WIFE ABUSE AMONG INDIANS IN THE U.S.

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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of my study is to contribute to our understanding of the complex ways in which race/ethnicity, class, gender and legal status intersect to shape the experiences of wife abuse among women.

In this study, I analyze the experiences of one group of abused women -- Indian women in the U.S. I examine how Indian women's experience of abuse, and their reaction to it is shaped by the patriarchal gender relations within the family, as well as by their class status, their legal status, and their status as a minority racial/ethnic group in the U.S. I also examine Indian women's strategies of accommodation, negotiation and resistance to abuse.

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Chapter I
Introduction

The social construction of gender relations and the institution of the family vary across socio-cultural contexts and time. Yet wife abuse is a near-universal phenomenon occurring in 71% to 92% of societies (Levinson 1983, Torres 1991) and cutting across ethnic and class boundaries (Carbonell, et. al. 1984; Seitz 1995, forthcoming; Torres 1991). Wife abuse and other forms of violence against women occur within the context of patriarchal gender relations (Breines and Gordon 1983; Kurz 1989; Yllo and Bograd 1988). However, patriarchal relations do not operate in a vacuum; multiple social systems such as race/ethnicity, class and legal status influence both gender relations and women's experiences of these, including wife abuse. That is, systems of privilege and oppression do not operate independently; rather, they are interconnected in myriad ways that have differential impacts on women located in different positions within these interlocking systems. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which race/ethnicity, class, and legal status interact to influence the experiences of women necessitates the inclusion of the experiences of women occupying different positions within racial/ethnic and class hierarchies. In this study, I explore how race/ethnicity, legal status and class interact to influence the experiences of wife abuse among Indian women in the U.S. Similar studies of the experiences of wife abuse among different groups of women will help illuminate the complex ways in which the multiple systems of domination affect experiences of wife abuse and will render a better understanding of this particular aspect of

violence against women in all its dimensions (Gelles and Cornell 1983, Levinson 1983, Torres 1991).

Literature Review

Johnston (1984) characterizes most of the research on wife abuse as belonging to one of three schools that attempt to explain the existence of wife abuse; psychodynamic, psychosocial, and feminist formulations. The first approach, which is also referred to as the social-psychological approach, attributes wife abuse to pathological characteristics of individuals -- both wife abusers and battered wives -- which arise from learned behavior, or to the 'pathological' nature of the relationship itself, in which abuse results in rewards for each partner. Thus, batterers are described as "passive-aggressive", "obsessive-compulsive" or "sadistic" men who abuse their wives due to a jealous nature, alcoholism, drug addiction, frustration, and/or provocation (Faulk in Roy 1977, Shainess in Roy 1977). Battered wives may 'provoke' violence because they are 'verbally aggressive', flirtatious/promiscuous or alcoholic. Thus abuse is regarded as arising out of individual pathology, and should be treated at the individual level, primarily through counseling. However, given the high rates of occurrence of wife abuse, locating its causes in abnormal behavior -- the 'pathology' of the husband or the wife -- would imply that there is a great deal of abnormality in society. Moreover, attributing wife abuse to a wife's personality traits amounts to blaming the victim, while the abuser is excused on grounds of alcoholism or frustration and thus freed from all responsibility for his actions.

The psychosocial formulation, also called the 'family violence perspective' (Kurz 1989), addresses violence as an inherent feature of family relations. Johnston further subdivides this approach into three groups based on their explanation -- socio-cultural and personal causes, the impact of the sexist tradition of society, and social learning theory. The first group locates abuse in the socio-economic and personal problems that lead to stress -- unemployment, low income, family size, low economic status, isolation, frustration, lack of control, stress arising from financial and medical problems, and the perception of violence as the only means of problem-solving. The second view focuses on cultural norms that regard the marriage license as simultaneously a license to hit. Sexism is regarded as a cause of wife abuse for several reasons: the 'defense of male authority'[1]; 'compulsive masculinity'[2]; and the 'male orientation of the criminal justice system' which provides women with little legal protection against battering (Straus 1976; 1980). Thus, men's power over women is seen as a cause of violence. However, violence is regarded as a means by which the most powerful member of the family maintains authority, and, as Kurz (1989, 494) points out, the researchers 'assume that power can as equally be held by a wife as by a husband'. The third view, the social learning theory, attributes wife abuse to the husband's experience of abuse (child abuse as well as violent parental relationships) and argues that women who experience such abuse in their

[1] Urban, industrial, individualistic societies that ascribe superiority to men validate the authority by giving them greater access to 'resources'. However, not all men are superior to their wives. "Consequently, many men feel almost compelled to fall back on the 'ultimate resource' of physical violence to maintain their superior position." (Straus 1980, 87).

[2] This concept is borrowed by Straus from Talcott Parsons. Due to the gendered division of labor, boys are brought up by women, and have problems in attaining a masculine identity. They blame women for this problem and adopt an attitude of aggression towards all women, and wives in particular (Straus 1980).

natal family regard wife abuse as a way of life; therefore they eventually "lose the ability, and even the desire, to break free." (Gayford in Martin 1978, 34).

The psychosocial perspective criticizes the psychodynamic view that violence is pathological. However, though recognizing the existence of sexism, psychosociologists regard violence as an inherent aspect of families in a violent society, as a last resort for family members to advance their interests (Straus and Steinmetz 1974; Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz 1980). They link wife abuse to the social norms and values that permit and expect violence in certain situations and by certain people, leading to categories such as "normal violence" and "secondary violence." (Gelles 1974). These researchers therefore regard wife abuse, child abuse, incest, sibling violence and elder abuse within the same category of 'family/domestic violence' without taking into consideration the differential power contexts within which these different kinds of abuse occur (Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz 1980). Violence therefore comes to be regarded as the *problem* rather than as a *symptom* of the problem -- the existence and exercise of power in marital relations and the role of patriarchal social structures and ideology in supporting and legitimizing these inequalities which make women the primary targets of abuse (Breines and Gordon 1983).

The feminist perspective starts with the premise that in social systems based on patriarchy, the experiences of men are universalized and used in the creation and validation of knowledge (Yllo and Bograd 1988). Such knowledge is incomplete because it does not take into consideration the experiences of women who, given their subordinate position, have greater awareness of the social reality; that is, men's experiences of privilege rest upon

women's experiences of oppression. The incorporation of women's perspectives is therefore essential to have a comprehensive view of reality: " ... women's specific location in patriarchal societies is actually a resource in the construction of new knowledge." (Harding cited in Andersen 1993, 347). This emphasis on women's location in patriarchal societies involves a consideration of the socio-historical, cultural, and political context of the subordination of women.

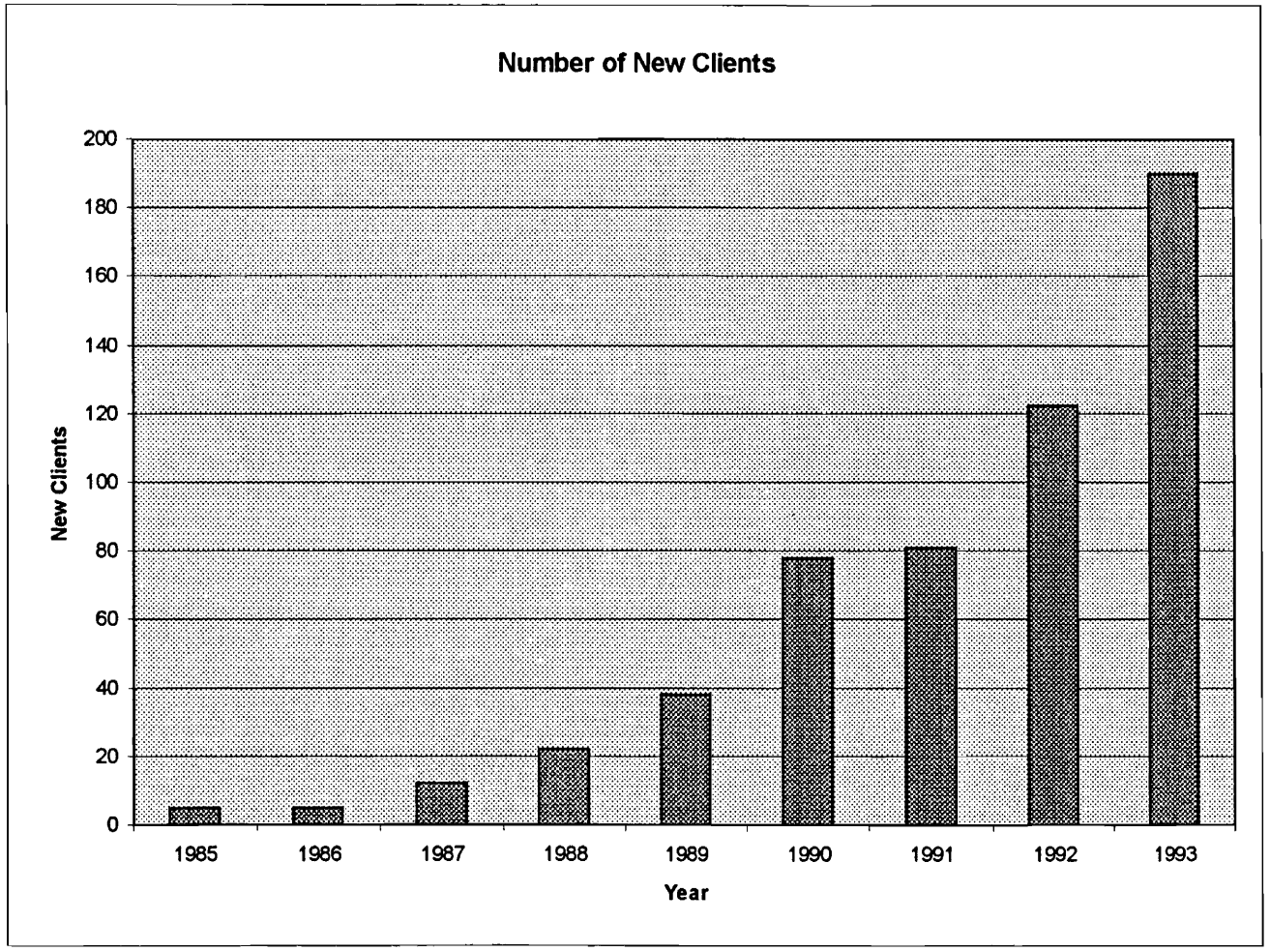
From the feminist perspective, wife abuse is located in patriarchal social structures rather than in individual pathology or in a subculture of violence among certain groups in society (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Yllo and Bograd 1988). Wife abuse is seen as an extension of social processes which work to control women: "The reality of domination at the social level is the most crucial factor contributing to and maintaining wife abuse at the personal level." (Yllo and Bograd 1988, 14). Thus the issue of power and control is central to understanding the various forms of oppression that women encounter, including wife abuse (Breines and Gordon 1983; Yllo and Bograd 1988). This emphasis on the ideological and structural bases of women's oppression helps the feminist perspective go beyond individualist solutions to recommend a comprehensive, multi-faceted effort to end wife abuse.

The feminist perspective, which is based on the experiences of a subordinate group, women, is the most comprehensive of all the perspectives, because it 'starts with a validation of women's experience' (Walker 1990, 83) and analyzes the ideological as well as the structural bases underlying wife abuse. However, the experiences of women are not all the same, since gender relations do not exist in a social vacuum (Jaggar 1988; Smith 1987). An individual's

experiences depends upon his/her position in systems of racial/ethnic relations, class relations, legal status and potentially still other critical power relations and experiences. Thus, the experiences of women in different locations within the multiple systems of power relations must be included to understand the complex ways in which ideological and structural bases of oppression interact to shape experiences.

Why Indian Women?

In this study I explore the experiences of abuse among Indian women in the U.S. from a feminist perspective. I chose to study the experiences of Indian women for several reasons. First, as I have noted, the experiences of women located at different positions within the interlocking systems of racial/ethnic, nationality and class relations must be included if we are to understand the numerous and complex ways in which these multiple systems influence social reality. Due to differences from white, native-born American women in culture, race/ethnicity and legal status, Indian women's experiences of abuse are expected to be different, in many ways, from those of other groups of women in the U.S., and therefore have to be included in research on wife abuse. Second, an analysis of the unique experiences of wife abuse among Indian women is important to understand their special problems and to arrive at solutions, both immediate and long-term. Third, wife abuse in the Indian community has become increasingly visible with more and more women are seeking help, as the records of a support group for South Asian women indicate (Figure 1). The number of clients at support groups for South Asian women is expected to increase because the number of Indian immigrants to the U.S. is rising. In 1991, there were about 750,000 Indians in the U.S.; this number is estimated to



(Manavi, 1993)

Figure 1 Number of New Clients by Year: Manavi, 1993

increase to one million by 2000, and two million by 2050 (Segal 1991). This will have an impact upon the services provided by support groups and shelters as well as welfare agencies, an important factor in the light of the ongoing debates about welfare. Fourth, being an Indian woman myself, I was drawn to this group of women, and the women found it easier to converse with me due to similarities in ethnic background. This study is therefore written not only from a feminist perspective, but also from the perspective of an Indian Hindu woman.

The goal of my study, then, is to examine the ideological and structural bases of Indian women's experiences of abuse. In so doing, I explore the complex ways in which Indian women's ethnicity interacts with their class and legal status to influence their experiences of abuse and the options available to them. Ultimately, then, my study will also be a further step toward understanding the myriad ways in which multiple power relations shape experiences of wife abuse, as well as revealing points of intervention.

Chapter II
Theoretical Foundations

In this chapter, I present the theoretical foundations of my study. I first state the major premises of standpoint theory and socialist feminism and how these are relevant to my study of wife abuse. Next, I present some key concepts in relation to the issues my study addresses -- class, patriarchy, the public and the private, racial/ethnic relations, resistance and legal status. I conclude with a list of the objectives of my study.

A. Theoretical Perspectives

While wife abuse is common to most societies (Figure 2), its forms and manifestations and the options available to abused women are not the same. Even within the same society, differences based on racial/ethnic and class relations, and legal status result in divergent experiences of wife abuse. To understand the role of these social relations, we must begin by acknowledging that gender is socially constructed. In explaining this phenomenon, feminist scholarship has distinguished between sex and gender.

> "Sex refers to the biological identity of the person and is meant to signify the fact that one is either male or female... gender refers to socially learned behaviors and expectations that are associated with the two sexes." (Andersen 1993, 31).

Since gender is socially constructed, it is dynamic. Divergent gender expectations can lead to varied interpretations of experiences and situations. For instance, in a study of Anglo-

In Bangladesh, murder of wives by husbands accounts for 50% of all murders.

In the U.S.A. in 1984, nearly a third of female homicide victims died at the hands of a husband or a partner.

In Papua New Guinea, 67% of rural women and 56% of urban women have been victims of wife abuse.

61% of Mexican housewives are physically abused by their husbands or partners.

In a random sample of Norwegian gynecological patients, 23% of women who had ever lived in a relationship had been physically and/or sexually abused by their partner.

In one study of an Indian village, more than 75% of men from scheduled classes admitted to beating their wives.

In Shanghai, domestic violence is the cause of about 6% of serious injuries and death.

In a country-wide survey on violence in Colombia, one out of five women were beaten by their partners, one out of ten raped, and one out of three had been mentally abused.

One out of every three women who come to hospital emergency rooms in Peru are victims of domestic violence.

India had 999 registered cases of dowry deaths in 1985, 1,319 in 1986 and 1,786 in 1987.

A survey in Santiago, Chile reported that 80% of women have suffered physical, emotional or sexual abuse by a male partner or relative; 63% report that they are currently being abused.

42% of 733 women in Kenya said they were beaten regularly by their husbands.

Source: Freedom From Violence: Women's Strategies from Around the World by Margaret Schuler (ed.) 1992. UNIFEM. 339-343.

Figure 2 Fact Sheet on Domestic Violence

American and Mexican-American battered women, the latter identified fewer types of behavior as abuse, even though both groups of women experienced abusive acts similar in frequency and severity (Torres 1991). Culturally-specific patriarchal traditions and ideologies influence women's understanding of and reaction to abuse. A feminist analysis of such understandings, as they are articulated by women, illuminates the complex ways in which the multiple systems of social relations interact to oppress some groups and privilege others. For example, in a study of police officers, Martin's (1994, 383) in-depth interviews with 106 black and white, men and women revealed that black women officers faced 'a double whammy' on the grounds of race and gender: "The interaction of racism and sexism results in each form of oppression modifying the nature and impact of the other."

Gender is not merely a result of socialization but is also structured in social institutions (Andersen 1993) that maintain and reproduce unequal gender relations such that in similar situations, men and women of varied race/ethnicity, class and legal status have very different experiences. For instance, research indicates that women in male-dominated occupations face numerous barriers, such as the 'glass ceiling' effect which refers to the obstacles women encounter when they attempt to move up organizational hierarchies. Meanwhile, men in traditionally female occupations enjoy structural advantages, which Williams (1992, 263) has termed 'the glass escalator effect':

> "The men and women interviewed [in her research] for the most part believed that men are given fair -- if not preferential -- treatment in hiring and promotion decisions [in traditionally female occupations], are accepted by supervisors and colleagues, and are well-integrated into the work place subculture. Indeed, subtle mechanisms seem to enhance men's position in these professions -- a phenomenon I refer to as the 'glass escalator effect'."

In both instances, the experiences of men and women are different because of the gendered nature of social institutions. The social constructions of gender vary by these other crucial social locations and structures. This in turn leads to different interpretations and experiences of abuse, and it is important to acknowledge and incorporate these differences. "[I]t is not sufficient to seize upon a few superficial likenesses which reassure us [mainstream women] and confirm our own view of the problems we have, and assume that their own problems are precisely the same as ours." (Armstrong, cited in Cervantes and Cervantes, 1993). Such assumptions create 'gaps' in our understanding of abuse -- for instance, for obvious reasons, research on wife abuse among Americans citizens has not focused upon the issue of legal status. Unless the perspectives of immigrant women are considered, they will 'fall through the cracks' in the general body of research on wife abuse, and an understanding of the complex ways in which race/ethnicity, class and gender interact with legal issues in shaping the experiences of all women would be compromised. In the same vein, it would be incorrect to group all immigrant women together apriori. Immigrant groups in the U.S. have different experiences, based on the group's race/ethnicity, the history of its immigration to the U.S., its cultural traditions and the historical experience of its 'home country'[1] It is therefore important to include the experiences of women located in different positions within the social system in the U.S.; in this study I examine wife abuse among Indians in the United States.

[1] Immigrants from colonized countries often have a better knowledge of English than immigrants from other nations, and this influences their experiences in the U.S. Of course, class status plays an important role in this respect.

Standpoint Theory

The starting point of research that studies wife abuse "in its own right" is the perspective of wives themselves.

> "Typically, researchers have employed social, legal, conceptual and methodological perspectives in deciding what constitutes wife abuse... Feminist research, however, seeks to examine women's experiences from their own perspectives. Thus, for research [on violence against women] to be feminist, it must have as its paramount purpose the exploration of women's own labels, thoughts, and beliefs about the experience of violence." (McHugh 1993, 58).

This study uses feminist standpoint theory[2] -- which emphasizes the inclusion of observed experiences of people located at different points within the social system -- to explore the viewpoints of different groups of Indian women in the U.S. on the issue of wife abuse, thereby broadening our understanding of the ways in which race/ethnicity and class intersect with gender relations to reproduce wife abuse. The emphasis on the existence of different perspectives based on one's location has been a theoretical premise in past studies as well. For example, in their study of the class system among whites in the southern part of the U.S., Davis, Gardner and Gardner (1941, 61) discovered that "... the social perspective [on the local social class hierarchy] varied with the social position of the individual."

Standpoint theory states that an individual's location within the hierarchical social system shapes his/her perception of social relations. Not all viewpoints are equally comprehensive, since, within any hierarchical relation, the structures of oppression are often

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[2] While many theorists refer to standpoint epistemology, Grant (1993, 100) advocates the label 'standpoint *theory*' rather than 'standpoint *epistemology*' for several reasons; first, if feminism seeks to present a view of knowledge distinct from the Enlightenment view, it should avoid starting with epistemology, which, according to Grant, is a 'rationalist discourse'. Second, epistemology cannot be grounded in experience because experience is 'contaminated' with ideology. Third, "a purely experiential epistemology does not tell us *which* aspects of the lives of women count as epistemologically important."

invisible to the privileged, but form an important part of the experiences of the oppressed: "... systems of privilege are least visible to those who benefit the most from them and who, at the same time, control the resources that define dominant belief systems." (Andersen 1993, 347) For instance, the dominant group, for whom the existing social organization is beneficial, has an interpretation of reality that does not conflict with that system of organization. Though their existence depends upon the labor of the oppressed, this labor is for the most part invisible, as it is embedded within the taken-for-granted social organization. Therefore, they are either unaware of the suffering of the subordinate group/s, or if aware, regard it as justified or inevitable. Those with less power, who suffer from oppression daily, are more aware of the perspectives of both the oppressors and the oppressed as they experience both. Their survival mandates that they learn and understand the culture, ideology and institutions of the dominant group(s). Therefore, their perspective of social reality is more comprehensive (Jaggar 1988).

The same is true for race relations and gender relations (Andersen 1993). In patriarchal social relations, the experiences of men are universalized and used in the creation and validation of knowledge (Yllo and Bograd 1988). Such knowledge is incomplete because it does not include the experiences of women. Women's perspectives must therefore be incorporated to better comprehend reality. " ... women's specific location in patriarchal societies is actually a resource in the construction of new knowledge." (Harding cited in Andersen 1993, 347).

However, women's perspectives are not all the same (Jaggar 1988; Smith 1987). An individual's perspective depends upon his/her position in the interlocking systems of

racial/ethnic and class relations, and legal status, among others. In this study, I examine the standpoints of Indian women on the issue of wife abuse and illustrate some of the ways in which the interlocking systems of racial/ethnic relations, class relations and legal status influence the experience of, and resistance to abuse on the part of Indian women in the U.S.

Socialist Feminist Theory

Socialist feminism emerged, in part, as a response to the gender-blindness of Marxism. Starting with women's standpoint, it seeks to place gender at the center of Marxist analysis to reveal the interconnections between capitalism and patriarchy (Jaggar 1988). For the purposes of this study, I use the socialist feminist concept of class as a gendered and racialized process to examine the experiences of wife abuse among Indian immigrant women.

The concept of class in sociology has typically taken one of two major approaches -- The Weberian and the Marxist. The Weberian concept measures class in terms of the individual's income, wealth and occupation. The Marxist perspective views class as relations between conflicting groups with mutually exclusive interests, who are identified according to their relationship to the means of production. Feminists have critiqued both these models for being gender-blind, that is, for their assumption that men's experiences, from which the concepts are derived, are the 'norm', and for their resulting inadequacy when applied to women's experiences. The Weberian definition of class does not take into account women's unpaid labor or the change in their income and standard of living after divorce, or how either of these are related to men. Marxist feminism attempts to include housework by highlighting the importance of its reproductive tasks (the reproduction of the labor force, and of class relations)

to capitalism. However, the question of why it is *women* who are predominantly involved in unpaid labor remains unanswered (Acker 1988; Andersen 1993; Hartmann, in Jaggar and Rothenberg 1993). Psychoanalytic and radical feminist attempts to answer this question have been characterized as universalistic -- psychoanalytic feminism attributes the predominance of women in unpaid labor to the "ways in which men's and women's gender identities and behavioral repertoires are constructed deep in the unconscious"; radical feminism attributes it to patriarchy, but regards patriarchy as a decontextualized phenomenon (Tong 1989, 174)

In response to the perceived inadequacies of Marxist, radical and psychoanalytic feminisms, socialist feminism focuses on both patriarchy and capitalism. Two general strands of socialist feminism have emerged to describe the relationship between these two oppressive systems. The dual systems theory regards patriarchy and capitalism as two autonomous forms of exploitation that intersect to oppress women in particular ways. Still, this approach views class as gender-neutral (Acker 1988; Tong 1989). Men's experiences are taken as the norm while women's experiences are analyzed on the basis of gender. Acker (1988, 475) has noted that theories that regard capitalism and patriarchy as autonomous forms of oppression "ultimately leave the conventional analysis of class unaltered by locating the roots of women's oppression outside of class structure."

Unified systems theory regards capitalism and patriarchy as inextricably linked: "Class and gender structures are so intertwined that neither one actually precedes the other." (Tong 1989, 185). Gender is seen as integral to all analyses rather than viewed as a system that

intersects with other social systems at certain points Acker (1988). This approach eliminates the dichotomy between the concept of 'gendered' and 'gender-neutral' systems.

> "By asserting that gender is part of the institutional and organizational infrastructure of capitalist society, this claim challenges those who ascribe gender-neutrality to economic processes and organization, arguing instead that gender-neutrality is a guise for privileging male experience. To adopt a gendered view of the world is thus to acknowledge that there is no vantage point outside gender relations from which the world can be understood." (Wharton 1991, 382).

This view therefore does not see class as 'gender-neutral' but rather, as gendered and racialized. Thus, race/ethnicity, class and gender form multiple forms of oppression that shape women's experiences according to women's location in these systems. In the present study, I have adopted the understanding of class as a process that is gendered and racialized, in examining the experiences of abused Indian women in the U.S.

At this point, I would like to define some of the key concepts used in this study, and how they relate to my research.

B. Key Concepts

Class

As mentioned above, in this study I regard class as a gendered and racialized process that shapes women's experiences in the family as well the 'market'. Some research on abused women in the U.S. establishes a correlation between work status, income levels and wife abuse. For instance, Schwartz (1990) indicates that women who are employed outside the home are less likely to be abused, especially if their husbands are also employed. However, most such studies emphasize on violence as the problem, rather than a symptom of the problem: the

unequal distribution of power within the patriarchal marital relationship. This misplaced emphasis renders invisible the various manifestations of abuse, and the occurrence of these forms of abuse across income levels.

Moreover, women's access to economic resources depends to a large extent upon the amount of control exercised over them by the husband, rather than solely by whether they are gainfully employed or not. Thus, while women's class status is ostensibly determined by that of their fathers/husbands, women's experience of class, in terms of access to educational and economic resources, as well as other 'lifestyle' factors, often differs from that of the male members of the family. Further, it is not only within the context of the family, but also of the 'market' that gender, race/ethnicity, class (McGuire and Reskin 1993; Reskin 1993) and legal status intersect to shape all women's experiences. In the section on class, therefore, I examine the numerous ways in which Indian women's gender, race/ethnicity, class and legal status intersect to shape their experiences of abuse and the options available to them.

Patriarchal Ideology

Before engaging in the study of standpoints on abuse, it would be helpful to examine patriarchy within Indian society because it shapes norms about gender roles and relations, and thereby has an influence on the interpretations of wife abuse. Patriarchy can be defined as the unequal relations of power between men and women in which men dominate women, and that are institutionalized by society and transmitted to succeeding generations through socialization (Andersen 1993).

In conceptualizing patriarchy, this study follows the socialist feminist conception of patriarchy as both an ideology and a structure. While structure refers to patterns of norms and behavior constituting social institutions, ideology is the belief system used to justify and thereby maintain the existing unequal relationship[3]. This ideology is propounded by social institutions and digressions are met with sanctions. Within the social institution of the patriarchal family, the patriarchal ideology shaping existing gender relations is apparent. Thus,

> "[The] willingness to use force is coupled with a set of beliefs and standards regarding the appropriate hierarchical relationship between men and women in the family and the rightful authority of husbands over wives." (Dobash and Dobash 1979, 23).

The historic shift from the extended to the nuclear family, the division between public and domestic spheres and the allocation of specialized gender roles, and the notion of the wife as the legal and moral property of her husband all relate to the occurrence of wife abuse (Yllo and Bograd, 1988).

Patriarchal gender relations exist in Indian joint/extended families[4]. With the exception of some matrilineal communities in the north-eastern and south-western regions of India, most Indian families - nuclear and extended - have a male head who commands respect and makes all important decisions in the family (Desai and

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[3] However, while structure and ideology are reinforcing, they can also be contradictory. Thus, if an abused woman feels that the abusive marital relationship has an adverse impact on her children, she faces a contradiction in her role as a 'good wife' and a 'good mother'.

[4] An Indian joint family may be defined as "... a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked in one kitchen, who hold property in common, participate in common family worship, and are related to one another as some particular type of kindred." (Karve cited in Desai and Krishnaraj 1987, 186).

Krishnaraj 1987). According to Hindu tradition[5], men's honor depends upon the controlled sexuality of the women in their family; therefore, to protect this honor, men exercise control over every aspect of women's lives: girls are controlled by their fathers and brothers, wives by their husbands, and widows by their sons (Das in Jain, 1975, Minturn 1993; Narasimhan 1990). In this dominant discourse, as Wadley (in Ghadially 1988, 31) points out, "The ideal women are those who do not strive to break the bonds of control."

Women are viewed largely in their relations to men; the ideal Hindu wife (at least as portrayed in ancient male written sacred texts such as the Ramayana) is the one who worships her husband as a god and is ever-willing to efface her identity and even sacrifice her life in order to ensure his well-being (Kishwar and Vanita 1984, Leslie 1989; Mies 1986). Mythology abounds with examples of devoted wives who are held up as the ideal to which every Hindu woman should strive (Mies 1986, Minturn 1993; Narasimhan 1990). The ultimate expression of a woman's devotion to her husband has been **sati** - the burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband.

As stated earlier, gender is constructed socially, and gender norms and expectations are transmitted through socialization processes. In terms of ideology within the Hindu tradition, women are expected to live under male control. The women of mythology - the Goddess in her numerous forms - are regarded as Nature and as the repository of **Shakti** [Cosmic

[5] Due to differences in cultural and religious tradition among Hindus and other religious communities in India, as well as differences in laws dealing with marriage, separation/divorce, inheritance among various religious groups, I shall examine the experiences of Hindu, Sikh and Jain women only. I have included Sikh and Jain women in my study due to the high rate of inter-marriage between Hindus and these communities.

Energy/Power] while men are equated with Culture. However, the combination of unbounded Nature and Power is considered dangerous. Thus male control of female power is essential, in order that the power be harnessed beneficially.

> "The benevolent goddesses in the Hindu pantheon are those who are properly married and who have transferred control of their sexuality (Power/Nature) to their husbands." (Wadley in Ghadially 1988, 28).

Moreover, social norms dictate that a woman should not criticize her husband, or even bear a grudge if he beats her (Leslie 1989, Narasimhan 1990). The *ideal* wife, according to scripture,

> "... should look upon even the ill treatment as an opportunity given to her to purge herself of her sins, if not in this life, then those of a previous birth..." (Narasimhan 1990, 32).

Wife abuse is therefore regarded by Hindu sacred texts as an opportunity for the woman to repent for her sins.

However, not all role models in Hindu tradition are 'good wives and mothers' alone. There exists an opposing group of images of **viranganaas** (female warriors), strong women who, at various points during colonial rule, fought for self-determination in their kingdom or as part of the larger Indian National Movement. However, the colonial context within which the reclaiming of 'Indian' tradition took place dictated which aspects of tradition would be upheld as the norm.

> "A persistent theme of Indian nationalism has been the re-processing of the image of the Indian woman and her role in the family based on models of Indian womanhood from the distant glorious past [a past re-created primarily by European historians]. The woman becomes a metaphor for the purity, the chastity, and the sanctity of the Ancient Spirit that is India." (Bhattacharjee 1992, 30).

The creation of 'womanhood' for Indian women is not confined to India, but is continued in the United States. Indians in the U.S. attempt to adhere to their cultural traditions, while at the same time participating in mainstream American life. The location of the preservation of 'Indian culture' is the family -- the private 'feminine' sphere, while the site for 'integration' is the economy -- the masculine sphere. Thus, even in the U.S., Indian 'womanhood' is recreated as emblematic of the 'spirit' of India -- chastity, purity, nurturance. The responsibility for 'continuing' tradition, and transmitting Indian 'values' to the succeeding generation falls on the backs of women. Since womanhood is equated with motherhood, "anything that threatens to dilute this model of Indian womanhood constitutes a betrayal of all that it stands for: nation, religion, God, the Spirit of India, culture, tradition, family." (Bhattacharjee 1992, 31).

This construction of the ideal Indian Woman, and the scriptural emphasis on toleration of wife abuse is the basis of public discourses on wife abuse which in turn shape perceptions of abuse. It is in this context that Indian women's experiences of abuse have to be understood. In the section on understanding abuse, I examine the patriarchal context of abuse and the manner in which dominant discourses render invisible the numerous forms of abuse that are an important part of abused women's experiences. I conclude that the inclusion of these various manifestation of abuse into the public discourse is an essential prerequisite for the empowerment of women.

The Public and the Private Spheres

The belief in the "inviolable nature of the family" compounds the problem of wife abuse in the U.S. and elsewhere (Dobash and Dobash 1979). Among many immigrant communities in the U.S., there is a common belief that

> "... the close-knit nature of the family precludes the possibility of domestic violence, or that the family should resolve such problems privately without outside interference." (Jang, Lee and Morello-Frosch 1990, 3).

Interference by the dominant culture is particularly resented, and therefore the burden of maintaining the sanctity of family relations is greater for immigrant women than for native-born American women. While the issue of privacy is important in the U.S., in recent years, the line of differentiation between the public and the private has been crossed to a certain extent, to draw public attention to family problems (Andersen 1993). However, the Indian community in the U.S. is still characterized by a strict division between the private and the public sphere. Unlike their counterparts in the dominant racial group, Indian, and indeed all women of color, face the public at two levels: their own racial/ethnic community, and the dominant racial group. The Indian community is the U.S. adheres to a rather rigid delineation between the private and the public sphere, thereby making it difficult for abused women to discuss their problems with members of the Indian and the dominant community.

Race Relations

The fact that Indians are a racial/ethnic minority in the U.S. adds to the barriers that women face. In this context, it is important first to talk about the manner in which the categories of race/ethnicity are created. I deliberately use the terms *race/ethnicity* because,

Indians are of Caucasian descent and thus 'white'; therefore, they differ from whites in the U.S. on grounds of ethnicity. However, racial categories are constructed in such a manner that Indians and indeed all South Asians, in the U.S. are identified neither as 'white' nor as 'black'; instead, they are classified with other Asians -- Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese -- even though they share neither racial nor ethnic characteristics with this group. In Britain, on the other hand, Indians are often identified as blacks (Westwood 1984). Thus, "for all practical social purposes 'race' is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth" (UNESCO document, cited in Cockburn 1991, 173).

By virtue of their race/ethnicity, Indian immigrants to the U.S. are subordinate to the dominant group and strive both to 'preserve' their cultural heritage and 'integrate' with the mainstream (white) American life. In this process, the label of 'model minority' bestowed upon Indians and other Asians plays an important part. To prove its 'model-ness' to the dominant group, the Indian community in the U.S. attempts to uphold an image of a hard-working, prosperous community maintaining its culture and 'family values'. Consequently, anything that detracts from this image is censured. Abused Indian women therefore face additional barriers in approaching official support systems for help. However, the label of 'model minority' does privilege Indian women relative to other minorities, while subordinating them to the dominant whites. Moreover, despite all its 'model-ness' the Indian community is still a racial/ethnic minority. Abused Indian women therefore face numerous problems when they approach mainstream support services: racism, lack of understanding due to cultural differences, problems of language, etc. The absence of traditional community networks - consisting of natal

kin - increases the isolation associated with abuse, and affects the experiences of Indian women in the U.S. In the section on the private and the public spheres, I examine the major obstacles faced by abused Indian women in seeking help and the role that the community can play to assist abused women.

Resistance

Resistance refers to efforts undertaken to deal with oppression on a day-to-day level. It involves acting in ways that promote survival, rather than attempt to initiate structural changes. Resistance usually does not involve direct confrontation and hence can often be missed in studies on oppressed groups, unless their reaction to oppression is included in analysis. For instance, research in the U.S. indicates that

> "The women who enter shelters are most frequently traditional women who have maintained conjugal relationships over long periods despite violence and pain." (Pagelow 1981, 156).

Patriarchy characterizes gender relations within the families of the women who approach support groups/shelters for assistance. It is generally the case that abused women are controlled by their husband and abide by the rules set by him; they may adopt ways of accommodation or negotiation to resist abuse within the family, seeking outside help only when they feel that the situation is dangerous for them, or when they are deserted by their husband and have no other source of assistance. This does not mean that women are to blame for their abuse. Rather, cultures create gender expectations which are transmitted through socialization. But perhaps even more importantly, social structures also create concrete barriers which hinder women from seeking help. For instance, a woman may realize that she will suffer more

financially (through loss of economic resources), physically (the husband may respond with greater violence), and in various other ways, including her children being hurt, or taken away, if she seeks help and may therefore choose not do so.

At the same time, these women are not passive "victims". Faced with ideological and structural constraints that prevent them from seeking help, these women may have adopted ways of resisting oppression while remaining within an abusive relationship. In this way, they may fulfill their "practical gender needs", that is, those needs that arise out of immediate necessity and involve survival strategies. Resistance is an important part of, and is shaped by, interpretations of wife abuse. Therefore, in this study, I will examine the various forms of resistance adopted by abused Indian women.

Legal Status

The issue of legal status has not been discussed by Socialist Feminism. However, I have included this factor in my study because legal status has a major impact on the experiences of abused Indian women. The legal status of immigrants in the U.S. influences their experience[6]. In turn, this experience is also gendered so that Indian women are further oppressed by this status in ways Indian men are not. For example, many Indian men in the U.S. return to India to marry a woman of their parents' choice. If the husband is on a student visa (F-1) or has a work permit (H-1), the wife comes to the U.S. as a dependent (F-2 or H-2), and cannot seek employment on her own. If the husband has a permanent visa (green card),

[6] Immigrant women in the U.S. can have various legal statuses; they can be undocumented, they can have dependent or provisional visas, they can have permanent visas, or they can be citizens, first or second generation. The nature of their legal status shapes their experiences. In this study I examine the experiences of documented, first generation immigrant Indian women with various legal statuses.

the wife can either wait in India to get a permanent visa, a process which takes anywhere between two to three years, or come to the U.S. on a tourist visa and apply for a permanent visa here. The application has to be made within two years of marriage; if not, the permanent visa is conditional and is valid only for two years. After that period, an application must be made to have the condition removed. At this point the couple has to apply together and convince the Immigration and Naturalization Services (I.N.S.) that the marriage is valid. If the couple is divorced, or the husband refuses to cooperate, the wife has to make an application by herself. Under these circumstances, she can get a permanent visa if she can show that originally the marriage was in good faith, but fell apart; or that her deportation will cause extreme hardship; or that she was abused by her husband (Canter and Siegel 1992). However, many Indian women are not aware of the fact that they can apply for a permanent visa on their own. Moreover, it is often difficult for women to prove that they were abused, since it involves certification by doctors and psychiatrists, among others (support group center counselor, personal communication). Therefore, it is easy for abusive husbands to use the threat of non-cooperation in the permanent visa process to oppress their wives and ensure that the latter do not seek help from public agencies. Moreover, the majority of recently arrived Indian women are unaware of the laws against wife abuse in the U.S. or the various services available to abuse victims. In the section on legal status, I examine the impact of immigration regulations on the experiences of women, and offer suggestions for change.

C. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of my study is to contribute to our understanding of the complex ways in which race/ethnicity, class and gender interact to shape the experiences of women by examining the experiences of one group of women -- Indian women in the U.S. I also examine their strategies of accommodation, negotiation and resistance to abuse. I therefore seek to:

1) Explore and describe the definitions of abuse as narrated by Indian women. On the basis of these definitions, I construct second-level generalizations and examine the importance of changing the public discourse on wife abuse to facilitate empowerment (*Chapter 4*).

2) Examine how the gendered and racialized class process shapes the experiences of Indian women within the family and the 'market' (*Chapter 5*).

3) Examine the impact of legal status on the experiences of abused Indian women (*Chapter 6*).

4) Study how norms (based on the patriarchal ideology) about the separation of the private and the public spheres shape the experiences of abused Indian women. I shall examine the impact of both levels of the 'public' -- the Indian community as well as the racial majority (*Chapter 7*).

5) Discover the "practical gender interests" of women who experience and/or define abusive relationships and examine the ways in which these women offer means of resistance that fulfill their 'practical gender needs'[7], while remaining within that relationship (*Chapter 8*).

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[7] "Practical gender needs are the needs women identify in their socially accepted roles in society. Practical gender needs do not challenge the gender divisions of labor or women's subordinate positions in society, although rising out of them. Practical gender needs are a response to immediate perceived necessity, identified within a specific context." (Moser 1993, 40).

Chapter III
Methodology

Sample

In this study, I interviewed 'clients' of support groups -- women who have perceived their situation to be abusive, and have sought help from support groups for South Asian women -- to obtain information about their experiences of abuse. I also sought out counselors at and/or members of support groups for South Asian women to learn about the larger picture, that is, the extent and nature of wife abuse in the Indian communities in which these support groups were situated. In addition, I interviewed a small but varied cross-section of married Indian Hindu, Jain and Sikh women living in a city in the eastern region of the U.S. to learn more about their understanding of wife abuse as well as the overall position of Indian women in families in the U.S.[1] My sample consists of primarily Hindu women from India, though interviews with two Jain and Sikh women were also included because of the high level of intermarriage between these groups and Hindus. Due to low rates of intermarriage between Hindus and other religious groups such as Muslims and Christians, available respondents from these groups were excluded from this study. In this study, I have also included information from interviews with two male members of support groups for South Asian women; I talked with them to see their perspective as male members of feminist organizations.

[1] Hitherto, abused women will be referred to as 'clients'; personnel at support groups as 'personnel'; and the general cross-section of Indian women as 'married Indian women'.

Demographics of the Sample

The average age of my respondents is 40 years, ranging from 27 years to 54 years of age. In terms of region of origin, six respondents are from the northern part of India, nine from the eastern, seven from the western and eight from the southern part of India. All the informants have at least a college degree, and do a wide range of work. This sample consist of housewives, lawyers, scientists, teachers, professors, managers, students, engineers and doctors. All the respondents in this study are first generation legal immigrants. Of the 30 respondents included in this study, 26 have a permanent visa or are citizens of the U.S.

Sampling Method

In this study I have used various methods to get in touch with my informants. The personnel and clients of support groups were contacted through snowball sampling, which "relies on previously identified group members to identify other group members of the population." (Henry 1990, pp. 21). Since the population from which part of my sample -- abused women who approach South Asian support groups, and personnel at support groups -- had to be drawn was a special population, there were no comprehensive listings available from which I could identify potential respondents at random. I contacted the members of support groups personally, during the monthly meetings of these groups. I attended several meetings of two support groups over a period of six months. At the first meetings, I introduced myself and talked about my research. At subsequent meetings, I approached the personnel at support groups and requested to talk with them. All the people I approached agreed to an interview, and eleven personnel, including two men, were interviewed, all for at least one hour. The

counselors helped me get in touch with the clients. The nature and purpose of my research was conveyed to the clients through newsletters, and personally, by the counselors. Five clients volunteered to be interviewed. However, one of the clients was a Muslim, and her interview was excluded from analysis, since this study deals only with Hindu, Jain and Sikh women. Moreover, one member of the support group was also a client, and her experiences were included among those of the clients, rather than the personnel of support groups. Thus, a total of six clients of support groups were interviewed, and the information provided by five was used in the present analysis.

To obtain the final group of a varied cross-section of married Indian women, I contacted the head of the local Indian association and obtained a list of telephone numbers of the members of the association. I selected potential informants randomly from the list, and their identity was kept confidential from the head of the association. Twenty-five women were contacted, and fourteen of them agreed to be interviewed.

Interview Technique

As mentioned in the previous chapter, my study seeks to illustrate the complex ways in which the interlocking systems of race/ethnicity, class relations and legal status intersect to shape the experiences of women. I base my study on feminist standpoint theory which emphasizes the inclusion of the observed experiences of women located in different positions within hierarchical social systems to arrive at a comprehensive view of reality. I attempt to analyze women's understanding of abuse through extensive interviews because surveys and completely structured interviews limit the scope of the responses and may lead to biased

results. Moreover, surveys do not allow for discussion and clarification of emergent themes and analytical categories. Semi-structured interviews permitted me to ask detailed questions based on the respondents' answers, and thereby gather more information. The format of the semi-structured interview facilitated a discussion between two of my informants (who chose to be interviewed together) as they attempted to arrive at an understanding of abuse based on their similar and dissimilar experiences. In addition, the conversational style of semi-structured interviews helped me establish a rapport with my respondents which was essential, given the sensitive nature of my research topic. As a result, I was able to record the respondents' experiences in their own voices. In my thesis I have quoted my respondents extensively. I seek to validate the experiences of women of one ethnic group -- Indian women in the U.S. -- from their own standpoint, in their own words, from their own 'frame of reference', because: "Oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group." (Collins 1991, xiii).

The format of semi-structured interviews that I used facilitated conversations between my respondents and myself, and they were encouraged to talk about all experiences which they felt were relevant to the questions asked. The duration of interviews ranged from 45 minutes to a little over four hours for a total of 40 hours of interviews. Respondents and I conversed in a mixture of English and one of the two Indian languages I have knowledge of. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the informants. Interviews were held at the homes of informants, in libraries, motels, parking lots, in restaurants, and while traveling in cars.

However, I do not believe that these unconventional locations affected the quality of the interviews. Rather, since these locations were chosen by the informants, they felt more at ease, and were able to interact in a relaxed manner.

Reporting Conventions

I have quoted extensively from my respondents' narratives in order to present their experiences 'in their own voices'. However, all names have been changed to ensure confidentiality. In addition names have been scrambled, so that each respondent has been assigned more than one name, and several respondents share the same name. Almost every respondent has been quoted in this study.

Chapter IV
Understanding Abuse

Wife abuse persists in almost all societies and cultures, and researchers often subsume wife abuse under the gender-neutral term "family violence": wife abuse is seen as one dimension of conflict in families, along with "husband battering", sibling violence, elder abuse and child abuse (Steinmetz 1977). Incorporating wife abuse under the generic term "family violence" ignores the gendered context of wife abuse -- the gender-based differential access to power evident not only within the heterosexual relationship, but in society as a whole.

> "Men as a class wield power over women... Although important social class and race differences exist among men, all men can potentially use violence as a powerful means of subordinating women." (Yllo and Bograd 1988, 14).

The interests of men as a dominant group are manifest in dominant social institutions and ideologies, which reach beyond any individual, woman or man. These, in turn, shape the meanings attached to all human experiences, including wife abuse. The importance of naming experiences and of investing them with meaning cannot be underestimated; such investiture helps us understand the experience and choose a course of action. However, the 'meaning' attached to an experience or interaction varies by individuals and societies, and over time.

> "What something means to individuals is dependent on the discourses available to them. For example, being hit by a spouse is experienced differently if it is thought of within the discourse of 'normal marriage', 'husband's rights', or 'wife battering'. If a woman sees male violence as 'normal' or 'husband's right', then she is unlikely to see it as 'wife battering', an illegitimate use of power that should not be tolerated. Experience is thus open to contradictory interpretations governed by social interests rather than objective truth." (Richardson 1994, 518).

Importantly, individuals and societies also vary in terms of their power and subsequent ability to promote their discourse. Within the context of a patriarchal society, the available discourses have been shaped by the experiences of men, and these discourses determine which kinds of interactions can be regarded as social problems. Thus, wife abuse was not considered a social problem until about 20 years ago, when feminists made it visible by introducing the term 'battered woman.' This term is now used frequently, but "even if a name exists and is known, the way it is understood can vary greatly" (Kelly 1988, 115). Thus, wife abuse is often seen only as physical abuse. The complex ways in which women experience abuse and define their experiences is usually ignored. However, an understanding of abuse that is based on the construction of gender is extremely important, because it determines women's reaction (or lack thereof) to the abuse. Such an understanding starts by looking at women's experiences of abuse, (though the women may not label it as such) to identify common threads, and to subsequently arrive at second-level generalizations which give us further insight into the causes of and solutions to abuse.

In this study I consider abuse to be a problem arising out of the unequal distribution of power in heterosexual relationships. The patriarchal structures of society provide men with greater access to power, and often this power is expressed through violence against women, of which wife abuse is one aspect (Kurz 1989; Yllo and Bograd 1988). Wife abuse is therefore not just about violence, but primarily about control. Issues of control are an aspect of every relationship between unequals, including marriage; the question that arises, then, is when can a woman's experience be called abuse? Based on my data, as I'll demonstrate, abuse occurs

when a husband's manifestation of power becomes a consistent pattern, and there is little or no scope for negotiation or dialogue. Neena[1], a counselor, emphasized on the role of power:

> "[Wife abuse] is a form of violence that, under patriarchal structures, men use to control women... Wife abuse is just one part of the larger rubric of violence against women. It is a form of control. In that sense, power and control hits it right in the head."

This expression of power can and does occur in any sphere of marital relations -- economic, sexual, emotional -- and it may take the form of physical violence and/or emotional abuse: these different forms and expressions of abuse can be revealed only by analyzing the narratives of women in different positions within the interlocking systems of race/ethnicity, class and gender. For instance, on one end of the spectrum, Rekha's husband controlled every aspect of life, even to the extent of not letting her keep in touch with her parents. Rekha was physically abused, did not have access to any money, and for the first couple of years in the U.S. with her husband, did not step out of the house by herself. Anita, on the other hand, had a high-paying job, but had no access to her income. All decisions were made by her husband. Indira, also gainfully employed, had control over her money, and in fact, was primarily responsible for all household decisions. However, she had to face a lot of verbal abuse from her husband, who threatened to make trouble for her at her workplace if she left him:

> "He started threatening me that he'll make sure that within a week of my leaving the house, I'd lose my job."

In the above situations, the women experienced different kinds of abuse -- physical and emotional. However, as these above experiences reveal, the common factor for all of them

[1] To ensure confidentiality, I have changed the names of all the respondents. Further, I have used the false names interchangeably among respondents.

was the gendered power differential of their marital relationship, wherein they lacked control over things which had a direct impact on their lives, including their physical beings, their work, their money and their relationships with others.

In the interviews, many women recalled their husband's attempt to control every aspect of their life. Manjari saw a similarity between her father-in-law and her husband in this respect.

> "He is a replica of his father. He wants control, he wants to have everything under his command. Things should go exactly as he wants... His father was stricter... His [husband's] sister could never stand near a window, and his mother could never step out of the house."

It would be incorrect, on seeing the on seeing the similarities between Manjari's father-in-law and husband, to conclude that her husband "learned" his desire to control his wife, because control over women, whatever form it may take, is not seen as abusive or exceptional. Rather, control is regarded as 'normal' family behavior; many of the women I interviewed talked about the control they had experienced as girls.

Deepika also talked about her husband's desire to control her life:

> "[Our home] was not like a disaster zone or something where there is constant fighting and screaming. But there was a tension and I wasn't very happy. As far as he was concerned, he was happy as long as I did whatever he wanted me to do."

Therefore, it is only when the issue of power is addressed that a meaningful understanding of abuse will evolve that takes into consideration not just physical abuse, but other abusive expressions of power within the heterosexual marital relationship. In order to identify the numerous forms of abuse, then, it is important to 'listen to women's voices' and analyze women's narratives. Further, to avoid essentializing the experiences of one group of women (for instance, white working class women in the U.S.), we have to 'listen' to women

occupying different positions in the hierarchies of race/ethnicity, class and legal status systems. However, just the acknowledgment that abuse takes various forms is not sufficient. It is important, using C. Wright Mills' (1959, 8) definition of a social issue, to move beyond regarding wife abuse as a personal trouble to analyzing it as a social issue.

> "Troubles occur within... the range of [the individual's] relations with other; they have to do with his [her] self and with those limited areas of social life of which he [she] is directly aware. Accordingly, the *statement* and the *resolution* of troubles properly lie within the individual as a biographical entity and within the scope of his [her] immediate milieu... A trouble is a private matter...
> Issues have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of his [her] inner life... An issue is a public matter...[and] often involves a crisis in institutional arrangements." [emphasis added].

Thus, social issues originate in particular socio-historic contexts and are manifested in personal troubles. Andersen (1993, 6) uses Mills' concepts to analyze wife beating.

> "Common patterns in the experiences of battered wives reveal that wife beating is more than just a private matter. It has its origins in complex social institutions that define women's place as in the home, as subordinate to their husbands, and as dependent on men. In this sense, wife beating is both a personal trouble and a public issue."

The recognition of the role of unequal marital relationships in wife abuse helps us move beyond attributing abuse to the pathology of individuals/families to analyzing the role of patriarchal social structures in maintaining abuse. The inclusion of this recognition into the public discourse on wife abuse will help women name their experiences, and attribute abuse to the unequal power relations in their marriage, rather than to the pathology of their husband: an important step towards empowerment.

In the next section, then, I look at the stereotypes about abuse and abusers and how these shape women's experiences. Second, I examine the narratives of women and categorize

the different forms of abuse and the common thread/s in the narratives. Third, I look at the process of empowerment and the solutions to end abuse.

Beyond stereotypes

The term wife abuse, though commonly used in literature on family violence, is typically applied uncritically to the use of physical violence alone, and the various forms of abuse experienced by women are pigeon-holed into this category. Further, these uncritical definitions do not analyze the patriarchal context of abuse; instead they reinforce the stereotype of 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' abuse.

> "... I feel that rather than considering wife abuse to be a single phenomenon with a continuum of levels of severity ranging from a slap to a brutal beating there may be two distinct phenomena: the Saturday night brawl and the chronic battered syndrome.
>
> The Saturday night brawl is characterized by reciprocating, escalating violence usually confined to the less severe levels of physical violence. During such a brawl... either partner may become victim. It is often the interaction in which women note that they 'deserved it' or 'asked for it'...
>
> Women who are victims of a chronic battered syndrome do not provoke, do not escalate, and usually do not know when the attack might occur. The attacks, which are brutal and life threatening, start early in marriage..." (Steinmetz 1977, xviii).

By rejecting the continuum of abuse, Steinmetz ignores the fact that the same act can have different meanings for different individuals. Moreover, the emphasis on the 'amount' of violence indicates that it is the violence that is seen as the problem, rather than the underlying gendered differential of power. Further, her emphasis that 'battered women' do not 'provoke' or 'escalate' the violence, implicitly places blame for the abuse on women who supposedly 'provoke' the abuser or 'retaliate' against the abuse. In some studies, researchers make distinctions between forms of physical abuse based not only on the amount of physical aggression, but also on the ethnicity of the individuals involved.

> "Care must be exercised to distinguish between wife beating and wife battery... In many non-industrial societies, husbands beat their wives... as a 'physical reprimand'. Where such behavior is customary, it is viewed as unremarkable. The distinction between wife-beating and wife battery is necessary to accommodate data from these societies, where men who beat their wives are not 'abnormal' or deviant. Their conduct is culturally expected. The women in these societies are not meek and unaccepting. They are compelled to tolerate such treatment, but would decidedly prefer husbands who do not beat them... Wife battering, on the other hand, is something extraordinary, possibly resulting in severe injury, incapacity or even death. In most instances, such behavior is not viewed as usual or acceptable by members of the society and elicits interventions by a third party or parties. The distinction does not depend entirely on the response of others to the assault, but also on the extent of the aggression, since in some instances even the murder of wives provokes no reaction [the author places in India in this last category]." (Brown 1992, 2).

The emphasis on physical abuse alone renders invisible the other forms of control that men exercise over women in heterosexual marital relationships. Further, both the above categorizations of abuse regard violence as the *problem* rather than a *symptom* of the problem; hence the researchers fail to question the patriarchal nature of most societies that either regard wife abuse (both 'beating' and 'battery') as normal, or do not have effective and clear-cut sanctions against it. Brown writes that women who experience 'wife beating' as 'normal' are 'not meek and unaccepting'; however she does not question why they are unable to stop the abuse, even though they would 'prefer husbands who do not beat them'. The phenomenon of the unequal distribution of power, at the intimate as well as the societal level, remains unexamined. These researchers therefore fail to see the common thread -- the issue of power and control -- running through the different forms and levels of abuse across families and societies. As we have seen, this leads to the view that some levels and forms of wife abuse are normal, and to the attribution of 'excessive' wife abuse to the pathology of the

individuals/families involved. Such stereotypes become part of the public discourse and can and *do* have the effect of increasing tolerance for abuse, as was the case with Rupa.

> "I adjusted to everything he did [physical and psychological abuse] because deep down I knew he is a sick man, and I felt sorry for him." (Rupa).

While other women took steps to react to the abuse, they attributed the abuse to various characteristics of the husband, particularly his mental condition.

> "I am having a lot of ... problems... But to go to court and tell... the judge or whoever there is, to complain officially against my husband... I don't want to do that. I still do have very strong feelings for him... Sometimes I think... maybe he's getting old." (Rekha).

Mona, in retrospect, labels her marital relationship as abusive, but simultaneously sees the physical forms of abuse as arising out of her husband's frustration:

> [I]n retrospect, what I saw was that uncontrolled anger that he [husband] just didn't know what to do with. That [physical abuse] was the only outlet he had. He was not an athletic person... He had to release [his frustration]. So it was me as well as my [child]... [M]y husband was not hitting me with an intention of harming me... It is an insanity state."

The above explanations for wife abuse, especially its physical forms, fail to question why men *abuse their wives* to release their frustration rather than, say, smash the furniture or break dishes. Lakshmi raised this issue, when she recalled that her husband's efforts to 'release his frustration' were selective.

> "[M]aybe those people who are not athletic have no outlet to release their anger and their tension, and they take it out on their wives. Right? But my husband, well, to this day, has never yelled or struck a hand against his [child], which is *very* strange, thinking that he had just the excuse to... hit me... When he was angry with me, he would neglect [the child] also... But till today, he has not raised his hand against [the child]."

However, though Lakshmi questions the selective targets her husband chose to 'release his frustration', neither she nor the other women cited above question the link between violence and masculinity. Male aggression is considered 'normal' and physical activities such as sports are seen as essential outlets for this aggression. The issue of power in the marital relationship remains invisible; consequently, as the above narratives reveal, wife abuse is regarded as a means to 'release frustration' and, thereby, a problem arising from the husband's inability to use 'legitimate' outlets for his frustration. Abuse therefore remains confined to the personal sphere; it continues to be viewed as an individual problem.

The emphasis on the pathology of the individual/family leads to the myth that wife abuse is limited to lower income groups since educated people, who correspondingly have higher incomes, 'know better' or have other outlets such as membership of a gym. Of the 29 people whose interviews were analyzed, this stereotype was part of the perceptions of 6 people.

> "There is no abuse [in our community] probably because more educated people are here right now." (Durga).
>
> "There is no abuse [in our community] that I know of. The people who come here are well educated." (Soma).

All the personnel at support groups were quick to debunk the myth of an inverse, and as a matter of fact *any* relationship between income/education and the incidence of wife abuse. Not just the personnel, but also other members of the Indian community did not view the *incidence* of abuse to be restricted to any one educational/income group. However, the *causes* and *forms* of abuse were linked to the location of the family within the economic structure. For instance,

Suman classified the different 'immediate' causes and expressions of abuse based on the level of income of the family involved.

> "You... see a different kind of abuse in different classes. In the lower class, you see that the wife is working, and the husband drinks and abuses her. They have a lot of children who do not go to school. [They are] completely labor class, uneducated. In the middle class, you see beating due to dowry problems... But I don't see a high percentage [of that]... [Among] the upper classes, you may see [abuse], but not due to money because they have a lot of money. There might be some mental tension because the husband does not have enough time for the wife and children, or both [parents] do not have time for the children, so they [children] go in the wrong direction."

Again, the fact that *wife abuse* is the outcome of the stresses associated with different income levels and corresponding 'lifestyles', rather than other means of releasing tension, remains unquestioned.

These stereotypical explanations for wife abuse seldom fit the experiences of abused women, and as a result, they often face problems in understanding their experiences and giving it a name.

> "I was very naive when I grew up... I had this stupid notion that... if you are reasonably good-looking, and... you can bring home a nice second income, I just thought that any man would treat me like a princess... The days [that] were the worst [were] the says I would bring in the pay stub. I was getting yelled at so much, I would take my pay stub, I would go to ... my bedroom closet, close the closet and sit there and cry, for two hours, three hours. I'd just sit there, unable to figure out what is going on. What's wrong here? What am I missing? Here I am, I do every meal in this house. I do every cleaning, on every floor in the house. I do every bathroom... He has not lifted a finger... I couldn't figure it out." (Anita).

It is therefore important to examine the various causes of abuse, as well as their expression, and to include these in the public discourses about abuse so as to change perceptions about this phenomenon.

The issue of power

The various forms that abuse takes can broadly be divided into two categories -- physical and psychological (Yllo and Bograd 1988). There is, of course, considerable overlap between these two categories; they are not mutually exclusive but heuristic. For instance, a woman is psychologically abused when she has no control over any money and has to depend upon her husband for everything, but physical abuse occurs simultaneously if she does not get enough to eat, and has no money to buy food. To understand the various forms of abuse, it is important to start with women's narratives.

A considerable amount of recent research acknowledges the existence of physical *and* psychological abuse but focuses on physical abuse alone for analysis. In this study I look at all forms of abuse. Nearly *all* the informants (27) in this study identified abuse to be not only physical but also psychological -- 'mental', 'verbal', 'emotional', 'economic':

> "[Abuse] is physical or mental. Both are abuse. Mental means, you can't do this, you can't go to your parents' house, you can't spend money, you can't talk to somebody, you can't do this, you can't be seen doing this, doing that, talking to neighbors... that's mental abuse." (Srilekha).

> "[Wife abuse] runs the full gamut of just harassment on one side, including verbal harassment... I see abuse as anything that keeps a woman in a subjugated position. So wife abuse to me would be any attitude, behavior, action and anything that you can think of that keeps the wife in a subjugated position... And that includes from verbal harassment or just even subtle hints such as I'm better than you and that type of stuff, to murder." (Deepika).

> "My understanding of abuse is a situation, any situation, where a person feels that their normal functioning, the normal functioning of their life is impaired because of fear of another person. Fear of another person emotionally, fear of another person financially, fear of another person physically. All of that I consider to be abuse..." (Sushmita).

Manisha talked about one form of psychological abuse, which she termed 'comparative abuse' -- when the husband frequently compares his wife to other women, and constantly puts her down. Another dimension of psychological abuse cited was 'neglect' of the wife, a complete disregard for her wishes and refusal to communicate with her. Radhika mentioned her cousin who was completely ignored by her husband who was 'totally like a stone wall', refusing to even talk to her. Thus abuse involves not just the husband *doing* something, but also his *not doing* something, that is, not communicating with his wife. Both aspects of abuse result from the power that the husband has in heterosexual marital relationships: he can *choose* to ignore his wife. While abused women do resist abuse by ignoring their husband, their apparent inaction is an *active* effort that is not abusive because it is not an expression of power but rather a reaction to the expression of power by the husband. Malti talked about the lack of communication on her husband's part.

> "He never stood around me. He never wanted to see me. He never wanted to talk to me. It was just *unbelievable*... Many times, he has not answered a question that I asked, for many months. He's an extremely icy-cold man. He doesn't have to talk to me... He never really particularly believed that he had to answer my questions at all. Everything was just small, one-word answers really. No discussion, nothing. No sharing... He was perfectly comfortable like that... See what happens to me, right? I don't have a life where I sit and get to share. I don't have a real marriage."

The fact that her husband did not scream or shout, or 'throw tantrums' was seen as positive by other people, especially since he was a 'perfect gentleman' and 'very charming' with others. "My biggest problem was [that] *everybody* saw him as every woman's dream man." (Malti).

Economic abuse, in the sense of lack of control over economic resources was also

mentioned by some women. Rekha, for instance, had no access to money and was dependent on her husband for everything, even little things like candy.

> "I one day wanted to buy a [pack of] gum. I said, 'Can I buy it?' He said, 'No. You [cannot] buy it'."

Anita had a high-paying job, but her paycheck was deposited directly into an account set up by her husband, and she used to get an allowance very week. However, any purchase that she made, even though inexpensive, would result in arguments at home. Her husband did not like her spending any money, because it 'was [her] decision' and he wanted to 'set the rules'. Rupa, meanwhile, had control over money, but faced a lot of verbal abuse. Thus abuse takes many forms, both physical and psychological.

The common thread in all the above examples, and indeed all experiences of abuse, irrespective of the form in which it was expressed, is the issue of the unequal distribution of power in the marital relationship. Therefore, a meaningful understanding of abuse has to take into account the issue of power not just within the families of abused women but in all patriarchal gender relations, because a focus on inequality as an attribute of particular families once again results in locating wife abuse in individual pathology and prevents us from seeing the socially-constructed commonalties in experiences of abuse. Thus, as I have narrated above, some women recalled their husband's desire to control their lives, but attributed it to the husband's personality.

Empowerment

Empowerment is the process of gaining control over every aspect of one's life. It is the ability to make decisions about oneself; in other words, empowerment involves self-

determination. Understanding the definitions of abuse is critical to understand the links between empowerment and solutions to end abuse. An understanding of abuse that takes into consideration the patriarchal nature of gender relations and the various forms of abuse -- physical and psychological -- has to become a part of public discourse on wife abuse to enable women to understand their experiences and name them. Naming one's experience can be an important aspect of empowerment. Lakshmi was in an abusive marriage for more than fifteen years, and recalls her problems in understanding her experiences of abuse:

> "It took me many, many years to even figure out that something was wrong... I mean, I knew that something was wrong, but I didn't have a name [for it]. I didn't know what it was, and I couldn't figure it out, and I couldn't talk about it with anybody because these are not things that you discuss with anybody... It took me the longest time to figure out what the heck was going on. And once I figured it out, I realized that I had to get out of it. But then, by that time, I had my children, and I realized that I can't just walk out the door. I have to prepare myself and position myself so that I can do it. So I worked on it."

Of course, women do not have to label their experience as *abuse* before seeking assistance, though it appears that they do have to view their experience as a problem rather than as an inevitable part of marriage. Shweta went to a counselor to deal with her marital problems and in the process, learned that she was not to blame for the abuse..

> "I went counseling and learned two things: Whatever he does is not my fault, because I used to blame myself for it, and... that made me very depressed, that I am such a stupid person that I failed at marriage, and that I am not a good mother and wife. Secondly, I am a human being and I deserve respect. He treated me like a door-mat... [Since I went counseling], I became bolder and bolder."

Once women talk about their experiences, they realize that the abuse is not their fault, and that their experiences are not unique, but are shared by many women: the abuse is no longer considered just a 'personal trouble' but rather a shared experience. This realization is

empowering because it helps them shift blame from themselves to the abuser and to channel their anger. Moreover, talking about their experiences also helps them learn about alternatives and the available services. Thus, the empowerment and support is both emotional and material. For instance, Sushmita outlined the purpose of the support group of which she is a member:

> "[W]hat we are trying to do is educate women that you can do something, no matter how bad the situation is... We give them information, because we believe that information is power. If you are informed, you can think better, you don't feel that helpless."

However, the process of empowerment, as many members of support groups pointed out, is neither quick nor linear; it is dynamic. The personnel at support groups and their clients have a dialogue that continues over a long period of time.. The abused women in my study have been married for an average of more than 12 years, ranging from 2 years to 22 years, with only one woman being married less than 5 years. As Lakshmi pointed out above, it took her the longest time to deal with her experiences and to give them a name. The personnel at support group often counsel women for many years: Sushmita remembered a woman she had counseled for more than 3 years.

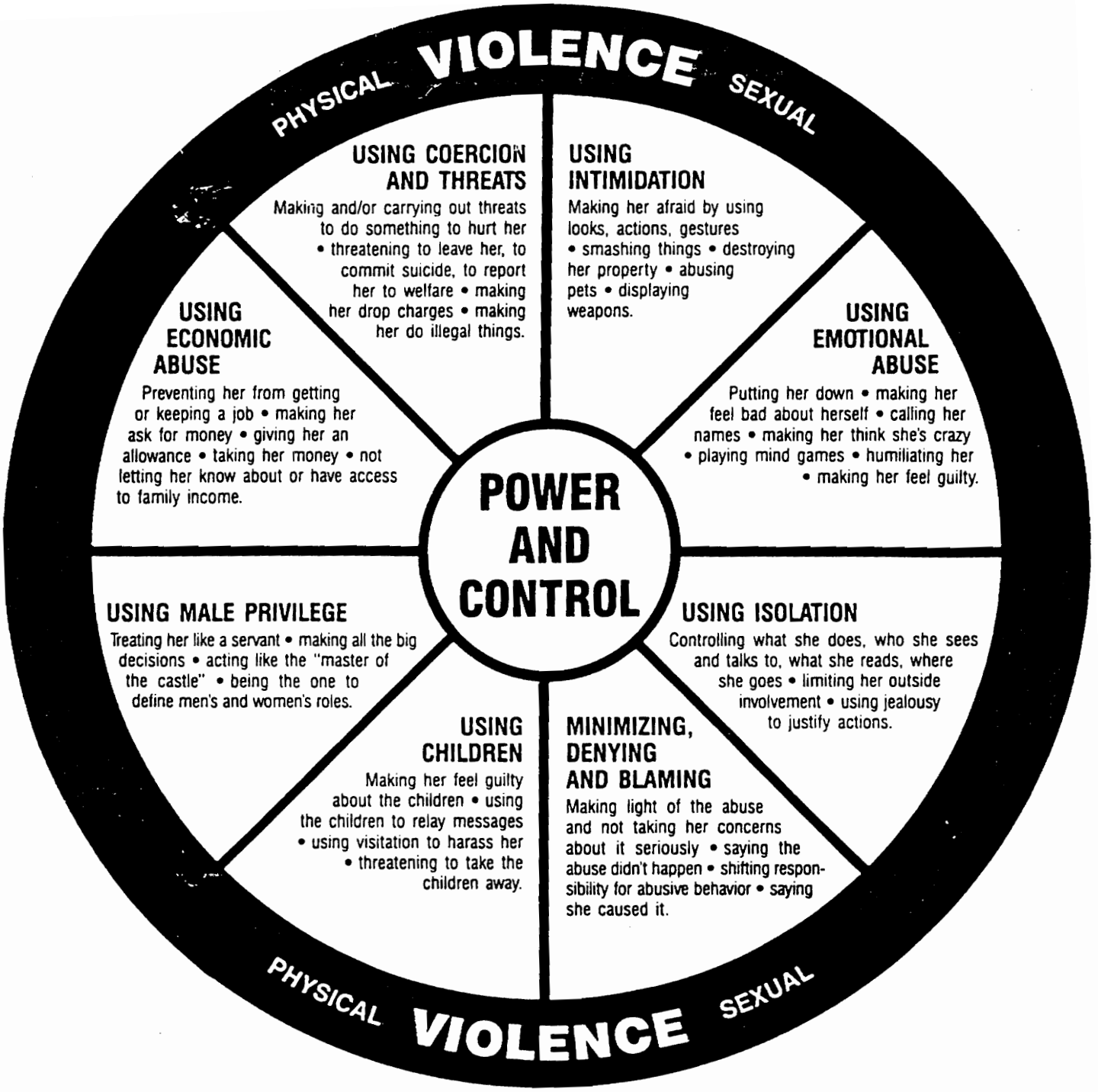
> "... I could see that she [client] was getting more and more courage to move out. *It took a long time.* But I think that had she not talked with us, she would never have made the move." [Emphasis added].

Thus, support groups are essential for providing women with emotional and material assistance and thereby leading to the resolution of wife abuse at the individual level. If a greater awareness about the extent of abuse within the Indian community becomes part of the public discourse, abused women will not feel as isolated and the transition from individual efforts at

resistance to talking about their problem and gaining control through empowerment will not be as long.

However, most of the support group personnel I interviewed, though aware of the extent of wife abuse among the Indian community in the U.S., see it as an individual problem and respond to it accordingly. If a meaningful understanding of abuse -- one that locates the causes of abuse in the power differential in patriarchal gender relations and emphasizes the various expressions of abuse -- becomes part of the public discourse, support groups will perhaps be able to provide not just emergency assistance, but also adopt strategies to empower women irrespective of the specific nature of the problem.

A change in the public discourse on abuse will help individual women deal with abuse but it does not eradicate abuse in the larger society. As mentioned earlier, wife abuse, and other forms of violence against women, arise from patriarchal gender relations. This fact is reiterated by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project which developed the 'Power and Control' Wheel to encompass the various forms of abuse (Figure 3). The emphasis on power and control is essential to locate the causes of wife abuse in patriarchal social structures rather than in individual pathology. Such analyses of unequal gender relations will also prompt a transition from individual, piece-meal efforts to end abuse to addressing the issue of equalizing gender relations. Importantly, the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project places equality at the center of its wheel of Nonviolent gender relations (Figure 4).



DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROJECT
206 West Fourth Street
Duluth, Minnesota 55806
218-722-4134

Figure 3 The 'Power and Control' Wheel

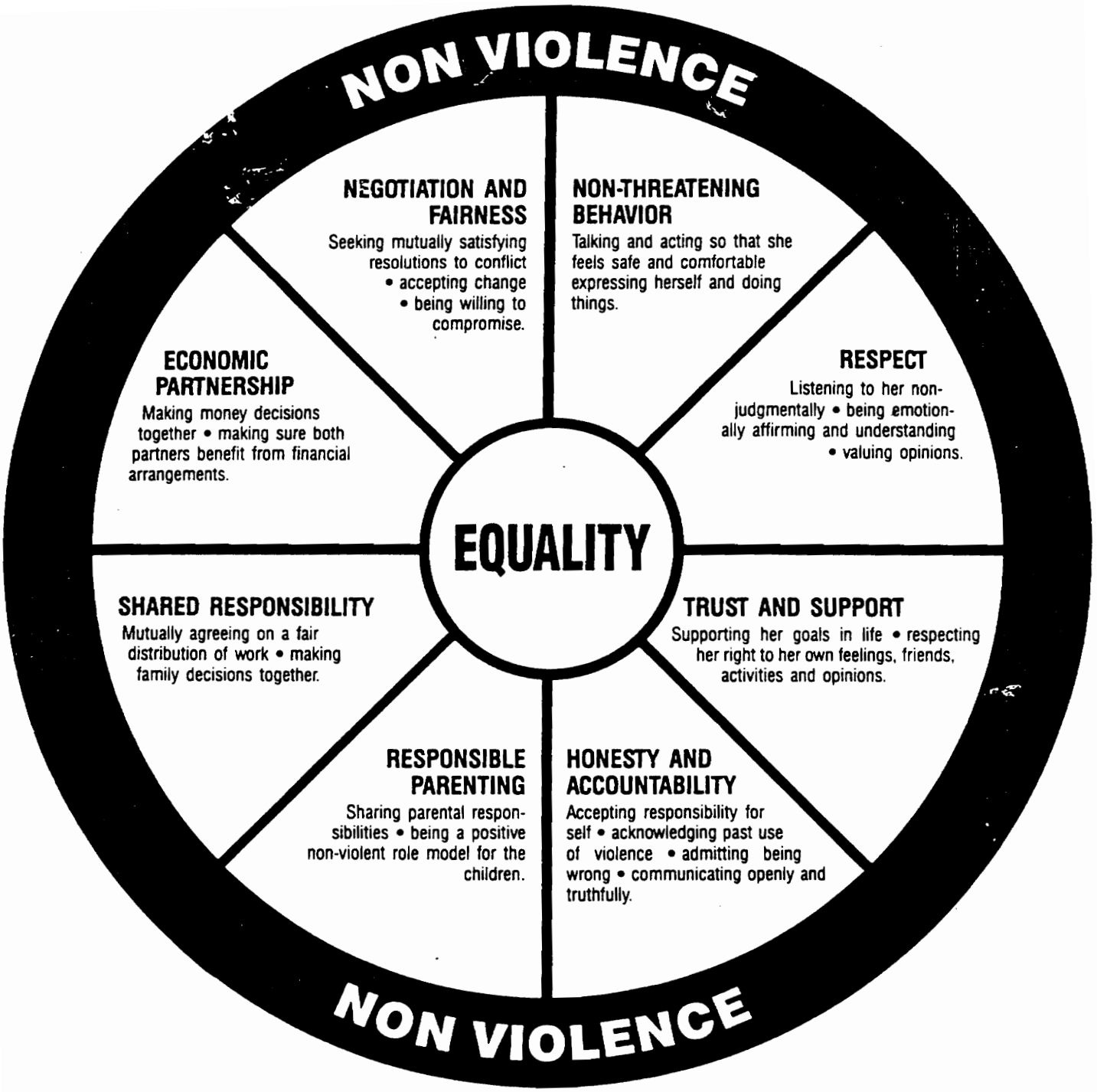


Figure 4 The 'Equality' Wheel

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Conclusions

It is essential to move beyond stereotypes about abuse by listening to women's narratives. Analyses of such narratives will reveal that abuse is not a 'personal trouble' arising out of individual pathology and requiring individual solutions. Rather, wife abuse is one dimension of the larger rubric of violence against women that arises from the unequal gender relations in society. Thus, wife abuse -- and indeed all forms of violence against women -- is not just about violence, but about power. For my purposes in this study, abuse occurs when a husband's use of his power in the marital relationship becomes consistent and a woman loses control over the things that have a direct impact on her life, including her body, her work, her money and her relationships with others. It is only when we see abuse as an issue of power, with violence as a manifestation of this power, that all forms of abuse -- physical and psychological -- will become visible.

Further, such analyses of power suggest that the solution to wife abuse lies not just in the resolution of individual incidents of wife abuse but in the empowerment of all women, and in far-reaching and long-terms structural changes to establish equal gender relations that will bring an end to not just wife abuse but to all forms of violence against women.

Chapter V
Class and Forms of Wife Abuse

In this section, I critique research that tries to correlate work status, income level and wife abuse. I examine how class, as a gendered and racialized process, shapes the experiences of abused Indian women it the U.S. My discussion begins with a brief discussion of class as a process.

Class as a process

Class is, at base, a social relation. It is a process.

> "Class is a socio-historical process in which 'men and women, in determinant productive relations, identify their antagonistic interests, and come to struggle, to think, and to value in class ways. Thus, the process of class formation is a process of self-making, although under conditions which are 'given'." (Thompson quoted in Acker 1988, 478)

Therefore men and women's experiences in what would otherwise appear to be similar class situations are different. For instance, men are paid higher wages than women for the same jobs. These experiences are further compounded by race/ethnicity. Class and gender intersect with race/ethnicity to form multiple forms of oppression that shape a person's experiences based on his/her location within these interlocking systems. Given their differential social loci, men and women undertake this similar process of learning to value in 'class ways' in different ways. Based on this understanding of class as a process that is gendered and racialized, I now examine existing research on the correlation between work status, income levels and wife abuse.

Work Status, Income Levels and Wife Abuse

Various studies, following the psychosocial perspective, have attempted to establish a causal relationship between work status, income levels, and wife abuse. Some studies locate the cause of wife abuse in the employment status of the husband; in other words, the incidence of wife abuse increases when the husband/partner is unemployed (Straus et. al. 1980; Gelles and Cornell 1985). Other studies, which Schwartz (1990) refers to as 'resource theories' or 'social exchange theories', conclude that the higher the man's education and income, the less likely he is to abuse his wife; the underlying assumption is that educated men, who correspondingly have higher incomes, have various resources besides violence to use to fulfill their demands (Gelles 1983). A recent study of wife abuse in Nigeria provides one example:

> "... [H]usbands with unskilled occupations (36.1 percent) such as laborers had a higher incidence of wife abuse than husbands with skilled occupations such as artisans, apprentices, etc., (27.5 percent)... teachers (2.4 percent) and husbands with managerial, administrative, professional technical occupations and skills (3.9 percent) abused their wives the least. This situation may be accounted for by the busy and intellectual nature of such occupations than for others such as the unskilled types which requires minimal time and intellect." (Iwarimie-Jaja 1989, 11).

By conceptualizing wife abuse to be primarily an outlet for frustration, all the above studies ignore the patriarchal context of heterosexual marital relationships. Hence, they do not question why the perpetrator of violence in the majority of the cases is the male spouse/partner. Nor do they question why men *abuse their wives* as an outlet for stress, rather than, say, chop down trees, break dishes or play golf. Male aggression is seen as *normal*, and wife abuse as an outlet for that frustration is also seen as *normal*. Thus, in the above studies, the research

question is concerned with the situations in which women are *more likely to be abused* rather than *why women are abused*!

Researchers have also sought to establish causal relationships between a woman's work status and battering, and have arrived at different conclusions. One the one hand, some researchers indicate that unemployed women lack resources to counter violence, and are therefore more likely to be abused (Gelles 1976; Straus et al 1980). On the other hand, other scholars maintain that women who seek paid employment are more likely to be abused by their husbands (Brown 1980), especially if the wives' earnings are higher than that of the husband (Gelles 1974; Allen and Straus 1980). Declaring all above findings to be nothing more than 'arguments about how violence is normative for males' Schwartz (1990, 57) adds the dimension of extent of injury. He concludes that women in dual-earner families have lower risks of injury and suggests two possible reasons for this -- first, as resource theory suggests, in a relationship of 'relative equality', couples are less likely to be violent, and, second,

> "... [T]he higher income of dual-earner families allows them to purchase relief [by joining a gym, going on a cruise, etc.] from the frustration and stress that many claim is related to violence against women." (Schwartz 1990, pp. 61).

At least three important problems are apparent in the literature examining the relationship between work status, income levels, and wife abuse. First, the assumption underlying the women's paid work/abuse relationship is that women's paid employment is synonymous with their having control over economic resources. Second, Schwartz, and the researchers he critiqued, ignore the role of power in marital relationships. Therefore, the fact that *women* are abused, irrespective of the work status and income level of the couple, is

regarded as *normal* and remains unquestioned. Third, Schwartz's study is based exclusively on the incidence of physical abuse, and all other dimensions of abuse are ignored.

The emphasis on physical violence renders invisible the other forms of abuse the women experience. It is therefore likely that scholars reach such contradictory findings not because one class is 'more' or 'less' abusive, but because the 'pathways' to, and the manifestations of, abuse may well differ. Suman's awareness that abuse cuts across class lines is evident in her statements to me:

> "You... see a different kind of abuse in different classes. In the lower class, you see that the wife is working, and the husband drinks and abuses her. They have a lot of children who do not go to school... In the middle class, you see beating due to dowry problems... But I don't see a high percentage [of that]... [Among] the upper classes, you may see [abuse], but not due to money because they have a lot of money. There might be some mental tension because the husband does not have enough time for the wife and children..."

Scholars such as Pagelow (1981) also write that wife abuse is not characteristic of a particular class, but rather, the form of abuse women experience may differ by class. Thus, middle class men may be more inclined to use either psychological abuse, or to physically abuse their wives in a manner that the bruises are not visible. The middle-class husband of one of my informants, Rekha, even verbalized his intention of doing so when hitting her.

> "He continuously went on hitting me there, punching me. He [said]... 'I'm going to hit you this time, and I'm going to hit you in such a way that it will not leave a mark on your body, that you can go to the cops", because I was threatening [to go to the cops]."

Thus, although the *forms* of abuse may differ, socioeconomic groups are similar in their occurrence of abuse, based on the gendered unequal distribution of power that characterizes the marital relationship. The counselors I interviewed affirmed that women whose husbands

are high-ranking professionals -- doctors, research scientists, professors, lawyers, management consultants -- as well as women whose husbands are in lower-paying, dead-end jobs -- convenience-store owners/managers, cab drivers, clerks, factory workers -- call support groups for assistance. The work status of the women who seek help also varies -- full-time housewives, domestic workers, convenience-store workers, factory workers, fast-food women, students, clerks, store-owners, teachers, managers, doctors, lawyers, scientists. Of the five abused women I interviewed, three were gainfully employed - as a teacher, an engineer and a manager -- during their years of marriage. This concurs with the counselors' observation that employment does not guarantee that a woman will not be abused and even badly injured. Since abuse arises from the gendered power differential within the marital relationship, neither men's nor women's education, employment and income have any impact on the incidence of abuse. Thus, "abuse has no boundaries."

The Gendered Nature of Class

As I have stated above, class is a process that is gendered and racialized. Traditional concepts of class regard it as a static category and are based on the assumption of women's dependency on men; traditional perspectives therefore identify women's class status based on that of their husband or father. However, the fact that class is a process is evident when we examine the downward mobility experienced by women after divorce (Grella 1990). My interviews demonstrate that classifying women into a particular class based on the status of the husband or father does not adequately represent women's experiences. The resources and

privileges typically believed to accrue to class membership in reality refers to men's class membership. I illustrate this below.

The family: While the level of education and the nature of employment does not have any impact upon the incidence of abuse, either may increase the resources available to abused women. But often, these resources is not available to women. The gendered nature of class becomes evident when one examines women's access to education. Some of the women I interviewed recalled that their parents forbade them from pursuing careers of their choice because, being women, they had to be married by a certain age, after which their husband and/or in-laws would decide about their career. This was the case for Durga and Sushmita. When Soma's sister-in-law joined a Ph.D. program, relatives objected on the ground that it would be difficult to find her a husband with higher or equal qualifications. Radha recalled that her family did not emphasize on women's education to the extent that it emphasized on men's. Suman and Anita regretted the fact that they were not allowed to move away from home, and were therefore unable to achieve the educational qualifications of their choice. Not all women were so overtly discouraged; however they were not encouraged, either. Sangeeta remembered her experiences:

> "My parents wanted me to settle down, get married in typical Indian fashion, and then do whatever I wanted. If I had put my foot down about a career, they would not have resisted, but I wouldn't have been encouraged like my brother was. They never sat down with me when I was a kid, to discuss my career."

Gender shapes women's access to economic resources as well. Thus, for instance, based on the mainstream concept of class, researchers would see Leela's class status as defined by that of her husband; however, she was not gainfully employed and had no control over any

money while he made all the decisions. Manjari and her husband had high-paying jobs, but she did not have access to her income for many years, while her husband controlled all the money. Sarita and her husband were also gainfully employed, and she *did have* control over her income. However, expenses were split up in such a way that she made all the purchases, while he *shared* the rent and utilities. Thus she bore the major burden of household expenses, and thereby had fewer resources left at her disposal than if her husband had shared household expenses equally.

The job market: Women with a college education or a professional qualification may find it easier to get a job. Indian women from a middle/upper class Indian family have a good knowledge of English, which definitely helps them in the job market. However, the nature of employment depends in part upon the kind of education a woman has, as well as the number of years she has been out of the job market. Sometimes women have skills that cannot be marketed effectively. In her study on abused women, Pagelow (1981) cites the example of a woman who was an equestrian, a show-dog trainer and grew orchids; none of these were skills that would help her get a job in an emergency. Another woman was a biochemist, but was not allowed by her husband to be gainfully employed. When she was finally divorced, she had been out of the job market for 18 years, and could only get a job for minimum wage. Similarly, in my study, Prema had a double masters, but was not involved in paid employment after her marriage. When she returned to the job market after more than five years to support herself and her child, the only jobs she could get were either clerical or minimum wage jobs in the fast-food industry.

It is not just 'human capital' that shapes women's experiences in the labor market, but the way the market is structured. Socialist feminists claim that all social relations are gendered:

> "By asserting that gender is part of the institutional and organizational infrastructure of capitalist society, this claim challenges those who ascribe gender-neutrality to economic processes and organization, arguing instead that gender-neutrality is a guise for privileging male experience." Wharton (1991, 382)

The gendered nature of organizations results in income and status disparities between men and women (and further, among men and women based on their race/ethnicity), segregates women into low-paying industries, and within the same industry, into the lower-paying, dead-end jobs (Acker 1990). Women of color are disadvantaged by virtue of their race/ethnicity and gender, and earn less than all men and white women. Among first-generation Indian women, ethnicity plays an important role in the job market. Prema had a double-masters; however, since her degrees were acquired in India, they 'do not hold as much water here'; she was therefore planning to go back to school when she had the money, and get the credentials to have a better-paying job.

Class position is crucial in understanding the interaction between abused women and counselors and shelters. Most of the members of support groups are women (and men) of the middle class, typically more highly-paid professionals who usually do not need to work multiple shifts to supplement their income. They are therefore able to find time for forming support groups and volunteering their help. This is not to say that members of the working class do not help out. Rather, the point here is that the economic imperative to utilize each moment of one's time to ensure the continuity of life is not as strong for the middle class. This affects the dynamics of support groups. Since most of the members belong to the middle class, women

from the working class are often unwilling to seek help from these support groups. Thus, Naina pointed out that the reason they did not get many women of the working class was because of the predominantly middle-class composition of support groups.

Class also interacts with legal status to shape the experiences of immigrant women. Women from high socio-economic backgrounds may be able to seek financial and other help from their family and attempt to hire a good lawyer to deal with issues of divorce and child custody, while other less affluent women have to rely on assistance from South Asian support groups and mainstream support services. Most middle-class South Asian women also have a working knowledge of English, and therefore find it easier to cope with dealing with mainstream agencies and services.

Conclusions

An understanding of wife abuse as a manifestation of the patriarchal marital relationship helps debunk the myth of a causal relationship between empowerment, work status/income level/socioeconomic status and wife abuse. My data reveal that there is no correlation between the above categories and the incidence of abuse. Moreover, a critique of these theories helps shift the focus from analyzing which group/s of women are more likely to be abused, to the question of why women are abused at all. The emphasis on the patriarchal context of human relations reveals that class is gendered, and women experience class in ways different from men. My study reiterates the socialist feminist critique of class as a gender neutral concept. Definitions of class that are unable to explain adequately the experiences of women, for instance the downward mobility women experience after separation/divorce have to be

replaced by an understanding of class as a process and as a relation. Such a concept of class helps us see how different groups of women and men experience class, and its impact on their experiences. Such a view of class also helps uncover the gendered and racialized structure of the labor market, and move away from "human capital' explanations for income disparities based on race/ethnicity and gender.

Chapter VI
The Impact of Legal Status

Adding the lens of immigration status along with race/ethnicity and class to the study of wife abuse reveals another means of oppression that obviously has not been considered in mainstream research that focuses on American citizens. Immigrant women in the U.S. have various legal statuses -- they may be undocumented, they may have dependent/provisional visas, they may have permanent visas, and they may be citizens of the U.S. The nature of the visa status shapes women's experiences of abuse. Research on immigrant women with undocumented status or dependent visas indicates that fear of deportation may prevent them from seeking help from state agencies, particularly if the partner threatens to report them to the Immunization and Naturalization Services (Jang, Lee and Morello-Frosch 1990; Hays 1993).

> "... [M]en use the green card [permanent visa] as a power tool to keep newly arrived, status-less wives in control." (India-West 1988, 51).

An understanding of the ways in which a woman's immigration status can be used as a threat requires a knowledge about immigration regulations.

Immigration Regulations

In 1986 the Immigration Marriage Fraud Act was passed to prevent fraudulent marriages undertaken for the express purpose of immigration. According to the Act, immigrants who seek to receive legal status through their spouse are issued a conditional residency for two years. Three months prior to the expiration of this residency, the couple is required to make a joint petition for legal status and submit at least two pieces of evidence to

prove they are married in good faith. Such evidence includes joint bank accounts, telephone and utility bills, and leases in both names. In lieu of the above evidence, the couple can provide affidavits from at least two persons, attesting to the validity of the marriage; these persons may be required to testify before the Immunization and Naturalization Services (I.N.S.). If the couple fails to file the petition or appear for the interview, the alien spouse may lose his/her permanent resident status and be deported. (Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, pamphlet, n.d.).

The Impact of Immigration Regulations

This 1986 legislation may or may not have reduced the number of fraudulent marriages, but it undoubtedly added another dimension to the obstacles facing abused South Asian -- and indeed all -- immigrant women with a dependent visa status. In abusive situations, husbands may refuse to file papers to accord legal status to the wife. This was reported by one study:

> " [A] battered wife, whose husband had thrown her out, was fighting to keep custody of her child without having money or even a valid United States visa, because her husband had had her visa application withdrawn..." (Borsellino 1988).

In turn, fear of deportation and lack of knowledge about the immigration laws and the workings of the legal system force abused women to stay in abusive situations. This was exemplified by Radha, who came to the U.S. as a dependent of her husband, a student. She was on an F-2 visa (dependent of a student) for about 5 years, and then on an H-2 visa (dependent of a person with a working permit) for another 2-3 years, before she and her

husband got her permanent visa. During those years, fear of deportation limited Radha's options severely:

> "[Abused women] are afraid that if they leave their husband, they are going to be deported, and that was a factor for me too. I realized that if I had an F-2 status and I left him [husband], I don't have... any basis for being here. And I would be sent back to India, and I didn't want to do that..."

Moreover, the requirement of proof, in the form of joint assets, compels women to stay in abusive situations until such proof has been collected. Sushmita recalled a case where a woman who had left her husband a few months after marriage was advised to go back, since the situation was not potentially very dangerous, and accumulate such proof (joint assets) before leaving her husband.

The Act of 1986 does contain a 'hardship waiver' that can be used by the alien spouse to prevent deportation even if s/he fails to file the petition or appear for the interview. This waiver can be based on two grounds -- proof that deportation would cause extreme hardship, or a claim that the marriage was entered into in good faith but was terminated for good cause by the alien spouse who was not at fault for not meeting the petition requirements. The alien spouse must be the moving party in the divorce, and can apply for the waiver before the twenty-one month deadline.

> In order to avoid deportation, the immigrant spouse must be the petitioner. If she is not, the marriage is conclusively determined not to have been entered into in good faith and not terminated for good cause." (Jang, Lee and Morello-Frosch 1990, 2).

Importantly, however, if the divorce is not final, waiver cannot be granted. Eligibility for the hardship waiver requires evidence from various social service agencies, such as counseling services, women's shelters, police reports and copies of protective and restriction

orders. The burden of providing such proof falls on the immigrant woman. This requirement, according to the support group personnel I interviewed, is one of the biggest obstacles facing South Asian women. First, as has been documented in numerous studies examining spouse abuse across racial/ethnic groups, very few women are willing to report abuse to the police. Rekha was opposed to the idea of reporting her husband to the police:

> "I cannot officially complain against my husband... to go to court and tell the judge... to complain officially against my husband, I don't want to do that. I still do have very strong feelings for him."

Second, attitudes towards professional counseling are different in the South Asian community. Professional counseling itself is a very western concept.

> "... [C]ounselling is very therapeutic... It is very clinical. There is a distance between the therapist and the client... You can't get personally involved." (Papp 1991, 30).

This is quite different from what Indian women experience within their communities in India, where a network of neighbors, friends, and female relatives often provide support and advice. Moreover, arbitration and counseling is usually the task of elders (Pamphlet published by a South Asian women's support group, n.d.). Radha considered counseling to be ineffective in cases of wife abuse.

> "First of all, I think the counselors pussy-foot around all the time. Like, nobody is willing to tell the guy [abuser], give him a clear message that this [abuse] is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. They just pussy-foot around, and say [to the abuser], 'You have to learn to deal with your anger'... I think it's all crap. I think that people have to really come down hard and give a clear message from all sides -- the police, the counselors, the judges -- everybody has to make the same point. And *then* somebody [abuser]might pay attention."

Negative views about counseling, coupled with reluctance to seek help from the police and other official social support networks which are primarily staffed by people of other ethnic groups, makes it very difficult to gather evidence of abuse for presentation before the INS.

Even when women do have a legal status in the United States, abusive husbands often create problems, such as hiding the wife's immigration papers and her passport. Roshni informed me that she used to carry her important documents (her passport, citizenship papers, school certificates) with her whenever she left the house. Similarly, Malti related a case where the woman's passport had to be kept at the Indian consulate for safe-keeping. Ashok, when outlining the problems unique to immigrant women, emphasized that

> "If a woman [has] to leave the home in a hurry, the first thing we tell her is to take her green card [permanent visa]. This would never occur to somebody who is running a mainstream shelter."

Further, individuals in a dependent visa are barred from taking formal employment. Thus, most abused women on dependent legal status do not have access to economic resources, and are unable to get out of abusive situations. Prema was one of them:

> "[My dependent immigration status] had a [major role] to play, because in the first five years [in the U.S.], I didn't have the option of either going to school or earning anything... I could only go to school after my husband got a job, because before that, we didn't have any money... But even with the H-status [that is, dependent of a person with a working permit], I couldn't get a job... It was only after I got my green-card that I could have looked around."

Thus, immigration regulations add another dimension to the problems faced by abused immigrant women.

Gender and Legal Status

As is the case with other organizational rules (Acker 1990), immigration regulations appear to be 'gender neutral' in that they are applied to all individuals irrespective of gender. However, their apparent 'gender neutrality' renders invisible the fact that laws are applied in a gendered context, and hence their impact is gendered. In patriarchal marital relationships, there is an unequal distribution of power in favor of the husband, and if the wife is legally dependent upon him, it adds to the power he has and becomes a potential tool for abuse:

> "An Indian woman's immigration status is often contingent on her husband's sponsorship because she usually enters the United States as his wife. Her dependence on him for legal status adds to her vulnerability, and is a threat that her husband often does not hesitate to use to his advantage." (Bhattacharjee 1992, 36).

The issue of power is evident in an abusive husband's refusal to sponsor his wife's visa application, and often, in the fact that she is unable to make him do so. Moreover, the waiver requirements outlined earlier also ignore the unequal power of women and men in the marital relationship. First, the evidence required to prove that the marriage was conducted in 'good faith' -- joint bank accounts, telephone and utility bills, and leases in both names -- is often not available to women. Deepti did not have a bank account, individual or joint, had no money of her own, and in fact, did not even have access to the mailbox key. Leela had a high-paying job, but her paycheck was deposited into an account set up by her husband, and, for many years, he prevented her from having a check book. Second, the requirements for the hardship waiver -- evidence from counseling services, women's shelters and police reports -- also ignore the gendered power differentials in marriage. For instance, abused women often do not call the police for fear of retaliation. Moreover, some women talked about a negative reaction from

the police. Radha recalled the reluctance of the police to get involved because they did not see wife abuse as a problem.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, many women are unwilling to call the police to report against their husband. All these factors make it very difficult for women to gather evidence for the hardship waiver, but their difficulties are rendered invisible by the apparent 'gender neutrality' of the laws.

Bhattacharjee (1992, 36-37), in fact, considers even the terminology used by the Immigration and Naturalization Services to be inadequate because it does not accurately reflect the experiences of immigrant women:

> "The position of [abused Indian] women reveals the poverty of terms such as 'expatriate' and 'immigrant' which the United States immigration service officially uses to categorize them. Both terms usually convey a sense of agency or voluntary will on the part of the expatriate or immigrant, and assume that the presence of the 'resident' alien in the United States was (and is) a freely chosen status. For an Indian woman, who is often forced implicitly or explicitly to marry through a process over which she has little control, the question of free will may be a matter of life or death. If she arrives in the United States through a decision that she did not participate in or agree to, then her classification as an immigrant which implies agency and free will is at best inadequate."

Thus, the immigration regulations themselves are gendered because they reinforce immigrant Indian women's dependency upon their husband.

Suggestions for Change

Changes in the Immigrant Marriage Fraud Act of 1986 are essential, if some of the obstacles facing abused immigrant women are to be removed. Based on her experiences, Radha was implicitly cognizant of the gendered and racialized aspects of the law, and thus favored doing away with the category of 'dependent status':

> "I think that this whole business of bringing people as dependent and independent statuses... is outrageous, because if you allow someone to come in, then everyone should have the same rights and responsibilities."

Indeed, researchers have already suggested that battered women married to U.S. citizens or permanent residents should be allowed to make an independent application for permanent residency, and any attempts by abusive husbands to withdraw the application should be declared unlawful (Jang, et. al. 1990). Additional changes were suggested by my informants. For instance, Neena spoke to the need for changes that would redress the gender and race inequities:

> "... [I]t seems to me that if a woman comes... bona fide married from India,... she should not have to hire a lawyer and pay a thousand dollars to tell the immigration [officials] that, 'Yes, we've been married.' They should make it a little easier. They should put the onus of ... proof not so much on the women but on the men, who are bringing these women from India."

Cooperation between service providers, legal experts, and domestic violence activists is also essential. Many counselors expressed the urgent need for lawyers willing to work pro bono on cases dealing with issues of immigration status, divorce, and child custody. Efforts to increase awareness among immigrant women and among the larger immigrant community about immigration laws and avenues of access to legal services would help at least some women terminate abusive relationships:

> "Networking and coalition building efforts should focus on creating multi-faceted strategies that range from public policy advocacy to community outreach and public education on domestic violence, the rights of immigrant women and the need for accessible, culturally relevant services." (Jang, Lee Morello-Frosch 1990, pp. 6).

Conclusion

The lens of visa status thus reveals another dimension of oppression faced by abused women. The gendered nature of immigration regulations makes them oppressive. Many of the problems faced by Indian immigrant women are faced by other immigrant women as well (Jang et. al. 1990). However, in this study, I have examined the experiences of *legal* immigrant women alone. Undocumented immigrant women who are abused undoubtedly face greater problems, since they are unable to approach the police and other official support services for fear of deportation. Though battered women's shelters assist women irrespective of their legal status -- documented or otherwise - lack of awareness of this fact prevents many women from approaching these shelters for help. For undocumented immigrant women, the legal and other consequences of approaching shelters would constrain them even further. Therefore, changes are urgently needed.

Chapter VII
The Public and the Private

The belief in the "inviolable nature of the family" compounds the problem of wife abuse (Dobash and Dobash 1979). Many immigrant communities in the U.S. believe that

> "...[T]he close knit nature of the family precluded the possibility of domestic violence, or that the family should resolve such problems privately without outside interference." (Jang, Lee and Morello-Frosch 1990, 3).

While the issue of privacy is important in the U.S., in recent years the line of differentiation between the public and the private has been crossed to a certain extent, to draw public attention to family problems (Andersen 1993). Thus, though taboos against discussing private family matters in public is a barrier most women face, for Indian -- and indeed all women of color -- in the U.S., the problem is compounded by the fact that the public, for them, exists at two levels: one, their own community, and the other, the white majority. In this chapter, I shall first look at the problems Indian women face within their own community, and then examine their experiences as women belonging to a racial/ethnic minority.

The Indian Community as the 'Public'

The Indian community in the U.S. adheres to a strict division between the private and the public. Many respondents indicated that women are taught to resolve family problems within the private sphere.

> "I think we are usually brought up in a way that families try to keep their matters within themselves. You don't want the whole community to know [about your problems]." (Srilekha)

> "[Abuse] happens in private... It's hidden, and that's the most difficult part. Because we are taught that we have to cover-up... everything that happens which shouldn't be happening." (Radha).

Indian women therefore find it difficult to discuss problems within their family with other people in the community. Thus, though the third group of women I interviewed (Indian women in a small community) were quick to point out that they had never heard of any case of abuse in their community, some did observe that they might not be aware of ongoing abuse, particularly emotional abuse, because

> "The abused person wouldn't talk about it, because they would be too embarrassed to let others know that there is a problem.... This is probably the reason why we don't know if there is any abuse." (Seema).

Many of these women stated that if faced with an abusive situation, they would deal with it within the family, and would approach their close friends only if they were in desperate need of help. If provided with a choice of approaching a South Asian support group and a mainstream shelter, three of them said they would opt for latter for reasons of confidentiality.

> "Maybe, for privacy sake, I might go to an American [shelter], because... an Indian might talk with another. So you are afraid of your reputation being tarnished." (Manisha).

Even when women do discuss their options with friends, they are often advised to stay with the abuser, especially if he is prosperous and well-known in the community, so as to not jeopardize his career and status, and thereby their own. Sangeeta believed that this could be a major deterrent for abused women:

> "[Abused] women will not come out and expose themselves because it would make them look small. In our Indian society, no matter how important the wife is, or how educated or how much she is earning, what really matters is that she has certain respect, and respect for her is not just because of what her own earnings or her own status is. It's because of her husband's status too, and her husband's status in the eyes

> of the world will automatically go down if he was shown to be a wife abuser, and she would rather keep that secret and protect him at any cost, rather than expose him. If her life was in danger,... or her children were very badly affected... that's one thing. But anything less than that, I don't think she would come out and tell anyone about it, [not] even maybe her own parents."

Thus, not only is there a rather rigid distinction between the private and the public sphere, the latter also exercises a strong control over the former. This was also evident when women narrated their experiences of growing up as a girl in the Indian context. Soma recollected that her parents had exercised great control over her as a girl because

> "For my parents, before they decide anything, their first question is, 'What will our ... [caste] community think?'"

The need to control arises from the belief that family honor depends, to a large extent, on women's sexuality. The rigid patriarchal context of gender relations places the burden of maintaining culture, values, tradition, religiosity, moral values and family honor on women (Bhattacharjee 1992; Das in Jain 1975; Minturn 1993; Narasimhan 1990; Westwood 1984), and women have to pay a heavy price for this burden -- lack of self-determination. Even in cases of rape or sexual harassment, the blame falls on the woman, for 'tempting' the man by being out alone/late at night/at the wrong place and at the wrong time, for not being able to 'avoid' the situation. Families therefore exercise a rigid control over women, to prevent them from inadvertently 'getting into trouble'. Suman, for instance, had to be back home before dark, because: "I was a woman and if something happened, my family and I would lose face in town."

To maintain family honor, therefore, women's bodies, their activities, their conduct and their relationships, in fact, every aspect of their life is controlled by men: girls by fathers

and brothers, wives by husbands, and widows by their sons. This control is pervasive to the extent that it becomes almost invisible and is accepted as a part of life by most women. Manisha emphasized that there was no preferential treatment towards boys in her family, and that she and her sister had a lot of freedom and were also controlled "as in any Indian family, they would have girls live by certain rules." Thus, the control exercised over women's bodies is accepted to such an extent that Manisha did not see her statements as contradictory.

Such concerns about 'family honor' are carried to the U.S. and affect the quality of life of Indian women growing up here. Once again, the control that such views of honor entail is taken-for-granted and thereby rendered invisible. Like Manisha, Roshni and Srilekha saw the control over daughters as 'normal':

> "Among Indians here, most families treat sons and daughters in the same way but people with adult daughters are more worried than those only with sons. It is the same in India. Parents worry about their daughter getting pregnant [before] marriage. Other than that, I don't see any difference between having a boy or a girl." (Roshni).

> "[With] a girl, you have to be more careful... in India or even here. You have to be more vigilant and more careful about where she goes, the people she associates with." (Srilekha).

The concept of 'family honor', coupled with ideas about the sanctity of marriage, stigmatizes divorced women, whose sexuality is no longer under male control, and who, in addition, are "used property" and hence no longer as desirable as before divorce. Indian women are therefore very reluctant to end their marriage. This, as Sangeeta pointed out, is due to the gendered nature of the social sanctions against divorce.

> "A woman who has left her husband, she may have done the right thing, but she is not really going to be accepted in the Indian community, wherever she is. She will put up with a lot... [T]hat certainly is what Indian men and women grow up with. That is

> why men who have a tendency to abuse their wives are not curbed, and Indian women will never expose their mates."

Divorce leads to loss of social status and prestige for women, while men, even if they are known to be abusers, whether divorced or not, do not face social censure, at least not to the extent that divorced women do. As a result, as Deepika pointed out, women put up with a lot of abuse before they think of separation:

> "The reality is that when [women separate], no matter how bad the abuser is, the community is not going to have sanctions against the abuser, whereas there are community sanctions against the [abused woman], in the sense that she is not allowed to participate in community activities... Once you lose [your marriage status], people don't... talk to you, don't invite you any more... [These] issues... leave women thinking that [they] should tolerate this [abuse] rather than go through divorce."

Since women's status is based on being 'appropriately controlled' by men, loss of 'marriage status', and hence sexual control, is accompanied by social censure and stigmatization. This stigma was part of the experiences of Deepti, who pointed out that after her separation, she was looked at with suspicion by married Indian women, who feared that she would "steal their husbands" from them. The social censure against divorced women often leads their parents to regard remarriage as a very attractive option. At this stage, any caste, racial or even religious qualifications required of the groom during the first marriage are ignored. Manjari discussed her cousin's remarriage as follows:

> "For remarriage, it doesn't matter who [the man] is... I don't think you have much choice left... If it is a nice match, she should get married. Her family would not object to anything. The first time, they wanted someone of the same caste, but now, anybody who is a nice person, with whom she will be happy, will do. There are no religion or race barriers, though it would be preferable if [the man] was Indian or Hindu."

The stigma associated with separation and divorce is not confined to the woman alone, but carries over to her family, including her siblings. This is because, in the Hindu context, marriage in not just a relationship between two individuals, but two families, and the honor of each depends upon the other. Thus, the actions of the individual have repercussions not just for him/her but for the family as well. Since women have the greater responsibility for maintaining family honor, if they separate/divorce, the stigma faced by their family is greater than that by men's families, especially if the wife files for divorce. Most women therefore do not wish to go back to their natal home after separation/divorce. Moreover, as mentioned above, divorce carried a stigma for siblings, particularly younger sisters, as well. Since most Indian marriages are arranged by parents, the families do not know much about the prospective bride/groom, and therefore lay a great deal of emphasis on the religious affiliation, caste, class status and *reputation* of the family. Any incidence of separation/divorce, particularly involving the prospective bride's sister, is regarded with great suspicion; since the honor of the family depends upon its women, and since women are expected to maintain their marriage at any personal cost, when a woman separates/divorces, it is usually considered her fault, a fault that she may share with her sister/s. The parents therefore have a very difficult time finding a groom for their younger daughter if the older daughter is separated/divorced.. Therefore, many women with younger siblings, particularly younger unmarried sisters, wait till all their siblings are married before separating from their husbands. Anjali remembered a woman who waited for two years before walking out on her abusive husband:

> "I asked her why she had kept quiet for two years... She said she was waiting for her sister to get married... Because in India... people think [the divorce] might be [due to]

> the fault of the girl, [that] maybe the problem is with her, and maybe the problem exists with her sister as well."

Suman related another case in which

> "The girl put up with [abuse] because her parents would be unhappy if her marriage broke-up. Her father was very ill. She had seven or eight sisters."

The spillover of social censure to the natal family prevents women not only from ending an abusive relationship, but also from discussing their problems with others in the community. The fact that this community is a racial/ethnic minority adds to the problems of abused Indian women. Understanding abused Indian women's experiences will therefore help us understand the myriad ways in which race/ethnicity intersects with gender to shape women's experiences.

The Racial Context of the 'Public'

A critical point which differentiates Indian and U.S. women has to do with concept of the "public" itself. For immigrant Indian women, multiple layers exist: at one level, the public is the Indian community: at another level, within the context of the U.S., the public is the dominant racial group. Thus abused Indian women face additional layers in the barrier between the public and the private that they have to overcome to seek assistance. In this context, it is important to talk about two kinds of barriers that Indian women face: obstacles from within their own community when they approach official support services for assistance, and problems with some official support networks due to their racial/ethnic minority status.

The opposition that women face from their own community is often due to the fact that it spoils the image of the 'model minority'. Bhattacharjee (1992, 31) writes that Indians and

other Asians in the U.S. are regarded as a 'model minority' characterized by high educational and economic achievement. Such an opinion by the dominant group is a strong incentive to create and maintain an image of an ideal Indian community upholding its culture, traditions, and family values. Since the image of the 'model minority' is created by the dominant racial group, the Indian community, seeking further advances in the sphere of legislative politics and the economy, adhere to the image and see all divergent views as betrayal. For instance, a strong component of the 'preservation' effort is the reiteration of the image of the Ideal Indian Woman -- self-sacrificing, nurturing, benevolent, patient.

> "Consequently, anything that threatens to dilute this model of Indian womanhood constitutes a betrayal of all that it stands for: nation, religion, God, the Spirit of India, culture, tradition, family. Thus Sakhi [a support group for South Asian women] is seen as a betrayal of India's heritage and as contaminated with Western values when it challenges this model of the Indian woman." (Bhattacharjee 1992, 31).

Another image, according to Sushmita, is that of the ideal family:

> "[T]he Indian community does not want to hear that there is abuse in our families, because the family is the only thing we can boast about... [In] Everything else, we are on par with other Asians... Our children are no smarter than Chinese, Vietnamese, Koreans... So what the Asian Indian community often falls back upon is saying that we [have] something special -- our family."

This stereotype of the ideal Indian family is internalized, hence instances of wife abuse are either ignored as aberrations arising from the pathological nature of the individuals and/or the family involved or regarded as betrayal, and the women who seek help face censure. This stereotype thus acts as a powerful deterrent to women seeking assistance against abuse from community services.

The stereotype also influences the Indian community's dealings with South Asian support groups. As one counselor pointed out, her group faced extreme resistance from the community when it first started its work. Support group members were seen as home breakers and were discouraged from participating in community festivities because they were regarded as presenting to the white majority, a negative image about the Indian community, an ethnic group that has done well for itself in relation to many other ethnic groups. Having realized that the group will not end its activities, most members of the community have adopted an attitude of passive acceptance, and primarily ignore the group. The denial, therefore, continues.

Myths about abuse, including the belief that abuse is particular to the uneducated or poorly educated lower classes, also either renders most cases of abuse invisible or leads to the view that they are aberrations characteristic of 'dysfunctional families', as Naina points out:

> "Sometimes it is easier for people to say that it happens to them -- lower class, poor women; that it doesn't happen to professional women who are earning large sums of money, and thereby dismiss the whole issue."

Ashish revealed out that he was unaware of the extent of the problem of wife abuse among the South Asian community until he read the literature provided by the group of which he is now a member.

> "I saw some of the statistics that they quoted, and I was shocked at the number of South Asian women they had helped in what I thought to be a relatively prosperous and educated community. And much to my chagrin, I found that it made no difference what economic, caste, religious boundaries you came from."

The second barrier that abused Indian women face are the problems that arise due to their racial/ethnic minority status. For all their 'model-ness', Indian immigrants to the U.S. are

still a minority, and this influences their interactions with official support systems. For instance, Deepika talked about the racial dimension of the public sphere:

> "[I]n immigrant cultures, it is very difficult, because... the public is that which ridicules us, or makes racist comments against us... And it definitely affects women seeking some kind of a change in their life."

Neena noted that

> "The police, especially in areas where there are greater concentrations of Indians,... are much more likely to dismiss calls of abuse."

Moreover, cultural differences in attitudes towards officially complaining against the husband make some women uncomfortable in their dealings with official support systems. Rekha talked about her experiences with medical and social service organizations:

> "They are very well-equipped organizations, but... they don't understand our cultural problems... They were in fact forcing me to call the police and apply for a restraining order... These are things we [Indian women] can't do, however bad the marriage has been."

First generation abused Indian women in the U.S. therefore often face problems in their dealings with mainstream support services. This coupled with the barriers they face in talking about their problems in public, adds to their isolation.

Isolation

The emphasis on the private nature of family problems isolates abused women, both in the U.S. and in India. However, in India, the existence of traditional support systems -- parents and other elders -- helps women at least discuss their problems, receive moral and other kinds of support, and recuperate. As Leela points out:

> "[In India] there is a bit of community pressure that can be generated [against the abuse]. Here, people become totally isolated in these little homes and apartments... [South Asian women] are in a really terrible bind, because on the one hand they are completely cut off from all their relatives. The networks that they had... and the

> mechanisms that they are familiar with, they are cut off from that... [On the other hand], they are also in this [marital] relationship which is the only relationship [they] have to hang on to."

Of course, the existence of the natal family does not guarantee that women will receive assistance if faced with abuse. For instance, the parents may just ask the woman to go back and cope with the abuse. In one case, a woman was badly abused by her husband, and was also in danger of losing her very good job because of the abuse. However, for a longest time, her parents were very unsupportive and held the view that she should give up her job to be with her husband and children. According to counselors, such parental attitude can be a real "detriment" to the process of separation

The sense of community -- consisting of natal kin -- that women have in India is often absent in the U.S. Of course, women do talk about their problems with their friends in the community and receive support from them. However, such support is confined to a few women in the community. Most people, especially men, turn a blind eye to incidents of abuse. Prema viewed wife abuse to be a "woman's problem":

> "I think [abuse] is a woman's situation; especially if the husband doesn't want to let it out, the men are not going to do anything, [though] in the case of physical abuse, men would help." (Indian woman).

Further, the women -- and some men -- who are supportive primarily provide the woman with emotional and material assistance, and help her reconcile with her husband or separate; there are often no community sanctions against the abuser. This is because abuse is seen primarily as a 'personal trouble' to be resolved by the woman. The 'social issue' that is, the patriarchal nature of the marital relationship is ignored. Abuse is therefore seen as an aberration, rather

than a social problem, and there are no sanctions against the abuser. The majority of the Indian community in the U.S. is very traditional; most Indians who come to the U.S. try to recreate a very traditional, patriarchal set up. Interestingly, this creates greater constraints upon Indian women in the U.S. Not only are there different kinds of people, traditional and otherwise, in India, but in the U.S., the social dynamics of Indian society is lost. That is, the majority of the Indians in the U.S. bring with them an image of India that remains frozen in time. Therefore, the social setup here is very rigid and, as Srilekha indicates, provides women with few outlets for discussing their problems.

> "The kind of community [here] is so mainstream, so traditional. You don't have all the options that you often have in India, you really don't. The people who come here, in terms of Indians, are from a particular background..., and the kind of India they are trying to recreate is a very traditional, patriarchal India... whereas in India you have a lot more other options."

The above analysis reveals the contradictions inherent in public responses to abuse. On the one hand, traditional support groups help women deal with their situation, and the absence of these networks isolates Indian women in the U.S. On the other hand, these very networks can create obstacles for women seeking separation. Naina related one incident to me:

> "There was a woman who committed suicide here,... Her parents were here [in the U.S.]... It is difficult for a woman whose parents are not here. On the other hand, experience also shows that parents also want her to go back in some cases, go and try again, reach a compromise."

The presence of traditional networks may help women discuss their problems, but may present barriers when women want to end abusive relationships, because of the stigma attached to divorce. Similarly, the services provided by support groups which arise in the absence of

traditional networks help women change their lives. According to Seema, abused Indian women have more options in the U.S.

> "I think abused Indian women are better off here than in India. At least they have some recourse to some shelters or support groups... which most of them don't have in India."

In other words, the community networks in India help women cope with abuse, and perhaps generate pressure against abuse, but the stigma attached to separation as well as lack of parental support often makes it difficult for women to separate from abusive husbands. In the U.S., on the other hand, lack of traditional community networks often makes it difficult to discuss their problems except within the context of the support group. However, the assistance provided by support groups often initiates the process of empowerment that helps women change their lives. Support groups therefore need all the help they can get from the Indian community to expand their services and assist the women who approach them for help.

Conclusion

To better assist abused Indian women in the U.S., the Indian community has to play a major role. First, as Manjari indicated, community networks must assist in efforts to help provide abused women with a safe place to live, money, and a job.

> "The community is quite wealthy here... They can hire some of these women, give them a decent living... Give them a chance to live a life away from this abusive situation, where they can bring home some food, pay the rent and raise the children without this daily, obsessive fear that robs them of all self-esteem and self-confidence, and just perpetuates a vicious cycle I which they feel hopeless at times. If the community can come forward with resources and job opportunities for women... that would be great."

Second, as social sanctions against the abuser are still virtually nonexistent, the Indian community must also create and enforce such sanctions. It is only when the community gets across a strong message, that abuse is unacceptable, and censures the abuser, that the overall situation itself will change. Neena made the following recommendations:

> "When women are displaced, it is important to be able to place them in safe locations, give them a job... [but] whatever we do, all South Asian support groups have to recognize that these are Band-Aid solutions, and are not dealing with what the larger problem is... Why is it that women are being censured for something they have had to endure?... Instead, the community has to censure batterers. Irrespective of your status, if you are caught battering your wife, you should pay the price for it."

CHAPTER VIII
Resistance

In any study of oppression, a focus on the experiences of oppression alone is not sufficient, since it leads to images of oppressed individuals as passive victims: images that are both disempowering and misleading. Various studies have examined the ways in which oppressed individuals resist, that is, the ways in which they deal with their situation. For instance, Paules' (1991, 10) research among waitresses in a New Jersey restaurant highlights their efforts to deal with the 'emotional and financial hazards' of the job. In studying the experiences of Japanese-American domestic workers, Glenn (1980, 433) focuses on the 'contradictions between the multiple forms of oppression to which women were subjected and the resilience they developed.' Resistance involves attempts to promote survival rather than to change social structures. Resistance strategies, often covert and indirect, have variously been labeled the short agenda (Cockburn 1991), practical gender interests (Molyneux in Safa and Flora 1992) or the 'garden' variety, because they are 'concerned largely with immediate defacto gains' (Scott 1985, 33); however, resistance is an essential part of the process of empowerment. In this section I examine the various forms of resistance abused Indian women in the U.S. adopt, and what these forms reveal about the nature of power relations within their families.

The Domestic Sphere

Strategies of resistance are shaped by the context in which they are expressed. The strategies of the women in this study were shaped by the patriarchal structure of the family, characterized by a division of labor where women have primary responsibility for housework; it is in this sphere that women most often resisted. The most common method of direct resistance was refusal to cook: a particular meal, for the whole day, or refusal to cook at all for the husband. Sarita frequently adopted this strategy:

> "When we first got married, I used to get up in the morning, and... fix his lunch everyday. And I was giving him fresh food which I cooked that day, not from the night before. One day... I brought him his lunch box... He got mad [about something]... He took that lunch box and he threw it at the wall. The food fell all over. I didn't say anything to him about it, but I didn't pick it up. I just left it there and when he came back from work, it was still there and he had to pick it up and clean it because I wouldn't touch it. From that day till now, I never fixed his food in the morning. He had to pack his own lunch, or he had to buy it, or whatever. I just never did it."

Radha too would often refuse to cook:

> "When he used to come back from work in the evening, many times he would... start yelling... I found it very difficult to prepare the meal, and serve it and take care of the kids... in the middle of all this turmoil... In the past three or four years, if he ever started yelling when I was preparing the food, I would just turn everything off and leave the house, and there would be no food that day... I would just leave. I refused to cover that up."

Covert acts of resistance are also empowering. In some instances, women would spit into their husband's food before serving him his meals. This act is particularly important in the Indian context, where bodily fluids are considered not only unsanitary but also *polluting* and contact with the bodily fluids of another individual is avoided in most circumstances..

Other household chores also offered opportunities for direct and covert resistance. Manjari related one such incident of resistance: when her client's husband refused to let her have any input in household decision-making, she withstood this for a long time, until she finally resisted. After her husband again denied her any say, she destroyed all his underclothes and he had nothing to wear to work the next day:

> "Somehow, the fact that she even did that really helped in changing the dynamics of the relationship, where he realized that this woman is not so stupid, and that she can do things. It really helped to change the perspective of that relationship."

The Interpersonal Sphere

Abusive husbands often exercise complete control over women's mobility. Wives often have to seek their husband's permission before stepping out of the house. The fact that many women have no access to money further limits their freedom. However, women have found innovative ways to deal with these problems. Priya recalled the experience of her relative who loved watching movies, but was not allowed to do so by her husband. So whenever her husband went out of town, she saw a movie every day. Often her husband would eventually find out about this, and she was yelled at, but she resisted all the same:

> "[Her] reasoning was, when it comes out, I have already done what I have to do. So he can yell as much as he wants, I don't care."

Seema took small sums of money from her husband's wallet whenever she had the opportunity.

> "... I took about $4-5 from his wallet, sometimes in the morning before he left for work."

Sometimes men attempt to control their wives by hiding or destroying things, especially important documents and keys, and women adopt innovative strategies to deal with this, as the following examples show:

> "One day he took my set of keys so that I [couldn't] reach his car. He doesn't know I made an extra set which I have here... My car is a mess because I keep most of my important documents [immigration papers, school certificates, passport] in the car" (Rupa).

> "The only thing he gets real pleasure in hiding is my diary, because I have all the phone numbers in here. So I keep that in the car, and I've made copies so that there's one [at work] and one at [friend's] place. I've told everybody to call me [at work]." (Sangeeta)

Some women who are forbidden to communicate with their relatives in India have also found ways to circumvent this, as Anjali reveals.

> "I don't call from home. He doesn't know I call. I use my calling card and other phones."

The Body

Control over their bodies was another area in which we can see resistance. For example, many husbands opposed their wives' desire to have children. Lakshmi's husband was one of them:

> "...I tried to have a baby when I was [over 25 years old]. I started talking about it. He just said, 'There's no discussion. There's no reason to have a baby [for another two years]'... He made a decision that we'll wait until then, and that was all there is to it. Everything in this house, he made a decision."

Deepika noted that in the face of her husband's denial of her desire to bear a child,

> "I became obstinate that I will have a kid."

And she resisted by becoming pregnant.

Other women, such as Durga, sought to resist abuse by refusing to continue a physical relationship with their husband.

> "I decided that I wasn't going to sleep with my husband anymore, but he got mad. He even suggested that... [I] have an operation [to prevent pregnancy]... but I refused... and said 'you go and have an operation if you want to. Not me.'"

Many women used apparent passivity to resist. Importantly, these strategies were *not* passive; the women actively worked at such resistance. For example, they refused to speak with their husbands and ignored them for most of the time.

> "... I decided that I am not going to even try to pacify him anymore, or try to make it up. I'm going to do something different. I'm going to ignore this man." (Mona).

> "I heard a mouthful of abuse, but I ignored it... I was taking a stand, which he couldn't bear - that I was getting more independent. From then on, I didn't care about him. If we had an argument, [I] ignored him." (Anita).

Going outside the relationship

Another important effort at ending abuse consists of involving family members or close friends whom the husband respects, to put pressure on the husband and end the abuse. Calling the police also helps; sometimes such phone-calls can change the dynamics of a relationship. Rekha related one such incident:

> "One woman called 911, and [the husband] was so petrified of the police, he stopped battering her after the first time the police came."

Restraining orders on abusive husbands, though often withdrawn, also help abate the abuse, as in the case of Manisha:

> "He touched me. I got a restraining order against him... [However], as a good wife, as an Indian woman, I withdrew that order. I wish I hadn't."

The need for resistance

As the above instances reveal, acts of resistance are efforts used to deal with the daily experience of abuse and do not involve direct confrontation. The use of covert forms of resistance reveals the relative lack of power women have in the marital relationship, and this is true not just for abused women, but for most married Indian women, as the following narratives reveal. Many Indian community women talked about 'nagging':

"Just now and then, I nag a bit." (Anjali)

"When we have arguments now, I reason, I talk, I nag." (Prema).

Some women acknowledged these forms of resistance, but saw them as "underhand ways".

> "Women sometimes take it out in all kinds of underhand ways. They will pass these snide comments. They don't come out openly, but they pass these snide comments which certainly don't make the man look very big hearted..." (Malti).

The fact that women have to use 'underhand ways' reveals the imbalance of power within the marital relationship. Resistance is a strategy adopted by all people, but it becomes covert only when there is a realization that direst resistance will have a negative impact. Thus, Shweta revealed why women had to resort to such "underhand", indirect ways:

> "My grandmother thinks that instead of direct confrontation, the way we do it, we should bring up the topic [of disagreement] at an appropriate time. Manipulativeness is taught to you when you are expected to behave that way, because you feel that that is only what is allowed."

Women, including myself, are often taught that the best way to have your husband agree to your point of view is to approach it in indirect ways, since direct confrontation often leads to refusal. The fact that the husband has the power to refuse his wife what she wants,

and his decision prevails, remains unquestioned; women therefore have to resort to indirect ways to attain some amount of control over household decision-making.

The imbalance of power within the marital relationship is also revealed by the differential impact that the actions of husbands and wives have on each other. Thus, for instance, a husband can psychologically abuse his wife by ignoring her. However, when a wife ignores her husband, it is often an *active* strategy on her part to resist his abuse; moreover, since her strategy is not based on power, it does not have the same impact on him as his neglect does on her.

Conclusion

The above-mentioned examples of resistance therefore challenge the image of abused women as passive victims, by examining not why women stay in abusive relationships, a frequently asked question (Gelles and Cornell 1985; NiCarthy 1987; Pagelow 1981; Wodarski 1987), but how women resist in the face of abuse. An analysis of the various strategies of resistance reveals the unequal nature of the marital relationship: covert strategies are used because women lack the power to directly confront their husbands. The fact that such resistance is adopted not only by women who perceive their situation to be abusive, but by most married Indian women indicates that abusive relationships are along a continuum, and the central issue is the imbalance of power within marriage.

This focus on resistance does not attempt to downplay the amount of abuse women experience, or the various ideological and structural barriers they face in either negotiating an end to the abuse or ending the abusive relationship. Rather, the effort has aimed at balancing

dominant images of women's passivity with those of defiance; and the fact that this defiance is confined within the parameters of the abusive relationship draws attention to the need to empower women even further.

> "It is important to do the small resistances for your own self so that you can believe that you can do something." (Roshni).

Chapter IX
Conclusions

Basing my study in feminist standpoint theory, I have listened to the 'voices' of Indian women and have attempted to analyze their narratives to discover the myriad ways in which race/ethnicity, class and legal status interact to shape the experiences of Indian women in the U.S. While there are important similarities, other differences point to experiences that are missed by research on mainstream American women who have different experiences by virtue of their different, and varied locations within these interlocking systems. In this concluding section, then, I examine experiences that set Indian women apart from other groups of women, as well as experiences that they share with other Asian women, with other immigrant women, and with all abused women in the U.S.

Being an Indian

Taboos against discussing 'private' family matters in public are common to many societies and create barriers for abused women seeking assistance. However, the problem is compounded for Indian women because of continuing rigid sanctions against separation/divorce. According to Hindu tradition, women's sexuality is dangerous, and has to be controlled by men since family honor depends upon the control of women's sexuality. At every stage of their life, Hindu women are controlled by men: by fathers, brothers, husbands and even sons. As a result, separated/divorced women, whose sexuality is no longer under *direct* male control, face severe social sanctions. Thus, many Indian women put up with a lot

of abuse before they decide to separate. The stigma attached to separation/divorce spills over to the family, and due to a tradition of arranged marriages, has an impact on the younger siblings of the woman, and especially on her sister/s. These factors create barriers that are particular to Indian and perhaps other South Asian women, but are not faced by women of other racial/ethnic groups.

The gendered experience of class is common to all women, but is compounded for Indian and other South Asian women for several reasons. First, control over women's bodies is considered 'normal' and this prevents many women from moving away from their natal home to acquire the desired educational qualifications. Second, since marriage is considered to be the ultimate destiny for Indian women, their education is not given as much importance, and is, in fact, even curtailed, if parents feel that their daughter's high education will be a barrier in getting her an equally/better qualified husband. The patriarchal nature of the marital relationship is evident: the husband has to be equally or better qualified, not only because of a strict gendered division of labor, where he is still seen as the major bread-earner, but also because he should have control in the relationship. Thus, many women are not allowed to pursue careers of their choice, or even to pursue a career at all; women therefore experience 'class' very differently from men. The gendered division of labor, and the unequal distribution of power in marital relationships is experienced by most women (Hochschild 1989).

Being an Immigrant

Undoubtedly, a major factor shaping the experiences of many first generation immigrant women, and one that is not discussed in mainstream research for obvious reasons, is

legal status. Immigrant women in the U.S. have varied legal statuses: they may be undocumented, they may have a dependent or provisional visa, a permanent visa or they may be citizens of the U.S.[1] The nature of the visa status shapes the experiences of abused immigrant women. For instance, the dependent or provisional visa status held by many Indian and other immigrant women can and is used by abusive husbands to threaten them. Husbands may refuse to sponsor their wives, may hide or destroy their immigration papers, and may threaten to report them to the I.N.S. This experience is not unique to Indian women, but is shared by all immigrant women on a dependent visa. The hardship waiver requirements -- joint accounts, leases in both names, certification from counselors, police reports -- pose additional problems for abused immigrant women with an undocumented status or a dependent visa, many of whom are not aware of the waiver at all. Moreover, the restrictions against formal employment while on dependent status, again, affects all immigrant women on dependent visas. In this study I have examined the narratives of women who have a documented status. The experiences of undocumented women in abusive situations are undoubtedly much worse; the option of seeking help from official support services is closed to them.

Being an Indian in the U.S.

The stigma against discussing 'private', family problems in public is faced by all women, but the problem is compounded for immigrant women, women of color and women of the working class, for whom the public consists of multiple layers -- one's own

[1] Both first generation Indian women as well as women born in the U.S. but of Indian ethnicity can be regarded as 'immigrants'. I have analyzed the experiences of first generation Indian women; hence, in my study, the term 'immigrant women' refers to first generation immigrants. Further resarch is needed to compare the exeriences of second generation Indian women in the U.S. with those of first generation Indian women.

community/class as well as the dominant racial/class group. Hence, women face various barriers when seeking help. Women of color encounter racism from many official support services, particularly the police and the judicial system. Often the abuse women experience is ignored on the ground that it is part of their cultural tradition: this is certainly true for all Third World women. The problem of multiple layers of the public is faced by working class American women as well, since they often encounter middle/upper class women in shelters; the public, for them, is their own class as well as the middle/upper class personnel of support services.

Class intersects with ethnicity to shape women's experiences. Thus, most middle class women from India know English, as a result of colonization. This holds true for all middle class South Asian women; other Asian women, Chinese, Thai, Japanese women for instance, may not be as familiar with, and fluent in English. Of course, lower income group women from India are often not familiar with English either, and therefore face problems, along with other immigrant women, in communicating with mainstream support services.

The concept of the 'model minority', shared by most East and South Asians also shapes women's experiences: In order to maintain the image of "model-ness" the Indian community in the U.S. creates an image of the ideal Indian Woman -- patient, nurturing, caring -- and censures women who falsify this image by talking about their experiences of abuse; this censure is extended to the personnel at support groups for South Asian women.

> "Sakhi [support group for South Asian women] is seen as a betrayal of India's heritage and as contaminated with Western values when it challenges [the ideal] model of the Indian woman." (Bhattacharjee 1992, 31).

The label of 'model minority' is not always constraining, but has a positive impact as well. For instance, due to this positive label, the experiences of Indian women are probably different from those of other racial/ethnic minorities, especially black women and Latinas, when dealing with support services such as shelters and the police. Since other East and South Asians also bear the label of 'model minority', these experiences of Indian women are probably shared by women of other Asian communities as well.

Importance of South Asian support groups

When South Asian women approach mainstream shelters for help, their cultural background shapes their experiences during their stay. Language plays a major role in influencing interaction between support providers and abused Indian women. Most middle/upper class Indian women have a working knowledge of English. However, many working class Indian women and other Asian women lack fluency in, or knowledge of English, and this presents barriers in their attempts to seek help. For instance, Dasgupta and Das Dasgupta (1993) recall an incident where an Indian woman in a mainstream shelter did not eat for three days because she was a vegetarian, and all the food offered her had come in contact with meat. Since she spoke limited English, she was unable to relay her concerns to the personnel at the shelter. Moreover, cultural differences in attitudes towards marriage and separation/divorce also influence experiences. For instance, mainstream counselors often have a problem understanding why an abused Indian woman cannot leave her husband because her younger sister is still not married. This concern for the stigma spreading to the natal family is shared by all South Asian women. Therefore the personnel I interviewed emphasized the need

for having separate shelters, not just for Indian women, but for all South Asian women Many of the Indian community women also indicated that if faced with a problem, they would prefer to seek assistance from a South Asian women's support group.

The role of patriarchal gender relations

The above analysis reveals that despite different experiences based on race/ethnicity, class, and legal status, all abused women share some similar experiences. Thus, for instance, the public is composed of multiple layers for immigrant women, women of color and women of the working-class, and it adds to the barriers these women face in seeking help against abuse. However, the common thread in all experiences of abuse is the issue of the gendered division of power in marital relationships. This unequal access to power, as revealed by analysis of narratives of abused Indian women, is common to all experiences of wife abuse, and indeed all forms of violence against women. Therefore, the long-term agenda for ending abuse, and indeed, all forms of violence against women involves empowerment, of abused women and of all women, across all lines. This calls for widespread structural changes to establish equal gender relations. Short-term, 'immediate' solutions to individual cases of abuse require the existence of special support groups for South Asian, and indeed all groups of women; in addition, the suggestions provided at the end of each section -- reform in immigration regulations, a more positive and active role by the Indian and indeed all communities -- need to be implemented to assist women in abusive situations.

My study therefore takes into consideration the standpoints of Indian women and thereby reveals, first, how interlocking systems of oppression interact; and second, the

similarities and differences between abused Indian women and other groups of women. My hope is that my research contributes to feminist theory because it reveals the complex ways in which women experience abuse by drawing from the experiences of one group of abused women themselves. Further research needs to contribute to the understanding of the myriad ways in which race/ethnicity, class, gender and legal status intersect and shape the experiences of different groups of women, in order to reveal similarities and differences in experiences; such revelations will help us form coalitions to struggle for change.

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