at the local level.

Furthermore, it is important to underline that Jeanette Llaja is not alone in her call for the contextualisation of empowerment. Recent years have witnessed increased criticism among prominent scholars of the one-size-fits-all approach.
taken to key theories used in development programmes, such as that of empowerment. Insofar as empowerment does not take into account the local context, scholars fear it can essentially become hegemonic in nature, resorting to essentialisations and simplifications of complex social realities and otherising those who are to be empowered. Therefore, especially in the field of postcolonial studies, scholars – ranging from Homi Bhabha and Emmanuel Chukwudu Eze to Dipesh Chakrabarty – have called for the legitimatisation of local points of view as equally valuable and significant in the conceptualisation of theories used in the field of development. The logic goes that by taking into account local knowledge and expertise, we can comprehend multifaceted realities more holistically. As Dervin et al. note, “Putting the methodological focus on processes, instabilities, [and] contextual dynamics allows us to comprehend social life in all its density and complexity.”

It is imperative then to pay attention to each environment individually in order to try to understand the intricacy that is embedded in social relations and to deduce a more coherent representation of reality. The present study is thus also vital from this perspective. By interviewing Peruvian women, the study gives value to the local experiential knowledge and hopefully allows us to obtain a more comprehensive and realistic understanding of women’s empowerment in Peru.

Moreover, from the viewpoint of postcolonial theory, the present study is important also because it can contribute to the subversion of hegemonic systems of knowledge. Indeed, scholars of postcolonial theory have emphasised that, if not contextualised, concepts largely coined and developed by Western scholars, such as empowerment, can contribute to propagating the disenfranchisement of the “Other.” In other words, scholars of postcolonial theory argue that uncontextualised concepts become oppressive systems of knowledge that can subjugate the Other, the native, in order to ‘civilize,’ ‘liberate,’ and save his or her soul from barbarism in the name of modernity, progress, democracy, and capitalism. By utilising universal, one-size-fits-all development theories, we obviate the important and valuable insights of the marginalised. The concept of empowerment can thus otherise women and hegemonically “impose itself as [a]
strongly conditioning model” that perpetuates the “forced deculturation of Others.” From this viewpoint, as the present study creates a space for incorporating women’s voice and input into the conceptualisation of empowerment, it contributes to reducing this potentially oppressive nature of empowerment discussed by postcolonial theorists.

For these reasons – contributing to making empowerment programmes more effective and addressing postcolonial theorists’ concern over the hegemonic nature of uncontextualised, universally applied concepts – it is therefore clear that the topic of tailoring empowerment to the Peruvian context is justified, timely, and important. Now, then, what exactly did the research carried out for this study reveal about contextualising women’s empowerment to the Peruvian setting? To begin with, an important observation to highlight is that the research conducted confirmed that there is, indeed, great demand and need for contextualising the academic, conjectural concept of empowerment. More specifically, in terms of key findings, the investigation revealed, as will be meticulously explained in later sections of this study, two particular aspects that should constitute the contextualisation of women’s empowerment to the Peruvian context.

First, a broad societal approach to empowerment, which improves the situation of all marginalised groups instead of merely focusing on women, is needed in the Peruvian setting. Apart from their gender affiliation, women in Peru belong to diverse groups that make them vulnerable to various sorts of oppression. Therefore, to genuinely empower women, empowerment programmes in the country ought to focus on materially, sociopolitically, and intrapersonally empowering the marginalised in general – women and men alike. For instance, rather than just improving women’s rights, the Peruvian context calls for the improvement of all citizens’ rights and the strengthening of rule of law so as to effectively empower women.

Second and closely related to the first finding, the research presented in this study revealed that the Peruvian context calls for comprehensive, multifaceted empowerment that takes into account material, sociopolitical, and
intrapersonal empowerment and that works to build critical consciousness among women, turning them from objects to subjects. Women in Peru face numerous types of discrimination and marginalisation, and addressing only one area of empowerment, such as women’s material wellbeing, will fall short of bringing about genuine and sustainable gender equality. The research revealed that women must not only be made explicitly aware of the discrimination they face, but they need to be empowered to move from being objects of social constructs towards becoming active subjects that critically analyse and work to change their situation.

Furthermore, in addition to the two overall findings summarised above, the research revealed several more specific aspects of women’s empowerment that need particular emphasis in the Peruvian context. For example, in terms of material empowerment, Peruvian women would contextualise the scholarly conceptualisation by focusing on the quality of public services – most notably education and health care – as opposed to simply demanding greater control of and access to such services. With regard to sociopolitical empowerment, the research revealed that to increase women’s political activism and participation in the Peruvian context requires particular efforts to combat the association of politics with terrorism, corruption, and masculinity. Finally, in terms of intrapersonal empowerment, the research uncovered that empowerment of women in Peru ought to focus on fostering respect. Greater respect for all marginalised ideas and people needs to be enhanced for Peruvian women to develop a stronger sense of self-worth and self-respect that can contribute to them becoming more active in demanding just gender relations.

These key findings will be further elaborated in latter sections of this study. However, before moving on to exploring the methodology, findings, and analysis of the study at hand, let us say a few words about its structure. The remainder of the present study is divided into five parts. To begin with, the following Section 2 will take a look at the methodology chosen for the present academic research project and explain at length what types of data were collected for the purposes of contextualising empowerment to the Peruvian society. Moreover, the
limitations of the chosen methodology and their implications will be discussed in that section. The methodology section is then followed by Section 3, which consists of a detailed inquiry into the ways in which prominent scholars have conceptualised the complex term empowerment. It will be shown in this section that current scholars emphasise, by and large, three broad types of empowerment: material, sociopolitical, and intrapersonal. Consequently, the section will follow these three types of empowerment, beginning with an explanation of what material empowerment entails and moving on to similar accounts of sociopolitical and intrapersonal empowerment. In Section 4, which follows the theoretical framework, the key findings of this research will be presented. Going through the three types of empowerment one by one, the most significant aspects of Peruvian women’s contextualisation of the concept will be analysed. It should be noted that this section will incorporate several direct quotations from the interviews conducted for this study in order to illustrate the ways in which Peruvian women argue empowerment should be tailored to meet the particularities of the local setting. These quotations have been freely translated by the author from written transcriptions of the conducted interviews. Finally, Section 5 will revisit the findings presented in Section 4 to further analyse them by identifying broader themes and tendencies. Moreover, this section will analyse more deeply the significance of the findings from the viewpoint of women’s empowerment. To conclude the present research project, Section 5 will be followed by a few final remarks on the broader implications of the study at hand. Stylistically, this written report follows the instructions laid out in the sixteenth edition of the Chicago Manual of Style, published by the University of Chicago in 2010. Short citations of sources directly referenced in the text are included in endnotes, while the bibliography at the very end of the paper gives full publication details of the sources referenced in the text or otherwise used for background research.
2. METHODOLOGY

The present study originated from a need to explore how the theoretical concept of empowerment should be contextualised to meet the idiosyncrasies, peculiarities, needs, and challenges relevant to Peruvian society. In undertaking the task of examining how women living in the Peruvian capital, Lima, or limeñas would contextualise empowerment, three research methods were utilised: literature review, exploratory academic interviews, and collection of a sample of twenty-one semi-structured, thematically organised interviews.

2.1. Background Research: Literature Review and Exploratory Interviews

To begin with the present study, extensive review of academic literature on the topic of empowerment was carried out. The literature review – which consisted of reviewing a multitude of international academic journal articles, books, development publications, and government documents – had three primary goals. First and foremost, at the very outset of the present study, it was important to understand how prominent scholars have conceptualised the term empowerment. In other words, in order to study how the theoretical concept could and should be contextualised, it was important to begin with developing a thorough understanding of the ways in which experts in the subject have defined the term empowerment. It became evident early in the process that scholars have taken various approaches to conceptualising this broad term. Nonetheless, in reviewing literature on the topic, overarching tendencies and similarities were also identified in the types of empowerment scholars refer to in their research. These principal themes were then further studied through the review of academic literature in order to form a detailed understanding of the current scholarly conceptualisation. This understanding is explained in the following section of this research project, entitled “Types of Empowerment – A Theoretical Framework.”
The second goal for the literature review was to explore whether the topic chosen for the present study was justified. In other words, the review set out to ascertain if previous researchers have contextualised the concept of empowerment to the Peruvian context. Should there have already been extensive research conducted on this particular topic, the author of the present study would have had to revisit the research questions in order to avoid duplicating valuable research. Nonetheless, as noted already in the introductory section, the topic of contextualising empowerment to the Peruvian context was found to be a field that is yet to be extensively studied. Therefore, it was deduced early on in the literature review process that the chosen topic was both valuable and justified.

Finally, the literature review also had the purpose of developing an enhanced and deeper understanding of the overall Peruvian context. At the outset of the study, it was imperative to assure that the author gain a comprehensive knowledge of not only the situation of Peruvian women but also recent socio-political developments in the country that may affect the process of empowerment. This vital background research and the acquired context-specific knowledge were factored in the preparation of the semi-structured interviews that would form the sample analysed in the present academic work. It should be noted that the collection of information on the Peruvian context and the situation of women in Peru greatly benefitted from the author’s four-month stay in Lima in August-November 2012, when he worked as a visiting fellow at the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (IEP).

In addition to the literature review, eleven exploratory interviews were carried out with prominent Peruvian experts in the field of empowerment. These experts, listed in TABLE 1, ranged from university professors and civil society activists to Peru’s Minister of Development and Social Inclusion. The primary goal of these interviews was to complement the literature review in order to gain a better understanding of the current Peruvian context, especially with regard to the situation of women. The interviews were semi-structured around questions about gender equality, government programmes, and recent social, political, and economic developments in the Peruvian society. Moreover, the interviews
focused on the three overarching types of empowerment identified in the literature review, asking the experts about their understanding and views on the various ways in which one can be empowered. All of the eleven interviews were carried out in Lima, Peru, in August-November 2012.

**TABLE 1.** Exploratory Interviews with Experts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Interviewee</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Patricia Ames</td>
<td>Main Researcher</td>
<td>Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (IEP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Maruja Barrig</td>
<td>Author/ Consultant</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Virginia Borra</td>
<td>Former Minister</td>
<td>Ministry of Women’s Issues and Social Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Norma Fuller</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Natalia Gonzales</td>
<td>Main Researcher</td>
<td>IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Edita Herrera</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Red Nacional de Promoción de la Mujer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Jeanette Llaja</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Estudio para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer (DEMUS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Tarcila Rivera Zea</td>
<td>Director/ Activist</td>
<td>Chirapaq – Centro de Culturas Indígenas del Perú</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Carolina Trivelli</td>
<td>Minister</td>
<td>Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Maria Yanaylle</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>PUCP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Carmen Yon</td>
<td>Main Researcher</td>
<td>IEP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2. Study Sample and Qualitative Data

In addition to the extensive literature review and background interviews, twenty-one semi-structured, thematically organised qualitative interviews with Peruvian women were conducted for this study. These interviews formed a study sample, which was analysed in order to examine how the scholarly concept of empowerment ought to be contextualised when taken to the Peruvian context.

In short, the purpose of these interviews was to understand how in Peruvian women’s view empowerment should be tailored to meet the particular challenges and peculiarities of the Peruvian context. In other words, the interviews were conducted to analyse what parts of the scholarly concept ought
to be emphasised and what parts de-emphasised for empowerment to effectively empower Peruvian women. Moreover, the interviews were carried out to identify certain characteristics and variables that need to be added to the scholarly conceptualisation for it to be suitable to the Peruvian context. In short, through the interviews, a contextualised view of empowerment was to be developed.

Undertaking the task of studying how empowerment should be contextualised to empower Peruvian women, the present study identified Peruvian women as its target population. That is, this academic project set out to study how Peruvian women would contextualise empowerment. To narrow down the focus, the sampling frame was determined to encompass only Peruvian women living in the country’s capital Lima. In the end, the study sample became to consist of twenty-one women from Lima who were each interviewed individually. While strategic convenience and snowball sampling were generally used to identify the twenty-one interviewees, demographic variables were also taken into account in the sampling process. Most notably, age, self-identified ethnicity, and the interviewees’ parents’ mother tongue were important variables; it was decided in the beginning that to be more representative of the sampling frame (Peruvian women living in Lima), the study sample ought to include women of diverse ages, socioeconomic, educational, religious, and ethnic backgrounds.

As described in TABLE 2, a total of twenty-one women were interviewed face-to-face during the author’s research stay in Lima in August-November 2012. The youngest participant was 19 years old, and the oldest one was 65 years of age. A slight majority of the study sample was made up of women who were single (52%), while the rest were either married or divorced. Ten respondents had children, with the average number of children being 2.3. Moreover, religious affiliation among the interviewees was high (63%) with most participants self-identifying as Catholic. The group was diverse also in terms of linguistic heritage; many of the participants’ parents were bilingual (24%), speaking both Quechua and Spanish. It is important to note that each interviewee was presented...
with an informed consent form (See Appendix 1) before the interview. The respondents were asked to sign the form, which detailed the interview procedure, including recording of the interview, and acknowledged the interviewee’s voluntary participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Participant (Pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Civil Status</th>
<th># of Children</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Mother Tongue of Parents (Mother/Father)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Sofia Lopes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Spanish/Spanish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luna Paz</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Quechua/Spanish</td>
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<td>Laura Otero</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Spanish/Spanish</td>
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<td>Juana Ayala</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Single</td>
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<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Spanish/Spanish</td>
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<td>Rita Vega</td>
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<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Spanish/Quechua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa Franco</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Quechua/Quechua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luisa Sanchez</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Spanish/Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta Soto</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Quechua &amp; Spanish/Quechua &amp; Spanish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marcia Costa</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Spanish/Spanish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elena Sosa</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Spanish/Spanish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gina Flores</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Spanish/Spanish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eva Silva</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Spanish/Spanish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flor Ortiz</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Spanish/Spanish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ines Arias</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Spanish/Spanish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brenda Ruiz</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Married</td>
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<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Spanish/Spanish</td>
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<td>Mariela Rivera</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Spanish/Spanish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alma Vasquez</td>
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<td>Monica Campos</td>
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<td>Divorced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blanca Diaz</td>
<td>58</td>
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<td>Spanish/Spanish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carla Romero</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Spanish/Spanish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ana Perez</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Quechua/Quechua</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviews were semi-structured, consisting of a brief demographic section and a number of thematically organised open-ended questions. The open-ended questions (see Appendix 2 for full list of questions) were chosen so as to learn about the respondents’ views on empowerment and, more specifically, the three types of empowerment prevalent in the scholarly conceptualisation of the
term. However, general questions about gender equality and empowerment were asked first in order to get a sense of the respondents’ overall prioritisation with regard to the reforms that ought to be carried out in Peru. It was thought important that the interviewees would be able to elaborate rather freely on their views on women’s empowerment before asking more specific questions that might guide the interviewees’ responses. These general questions were then followed by more detailed open-ended questions pertaining to the three types of empowerment (material, sociopolitical, and intrapersonal) discussed in the section on theoretical framework. These questions were asked in order to discern each type individually and see if there are certain adjustments or emphases the respondents would make to contextualise the scholarly concept of empowerment.

It should be noted that while there were a number of open-ended questions used to guide and structure each interview, many follow-up questions were made in order to engage the interviewee in free-flowing conversation that would allow them to share their views unreservedly and openly. Finally, the interviews were concluded by asking the interviewees for basic demographic information, including their age, civil status, mother tongue, and occupation (see Appendix 3 for detailed questionnaire). This information was gathered for the purpose of being able to compare the interview responses against the respondents’ demographic background. Moreover, by collecting the demographic information, the author was able to assure the study sample was diverse in age, socioeconomic, educational, religious, and ethnic background.

After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed so as to have complete written manuscripts records of what was said during the interviews. With the interviewees’ consent, each interview had been recorded with a tape recorder. Although a painstakingly long process, transcribing the interviews was considered important, as it would make analysing the vast qualitative data easier. Using written transcriptions, the interviews were translated from Spanish to English by the author. While there was no professional help involved in this task, the endeavour was carried out with extreme care by trying to respect the content and the meaning of what was said by the respondents.
The data analysis process consisted of two fundamental steps. First, to the extent that was possible with semi-structured questions, the responses were rearranged by grouping them under each question. In other words, all the twenty-one responses to each question were put together, for it allowed the author to look at every interviewee’s contributions to each question side by side. Building on this grouping, the second step in the analysis process was identifying principal emergent ideas in the data. There are various ways in which scholars refer to this step, ranging from typologies and taxonomies to patterning, clustering, and coding. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this study, interesting emergent trends were identified and categorised under the three types of empowerment discussed by scholars in their conceptualisation of empowerment. These trends were identified in relation to the research question; that is, the noted trends were ways in which the respondents felt the scholarly concept of empowerment ought to be contextualised to meet the particular challenges of empowering women in Peru. For example, there were several responses elaborating on the role of mutual respect in the development of one’s feeling of self-worth, which in the interviewees’ view was closely linked to empowering women intrapersonally in the Peruvian context. The responses correlating to this view in the vast qualitative data were collected and grouped together so as to allow for their deeper analysis.

Accordingly, the section of this study that is entitled “Analysis: Contextualising Empowerment” presents the qualitative data collected through these twenty-one semi-structured interviews. In terms of terminology, it should be noted that when the text talks about the “Peruvian women,” “limeñas,” the “respondents,” or the “interviewees,” the author is referring to the twenty-one women interviewed for this academic project. This is especially important to understand as the word limeñas linguistically refers to all women living in the Peruvian capital Lima. Nonetheless, unless otherwise noted, in this study the word limeñas refers specifically to those twenty-one women interviewed by the author.
Finally, the methodology chosen for this study bears a few limitations that are worth highlighting. First and foremost, given the method of strategic convenience and snowball sampling, the representativeness of the study sample is not faultless. However, a non-random sampling method, typical to qualitative research, was chosen because of the author’s focus on conducting long, in-depth interviews rather than acquiring as large and representative sample as possible. In other words, it was considered more important to choose a study sample, whose members would have ample time for the time-consuming (approximately 75 minutes) personal interviews than being primarily preoccupied by representativeness. Moreover, the focus of the study is on Peruvian women’s individual and experiential thoughts, perceptions, and ideas regarding empowerment, which is why representativeness was not of pivotal importance in the context of this specific study. Hence, it was considered the interviewed women’s local knowledge and experiences would be valuable enough for attempting to contextualise empowerment, though other approaches, including quantitative methods, could result in complementary information that would paint a broader picture of women’s empowerment in Peru.

It is also evident that the gathered study sample excludes men. Only women were interviewed for the present study because it set out to investigate how Peruvian women would contextualise empowerment. Nonetheless, in future studies, it would be important to also analyse men’s perspectives on empowerment in order to understand more comprehensively how Peruvians in general, not just Peruvian women, would tailor the scholarly concept of empowerment to the local context. Similarly, the study sample only included Peruvian women living in Lima, which is why future studies should consider the option of utilising a geographically larger sample of Peruvians living also outside the capital area.

Finally, though rather obvious, the impact of the researcher on the interviews should always be identified as a limitation in qualitative research. In the case of the present study, the author, who also carried out the interviews, is a Peruvian male. Given that the interviews focused on women’s empowerment, the
female respondents may have felt slight discomfort with elaborating on women’s role in the Peruvian society when interviewed by a male researcher. Put differently, the interviewer’s gender may have influenced the data gathered through the interviews. However, in preparing for the interviews, the author was aware of this limitation and, therefore, paid special attention to creating a relaxed, trustful atmosphere during the interviews. Moreover, it was made explicitly clear at the beginning of each interview (and in the informed consent form) that the respondents’ anonymity would be protected in the study through the use of pseudonyms. It should also noted that, though a male, the researcher was Peruvian, which might have helped in creating a relaxed atmosphere during the interviews. Had the author been a foreign male, the interviewees might have felt less at ease to openly talk to the researcher. In future studies, conducting a few focus group discussions on the topic of empowerment would be helpful in creating an open forum through which different perspectives on the topic can be shared. While individual in-depth interviews are valuable, focus groups could complement them and enable the researcher to observe women’s mutual discussion on the topic.

3. TYPES OF EMPOWERMENT: A Theoretical Framework

This section is dedicated to an exploration of the ways in which prominent scholars define and conceptualise empowerment. As the present study explores how the theoretical concept of empowerment should be contextualised to meet the idiosyncrasies and challenges in the Peruvian society, the first step is to infer exactly what constitutes that theoretical concept. Therefore, this section will first briefly explain the overall logic behind the concept empowerment and then move on to describing in detail three types of empowerment prevalently discussed by key scholars: material, socio-political, and intrapersonal. The section will draw on extensive review of literature on the topic of empowerment and a number of exploratory interviews conducted for this study. Stylistically, this section will
stay away from extended accounts of theories presented by individual scholars
and rather focus on describing larger themes that cut across several authors’
conceptualisation of empowerment.

To begin with, it is important to note that although there exists a plethora
of definitions of empowerment, scholars agree that empowerment is a complex,
ambiguous concept. Scholars across disciplines – from Batliwala and Kabeer to
Rowlands, Sen and Grown – have frequently emphasised that it is nearly
impossible to arrive at clear, fixed definitions and conceptualisations of
empowerment. Nonetheless, they do by and large agree that empowerment
always entails some sort of change process. This change can be about
structural, social, or individual transformation. More importantly, empowerment
brings about changes in the power relations that exist in society and constrain the
lives of marginalised people and groups. Empowerment works, then, towards
doing away with apparent disparities, redistributing power previously beheld by
a selected few more equally in order to empower the marginalised. In the case of
women, the overarching goal of empowerment is, therefore, to transfer power
from men to women and to build women’s own skills and capacities, so as to
bring about more equal gender relations.

The logical follow-up question is then: what types of power can be
transferred from one group to another? In other words, in what different ways
can empowerment practitioners go about empowering marginalised people and
groups? These questions are at the heart of this section. Prominent scholars and
theorists have often conceptualised empowerment in relation to a certain type of
power that can be distributed more equally. While some scholars call for more
equal distribution of economic assets, others write at length about the importance
of improving legislation on women’s rights so as to give women more power in
the eyes of the law. Indeed, no uniform conceptualisation of empowerment exists
in the academia. However, as scholars have over the past decades taken on the
challenge of conceptualising and re-conceptualising empowerment, three general
themes have emerged. More specifically, theorists continuously refer, though in
different terms, to three types of empowerment: material, sociopolitical, and
intrapersonal empowerment.\textsuperscript{14} For the purpose of this study, this tripartite approach constitutes the general scholarly conceptualisation of empowerment, whose \textit{contextualisation} to Peru will be analysed through the conducted interviews. Before moving on to a more thorough explanation of these three types of empowerment, it should be noted that while these types are solidly based on theories of prominent scholars, the classification itself and the terms assigned to each type have been only selected by the present author for the purposes of this specific academic work.

3.1. Material Empowerment

A traditional way to view empowerment is to link it to the importance of controlling and having access to diverse sorts of resources. In the field of women’s empowerment, this material-based empowerment emerged in the 1970s in the United States, when feminism and the concept of “popular education” interacted.\textsuperscript{15} Advocates of material empowerment then believed that women ought to be empowered by giving them greater access to economic and material resources. Since then, scholars ranging from Kabeer to Boserup, Chen to Goetz, Jackson, Johnson, and Sen, have repeatedly emphasised the importance of improving the material wellbeing of women.\textsuperscript{16} While there have been varying views on what women’s material wellbeing should entail, it is commonly agreed that the empowerment of women should address gender disparities in control over and access to resources. For the purposes of this study, this type of empowerment, dealing with material assets, services, and resources, will be referred to as “material empowerment.”

Material empowerment refers to a process through which people, by gaining better access to and control over material resources and assets, reduce their economic dependency on others and become freer to make independent choices. “The material assets over which control can be exercised may be,” as listed by Batliwala, “physical, human, or financial, such as land, water, forests, […], labor, money, and access to money.”\textsuperscript{17} In this respect, some feminist economists affirm that women acquire, through material empowerment, the
opportunity to become more autonomous agents and develop practical skills for demystifying traditional gender roles that reinforce images of feminine passivity.\textsuperscript{18} The OECD-DAC Network on Gender Equality has noted that women’s economic empowerment has to do with “capacity to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth.”\textsuperscript{19} Consequently, the development of material empowerment is thought to trigger fundamental change towards women becoming economically active, self-sufficient members in their surrounding environment.\textsuperscript{20}

It should also be noted that when conceptualising this type of empowerment, scholars acknowledge the need to take into account how the process of empowerment is intrinsically linked to one’s ability to make meaningful choices. Material empowerment does not only bring about improvements in women’s access to resources and reductions in structural causes of material subordination, but it can also empower women by advancing their skills and capacities. Writing for the World Bank, Alsop and Heinsohn, for example, describe individuals and groups as being empowered when “they possess the capacity to make effective choices: that is, to translate these choices into desired actions and outcomes.”\textsuperscript{21} Hence, access to and control of material resources largely determine the way in which people are able to exercise strategic choices. Furthermore, scholars widely argue that in the quest for material resources and assets women often may acquire new capabilities and skills. Golla et al., in a publication for the International Center for Research on Women, made the case that “economically empowering women is essential both to realise women’s rights and to achieve broader development goals such as economic growth, poverty reduction, health, education and welfare.”\textsuperscript{22} In this sense, by accessing and controlling material resources one can also contribute to the overall development of one’s own community. Indeed, material empowerment is thought to represent meaningful and visible societal change as attainable, and therefore, valuable.\textsuperscript{23}
The notion of *condition*, developed by Kate Young in tandem with the idea of one’s *position*, helps us further describe the realm of material empowerment and its logical schemata. Young defines *condition* as the material state in which poor women live – low wages, poor nutrition, and lack of access to education, health care, and training. Material empowerment is, therefore, associated with improvements in the *condition* of women: moving from a state in which material resources are limited to a position where options for accessing these resources are not constrained. Young’s insights present a broad perspective for understanding material empowerment; economic resources are not the only manifestations of this type of empowerment but access to services, such as education, health care, telecommunications, public libraries, law enforcement, and public security, should also be included in its conceptualisation. To illustrate the logic behind this first type of empowerment, let us take a simple example. If A is materially more empowered than B, he/she lives in a better *condition* and has greater access to and control over material resources, services, and assets than B.

Material empowerment is concerned with improved access to visible objects, such as assets, but also with removing invisible structures that thwart marginalised groups’ access to and control over resources. As noted by the World Bank, UNDP, UNRISD, and OECD, material empowerment is a form of visible empowerment, since it entails the idea of possessing material assets (i.e., visible resources and assets) for advancing one’s capabilities. Nonetheless, as noted by Folbre and Kabeer, material empowerment might also be affected by invisible structures that facilitate an unfair distribution of such assets and resources. Indeed, gender disadvantages in terms of material empowerment are often considered to be, as Folbre has asserted, the product of ‘structures of constraint.’ Depending on the context, these constraints can take different forms, such as rules, norms, and social constructs. Therefore, sustainable material empowerment, envisioned as equal and just material resources for all, demands a redistribution of assets and available services and the restructuring of oppressive, constraining social structures. Accordingly, *condition*, as explained
by Young, is related, on the one hand, to direct access to material assets and resources and, on the other hand, to a restructuring of unequal distribution channels within a specific social system.

The notions of women’s practical needs and strategic interests have also been used by scholars to conceptualise material empowerment. Drawing on her analysis on the situation of Nicaraguan women during the revolution of the 1970s, Molyneux distinguishes between women’s practical needs and strategic interests. Women’s practical gender needs reflect the roles and responsibilities associated with their position within a socio-economic hierarchy, and hence vary considerably across contexts, classes, and cultures. Strategic gender interests, on the other hand, entail the advancement of transformative feminist politics based on shared experiences of oppression and targeting structural causes of women’s subordination. Molyneux states that women’s practical gender needs, such as health, water, food, childcare, and education, must be met in order for women to be fully materially empowered. Practical gender needs are, in other words, expressions of this type of empowerment and represent a demand for material development by the acquisition of resources and assets.

The idea of such materials assets and resources as indispensable for subsistence explain why this form of material power is often considered the most fundamental notion of empowerment. Material needs, such as food or shelter, are important for the endurance of life, and material empowerment aims at increasing one’s access to exactly those basic tools of survival. This subsistence-related characteristic of material empowerment has been appealing to many authors and politicians, who have identified it as an area where major improvements are needed if women are to be fully empowered. Peru’s Minister for Development and Social Inclusion, Carolina Trivelli, for instance, highlighted the importance of material empowerment during an interview conducted for this academic research: “Women’s economic [material] empowerment is perhaps the most important type of empowerment there is. It brings about direct change in the lives of women and it also presupposes fundamental changes in the lives of others.” Advocates of material
empowerment thus, at times, seem to consider other types of empowerment processes secondary or, at the very least, place material empowerment as the paramount basis of change in power relations based on gender. For the purposes of this study, however, material empowerment is considered neither more nor less important than other types of empowerment. As explained in the following sections, sociopolitical and intrapersonal empowerment are also crucial in the quest for more equal gender relations. Nonetheless, the heavy emphasis put on material empowerment by scholars is noteworthy due to its relation to basic subsistence, and, therefore, it is also essential to acknowledge its fundamental role in the theoretical conceptualisation of empowerment over the past decades.

Finally, if we were to consider a hypothetical example describing the successful and full development of material empowerment, women would have equal access and control to material assets, resources, and services. In other words, in a society where women are materially fully empowered, there are no gender-biases in the allocation of economic, financial, and other types of material wealth. Women have equal access to all levels of education, adequate nourishment, and health care services. Women enjoy the same opportunities to succeed in the labour market and maintain equal salaries with men; women have sufficient economic independence to make decisions free of dependence on men. By being active members in the labour market, women are widely capacitated and increasingly skillful alongside men which increases their ability to make meaningful choices in their own lives. Consequently, when material empowerment is developed to its fullest, the condition and practical needs of women are satisfied and on a par with those of men.

3.2. Sociopolitical Empowerment

Focusing one’s understanding of empowerment solely on improving the daily conditions of women’s subsistence can restrain women’s personal awareness of and willingness to act against the less visible but powerful underlying structures of oppression, subordination, and inequality. Therefore, scholars such as Rowland, Karls, Yuval-Davis, Acosta-Belen and Bose, for
example, have widely acknowledged that empowerment can, and should, take a sociopolitical form as well.\textsuperscript{31} Similarly, the United Nations Population Fund, for instance, has affirmed that “throughout much of the world, women’s equality is undermined by historical imbalances in decision-making power and access to resources, rights, and entitlements…women are still widely under-represented in decision-making at all levels, in the household and in the public sphere.”\textsuperscript{32} Thus, while the previous section explored some of the characteristics that make up the conceptualisation of material empowerment, the following paragraphs shall try to explain another type of empowerment prevalently discussed by scholars: sociopolitical empowerment.

Just as the theme of material empowerment is important for developing women’s overall process of empowerment, so are changes in law, property rights, and other institutions that reinforce and perpetuate disadvantaged opportunities for women. Whereas material empowerment is linked to Young’s notion of \textit{condition}, as previously explained, sociopolitical empowerment relates to the concept of \textit{position} of women; that is, the social and political status of women as compared to that of men. Furthermore, whereas \textit{practical} gender needs, as defined by Molyneux, are closely linked to the theme of material empowerment, organising and mobilising women to fulfill their long-term \textit{strategic} gender interests is essential to sociopolitical empowerment. These strategic interests can include, for instance, the abolition of the sexist division of labour, the alleviation of the unequal burden of domestic labour and childcare, the attainment of political equality, and the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women.\textsuperscript{33} This type of empowerment can thus create a sustainable path for the transformation of structures of subordination through radical changes in law, property rights, and other sociopolitical structures that reinforce and perpetuate oppression in a given social system. Many scholars across disciplines state that sociopolitical empowerment is as equally important as material empowerment and that, in fact, the two forms complement each other and are intrinsically linked to one another.\textsuperscript{34}
The realm of sociopolitical empowerment pertains to one’s collective interactions, relationships, and social relations. In this sense, sociopolitical empowerment is related to social encounters, particularly if we consider power as something that exists in the relations of individuals and groups, as asserted by Michael Foucault.\textsuperscript{35} Indeed, Foucault argues that power is an inherent, fluid feature of any society and hence is present in the interactions between people and institutions.\textsuperscript{36} Therefore, sociopolitical empowerment can be invisible in form, as changes in it are not necessarily material but symbolic and discursive. Likewise, Rowlands concurs with this relational characteristic of power and states that, “power is an instrument of domination, whose use can be seen in people’s personal lives, their close relationships, their communities, and beyond.”\textsuperscript{37} Sociopolitical empowerment can, therefore, prompt an adjustment in the structure of a system so as to advance or diminish particular interests. Though the changes are not material, but rather symbolic, they incentivise the construction of uncorrupted channels of distribution, new systems of knowledge, and legitimisation and recognition of the demands of the less powerful.

This second type of empowerment, sociopolitical, is linked to the structure of a system in the sense that through the collective actions of people it aims to change the social and legal rules of power relations. This particular theme of empowerment is closely associated with the establishment of a collective drive by the coming together of people with the same motivations and goals. In other words, it is intrinsically linked to the political interactions in the everyday lives of individuals, who by their active engagement and the creation of a communal voice desire to affect the system. The sociopolitical empowerment might virtually, scholars such as Friedmann, Cummings, and Boesten argue, alter how people perceive and function within a given socioeconomic and political environment.\textsuperscript{38} Sociopolitical empowerment then “creates new possibilities and actions without domination” based on the principle that a group’s power in tackling challenges is more than the sum of its members.\textsuperscript{39} Consequently, sociopolitical empowerment requires organised collective action if members of a
marginalised group aspire a fairer redistribution of power and an end to their subjugation.

Increased political and social activism are clear expressions of sociopolitical empowerment. The distinction between protesta and propuesta, as defined by Hershberg and Rosen, sheds some light on this reasoning and helps us to further understand and describe the realm of sociopolitical empowerment. Describing the founding of the feminist movement, the two scholars state that: “There were those who believed that the time was ripe for women to move from resolute political opposition (protesta) to try to access power in democratic institutions and generate political alternatives (propuesta).” Both parts of this dichotomy – radically opposing the status quo and proposing alternatives to the status quo by accessing it – are expressions of sociopolitical action. Therefore, political involvement, activism, and protesting can be considered manifestations and expressions of advancements in sociopolitical empowerment.

As previously mentioned, the collective and relational dimension of sociopolitical empowerment can incite a state in which an individual perceives the well-being of his or her group relevant. In this context, sociopolitical empowerment thus exists inside the collective drive created through a communal desire to change the prevailing status quo by getting organised and mobilised. Indeed, this type of empowerment can serve as a tool for allowing people to start to feel aware of their own sociopolitical interests and how these relate to the sociopolitical interests of others. Undeniably, transformational change requires action on many fronts and at different levels; hence, sociopolitical empowerment is transformative and showcases the fluidity of power. Similarly, it is thought that this type of empowerment develops strong, collective interests and group identities that enhance the likelihood of bringing about a change in a specific social structure. In this context, then, individuals get together in order to change their environment, as they realise that together they are able to achieve a more extensive impact on their reality than each would have had alone. In the case of women, sociopolitical empowerment can bring together around their gender identity to demand a more equal status in their society.
Finally, if we were to think of sociopolitical empowerment as hypothetically fully developed, women would be able to take collective action effectively, either in their local communities or at the national level. Women would be influential, significant members of the government; along with other issues, they would represent women’s rights and try to advance their own strategic gender interests. Sociopolitically empowered women also have channels to make their voice heard and demand changes when they face marginalisation. Additionally, governmental policies would be free of gender-biases and legislation would guarantee comprehensive gender equality. Likewise, there would be plenty of institutions that would look after the well-being of women’s rights.

3.3. Intrapersonal Empowerment

In recent years, feminist writers have grown to be particularly concerned about marginalised people, who have been systematically denied power over an extended period of time, beginning to internalise and believe messages they receive about how they are and what they are supposed to be like.\textsuperscript{44} This perspective opens up a new dimension for understanding the process of women’s empowerment as it brings forward questions regarding individuals’ self-perception and ways in which people conceptualise their own surrounding environments. In discussing empowerment from this perspective, concerned with individuals' sense of self-worth and self-esteem, scholars have placed heavy emphasis on subjectification and agentification, noting that “the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us”\textsuperscript{45} play a pivotal role in empowerment. Indeed, this third type of empowerment, located inside the perception we have of ourselves and going beyond material and sociopolitical empowerment, has as its basis one’s self-acceptance and self-respect which extend, in turn, to respect for and acceptance of others as equals. For the purposes of this study, I will refer to this internal type of empowerment as intrapersonal empowerment.
Although perhaps a harder type of empowerment to conceptualise, intrapersonal empowerment is, nonetheless, thought to be a fundamental aspect of comprehensive, holistic empowerment that can yield meaningful, sustainable outcomes. Scholars such as Boulding, Hartsock, Lukes, Yanaylle, Barrig, Nieves Tico, Belenky et al. and Pheterson, note that this type of empowerment underlines that an individual’s development of self-confidence and intrapersonal capacity are necessary for undoing the effects of internalised oppression. In other words, intrapersonal empowerment makes people understand their situation more objectively, free of internalised messages of oppression, and pushes them to do something in order to improve it. Intrapersonal empowerment, deals directly, then, with the successful realisation of one’s own capabilities and strengths, which can aid prompting advancement of the other types of empowerment, such as those previously explained.

Hence, scholars often relate intrapersonal empowerment to agency – that is, the ability to define one’s own goals and act upon those. Kabeer, for instance, states on this matter: “Agency is about more than observable action, it also encompasses the meaning, motivation, and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or the power from within.” Therefore, intrapersonal empowerment deals with a ‘deeper’ level of reality, which is not visibly evident in the everyday life of people, because it is inscribed in the taken-for-granted norms and customs according to which we lead our daily lives. Indeed, a way of understanding the realms of intrapersonal empowerment is to be found in Bourdieu’s idea of ‘doxa.’ Doxa refers to traditions and beliefs that exist beyond discourse and argumentation, and are “undiscussed, unnamed, admitted without argument or scrutiny.” Intrapersonal empowerment thus puts forwards a contextual reality in which a fundamental empowering change occurs in the private, personal sphere of an individual’s consciousness. As Batliwala argues, intrapersonal empowerment serves as a tool for destroying the causes of women’s self-perception of inferiority that are “deeply rooted in history, religion, culture, in the psychology of the self … and social attitudes.” Intrapersonal empowerment is also fundamental because it contributes to the individual
ownership of empowerment, as explained by Rowlands’ reflection on Taliaferro’s insights on education: “true power cannot be bestowed: it comes from within.” Therefore, this type of empowerment pertains to the development of a sense of self to realise one’s own capacity to counter the effects of internalised oppression by the development of individual agency.

In this regard, scholars emphasise that intrapersonal empowerment is related to self-worth, self-acceptance, and self-esteem, which might translate to the exterior of a person in the form of self-respect and respect for others. This dimension is invisible in nature as there is no known method or reliable indicators to measure its progress. This apparent inconspicuousness, however, does not denote non-existence. As Weiler, Ward and Mullender affirm, for instance, intrapersonal empowerment should be, on the contrary, further acknowledged and studied as it can contribute to a sustainable change at the individual level that can trickle down bigger changes at collective and structural levels. Consequently, self-perception is important because it determines in a great manner the options each individual see as available and attainable. Intrapersonal empowerment can be expressed in the growth of personal drive for seeking improvements first at the personal and subsequently potentially at the collective level in any given society by the creation of a feeling of being at ease in one’s own skin, that is, being at peace with one’s identity.

If we were to hypothetically theorise about the full development of intrapersonal empowerment of women, this utopian situation would include women having a strong sense of self-worth and high self-esteem vis-à-vis their male counterparts. They would feel confident enough to be active in labour and political life, and they would be critical of any oppressive message targeted at them. Overall, women would be able to fight and reject internalising messages of oppression, subordination, and domination. In this sense, women would be able to further affect and transform their assumed “doxa.”
4. ANALYSIS: Contextualising Empowerment

Do the three types of material, sociopolitical, and intrapersonal empowerment, as presented in the theoretical framework, concur with the priorities of Peruvian women? How should the theoretical concept of empowerment, conceptualised by academic scholars, be contextualised to reflect the Peruvian reality? To answer these questions, this section sets forth to analyse in what ways Peruvian women’s understanding of empowerment relates to scholars’ broader theoretical conceptualisation of the term. This section thus will essentially aim to put the concept of empowerment in the context of today’s Peru. In essence, the contextualisation of empowerment will shed light on different ways of understanding the term and open up a space in which the voices of local experts, that is, the women themselves, contribute to the conceptualisation of empowerment.

As noted in the methodology section, the following analysis will be based on the views of the twenty-one limeñas who were interviewed for this study. The intention behind this section, and hence the contextualisation of empowerment, is to raise the communal voice of women in matters that concern them in order to include their local knowledge, experiential knowhow, and individual perspectives in the conceptualisation of what empowerment should entail in the Peruvian context. In this way, the following few pages will present an extended understanding of empowerment appropriated to Peru by Peruvian women or, more specifically, by the diverse group of limeñas who participated in this study.

In terms of structure, this section will individually analyse the three types of empowerment discussed earlier – moving from material to sociopolitical and finally to intrapersonal empowerment – and present in what ways limeñas, drawing on their own valuable insights and personal experiences, would tailor each type so as to meet the challenges women face in Peru. In other words, the particular, context-related priorities Peruvian women have pertaining to each type of empowerment will be discussed. Nevertheless, it should be noted that as counting everything the interviewed limeñas had to say about empowerment
would be beyond the scope of this study and not particularly conducive to contextualising empowerment, the following analysis will focus on the key emphases, tendencies, and priorities laid out by the interviewees. Therefore, in discussing each type of empowerment, only the most fundamental aspects deemed significant by the interviewees will be presented. While this approach will not give us a holistic recount of all the idiosyncrasies of each *limeña’s* responses, it will allow us to deduce a well-rounded understanding of how the respondents contextualise empowerment to meet the challenges, needs, and obstacles relevant to the Peruvian society. By showcasing these key themes, the theoretical concept of empowerment will effectively be put into context by acknowledging and validating local voices.

As will become clear in the following pages, Peruvian women deemed it imperative that the academic, conjectural concept of empowerment be tailored to the particular context of Peru. In terms of material empowerment, the *limeñas* called for a broader approach to resource distribution than in the scholarly concept of women’s material empowerment. In their view, empowerment ought to work for the welfare of the impoverished in general rather than solely working for the benefit of women. In the same line of thought, *limeñas* placed themselves within a broader societal framework, frequently identifying with class-based groupings, such as the middle class, instead of gender. The interviewees also fine-tuned the scholarly conceptualisation of material empowerment by focusing on the quality of public services – most notably education and health care – as opposed to simply demanding greater control of and access to such services. Finally, an interesting aspect of the *limeñas’* conceptualisation of material empowerment was their strong emphasis on the importance of women entering the labour market. While this call conforms to the theoretical conceptualisation, the interviewees presented varying reasons for increasing women’s economic activity; for some, entering the labour market meant becoming economically independent, while others saw it as an extension of women’s conventional caretaker role.

With regard to sociopolitical empowerment, *limeñas’* view of
empowerment largely conformed to the theoretical understanding of the concept. Nonetheless, there were three aspects that the respondents insisted on emphasising when contextualising empowerment. First, the interviewees noted that to increase women’s political activism and participation in the Peruvian context requires particular efforts to combat the association of politics with terrorism, corruption, and masculinity. Second, to empower Peruvian women sociopolitically, the limeñas felt that strengthening women’s visibility in political life must be emphasised. Third, while the limeñas interviewed considered it important to improve women’s rights, conforming to the theoretical conceptualisation, they called for the overall strengthening of citizens’ rights in Peru. In this sense, by emphasising citizens’ rights over women’s rights, the interviewees took, once again, a broader societal approach to empowerment.

Finally, in terms of intrapersonal empowerment, the limeñas pointed out that in the Peruvian context, empowerment ought to focus on fostering respect. Greater respect for all marginalised ideas and people – not just women – needs to be developed in their view. This call reflected again a broad, class-based approach to empowerment, as the interviewees felt that embracing diversity and legitimising the views of the marginalised in general would also empower women. Women, according to the respondents, have multi-faceted identities that make them vulnerable to marginalisation, which is why it is important to tackle disenfranchisement in general instead of merely focusing on women. Lastly, the limeñas interviewed for this study called for a heavier focus on building active critical consciousness among women. Women must not only be made aware of and able to critically analyse their position in a society, but they also need to be turned from objects of oppressive social constructs into subjects that can act to change the status quo.

4.1. MATERIAL EMPOWERMENT

4.1.1. Redistribution of Material Resources

An important part of material empowerment entails, as explained in Section 3.1, improvements in women’s attainment of resources, such as material
assets, shelter, food, and water. Material empowerment thus often necessitates some level of redistribution of resources; that is, when empowered, women gain more access and control to material resources that, in their majority might, have previously been held exclusively by men. In discussing material empowerment, the limeñas interviewed for this study frequently called, like many scholars on empowerment, for a fairer redistribution of resources. Nonetheless, they took a broader, societal approach to resource distribution, noting that it ought to work for the welfare of the impoverished in general rather than solely for the benefit of women. In doing so, the limeñas took on class-based identities and distanced themselves from the scholarly conceptualisation of focusing on improving merely women’s access to and control over material resources.

In accordance to the scholarly conceptualisation of material empowerment, the need to address material and economic gender inequalities in Peru was frequently brought up by the limeñas as a key aspect. Indeed, the interviewees frequently objected the fact that women receive lower salaries and benefits in comparison to their male counterparts, despite being equally qualified and experienced. On this topic, Elena Sosa, a pharmacist aged 34 stated:

“In Peru the norm is that if you are a woman you will earn less, employers will always try to pay you a lower salary. They think that because you are a woman you are less qualified than a man. You always have to be inquiring about other’s salaries so to know that you are not being discriminated. You can have the same responsibilities, the same duties and be equally or even more qualified, but still men get paid more. It is discriminating.”

The unfair distribution of wealth between men and women in Peru was mentioned in twenty out of the twenty-one interviews that were conducted. It is clear, therefore, that the respondents strongly corroborated the call made by prominent empowerment scholars for strengthening women’s access to and control over material resources. The participants envisioned material empowerment as an attainment of equal working conditions for the expansion of their available choices in life.
Nonetheless, what is interesting about the limeñas understanding of bringing about more equal redistribution of resources is their tendency to favour a societal, class-based approach over one based on gender. While unequal distribution of wealth between men and women was frequently mentioned, it was placed in a structure of vast socioeconomic inequality that affects large portions of the Peruvian society, not exclusively women. The respondents thus felt that in the Peruvian context, empowerment ought to work for the welfare of the impoverished rather than solely working for the benefit of women. Whereas the scholarly conceptualisations of material empowerment focus on improving women’s access to and control over resources, limeñas stressed the importance of bringing about a fairer redistribution of wealth not just for women, but for the poor in general – that is, for women and men alike. What is noteworthy in this comprehensive, society-wide approach to resource redistribution taken by the respondents is their belief that a more equal society for all will bring about a more just society for women in general. In other words, to empower women, socioeconomic equality should be tackled at the societal level instead of specifically targeting women. While this call for a comprehensive redistribution of resources certainly is not unique to Peru, the priority given to it over women-specific programmes makes it significant for the process of tailoring empowerment to meet the particular needs of Peru and its inhabitants. Mariela Rivera, a self-employed mother of two, stresses the need to acknowledge the entrenched Peruvian inequality:

“One of the most significant changes I would like to see happen in Peru pertains to having more availability of resources for everyone in the country; men and women should be entitled to have equal access to opportunities, gender shouldn’t matter. Social equality and access to economic resources must be comprehensive.”

Rivera’s statement embodies well the communal demand made by the limeñas for a holistic redistribution of resources that benefits all the economically unprivileged. When contrasted with the scholarly perception of material
empowerment, this approach to redistribution goes beyond gender considerations; it addresses the material needs of society as an un-gendered unit.

As the limeñas discussed the redistribution of resources from a societal perspective, they chose not to explicitly identify themselves as women. In fact, apart from the simple acknowledgment of gender income inequality as an example of vaster societal inequality, the interviewees did not talk about economic redistribution in terms of gender or from a gendered perspective. Instead of using terms like “women” or “gender,” the respondents referred to more class-based categories, such as “the people” (“el pueblo or la gente”), “the underprivileged” (“los desfavorecidos” or “la gente desprotegida”), “the commoner” (“el Peruano común”), and “the middle class” (“la clase media,” “la clase salarizada,” or “el estrato social medio”). Hence, it can be coherently stated that there was no clear identification with being “women” in the respondents’ discourse but, in contrast, a tendency towards a broader, societal identification. This highlights a very interesting finding; instead of solely identifying as women, the interviewed limeñas place themselves within a broader, societal framework when discussing and conceptualising aspects that make up material empowerment.

In associating redistribution of resources with the broader society, the interviewees considered material empowerment a process that is beneficial not only for women but for the society as a whole. As one of the respondents, Luisa Sanchez, explained:

“Economic growth is important, but inequality among people has not changed despite the growth. In order to improve our country, we need to stop being such an uneven, unequal society. Fairer redistribution [of resources] would help the rich and the poor, women and men alike.”

Similarly to believing that material empowerment should target the poor in general, the respondents felt that its benefits would not be exclusive to women. In fact, many limeñas felt that a fairer redistribution of basic economic resources would form a positive trigger for the improvement of not only other manifestations of material empowerment, such as schools, poverty reduction,
hospitals, welfare, etc., but also wholly different types of empowerment. In particular, the interviewees felt that an economically more just society would bring about more respect for one another in Peru, which contributes to the intrapersonal empowerment of women. This theme of respect will be discussed in more detail later on in the section on the contextualisation of intrapersonal empowerment (Section 4.3.1).

4.1.2. Quality of Education and Health Care Services

In the scholarly conceptualisation, access to and control over public services, such as electricity, telecommunications, education, and health care, constitute a fundamental aspect of material empowerment. The theoretical framework on material empowerment denotes, then, two important dimensions when talking about material services and assets: control and access. This notion was strongly validated by the interviewed limeñas, who reiterated the importance of such assets and services for women. More specifically, they pointed out that improvements are particularly needed in women’s access to education and health services. They felt, nevertheless, that to empower women in the Peruvian context, specific attention needs to be paid to the role of quality. Indeed, when tailoring the scholarly concept of material empowerment to the Peruvian context, the respondents emphasised that a new dimension of quality, alongside of control and access, is of pivotal importance.

While discussing the conceptualisation of material empowerment, the interviewees identified education and medical services as the two most important resources to which access should be unlimited. This demand clearly correlates to the mainstream conceptualisation of material empowerment, which insists that material resources should be understood as being comprised by more than sheer economic assets. In this respect, the interviewed limeñas seem to agree that any developments leading to greater access to education and health care services are essential for improving the daily conditions of all. Both of these material resources were considered to be key factors for prompting societal change and the development of a fairer reality guided by educated and healthy citizens.
The interviewees were also concerned over the disparity between public and private education and health care services in Peru. It was stated by some of the respondents that women from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds often lack access to the country’s top private education and health care services which are normally expensive and provided by the private sector. Most women felt that the government should devote more money into making national schools, universities, and public hospitals more attractive to the general public. They mentioned how the choices women are able to make for themselves or their children are often constrained by their socioeconomic status. The poorer a person is, the worse education and health care services he/she can obtain. Apart from the concern over the privatisation of public services, which is a particular challenge in Peru (and elsewhere in Latin America), the notion of demanding more equal access to material services conforms to the scholarly conceptualisation of material empowerment.

In contrast, another key finding pertaining to material resources and assets relates to an aspect obviated in the scholarly conceptualisation of material empowerment. This distinguishing aspect of the limeñas’ understanding of material empowerment was their constant preoccupation with the current state and quality of public education and health care services. In other words, the respondents felt that in the context of Peru, particular attention ought to be paid to the quality, as opposed to quantity (e.g., access and control), of health care and education services in the quest for empowering women. The women felt that patriarchal behaviour is currently reproduced in public schools, while high quality education should in their view work to combat traditional gender roles, discrimination, and alienation. Sofia Lopes, the youngest interviewee, aged 19, stated:

“Quality education, for me, goes beyond infrastructure, bricks, and cement. Still today we see that girls and boys are treated differently in classrooms just because we are considered to be different in nature. It has happened to me, it happened to my mom, and it most probably happened to my grandma. I think that it is from that point [school] onwards that women
start to learn that we are incapable of doing certain things, that we are not
strong enough or that we lack something or that men can do things for us.
Schools and teachers should on the contrary incentivise other type of
thinking, provide quality education in that sense; but how could they?
Peruvian patriarchy is omnipresent in all those public spaces. No matter
how modern and fancy a classroom in a public school is, those archaic
ideas still remain.”

Some respondents affirmed that textbooks and curricula ought to be revised in
order for education to stop reinforcing conventional gender roles and for schools
to become instead forums where such roles are demystified. Furthermore, sexual
education in schools was frequently identified as a priority that would help
improve the quality of education in Peru. In this regard, quality in relation to
material resources was normally associated with changes that would prompt
ideological thinking that would challenge old dogmas.

In the health care sector, while access still remains a challenge, the
respondents felt that its poor quality is a particularly big obstacle to women’s
empowerment. In addition to poor infrastructure and saturated human resources,
the content of public health care is unsatisfactory. According to the interviewees,
prenatal care, family planning, and psychological services, for instance, are
limited and of very poor quality. They called on the Peruvian government to
focus on improving the quality of health care and, in doing so, demanded that the
government take into account aspects of health care that are conducive to
empowerment of all citizens. Alma Vasquez, a physician aged 56, exemplifies
well the call for better quality health care:

“The health care sector in Peru is literally collapsing. Apart from being
unsatisfactory in terms of infrastructural resources, it also lacks a great
humanitarian focus. The government, and not only this current government
but all the past ones too, have systematically ignored the needs of all the
common Peruvians. Big public hospitals in Peru are crumbling apart while
more private hospitals and clinics are flourishing. The current situation is
not conducive to a good future because essential needs of people, those that are the seeds of personal growth and improvement are being overlooked.  

Finally, it should be noted that, similar to the discussion on redistribution of resources (Section 4.1.1), the limeñas’ call for improving the quality of education and health care in Peru implies a broader societal approach to empowerment than one based solely on gender considerations. In demanding better quality education, the respondents constantly reiterated its importance for not only women but for the entire Peruvian society. The respondents expanded the attributes related to material resources and assets by including quality as a fundamental aspect that should be taken into consideration in the quest for advancing material empowerment in Peru.

4.1.3. Women’s Access to the Labour Market

Access to the labour market was considered a crucial aspect of women’s empowerment by an overwhelming majority of the limeñas interviewed for this study. The notion of making women economically active conforms to the theoretical conceptualisation of material empowerment. Nonetheless, the reasons given for including women in the labour market varied and some deviated from the scholarly understanding of material empowerment. Two significant trends were observable in this regard. While most women felt that women should work to become economically independent, as theorised by scholars, others considered women’s entrance to the labour market an extension of their conventional caretaker role and a mere necessity stipulated by the lack of economic means. In the Peruvian context, then, increasing women’s access to the labour market is a fundamental aspect of women’s empowerment, even though, at times, the reasoning for its importance varies.

As elaborated in Section 3.1, scholars consider women’s access to the labour market important, for it allows women to become economically more independent and thereby detach themselves from a patriarchal power relation to men. Most of the limeñas interviewed for the study at hand followed this train of thought. For them, being able to work and earn a living meant becoming
economically independent and gaining control of their own economic resources and decisions. Marta Soto, a twenty-six-year-old limeña, emphasised the liberating quality of accessing the labour market:

“I think all women should work so they can enjoy economic independence. If you don’t make your own living then you might be subjected to the decisions of others. In most cases, your decisions will be affected by your dependence and it shouldn’t be like that. A woman should choose what she thinks is best for her; every man and woman alike should have that right.”[^61]

Indeed, the interviewees regarded working as a way to gain control over their lives. The traditional economic dependence of Peruvian women on their male counterparts was considered deleterious for material empowerment because it hampered women’s liberty and freedom to influence their own lives and choices.

In addition to the liberating quality of accessing to the labour market, the limeñas pointed out that women benefit from working also in terms of capacity building. By working and being exposed to new challenges and environments, women have the opportunity to enhance their individual capabilities and skills. The interviewees pointed out that working can also contribute to broadening women’s understanding of the world and gender roles, in particular. As Juana Ayala noted, “If you work, that opens up your mind, you get know more people, different ways of understanding, seeing and feeling the world.”[^62]

In reaffirming the liberating and capacity building qualities of accessing the labour market, the interviewees corroborated the validity of the scholarly understanding of material empowerment vis-à-vis the labour market in the Peruvian context.

Nonetheless, approximately one third of the respondents did not consider accessing the labour market important for its emancipating character. While noting that women do have to work in today’s Peru, this group of interviewees insisted that women ought to work not for themselves but for the wellbeing of their families. An interesting characteristic of this respondent group was its demographic make-up: these limeñas were predominantly older (above 40 years of age), married, and mothers. These respondents regarded women as, first and
foremost, caretakers in their families; accordingly, should there be a scarcity of economic resources, women should work to provide for their family. Brenda Ruiz described the reasons for her entrance to the labour market as follows:

“I work not because I want to leave the house and forget my other duties, but the current economic situation is hard and I must help my husband. If I work it doesn’t mean I want to be independent from my husband, I do it because it is necessary.”

The women in this group felt that it was their duty as mothers and wives to help and provide for their family if their husband were not able to provide an income sufficient for the survival of the entire family. Nonetheless, as Flor Ortiz recounts in a very descriptive way, many felt that women should not lose their conventional caretaker role despite entering the workforce:

“Honestly, I think women shouldn’t work. Their natural role is to be at home, with their children. But sometimes there are too many immediate necessities and we must work. But our role is to take care of our children and our husbands; we have to know if they are hungry, if they are clean, know where they are, who they are with, know their friends. Sometimes women start to work and forget all of that, and that shouldn’t happen as we are the glue that unites all the members of the family together.”

It is clear that this group of limeñas considered it generally important for women to work in order to provide for their families, but not for liberating women from a traditional position of economic dependence. Indeed, a clear contrast can be made between the two groups presented in this section with regard to the reasoning they gave for increasing women’s access to the labour market.

In summary, when it comes to material empowerment, assuring women’s access to the labour market is fundamental in the Peruvian context. While the respondents’ widespread call for women’s entrance to the workforce correlates to the mainstream scholarly conceptualisation of material empowerment, the reasons for regarding women’s economic activity essential vary a great deal. The notion that some women hold conventional views about women’s caretaker role
valuable even if they enter the workforce is noteworthy for the process of contextualising empowerment to meet the particular challenges in Peru. For example, does the prevalence of such ‘traditional’ views imply a need to focus on questions of gender roles vis-à-vis the household and the labour market when empowering Peruvian women? Are these views oppressive systems of knowledge that ought to be tackled in the Peruvian context? How effective can empowerment projects based on increasing women’s access to the labour market really be if these considerations are not taken into account? These important questions, raised through the limeñas’ perception and reasoning behind their own access to the labour market and material empowerment, are fundamental for comprehensively acknowledging the connections between all types of empowerment. For that reason, these questions will be further discussed in the subsequent section on the contextualisation of intrapersonal empowerment (Section 4.3) and in the final discussion of this academic project (Section 5).

4.2. SOCIOPOLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

4.2.1. Political Activism

Given the country’s recent history of political terrorism and corruption, the participants of this study felt that increasing women’s political activism is particularly important for advancing their sociopolitical empowerment in the Peruvian context. Indeed, some of the participants affirmed that in order to make fundamental changes in their surroundings, collective action, political activism, and social awareness are essential. This was particularly the case among the younger interviewees, who, enthusiastically, demanded greater women’s political participation so as to affect the status quo. In other words, a perspective that recognised the unbalanced state in power relations and the need for political reformation was heavily present in the interviewees’ discourse. This observable trend can be associated with the mainstream view of sociopolitical empowerment described in the theoretical framework of this study. Therefore, it is evident that increasing women’s political activism ought to be emphasised in order to empower Peruvian women. Nevertheless, in contextualising empowerment to
meet the challenges in the Peruvian society, there are particular obstacles to women’s political activism that need to be tackled: the stigmatisation of political activism and its association with terrorism and corruption; and the identification of politics as a masculine sphere of society.

The limeñas interviewed for this study regarded political activism a strategy for facilitating the abolishment of unjust and corrupt sociopolitical structures that continue to subjugate women. The call for political activism and participation as a way to empower women conforms to the mainstream theoretical conceptualisation of sociopolitical empowerment. However, the interviews enable us to attain a deeper understanding of the Peruvian reality and, more pertinently, of the idiosyncrasies related to political activism in Peru. In other words, while the scholarly conceptualisation allows us to deduce that increasing women’s political activism is important and conducive to their empowerment – an aspect that was strongly corroborated by the interviewed limeñas – the experiences counted by the interviewees give us a unique opportunity to identify the key obstacles to women’s increased political activism. Such insights represent a deepening in the understanding of the peculiarities of sociopolitical empowerment in the Peruvian contextual reality.

First, the interviews revealed that one of the key obstacles to women’s political activism is the continued social stigmatisation of such activism and its association with terrorism. In discussing the reasons for women’s low levels of activism, many limeñas pointed to Peru’s recent history of political terrorism. According to some respondents, political activism continues to be closely linked to terrorism in the psyches of people. This association has made men and, more importantly, women wary of taking an active role in politics and has diminished their political involvement. Many respondents noted that especially the Partido Comunista del Perú - Sendero Luminoso or the “Shining Path,” a Peruvian Maoist terrorist organisation founded in 1970 that employed guerrilla tactics and resorted to violent terrorism for advancing its agenda, has stigmatised political activism in the country. The leader and principal founder of the Shining Path was Abimael Guzmán Reynoso, alias Comrade Gonzalo, who was a long-time
communist and former philosophy teacher (1962–78) at the National University of San Cristóbal de Huamanga in the city of Ayacucho. Guzmán and his followers, known as Senderistas, sought to restore the “pure” ideology of Mao Zedong and adopted China’s Cultural Revolution as a model for their own revolutionary movement which was planned to be imposed on Peruvian soil through armed forces. Gaining control of poor rural and urban districts in central and southern Peru through violence and intimidation, the Shining Path attracted many sympathisers and supporters. The organisation’s tight discipline, organising ability, and emphasis on empowering the native population at the expense of Peru’s traditional Spanish-speaking elite made it a powerful – and widely feared – actor in Peruvian political life starting in the 1970s. Although the Shining Path began its revolutionary campaign in remote areas of the Andes, it was soon engaged in bombings, assassinations, and other terrorist acts in various urban centres all over Peru, including Lima and Callao.

The interviewed limeñas noted that the legacy of the Shining Path has left especially the youth’s political activism heavily stigmatised. At the height of the Shining Path’s power, many students from national universities were recruited to participate in the organisation’s violent activities. The interviewees noted that since the restoration of democracy, Peruvian universities and other academic institutions have been wary of incentivising political involvement of their students as the traumas of terrorism still remain. For instance, Rosa Franco, a politically active history student at the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, affirmed the still-prevalent stigma associated with being politically active:

“If you get involved in politics, people assume you want to get involved in Sendero. I have felt people judging me for my activism at the university. Students, teachers, everyone has prejudices against being political; for most people, participating in politics and political discussions is something very radical.”

The respondents felt that an advancement in sociopolitical empowerment would entail a reduced association of political participation with the stigma of terrorism.
Second, according to some of the women who participated in this study, corruption also prevents political activism. In this respect, the respondents associated the alienation of the general population from politics and collectivism with the recent history of corruption in Peru. For instance, former President Alberto Fujimori was mentioned as exemplifying all of the wrong, corrupt characteristics of Peruvian politics. Carla Romero, aged 59, noted on this matter that: “Politics is dirty business; it is well-known that in Peru an easy way to make money or gain power is to become a politician. To be in politics you must be cheeky (uno debe ser caradura).” In the limeñas’ view, people do not trust politicians or they think politics only involve an exclusive and corrupt elite, which is why many Peruvians, including women, stay away from political activism.

Third, in addition to the notion of political activism being stigmatised for its supposed association with terrorism and corruption, the interviewed limeñas noted that political activism remains low among women because politics continue to be considered a domain of society exclusively designed for men. Many respondents referred to hidden, indirect, and pervasive discrimination at all levels of society against women who try to become politically active. According to the respondents, both men and women enforce such discrimination. On the one hand, men who are involved in politics often sideline women and act from a supposed position of superiority in politics. On the other hand, women themselves reproduce discriminatory behaviour by looking down upon initiatives led by politically active women. A peculiar example posted by Rita Vega, a university student in archaeology, illustrates well the persistence of the view that politics is a masculine sphere of life:

“Many of the women who have tried to become political at my university have adopted masculine mannerisms. The interesting thing is that they have become popular by doing so, though their proposed policies have remained intact. As some think politics are only for men, acting, talking, and behaving like them might help you if you want a share of power.”
The belief that politics is only a masculine sphere is pervasive; it limits the potential activism of women in politics as it alienates many from participating in important decision-making processes. Hence, sociopolitical empowerment of women should, in the respondents’ view, emphasise the support of women’s political activism in order to reverse the trend of viewing politics as an area of society exclusive to men.

In short, the limeñas interviewed for this study conform to the traditional conceptualisation of sociopolitical empowerment in considering efforts to increase women’s political activism important. Nonetheless, to enhance women’s activism in the Peruvian society, empowerment has to be contextualised so as to focus on reducing the traditional stigma associated with political activism and its identification as a masculine sphere of society. These are unique features related to political activism that only the contextualisation of sociopolitical empowerment enables us to deduce.

### 4.2.2. Women’s Political Visibility

When empowering women in sociopolitical terms in the Peruvian context, it is also important to pay particular attention to increasing the visibility of women in politics. Many of the respondents affirmed that women are almost invisible in national politics and, though women have gained prominence in other spheres of society, politics still remain largely dominated by men. There was a general concern among the interviewees that women were not represented in areas of power, or the women in high political positions were not safeguarding their rights as women. Therefore, related to the point made above about political activism, the limeñas felt that increasing the visibility of women in politics is particularly important for women’s empowerment in the Peruvian context.

In addition to the challenges mentioned in the discussion on political activism, the limeñas identified traditional values still upheld in the Peruvian society regarding the role of women as a key reason for women’s invisibility in politics. More specifically, the interviewees pointed to the conventional dichotomy between private and public spaces, in which women are limited to the
private sphere, to explain the low visibility of women in politics. Abolishing hegemonic discourses of male superiority in the public sphere could, in the *limeñas*’ view, pave the way for increasing women’s role and weight in Peruvian political life.

Women’s visibility in politics touches upon what was described in the theoretical framework as the *position* of women. Most respondents noted that Peruvian women are underrepresented in politics and throughout the years their role in decision-making processes has been very limited and, in many cases, non-existent or irrelevant. Even if women have acquired powerful positions, they have fallen short of addressing issues of gender equality. Indeed, the *limeñas* stressed that women who have been able to access political power have become ‘accomplices’ and largely ignored the subjugated position of women in society by disregarding the need to challenge the status quo. Therefore, the interviewees felt that collective and organised action is needed to prompt fundamental changes in power relations and the political visibility of women in the Peruvian context. They called, on the one hand, for women’s more active direct engagement in politics and, on the other hand, for women’s more fervent protesting against deleterious gender roles that hamper women’s visibility in political life. The approaches suggested by the *limeñas* are very much related to the scholarly conceptualisation that distinguishes between two potential expressions of demanding greater political visibility: *protesta* and *propuesta*. In both approaches, however, the distinctiveness of the Peruvian context is the zealouslyness with which the *limeñas* called for the need to take collective action to increase women’s visibility.

In today’s Peru, the *limeñas* felt that there are no strong political female figures in their own right who stand up for gender equality. Nonetheless, many of the respondents interestingly used the the life and work of the assassinated Peruvian community organiser and activist Maria Elena Moyano as a positive example of women’s political visibility. Many of the interviewees thought that Peru has not seen a strong woman leader since Moyano in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Moyano was an afro-descent social activist, feminist, and
community leader popularly known as the "courageous mother."73 Due to the worsening of the economic, political, and social situation in Peru, which profoundly affected the daily lives of the poor, soup kitchens emerged in the early 1980s to address food shortages and alleviate hunger.74 It was through these community-based organisations that Moyano gained social recognition for her active and passionate involvement in demanding social justice and an end to social exclusion. On February 15th, 1982, a member of the Shining Path shot Moyano in the chest and head, after which five kilos of explosives were attached to her body and detonated in front of her family and friends.75 The brutal crime committed against a charismatic social leader due to her up-front denunciation of terrorist activities in her neighbourhood caused widespread roar at the time. Yet, even today, Moyano is held in high esteem; she was mentioned time and time again in the conducted interviews as the embodiment of political activism and the potential for women’s political visibility. As Luna Paz, aged 22, stated:

“I deeply admire Maria Elena. Being a visible, politically visible, leader and representative during her time was difficult, still she pressed for the alleviation of social problems, including the preposterous situation of women at the time. People liked her because she didn’t just represent men, but women and men alike. You cannot buy or sell such true representativeness; you earn it with trust, hard work, and responsibility.”76

Like Paz, most respondents felt that today’s Peru is lacking strong political female figures that represent women. For this reason, the limeñas reiterated that structures of power and systems of knowledge that subjugate women into thinking that their participation is needless ought to be reversed in order to increase women’s collective action and visibility in politics.

4.2.3. Women’s Rights and Legislation

An important aspect of sociopolitical empowerment, as explained in the section on theoretical framework, is guaranteeing the recognition of women’s rights. The limeñas interviewed endorsed the importance of this aspect of
sociopolitical empowerment. Correlating to the scholarly conceptualisation of this type of empowerment, the respondents agreed that focusing on improving women’s legal rights is necessary and timely in the Peruvian context. Nevertheless, the respondents felt that while strengthening women’s rights is necessary, in the Peruvian context it is just as – if not more – important to improve citizens’ rights in general. In other words, the interviewees called for a broader approach to improving legislation to guarantee stronger rights for citizens regardless of their gender.

A thought-provoking finding was the fact that only a minority of the respondents focused their analysis on the improvement of specific women’s rights. Only few respondents noted that the rights of women were inadequate in Peru, especially with regard to sexual rights. They called for the improvement of current laws regarding abortion, sexual education, and violence against women. Eva Silva, a nurse aged 44, said: “The situation of women is at rock bottom. Our rights are ignored and trampled. Women get beaten up, abused, and killed. Men get away with impunity. No one seems to care, not the government or the parliament anyways.” In this sense, some limeñas concurred with the mainstream conceptualisation of sociopolitical empowerment in that they called for changes in legislation that pertain directly to women.

Interestingly, however, an overwhelming majority of the limeñas talked about the need to improve citizens’ rights, not women’s rights specifically, in order to empower Peruvian women. These respondents pointed out that proper legislation is not currently in place to safeguard the rights of all citizens in the Peruvian context. They put forward a broader understanding of improving women’s rights as part of wider citizens’ rights that ought to protect all marginalised groups. Anti-discrimination laws, property rights, and proper recognition of indigenous people were identified as areas where improvements in legislation were needed in order to attain better sociopolitical empowerment. The respondents noted that gender is not the only reason why they are discriminated against; depending on the situation, their race, socio-economic status, religious affiliation, looks, profession, or provenance can make them vulnerable to
discrimination. Therefore, the interviewees conceptualised sociopolitical empowerment as a multi-level process that should take into account their multi-faceted identities. In addition to being women, the limeñas are members of other groups in society and, as such, vulnerable to other types of prejudices and injustices. Consequently, the interviewees thought that changes in legislation pertaining to women’s rights alone would not bring about holistic sociopolitical empowerment, as it would obviate the multitude of identities one person may have. The lack of rights for underprivileged men was given as an example by Marta Soto and illustrates well the above findings:

“Just because you are a man, that doesn’t make you powerful. If I had been born a poor, uneducated, gay, indigenous man, my powers and decisions would be more limited than those of a white middle-class woman. Discrimination, recognition of my culture, and my lack of resources and protection from the state make me vulnerable. Gender as the only factor that constrains one’s life is a bit simplistic.”

While acknowledging the importance of bringing about improvements in women’s rights, the limeñas thus argued that to truly empower women in sociopolitical terms in the Peruvian context, one has to address wider issues in legislation. Hence, the respondents seemed to situate themselves within a multi-faceted structure in which their identities are volatile and contextual. These given insights point to the necessity to take into account individuals’ multiple identities as a variable when trying to put empowerment in practice.

In conclusion, the interviewees acknowledged the importance of improving women’s rights, as corroborated by prominent theorists, but overwhelmingly stressed the need to strengthen citizen’s rights in general for the overall development of sociopolitical empowerment. This type of empowerment was in this regard envisioned as a more comprehensive process that includes not only women but also men. The complexity of social relationships and identities was taken into consideration by the interviewees, which represents, then, an expansion in our understanding of sociopolitical empowerment in the context of
Peru. It is thus important to acknowledge this aspect when tailoring the scholarly concept to the Peruvian or any other contextual reality.

4.3. INTRAPERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

4.3.1. Respect

In the mainstream theoretical conceptualisation of empowerment, fostering respect constitutes one of the foundations of intrapersonal empowerment. As mentioned in Section 3.3, the development of one’s self-worth and respect is necessary for undoing the effects of internalised oppression and marginalisation. Therefore, when intrapersonally empowered, one develops his/her self-esteem to fully realise his/her own capabilities and rights – a process, which then translates into respect not only for oneself but also for others. In essence, intrapersonal empowerment aims to enable people to value themselves and others despite their differences. In contextualising the abstruse concept of intrapersonal empowerment to meet the idiosyncratic challenges of Peru, the limeñas interviewed for this study emphasised the importance of fostering respect for diversity. The interviewees felt that in order to empower women in Peru, a broader respect for all marginalised ideas and people needs to be developed. They called for an inclusion of marginal perspectives, such as those of women, into what is considered legitimate, mainstream, and acceptable. In demanding more respect, the limeñas supported the theoretical conceptualisation of intrapersonal empowerment; however, their persistent focus on aiding the marginalised citizens in general (instead of focusing merely on women) reflects, once again, a broader, societal approach to understanding women’s empowerment, which should be taken into account in the process of contextualising intrapersonal empowerment.

In discussing women’s empowerment, the limeñas were concerned with the overall lack of respect for marginalised, non-mainstream views and perspectives throughout the Peruvian society. Mariela Rivera stated, for instance: “I hope to see an increased desire to harbour respect for traditions, lifestyles of others, different religions and other perspectives that are not mainstream at the
moment.” In this way, the *limeñas* followed the theoretical logic for intrapersonal empowerment based on the idea that respect for diversity brings about mutual trust in society, contributing to the development of people’s sense of self-worth.

Nonetheless, the *limeñas’* call for more respect was characterised by a societal, rather than gender-based, approach to intrapersonal empowerment. The majority of respondents felt that there is an overall lack of respect for the views and perspectives of different marginalised groups in the Peruvian society, not just those of women. Indeed, this finding can be linked to the country’s vast socioeconomic inequality discussed in section 4.1.3. The country’s socioeconomic inequality has, in their view, left large portions of the population marginalised and, in essence, disrespected. As Luisa Sanchez noted, “It is all about respect and recognition if we want equality; we need to respect each other by accepting our differences, similarities, and brotherhood as Peruvians.”

Therefore, in order to empower women, one ought to empower the marginalised as a whole.

As an example of the ubiquitous neglect and disrespect for diversity in the Peruvian society, many interviewees referred specifically to the 2009 Peruvian political crisis of “Bagua.” The crisis resulted from wide opposition to two government decrees for oil exploration in the Peruvian Amazon that led the local indigenous groups at odds with *Petroperú* and the Peruvian National Police. At the forefront of the resistance movement was AIDESEP, the coalition of indigenous community organisations. In June 2009, the government under Alan Garcia’s command suspended civil liberties, declared a state of emergency, and sent in the military to stop the AIDESEP-led protests that were taking place at the “Devil’s Curve” jungle highway close to Bagua, over 1,000 kilometres north of Lima. The military intervention resulted in two days of bloody confrontations, in which at least 54 people were killed – among them fourteen police officers and three children. The conflict, dubbed as Peru's worst violent crisis in years, eventually led to the resignation of Prime Minister Yehude Simon and the reversal of the government decrees that had initiated the protests. For
the interviewees, notwithstanding their differing political views on the oil exploration, the Bagua incident and the Peruvian government’s adamant refusal to negotiate with AIDESEP reflected the deep lack of respect for marginalised groups prevalent throughout the Peruvian society.

For the limeñas, it is thus imperative to focus on fostering respect in order to empower women – and other marginalised groups – in the Peruvian context. Increased respect for all marginal groups contributes to women’s intrapersonal empowerment as a by-product. Additionally, further respect is conducive to bringing about changes in people’s everyday lives as tighter ties built on trust and respect may replace fragile social relations between different groups in Peru and establish new canons of interaction. What is noteworthy in this unique emphasis put on respect is the focus the limeñas place on overarching inclusiveness, legitimisation, and recognition of all marginalised groups instead of exclusively focusing on women. Once again, in contextualising empowerment to Peru, the limeñas reiterate the need to approach intrapersonal empowerment more broadly as working for the attainment society-wide equality also entails in itself further empowerment of women.

4.3.2. Women’s Status, Social Roles, and Responsibilities

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, there are no concrete, reliable indicators that can be used to measure the state of intrapersonal empowerment among a specific group of individuals. Nonetheless, as intrapersonal empowerment is rooted in the perception we have of ourselves and in the understanding we have of our role in society, the respondents’ views on what is the current status of women in Peru can serve as an approximation of how they conceptualise this type of empowerment. From the perspective of contextualising empowerment to Peru, three important trends emerged from the limeñas’ discourse on intrapersonal empowerment. First, the scholarly conceptualisation’s notion of developing women’s self-awareness and self-confidence was frequently acknowledged by the interviewees to be crucially important in the Peruvian context, where women often look down upon themselves. Second, and
more interestingly, the *limeñas* felt that in Peru heavier emphasis needed to be put on the situationality of women’s self-awareness. In other words, they called on women to develop critical consciousness and the ability to situate themselves in the broader society with plethora of social roles and constructs. Finally, taking the idea of building one’s critical consciousness further, the *limeñas* pointed out that in the Peruvian context empowerment ought to have as its goal the development of active, dynamic critical consciousness. In their view, Peruvian women need to be empowered in order for them to turn from objects to active subjects, who can work to change their status quo.

In discussing women’s self-awareness, the *limeñas* clarified that in the Peruvian context it was particularly important to focus on developing women’s critical consciousness. More specifically, the respondents felt that women ought to become aware of their position in the Peruvian society and critically analyse the socially constructed roles and responsibilities associated with that position. Indeed, the interviewees seemed to be concerned with the situationality of empowerment and the role of power in the relationship between the individual, the community, and the society. In this way, the *limeñas*’ perspective broadens the focus of intrapersonal empowerment, as described in the theoretical framework, from the individual’s self-awareness to the individual’s self-awareness in relation to the surrounding environment. In other words, women ought to be aware of the power structures located beyond themselves as individuals. Therefore, in the Peruvian context, critical thinking, as a part of intrapersonal empowerment, should be developed into a powerful tool that enables women to discover their submersion in social structures. This call for focusing on the development of critical consciousness vis-à-vis socially constructed roles and responsibilities is in many ways connected to the concept of *conscientização* developed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. His idea of “conscientization” or critical consciousness refers to one’s ability to think critically about their own situation and how it connects to the social context in which it is embedded. The *limeñas* concurred with this notion of developing one’s critical consciousness, emphasising that women ought to become aware of
the roles imposed upon them in the Peruvian society. Rita Vega, while talking about marriage and virginity, emphasised the above dynamics by saying:

“It is time that we start building ways for new kinds of approaches. By considering our own thoughts and knowledge, we can decide about our own selves, we can decide when and where to exercise certain roles and other supposedly assigned responsibilities. We should depart from the idea that what we are and are supposed to be are predetermined; we can change in accordance to how we feel and understand as correct.”

In addition to the call for the development of women’s critical consciousness, the limeñas’ perception of intrapersonal empowerment was characterised by a strong emphasis on activism. They felt that in the Peruvian context it is not only important to support women to become more aware and critical of their social position, but it is also of pivotal importance to encourage women’s active rebellion against deleterious social roles and norms. The majority of the respondents thus understood intrapersonal empowerment as the rise of critical consciousness that defies and challenges known archetypes. The limeñas emphasised that in order to make real changes at the intrapersonal level among Peruvian women there should be constant ideological insurgence against fixed social roles imposed upon them. Laura Otero, a 23-year-old university student, emphasised the role of questioning conventional gender roles:

“As a society, we should aim to start changing old mentalities. Each one of us should question why things are the way they are and act upon that. I think it is important to ask, but also to question why we are even asking those questions. This change in how we operate is necessary for waking up and for us to start creating new ways of organising ourselves in a society.”

The emphasis on active critical consciousness relates to women becoming subjects rather than objects in the web of social constructs that constitute the Peruvian society. The limeñas explicitly called for women to break away from being mere objects within a social structure and turn themselves into independent, active subjects. This call is very similar to Freire’s discussion on
**dignidad**, in which he argues that people should develop the capabilities necessary to becoming authors of the slogans they produce, as opposed to merely internalising and reproducing messages imposed upon them, and thereby turn themselves into subjects.\(^88\) People, in other words, move from being objects of social constructs to subjects of their own lives.\(^89\) One of the *limeñas*, Laura Otero, vividly described the need for Peruvian women to think critically about their position and become active to change their status quo:

> “I don’t believe in social roles, they are mere fabrications. They can change and should change. It is like saying that we are destined for something. Our roles and our responsibilities are created by society and in our case a very *machista* one. So it is time that we all challenge that. We should push for new rules, new consciousnesses, make our own path while we keep on walking, and think, because, sometimes, I feel many Peruvians have forgotten how to critically think about their lives.”\(^90\)

Accordingly, for the interviewees, in order to successfully develop intrapersonal empowerment, women ought to become not only more aware of their surroundings and capable of analysing them critically but also more dynamic actors who can influence the social fabric around them. As Foucault argues that power has the capability to turn people into subjects – that is, into individuals who can think and influence the way they behave – intrapersonal empowerment should turn women into subjects as well.\(^91\) Hence, the underlying implication of being a subject is the ability to take in information and knowledge, but also the ability to analyse, reproduce, and rearrange that information.

In summary, when the scholarly conceptualisation of intrapersonal empowerment is contextualised to meet the particular challenges of the Peruvian context, two fundamental aspects need to be taken into account. First, while the development of one’s self-awareness and self-confidence is important, the Peruvian context calls for situating that development of self-confidence in the web of social constructs that exist at all levels of society. Women’s critical consciousness thus needs to be built, for they ought to be able to analyse their own position and social role more critically. Second, a heavy focus on *active*
critical consciousness is required in the Peruvian context. Women must not only be made aware of and able to critically analyse their position in a society, but they also need to be turned from objects of social constructs into subjects – subjects, who critically evaluate their role and work to change the status quo so as to do away with conventional, oppressive, and unjust social roles and norms.

5. DISCUSSION

Undertaking the task of contextualising empowerment is important, for it allows us to develop a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of the challenges and needs that ought to be addressed in a particular context. In the present study, interviews were carried out with Peruvian women for the purpose of tailoring the scholarly concept of empowerment to the local Peruvian setting. As explained in Section 4 and summarised in TABLE 3, the contextualisation of empowerment has revealed idiosyncrasies with which we would not have been familiar had we only examined the mainstream scholarly concept. For example, the interviews pointed to the need to foster broader respect for all marginalised ideas and groups in order to empower women. While the notion of respect is included in many scholarly conceptualisations of empowerment, the heavy emphasis put on it by the limeñas implies that this aspect of empowerment is particularly important in the Peruvian context.

These valuable insights gained through the interviews into the Peruvian context can be utilised to better target efforts to empower women in Peru. For empowerment programmes to be effective and meaningful, they should take into account the local setting and aim to address the most pressing obstacles in that context. Increasing women’s role in politics, for instance, is widely accepted as a key step in empowering women. Nonetheless, exactly how one should go about strengthening women’s political activism largely depends on the challenges, opportunities, and obstacles posed by the context. While some strategies, such as quotas and awareness raising campaigns, may be suitable to many situations,
each environment has its unique characteristics that have to be taken into account. What the present study revealed about the Peruvian context with regard to increasing women’s role in decision-making was that many women stay away from politics because political life continues to be stigmatised for its historical association with terrorism and corruption. This is an important insight that should feed into the planning of empowerment efforts aimed at increasing women’s political activism; yet, at the same time, its relevance became evident only when the scholarly concept of empowerment was contextualised to the Peruvian society.

In the next few pages, I will take a look at these findings presented in Section 4 from an analytical perspective. Instead of recounting the most noteworthy findings that are concisely presented in TABLE 3, the findings and, more importantly, their significance will be further analysed and critically evaluated. In other words, I will revisit the findings by identifying broader tendencies and analysing wider dynamics and forces at play that may help us explain the significance – or lack thereof – of the findings arrived at through the interviews.

More specifically, the following pages examine the implications of the crosscutting finding of the limeñas call for broad societal approach to empowerment. This finding is significant as it underlines the need for holistic approaches that view empowerment as a complex, multi-level process, and do not consider focusing solely on empowering women as a panacea for emancipating women from an oppressed social position. It also points to women’s lack of identification with other women and their preference to resort to class-based identities. However, as will be discussed in the following pages, the fact that women do not call for women-specific approaches to empowerment raises questions about the level of their intrapersonal empowerment. In other words, the limeñas’ focus on broad approaches to empowerment calls for more research on whether Peruvian women have internalised messages about oppressive, conventional gender roles and therefore choose not to focus specifically on the empowerment of women.
TABLE 3. Findings of the Contextualisation of Women’s Empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. MATERIAL</th>
<th>2. SOCIOPOLITICAL</th>
<th>3. INTRAPERSONAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Broad approach to resource redistribution</strong></td>
<td><strong>Focus on tackling obstacles to women’s political activism</strong></td>
<td><strong>Focus on fostering respect</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment ought to work for the welfare of the impoverished in general rather than solely working for the benefit of women. A more equal society for all will bring about a more just society for women.</td>
<td>The stigmatisation of political activism and its association with terrorism and corruption need to be addressed. Also, the identification of politics as a masculine sphere of society ought to be reversed.</td>
<td>A broader respect for all marginalised ideas and people needs to be developed. Marginal perspectives, such as those of women, ought to be included in what is considered legitimate, mainstream, and acceptable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class-based identification</strong></td>
<td><strong>Focus on increasing women’s political visibility</strong></td>
<td><strong>Broad, class-based approach to fostering respect</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Limeñas</em> place themselves within a broader, societal framework when discussing income redistribution and quality of public services. Use of terms “the middle class” and “the people” in lieu of “women.”</td>
<td>The association of the public sphere with the masculine and the private with the feminine should be withered. Collective action is needed to increase women’s political visibility. Female politicians need to be encouraged to defend women’s rights.</td>
<td>A societal, rather than gender-based, approach to fostering respect was visible. Embracing diversity and legitimising views of the marginalised will empower women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus on quality of resources and services</strong></td>
<td><strong>Broad approach to the improvement of citizens’ rights</strong></td>
<td><strong>Focus on building active critical consciousness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Along with access and control, attention ought to be paid to the quality of health care and education services. These services should be prioritised and inequalities rising from the division between the public and private sectors addressed.</td>
<td>Apart from being women, the <em>limeñas</em> are members of other groups in society and, as such, vulnerable to other types of prejudices and injustices. They thus stress the need to improve citizens’ rights, not women’s rights particularly, in order to empower Peruvian women.</td>
<td>Women must not only be made aware of and able to critically analyse their position in a society, but they also need to be turned from objects of social constructs into subjects that can rebel to change the status quo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women should enter the labour market, but for different reasons</strong></td>
<td><strong>Focus on fostering respect</strong></td>
<td><strong>Focus on building active critical consciousness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For some <em>limeñas</em>, entering the labour market allows women to become economically independent and detach themselves from a patriarchal power relation to men. For others, women ought to work to fulfil their caretaker role and provide for their families.</td>
<td><strong>Broad, class-based approach to fostering respect</strong></td>
<td>Women must not only be made aware of and able to critically analyse their position in a society, but they also need to be turned from objects of social constructs into subjects that can rebel to change the status quo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The single biggest crosscutting theme throughout the *limeñas’* discourse and the findings presented above is the call for a broad societal approach to
empowerment as opposed to one purely based on gender. From material and sociopolitical to intrapersonal empowerment, the interviewees emphasised the need for empowerment to take into account wider disparities beyond those that affect exclusively women. What, then, are the implications of this call for broader approach to empowerment?

One clear aspect of the societal approach is that Peruvian women identify with various social groups and not just with women. They acknowledge that while women are marginalised in the Peruvian society, there are also other groups, such as ethnic minorities, that face widespread discrimination and disenfranchisement. Socioeconomic inequality, in particular, was identified as a cause of marginalisation that has put many Peruvians in an inferior, oppressed position. Women also belong to these other marginalised groups and face therefore many levels of discrimination. For that reason, as it was observed in Section 4, the limeñas identified especially strongly with socioeconomic classes, referring frequently to the middle class or the poor, and called for the empowerment of lower socioeconomic classes. As women belong to many disenfranchised groups, the limeñas felt that in order to bring about sustainable empowerment for women, more systematic and broader structures of oppression have to be tackled, not just for the benefit of women but all marginalised groups in Peru.

For empowerment practitioners – be they international non-governmental organisations or the Peruvian government – the call for a broader approach should signal a need to move towards addressing marginalisation of women more holistically. While women-specific programmes may still be needed, practitioners have to be cautious and keep in mind that Peruvian women fervently ask for widespread approaches that empower all of the marginalised groups to which women may belong. If women’s position as women is improved, women may still continue facing pervasive marginalisation if they are affiliated with other disenfranchised identities, such as ethnic and linguistic minorities or lower socioeconomic classes. Women’s empowerment should thus not be seen as a panacea that can alone emancipate women from a position of
subjugation. Instead, it ought to form part of wider development programmes that work towards the end goal of bringing about a more just and equal society for all.

Nonetheless, although the finding of women’s preference for a broad approach to empowerment is significant and, as such, a valuable insight that should inform empowerment practitioners working in Peru, the logic behind it requires further analysis. While women may indeed genuinely call for the empowerment of all marginalised groups so as to empower women in a sustainable and comprehensive fashion, they may also be wary of women-specific approaches and self-identifying merely as women because of pervasive, hegemonic discourse that oppresses women’s gender identity. In other words, one could argue that Peruvian women choose not to focus specifically on the empowerment of women because they have internalised messages about oppressive, conventional gender roles and norms. Following this train of logic, we might point to the example that some limeñas argued that women ought to enter the labour market not for its emancipatory quality but because women, as caretakers, have to provide for their families. Such reasoning given for the importance of women’s economic activity could indeed signal strong assumed ideas regarding gender roles and norms: women remain primarily as caretakers, even if they earn an income of their own.

This concern over internalised messages of oppression was brought up in the theoretical framework of this study and made up a big portion of the conceptualisation of intrapersonal empowerment. In this sense, the women’s lack of self-identification as women and tendency towards class-based identities could imply low levels of intrapersonal empowerment among limeñas. That is, repressive, dogmatic discourse may be so prevalent and daunting throughout the Peruvian society that women have internalised messages about men’s supposed superior role in society and thus, while acknowledging women’s disenfranchised position, women prefer calling for empowerment that does not target women exclusively. Should this logic be true, building Peruvian women’s critical consciousness is crucially important in the Peruvian context. By making women
more aware of the repressive social constructs and messages they face in different areas of society, they may begin to think critically of their situation and start undoing the effects of internalised oppression.

Confirming with more certainty whether the limeñas preferred broad over narrowly-focused approaches to empowerment because of internalised messages of oppression would require further inquiry into the matter. Though beyond the scope of the present study, analysing this aspect of women’s conceptualisation of empowerment would be helpful in developing a more accurate understanding of women’s empowerment in the Peruvian context. For example, further studies could shed more light on the channels through which women are exposed to oppressive messages that they internalise. Future studies would also benefit from an intersectional, multi-level approach to researching empowerment that analyses the concept at different levels of social relations: both at the individual and collective levels. Nonetheless, regardless of the limeñas’ reasoning, the fact that they do insist on taking a broader, societal approach to empowerment is a valuable insight that ought to be taken into consideration when programmes for empowering Peruvian women are designed. Therefore, one lesson learnt from the findings presented in Section 4 is that it is of pivotal importance to allocate more resources and efforts into understanding intrapersonal empowerment, as its implications on the overall process of empowerment are significant but remain largely blurry to the academia.

The contextualisation of empowerment to Peru also underlines the importance of understanding empowerment as a complex, multi-level process. The fact that the limeñas repeatedly stressed the need to empower women materially but also sociopolitically and intrapersonally makes it clear that empowerment cannot be simplified, especially not in the Peruvian context. Instead, it ought to be viewed from a holistic perspective that takes into account the multi-faceted nature and the interconnectedness of all the types of empowerment. If Peruvian women are to be empowered, practitioners cannot focus solely on material or sociopolitical empowerment. Narrowly focused programmes may yield some improvements but are likely to fall short of
bringing about profound, sustainable outcomes. The contextualisation of empowerment should be the first step in reverting this trend of narrowly focused empowerment programmes. The challenge of taking on the complexity associated with empowerment, as well as the acknowledgement of local voices, can prove to be the fuel needed for creativeness in the field of gender relations. Holistic, unconventional methods can lead to bottom-up approaches that in turn can yield sustainable results. In essence, empowerment should be understood then as process of change that cannot be bestowed.

6. CONCLUSION

Empowerment is a multifaceted, complex, and diverse process. It can take many shapes and forms – from material to sociopolitical and to intrapersonal – but at the same time its ultimate goal remains always the same: to emancipate marginalised people or groups from a position of oppression. The present study has also revealed that while empowerment is a useful concept, it ought to be contextualised. For empowerment to yield sustainable outcomes towards equality – be it societal, ethnic, linguistic, or gender equality – it must be tailored so that it takes into account the most pressing obstacles to equality that there exist in a given context.

In the Peruvian setting, there is a profound need to contextualise the scholarly concept of empowerment. As was explained in Section 4, there are aspects of each of the three types of empowerment identified by prominent scholars – material, sociopolitical, and intrapersonal – that ought to be adjusted when taken to the Peruvian context. In terms of material empowerment, a broader approach to resource distribution is needed as well as a stronger focus on the overall quality of public services as opposed to simply improving women’s control of and access to such services. The Peruvian context also calls for particular efforts to increase women’s economic activity, even though limeñas have varying views on the reasons for why women should work. With regard to
sociopolitical empowerment, limeñas’ view of empowerment largely conformed to the theoretical understanding of the concept. Nonetheless, the research presented in Section 4 revealed that increasing women’s political activism and participation in the Peruvian context requires particular efforts to strengthen women’s visibility and to combat the association of politics with terrorism, corruption, and masculinity. Moreover, in the field of sociopolitical empowerment, the overall strengthening of citizens’ rights is needed to empower women in the Peruvian setting. Finally, we saw in Section 4 that also the scholarly conceptualisation of intrapersonal empowerment needs to be tailored to effectively empower Peruvian women. The local context calls for marked emphasis on fostering greater respect for all marginalised ideas and people – not just women. Women, according to the respondents, have multi-faceted identities that make them vulnerable to marginalisation, which is why it is important to tackle disenfranchisement in general. It became also clear that limeñas call for a heavier focus on building active critical consciousness among women; that is, empowerment in the Peruvian context ought to enable women to critically analyse their position in society and become active subjects that can act to change their status quo.

In Section 5, we were reminded of the broad tendency among the limeñas interviewed for this study to avoid gender-based identifications and instead call for wider approaches to empowerment that take into account women’s manifold affiliations and identities. This tendency might prove to provide important implications to development practitioners as they should, in the interviewees’ view, address more entrenched and widespread exclusion in the Peruvian society in order to genuinely empower women. Furthermore, Section 5 cautioned us not to fully digest the findings at face value. In particular, the broad societal and class-based approach taken to empowerment by the limeñas requires further studying as it may very well be a sign of high level of internalised oppression, as opposed to a genuine call for widespread empowerment.

Given the findings presented in this study, it is clear that contextualising empowerment serves as a useful tool for incorporating local knowledge and
expertise in the conceptualisation of women’s empowerment. It allows us to identify main challenges and obstacles that are particular to empowering women in a specific environment. As noted earlier on in this study, these insights are of key importance for better planning, designing, and targeting programmes aimed at improving the situation of women. Unfortunately, however, contextualisation of empowerment remains a rare practice and one-size-fits-all approaches to empowerment are more the norm than the exception. While scholars in the field of postcolonial studies have in recent years made calls for contextualising general concepts, such as empowerment, these demands are yet to materialise in broader terms. Concepts continue to be widely used and applied without strong efforts to contextualise these often-hegemonic terms.

There is no question about the urgency to strengthen women’s empowerment in Peru and elsewhere in the world. Women and men across the globe have unequal positions in social, economic, and legal terms. For centuries, women have been subordinated to a marginal social standing, and these extensive gender gaps remain widespread in access to and control of resources, in economic opportunities, in power, in political voice, and in many other areas of social life. In Peru, like in all other Latin American countries, women have not been spared of gender discrimination, and they continue to face wide-ranging, entrenched disenfranchisement. While these gender inequalities persist, the importance of working towards gender equality has, fortunately, become widely acknowledged around the world. Scholars, international institutions, and development practitioners have pointed to the fact that although women and girls suffer the most from gender disparities, improvements in women’s situation benefit the entire society – not just women. While this trend is positive, the inclination to use hegemonic systems of knowledge in developmental practices is deleterious as it oppresses people and those who are the subjects of development programmes. More space should be opened for local people to speak up and share their own views on matters that affect their lives. Therefore, the role of a researcher and a development practitioner should be to take into account such voices and try to avoid imposing ideas of what modernity and prosperity entail.
Researchers and practitioners ought to avoid further otherising local voices and their transcendental value. Furthermore, gender should not be the only variable that exists when we talk about women’s subjugation, as women are also members of other groups in society, and oppression and discrimination occur at many levels. Empowerment, as a theory, should thus evolve to include potential variations based on local voices and experiences. Revision and microanalysis are needed when creating development projects that deal with this term. For a country to attain wide and sustainable progress, it must pay close attention to strengthening the role of women. Development strategies need to address gender disparities, for more equal gender relations can bring about sustainable, long-lasting improvements in the lives of all citizens.

In conclusion, let us hope that as calls for the need to work towards gender equality are becoming more and more common, so will the calls for including women’s own perspectives and ideas into the empowerment process. In the global quest for equality, contextualising empowerment is profoundly important, for it allows empowerment programmes to address the actual causes of marginalisation and focus on the most pressing obstacles that impede women’s emancipation. As Jeanette Llaja stated in the very beginning of this study, “Empowering women in the United States or in Europe or even in Brazil is different from empowering women here in Peru. You need to know the context, the situation. You need to know what works here and what doesn’t, what needs more attention, what is more easily attainable and what is not.” Just as women face different challenges in different contexts, empowerment should be conceptualised on a case-by-case basis in each unique situation. Local voices should be acknowledged by opening spaces where they become valuable perspectives for the reconceptualisation of women’s empowerment. Sustainable and all-encompassing empowering processes empower women to become subjects who bear and create their own ways of subscribing to emancipatory development efforts.
NOTES

1 Jeanette Llaja, personal interview with author, Lima, November 22, 2012.


3 CEPLAN, *Plan Bicentenario*, 86.

4 UNDP, *Empoderamiento*.


8 For more on how the “native” can be tamed and otherised, see, for example: Serequeberhan, “Colonialism and the Colonized” in Chukwudi Eze, *African Philosophy*, 234-254.


10 At the time of the interview (October 23, 2012), Carolina Trivelli was the Minister for Development and Social Inclusion. On July 22, 2013, Trivelli left the post of Minister to return to her post as Principal Researcher at the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (IEP).

11 See, for example: Brett Davies, *Doing a Successful Research*, 193; Bryman and Burgess, *Analysing Qualitative Data*; Robson, *Real World Research*.


14 Different scholars use different classifications to talk about these three classifications (Material, sociopolitical, and intrapersonal). Hence, it is important to note that the terms assigned to each type of empowerment have been selected by the present author for the purposes of this specific academic work.

15 Walters, “Her words on his lips,” *ASPBAE Courier*.


18 See, for example: Folbre, Structures of Constraint; Whitehead, “Gendered Impacts of Liberalization,” in Razavi, Gendered Impacts; Kabeer, Mahmud, and Tasneem, Does Paid Work Provide.

19 OECD, Women’s Economic Empowerment, 6.

20 See, for example: Kabeer, Women’s Economic Empowerment; Barrientos, Women, Informal Employment; Deere and Leon, Empowering Women.

21 Alsop and Heinsohn, Measuring Empowerment in Practice, 6.

22 Golla et al. Understanding and Measuring, 3.

23 See, for example: Kabeer, Women’s Economic Empowerment.

24 See: Young, Planning Development with Women.

25 See, for example: OECD, Women’s Economic Empowerment; UNDP, Innovative Approaches; UNRISD, Gender Equality; World Bank, Gender equality; World Bank, World Development Report.

26 See: Folbre, Structures of Constraint; Kabeer, Women’s Economic Empowerment.

27 Ibid.


29 Minister Carolina Trivelli, personal interview with the author, Lima, October 23, 2012.

30 See, for example: Young, Planning Development with Women; Rowlands, “Empowerment examined,” Development in Practice, 101-107; Rousseau, Mujeres y Ciudadanía. Blondet and Trivelli, Cucharas en Alto.


32 UNFPA, Promoting Gender Equality.


35 See, for example: Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in Dreyfus and Rainbow, Michael Foucault, 208-229; Foucault, Power/Knowledge.

36 Ibid.


39 Rowlands, Questioning Empowerment, 13.

40 Hershberg and Rosen, Latin America after Neoliberalism, 257.

41 See: Radcliffe and Westwood, VIVA.


43 Ibid.

44 See, for example: Pheterson, “Alliances Between Women,” Signs, 146-160; Barrig, Fronteras; Yanaylle, “Feminidad y Estereotipo,” in Bravo, Detrás de la Puerta; Barrig, “Pitucas y Marocas,” in Bravo, Detrás de la Puerta; Belenky et al., Women’s ways of Knowing; Nieves Rico, “Tiempos y Espacios,” in Arriagada and Torres, Género y Pobreza.

45 Rowlands, Questioning Empowerment, 15.


48 Ibid, 21.

49 Ibid.

50 Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory, 168.


54 See, for example: Belenky et al., Women’s ways of Knowing; DaMatta, Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes; Fullbrook and Fullbrook, Simone de Beauvoir; Covington and Beery, Self-worth and School; Kuokkanen, “Self-Determination,” Human Rights Quarterly; Green, Making Space; Weiler, Women Teaching for Change.

55 Weiler, Women Teaching for Change; Ward and Mullender, “Empowerment and Oppresion,” Critical Social Policy; Also, see, for example: Freire, Pedagogy; Dagnino, Meanings of Citizenship. Bourdieu, Masculine Domination.
Former President Fujimori has been sentenced to six years in prison for illegal purchase of local media outlets, congressional bribery and wiretapping. In addition, the former Peruvian president, extradited from Chile in 2007, was also convicted in two trials: six years in prison for burglary and seven years and six months for illegally paying $15 million to his former right-hand man, Vladimiro Montesinos, former head of the National Intelligence Service of Peru (SIN). In the 2004 Transparency International’s Global Corruption Report, Alberto Fujimori held the post number 7 among the most corrupt presidents in recent decades in the world.

For example, many respondents associated Keiko Fujimori, a female presidential candidate who placed second in the most recent Peruvian presidential elections, closely with her father, former President Alberto Fujimori, and considered her neither a representative of Peruvian women nor a female political figure in her own right.
The term "critical consciousness" prompts to establish an in-depth understanding about structures of oppression for achieving ultimate social freedom. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire explores the importance of developing liberating educational methods that could promote its development, especially among poor and illiterate people. *Conscientização* can be envisioned as a process that leads to emancipation and fruitful advancement of marginalised groups without subjugation.

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80 Luisa Sanchez, personal interview with the author, Lima, September 26, 2012.

81 *TheRealNews, Inside the Peruvian Amazon.*

82 Aquino, “Tension Roils Peru,” *Reuters Online.*

83 Collyns, “Peru polarised,” *BBC News Online.*

84 Ibid.

85 The term "critical consciousness" prompts to establish an in-depth understanding about structures of oppression for achieving ultimate social freedom. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire explores the importance of developing liberating educational methods that could promote its development, especially among poor and illiterate people. *Conscientização* can be envisioned as a process that leads to emancipation and fruitful advancement of marginalised groups without subjugation.

86 Rita Vega, personal interview with the author, Lima, October 25, 2012.

87 Laura Otero, personal interview with the author, Lima, October 9, 2012.

88 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*

89 Ibid.

90 Laura Otero, personal interview with the author, Lima, October 9, 2012.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Asociación Amigos de Villa. “Marielena Moyano: Admirable Luchadora Social.”


APPENDIX I.

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO
Master’s Degree Programme in Intercultural Encounters
Universidad de Helsinki, Finlandia

Título del Proyecto: Contextualising Empowerment: How do Limeñas Conceptualise Empowerment?*

Investigador Principal: Henry O. Salas Lazo, Estudiante de Maestría

Coordinadora del Programa: Sarri Vuorisalo-Tiitinen
Department of World Cultures
P.O. Box 59 (Unioninkatu 38 A)
00014 University of Helsinki, Finlandia

1. Objetivo del estudio: El objetivo de este estudio de investigación es explorar cómo las mujeres peruanas perciben, desarrollan y construyen el concepto de "empoderamiento" a través de su discurso oral. Mediante un arduo análisis de distintas entrevistas orales, realizadas con la participación de mujeres en Lima, Perú, este trabajo de investigación tratará de identificar las tendencias, similitudes y diferencias en las formas en que las mujeres peruanas asocian este concepto con normas sociales, roles de género, identidades y otros, para así construir y expresar su entendimiento sobre el tema.

2. Procedimientos a seguir: Se le pedirá que conteste algunas preguntas, las cuales son parte de una entrevista semi-estructurada. Además, se realizará una sección demográfica más detallada para concluir la sesión.

3. Duración: Le tomará alrededor de 75 minutos para completar la entrevista semi-estructurada y la sección demográfica.

4. Declaración de Confidencialidad: Su participación en esta investigación es confidencial. Los datos se almacenarán y protegerán. En el caso de una publicación o presentación académica, la cual fuese el resultado de esta investigación, ninguna información de identificación personal será compartida. Si se hace referencia directa a la entrevista o ha de citarse algo dicho en esta, se hará el uso de seudónimos para asegurar la privacidad del entrevistado y proteger así su confidencialidad.

5. Molestias y riesgos: Al participar en esta investigación, usted no correrá ningún riesgo, más allá de los experimentados en la vida cotidiana. Algunas de las preguntas serán personales y quizás puedan causar algún tipo de malestar.

6. Beneficios: Es posible que, con su participación en este estudio, usted aprenda algo nuevo sobre sí mismo. Es posible que consiga tener una mejor comprensión de cómo se ve a sí mismo en la sociedad y qué roles usted juega en esta. Asimismo, esta investigación podrá proporcionar una mejor comprensión de cómo se construye el empoderamiento en las mentes de diferentes personas. Esta información podría ayudar a
planificar y realizar programas de desarrollo más amplios y exhaustivos, teniendo en cuenta la experiencia personal de las personas comunes y corrientes en lo que respecta al empoderamiento.

7. **Derecho a hacer preguntas:** Si es que tuviese preguntas o dudas acerca de este estudio, por favor, comuníquese con el investigador principal del proyecto, Sr. Henry O. Salas Lazo al (358) 458884608 / henry.o.salaslazo@helsinki.fi.

8. **Participación voluntaria:** Su decisión de participar en esta investigación es voluntaria. Usted tiene el derecho a interrumpir el proceso en cualquier momento que usted crea necesario. Usted no tiene que contestar ninguna pregunta que no desee.

*El título del proyecto de investigación está sujeto a cambios.*

Usted debe tener 18 años de edad o más para participar en este estudio de investigación. Si usted acepta participar y acepta la información que se ha indicado, por favor firme e indique la fecha y lugar a continuación. Al firmar este documento, usted le da al investigador el derecho a utilizar la entrevista a los efectos de cualquier estudio académico y / o publicaciones futuras.

Se le entregará una copia de este formulario para sus registros personales.

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| Firma del investigador principal | Fecha y Lugar |
APPENDIX ii.

ENTREVISTA SEMI-ESTRUCTURADA

**Generalidades**
- ¿Cuáles son los principales cambios que le gustaría ver en el Perú en el futuro cercano?
- En tu opinión, ¿cuáles son los temas más importantes que el gobierno peruano debería enfocarse o hacer frente?
- En general, ¿cómo describiría la situación actual de las mujeres en el Perú?
- ¿Qué se podría mejorar en la actual situación de las mujeres? ¿Cuáles son algunos de los aspectos de esta realidad que se podrían mejorar?
- En su mundo ideal, ¿qué características tendrían las mujeres y sus vidas? Pedir descripción detallada.
- En su opinión, ¿Hay machismo en el Perú? ¿Ha sido testigo de algún acto machismo en su vida? Describa este evento, ¿Cómo reaccionó ante esta situación?
- ¿Cómo puede la mujer peruana obtener más poder en general?

1. **Esfera Económico/Material**
- ¿Crees que las mujeres deberían trabajar?
- ¿Consideras que las mujeres deberían quedarse en casa después de convertirse en madres? ¿Deberían seguir trabajando?
- ¿Está contenta con lo que está haciendo (por ejemplo, estudiar, trabajar) en estos momentos?
- ¿Cree que el gobierno peruano abastece buenos servicios públicos?
- ¿Crees que como mujer tienes las mismas oportunidades que los hombres? ¿En educación? ¿En el campo laboral? ¿En acceso a servicios públicos?
- ¿En general?
- ¿Crees que uno mismo puede afectar las oportunidades que uno tiene disponibles? ¿Qué obstáculos puede afrontar una persona en el Perú?
- ¿Crees que tu vida sería distinta si fueras un hombre? ¿Cómo? ¿Por qué?
- ¿Te has sentido alguna vez desfavorecida o discriminada a causa de tu género? ¿Cómo? ¿Cuándo? ¿Cómo enfrentaste esta situación?

2. **Esfera Sociopolítica**
- ¿Cómo describirías la situación de las mujeres en la esfera política?
- ¿Cómo crees que los derechos de las mujeres afectan a la sociedad peruana?
- ¿Qué piensas de la política en el Perú?
- ¿Cómo te sientes representada en la política peruana?
- ¿Derechos sientes que no son respetados por otros, o por el mismo estado?
- Como se podría cambiar una posible negación de tus derechos?
- ¿Es fácil hacer política en el Perú? ¿Hay obstáculos?
- ¿Crees que el Perú debería tener una mujer presidenta en un futuro cercano? ¿Cree que el Perú está preparado para una presidenta? ¿Por qué no/sí?
3. Esfera Intrapersonal

- ¿Crees que las mujeres deberían casarse? ¿A qué edad?
- ¿Cómo describirías a las mujeres peruanas? ¿Cuáles son algunas de las cualidades o características típicas de las mujeres peruanas?
- ¿Cómo describirías usted a los hombres peruanos? ¿Cuáles son algunas de las cualidades o características típicas de los hombres peruanos?
- ¿Crees que las mujeres tienen roles pre-determinados en la sociedad peruana? ¿Cuáles son estos?
- ¿Tienes un modelo a seguir o un héroe o heroína personal? ¿Por qué es él/ella tu héroe/ina? ¿Qué representa esta persona en tu vida?
- ¿Cuál es tu sueño / meta en la vida? ¿Cómo te gustaría verte a ti mismo en el futuro?
- ¿Qué piensas de la virginidad? ¿Cuál es su opinión en cuanto al uso de anticonceptivos? ¿del aborto?
- ¿Qué piensas de las mujeres de tu generación? ¿De la generación joven? ¿De generaciones pasadas? Explicar porque criticarías o felicitarias a cada una de estas generaciones (propia, actual, antigua o más joven)
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