Blogs on Domestic Violence against Immigrant South Asian Women: A Thematic Analysis

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THESIS

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This thesis is dedicated to my late sister, Malini, who always encouraged me to think positive, follow my passion and never give up in the face of adversity – words of wisdom that helped me through this doctoral journey.

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"Rise up this mornin',
Smiled with the risin' sun,
Three little birds…
Singin': "Don't worry 'bout a thing,
'Cause every little thing gonna be all right!"
(Marley, 1980)

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SUMMARY

The main goal of this study was to perform a thematic analysis of blog posts and comments on the topic of domestic violence against immigrant South Asian women in the United States, as evidenced in ten general-interest South Asian community blogs. In this qualitative project I have explored consequences of this recent way of communicating for bloggers from this transnational ethnic community who have found a new space for sharing experiences of their own and/or another's abuse. Guided by interdisciplinary theories of intersectionality and transtheoretical models of behavior change, this study has questioned, found and delivered emerging thematic evidence to interpret blogs as powerful channels of awareness-creation, contemplation of action, and as safe public communities for voicing private stories.

South Asian women living in the United States as dependents of their immigrant husbands or male partners make up a unique population for social research. The current era of neoliberal globalization has created a dubious situation for such women, many of whom have to uneasily balance the harsh consequences of being racially marginalized transnationals' in a western country, while being silently abused by their male partners/marital family by virtue of their expected gender- roles as subservient eastern women. As research in this area holds witness, there are several social and community based organizations in this country that are trying to combat the incidence of domestic violence within the South Asian diaspora. Yet its perpetration and maintenance continues to be a horrific routine happening. In such a scenario it is imperative that these immigrant South Asian women must learn to discover and avail of the alternate channels of support and empathy in order to change their violent marital situations. The study's findings have revealed that blogging about the intent, extent and experiences of domestic violence within South Asian community blogs has become a substantial cathartic instrument for

people from this ethnic community. Both victims and advocates are trying to communally thematize the histories, forms and patterns of domestic violence and its related impediments and interventions through these deterritorialized conduits of online communication.

The study's primary set of findings revealed three major themes related to the implicit or explicit identities of the bloggers and commentators, and the roles that they played within the discussion threads, namely (1) advocate/supporter, (2) advisor/information provider, and (3) actor/information seeker. The thematic roles and identities assumed by the bloggers and commentators have been found to overlap other roles in several individual blog posts and comments. This indicates that the bloggers and commentators have fluidly and interchangeably played central roles in the discussion threads, thereby demonstrating the presence of non-peripheral and heterogeneous, yet communally mediated interactions online.

The study's secondary set of findings revealed five major themes related to the typology of blog-generated themes on the issue of South Asian domestic violence, including (1) meaning making (2) conflict maintenance (3) local vs. transnational debate (4) consciousness creation and (5) change and action contemplation. It was revelatory to find that the domestic violence-related entries of South Asian bloggers and commentators have highlighted several questions, concerns and opinions that are by-and-large censored within the South Asian immigrant community in North America. These findings have also indicated that although these community blogs had their own discursive specificities and unique expectations of participation, all of them were bound by certain common attitudes and a sense of shared community for the ways in which they addressed the topic, as well as the disregard they displayed for insensitive dissenters and those who posed a threat to the overall philanthropic balance of the discussions. However, for the

bloggers and commentators to establish their topical strength as a single community of believers within the South Asian blogosphere, they would need to heighten their networks of inter-connection with other South Asian general interest blogs that discuss the issue of domestic abuse with similar passion and commitment.

The study's final set of findings revealed three major themes related to the consequences and uses of blogging by this microcosmic South Asian blogging community, including (1) creating awareness, (2) forming community, and (3) expressing opinion and identity. Bloggers and commentators in the sampled South Asian blogs have often been found to use these blogs in more than one of the above stated ways, and many parent bloggers and frequent commentators have explicitly revealed the consequences that blogging can/has create/d for its participants through the mobilization of an open platform for discussing a socio-culturally taboo topic. The third set of findings also reveals that the use of blogging to form community was primarily done on a micro-level, within the scope of the internal topical threads. However, to make extensive and practical use of the powerful discursive opportunities that blogging offers, the bloggers and commentators would have to aggressively interlink to similar topical blog threads within the larger South Asian blogosphere on a much wider scale of cross-communication.

The premise of any interaction, online or offline is *communication*. Accordingly, *naming* the abuse these women face, *identifying* its intersectional themes and patterns, as well as *communicating* the extent of this human rights violation should constitute the very first steps to opposing this oppression, followed by agency (written/vocal/symbolic/physical) for creating consciousness and enabling change and empowerment. Blogs in that respect are ideal material for social scientific research because in their very basic form they are digital mediums of

communication, which when taken further can serve as tools for awareness-creation, discursive agency and a space that creates knowledge bases across intersectional areas (human rights, gender, race, ethnicity, immigration, etc.). By exploring the possibilities that new media technologies offer in terms of: organizing community-specific cultures of interaction, creating individual agency, and promoting online advocacy through blogs, I argue that these digital forms of social communication can be considered alternative intervention strategies to challenge the continuation of domestic abuse. I believe that this qualitative project can not only enrich gender, immigration and cultural studies by providing an intersectional understanding of the very public crime of domestic violence against immigrant women of color, which is often misconstrued as private, but also contribute to communication research in areas of online activism and consciousness-creation within digital diasporas, *intra*-cultural communication and ethnic media participation, particularly at a time when intercultural communication through social media channels on the Internet has become commonplace.

I. INTRODUCTION

> …Domestic abuse within the South Asian immigrant community is largely kept under wraps. Nonetheless it is a major concern. From memory, I can name quite a few individuals who have been victims of domestic aggression, counting some family members. No one knows how many unreported incidents there are? We can't get far just by calling it a cultural problem… Of many reasons that abuse is not commonly discussed within the community is because the sufferers are made to shut up, voluntarily or violently. Several hushed voices are of South Asian females who are objects of oral, physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse. Most do not voice their predicament dreading what their families and socio-cultural community will say. Bodily and socially they feel threatened. They are totally deprived of the means: financially and communally, to yank themselves out of an abusive, dangerous, and detrimental condition ("Where's the Garam Paratha Bahu?" 2006). [1]

The blog post above is just one among many that voices the dilemmas inherent in countless stories of silence. These silent tales make up the life histories of many immigrant South Asian women who are victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence (DV) takes place in all ethnic groups in the United States, and the world over, transgressing "over boundaries of race, religion, class and sexual orientation" (Naresh & Surendran, 2001). The difference is that every ethnic group will react differently to domestic abuse[2] depending on their community's expectations, cultural norms, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, educational level, racial background and gender-roles. Moreover, cultural myths surrounding the rootedness of South Asian women in "centuries of submissiveness, passiveness, and denial," and the "power and control" held by South Asian men over women "who are reluctant, afraid, or slow in fighting them" (Naresh & Surendran, 2001), complicates matters further. As the blogger quite rightly makes clear in the

[1] The blog-generated quote in this chapter has been modified from the original for privacy reasons.

[2] The terms domestic violence, domestic abuse, spousal violence and/or marital violence, and in some instances Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) will be used interchangeably in this study.

epigraph, the tendency to blame "culture" ("Where's the Garam Paratha Bahu?" 2006) as the sole reason for the domestic abuse that several immigrant South Asian women face within their heterosexual marital relationships while living in the United States (US), grossly underplays other intersectional factors that lead to their predicament. It also trivializes their pain, suffering, and resistance to a great extent.

South Asia includes the countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Afghanistan, as well as South Asian expatriates from Maldives, Trinidad & Tobago, and some African countries, most of whom immigrated to the US over the last 5 decades. The passing of the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act in the United States paved the way for many foreign professionals to enter and settle in the country. For the purpose of this study and for sampling limitations, most attention will focus on the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi diasporas in the US. Recently, South Asians have immigrated to the US in increasing numbers on work visas related to the technology industry, with many who prefer to look to their home countries in search of spouses/partners. While they are not strictly immigrants, most of these foreign workers hope to eventually become Legal Permanent Residents (LPR) and US citizens. According to Naresh and Surendran "women often leave their homes in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh to board a plane to become wives of men they hardly know. For some, the life ahead becomes full of abuse" (2001).

Domestic violence against women generally takes the form of physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse and homicide. South Asian women's rights activist Sujata Warrier points out that many forms of sexual, emotional, and economic abuse, though rampant in immigrant communities, are toughest to substantiate because of the lack of concrete proof (Naresh & Surendran, 2001). In most cultures and ethnic communities perpetrators of domestic

violence are usually male, although in many heterosexual and homosexual relationships men are also found to be victims of domestic violence. Despite this, domestic violence statistics prove that "rural and urban women of all religious, ethnic, socioeconomic (SES) and educational backgrounds, and of varying ages, physical abilities and lifestyles can be affected by domestic abuse. There is not a typical woman who will be battered - the risk factor is being born female" ("What is battering," 2005-2009). To add to this, issues of culture shock, racial marginalization, language barriers, feelings of shame, social isolation and immigration status greatly complicate the problem of domestic violence among immigrant, refugee and minority women in the US.

A projected 1.3 million women are victims of physical violence by an intimate partner (IPV) each year (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). Put another way, 85% of domestic violence victims in the United States are women (Rennison, 2003). According to the Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum, domestic violence has been an alarming problem within the South Asian community in the US, with as many as 40.8% of South Asian women surveyed in the Greater Boston area admitting being victims of IPV (Raj & Silverman, 2002). Albeit, a dependable statistic explaining the perpetration of domestic violence against South Asian immigrant women has not yet been carried out on a national level. Lack of reliable figures on the nationwide incidence of South Asian domestic violence is disturbing for the fact that in spite of the problem being rampant within this ethnic community (Raj & Silverman, 2002), it seems to be "widely overlooked and heavily underrated" (Naresh & Surendran, 2001), not to mention severely underreported.

In the last two decades, quite a few domestic violence shelters and support services have been established throughout the country to specifically address the problem within the South Asian immigrant community. Cultural insensitivity and ethno-cultural incompetence on the part

of service providers had for quite some time (and some still do) marginalized immigrant women who were already hesitant to seek help from people different from them. It is no surprise that abused minority women seek help and guidance from community-specific groups that can "speak their language, understand their problems and sympathize better with their situation and limitations. Warrier, who also counsels, verifies that non-ethnic organizations are used far less frequently by South Asian women than are ethnic organizations" (Naresh & Surendran, 2001).

In the offline context, there are two primary kinds of organizations that have offered help to South Asian female victims/survivors[3] of domestic violence, one being the "temple and cultural organization that is there to preserve the ties of the family. The second type is the feminist organization committed to women's empowerment and liberation" (Naresh & Surendran, 2001). The former organizations function on ideals of cultural, social and familial reinforcement, while the latter stress on gender empowerment and self-sufficiency, providing legal, residential, psychological, and economic help to a certain extent, but "most importantly are there to listen" (Naresh & Surendran, 2001).

Communication is key, as is evident from the work being done by these cultural and non-profit *community based organizations* (CBOs). However, what happens when physical mobility or accessibility becomes an issue? What alternative does an abused woman have to voice her predicament when she is emotionally, socially, legally, and financially incarcerated? What channels of communication and community support are up for grabs for victims and advocates of domestic violence to raise awareness in the current era of technological ubiquity, social networking, global information flows and post-feminist liberations? For scholars and advocates who believe in a semi-teleological approach to gaining awareness, the end, though important, is

[3] In most cases, the terms *victims* and *survivors* will be used interchangeably in this study.

not as crucial to epistemological knowledge as is an in-depth understanding of the themes and patterns of the processes, forces and impediments that lead to (or hinder) such realizations. Ergo, *naming* the abuse, *identifying* its intersectional themes and patterns, as well as *communicating* the extent of this human rights violation should constitute the very first steps to opposing this oppression, followed by agency (written/vocal/symbolic/physical) for creating consciousness and enabling change and liberation.

A. Problem Statement

To better understand the history, context and forms of domestic abuse that South Asian women face in the US, it is important to address the violence that some South Asian women encounter from *their husbands/heterosexual partners* and/or *other members of their marital family,* as well as *forms of abuse* that among others may involve the misuse of legal and immigration status to perpetrate exploitation. For this study, I would like to substantiate examples from selected general-interest South Asian blogs that mobilize a range of community specific socio-political discussions through intra-communal participation, including the issue of domestic violence against adult, immigrant South Asian women in the United States.

To combat the painful muting caused by this human rights violation, many South Asian immigrants have recently started writing and commenting in blogs to *re-cite* testimonies of their own or another's experiences of abuse, naming the grounds for its perpetration, giving ethno-cultural advice for coping and dealing with the problem, increasing overall awareness of domestic violence in the South Asian diaspora and, on occasion, providing information about available resources and services. Simply put, a weblog or blog is an online journal that its authors can freely publish to engage in discussion, analyze issues, voice opinions, share experiences, and offer advice on a variety of topics (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004).

While some scholars have considered blogs legitimate media outlets that contribute to an understanding of serious political, journalistic, legal, and economic outcomes (Drezner & Farrell, 2008; Bruns & Jacobs, 2006; Wallsten, 2007; Quiggin, 2006), others have considered it an extension of democratic thinking and media freedom (Papacharissi 2009a, 2009b; Tremayne, 2007).

There are communication scholars who study blogs as narrative spaces to engage in dialog about oneself and perform identity (Huffaker, 2004; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Lindemann, 2005; boyd, 2006), and create community and gender neutrality (Blanchard, 2004; Gregg, 2006). There are also those who view blogs as channels of socio-cultural exchange and upcoming political agency (Sink, 2006; Mitra, 2006; 2008). However, what weblog research has yet to determine are if these digital social spaces can thematically represent our complicated and intersectional lived experiences? What this study primarily seeks is thematic evidence of blogs as potentially safe interactional spaces used by members of specific communities to re-situate their fractured identities, raise awareness, initiate change and gain empowerment against oppressive forces.

B. Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to use the following research questions as guiding principles for thematically analyzing parent posts and comments about domestic violence within the South Asian immigrant community in the US, as found in South Asian community blogs devoted to the issue.

RQ 1. What roles do the bloggers and commentators play within these South Asian community blogs?

RQ 2. What themes, patterns, and explanations emerge about the issue of domestic violence against South Asian women in the US, as evidenced in the selected South Asian community blog threads?

RQ 2a. Is there thematic evidence in these blogs that the problem of domestic violence within the South Asian immigrant community in the US is an intersectional problem?

RQ 2b. Do the selected blog posts and comments show any thematic evidence that the immigrant status of South Asian women in the US leads to domestic abuse?

RQ 2c. Is there thematic evidence of blogs as a way of "contemplation of action" for abused South Asian immigrant women?

RQ 3. Do the selected blog posts and comments show evidence of 'awareness of the consequences of this new way of communicating via blogs'? In other words, in what ways do bloggers and commentators use these blogs to narrate their experiences about the issue of domestic violence?

RQ 3a. Is there any thematic evidence of awareness-creation about the issue of domestic violence in the sampled South Asian community blog threads?

RQ 3b. Is there any thematic evidence that the South Asian bloggers consider these community blogs "safe" public spaces for voicing private stories?

C. Assumptions Intrinsic to the Dissertation

This dissertation is based on the intrinsic assumption that the blogs studied by me, the researcher, reveal the internal beliefs, emotions, positions, and opinions of the bloggers and commentators who are writing about the issue of domestic violence within the South Asian immigrant community in the United States. I have chosen to study the selected blog data, as they are naturally present and with minimal researcher interference, that is, as a non-participant

researcher who does not contribute to the text-based discussions within the selected blog threads. This study is also grounded on the assumption that the selected South Asian community blog threads acceptably present stories, experiences, facts and information related to the topic of domestic abuse. Lastly, it is presumed that some of the authors of blog posts and comments that are self-identified South Asian female victims of domestic violence in the US, have provided accurate accounts of their experiences of partner abuse. Their online accounts and user identities are not verifiable given the limitations of the study, and neither is it the intention of this dissertation.

D. Research Outline

Broadly speaking, this thematic analysis focuses on the textual exchanges of the South Asian immigrant community to understand the consequences that a multiplicity of online voices have on the creation of awareness, change and identity. Through a critical reading of topical blog posts and comments from victims and advocates[4] of domestic violence, the aim of this study is to find evidence, identify themes, understand patterns, and report findings that will help us to comprehend the forms, forces and extent of domestic abuse against South Asian immigrant women in the US, as well as the potential steps taken by bloggers and commentators to further community consciousness and suggest possible interventions to address this problem. The intention of this study is to solely address that percentage of the South Asian immigrant population in the US who have access to and/or can use the computer and/or web-enabled mobile technologies, to avail of its social media services. It goes unsaid that there are still at large digital divide issues that keep many South Asian immigrants from resorting to online channels of social

[4] Any blogger or commentator who is not a self-identified victim of DV (explicit and/or implicit) within the blog posts and comments will be identified as an *advocate* for reasons of simplicity.

interaction, but there is also a considerable section that turns to computer mediated communication (CMC) for support and advocacy.

The subsequent sections of the dissertation will identify this study's interdisciplinary position within new media communication, gender and women's studies, globalization and immigration research, and, will establish its theoretical and methodological foundations in the intersectional areas of post-colonial feminisms, cultural studies, social psychology and thematic analysis. To this end, I will start by examining the history, scope and forms of domestic violence against immigrant South Asian women as a unique form of IPV that is perpetrated against a particular ethnic minority in the US. This requires an in-depth understanding of the processes and patterns of globalization, transnationalism and immigration, which working together create such debilitating circumstances for several immigrant women of color in North America. To understand the impact that new media has on human rights issues and interventions, I then proceed to address the current research and future promise of blogs as potentially *safe* social spaces of communication and as highly accessible public forums that rework our traditional notions of human interactions into an altered sense of community, social capital and identity.

To theoretically tie these overlapping fields of inquiry, I review literature on theories of *intersectionality* that are derived particularly from the areas of race, gender, and cultural studies (Crenshaw, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997, 2005; Knudsen, 2006). Following this, I turn to extant research on *contemplation of action* and *consciousness-raising* as key constructs rooted in the *transtheoretical model of behavior change*, which explains the various stages and processes that battered women and IPV advocates go through for proactively changing their/other's violent situations (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984; Brown, 1997; Sowards & Renegar, 2004).

The theoretical grounding provides an optimal segue into a discussion of thematic analysis as the preferred methodology for this study, supported by a brief historical review of thematic analyses as an often used, yet under-researched qualitative method of inquiry, as well as the rationale for using it to identify, classify, code and analyze relevant themes and patterns that emerge from a close reading of blog discussions on domestic violence against immigrant South Asian women. Several illustrations from the sampled South Asian blog threads will later be provided to support the qualitative study's three major patterns of findings that are subsequently related to the role and identities of the bloggers and commentators, the typology of blog themes related to the topical discussion of domestic violence against immigrant South Asian women in the US, and finally the uses and consequences of the act of blogging for these individuals. Finally, the findings will be analyzed in light of the guiding research questions, as well as the limitations, challenges and investigative opportunities of this study, with a view to understanding *if* and *how* they all come together to help us interpret blogs as potential outlets of awareness-creation, contemplation of action against IPV, and as safe communal spaces for voicing private stories of abuse.

E. Research Significance

The issue of domestic violence among South Asian immigrants in the US may seem like a highly selective problem, but it is a blatant fact that cannot be ignored: a fact that has of late been given a legitimate voice by many South Asian bloggers on many South Asian community blogs.

Most scholarly research that has been done on issues of domestic violence and US immigration thus far, emanate from gender and women's studies, sociology and anthropology, law, criminal justice and social work, psychology, health sciences, and Asian American studies.

In essence, most of these studies indicate the need to create culturally adapted interventions that can encourage public participation of domestic violence victims to advocate community awareness of this issue, while providing counsel about victim services and batterers' interventions. In particular, IPV against women has been a highly researched subject within the area of feminist studies. However, studies addressing the impact of such human rights issues on new media research or design have rarely been taken up.

While we do find a great deal of research within the area of communication about awareness being created around shared interests by virtual communities (Mitra, 2006, 2008; Sink, 2006; Wei, 2004), there is very modest literature on violence against women in the context of the impact of digital and mobile technologies, other than those that use feminist and legal theories of violence, or conduct research in the areas of cyberviolence, cyber harassment, cyberbullying and privacy (Dimond, Fiesler & Bruckman, 2011; Adam, 2002; Citron, 2009), including the "prevalence of domestic violence along with the many activist projects that acknowledge a connection with ICTs, such as ''Take Back the Tech'' (Kee, 2005) and Hollaback! (Zraick, 2010)" (as cited in Dimond et al., 2011). One of my principal concerns is that there is a dearth of research that highlights the ethno-cultural impact of new media communication tools on *communities of consciousness* being created around human rights concerns, such as shedding light on the intersectional history and digital polyphony surrounding the issue of domestic violence within immigrant communities.

To help fill this research gap, I would like to identify and examine the explicit and latent themes relating to gender, race, ethnicity, immigration, and awareness that are uncovered, and to what extent they intersect (if at all) in blog narratives about domestic violence against South Asian migrant women, by building on the post-modern, post-colonial feminist theory of

intersectionality that ascribes acts of violence faced by women of color to an interlocking matrix of racism, sexism, cultural myths and legal pitfalls (Crenshaw, 1994). Gender and feminist theories such as *Intersectional Theory* can help new media (in particular, CMC) researchers and designers think about who is being included, who are the digitally marginalized, and ways in which their experiences can contribute to a better understanding of how those technologies that do not always reflect the experiences of all, can be made more inclusive in scope and address a heterogeneity of human experiences.

Now that we have a proposed understanding of gender and feminism's contribution to the field of communication, it is only fair to address why it is important to study this women's rights issue from the perspective of communication. What will it add to our knowledge, and how? The premise of any interaction, online or offline is *communication*. The fact that blogs in their very basic form are digital mediums of communication, which when taken further can serve as tools for awareness-creation, discursive agency and a space that creates knowledge-bases across intersectional areas (human rights, gender, race, ethnicity, immigration, etc.) make them a space pregnant with several epistemological, theoretical and methodological prospects. By exploring the possibilities that new media technologies offer in terms of: organizing community-specific cultures of interaction, creating individual empowerment, and promoting online advocacy through blogs that can be considered alternative intervention strategies to combat domestic violence, I believe that this study can contribute to communication research in the areas of online activism and consciousness-creation, *intra*-cultural communication and ethnic media participation, particularly at a time where intercultural communication through social media channels on the Internet has become commonplace.

F. Summary

There is no disagreeing that there are several CBOs and social service organizations that are trying to combat the incidence of domestic violence within the South Asian diaspora, yet its perpetration and maintenance continues to be a bleak customary practice in the United States. As women come face to face with the harsh consequences of being immigrants in a western country and battered by their male partners, they must learn to discover and avail of the alternate channels of support and empathy in order to change their violent situations. Blogging about the intent, extent and experiences of domestic violence within South Asian community blogs has become a substantial cathartic instrument for people from this ethnic community, both for its victims and its advocates. Since the practice of blogging has become a communication norm for these peripheral individuals for almost a decade now, it is about time that we make the attempt to recognize *what* histories, forms and patterns of domestic violence simultaneously affect immigrant South Asian women in the United States, and *how* these impediments and interventions are interactively textualized by South Asian community blogs.

G. Definitions of Terminology

This section will provide operational definitions for terms that have been frequently used throughout the study, including selected blog-generated terms that have been derived from certain South Asian languages, and which are contextual to the study's goals.

Battered: The act of being abused by a male intimate partner/male spouse/marital family member.

Batterer: The male spouse/male partner/marital family member who abuses the wife/female partner/daughter-in-law.

Blogging: The act of writing, adding new content, maintaining and frequently updating a blog. Writers or bloggers can also link to related online content, embed RSS feeds of recently posted content on the homepage, add their own comments to other blogs and filter comments within their own blogs (Drezner & Farrell, 2008).

Blogroll: A list of related or similar blogs or websites that have a stable position on the homepage of a particular weblog that bloggers and readers frequently refer to, with clickable links to the URLs of those blogs (Drezner & Farrell, 2008).

Blogs or Weblogs: Reverse chronological online journals with dated entries that its authors can freely publish, as well as regularly filter, archive, modify and invite participation from readers and/or commentators. Blogs can have textual, audio-visual or graphical content.

Blogosphere: The total community of blogs and bloggers that are linked and cross-referenced across several individual blog entries. The networking structure of the blogosphere creates possibilities for large-scale online social collaboration, wherein, "anyone with access to the network can participate; the barriers to entry are low, and there is no central authority to grant publishing rights or accreditation, nor to prevent bloggers from linking or responding to information or ideas found elsewhere" (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006, p. 5).

Blog Thread: A reverse chronological list of a single parent post and following comments within a blog page that usually contains text or related content about the same topic of discussion.

Bride Price: Historically, "bride-price" refers to gifts of money promised to the South Asian bride's family by the intended groom; in effect her family 'sells' their daughter to the highest bidder and forces their daughter to marry him. This practice is also rampant in South Asian immigrant communities.

Colored or *Post-Colonial Feminist Movement:* Also understood as the success of the third wave, indigenous, peripheral feminist ideologies that question the homogenizing and gender-equality-focused tendency of white feminism. Instead, colored or post-colonial feminists turn toward diversity, often observing how first and second-wave 'White' feminism has failed to include women of color.

CMC: Short for computer mediated communication that refers to various forms of real-time, synchronous and asynchronous forms of human communication via networked computers, including bulletin boards, instant messaging, text messaging, email, social networking, videoconferencing, blogging, etc.

Comments: The responses that follow the primary or first blog entry within a particular weblog page or thread, provided the readers or commentators have access (restricted or unrestricted) to leave their comments.

Commentator: The author of the response that follows the primary or first blog entry within a particular weblog page or thread, provided that he or she has access (restricted or unrestricted) to leave a comment.

Consciousness-Raising: Consciousness-raising is concept derived from the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change (Brown, 2007) that allows the oppressed, including victims and advocates of domestic violence to raise awareness of this human rights abuse in public, and thereby seek help and support.

Contemplation of Action: Battered women who are in the contemplation of action phase are aware of their abuse, mindful that they have to change, are contemplating changing their behavior toward violence, but are not fully ready for action (Brown, 1997). They often

use consciousness-raising as a process to contemplate changes in their debilitative condition.

Data corpus: The data *corpus* indicates *all* the data sampled for a specific research project, with particular emphasis on the use of thematic analysis as the qualitative method of inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The entire selection of blogs for this study is the data corpus.

Data Excerpt or Extract: Data excerpts are created by coding data items using a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software. Selected excerpts or data extracts are tagged and named from the selected data items (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data set: Data set indicates all the data selected from that corpus, which will be used for the final analysis, with particular emphasis on the use of thematic analysis as the qualitative method of inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The sampled blog threads are the data set for this study.

Descriptors: They are the demographics, quantitative variables, test scores, and other identifiers for each case, person, and transcript, to help organize and qualify the data. Dedoose (2011), the QDA software used for this study, has been particularly useful for coding excerpts and creating hierarchical categories, which are meaningful segments of demographic information derived from the blog resources.

Desi: Hindi or Urdu word used as a general vernacular reference for people of South Asian origin, mainly in North America and Europe.

Dharma Sankat: Dharma is a Sanskrit word that means ‘duty’ or ‘religion,’ while *Sankat* is a Sanskrit word that means ‘dilemma.’ Taken together, the word connotes a lot more, signifying that one’s duty in a particular role may well oppose his/her duty in another role, thereby creating a moral contradiction in the person’s mind and life. For instance, a

Hindu Indian woman's *dharma* as a self-sacrificing wife may not agree with her *dharma* as an independent, individualistic woman, thereby creating a *dharma sankat* for her.

Domestic Violence or Abuse: In the case of this study, it is a form of violence that is usually perpetrated by a male intimate partner or marital family member against the wife/fiancée/female partner/daughter-in-law, within a relationship such as marriage, courtship, or living-together. Domestic violence is a recognized human rights violation against women that generally takes several forms, including physical abuse, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, economic abuse, sexual abuse, immigration-related threats, homicide, etc. Although victims of domestic violence may be found in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, with many victims being men, in most cultures and ethnic communities the victims are usually women, a fact that will also be the subject of focus for this study.

Dowry: Historically, 'dowry' and 'dowry-deaths' refer to gifts of money and/or kind demanded by the South Asian groom and his family. Consequently, the failure to pay dowry has often led to wife/daughter-in-law abuse and death. This practice and its related crime are also rampant in South Asian immigrant communities.

Excerpts: See *Data Excerpt or Extract*. They can be described in a memo, given any number of codes, and, if the study requires it, can be rated based on any rating or weighting system that the researcher may have defined for a code (Dedoose, 2011).

Fraud Marriages or IMFA: The Immigration Marriage Fraud Amendment (IMFA) was passed in 1986 for the purpose of questioning the authenticity of immigrant marriages and often "requiring proof that an alien was 'bona fide' through evidence that the marriage had lasted at least two years," and was not a 'fraud marriage.' There were a few waivers for

abused immigrant women, and they were very difficult to obtain, making it hard for South Asian women to leave an abusive marriage for fear of deportation or becoming 'illegal' (Abraham, 2005, p. 430).

H1-B Visa: The H1-B is an employment-based visa given to foreign nationals who are residing in the United States for a temporary period in some specialty occupation. Those who are married, often bring their spouses on dependent H-4 visas. Nearly three-fourths of all H1B's are issued to men, with H4's being issued primarily to dependent women and children.

H4 Visa: The H4 visa is offered to dependent spouses of H1-B visa holders who are residing in the United States. The H-4 visa operates on three conditions: first, it stays valid as long as the marriage between the primary H-1B holder and the dependent spouse holds good. Second, it relies on the continued employment of the principal H-1B worker in his/her employment organization. Finally, and perhaps the most double-edged condition is that the H-4 dependent visa does not allow its adherent to work legally in the US.

Honor Killing: South Asian women have on occasion been killed by their marital or biological families, as a way to restore the family's tainted honor. It is a crime that is also rampant in South Asian immigrant communities.

Hyperlink: An electronic link that provides direct access from one specifically marked place within a hypertext or hypermedia document to another, within the same or a different document (Merriam-Webster, 2013).

Hypertext: Hypertext is a term coined by Ted Nelson in the 1960s to denote the system of coding that was used for writing pages on the Web, and was meant to function as "non-

sequential writing – text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen" (Landow, 2001, p. 100).

Intersectionality: The theory of intersectionality questions how varying issues relating to minority cultures intersect. It is primarily used to dissect the production of power in areas of gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class, nationality and immigration (Crenshaw, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997, 2005).

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): See *Domestic Violence or Abuse.* These terms have been used interchangeably in this study.

Model Minority Stereotype or Myth: "The Model Minority stereotype has been applied to Asian Americans since the 1960s. This stereotype suggests that Asian Americans as a racial/ethnic group are achieving a higher level of success than the population average, along dimensions such as educational attainment and income". Of course, this image is not without its internal contradictions, such as ignoring the specific needs of certain ethnic minorities/communities and dismissing acts of discrimination and racism perpetrated externally and internally (Counseling Center at UIUC, 2007).

Mother goddess: In Hinduism, the one goddess who is the symbol of 'creator-progenitor-destroyer,' and from whom a multitude of other Hindu goddesses emanate in different avatars.

Online Community: "An online community is defined as a large, collectivity of voluntary members whose primary goal is member and collective welfare, whose members share a common interest, experience, or conviction and positive regard for other members, and who interact with one another and contribute to the collectivity primarily over the Net. Online communities can have more or less structure and more- or less-committed

members. They may yield positive or negative consequences for their members, sponsors, and society" (Sproull & Arriaga, 2012).

Parent Blogger: The author of the primary or first entry within a particular weblog page or thread.

Parent Posts: The primary or first entry written by a blog author within a particular weblog page or thread.

Resources: See *Data Items.* They are the primary units of analysis, or qualitative *data items* such as interviews, blog posts and comments, field notes, stories, focus group transcripts, audio files, videos, and photos (Dedoose, 2011).

Samaj: A Sanskrit/Hindi/Bengali word (primarily of Indian origin) that signifies a society or a community, which could be religious, social, cultural, caste- or class-based.

Sati Savitri: Two separate Hindu mythological figures who represent the ideals of self-sacrifice, forbearance, obedience and interdependence. However *Sati* and *Savitri* are also the very same idols who are responsible for constructing and perpetuating traditional (and indeed patriarchal) Indian gender-roles for women (Goel, 2005).

Selective Sampling: Selective sampling of research materials is a common ethnographic or social scientific data gathering method where the investigator decides to collect from a selective group or location, and/or seek out specific types of people or data, being guided more by rational thought and judgment, rather than ease or preconception. However, this kind of selective sampling does run the risk of limiting the results and descriptions only to the identified sample.

Sense of Community: Sense of community is what differentiates an online community from an online group. The online community that is built on the foundation of a "sense of

community," is more of an interactive space that is made up of fluid borders, which intersect across areas of diverse interests, as well as shared relational ties (Blanchard, 2004; Sink, 2006).

Sita: A Hindu mythological figure enshrined in the Indian epic *Ramayana* who represents the ideals of self-sacrifice, forbearance, obedience and interdependence. However *Sita* is also the very same idol who is responsible for constructing and perpetuating traditional (and indeed patriarchal) Indian gender-roles for women (Goel, 2005).

South Asia/n: South Asia/n refers to immigrants from the countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Afghanistan, etc. who immigrated to the United States over the last 5 decades. However, given the limitations of this study, the South Asian immigrant population will mostly refer to the diasporic Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in the US.

South Asian Community Blogs: General interest blogs that discuss various topics including politics, culture, society, entertainment, community, crime, violence, etc. pertaining to this ethnic group, both on a national and diasporic level.

Spousal or Marital Violence: See *Domestic Violence or Abuse.* These terms have been used interchangeably in this study.

Tags: They refer to the meaningful categories that the *data excerpts* are coded as, and visually show up as a tag cloud. These tags or themes that emerge from close readings of the coded and organized data about the individuals, stories, groups, or settings become the main focus of qualitative research (Dedoose, 2011).

Themes: Themes can emerge explicitly or latently through an inductive process of analysis and can be defined as categories that are identified in discrete units and/or across data to communicate common meanings and patterns of occurrence.

Third wave Feminist Movement: See *Colored* or *Post-Colonial* Feminist Movement.

Unit of analysis or Data Item: An individual data item refers to each of the selected parent posts and comments within the sampled blog threads. In other words, each data item is an individual unit of analysis for this study.

URL: Short for Uniform Resource Locator. It refers to the Internet location or address for a specific web page, site, document, forum, organization, etc.

Web 2.0 Tools or Communities: Web 2.0 platforms or tools can be used by people to initiate communities online. They provide the resources for users to express themselves by using the platform, to create new content or tools, and to find people interested in the same content or even to get noticed. This means that Web 2.0 platforms provide tools that enable users to create, store, manage and share content. Examples of platforms or tools are the various blog or mobile blog platforms. Moreover, Web 2.0 communities unite Internet users through a shared objective. “The common goal can be something like "finding new friends", "finding relevant information" or simply "killing time". Community platforms offer complex services for social creation of content of various kind” (Hoegg, Martignoni, Meckel & Stanoevska-Slabeva, 2006).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of this study is to develop a comprehensive understanding of how the diverse areas of domestic violence, blogging, immigration and transnationalism, online community, intersectionality and consciousness-raising, all converge within selected South Asian community blogs that are devoted to the issue of domestic abuse encountered by women from this ethnic diaspora in the United States. Accordingly, this chapter will address six major literature pools, with *Part I* taking an historical look at the theories, forms, figures and interventions that help us to better understand the causes prevalence, maintenance and mediations of domestic violence within the South Asian immigrant community in the United States. *Part II* will review the impact that the forces and processes of globalization, immigration, and transnationalism have on South Asian female victims of domestic violence in the US, causing and complicating their debilitative situation in several instances. *Part III* will delineate how online communities have historically created and technologically mediated a sense of alternative space, newer social relations, a cohesive sense of community and renewed identities. *Part IV* will discuss the histories, structure, genres, theories and research advances of the online practice of blogging, with particular emphasis on the way that blogs stand as a hybrid medium of expression spanning the personal, political, social, ethnic, cultural and communal. *Part V* will explain the first of the two major theoretical foundations of this study, the theory of intersectionality, which has often been used in the areas of gender and cultural studies to demonstrate the ways in which race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and culture intersect in the perpetuation and maintenance of oppression against minorities. Finally, *Part VI* will review the second major theoretical support for this study, the transtheoretical model of behavior change, which espouses the process of consciousness-raising

and the stage of contemplation as two effective third-wave feminist strategies that are adopted by female victims of spousal abuse to end the violence they face.

A. Part I: Histories, Theories, Forms and Interventions of Domestic Violence within the South Asian Immigrant Community

Scholarly focus on domestic violence prevalence within diverse ethnic communities in the US has largely studied it from the post-marital (mostly heterosexual) aspect of the issue, particularly as that which pertains to intimate partner violence (IPV). Domestic abuse perpetrated on women by men, takes many forms. Some known examples are: a man emotionally abusing his girlfriend/wife, marital rape/rape, hitting/cutting/slapping/belting/burning/killing his wife/partner, sexual abuse, stalking, wife/partner torturing, intimidation, public humiliation, prevention from seeking health care, ridiculing, restraining, threats to harm family and friends, to take away/harm children, threats of being kicked out/using weapons, and several other examples ("What is battering," 2005-2009).

However, this leaves under-addressed other abusive treatments that women from many ethnic communities face within their marital homes, such as in-laws ill treating their daughters-in-law, husband's or in-law's control of finances, excessive limitations on women's freedom, forced marriages, using children to manipulate a mother's emotions, social isolation, communal shame, sexist/racist comments, deprivation of physical and economic resources, and similar instances that don't always fall under the general area of domestic violence or IPV intervention. Similarly, the *forms* domestic violence takes, particularly within the South Asian diaspora in the US, often overrides the known physical, emotional and economic violence that APIAHF reports (Dabby, 2007). It additionally includes abuse that takes advantage of the dependent legal status that many South Asian women have in the US. This form of domestic abuse, which partakes of a

woman's legal and economic reliance on her spouse/partner becomes all the more pertinent within the context of immigration and transnationalism, where women find their identities doubly displaced: by the politics of race/ethnicity, and the constructs of gender.

Of the 40.8% South Asian women surveyed in the Greater Boston area who admitted to having been the victims of domestic violence, 65% of the physically abused women also reported sexual abuse and only 30.4% of those women who reported injuries said that they sought medical attention (Raj & Silverman, 2002). Similarly, 63 separate reports of homicide and attempted homicide (which included murder-suicides) of South Asian women in the US and Canada between the years 1981-2000 revealed that although the majority of victims were domestically abused women, many of the victims were the battered women's children and relatives (Das Dasgupta, 2000).

A study that compared African American, South Asian, and Hispanic women in the US, found that the number of known domestic violence cases within the three ethnic communities were more or less the same, with the exception that the severity of IPV was found to be greater among South Asian women, as well as the finding that African American and Hispanic women left their abusers more often than abused South Asian women (Yoshioka, Gilbert, El-Bassel & Baig-Amin, 2003). However, the ways in which South Asian women respond to IPV is probably closer to the ways in which ethnic women from other Asian (South Asian, South-East and East Asian) and Middle Eastern countries react to it. Studies comparing women from different Asian and Middle Eastern immigrant communities in the US showed that Muslim women (particularly, from conservative Islamic countries) and Asian women from largely patriarchal cultures tolerate domestic violence much more compared to African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian American women. This is because they tend to view it as their own fault/fate, their cultural-

moorings that teach them to be subservient to their husbands/in-laws, their fear of community or cultural rejection, and their desire to uphold an ideal ethno-cultural image (Sthanki, 2007; Shiu-Thornton, Senturia, & Sullivan, 2005).

Carraway (1991) also points to the substantial underrepresentation of statistics for violence against women of color in general, and argues:

> Our societal definition of violence must include the direct results of poor medical care, economic inferiority, oppressive legislation, and cultural invisibility… By broadening our definition of violence, we combat the minimalization of our experiences as women of color by the dominant culture. (p. 1302)

Zetawos and Bunton (2007) and Yoshioka et al. (2003) have observed that in the current context, many South Asian women were reluctant to or did not report domestic violence incidents to the authorities. Although there are several domestic abuse shelters, organizations and support services across the US to address such issues among women from this ethnic population, South Asian women are usually disinclined to get help or report the violence for many reasons as "they may be accused of bringing shame on the family, may not be believed by friends and family, and may also have concerns regarding their immigration status" ("South Asians in the United States," 2003).

In all its varied possibilities the definitional paradigm of marital domestic violence needs to be expanded and contextualized to include forms, perpetrators, theories and research on IPV that were hitherto not taken into consideration. Contextualizing the causes, consequences and interventions of domestic violence from an ethno-cultural perspective can help to redefine its boundaries and reevaluate its histories. Before talking about the historical and interventional perspectives for considering the case of South Asian women who are domestic violence victims in the US, it is important to consider the extant definitions, theories, terminologies, interventions,

research trends and methods that have commonly been used in the areas of violence against women (VAW), especially domestic violence.

1. **Power and control in domestic violence: Common definitions, terminologies, forms, theories, methods and interventions**

An ideal definition of domestic violence should address the interplay of violence, power and control in hetero- and homosexual relationships that lends meaning to and produces the perpetration and consumption of such abuse (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). It should also address the intersection of social, cultural, racial, sexual, gendered, economic, political, legal and human rights abuses that these women endure as a result. DeKeseredy & Schwartz (2001) argue that the struggle to define VAW has been a common concern with scholars in various fields, debating if a narrow definition that has "the advantage of increasing clarity about the nature and context of a specific form of violence" (Dobash & Dobash, 1998, p. 4) is suited to explaining VAW, or if a broad definition has more methodological prowess. While some critics are wary of the all-encompassing nature of broad definitions, fearing an underplay of human rights violation issues (Turk, 1975; Gelles & Cornell, 1985; Duffy & Momirov, 1997), other scholars believe that narrow definitions tend to trivialize women's experience of abuse and lessen their chances of getting social support, as their subjective experience of violence may not fit into the general models of addressing VAW (Duffy & Momirov, 1997; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2001).

Undoubtedly, bulk of the research that studies VAW and domestic violence focuses on abused women's strategies for survival. Few scholars have tried to include freedom and agency as central actors in domestic violence cases. Hirschmann (1996) takes the framework of feminist political theory to render an alternative reading to the political and philosophical discourses of freedom/liberty, and frames 'choice' as a constructed concept within the context of horrifying

daily experiences of abused women. Carraway (1991) asks for a definitional and contextual broadening of domestic violence to include women of color. For Carraway (1991), it is imperative for women of color to 'name' the abuse that they face, including the ones that are not recognized by dominant discourses as VAW, as well as those that address the intersection of cultural, social, racial, gendered, and ethnic factors that are responsible for their abuse.

Crenshaw (1994) brought to the fore the theory of intersectionality as a way to increase the scope of understanding domestic violence from a non-White perspective. According to her, "ignoring differences within groups frequently contributes to tension among groups, another problem of identity politics that frustrates efforts to politicize violence against women." She further argues, "when the practices expound identity as "woman" or "person of color" as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling" (1994). This is the location that Crenshaw wants to signal by intersecting discourses of race and gender in discussions of violence against women of color, factors that are excluded from mainstream feminist and anti-racist practices. Moreover, it is because of their "intersectional identity as both women and people of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, [that][5] the interests and experiences of women of color are frequently marginalized within both" (Crenshaw, 1994).

2. **Power and control in the case of South Asian domestic violence: What makes the victim's condition unique?**

Domestic violence is a globally terrorizing condition, commonly prevalent in many (if not most) societies across the world. However, the forms it takes (both in terms of the perpetrator and the kind of violence used), calls for ways to initiate domestic violence activism,

[5] The use of words in box parenthesis [] found within direct quotations that have been used in this study, signify the researcher's own addition.

awareness, interventions, survival strategies and coping mechanisms that are mindful of the cultural, ethnic and racial histories of victimized women, and sensitive to their contextual, local, external and in-group differences. Such differences should also be kept in mind while studying the forms, circumstances and prevalence of domestic violence within the South Asian immigrant community in the US.

According to the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF) (Dabby, 2007), domestic violence against women within the South Asian community includes physical and mental violence by one/multiple perpetrators such as spouses/partners, fathers/mothers, in-laws, siblings, and brothers/sisters-in-law; sexual violence including being forced to watch and imitate pornography, severe sexual neglect, marital rape; using and ill-treating children to inflict harm, including threats of international kidnapping of children by family abductors and false accusations against mothers; abandonment and isolation (physical, economic, legal and social); threats of honor killings; *dowry*-related[6] deaths and asking *bride price*[7]; community's denial of the problem of domestic violence; less attention paid to the education and nutrition of girl children; forced abortion of a girl child; forced marriages (not to be confused with arranged marriages); victimization and exclusion of the South Asian Lesbian Gay Bisexual & Transgender (LGBTIQ) community; and immigration related threats, including withholding green card applications and petitions, destroying important legal documents, threats of deportation and

6 Historically, 'dowry' and 'dowry-deaths' refer to gifts of money/kind demanded by the South Asian groom/family, with the failure to pay often leading to wife/daughter-in-law abuse/death.

7 Historically, 'bride-price' refers to gifts of money promised to the South Asian bride's family by the intended groom; in effect her family 'sells' their daughter to the highest bidder and forces their daughter to marry him.

"deliberate measures to prevent the victim from becoming acclimated to her new country" (Roy, 1995; Goel, 2005).

What makes the case of abused immigrant South Asian women unique is the immense underreporting of such crimes by the South Asian ethnic community. Certain health and behavioral science surveys have established that while some of the older or first-generation South Asian immigrant women had approached domestic violence shelters, health services and community-based counseling, the more recent immigrants seemed to have *no* (or limited) access to, or knowledge of IPV support and counseling services (Raj & Silverman, 2003; Lee & Hadeed, 2009). The condition that sets migrant South Asian women apart is the use of their immigration status by their partners or marital family as a weapon to inflict violence on them.

In fact, most scholars working on issues of domestic violence and US immigration argue that isolation due to immigration is an important factor in IPV among South Asian families, majorly due to the invisibility immigrant women experience because of their ethnicity and gender status in the US (Abraham, 2000). Moreover, limited knowledge of English, proliferation of the forces of racism and sexism, religious beliefs, and the labeling of domestic violence within the South Asian community as a 'private' issue, has further disempowered many South Asian women from speaking out and seeking help (Goel, 2005; Das Gupta, 2006; Das Dasgupta, 2007).

3. **Community, health, counseling and social support for immigrant South Asian women who are domestic violence victims**

Community-based support services for domestic violence victims were virtually unheard of, if not totally non-existent before 1976, and many such shelters also refused to house battered women, frequently blaming the women themselves for the abuse they received. It was with the feminist movements of the 1970s that domestic violence came to be, as an independent

and accepted form of VAW. With it, community activists (many of whom were formerly abused women and feminists) formed domestic violence shelters and raised public consciousness about this oft thought *private* patriarchal terrorism. However, by the beginning of the 21st century there are recorded over 2000 domestic violence support programs across the US, with more than 20 shelters devoted to domestic violence intervention within the South Asian immigrant community. Many of them provide 24-hour crisis lines, emergency shelter services and several forms of community counseling (Sullivan & Gillum, 2001). While domestic violence shelters, community-based support programs and counseling services are found to be among the most supportive resources for battered women (Sullivan & Gillum, 2001), many women, including women of color and minority/immigrant women find it difficult to resort to shelter services because of language barriers, insensitivity to cultural differences, and legal hurdles that exclude them from receiving certain kinds of counseling and/or community support. It is but imperative for domestic violence shelters and community programs to be mindful of the cultures and ethnic contexts of the different women they serve (Das Dasgupta, 2007).

Shamita Das Dasgupta (2007) delineates the burgeoning advocacy work done by several South Asian community based organizations (CBOs), in addition to many scholarly treatises that have advanced the South Asian anti-domestic violence movement. What Das Dasgupta (2007) particularly points to is the pro-active support given by these service organizations and activists who are trying to re-define the notion of community-based work, and who also "have been challenging not only the patriarchal entitlements integral to the community but also the racialized marginalization by the larger community that would wrench power from South Asian women" (p. 5).

Goel (2005) points out how "basic acclimation difficulties, language barriers, and racism" (p. 645) further impede community-based support and counseling opportunities for South Asian victims and batterers. It is seen that South Asian Indian women's reactions to abuse and coping mechanisms are informed to a great extent by her community's myths and traditions, by "the ideals of the Indian woman's life: the models of the good daughter-in-law and the good wife; the ideals of community and family life; and finally, the ramifications of divorce or departure for her parents, siblings, and children." These "cultural ideals (that) tend to prevent Indian women from prioritizing their own needs and their own safety," is exemplified by the Hindu mythological figures of the self-sacrificial, forbearing, and interdependent *Sita* and *Sati Savitri,* the very same idols that are responsible for constructing and perpetuating traditional (and indeed patriarchal) Indian gender-roles (Goel, 2005).

Abraham (1995) also studies these community organizations, which she terms South Asian Women's Organizations (SAWOs) as growing social movements, and as agents of social change for battered South Asian women. She convincingly exhibits "their relevance and the instrumental role they play in shifting marital violence among South Asians in the US from a "private problem" to a "social issue"" (p. 450). What differentiates the SAWOs from other women's organizations in the US is that the former address cultural issues that pay heed to the social and family-structures of immigrant communities. They also weigh the power and control tactics that the perpetrator uses to induce and continue abuse, including (but not restricted to) "the "green card" factor, language barriers, and lack of information or access to support services" (Abraham, 1995, p. 459). In reaction, most SAWOs organize themselves around the principles of empowering South Asian women (at the community and individual level), ending domestic violence (through awareness creation and social/legal/health-based interventions) and

encouraging community education (involving respected community institutions like temples, mosques, community centers, etc.).

In many societies "women may be unwilling to disclose their experience of domestic violence for fear of bringing shame to their families and communities or of reinforcing stereotypes" (Kasturirangan, Krishnan & Riger, 2004, p. 321). Accordingly, when looking for help for domestic violence, "women of color may feel they have to place importance on their gender identity above their racial or ethnic identity," which poses a *dharma sankat* or moral dilemma for many abused women, especially from the South Asian immigrant community (Kasturirangan et al., 2004, p. 321). According to the authors, mainstream American society is dominated by a linear/individualist worldview that places a premium on personal independence and autonomy. In contrast, many of the ethnic and minority communities in the US, including the larger South Asian community believes in a relational and collectivist worldview that favors group loyalty and interdependence in most areas of life. This is one of the main reasons that community programs and counseling services for the battered and batterer interventions, which are devised for one cultural context cannot be (or, should not be) applied to another one (Parham, 2002).

Apart from the oppression that stems from within the family and community of these abused immigrant women of color, the stigmas of racial and ethnic intolerance, anti-immigrant attitudes, and social class prejudice are factors that may adversely impact their lives. Many scholars have pointed to the lack of cultural diversity in current domestic violence research, intervention strategies and counseling programs. Some scholars have challenged feminist therapists to move beyond sexism and begin to examine their own "subtle racist and classist assumptions," (Kasturirangan et al., 2004, p. 324; Sharma, 2001), while others have warned

domestic violence activists that "failure to do so means women of color must decide whether or not to engage with another potentially racist system: that of domestic violence intervention" (Kasturirangan et al., 2004, p. 325). As a result of this intersectional marginalization of battered South Asian women, researchers of domestic violence within this immigrant minority group have pointed to the positive impact of intra-community response in recent times (Kasturirangan et al., 2004).

Not only is it crucial for health support services to create more ethno-culturally specific assessment and intervention procedures for the mental and physical health implications of IPV (i.e., cultural-bound syndrome), but there should also be complete diversity in all support areas including shelters, court hearings, and physical/mental health services. As per Lee and Hadeed (2009), "Public education is the central pillar in raising community awareness of IPV and informing resources available in Asian immigrant communities … including multilingual newspapers, radio programs, flyers, and free educational classes" (p. 162). Raj and Silverman (2003) also demonstrate the lack of knowledge of services among the recently immigrated South Asian women, with only 11% South Asian women surveyed in the Greater Boston area reporting that they had received counseling and health services for domestic violence. Further, as Abraham (1995) points out, the negative attitudes, stereotypes and false perceptions of minority community members are also often held by health care providers. This can lead to a lack of sensitivity toward the victim, to the extent of resulting in an incorrect diagnosis, mistreatment of the problem and an eventual unwillingness of the victim to seek help (Hurwitz, Gupta, Liu, Silverman & Raj, 2006; Weil & Lee, 2004).

4. **Cultural myths, social effects, health outcomes, media portrayals, and economic factors that complicate domestic violence among South Asian women in the US**

> The autonomy advocated by newfound allies at the battered women's shelter smacks of foreign danger, totally alien to the security of Indian culture. Such a solution asks the woman to give up everything she knows about what it means to be a good wife… In so doing, she shames not only her family but also her entire country and history. As a result, this solution seems not a solution at all. Even departure (moving out, getting a job, a divorce, custody), which may be the only thing to ensure her safety, has nothing traditional to recommend it (Goel, 2005, p. 656).

This is the irony that defines South Asian feminism according to Goel (2005), an ideology that glorifies the South Asian woman for her sacrifices and her strength in tolerance. The South Asian woman is expected to be the embodiment of all that is righteous, preserve family hierarchy, be the ideal daughter-in-law, suffer in silence, sever connections with her natal family (if her in-laws want her to do so), remain *pativrata* or a self-sacrificing wife, and resort to departure only if there are no other strings attached (this rarely occurs as the abused woman's parents, children and families, also often get negatively affected because of her predicament) (Goel, 2005).

Community relations and family-structure play a very decisive role in the perpetuation of domestic violence on immigrant South Asian women. Although there have been considerable changes in family-related practices in India (and other South Asian nations) in recent times, it is particularly true that within this "narrowly defined understanding of cultural authenticity, Indian immigrant women in the United States are the main symbols of cultural continuity" (Abraham, 2005, p. 434). For the Indian diaspora in the US, the family-structure is the means for their experience of cultural identity, and also the main bridge that strengthens the ties between the host and home cultures. Stemming from this notion of the ideal family also comes the notion of the ideal wife who fits into the expected docile, passive and sacrificial mold.

This particularly happens in cases where transnational arranged marriages (Abraham, 2005) take place between a South Asian man working/studying in the US and a South Asian woman (usually from the same community, class and caste), as a way to ensure the continuance of family and gender-role hierarchies. The various factors that can lead to domestic abuse within such arranged marriages, where the liaison is often based on gendered matrimonial advertisements (often, offensively worded), are: minimum knowledge about the groom's personality and nature; the bride's parents' desires to 'enhance' her social status by making her an NRI (Non Resident Indian); her lack of choice in the matter of marriage and groom-selection; and above all a shortage of time.

Moreover, once in the US, interracial attitudes can also prove to be harmful for such immigrant women of color, especially if they are alienated and ultra-feminized, as South Asian women often are, because of the socially constructed model-minority myth. According to Abraham (2005), Indian immigrants of the 1960s and 70s, used *avoidance* and *identity dissociation* strategies to set themselves apart from other minority communities that were not as financially successful and family oriented. This legacy was primarily what gave way to the *model minority* image (Abraham, 2000) of the South Asian (particularly Indian) community in the 1990s, that is "a minority group whose members adhere to the valued principle of economic success in the public sphere, while retaining strong cultural values such as family harmony and solidarity in the private sphere" (p. 429). Portrayed by this myth as successful, law abiding, family-centered, hard working, and self-sufficient, many South Asians consider it below their dignity to seek community help or social service, including many abused South Asian women who find it embarrassing to approach the police or domestic violence shelters as a result of their community's conformity to this myth.

The idealized model minority image of the South Asian community in the US complicates the already persistent predicaments that abused South Asian women have to deal with simultaneously, including: the horror of emotional, physical and material annihilation; increased likelihood of physical (disability, chronic stress-related, and central nervous system issues) and mental health problems (depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and sleep disruption); fear of economic deprivation and legal expulsion in case of divorce from an abusive spouse; panic of racial profiling; media's *selectivity* and *censuring* of VAW in minority communities; and the gendered notions of shame, disgrace and honor. These intersecting forces prevent abused immigrant women from sharing their experiences and seeking help for fear of being socially ousted and culturally damned (Lee & Hadeed 2009; Raj & Silverman, 2003; Carraway, 1991; Mills, 2008; Okazaki, 2002; Reavey, Ahmed & Majumdar, 2006).

5. **Religious stance on domestic violence against South Asian women**

About two-thirds of all Muslims in the US are immigrants (Haddad & Lummis, 1987; Numan, 1992), with up to 42% of all US Muslims being African-Americans, 10% being of South Asian origin and 24% of Arab origin ("Muslim Americans," 2007).

According to a 1993 survey of 63 Muslim community workers, advocates, and individuals conducted by the North American Council for Muslim Women, it was found that cases of domestic violence (from physical violence to incest) against Muslim women and children took place within 10% percent of the immigrant Muslim population in the US. It was also cited that if instances of psychological and verbal abuse were factored in, the resultant domestic violence figures would significantly increase (Alkhateeb, 1998). Also, many "Muslim American immigrants fleeing oppressive governments may not yet have realized that their own family dynamics are a microcosm of the tyranny and despotism they so actively oppose, and

mistakenly think a tyrannical family structure is an Islamic one" (Alkhateeb, 1998). Patriarchal dominance as an accepted 'way of life' within the Islamic family structure, coupled with a man's prerogative to carry out a much misused 'will of Allah' creates an oppressive space for many women who ultimately become victims of domestic abuse.

"The strong man is not the one who can use the force of physical strength, but the one who controls his anger" (Bukhari, as cited in Alkhateeb, 1998). As per the Islamic holy text *Qur'an*, violence against women in any form is neither permitted nor supported. Several verses in the *Qur'an* encourage treating women and men equally (2:229-237; 4:19; 4:25), "with kindness, mutual respect, and caring." In some verses, Allah refers to men and women as "protecting friends of one another," pointing to "the mandated atmosphere of mutual kindness and mercy in the marital home (30:21; 9:71). Others show disapproval of oppression or ill treatment of women" (Alkhateeb, 1998). Ironically, the ahistorical misappropriation of *Qur'anic* teachings by abusive Muslim men have made it easy for them, and others like them, to misquote several *hadiths* and verses and use (or rather, misuse) them to exercise physical, mental, sexual and verbal control over their wives/partners/women. In addition, some Muslim men and women "believe it is the man's *Allah*-given right to abuse his wife and children in any way he sees fit," while others, such as Islamic religious leaders, or "Imams … blame the situation on the wife" (Alkhateeb, 1998). 'Avoidance' or 'lack of interference' by community members has been one of the common reactions to reported incidents of domestic violence within the Muslim community, which is another reason why incidents of VAW are also so severely underreported within the South Asian community in the US.

According to Alkhateeb (1998), this willful ignorance and underreporting of incidents of domestic violence against women, all in the name of religion, are factors that worsen the already

debilitated condition of abused women. The Muslim community in the US also needs to address individual instances of domestic violence in the context of "the nature of the global power structure, and that of the community as a whole, to discover whether the community power structure is actually promoting a license to batter" (Alkhateeb, 1998). The idea is not to relinquish the Islamic faith or its teachings, but to stay true to its intended spirit of equality, kindness and non-violence, as originally preached by Mohammed (Alkhateeb, 1998).

Building on similar constructs of equality, liberation, bravery across genders and a "God [who] belongs to neither sex" ("Sikh Missionary Society," 2013), Sikhism regards heterosexual marriage as an equal communion where the Sikh 'Kaur' woman is never to be considered subservient to her male partner. As one of the religion's founding leaders, Guru Amar Das has affirmed, "They are not said to be husband and wife who merely sit together, rather they alone are called husband and wife, who have one soul in two bodies" (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang. 788, as cited in "Sikh Missionary Society," 2013). In the same religious vein of preaching gender equality, the primary Sikh religious doctrine *Guru Granth Sahib* has several verses dedicated to the religion's renunciation of the practice of dowry and forced marriages, making overtly clear that "Sikhs are forbidden from marrying off their children for monetary benefit," and from "from forcibly marrying off their children without their prior consent" ("Sikh Missionary Society," 2013), practices that have quintessentially found space in Hindu and Islamic religious tenets. What is more, Sikhism also sets itself apart from some of its competitive South Asian religions by equally rejoicing the birth of a girl and boy child, by encouraging the Sikh woman to retain her maiden surname (Kaur) till death, and by condemning the practice of female infanticide. Yet, domestic violence, honor killings and subordination of women continues to be a horrific reality against Sikh women, including those who have spent their married/partnered lives in the United

States. In fact, in a study about the levels of awareness over the problems of forced marriage and domestic abuse within South Asian immigrant communities in western countries, an interview with a Sikh community leader in a local Gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) in UK revealed that "it was very difficult to ascertain the levels of forced marriage because of a policy of non-interference in family decisions, explaining that the community was unable to challenge parental decisions regarding marriage," and argued that since most "forced marriage involved young people from India … [he] thought that immigration policies should therefore be tightened" as a measure to address the propensity for Sikh women to be battered when residing with their marital families in western countries (Gangoli, Razak & McCarry, 2006, p. 30).

"If any man treats his wife as a slave or subordinate and thinks that she is meant for cooking and procreation only, it is a heinous crime" (Swami Sivananda, as cited in Anandan, 1994). Much like the original teachings of *Qur'an* and *Guru Granth Sahib*, nothing in Hindu religious scriptures, texts and laws endorses violence against women. Yet, Hindu men have also manipulated religious tenets to perpetuate and validate domestic violence. Moreover, Hindu "male privilege is deeply rooted in cultural norms and manifests itself strongly in husband-wife relationships" (Anandan, 1994), examples of which are also found in Hindu religious epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata,* and Hindu rites like *Sati* (forced widow immolation on husband's funeral pyre). The communal silence that also surrounds incidents of domestic violence within the South Asian Hindu immigrant community, "the justifications for battering and the systemic support have similarities that do not recognize religious boundaries" (Anandan, 1994), so much so that religion is often used to perpetuate, rather than prevent the occurrence of such crimes against women.

In addition to the intra-communal impediments that Hindu women face by which "domestic violence has been covered up and accepted for decades due to the connections between the concepts of woman, wife, home, and privacy" (Padayachee & Singh, 1998), immigrant Hindu South Asian women may face additional obstacles such as their religious minority status in the host country. Often domestic violence shelters may not be culturally and religiously competent to meet the needs of battered women from other religious backgrounds. This proves to be an impediment for many Hindu South Asian women who hesitate to approach general domestic violence services in the US, for fear of being religiously, linguistically, legally and communally isolated, and also apprehensive about unwittingly encouraging ethno-cultural stereotypes about passive, docile, and subservient Hindu women, who would rather suffer in silence appropriating the self-sacrificing *Sati Savitri* religious motif, than risking bringing 'shame' on her family and community.

6. **Need for ethno-cultural competency in domestic violence issues within the South Asian diaspora: Implications, concerns and changes for counseling, support services and research**

Erwin (2006) argues that domestic violence advocates, counseling services and community support in the US have much to learn from their counterparts in other cultural contexts, and hence should proceed carefully before exporting US models of domestic violence services to other ethnic groups. Family structure, acculturation, immigrant status, community response, and histories of oppression, all together impact the abusive experiences of women from minority communities (Kasturirangan et al., 2004). They argue that researchers and service providers should "acknowledge the effects on women of sociopolitical dynamics, including

racism and to identify specific aspects of culture that are relevant to intimate partner abuse" (pp. 318-319).

Another problem with current domestic violence research is the conflating of ethno-cultural differences with racial differences, for instance, using inappropriate measurement tools to study ethnicity with a tool created to study race (Lee & Hadeed, 2009). Considering language differences, role of SES, and culturally appropriate definitions for what constitutes domestic violence and it's various forms, are imperative for studying its impact on the South Asian community. Much research also overlooks the presence of ethnic differences in samples by using non-representative sample sizes, and disregards in-group heterogeneity. Moreover, "Feminism's focus on gender may ignore the intersectionality of social identities and force women to prioritize their gender identity over their racial or ethnic identity when dealing with domestic violence" (Kasturirangan et al., 2004, p. 319).

Riger (1991) and Riger, Raja and Camacho (2002) emphasize the importance of appropriate methods (for e.g. life-narrative interviews) and concentrate on first-, second-, and third-order effects of violence on women of color and women from minority communities. They argue, "Future in-depth interviews with women with abusive partners may explore how violence against them affects not only their lives but also the lives of those around them" (Riger et al., 2002, p. 201). Along with cultural factors, researchers and service providers also need to think about immigration patterns and acculturation processes in their analyses of domestic violence in the Asian immigrant communities in the US (Lee & Hadeed, 2009). The only key to understanding the ethnic diversity of this form of violence is by conducting cross-cultural studies that focus concurrently on the social, economic, cultural and political contexts of its occurrence.

B. Part II: Globalization, Immigration, Transnationalism, and Domestic Violence - How Each Implicates and Complicates the Other/s

Part of the problem in defining globalization lays in the almost arbitrary use of the term, from signifying internationalism, transnationalism, cultural homogenization, and Americanization, to deterritorialization, interdependence, capitalistic world economy etc. Indeed, globalization is facilitated and facilitates economic, cultural, political, social, and technological models of integration and interaction across national and regional borders, but adopting a one-dimensional perspective will in all likelihood, delimit the term's multivariate theoretical possibilities.

The globalization debate is primarily founded upon differing conceptualizations and different perceptions of its causes, consequences and future directions held by the radical, transformationalist and skeptical camps (Tadić 2006; Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 1999). Believers in the process of globalization (both, in its positive and negative implications), or globalists, view the phenomenon as a new historical phase that has greatly affected and altered the economic, socio-cultural and political organization of the world. In particular, the globalists point toward the rise of an integrated global economy based on the foundations of capitalism and forces of modernity, where geo-political borders are becoming more fluid and the importance of nation-states is being underplayed (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997; Ohmae, 2004).

An insistence on economic globalization through free trade, neoliberal economic policies and unrestricted labor movement is at the heart of the thesis of many globalists, as the only route to an improved and integrated world. Wolf defines globalization (specifically, economic globalization), as an "integration of economic activities, via markets. The driving forces are technological and policy changes – falling costs of transport and communication and greater

reliance on market forces" (Wolf, 2004, p. 14). Wolf (2004) agrees that technological and communication advances have pushed the world towards globalization. He also adds that it is economically and politically unwise of *controlled-market* nations to erect barriers, thus preventing them from taking advantage from a global resource-pool of talent and skills.

Friedman (2006) also agrees that in this age of globalization the only thing that can grant leading corporations *competitive advantage* is skilled talent from around the world. For instance, the surest way to create more jobs for the US and boost its economy in the throes of recession is to enrich its *knowledge economy* by stimulating all the resources that will attract more foreigners to immigrate with their valuable skill sets. Boundaries of nation-states seem to rapidly obliterate (except in some instances where its citizens need protection) in the imaginations of such messiahs of globalization. They believe that this interdependent economic network "now belongs to everyone who can figure out how to take advantage of its opportunities and minimize its dislocations." And in so doing, "it is inevitable that globalization will finally become, well, global – both culturally and commercially – a process no longer driven from America and Europe but from all four corners of the flat world" (Friedman, 2006, p. 488).

Tomlinson's (1999) transformationalist contribution to the field of globalization is the introduction and explication of the cultural aspect and its implications of/on a deterritorialized world. He defines globalization as a process of "complex connectivity" (p. 2), which "affects people's sense of identity, the experience of place and of the self in relation to place, how it impacts on the shared understandings, values, desires, myths, hopes and fears that have developed around locally situated life" (p. 20). However, in his discussion of the possibilities and implications of modernity as an inherently globalizing phenomenon, Tomlinson does admit of the ideological pitfalls in such an equation. Like Amartya Sen (2004), who points out the

unevenness of the economic benefits of globalization, Tomlinson points out the "uneven balance of (cultural) forces" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 62) that create a dichotomy in power relations, making globalization undeniably a complex process of connectivity. Also, he argues how the 'West and the rest' reading of globalization history and its anti-cultural[8] tendency to universalize, has rendered global modernity somewhat tainted in essence.

For Castells (2004), Christian and Islamic fundamentalisms represent the cultural backlash that is caused by exclusionary tendencies of the forces of globalization, purposeful constructions of identity at a time of nation-based conflicts. What Castells (2004) explains are the different ways in which social movements create cultural resonance and a powerful sense of identity, by guiding divergent ideologies within separate socio-political contexts, toward a common understanding. The global network of information, which Castells (1991, 2004) imagines as the *space of flows*, is vital in determining economic productivity. As opposed to the space of flows that "can be abstract in social, cultural, and historical terms," Castells (1991) puts forth the *space of places* that are "condensations of human history, culture and matter" (p. 14).

In evaluating the "capability for global control" (Sassen, 1991) within cities in the world economy, Sassen argues that the geographic and economic centralization of capital in some urban centers is governed by a transnational urban politics wherein the key contributors are not just multinational corporations, investment firms and telecom industries. Increasingly, an intercity network of immigrants, international women's movements, and anti-globalization agendas are adding to the transnationalism of globalization. It is not only the movement of capital that takes place in this "place-centered" yet, global "trans-territorial" network "but also

[8] Culture, in this particular case, is understood as the maintenance and celebration of ethnic/national identities, within a global space of interactions.

that of people … and it is a space for the transmigration of cultural forms, for the re-territorialisation of 'local' subcultures" (Sassen, 2002, p. 218).

Sassen (2006) argues that an inherent characteristic of global cities is the dichotomy between a "growing transnational articulation" of active diaspora communities, and, a "kind of horizontal globality anchored in localities" (2006), which favors place-based hierarchies. It is interesting how Sassen (2006) outlines the global migration of the marginalized, such as the trafficking of women, maids/nannies, sex workers, etc. as an age old phenomena, which not only precedes the notion of contemporary economic globalization, but has tremendous socio-political implications for the inter and intra-networking of economic establishments within urban centers. As per Sassen (2006), the low-waged, service communities and the top-level professional immigrant workers together create what Sassen calls *informalization* (2006) within the urban infrastructure, strengthening the role of domesticity within the larger economy, and ensuring progress and wealth generation through immigrant participation.

In a context where globalization is still largely considered an economic phenomenon operating within an internetworked world market, I propose to adopt a somewhat transformationalist approach, re-defining globalization as *a multilayered process and product of global and local connectivity, that is created by/creates/re-works a complex, uneven intersection of economic, social, cultural, political, national, ethnic, gendered, communicational, and welfare discourses.* Globalization is (or, rather should be) currently understood as an historical narrative based on shifting notions of power, identity, belonging, place, displacement, nationality, globalism and hybridity.

Wage differences between the poor/developing and rich/developed countries has been the prime reason for workers to migrate from the former to the latter for earning more money,

followed by reasons such as career advancement, and gathering newer experiences. Stalker (2000) points to certain primary models/theories that explain the reasons/flows of international migration, some highlighting "push " reasons from the sending nations, while the others underscore the "pull" reasons from the receiving ones. It is the combinations of these push and pull forces that create the global network of migration, facilitated by the intensification of transportation and communication links that are:

> …likely to promote further transnational communities … can develop and maintain many kinds of links, constructing social networks and life-worlds that join them to two or more locations and nation states … for these communities, concepts of culture and society can no longer be linked simply to territory or geography (Stalker, 2000, p. 128).

The above rationale seems viable "because at the moment that transnational immigrants are working to maintain homeland connections, they are also engaged in the process of acculturating to the host society" (Kivisto, 2001, p. 572). Kivisto (2001) tries to define or re-define transnationalism by positing it as one potential subset of assimilation theory rather than as an alternative to it, that is, as a conceptual construct to account for new immigrant identities and communities.

Furthering the local-global debate, Kearney (1995) argues that contrary to the uni-linear direction of dependency theories, movement towards a cultural "global theory also corresponds to some postcolonial displacement of the loci, authors, and subjects of historiography from central elites to the periphery," even as the spatial and typological differences between center and margin diminish (p. 551). The author also points to significant studies done by scholars like King (1990, 1991), Ong (1991), and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) that addresses under-researched, yet significantly co-occurring areas of gendered identities, immigration and globalization. In particular, all these theorists argue that there is a need for gender- and culture-

specific feminist discourses and paradigms to address local gender issues that occur transnationally.

1. **The case of skilled South Asians migrating to the US: The impact of transnationalism and immigration on the South Asian diaspora**

What is especially poignant about Kearney's (1995) summarization of the current globalization-localization literature is his argument that for an understanding of how globalization affects race and gender politics, "one finds little to build on in world-system and other global theories, which are notably silent on gender issues" (p. 560). Conversely, he also points out that "feminist poststructuralist or psychoanalytic theorists do not utilize a transnational frame or consider colonial discourse or discourses of race," and ethnic differences. He refers instead to the work of "Grewal & Kaplan (SS) (who) critique such varieties of global feminism as Western-centric models that fail to appreciate the specificities of local feminists identities that are affected by global forces," and appropriately call for "global forms of organized resistance without submerging local conditions and identities in alien projects" (Kearney, 1995, p. 560).

For instance, examining the impact that globalization has on transnational identities who lie further marginalized by the forces of racism, sexism, class, and gender play (especially, on immigrant women of color who are legally/economically/socially dependent on their partners and the state of residence), will bring to the fore the power and politics of globalism that operates within an external, local and constrained context. For most South Asians employed in the US on working visas such as the H-1B, an ultimate assurance of residency or citizenship acts as an extra impetus to strengthen the host economy by applying the special skill set that they have imported from their home country. Kunal M. Parker (1997) argues that immigration not only precedes globalization being an age-old process, but globalization has definitely modified migration as a

result of advances in technology and communication, wherein immigrants can equally correspond with their home and host countries.

Complete assimilation into the recipient community is no longer a necessity. The proponents of transnationalism see many benefits in the immigration of skilled workers, owing to the fact that it helps to reduce transactional costs related to conducting business overseas (Parker, 1997). On the flipside, globalization critics believe that the unchecked immigration of skilled workers leads to divided communities made up of incomplete assimilation patterns (Parker, 1997). Hence, the issue of immigration runs much deeper than the mere import of labor that enhances the host nation's economy.

Immigration scholar Johanna Lessinger (2003) believes that this outflow of highly trained immigrants symbolizes either a *reverse brain drain*, which weakens South Asia's talent resources, or a positive development that marks South Asia's contributions to a transnational class of high-tech entrepreneurs. This gives the so-called developing nations advantageous access to the global economy (2003, p. 166). In other words, the globalization of this migration is a way for skilled talent to find economic opportunities and vice versa (Lessinger, 2003, p. 165). In fact, to the displeasure of many labor-rights groups and anti-globalization camps, skilled immigrants are often seen as one of the first steps to globalization, a view that has also led to xenophobic reactions against immigrants from different South Asian ethnic communities.

Accusations are that skilled South Asian immigrant workers are dislocating US workers within a weakening economy, a fact that has added to their racial marginalization. There is also growing concern among the South Asian immigrant population regarding the attitudes of the US government toward tightening immigration policies, especially in the post 9/11 context, which

combined with the recent economic meltdown, global credit crisis and the government's leanings toward economic localization, has made their legal status in the host country questionable.

Conversely, the same process of localization if seen from another standpoint also espouses *collective control* and *identity creation*, but from a transnational perspective, wherein first and second generation immigrant communities in the US find strategies to "forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (Maira, 2005, p. 228). These local, socio-cultural productions of diasporic identities are dialectically related to both their ancestral and transnational identities in ways that are ideological (assimilative) and material (mainly economic).

Post 1965, US political ideology has shifted expectations to a model of cultural pluralism from its earlier insistence on forms of immigrant assimilation, although the withstanding black/white/brown racial schism of American society still remains as a set of *folk categories*. At this socio-political juncture, immigrant groups, including new migrants, are "officially encouraged to retain, and even to recreate their separate ethnic identities as part of their celebration of 'Americanness'… [and] within this cultural climate, Indians have been quick to create customs and institutions representing their Indian heritage" (Lessinger, 2003, p. 172). Also, this dichotomy further emphasizes the divided cultural, political, national and transnational loyalties of non-resident South Asians and skilled South Asian H-1B workers in the US, who are often torn between an obligation toward their adopted American life, nostalgia for their ethno-cultural roots, and membership in the globalized world of high-tech free enterprise. These are the members of a *localized* global world that "is American inflicted but international – and impatient of the restrictions on profit posed by nationalist interests and local cultures" (Lessinger, 2003, p. 167).

Appadurai (1990, 1996) speaks of the US as a *delocalized transnation*, where various immigrant communities converge among diverse ethnic backdrops to put "loyalty to a non-territorial transnation first, while recognizing that there is a special American way to connect to these global diasporas" (1996, p. 173). In explaining the various forces or "scapes" of globalization, Appadurai (1996) places primary importance on *ethnoscapes* and *finanscapes*. Ethnoscapes can be defined as a site of itinerant people, such as tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, skilled workers, etc. who comprise an indelible feature of the globalized world, contributing significantly to the politics, economics and cultures of their host and home countries. Similarly, finanscapes can be defined as movements of global capital through complex and refined fiscal/investment flows that connect two or more dependent economies through a worldwide network of monetary speculation, capital ventures and the movement of skilled professionals and unskilled labor forces (Appadurai, 1996). In post-national, global and diasporic spaces, it is only through the amalgamation of *ethnoscapes* and *finanscapes*, that "the incapacity of the nation-state to tolerate diversity … may, perhaps be overcome," to create a more *global* sense of locality (1996, p. 177).

With the advancement in communication technologies and transportation, it is easy for migrants to maintain external ties with their homelands, yet the internally perpetuated "politics of difference within the globalized political economy complicates the analysis of ethnic processes," that govern the *multicultural* lives of these skilled immigrant workers (San Juan, 2005, p. 278). Moreover, the economic frame of globalization, combined with the political frame of immigration has rendered the cultural frames of transnationalism and multiculturalism, "the cultural logic of multinational capitalism" (San Juan, 2005, p. 277). The idea of belonging to a

nation gets redefined as involvement with place-based politics, culture, and economy gradually gets *displaced*.

2. **Double edged sword of immigration: Legal constraints and options for South Asian women who are dependent immigrants and domestic violence victims**

Social Welfare scholar Rupaleem Bhuyan addresses the problems South Asian victims of domestic violence face when in the US on temporary dependent visas, their dependent status allowing their abusers to "maintain control through financial and legal means with severe consequences for the safety of victims/survivors of battering" (2007, p. 229). She particularly critiques the legal and social policies from the perspectives of gender, patriarchy, immigration and domestic abuse. In the current context of globalization and increased migration, it is very important to revaluate the discourse of patriarchy from a cross-cultural perspective (Ahmad, Riaz, Barata & Stewart, 2004).

Ahmad et al. (2004) argue that immigration of South Asian women to other (in particular Western) countries increases their susceptibility to harmful experiences of patriarchy. The acculturative stress is much more for women from cultures that are markedly different than the culture of the host country. While this migration-generated cultural differentiation "may culminate in stress and tension within immigrant families… Some studies also report a trend for domestic abuse to either start or become worse after couples' immigration" (Ahmed et al., 2004, p. 265). In brief, "the intersection of gender, ethnicity, culture, and immigration status increases the risk of experiencing adverse manifestations of patriarchy, particularly conflicts in spousal relationships" (Ahmed et al., 2004, p. 265).

Bhuyan (2007) bases her observations and critiques on her professional experiences at *Chhaya*, an organization that advocates "for the well-being of women on H-4 visa, given the

current social and political context" (p. 230). Skilled immigrants come in on H-1B visas as temporary workers in a professional capacity each year. Those who are married, bring their spouses on dependent H-4 visas. The H-4 visa operates on three conditions, with the most double-edged condition being that the H-4 dependent visa does not allow its adherent to work legally in the US. Hence, "If trapped in an abusive marriage, women who are dependent spouses of H-1B workers have very few resources available to them" ("Women Abuse in America," 2008).

As a way to combat domestic abuse perpetrated on legally dependent immigrant women, the battered immigrant women provisions of the *Violence Against Women Act* (VAWA) was passed by Congress in 1994 ("VAWA," 2009). This act was later restructured in 2000 as the *Battered Immigrant Women's Protection Act* to make provisions for special requirements within the US immigration law to defend abused noncitizens, by providing them lawful residency through non-dependent self-petitioning (Valente, Hart, Zeya & Malefyt, 2001, p. 296). However, as the law itself states, "If you have never been married to your abuser, or if your abuser is not a US Citizen or Lawful Permanent Resident, then you most likely do not qualify to self-petition for Lawful Permanent Residence under VAWA" ("VAWA," 2009). This narrow provision of VAWA worked on the politics of exclusion till recently, as is evident from the lack of mention of women on temporary dependent visas such as the H4 (dependant spouse visa) and the K-1 (fiancé visa). Also, a second provision called the *cancellation of removal*, which did consider battered women who are illegal immigrants or, expired temporary-visa holders to seek asylum, also functioned on the basis of segregation, requiring that the abused has "been physically present in the United States for 3 years prior to the date of application … [and] has been a person of good moral character during this 3-year period" (Valente et a., 2001, p. 296). However,

beginning October 2007, the U visa sub-category of VAWA provides political and legal asylum to abused spouses and children of temporary work visa holders with the understanding that:

> The abuser does not need to be a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident, and you do not have to have been married to the abuser to be eligible for a U visa. You are not required to be physically present in the US to qualify for a U visa. You can apply from abroad as long as the criminal activity violated US law or occurred in US territories ("VAWA," 2009).

Although this legal mandate can provide rescue from domestic abuse for a period of four years, and also give work authorization, many women on temporary dependent visas are not even aware of this because of the fear for their lives, the shame of making their abuse known within their community, and the sheer lack of financial means to be able to seek legal help.

To add to this matrix of power-hierarchies that the forces of immigration and gendered state laws play on women of color, Crenshaw (1994) adds the implications of the marriage fraud provisions of immigration regulation. The Immigration Marriage Fraud Amendment (IMFA) was passed in 1986 for the purpose of questioning the authenticity of immigrant marriages and often "requiring proof that an alien was 'bona fide' through evidence that the marriage had lasted at least two years." There were a few waivers for abused immigrant women, and they were very difficult to obtain, making it hard for South Asian women to leave an abusive marriage for fear of deportation or becoming "illegal" (Abraham, 2005, p. 430).

Coming from a multicultural law background, Goel (2005) discusses two commonly used legal intervention strategies for VAW, one being the Restorative Justice (RJ) procedure that "emphasizes healing the wounds of victims, offenders and communities caused or revealed by crime" (p. 641). The other strategy is the Adversarial Model of justice that advocates punishment and condemnation for the perpetrators, retribution for the victims and protection of public interests. Although RJ operates on the ideals of compassion, rehabilitation and "consensus-

based" group/family resolutions, it is not equipped to solve the problem of domestic abuse against South Asian women. Moreover, as Goel (2005) points out, RJ laws build on the victim's ability to self-advocate and self-preserve, ideals that go against the South Asian feminine stereotype of the self-sacrificing *Sita*.

The South Asian woman's dependent immigration status has critical implications for the way she perceives her role in relation to her partner, her perceptions of what constitutes patriarchal oppression, and her identification (or lack, thereof) with the South Asian identity. Ahmad et al. (2004) argue that a thorough understanding of patriarchy as a social construct that has different cultural manifestations "may help women distinguish between the aspects of their culture that they want to practice and those that they find oppressive…that they do not have to reject their culture or their identity as South Asian to resist patriarchy and wife abuse" (p. 278).

According to Erwin (2006), when US legal reforms are blindly applied to human rights violations within different ethno-cultural contexts, the consequences backfire. For instance, as per US law, because "the legal "rule" trumps the lived experience of the victim," as in the case of many abused South Asian immigrant women who are asked to provide "proof" of domestic violence when approaching the authorities, their safety and immigrant status in the country are often jeopardized, in case they are not able to provide the needful (Erwin, 2006). This mandates that domestic abuse advocates in the US should "look beyond their borders and possibly "import" a few model programs or best practices that have been developed abroad" (Erwin, 2006, p. 203), or at least keep in mind the socio-cultural dynamics governing the lives of minority communities residing in the US.

C. Part III: Communities Online - The Politics of Alternate Places, Spaces, Social Relations, Identities and Sense of Community

As discussed in the previous sections, most transformationalists believe that globalization is a result of combined complex workings of capitalism, consumerism, nationalistic endeavors, economic policy, political strategies, cultural discourses and ICT dispersions that not only changes the ways in which we create communities, but also the ways in which we "imagine" them into being (Anderson, 1983; Castells, 2004; Sen 2004; Tomlinson 1999; Sassen 1991, 2006). According to Castells (2000), various communication technologies create provisions for the obliteration of space, particularly during the era of globalization, and also the possibility for speedy and asynchronous communication that alters the relationship to time. In an age of 'networked individualism,' it is no wonder that online communities have in essence become a new form of social organization, a "key feature of social morphology" as Castells (2000) would say.

To understand the role that online communities play in the context of globalization, one has to consider its socio-cultural implications on a deterritorialized world. When communities are understood from Tomlinson's post-globalization perspective of cultural disembedding and time-space distanciation (adapted form Giddens, 1990), then it does not seem anachronistic to displace 'community' from the sole context of the 'local', and place it within modernity's technological frame of reference. Moreover, Tomlinson's insight about globalization creating ambivalence in geo-political displacement instead of alienation seems to be an idea that may partly explain the ambivalence of relationships in online communities. He supports this view by citing examples of current media-technologies, international fashion trends and culinary fads taking over world cultures, creating what he calls *non-places*. If in fact, globalized

communication constitutes a technologically backward, rural inhabitant in India 'Skyping' with foreign friends through her/his Wi-Fi-enabled smart phone, or even an abused Indian immigrant in the US 'visiting' a South Asian blog on her PC to find 'community support,' then the experience of this non-place would definitely entail "the ever-broadening horizon of relevance in people's routine experience, removing not only general 'cultural awareness' but", crucially altering our perception of community-creation "from a self-contained context centered on physical locality or politically defined territory" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 115) to a more mobile, symbolic and flexible concept.

1. **How we got the concept of community that we have**

Sherry Turkle (1997) provides a testimony from a member of an online community who, according to her, exemplifies a post-globalized, postmodern identity that is essentially fragmented and decentered.

> I feel very different online. I am a lot more outgoing, less inhibited. I would say I feel more like myself. But that's a contradiction. I feel more like who I wish I was. I'm just hoping that face-to-face I can find a way to spend some time being the online me. (p. 179)

Is the above statement an apparent opposition in terms, or does it in fact portend an important dialogue about how we establish, maintain and negotiate our relationships in an online environment? The ways in which members of a virtual community share their stories and literally narrate their desired selves into being, in order to create consensus and empathy in an essentially disjointed world, could be deemed a potential discourse of cooperation that builds and sustains online communities. Also, before getting into an immersive discussion of how a virtual community corroborates or alters our notion of a *real* community, it is important to understand what the term 'community' signifies, or rather, how it has evolved through time.

Traditionally, communities can be thought of as groups of people who interact socially (explicitly or implicitly) within a physical space, and share some common interests and specific objectives with other group members. However, with the inception and historical progression of online communities, starting with UseNet's, MUDs, MOOs, to blogs, social networking sites, social microblogs, etc. conventional notions of place-based community have been reformulated, as has been the idea of achieving particular goals, which are physical and tangible. It is needless to say that this debate about *real versus virtual community* has been an incessant, albeit legitimate subject in the area of communication theory. This dialectic has also prompted a change in the notion of social interaction, with theorists like Putnam (1995) lamenting the decline of civic membership, because of the infiltration of technology that compromises social capital. For some, the role of new communication media, particularly the Internet has been a perplexing phenomenon that impacts, "either by exacerbating social isolation or by reviving community ties virtually" (Norris, 2004; Putnam, 1995).

On the other hand, theorists like Castells (2001) and Fernback (2007) support online communities where people share common resources and norms of interaction through technological participation. According to Castells (2001), online communities are "based on cooperation and the free circulation of technical knowledge…(and are) culturally determined" (p. 38). Fernback (2007), also advises against thinking of community in a teleological fashion, as an "end unto itself" (p. 66), facilitated through the use of communication technologies. Community, she argues is an evolving process that is lent form and meaning by the actors who interact socially to create symbolic commitment to each other or, to others in the group.

Ever since the 1800s, scholars expressed their nostalgia for the loss of community. Starting with Tönnies who lamented the weakening of face-to-face (FtF) communication and the

dissolution of *Gemeinschaft* or the close-knit community, to the Chicago school sociologists who had firmly established the importance of *place* as the primary unit of community, all around the 'family' or 'home' became the gold standard for comparing most areas of social life and relations (Sennett, 1992; Fernback, 2007). However, there is no point in such nostalgic lamentations, as community is itself a shifting ideal made up of the qualities and values we ascribe to it. In retrospect, the fluidity of the term continues to attract us, and still makes us believe that 'community' is a deep value to cherish.

2. **Place, space and time in community: Evolving through different forms of globalization**

For Chicago school scholars' community was rooted in place, particularly urban space. In fact their research on community tended to focus on the triad of 'people, place, and institutions,' based on the interactions among them. It is now possible to transcend this geo-physical place using communication technologies facilitated by the Internet, but it is still imperative to understand the value of place as an ideological point of convergence: the place/s we live in, the places we lived in the past/visited, and the places we would like to inhabit (for example, to combat isolation and the feeling of being displaced, immigrants tend to find others who are from the same or similar place as them in online forums/communities).

Carey (1989) admits that technology is something we are culturally a part of, in the way that human communication and participation in networking technologies can create a community of shared realities. From this perspective, online communities can be seen as places where information is not only transmitted, but also ritualized through iterative interactions of its participants. Carey's (2001) conception of the community-building role played by communication technologies is rooted in Dewey's (1927) understanding of the purpose of

communication: “Men live in a community by virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common” (p.76).

Undoubtedly, place-based FtF communication is still considered the hallmark of community-based interaction. However, ever since the invention of print, people have been able to uphold community interactions over ‘dis-placed’ distances, a gap that seems to reduce with each technological innovation. Building on Innis’s characterization of temporal-spatial media forms and the distances they condense, Carey (1989; 2001) also traces the origin of his ritual view of communication to religion, ceremony and oral traditions. Participation in ritual activities such as a religious communion or church mass, serves not so much to transmit new information, but to confirm and alter shared knowledge, lessen social distances, as well as congregate communities in a common bond of understanding.

Evident in the summarization above is how the notions of place, space and time in community got created, annihilated and re-created, through what could be seen as precursors of the modern rendition of globalization, present in different ages, under different forms, different names, and different power relations. What’s more, with the current closing in of distances, people find more opportunities to congregate and tend to become members of multiple communities at once. Communities are intertwined in such a way that being a part of one automatically makes the individual part of a larger community – family, neighborhood, city, nation, region, and so on. And as Carey (2001) and his predecessor Dewey (1927) argue, *communication* is the link that ties together and maintains these community connections, be it FtF or technologically-mediated.

3. How evolving technology changed the concept of community

The challenge to find a definition for community has been present ever since Tönnies (2001/1887) tried to break it down to the difference between rural simplicity and urban complexity. However, a greater challenge was posed to the traditional notion/s of community when electronic technologies, from electricity, telegraph and telephone to computers and the Internet made the term suspect at best, and outmoded at worst.

Talking about computer mediated communication (CMC), Jones (1998) argues that virtual worlds, per se, have been created ever since the invention of writing, yet, "rarely have those worlds been created and shared simultaneously among people at such great physical distance from each other" (p. xvi). Technological innovations like the Internet, and through it CMC, usher an altered understanding of community, of social cohesion, and a renewed sense of identity in relation to others and ourselves. Moreover, how we create a discourse about communities online will be determined by the ideological, normative, symbolic and material conditions that mold it (Jones, 1998; Fernback, 1999). Alluding to Carey's ritual view of communication, Jones (1998) also urges the need to see the potential of new media technologies (Internet) as "tools for connection and community" (p. 5). He argues that the emotional investments that people incur from online participation may be just as real as their FtF activities.

The catchword is still community, and being a part of one/many is a positive experience. However, it is important to accept the changing notions of community that have accompanied every technological and communication innovation through the years. The Internet is founded as much on commonly held values and mores of a society distanced from tangible place, as it is on the give-and-take of infinite information and knowledge (Jones, 1998). Jones (1998) explains that it is not 'sharing' in the sense of linear transmission of information that connects online

communities, but "the ritual sharing of information (Carey, 1989) that pulls it together" (p. 15). We need to think beyond this model of a utopic FtF community, rooted in physical place. Only by accepting that new media technologies create communities across spatiotemporal distances, can we arrive at an alternate understanding of community.

4. Alternate notions of community: Of re-placed 'spaces'

> There is (or has been) an attempt to anchor the happenings of the real life community to the virtual global discourse in order for the cyber communication space to have meaning. Even so, the sense of community becomes unsettled – where is that community located? In space – which space? Whose space? (Harcourt, 1999, p. 223).

An alternate conception of community calls attention to people and their social interactions, with a renewed understanding of place and space. Many communication scholars have discussed the notion of community, based on the displaced politics of 'a virtual space for interaction' (Rheingold, 1993; Baym, 1995; Castells, 2001; Jones, 1999; boyd, 2006; Fernback, 1999, 2007). Being a communication medium that is mutable and not finitely circumscribed, can we ascribe Anderson's idea of imagined communities to explain the role of the Internet in creating online communities? Perhaps yes. For Anderson (1983), the 'imagined community' and its consciousness are cultural artifacts rooted in our everyday beliefs and practices. These technologies created a sense of belonging among people who were not within FtF proximity, yet connected them through the sharing of a common national identity and cultural experiences. This logic can also be applied to online communities arguing that virtual participants imagine their communities into being, because "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1983, p. 15).

Fernback (1999) also takes a symbolic approach to argue that online communities are "communities of meaning" (p. 210). What is needed according to Fernback (2007) is a sea change in new media scholars' appraisals of community as an end-in-itself. As she argues,

"Considering the potential oppressiveness of community in addition to its socially stabilizing potential, we must move beyond the nostalgic ideal of community," and think of it as an ever-changing process (2007, p. 66). Much like Fernback (1999), Baym (1995; 2000) and Rheingold (1993) also believe that members of online communities are active social agents who instill meaning into their communities, making them as real as their offline relationships/interactions.

Communities, whether online or offline thrive on the principle of commitment. And although this *social ideal in social interactions* has been dealt with in the area of physical community building, Fernback (2007) insists, "Scholarship would benefit from a considered turn toward the nature of commitment in online social groups." It would help to study how commitment is displayed online, how commitment to online social relationships is transferred to civic life, and to what extent the meaning of commitment to offline relations applies to the online community.

The Internet neither undermines, nor replaces civic participation, but adds a new meaning to it (Castells, 2001). Re-situating social presence within online communities, Castells (2001) argues that CMC allows for similar "selective social interaction(s) and symbolic belonging(s)" that FtF communities would allow (as cited in Jones & Mukherjee, 2010, p. 19). Like Jones (1999) and boyd (2006), Castells (2001) also believes that people resort to social media not to substitute, but to complement the decreasing FtF interactions in physical communities. With the reduction of physical interactions among strong ties, the time is ideal for weak ties to form networks through online communities. These weak ties are not solitary individuals, but "rather a community of like-minded people who create social patterns of networking through CMC" (Jones & Mukherjee, 2010, p. 22).

Many social networking sites (SNS/s) have become the online spaces for expressing identity and creating community, and although most are initially structured around a focused audience, they eventually attract a larger target (for example Facebook, My Space, etc.). What feeds the social grounding of these SNSs is the interpersonal nature of human interaction and norms of participation within it. Instead of falling into the real versus virtual dichotomy, it seems wise to consider that "offline and online worlds operate in synergy rather than in isolation," being founded on distinct public-personal spatial politics (Papacharissi, 2009c, p. 216).

This tendency of online communities to congregate around the personal, the individual, the private, etc., in the era of SNSs, has prompted communication scholars to call for a personalized approach to new media. In particular, Internet researchers are asked to be "sensitive to, and aware of their own experiences online…(and) focus not only on community but on individuals within social groups as well" (Jones, 1999, p. 18). As Jones (1999) points out, to study the Internet as a de-institutionalized personal mass medium, it is imperative to look at the processes that create non-traditional virtual communities of users, as well as the interpersonal ties of those individuals that eventually give rise to a different form of online social capital.

5. **Social capital and building relational ties in online communities**

The traditional notions of friendship, social capital, public-private information exchange and dialogic commitment have undergone a sea change with the infiltration of social networking sites and blogs on the Internet. For individuals immersed in these online communication tools, the strength of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) has taken on a different meaning, as the boundaries between their offline and online relationships become increasingly blurry. Some virtual communities are formed by strong-ties, groups of members who have already established friendships on the basis of traditional trust. Others are general-interest

communities, formed by members who are physically unacquainted, or weak-ties who depend on sharing common interests to create bridges of online trust. In any case, these new paradigms of social capital form virtual communities of sorts, where users can socially construct their identities, exercising greater control and more censorship than is possible in physical communities.

SNSs such as Facebook, MySpace, Sina Weibo etc. lets participants form relationships based on mutual interests in virtual environments (Rosen, C., 2007). Unlike real neighborhoods, "social networking sites are gatherings of deracinated individuals…here, the old arbiters of community – geographic location, family, role, or occupation have little effect on relationships" (2007, p. 22). C. Rosen (2007) contends that online communities create an atmosphere of homogeneity among strangers through a process of gradual self-exposure. Progression from exchanging third party information to self-disclosure is the sustaining activity in an online social environment. Information obtained from perusing an acquaintance's online public profile can add to more knowledge, than an in-person encounter with someone within the same amount of time can yield (p. 24).

No doubt, this debate about real versus online community has been an ongoing subject in the area of communication studies. However, in the current context it is admissibly practical to reflect beyond our insistence on trying to spatiotemporally converge, or separate the online and offline spheres of available communication. It would bode well to think of participating in online communities as an independent routine activity within a globalized internetwork, which we have taken as much for granted as interacting in offline communities.

6. **Identity in online communities**

> Can we have a fluid and multicultural communication space which is safe, one from which our visions can be drawn and eventually enacted in reality? …in order

> to create a critical mass it is important to find a sense of identity (Harcourt, 1999, p. 222).

In a community setting, real or virtual, people's identities are not only projected by them, but are simultaneously created by other group members who interact with them. This holds true all the more for virtual settings, where interactions within a community can take place among anonymous members. In such a context, what a community member writes and/or posts can (and sometimes cannot) be taken at face value. CMC frequently allows for the performance and negotiation of identities by its participants who share linguistic, textual and visual symbols within that online space.

A community forms a space for public interaction and within this kind of space the presentation of identity matters and has consequences. Virtual community participation not only ushers in an alternative conception of space, which is significant, but also creates an ever more complex paradigm of temporality given the simultaneity of identity performances and the immediacy of interactions that CMC offers. Moreover, these online communities turn the traditional notion of identity-formation on its head, and give us a chance to reevaluate our fractured FtF interactions through varied self-negotiations on the Internet (Turkle, 1997).

In an online community, members have more control over how to negotiate their identities and make it work to the advantage of group cohesion. It helps even more when one has not met the online community members (all or few) in real life. So, in a blog or fan community devoted to the discussion of a popular topic if one member's presentation of identity seems threatening to the shared understanding of the group, then more often than not the rest of the active members join in opposition to balance the community's status quo. Similarly, in SNSs and microblogging services like Facebook and Twitter, status messages, news feeds, audio-visual identity markers and comments about friends' profiles, all create cultural currency (boyd, 2006),

becoming ways of expressing mutual consent and commonality. These hypermedia symbols of communication ensure feedback and endorse the performance of one community member's online personae as socially viable by another.

Our symbolic interactions with others in an online community, how they perceive us, and the ways in which we perceive our own identities online (as different from, and similar to identities offline), all contribute to the formation of a socially and symbolically constructed identity, a view of the self on the "other side of the looking glass" (Turkle, 1997, p. 177). Not only does this augur implication for further research, but also helps us to understand why we try to look for virtual solutions for our real deficiencies and vice versa, be they having a Facebook friend network of hundreds while being considered a social outcast, or finding similar people with similar interests in a blogging community.

7. **Sense of community or SOC in online groups**

It seems probable that by following a symbolic approach to study online communities (Fernback, 2007; boyd, 2006; Turkle, 1997) we can find a legitimate way that social media technologies create and/or maintain them. This approach offers a cultural and social explanation for how people interact in communities, how they imagine their communities, how they use technologies to create and sustain them, and what meanings they ascribe to them. For a less imposing, yet more effectual way to understand the modern implications of community, it seems best to regard it as an ongoing process that changes as we change and as the world changes around us. As previously discussed, the ideal of a FtF community seems a bit outmoded, if not impractical in the postmodern and globalized world, which requires a more adaptable rendition of the term to acclimatize to a shifting social order.

In online interactions, many people make an effort to keep a balance between participating to please selves (expressing their desired identity) and participating to satisfy others (the need for community) (Efimova & Hendrick, 2004). In lieu of using the term "community" some scholars prefer to use terms like "virtual groups" (Hiller & Franz, 2004), and "virtual settlements" (Jones, Q., 1995) to denote online groups that engage in meaningful interaction, but cannot be considered communities in the traditional sense of the term. Blanchard (2004) takes Quentin Jones' (1995) idea of "virtual settlement" and expands it by arguing that the relational ties and emotional investments that are made among online participants can be defined as "sense of community." As a concept, it is not as rigid as Q. Jones' archeologically-grounded *virtual settlement*, neither as strictly rooted in place as *real community*, but more symbolic focusing instead on people's interactions with other members within an online community that they discursively render meaning to.

Blanchard (2004) argues that this sense of community is what differentiates a virtual community from a virtual group. This virtual community is built on the foundation of a "sense of community," an interactive space that is made up of fluid borders (Sink, 2006). For example, such a sense of community is often found in diasporic online forums that consist of "a group of people with relatively homogeneous social characteristics and possibly heterogeneous interests bound by a common stake in a homeland" (Sink, 2006). In other words, membership in such communities intersect across areas of expressing diverse interests, forming new relational ties, as well as sharing group nostalgia for a displaced geographic identity.

In a more focused way, "a virtual community functions as an alleviator of homesickness, partner in culture shock, and helper with assimilation into the new culture," for recent immigrants, while also being used in a more general sense, "for connection, support, and

political activism among migrants" from diverse geo-political areas (Hiller & Franz, 2004). Gajjala (2006) addresses the issue of online interactions among members from the South Asian diaspora, primarily focusing on how a sense of community is formed around the online practices and social narratives of such US-based minority populations. Such community interactions play on the politics of nationality and immigration, on economic and cultural globalization, and on the rhetoric of marginalization (Gajjala, 2006).

In examining the politics of home, homeland, and homepages of the Indian-American minority population in the US, Mallapragada (2006) shows that the Internet helps rethink the idea of diaspora, community-building and new media in relation to cyber-practices and current migrant experiences. Traditionally, diasporic communities are thought of as place-bound, tied nostalgically to their homeland and their national culture. Through online interactions and creation of community-specific websites "the Indian-American web reveals ambivalence, hybridity, uneven power relations and strategic alliances as symptomatic of a community shaped by diverse histories of migration and different imaginings of the homeland" (Mallapragada, 2006, p. 209).

Mitra (2006) coined the notion of "cybernetic safe spaces," to explain how the South Asian diaspora created online communities to remake place-based and culture-specific identities, mainly as a way to counter the sociopolitical and economic repercussions that they encountered in the post-9/11 US society. He argues that since "For many Indians there simply may not be enough Indians around them…to create a sense of community where Indian practices would be accepted… [so] living in cybernetic space offers the sense of 'safety' that real spaces cannot produce" (p. 265). It has been seen in recent literature on blogs (Sink, 2006; Mitra, 2006) that this form of reverse-chronological online journaling presents such a sense of community to

diasporic groups, by providing their members a space in which to voice their experiences, counter the dominant discourse, and find ways to resist social marginalization.

D. Part IV: Blogs, Bloggers and Blogging - Histories, Genres, Theories and Research Advances

As per a Pew Internet and American Life Project survey that measured blogging and blog readership in the US, a total of 33% of Internet users said that they currently read blogs (2009). While 11% of Internet users said that they read blogs on a daily basis, 42% answered that they did read blogs regularly in the past. In terms of blog creation, 12% of Internet users said that they have created or worked on their own online journal or blog. However, a majority of bloggers mentioned not working on their blogs as an every-day activity, with 5% of Internet users blogging on a typical day (Smith, 2008). It is interesting that although blogging as a regular online activity has statistically gone down since a Pew survey conducted in 2006 (in particular among teens and young adults, who prefer social networking and microblogging), it is rising in appeal for Internet users 30 and above, who are regularly using it as a medium to express themselves and their areas of personal interest. Also, bearing in mind that "blogs do not rely on marketing, it is not insignificant that they attract such a wide readership, probably more than any other form of self-publishing online" (Gurak, et al., 2004).

Although blogs started as narrative experiments in personal reflection and experiences, they picked up momentum after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 with many users authoring *warblogs*, a sub-genre of the more widely written and read, political and journalistic blogs. *Where is Raed?*, a famous war blog started in 2002 by Iraqi architect Salam Pax, is one such example. Pax's blog narrated the story of his life-experiences, in particular the unstable social and political situation in Baghdad after 9/11 and openly criticized the Saddam Hussain regime. Not only did his blog,

and many like his, garner global readership and extensive mainstream media attention, but it "also served to launch a public understanding of the power of blogging" (Gurak, 2004; Turnbull, 2002).

1. **Network structure of blogs: Linking through the blogosphere**

Simply stated, the blogosphere can be defined as the total community of blogs and bloggers, linked and cross-referenced across several individual blog entries. The mass publishing of information online and the expression of personal identity are simultaneously made possible by the networking structure of the blogosphere. They hold the promise of social collaboration, wherein, "anyone with access to the network can participate; the barriers to entry are low, and there is no central authority to grant publishing rights or accreditation, nor to prevent bloggers from linking or responding to information or ideas found elsewhere" (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006, p. 5). The term blogosphere alludes to the Greek word logos (meaning word), and the use of the word sphere gives this democratic network a sense of community, thereby encapsulating "the level of interconnectedness among bloggers" (Papacharissi, 2009b, p. 36).

In this widely connected and distributed network structure, bloggers become what Bruns (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006) has termed "produsers," or the potential producers (creating and publishing) and users (commenting and reading) of blog content. Similarly, talking about ways to disseminate and control media literacy in a media-saturated world, Dan Gillmor (2009) mentions how the present shifts toward democratized media has turned the online medium into "a read-write medium, where it is nearly as easy to write online (using the broadest form of the word "write" to include all kinds of media) as it is to read." Mainly, he points to blogs or the blogosphere as a medium for creating this kind of democratic media content and "make it available, on a many-to-many network of networks" (Gillmor, 2009).

As a global social network, the blogosphere is ideal for research. Because blogs are primarily text-based and archived, it is easier to look for a group of interrelated blogs in which a specific topic has been discussed, by using analysis of traffic data, general search engines such as Google, searchable databases of bloglinks such as Technorati, and the Blogosphere Ecosystem (Tremayne, 2007; Drezner & Farrell, 2008). Search engines allow bloggers to discover who is linking to their blogs rapidly, while common linking has become a sort of unstated rule in the blogosphere because it is considered mutually valuable. The most important difference between blogs and more traditional media is that blogs are networked and rely on hyperlinks. Links that interconnect blogs primarily take two forms. First, most bloggers have a "blogroll" on their website, that is a list of blogs that they frequently read or refer to, with clickable links to the URLs of those blogs (Drezner & Farrell, 2008). Second, bloggers may write posts containing hyperlinks that directly connect to other blog posts. Unlike blogroll links, which have a stable position on the blog home page, in-post links get archived and replaced by newer links, over time.

a. **Blogs through the lens of CMC**

Networks have become the basic social units of contemporary society, influenced not only by the omnipresence of technology, but also by religious institutions, cultural background, political associations, and social positioning (Castells, 2009). The most potent form of creating networks through technology in the present context (albeit in the last two decades) is through the computer, primarily the Internet, known as computer-mediated-communication or CMC. From the technological perspective CMC is applied to the exchange of information between networked computers. But, in the larger socio-cultural sense, it applies to networks of

interaction that individuals mediate through e-mail, instant messaging, blogs, social networking sites, and microblogging services, among other forms of CMC.

In the current global economic infrastructure, social relationships are centered on the individual. This individuation of society and the resultant mechanization of representation distances people from the public sphere, resulting in what Castells (1996; 2004) considers the growth of networked individualism. Embodiment has become a privilege and FtF communication a scarcity in the post-industrial society, where people are gradually adopting newer forms of family and friendship circles, including digitally mediated ones. This sort of technologically negotiated networked individualism encourages ""specialized communities;"… (or) forms of sociability constructed around specific interests" (Castells, 2001, p. 132), through various social media services (for example Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Sina Weibo, etc.), as well as blogs or blogging communities (for example SepiaMutiny.com).

b. **Structure and format of blogs**

Those who have very limited knowledge of computer and Internet usage can easily create blogs. They are usually authored by a single user (or multiple users from a single community blog), who post/s entries that could be textual, could include links to other interesting blogs, images and/or biographical information of the author, audio, video, a comments section for other readers/bloggers to post responses, and a guestbook. The blog posts display in reverse-chronological order along with time and date stamps on all entries, with the most recent post appearing at the top of the page (Huffaker, 2004).

Historically speaking, blogs are narrative in structure and reflect the personality of its author, even if the blog is dedicated to some general issue or topic of discussion. Technically however, well over 70 % blogs are considered self-reflexive, personal journals, while other types

include A-list or filter blogs, knowledge logs (k-logs), subject-specific blogs, or those which serve commercial functions such as trading or ad hosting (Sink, 2006; Herring et al., 2004). According to Tremayne (2007), two of the most common types of filter blogs are those focused on technology, and on politics or current events. The maximum impact on mainstream media comes from filter blogs, in particular the political blogs, and not the personal journal style blogs (Herring et al., 2004). This selection criterion that separates A-list blogs from the lesser-known personal blogs also operates on the politics of exclusion, an online power play that has made the blogosphere an area ripe for multi-disciplinary research.

c. **Advantages, practices and uses of blogs**

Blogs primarily offer the gift of speed and social presence to its author/s, which reduces the gap between the writer and reader (Castells, 2001; Matheson, 2009). Even the instantaneous rebuttals and comments on a blog can be argued to be legitimate, because it stands outside political, media or public relations institutions by the sheer virtue of its speed, as "Speed is linked in our [Western] culture to veracity" (Matheson, 2009). It guarantees to be free of the ideological, factual or emphatic falsehoods that television and print are often accused of. Conversely, critics of blogging contend that it can also act as a process of mediation, and therefore position the author/s and readers as holding a more distanced and filtered knowledge of the real (Bolter & Grusin, 1999; Fagerjord, 2003).

Secondly, blogs are intrinsically personal in nature. According to Matheson, "the "project of the self," (to use a cultural studies term) seems to apply to how audiences make sense of and use blogs, as they take readers "into the informal space of descriptions of the everyday" (2009). The author also believes that we need to read bloggers' statements/opinions, not only as reflections of his/her individual beliefs, but also as an "attempt to reconvene politics in citizen-

produced media around everyday life" (Matheson, 2009). Thirdly, with respect to institutional power, the voices of the bloggers are polyphonic, i.e. they are much less dependent than journalists' opinions, on people above them in a hierarchy. Rather, the power of the blog lies in the readers' knowledge of its author's position in the circulation of news, opinion, gossip, etc. (Matheson, 2009).

A long-term process of de-institutionalizing can be seen in the networks enabled by communications technology, the globalization of capitalism, and the play of identity politics (Castells, 2001; 2009). From this perspective, the blogosphere becomes one such informal network of power, and blogs operate within this "space of flows," as a form of knowledge. As a part of this process of de-institutionalization, blogs can also be considered a part of the cultural convergence that Jenkins (2006) sees happening alongside technological convergence of digital communication technologies. This means that media consumers can manipulate/add to media content simultaneously, further blurring the boundaries between producers and users in this post-industrial, globalized economy.

The use of blogs may also be sufficiently related to self-efficacy (Kaye, 2005). Compared to previously established forms of online communication such as IM, bulletin boards, mailing lists, etc. blogs and microblogging practices provide online opportunities for those who believe they may have the power to bring about political and social change, taking stands, and, mobilizing and taking action. Kaye (2005) found six primary motivations for accessing Weblogs: information seeking and media check; convenience; personal fulfillment; political surveillance; social surveillance; and expression and affiliation. She also discovered that "political involvement" predicted all six Weblog motivations. This study reveals the importance of

researching the relationship between blog content and reader motivation as a way to better understand readers' attraction to blogs, how they are used, and the needs they gratify.

2. **Blog genres**

In their investigation of the relationship between language, gender and discourse genre in weblogs, Herring and Paolillo (2006) regarded blogs as the "fastest-growing CMC genre" that deserves linguistic attention (p. 440). The emergent nature of the blog as a genre is in itself significant as the arrival of a new genre creates a rhetorical break in the already established and "stabilized-enough," genres (Gurak et al., 2004). In terms of subject matter the most often-discussed topics are daily life experiences of the bloggers themselves. Following personal blogs are blogs that talk about hobbies, sports and technology. Blogs that discuss current events, political issues, and news about the government are also equally important. Lastly, there are blogs that put forth media and entertainment-related posts, such as videos games, movies or music (de Zuniga, 2009).

The study of the language and discourse of blogs, the communicative practices of bloggers, as well as research into its uses, practices, gratifications and reader or commentator-participation, all have led to the emergence of various genres and sub-genres of weblogs. Although presently there are numerous blog genres online (including travel blogs or travelogs, music blogs, art blogs, family or 'mom' blogs, dream blogs, fashion blogs, and spam blogs or Splogs, etc.), it is beyond the capacity of this essay to address all of the above. Similarly, blogs can also be typified according to media-type, such as a vlog or a blog comprising videos, a linklog or a blog comprising links, a sketchblog or a blog comprising a portfolio of sketches, and a photoblog, or a blog comprising photos. There are also blogs that possess a combination of some/all of these features (i.e. with smaller posts and mixed media forms) that are called

tumblelogs or microblogs. However for brevity's sake, emphasis will primarily be given to text-based blogs (although some may have other forms of embedded media, or may even cross genres). Additionally, for the present project it will bode well to focus on only those blog genres that are relevant to the cross-disciplinarity of the present study, namely personal blogs, health blogs, social/community blogs and ethnic/cultural blogs.

a. **Personal blogs**

Blogs are said to be one of the most personalized of personal media genres. Rather than understanding blogs in terms of narrative argument or discursive "coherence," they should be studied in terms of the "selfhood being projected" (Matheson, 2009) through personal storytelling. Matheson (2009) cites the example of Bruce Rolston's blog, "Flit," where at once he talks about US security's failure to protect Samarra's sacred mosque Al-Askari, and at the next moment about how many times he lost the online "Lord of the Rings" game. This apparent disconnection may be symbolic of Rolston's disjointed thought-process, as projected through the blog. Nonetheless, it is the "selfhood of the blogger," that creates discursive coherence in a blog, no matter how disconnected his blog musings are.

Blogs, in essence become 'personal spaces' for authors to carry out their inward thought-experiments, and sometimes are also meant to attract a 'diffuse audience' by virtue of the diverse range of topics touched upon (Matheson, 2009). Many blog readers seek expressions of the "subjective version of reality" that have been narrated in blogs. As Rogerson (2007) says, "In information theory's terms, the "provenance" of the information is available for all to see, allowing people to assess it better" (Matheson, 2009). The *common purpose* of blogging seems to be the sharing of the self (Herring et al., 2004). Outlining external (political, news-related,

social, etc.) events seems only consequential compared to the sharing of personal stories, experiences and anecdotes.

b. **Health blogs**

Although there are quite a few health-related blogs in the blogosphere, this genre (or sub-genre) of personal blogging has got little attention from mainstream media and scholarly research. Shyam Sundar, Edwards, Hu, & Stavrositu (2007) have studied a sample of mental-health blogs to understand their nature and elicit their role in the future of health communication. According to the authors, blogs have become a leading forum for health information propagation, with a recent AOL survey claiming, "By July 2005, nearly 50% of bloggers in the United States kept a blog because it served as a form of therapy" (Shyam Sundar et al., 2007).

Also, the finding that most mental-health blogs are personal in nature and text based, made clear that users preferred this communication tool because of its descriptive capabilities. Particularly, "they seem to encourage expression of emotion, which bodes well for this venue acting as an effective vehicle for realizing therapeutic psychological benefits for patients and caregivers with pressing health issues" (Shyam Sundar et al., 2007). Not only does this genre of blogging rupture the traditional public-private gendered patterns of discursive participation and create an open space for an uninhibited discussion of sensitive health issues, but in this context, "mental health blogs have the real potential to put the public back into public health" (Shyam Sundar et al., 2007).

c. **Social/community/group-based blogs**

Social blogs or group-based blogs are often created around communities sharing similar interests. Many of these community blogs operate on their own norms and

interactive guidelines, stated explicitly or implied. Wei (2004), who has studied a community of blogs devoted to knitting (*Knitting Bloggers NetRing*), compares the community's explicit norms of participation with the practical implementation of those norms by blog members. Wei (2004) notes that true to online communities, the Knitting Bloggers also represent a unique culture where members are equally enthusiastic about knitting as they are about getting to know "like-minded people either through personal interactions or through the words on a blog." What Wei's content analysis of community blogs reveals is how a community's culture can impact the implementation and practice of its norms.

In studying the gradual growth of a UK blogging community, Reed (2005) noticed that after many months of interacting online, community members of this particular blog started meeting in-person. Moreover, because these bloggers "equate their blogs with their selves, the meetings were considered simply extensions of the blogging community: a meeting of old friends rather than complete strangers" (p. 75). Using examples of English-language blogs written by six Muslim women of Middle Eastern or North African descent (MMENA) in the US, Sink (2006) explains how strong communal feelings are often found in online diasporic groups. Many cultural, ethnic and immigrant blogs are built on such foundations of a "sense of community," an interactive space made up of fluid borders that includes "feelings of membership and influence, the fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection" (Sink, 2006).

d. **Cultural and ethnic blogs**

Blogs need to be theorized in ways that account for an acknowledgment of ethno-cultural differences depending on the social and political context of its origination (Matheson, 2009). Hallin and Mancini (2004) argue that a great deal of media literature is

ethnocentric, "reading local contexts as if the model in one country were universal. Blogs are no different, and need to be theorized in terms of their contexts" (p. 2).

The evolutions of various communication genres are often results of external pressures and cultural resistances to established or popular media, as they are also the reflections of their inherent semiotic and technological properties. In that respect, blogging can also be seen as a discursive space for creating cultural resistance, with the potential to expose and problematize the hitherto uneasy intersection of private stories and public issues (Gillett, 2007). Gillett (2007) studied the counter-rhetoric created by sarsart.org, a cultural blog that opposed the "official" representations of the 2003 SARS outbreak in Asia, by mainstream media. What Gillett's semiotic analysis of blogs brings to the fore is the fact that social technologies like blogs create a public space for those who have been historically and culturally silenced to articulate their *private* problems, in ways and through channels that were previously not available.

Blogging serves as the ideal interactive space for marginalized peoples who are silenced by the dominant discourse. Blogs may be able to empower ethno-cultural communities of action from the bottom-up (2006). The cultural interruption that can and is being caused by online social media like blogs makes it clear that "…how people use blogs to achieve things—and therefore the power of the blog to affect people's ideas, values and actions—is largely a cultural matter" (Matheson, 2009).

3. **Methods and theories to study blogs and blogging**

On the methodological side, most quantitative research on blogs that focus on topical relevance, uses and gratifications and networking capabilities have been conducted using methods such as content analysis (Herring et al., 2004) and network analysis (Efimova & Hendrick, 2004; Herring, Kouper, Paolillo, Scheidt, Tyworth, Welsch, Wright, & Yu, 2005). To

study the viability of blogs as a novel rhetorical genre, qualitative methods such as rhetorical and textual analysis have been used (Miller & Shepherd, 2004; Sink, 2006). Social digital ethnography (Hevern, 2004) and ethnographic interviews (Hiller & Franz, 2004) have also been employed to illustrate the social forms, cultural uses, as well as identity negotiations found in/through blogs.

Most of the research done on blogging has been on filter (because they "filter" information from other web sources) and A-list blogs. Much theorization on blogs has focused on blogging as a grassroots form of political communication (Wallsten, 2007; Tremayne, 2007); the impact of bloggers as "citizen journalists" or "civic journalists" (Gillmor, 2009; Papacharissi, 2009a, 2009b); and as "public intellectuals" or opinion leaders, as well as "media watchdogs" (Papacharissi, 2009a, 2009b). Other than research concerning the political implications of blogs, several other theorists have 'read' blogs as narrative performances, and as a socio-culturally impregnated, rhetorical or storytelling genre (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Lindemann, 2005; Gurak et al, 2004).

From the social and cultural point of view, certain media theorists have studied blogs as instances of interpersonal communication and identity negotiations of desired selves (Hevern, 2004; Sink, 2006). Blogs have also been theorized as online communities that encourage the creation of a 'Sense of Community' or SOC (Wei, 2004; Blanchard, 2004; Lindemann, 2005), as well as a discursive space that blurs or reworks the public-private dichotomy (Gregg, 2006; Sink, 2006). Many scholars have theorized blogs as 'gendered' or 'gender-neutral' spaces, and there are associated feminist discourses surrounding this issue (Huffaker & Calvert 2005; Herring & Paolillo, 2006; Gregg, 2006; Wilson, 2005; Sink, 2006). Special emphasis will be paid to the

socio-cultural theories of blogging, as a way to address the intersectional scope of the present study.

a. **Theorizing blogging as intercultural, intra-cultural and personal communication**

Intercultural communication builds on conceptions of identity and self-development, particularly as it applies to communication among people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Although research has currently been done on blogs and CMC as forums for the exchange of intercultural discourses (Sink, 2006; Papacharissi, 2002; Mitra, 2006), traditional areas of research focus on nonverbal communication, individualism-collectivism, cultural assimilation, multiculturalism, ethnocentrism, and racial discrimination.

When the theoretical paradigm of intercultural communication is applied to blogs, it may be defined as "a process by which a group of social (cultural) actors in a given situation negotiate the meaning of the various situations, which rise between them" (Sink, 2006). Orality and textuality are simultaneously present within the narrative paradigm of blogs by virtue of its fluid hypertextual features and chronological (though, reversed) textual organization, making it a "site of oral culture, albeit an oral culture with distinctly print characteristics" (Sink, 2006).

Blogs have also been extensively studied from the theoretical perspective of interpersonal communication, with particular emphasis on the expression of the 'personal' (Wilson, 2005; Lampa, 2004; Badger, 2004). Creating blogs for maintaining personal relations with family, friends and acquaintances is an often-observed phenomenon within blog research. Most blogs have a narrative structure and are built around the author's personality (Wilson, 2005). Blogs have privileged the voicing of personal stories. Some bloggers consider their blogs as "extension of self, a facet of their personalities revealed in public…[where] one blogger described blogs as

"the great I am" (Wilson, 2005). In studying the uses and gratifications of personal blogs, Lampa (2004) observed that the bloggers' main purposes for writing the blogs were to record life experiences, express opinions, purge emotions, reveal thoughts, test audience reception, and create a community of like-minded people.

b. **Theorizing blogging as identity negotiation and performance**

Online identity is a disembodied concept wherein players are constantly interchanging genders-roles and real-virtual relationships. In fact, CMC offers users/players a stage to act out their desires, and experiment with identity construction (Turkle, 1997). The central aspects of blogs are "the struggle over identities—interpersonal, social, moral, aesthetic—in uncertain and unstable conditions by making that struggle concrete and accessible" (Langellier & Peterson, 2004, p. 187).

Papacharissi (2002) studied the presentation of 'self' in personal web pages. According to her web-community membership displays not only a user's need for attachment and support, but also the assurance that his/her projected 'self' is acknowledged by others in the community. Hevern's (2004) analysis of twenty personal blogs exposed the primacy of 'time' in online identity construction. Blogs offer the possibility of charting the author's identity development through the reverse chronological ordering of blog posts (Hevern, 2004). In a study of teenage blogs, Huffaker (2004) observed that screen or blog names became the most important markers of teen identity.

By studying the identity creations and negotiations of MMENA women through their personal blogs, Sink (2006) shows how these women addressed identity issues within diverse areas, "in each one displaying a "paradox of identity": what Edward Said also called "plurality of vision" or "a constant contest between cultures."" They seemed to be at dissonant crossroads of

many different cultures at once (that of mainstream America, and their own cultural heritage), being a part of neither of them in entirety. For them, their "blogs seemed to be a kind of identity workshop, a fluid space between the different aspects of who they are" (Sink, 2006).

c. **Theorizing blogs as online communities or SOC**

Some recent literature on blogs (Sink, 2006; boyd, 2006; Hiller & Franz, 2004; Mitra, 2006) argues that blogging may present a sense of community to groups on the periphery of the mainstream society. As time passes relational ties develop in an online community as a consequence of interactions between participants (Sink, 2006). In the present socio-political context, where in-person communication between strong ties is largely reduced due to spatiotemporal constraints, the scope for weak-ties to form networks through blogs and blog communities is ideal. These weak ties are not *isolated individuals*, but rather a community of like-minded people who create social patterns of networking through the practice of blogging. Blanchard (2004) argues that the interpersonal relations and affective investments that are gradually developed among bloggers and their readers/commentators can be defined as "sense of community," a concept that is emblematic of their interactions with each other within the blog community, that they essentially render meaning to.

d. **Theorizing how blogging resituates public-private information**

There is a treasure of current literature that addresses the public-private dichotomy, in terms of whether blogs/blogging encourages the publication of what is considered 'private' information, or discourages it. According to Gurak at al. (2004), "because of the very public nature of the weblog as online text, the public and the private often overlap and conflict within the blogosphere." Roberts-Miller (2004) finds that although blogging facilitates the creation of a public space for argumentation, it encourages "enclave-based discourse," thereby

reinforcing the hegemony of offline public-private divisions. Mortensen (2004), Sink (2006) and Gregg (2006) have examined how blogs have complicated our traditional understanding of what constitutes 'public' and 'private' discourse by furnishing examples of how bloggers relate their personal stories, share private information, and simultaneously discuss public affairs, making "the public personal as well as the personal public." From this perspective, blogs/blogging have been known to challenge, or modify institutional representations of what constitutes public and/or private information within the online sphere.

e. **Theorizing blogging as a gendered activity - Feminist discourses about blogging**

Continuing the public-private dialectic further, one of the many promises made by the Internet, right from its formative phase is the possibility that users would neither have to be recognized by, nor subscribe to the dictates of gender norms that are spatially separated as being public or private. Ironically however, it is this very notion of "recognition" on the Internet that complicates the medium, and renders blogs as a space that also to an extent continues the gendered public-private dispute (Gregg, 2006). There are feminist discourses about the role of women's blogs or blogs about women's issues pertaining to the so-called *private* sphere, yet that too is narrow in scope, being framed mostly from the "white, college-educated, US-centric," position (Gregg, 2006, p. 152).

Gendered uses of language in blogging have been known to offer diverse perspectives into the ways men and women present themselves and interact with each other online, in ways that are similar to, different from, or defiant of traditional FtF interactions (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005). On a more dismal note, Wilson (2005) argues that the blogosphere only extols "a Utopian "equal turf' image," when in actuality there is no gender equality within its virtual space. In fact,

she says that blogs re-create the same gendered hierarchy that they supposedly are said to contradict. This online gendered disparity (favoring of male blog discourse, over female blog discourse) is not only evident in the genre of political blogging, but also evident in "discussions about poverty, gender and racial discrimination, child welfare, elder issues, family issues such as the politics of marriage and divorce, gay and lesbian issues, housing, and health care (which) do not get the attention they deserve" (Wilson, 2005).

On the flipside, scholars like Sink (2006) who study online identity creations and gender empowerment of MMENA women bloggers in the US, noticed how the processes of "Personal identity, gender identity, and cultural/ethnic identity were constantly negotiated and developed…in uniquely overlapping, dynamic ways within each woman's blog," particularly in the areas of religion, family, marriage and romantic relationships. Gregg (2006) also points to the potential that blogs hold, not only for the discussion of issues pertaining to women of color, but as a space that can create polyphony of racial, cultural, sexual, gender and class-based narrative intersections. She offers examples of webrings and web hosts that are essentially "gender-free" spaces that bring together blog communities like *Feministe*, *Ms. Musings* and *The Progressive Women Bloggers Ring*, which "offer independent alternatives to the malestream media," presenting the virtual blogosphere as a site of socio-cultural refuge for many women who need respite from "the difficulties and dangers of non-normative gender identification offline… [and seek] a safe and fairly anonymous forum in which issues of concern and potential threat can be raised and discussed without fear" (pp. 152-53).

4. **Advances and limitations of research on blogs/blogging**

Several research advances have been made in terms of regarding blogs as independent forums for conducting meaningful political discussion and communication (Drezner

& Farrell, 2008; Papacharissi, 2009a, 2009b; Smolkin, 2004; Tremayne 2007). Its importance has already been established as an activity independent of journalism (Papacharissi, 2009a, 2009b; Herring at al., 2004) and many scholars have outlined the "journaling" substance of blogs, signaling the birth of a new rhetorical genre (Gurak et al. 2004; Langellier & Peterson, 2004; Lindemann, 2005).

However, there are certain limitations and gaps within the research on blogs that has been conducted so far. There is insufficient literature addressing non-filter blogs (Herring et al. 2004), and not enough is available in terms of research on the socio-cultural impact of blogs, although scholars like Papacharissi (2009a, 2009b, 2009c), Gillett (2007), Wei (2004), and Matheson (2009) have made important contributions to literature addressing the socio-cultural uses of new media technologies. Their studies have elicited the role blogs play in making personal stories publicly accessible, and have also rendered a modern discursive quality to blogs as a genre that enmeshes the private and the political. As some scholars rightly argue (Lindemann, 2005; Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmoki, & Sapp, 2006; Sink 2006; Gregg, 2006; Gillett 2007), further research is required on community-based blogs, reader-impact on blog discussions, narrative performances of online identities, and thematic evidence of how race, gender and ethnic politics play out in blogs. Based on the extant literature on blogging as a practice of personal and cultural communication, I believe that future research should focus on how marginalized people and oppressed communities find their voices on blogs, and how blogs can function as safe public spaces by forming a sense of community around sensitive issues.

E. Part V: Theories of Intersectionality - Where Race, Gender and Ethnicity Intersect

The theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997, 2005) largely deals with how varying issues relating to minority cultures intersect. It is primarily used to dissect the

production of power and processes in areas of gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class, nationality and immigration, as well as being involved in analyzing social and cultural hierarchies within different discourses and institutions. Although this theory is based largely within feminist/gender studies, it partly derives from cultural studies, particularly as it looks at the relations between internally- and externally- diverse socio-cultural categories and everyday meaning-creation in post-colonial contexts. Part of it is also rooted in the study of identity politics, specifically of the marginalized people and communities. If at all, the act of blogging plays a role in 'making public' the intersectional presence of cultural, racial, class, gendered, sexual and ethnic discourses surrounding the issue of domestic violence in South Asian immigrant communities, then it is my belief that approaching the problematic from a race/gender and cultural studies perspective will theoretically corroborate the expected findings.

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1994) argues that acts of violence faced by "women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism." This theory focuses on minority cultures and marginalized identities wherein "gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class and nationality are categories that may enhance the complexity of intersectionality, and point towards identities in transition" that are socio-culturally created through exclusionary and inclusionary power politics (Knudsen, 2006, p 61; Crenshaw, 1994). Western feminist studies have often been criticized for their exclusive focus on gender diversity and exclusion of race. As a reaction, some North American intersectional theorists started studying ways in which "people of colour cross gender" (Knudsen, 2006, p. 62), as the concept originally came forth as an interaction between Black Feminism, feminist theory and late 20th century post-colonial studies.

However, this additive form of intersectionality eventually proved limiting as it valued socio-cultural categories in terms of "a hierarchy as was the case in the 1970ies debate on whether class was more significant than gender" (Knudsen, 2006, p. 64; Yuval-Davis, 2005). There was eventually the need for a transversal form of intersectionality that could not only pose questions about how ethnicity is gendered, but also how masculinity and femininity are racialized and ethnicized (Knudsen, 2006, p. 64). Moreover, since the earlier "studies concentrated (more so) on the poor and marginalized colored population, the class dimension was often implied in the theoretical reflections and analysis" (Knudsen, 2006, p. 62). In fact, the focus on disability and sexualities, and that on post-colonial feminism, queer feminism and the relation between gender/feminism, socialism and nationality came in much later to transversalize and further complicate the theory (Meyer, 2002; Yuval-Davis, 2005).

Intersectionality is particularly useful for studying the cultural, social, political, legal and economic forces that are produced and sustained within different power structures (Yuval-Davis, 2005; Knudsen, 2006). Studying the minority culture from within, the theory of intersectionality "points towards the critical view of becoming "the other" in a normative setting" (Knudsen, 2006, p. 62). This 'othering' happens, both, "within a general Western culture or more locally" (Knudsen, 2006, p. 62), as within the South Asian diaspora in the US where domestically violated women from this ethnic minority have the potential of being labeled *troublesome* within their own community, primarily due to the threat that they pose to the model minority image.

As is evident, the exclusionary politics that abused women of color often face is complicated by the cultural myths that incarcerate them within the normative confines of their own communities. In some cases, language barriers prevent the non-English speakers from getting help from external state-sponsored and private support centers. According to Crenshaw

(1994) and Yuval-Davis (2005), the communal efforts to curtail the politicization of domestic violence in non-white communities are often times undergirded by the workings of an internally-operative patriarchal discriminatory politics and an overtly-masculine de facto nationalism, processes that work alongside the pressures of mainstream white racism.

In an effort to "weigh their interests in avoiding issues that might reinforce distorted public perceptions against the need to acknowledge and address intercommunity problems" (Crenshaw, 1994), the cultural rhetoric assumed by many minority communities, including the South Asian community in the US, denies the very reality of IPV within their society. This they do "in a misguided attempt to forestall racial stereotyping" done by Western discourses (Crenshaw, 1994). Instead, they adhere to a rhetoric that obscures the existent abuse faced by immigrant women of an ethno-racial minority by "obliging women not to scream rather than obliging men not to hit" (Crenshaw, 1994).

The kind of relegation produced by the power politics of exclusion-inclusion does much to rid the people in question of self-reliant independence and agency. Certain scholars and critics of cultural studies and postcolonialism argue that by falling outside the boundaries of traditional normative behavior, minority/immigrants/women of color are either relegated to the external, objective category of 'victim' and/or 'colonized' by the majority culture (Yuval-Davis, 1997, 2005; Mohanty, 1994), or are internally silenced as 'misfits' and/or 'martyrs' (Mani, 1992; Spivak, 1994; Goel, 2005) by the minority culture. Also, the notion of being potentially *troublesome* not only refers to those who are represented as marginal, from within and without. It ironically, refers to the agency and empowerment of marginalized populations and their theorists, who not only counter-pose the institutional discourses of power, but also challenge and make 'troublesome' this very process of representation, labeling and exclusion.

1. Roots in cultural studies and post-colonialism: Using 'culture', 'subaltern' and 'colonial/ism' as metaphors

Before playing the blame-game, 'this is what our culture says, this is what we do…' it would be wise to think again. Given that our everyday understandings of gender, race, ethnicity and nationality are based on socio-cultural categorizations, "connected to something "out there" in the society or in the nation," the only way to arrive at a more transversal and eclectic understanding of how these realities intersect is to study them as fragmented identities and fluid subject-positions, which are "connected to individuals, groups and collective narratives telling (us) how we represent and construct our selves" (Hall, 1994; Knudsen, 2006, p. 65). Lata Mani (1992) succinctly puts into words the unproblematic equivalence of cultural differences when she says, "difference is insufficiently engaged," agreeing with hooks (1990) that the field has partly re-appropriated "the decentered conditions of marginal people of color…into an abstract, depoliticized, and internally undifferentiated notion of "difference"" (pp. 392-393). What is required in contrast is a transversal underscoring of historical variations and cultural specificities within post-structural, post-colonial and post-modern areas of inquiry.

The *transversal* strain of intersectionality has its partial roots in post-structuralism in that it not only argues for the deconstruction and destabilization of the object under consideration, but also studies the diverse systems of knowledge and power that produce the object of study, thereby providing "a location where the new politics of difference – racial, sexual, cultural, transnational – can combine and be articulated in all their dazzling plurality" (Mani, 1992, p. 392). The *anti-categorical complexity* of transversal intersectionality theory argues for this kind of rejection and destabilization of race, gender, class, sexuality and disability as categories that are constructed by the inclusionary and exclusionary power of language (McCall, 2005;

Knudsen, 2006). In essence, the anti-categorical complexity of intersectionality tries to "avoid fixed and normative structures and subjects" (Knudsen, 2006, p. 66), and analyzes power-knowledge relations in a fashion similar to post-colonial theorists (Spivak, 1994; Mani, 1992) who scrutinize ways in which both dominant and counter-hegemonic discourses scribe, re-inscribe and marginalize colonial/post-colonial subject positions.

Recalling eyewitness accounts of the practice of *Sati* (widow immolation over the deceased husband's pyre, practiced mainly in Bengal) in early 19th century colonized India, Mani (1992) shows how the colonial discourses that represented widow's words/actions when thrown into the pyre, polarizes them as *voluntary heroines* or as *coerced victims*. Mani contends that these polarized representations "preclude the possibility of a female subjectivity that is shifting, contradictory, inconsistent. Such a constrained and reductive notion of agency discursively positions women as objects to be saved – never as subjects who act, even if within extremely constraining social conditions" (Mani, 1992, p. 397). This narrative of salvation, according to Mani propagated a 'West as savior' discourse within the contexts of colonialism, nationalism and later Western feminism.

As opposed to the colonial narratives on so-called "voluntary" sati, Mani also puts forth first-person narratives by women who escaped the pyre and women eyewitnesses that are "exceptional in their attention to the palpable, visceral effects of sati…unusual in representing the woman as "subject of/in pain" (1992, p. 401). What Mani describes in details are the intersectional forces that led Indian widows to commit/escape sati: violence, active suffering, coercion, external (economic/practical) pressures, resistance, choices, empowerment and agency. While the cultural and historical variations of such post-colonial studies make them "local projects, globally informed" (Mani, 1992, p. 407), to make the intersectional theory meaningful

in the larger context, "what is necessary is a rigorous politics of translation in the widest sense of the term: transcoding that is scrupulously alert to specificities, avoiding the triple pitfalls of conflation, erasure and elision" (Mani, 1992, p. 394-95).

Ironically however, post-colonial theory also seems to fall prey to some of these pitfalls, being split along two schools of thought: between those scholars (Guha, 1982) who argue in favor of giving a collective "voice" to the under-represented *subaltern* subject (a Gramscian term referring to the economically and socially dispossessed), and those who argue for first-person "voices" and attempt to deconstruct the essentialism displayed by the former camp of subaltern theorists (Spivak, 1994; Mani, 1992). Spivak (1994) questions the very grounds on which post-colonial studies in general, and subaltern studies in particular operate, to re-create an academically-institutionalized and male-privileged Western colonial discourse: a form of neo-colonialism that perpetrates the same kinds of economic abuse, political clout, and cultural exclusion that it had originally set out to take apart.

Spivak (1994) does agree with the reality of epistemic violence that is carried out on the "subalterns," especially in the context of the economically, socially and sexually disadvantaged Indian women, but she ends on a dismal note suggesting that female subalterns cannot (or, are not given the opportunity to) speak, being silenced by both the dominant colonial forces of subversion and ironically, by its critics. However, history does bear witness to many digressive acts of speech by subalterns that challenge 'His master's voice,' a fact contrary to Spivak's radical bleak conclusion.

Colonialism, *colonization* and *colonized* are all words intrinsic to the vocabulary of post-colonial studies, and have grown to encompass meanings that not only apply to the macrocosmic domination of a weaker/smaller group of people by a stronger/larger power, but also to the

internally perpetrated political, social, cultural, emotional, economic and gendered forces that are subversive on a microcosmic level. Spivak (1987) argues that "Women in many societies have been relegated to the position of 'Other,' marginalized and, in a metaphorical sense, 'colonized,'" who try to oppose such internal colonialisms by fighting "against imperial domination from positions deeply embedded in, yet fundamentally alienated from that imperium" (as cited in Landow, 2001). However, these same words also prove problematic, being rhetorically and metaphorically essentialized by many scholars in the field to mean any exploitative relationship, irrespective of the their particular histories and contexts.

South Asian post-colonial theorists, Suleri (1994) and Mohanty (1994) critique this essentialist trend of post-colonial studies. According to Suleri (1994) and Mohanty (1994), "when applied to women, such terminology implies that all women, particularly all so-called Third World women, had the same experience and that it has to be judged by the standards and experiences of American and European feminist assumptions" (as cited in Landow, 2001). Advocating counter-essentialist views, feminist Yuval-Davis (1997, 2005) argues that this socio-cultural homogenization also ignores the reality of differences that abound between men and women who share the same ethno-cultural background. One has to be mindful of the differences that abound in the causes, manners and degrees of their subjugation at a similar historical moment and within the same social structure.

Mohanty (1994) furthers the argument by criticizing the unidirectional view that posits 'women' as a fixed category, situated outside of the social and cultural processes of which they are intrinsically a part. Rather than acknowledging their diversity and viewing their agency and struggles as historically and socially subjective narratives, they are objectively represented as martyrs, and/or quintessentially oppressed, by colonial and postcolonial discourses alike

(Mohanty, 1994; Mani, 1992). This condescending 'rectitude' (Suleri, 1994) of post-colonialism situates it in a grey area within cultural studies. On one hand, this theoretical/ideological split compromises its historical value and renders it abstract, while on the other hand, it also "allows for a vocabulary of cultural migrancy, which helpfully derails the postcolonial condition from the strictures of national histories, and thus makes way for the theoretical articulations best typified by Homi Bhabha's…Nation and Narration (1990)" (Landow, 2001; Suleri, 1994).

2. **Cultural identity and displacement: Diasporas, hybridity and nationalism**

Talking about the intersection of cultural and national identity as the space where cultural displacement occurs, Homi Bhabha (1995) terms this itinerant site the "third space." Manifest through what he calls the post-modern reality of cultural "hybridity," this fluid space of interaction is always evolving and resists being normatively fixed (p. 209). He argues that there is a split between the moralistic, national discourse that historically objectifies people as the "site of writing the nation," and the processual or performative discourse, which regards people as diasporic subjects moving seamlessly through their day-to-day lives. Cultural displacement plays out through repetitive processual narratives wherein any kind of "homogenizing descriptions are impossible" (Bhabha, 1994 as cited in Odin, 2001). Moreover, as Bhabha (1994) points out, minority cultures cannot be studied in temporal fixity. Their performative negotiation is with spaces that are marked by disjunctures and possibilities that resist fixed, dominant categorization (Odin, 2001). This new narrative of nation points to an intersectional break located in between a temporal and real/imaginary space "that is internally marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense location of cultural difference" (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 145-148). Also, it is by paying attention to these

interstitial discourses that we will be able to "elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (Bhabha, 1995, p. 209).

Stuart Hall (1994) agrees with Bhabha (1994; 1995) in saying that diasporic peoples are constantly producing and re-producing their cultural identities through processes of transformation, hybridity, and difference. Hall (1994) posits two different ways of thinking of cultural identity in the post-colonial context, one being a form of restored collective identity, that is especially forceful among hitherto colonized/marginalized peoples as "resources of resistance and identity" (p. 393). The other is a more transformative and multilayered sense of cultural identity, which recognizes that "there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather – since history has intervened, 'what we have become'" (Hall, 1994, p. 394).

To this matrix of cultural identity and difference, Deniz Kandiyoti (1994) adds the patriarchal regulation of gender politics through the dominant discourse of nationalism, which singles women out as "the symbolic repository of group identity," and denies them agency as full-fledged citizens of modern nations by associating them with "the private domain (that) reinforces the merging of the nation/community with the selfless mother/devout wife" (p. 382). Such categorizations of women, immigrants and minority cultures as "object or Other," is part of the ideological processes of representation which "persuade us that how things are is how they ought to be and that the place provided for us is the place we ought to have," key ideas within the larger process of creating subject- and object-positions based on cultural group identities (Brummett & Bowers, 1999).

As per Brummett & Bowers (1999), "the question of subjects is therefore a question of rhetoric," as the struggles over how people are textually represented according to race, ethnicity,

gender, class, and sexual orientation determines their subject positions. Considered an important theoretical perspective within Marxism and feminism, subject position "is a stance, role or perspective one takes in relationship to a text so as to read or engage the text" (Brummett & Bowers, 1999, p. 118). Stories are related by active subject-positions and not by passive and voiceless object-positions, with the act of discussion providing "an explanation for why people are doing what they are doing, how they got "here," and where they are going" (Brummett & Bowers, 1999, p. 131).

On the other end of discussion lies noise, seen by the authors as "comprising at least two elements: isolation and acontextuality, and otherness," that is, a form of ahistorical and objectified positioning of the subordinate group by the dominant discourse, as frequently seen in the context of racism and colonialism (Brummett & Bowers, 1999, p. 132). However, what appears as *disengaged noise* in one instance can be turned around at a particular socio-cultural juncture as *active storytelling* and *contemplative consciousness-raising*, for history has shown that "margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance" (hooks, 1990, p. 151). This historical disruption requires an intersectional viewing of discursive feminist themes as they ascribe to culturally-negotiated, subject/object positions within the "alleged determinisms of class, race or gender," and on the other to cultural studies, as it tries "to grasp the essentially rhetorical concept of texts as sites of struggle, in which signs and reading strategies are used by people toward competing suasory ends" (Brummett & Bowers, 1999, p. 136).

F. Part VI: Consciousness-Raising and Contemplation of Change

According to Jody Brown (1997), a battered woman who desires to bring about a major *change* in her current abusive situation has to first understand and reevaluate the situation as something she wants to change, and only then can she actively take steps to change it.

Prochaska and DiClemente's (1984) *Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change* (TMBC) gives us a systematic and methodical view of how abused women attempt to make changes in their lives, through various processes, stages, decisional and self-efficacy measures. Brown (1997) builds on the TMBC to argue that the cognitive, emotional and practical processes involved in bringing about those positive changes are time-consuming, yet dynamic, leading the ones affected through gradual stages of pre-contemplation, contemplation and finally, well-weighted action. Although battered women undergo various mental and physical stages (pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance) and processes of change (consciousness-raising, helping relationships, self-revaluation, etc.), none of these *constructs of change* are mutually exclusive, being essentially non-linear and co-dependent. However, for the purpose of this study, special attention will be paid to the relationship between the battered woman's 'contemplation' as one of the imperatives within the *stages of change* that indicates one's readiness to make alterations in her life, and 'consciousness-raising' as one of the prime processes of change that "describe experiential and behavioral techniques or strategies used in bringing about changes" (Brown, 1997, p. 10).

1. **Transtheoretical model of behavior change: Contemplation of action and consciousness-raising**

Battered women who are in the contemplation phase are aware of their abuse, mindful that they have to change, are contemplating changing their behavior toward violence, but are not fully ready for action (Brown, 1997). They use this phase to actively figure out how to implement those changes: be it for building social support, gaining emotional capital, or looking for options to become economically self-sufficient. In fact, at this stage they look for advice and information about what they can do to make psychological- and physiological-health

related changes, much more proactively than those women who are in the pre-contemplative stage (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984; Brown, 1997). However, battered women who are contemplating doing something to end the cycle of spousal violence are also often found to be "ambivalent about the pros and cons of making changes," (Brown, 1997, p. 12) and can actually linger for a long time within this phase, weighing the consequences of leaving their abusive partners. In several cases, the aftermath of their love for their partner/spouse, or other debilitating impediments may actually make them compromise their own safety.

Social activists and psychologists agree that tailoring interventions to the particular stage of change that victims of violence are in have been found to be more effective in changing behaviors than conventional, *action-oriented* strategies that are actually more suited to those who are in the action phase of the behavior-alternation stage (Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross, J. C. & Vangarelli, 1989; Prochaska, DiClemente, Velicer, & Rossi, 1993; Brown, 1997). According to Brown (1997), women in violent relationships cannot be forced to change. They can only be helped and empowered to recognize that they are in an abusive trap that they should try to come out of. One way of doing that is for social activists, researchers, psychologists, health officials, domestic violence service providers and the victims themselves to accept that a 'stage- and process-based approach' to understanding behavior change can in reality, help one to realize the impact of domestic and systemic restraints that battered women face in attempting to end the abuse that they encounter at home. "To insist that a woman simply leave when she is still in the stage of exploring alternatives is not only a waste of time, it is not responsive to her needs" (Brown, 1997), and works only to homogenize and de-contextualize the experiences that are unique to each victim of domestic violence.

In recent times, many domestic violence shelter services and advocates have created interventions based on the TMBC, with the incorporation of support groups that address the requirements and queries of victims who are aware that there is a huge problem that needs to be addressed and are contemplating some kind of action to change their abusive situation. Through such social support groups, abused women and the moderating advocates can not only create awareness of the different stories, contexts, forms and forces that complicate their abuse, but can also "validate each others' experience and share information" (Brown, 1997, p. 16). Usually, the affective and rational processes such as consciousness-raising, emotional arousal and self-reevaluation are utilized most by abused women in the contemplation- and preparation for action stages. In the contemplation of action stage, battered women were most seen to use consciousness-raising techniques, as well as "bibliotherapy" and similar instructive strategies (Brown, 1997). As part of the consciousness-raising process, victims and advocates engaged in evaluative, affective and experiential discussions that led to emotional or dramatic arousal, self-reevaluation of their situation and opportunities for social liberation, as well as acknowledging the effect of their perpetrator's abusive treatment on their immediate and extended environment (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984; Brown, 1997).

The combination of the various stages and processes of change can lead to effective ways in which stage-suitable interventions for battered women are designed and implemented. In fact, a particular requirement is to develop successful interventions for abused women who are entering the contemplation phase, such that they can recognize and evaluate the self- and other-related impact of their abuse (environmental reevaluation), know that it is unacceptable (emotional relief), believe in the fact that they are not to blame for it (self-reevaluation), hold

the perpetrator responsible for the abuse (social liberation) and share experiences and information with others to create holistic support (consciousness-raising).

Sharing personal stories has been one of the primary ways marginal groups have raised consciousness about their oppression, and created agency to initiate changes. Consciousness-raising allows the oppressed to voice their anguish in public, to the extent that the "discussion of inequality and discrimination help connect personal experiences with a larger need to address the problems of all" (Carver, 2008, p. 18). The contemplation and promotion of change is an essential part of most consciousness-raising agendas, facilitated through intra- and inter-group discussions among members of oppressed groups (Chesebro, Cragan & McCuIlough, 1973; Campbell, 1983; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984; Brown, 1997). Those who are rendered voiceless by the oppressive forces of society can find ways to create agency and perpetuate change through consciousness-raising tactics, although consciousness-raising has been largely seen in the recent past as a discursive second- and third wave feminist tool for creating awareness about women's rights and gender-related issues (Sowards & Renegar, 2004).

The success of feminist agendas in one part of the world has to be counter-balanced with a scathing look into the failures that abound in other parts of the world with respect to women's rights and modes of oppression. Third wave feminists question the homogenizing, gender-equality focused tendency of second-wave white feminism, through consciousness raising texts such as "*To Be Real*, *Listen Up*, and *Colonize This!* [which] focus on diversity as a primary issue, often observing how feminism has failed to include women of color and other diverse aspects of women" (Sowards & Renegar, 2004, p. 540). The exclusion of minority women, women of color, and other marginalized groups by second wave feminists, unfairly "leave no room for women who find their power through a perceived powerlessness" (Austin, 2002, p.

167). A large part of the discursive struggle that third wave feminists, women's rights advocates, gender theoreticians and contemporary women go through is etched into their "cultural memory [which] is marked by this sense of exclusion" (Sowards & Renegar, 2004, p. 541).

2. **Third wave feminism and consciousness-raising: Addressing cultural differences**

To be able to address a diversity of experiences and audiences are hallmarks of third wave feminism's consciousness-raising agenda. The moment someone understands, names, describes and tells a story about an oppressive experience, that person creates an opportunity for critical consciousness-raising though active self-expression. Understanding the histories, politics, goals, modes, and roots of multicultural gender oppression are more a part of their schema, rather than focusing on the successes and/or failures of the women's movement, per se (Cox, Johnson, Newitz & Sandell, 1997; Hopkins, 1998). In fact, shifting the focus from "inclusive feminisms" that have a tendency to homogenize women's experiences of oppression, the third wave feminists concentrated on the self-expressive, rhetorical qualities of consciousness-raising that "create new possibilities for voice" (Sowards & Renegar, 2004, p. 542). As a participant of a consciousness-raising community, Lee admits that, "to come to a class that addressed these issues directly and gave me the words for all those pent-up feelings and frustrations was a tremendously affirming and empowering experience" (2001, p. 68).

Consciousness-raising as a mode of public awareness creation has been present in various forms, and within different discursive spaces. The Women's Rights movement of the 1960s and 70s brought about by the second wave feminists popularized face-to-face, small group discussions that facilitated consciousness-raising (Chesebro et al., 1973). However, according to

Carver (2008), what orality-based FtF consciousness-raising did for the Women's Rights movement, was also done successfully by newspapers for the early suffragists, bringing "people together, enabling them to interact" (p. 20) collectively through this textually-mediated consciousness-raising mode of communication. This kind of a collective consciousness-raising rhetoric against oppression was also witnessed during the late 1960s Redstocking's Abortion Speak-Out movement in the US (Sowards & Renegar, 2004). At present, third-wave feminists, developing nations' women/men, women/men of color, the LGBTIQ community and people with disabilities, all are seen to disclose personal stories in public spaces through mass media, academic channels and popular culture to share, perpetuate and continue awareness (Sowards & Renegar, 2004).

G. Summary

The preceding literature review reveals how the six scholarly pools of domestic violence, immigration and transnationalism, online community, the practice of blogging, intersectionality and consciousness-raising simultaneously connect, contradict and reveal research gaps in each of the other fields.

In the particular area of domestic violence against South Asian women in the United States, this chapter has not only reviewed the role that immigration and transnationalism play in creating conditions for skilled South Asian workers to immigrate to the US, but it has also helped us to interrogate the under-researched, double-edged politics of globalization that marginalizes, complicates and/or sometimes improves the conditions of battered South Asian adult females, particularly those on dependent visas. In the incapacitating condition of being abused by their partners/marital families, it is very difficult for South Asian women to claim safe spaces that may help them to come to terms with their split identities of being transnational migrants in a Western

country on one hand, while on the other being relegated as mute forbearers of a patriarchally-overbearing, South Asian culture. In particular, this study asks if there are *alternative ways and spaces* in which an immigrant South Asian woman's muted voice can be heard, her stories textualized, her experiences of abuse expressed publicly and her community's support garnered, without the fear of her mental and physical identity being internally and externally obliterated.

Review of a few leading theories and current research trends within a very selective niche of social media studies has revealed that weblogs offer marginalized groups one possibility to: *intervene* in existing social and political relations by changing the ordering of cultural content (making the reality of their lives visible and public), *empower* identities (both online and off) and *reverse* the ordering of tasks (shifting the production and consumption of weblogs so they are by, about, and for a marginalized group) (Langellier & Peterson, 2004). However, as apparent through the gaps in blogging literature, a persistent part of the problem with historically defining blogs has been the frequent ignorance of their power as culturally viable, open social spaces for locating desired identities and finding online community support through consciousness-raising. Also, given that this is an era of extensive social networking, I believe that there are alternate ways of thinking about the notion of *community*, as a renewed politics of 'place' and 'space,' and at times, even as 'safe' public forums for creating critical awareness, liberation and identity. Moreover, by approaching the area of online social media practices from a hitherto overlooked, race/gender and cultural studies perspective, this study would like to clarify *if at all* the act of blogging plays a role in 'making public' the intersectional themes of culture, race, class, gender and sexuality within online discussions about violence against immigrant women of color.

In summary, this thematic analysis project is designed to address the importance of blogging as an accepted, yet academically under-addressed, socio-cultural practice of

communication that is rooted in and grows out of the everyday politics and complexities of modern society. I will also take this scholastic opportunity to portend the future promise of blogs as powerful channels of social communication within a post-modern, post-globalized society that has the potential to concurrently spread the themes of community awareness, identity negotiation, action-contemplation and consciousness-raising in the areas of culture-specific, gender issues and human rights.

III. METHOD AND STUDY DESIGN

The current study's goal is to conduct a thematic analysis of blog posts and comments on the discursive topic of domestic abuse against adult, immigrant South Asian women in the United States, as found in general-interest South Asian community blogs. This chapter will seek to explicate the method and design used for collecting, coding and analyzing relevant blog-generated data. *Part I* will explain the role of qualitative research in social sciences and the rationale for using thematic analysis as the method of exploration for this study, including its historical background and types, whether blogs are suited to this particular method, stages of performing a thematic analysis, and its advantages and limitations. *Part II* of this chapter will explain the research design implemented for the actual study, including blog data collection and sampling, using qualitative data analysis (QDA) software for data management and analysis, the coding scheme, roadblocks of the emergent design, ethical concerns, and finally, the limitations, feasibility and validity of the study. Through the lens of thematic analysis, this inquiry will improve our knowledge of how patterns of themes and meanings are created through the act of blogging, as well as through the textual interactions of this topic-specific South Asian blogging community. In particular, the direction of the study's methodology is to be guided by the following research questions:

RQ 1. What roles do the bloggers and commentators play within these South Asian community blogs?

RQ 2. What themes, patterns, and explanations emerge about the issue of domestic violence against South Asian women in the US, as illustrated in the selected South Asian community blog threads?

RQ2a. Is there thematic evidence in these blogs that the problem of domestic violence within the South Asian immigrant community in the US is an intersectional problem?

RQ2b. Do the selected blog posts and comments show any thematic evidence that the immigrant status of South Asian women in the US adds to or leads to domestic abuse?

RQ2c. Is there thematic evidence of blogging as a way of "contemplation of action" for abused South Asian immigrant women?

RQ 3. Do the selected South Asian blog posts and comments show evidence of 'awareness of the consequences of this new way of communicating via blogs'? In other words, in what ways do bloggers and commentators use these blogs to narrate their experiences about the issue of domestic violence?

RQ3a. Is there any thematic evidence of awareness-creation about the issue of domestic violence in the sampled South Asian community blog threads?

RQ3b. Is there any thematic evidence that the South Asian bloggers consider these community blogs "safe" public spaces for voicing private stories?

A. Part I: Role of Qualitative Research and Method Rationale

What sets the social science qualitative researcher apart from the quantitative researcher is an acute interest in texts that give primary impetus to cultural identities, social histories and temporal contexts. According to Banks (2008) "The study of text has been used for a considerable time as a vehicle for gaining deeper insight to a writer's motivation or state of mind…(and) therefore analysis has to be essentially qualitative." Rather than analyzing

behavioral or social-psychological data for statistical validity, reliability and generalizability, qualitative research is more concerned about "how people think and feel about the circumstances in which they find themselves" (Thorne, 2000).

The qualitative method of *thematic analysis* used for this study follows an inductive, constructionist and interpretive scheme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is often used in the social sciences when the data being investigated for evidence is not wholly self-explanatory, or that warrants a closer look at implicit meanings that are socially created and mediated. The process of inductive, interpretive reasoning (a method that suggests, and not ensures answers on the basis of available data) is usually applied in a qualitative study to interpret the latent themes and meanings that emanate from given data/materials. It frequently goes hand in glove with the paradigm of constructionism where "meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced" by participants, their socio-communal context and the researcher's evaluation (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). The guiding research questions, supporting theories, data collection, coding and analysis, as well as the researcher's subjective perspective regarding what constitutes useful information, are all factors that have equally weighed in on the formulation and execution of this study's qualitative methodology.

In qualitative methods, since the processes of data collection and analysis tend to be coexisting, "with new analytic steps informing the process of additional data collection and new data informing the analytic processes, it is important to recognize that qualitative data analysis processes are not entirely distinguishable from the actual data" (Thorne, 2000). All methodological choices for this study have been clearly documented in field notes (in this case, detailed notes taken during the research phase of this online non-participant observation analysis)

and have logically followed from previously taken decisions on steps of the research design. My principal advisor regularly examined every step of the method rationale, scheme and implementation to look for inconsistencies and suggest changes. The required changes, improvements and implementations were made, and the methodology followed was documented as a step-by-step emergent qualitative design.

Studies that use thematic analysis as the preferred methodology usually pose research inquiries that seek to comprehend specific human practices or experiences through an investigation of emergent themes. Thematic analysis for this study will identify and categorize themes that emerge within community blog posts and comments dedicated to the discussion of domestic violence against immigrant South Asian women in the US, with a view to better comprehend the forces and dynamics that complicate this human rights violation against ethnic minority women. This study's design will also look for thematic evidence to interpret blogs as possible channels of awareness-creation, contemplation of action, and as safe communal spaces for marginalized voices.

1. **Thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis is a method of inquiry that is widely used by social science researchers as a tool that helps to perceptively visualize and methodically gain knowledge of social contexts, cultural observances, individual issues, communal interactions, patterns of behavior, political ideologies, ethnic identities, health concerns, economic happenings and most cross-disciplinary conceptual categories (Aronson, 1994; Attride-Stirling, 2001; Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clark, 2005; Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Riessman, 2002; Roulston, 2001). As much as it is used by scholars from psychology, sociology, health sciences, history, anthropology, etc., social psychology researchers Braun & Clarke (2006) argue that there is still

a lack of consensus in qualitative studies about "what thematic analysis is and how you go about doing it" (2006, p. 79). These social science scholars further state that in spite of being used extensively as a legitimate qualitative method of analysis, it is "poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged" (2006, p. 77) when in reality the versatility of this method lends itself to various epistemological and ontological interpretations and theoretical frameworks.

In particular, thematic analysis helps the researcher to identify, label, analyze, and report the various themes and patterns that emerge from the selected *data corpus* or *data set*. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), whose work on thematic analysis will be closely followed throughout this study, the data *corpus* indicates *all* the data sampled for a specific research project, while the data *set* indicates all the data selected from that corpus, which will be used for the final analysis. *Themes* can emerge explicitly or latently through an inductive process of analysis and can be defined as categories that are identified in discrete units and/or across data to communicate common meanings and patterns of occurrence. Although this method primarily seeks emergent thematic evidence from the data set, an understanding of some foundational concepts, questions and theories that guide the research study should be pre-held by the researcher in order to start the actual analysis process. It is important to note that the method of thematic analysis systematically arranges and explains the study's data set in depth. Braun & Clarke (2006) also claim that the inductive process of analysis surpasses this stage to interpret various latent and rich layers of the research topic, and report a complex account of the analytical findings (Boyatzis, 1998).

One of the primary advantages of thematic analysis is its flexibility of application that lends itself equally to the essentialist paradigm that simultaneously "reports experiences,

meanings and the reality of participants," or the constructionist method "which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society" research (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). Both these positions make thematic analysis particularly well suited to an exploration of the areas of individual and interactive communication.

Contrary to discourse, narrative and conversation analysis methodologies, thematic analysis can fit in with a 'contextualist approach' (Willig, 1999). It can be effectively described by theories such as critical realism that explain the ways in which participants create meanings from their experiences, and in turn, the ways in which the larger social context affects those meanings, while still emphasizing on the material and other parameters of 'reality' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). In fact 'reality' itself is problematized as a relational and contextual concept that "works both to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality'" as shifting meanings that emerge from several close readings and re-readings of the textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). Hence, it is vital that the researcher should clarify the theoretical position of the study so as not to give way to analytical ambiguities and research questions left unaddressed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis and grounded theory (both methods are often regarded as the same) are operationally similar modes of analysis, but the ways in which concepts, themes and categories are organized in each of the approaches significantly differs. In contrast to grounded theory or narrative analysis, "thematic analysis is not wed to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and so it can be used within different theoretical frameworks (although not all), and can be used to do different things within them" (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis and content analysis are also often confused with each other. The former method centers mostly on meaning creation and tends to lead to a more macro explanation where individual codes can cross-reference multiple themes. Content analysis, on the other hand, functions on a more micro level of analysis by using pre-defined exclusive categories to purposively count a theme's frequency of occurrence, and is more suitably used to statistically test hypotheses. Though the emerging themes in the former method are generally *not* meant to be quantified, Boyatzis (1998) suggests that thematic analysis can in fact be used to convert qualitative data into a quantitative form that can then become the raw material for statistical analyses, or even help to qualify or corroborate qualitative research areas by providing supporting quantitative evidence. In such cases the unit of analysis tends to be more than a word or phrase, which it usually is in a content analysis study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

a. **Inductive and theoretical thematic analysis**

In conducting a thematic analysis, once the data set is sampled and filtered, themes or patterns within the data can be identified in either of two prescribed ways: in a theoretical/deductive or 'top down' way (Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006), or in an inductive or 'bottom up' way (Frith & Gleeson, 2004 as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006). *Inductive thematic analysis* is a method of coding and analyzing the data *without* trying to appropriate it into a pre-set coding scheme, or even solely to suit the researcher's analytical presumptions. However, since this type of thematic analysis is data-driven to quite an extent, the researcher has to be true to the overarching theoretical obligations as the data set in such enquiries are not coded and made sense of in an 'epistemological vacuum' (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

A *theoretical thematic analysis*, on the other hand is primarily 'analyst driven,' that is, led by the researcher's investigative or theoretical interest in the subject, and it usually generates "less a rich description of the data overall, and more a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Given that the principle concern in thematic analysis is the decision that the researcher has to make about *why* and *how* the data should be coded (Braun & Clarke, 2006), it is also true that in many research contexts it is difficult to clearly delineate theoretical and inductive thematic analyses, as selected elements from both the ontological approaches may overlap with each other to create a hybrid method of qualitative enquiry.

b. **Semantic and latent themes**

Themes within the data can be looked for semantically or in a latent fashion. In a semantic method, data in analyzed on the surface level to look for explicit themes and patterns. The analytic process here involves a movement from *description* to *interpretation* (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 1990), mostly in relation to previous literature (Frith & Gleeson, 2004 as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Contrary to this, a latent thematic analysis takes apart the semantic substance of the data to organize and study the implicit concepts, probabilities, and meanings that shape or explain what is evident in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). For conducting a latent thematic analysis, identifying the emergent themes calls for interpretative work that is corroborated by existing theory. In most cases, analysis of the latter kind is supported by a *constructionist* model of knowledge (Burr, 1995) where "broader assumptions, structures and/or meanings are theorised as underpinning what is actually articulated in the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This constructionist approach particularly suits the present study's method of latent thematic

interpretation, which can shed light on the underlying meanings and concerns that emerge from selected South Asian blog discussions on the topic of domestic violence against women from their ethnic immigrant community.

c. **Essentialist and constructionist thematic analysis**

The epistemological paradigm of a research project "guides what you can say about your data, and informs how you theorize meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). By using an *essentialist* thematic analysis approach a researcher can posit understandings, motivations and implications in a direct manner as this methodological approach assumes a straightforward and mostly linear interaction between peoples experiences and the meanings they create through the use of language (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

However, when explored from a *constructionist* standpoint, not only are experiences and meanings created by the participants who communicate those, but they are largely shaped and re-shaped by the social realities of their lives and interactions (Burr, 1995; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consequently, constructionist thematic analysis tries to identity, focus and theorize the "socio-cultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). It should be noted that most studies that use the constructionist thematic analysis approach look for 'latent' themes. However, not every latent thematic analysis follows a constructionist paradigm, given the fact that the inherent flexibility of the method allows for frequent overlaps of its ontological, epistemological and content-based frames.

2. **Thematic analysis of blogs: Compatible or contradictory?**

Thematic analysis has of late been used quite often as the preferred method of investigation to identify and analyze recurrent patterns of themes and meanings, using textual data that were transcribed from interviews and focus groups (Clarke, 2005), case studies

(Bischof, Warnaar, Barajas & Dhaliwal, 2011), as well as online discourses, including blogs (Yao, 2009). Bungay, Malchy, Buxton, Johnson, Macpherson, and Rosenfeld (2006) performed a brief qualitative study using semi-structured interviews for a thematic analysis of how street-level urban youth justify the social circumstances of their crystal meth use. Yardley, Donovan-Hall, Francis and Todd (2006) conducted focus groups and in depth interviews with elderly participants using falls prevention messages to encourage communication as a group. The thematic analysis of their data revealed three major themes that motivated the conception of 'falls prevention,' namely as a concept that implied 'hazard reduction,' 'use of aids' and the 'restriction of activity' (Yardley et al., 2006).

Yao's (2009) interviews with a few immigrant Filipino women in Britain and her qualitative thematic analysis of their blogs revealed the major motivations for blog creation, use and maintenance. An examination of the emergent themes revealed that the immigrant women's blogs served as a channel for sharing experiences and emotionally connecting with the readers, a kind of meaningful communication that eventually led to various other forms of online and offline interactions among blog participants. Yao's thematic study reveals blogging as a subjective process in which reasoning, uses and content are time-sensitive, but it also highlights its value as a rich, interactive practice that offers meaningful experiences and the scope of identity empowerment, themes that offer both promise for, and challenges to its adoption for immigrants and other minority groups (2009).

Blogging is essentially an intersectional, communicative practice that constructs and reconstructs "social norms and cultural concepts, such as individual and community, privacy and publicness, experience and memory" (van Dijck, 2004). From this perspective it can be said that

the socio-cultural context of technological narratives and those of everyday discourses, be they face-to-face accounts of experiences, documented and archived materials, or the traditional practices of cultural groups, all structure and complement each other. Researchers in various disciplines have recognized and reported the power of blogging for people who have been marginalized (in particular, women from minority groups) and who, for lack of more traditional forms of social cohesion and public expression, resorted to blogging in order to "to actively create and disseminate knowledge, and promote equality and empowerment" (Yao, 2009; Somolu, 2007; Karlsson, 2006). According to Yao (2009), future research on the ethno-cultural impact of new media should address the social dimension of blogs as critical tools in shaping and constructing identities by investigating and identifying themes and patterns which reflect the fact that "technologies are adopted as much–needed outlets for creativity, expression, connection, and support for migrants, who are themselves the very definition of the modern condition."

The ordering of blog posts and comments in topical threads present such an example of thematic organization where discrete stories are narrated by the primary blog author/s and commentators in response to one 'master' narrative or parent post. Riessman (2002) contends that the causally structured, modernist tales of the '60s and '70s gave way to the non-linearity of post-modern storytelling. It blurred the identities of subject/author/reader, in much the same way that the reverse-chronological ordering of blogs help us in "discovering connections we had previously been unaware of, repositioning ourselves and others in our networks of relationships" (Mishler, 1999, p. 5).

Moreover, as Plummer (1995) argues, for thematic patterns of meanings to emerge "there must be a community to hear, and "for communities to hear, there must be stories which weave

together their history, their identity, their politics"" (p. 87), an argument particularly relevant in the case of text-based digital communities being created around South Asian immigrant women's past/present experiences of domestic violence. Thematic analysis represents an interpretive "turning point" that can help us to identify and locate the meanings of observed past experiences and set identities. What is more, as in the case of blog threads about South Asian female victims/survivors of domestic violence, "past abuse is given new significance as women move out of destructive relationships and construct new identities" (Mishler, 1999, pp. 7-8) online, with bloggers and commentators potentially informing us about the thematic intersections that help explain their battered condition.

3. **Stages of performing a thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis, according to many qualitative researchers, starts from the process of data collection when the researcher begins to observe and identify unique and recurring themes, as well as patterns of meanings within the data set. Effectively reporting the thematic content and meanings inherent in the data is considered the most important step of the analysis where "themes are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs the investigators identify [sic] before, during, and after analysis" (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 780 as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For this study, a guiding scheme developed by Braun & Clarke (2006) for conducting a thematic analysis in six phases has been generally followed, which includes: i. data familiarization, ii. initial code generation, iii. searching for themes. iv. reviewing themes, v. defining and naming themes, and vi. reporting the analysis. However, it is vital to remember that any sort of guideline for conducting a qualitative study is precisely that: "they are not rules, and,

following the basic precepts, will need to be applied flexibly [sic] to fit the research questions and data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88; Patton, 1990). Thematic analysis is not a simple, *linear* process where the researcher proceeds unidirectionally through all the required stages of analysis. It is undoubtedly a time-sensitive, *recursive* method where the qualitative researcher has to continuously move back and forth between the sampled data set, the coded excerpts of data, and the resultant analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

a. **Phase I: Data familiarization**

The first phase that starts post data collection, requires that the researcher is thoroughly familiar with the entire extent of the data set. If the study began with certain guiding questions and theoretical assumptions then the analysis will also be influenced by the researcher's prior knowledge of the data. How the researcher 'reads' and 're-reads' the data will largely be guided by his/her research agenda, whether it is to look for latent or semantic themes, be inductively- or theoretically-driven, perform a constructionist or essentialist analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), or even follow a mixed methodological approach that builds on all the above content-based, epistemological and ontological areas of inquiry.

b. **Phase II: Initial code generation**

Generation of a primary list of ideas and concepts about what the data reveals marks the next stage after data familiarization. During this phase, initial codes that the data can be categorized into are identified and noted by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These primary codes can refer to the semantic or latent (or both) content of the data set and denotes "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). Coding can be done either manually or by using a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software program (Kelle, 2004;

Seale, 2000) where data *items* are coded by tagging and naming selections of text, or creating *data extracts* from them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interpretative breakdown of data occurs in the next stage of analysis when the researcher begins to identify, develop and code emerging themes from it, and "in relation to which arguments about the phenomenon being examined are made" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88; Boyatzis, 1998).

c. **Phase III: Searching for themes**

This phase includes classifying the different codes into probable themes, and then organizing all the pertinent coded data excerpts into the identified themes, a process that is now greatly facilitated by a host of recent QDA software programs such as TAMS, Weft and Dedoose. In essence, the researcher is analyzing the codes and beginning to understand the importance of individual themes that have shaped up such that some of them may end up as principal themes, while other codes may become sub-themes, and still others that may not be taken into analytic consideration.

d. **Phase IV: Reviewing themes**

It goes unsaid that to a large extent what amounts to 'accurate representation' is shaped by the study's theoretical and critical approach. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), this phase warrants the re-reading of the entire data set for two reasons: "The first is, as discussed, to ascertain whether the themes 'work' in relation to the data set. The second is to code any additional data within themes that has been missed in earlier coding stages," as coding in thematic analysis is essentially an "ongoing organic process" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92-93).

e. **Phase V: Defining and naming themes**

Once the researcher has a substantial understanding of the different themes, how they connect to form a pattern, and the overarching meanings they create about the data, the next phase warrants defining those themes, naming them appropriately, describing them in details, and analyzing the data items that relate to each of the identified themes that have emerged. In other words, what this phase of the thematic analysis should be geared toward is "the 'essence' of what each principle- and sub-theme is about, and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures," (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 94-95), while closely adhering to the study's guiding research questions. An important part of this *refinement* phase is to also define the sub-themes for all the identified principle themes.

f. **Phase VI: Reporting the analysis**

The main goal of the final stage of a thematic analysis is to break down the complicated meanings inherent within the data set using a method that corroborates the validity of the qualitative study. Once there is a comprehensive set of themes, patterns and sub-themes, the researcher reports the final analysis using a "coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell – within and across themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 96-97). The findings, analysis and discussion phases should provide appropriate examples from the data, which are relevant excerpts from the sample that validates the occurrence, frequency and/or recurrence of a theme/pattern. Moreover, the data excerpts used as thematic illustrations should be rooted within an *analytic narrative* that convincingly illustrates the researcher's analysis of the subject, and it "needs to go *beyond* description of the data, and make

an *argument*" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 95) in relation to the specific research questions and theoretical paradigm/s.

5. **Advantages and limitations of the method**

As discussed earlier, the most discernible advantage of thematic analysis as a qualitative method of studying a phenomenon is the flexibility of application that renders it useful to several analytical and theoretical frameworks. Although a time-consuming methodology that warrants multiple readings of the data, its learning curve is relatively simpler and more systematic compared to some other text-based qualitative methods. Also, the results of qualitative studies using thematic analysis are "generally accessible to educated general public" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 99). It is considered a valuable methodology for analyzing data within interactive research areas where the researchers and participants essentially collaborate (as during interviews and focus groups). This said, thematic analysis also proves very suitable for unearthing the "key features of a large body of data, and/or offer a 'thick description' of the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 99), as in the case of blogs that contain several topical post and comment threads. In addition to providing an inherent comparative perspective that can allow the researcher to delineate parallels and disparities across the data set, this method is potentially most useful for its capacity to highlight and create unforeseen perceptions and insightful meanings. Thematic analysis has been particularly adopted by several social science scholars for its ability to create social, cultural, behavioral and psychological explanations of data, and has also been "useful for producing qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 99).

Thematic analysis is also not without its drawbacks. If the coding and analysis is inefficiently carried out, if there is no supporting theory to back the analytical claims, or if the

research questions do not relate coherently to the data being analyzed, then the thematic methodology runs the risk of becoming an aid to skim through surface-level descriptions. Interestingly, although the method's flexibility of application allows for it to be used extensively across disciplinary and analytical paradigms, it can also make the object of study rather broad and create a disadvantageous situation for the researcher who can lose sight of his/her research focus. Contrary to qualitative methods like conversation analysis or discourse analysis, a straightforward thematic analysis does not always let the researcher look into the impact of the structure of language used in the textual exchanges, or the "fine-grained functionality of talk" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 98). Unlike similar narrative or textual methodologies, thematic analysis has often been accused of emphasizing homogeneity across findings as a method that is "unable to retain a sense of continuity and contradiction through any one individual account," which may on occasion be illuminating during data evaluation. Lastly, as has been mentioned earlier, one of the biggest unintentional drawbacks is that thematic analysis has been under-analyzed and inadequately defined in spite of being widely and successfully used in qualitative studies across disciplines.

I believe that the use of thematic analysis as the chosen method for this qualitative study of South Asian blog threads on domestic violence will alter some of these negative perceptions by delineating a "thorough thematic approach [which] can produce an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Selecting a method of inquiry that is guided by and that seeks to answer the study's research questions is more vital than being blindly led by what Holloway and Todres (2003) call *methodolatry*, or the researcher's sole commitment to a method, instead of his/her focus on supporting theories, data content and/or

research concerns. To reiterate, thematic analysis, when carried out as a thorough, theoretically sound and systematic process is a "flexible approach that can be used across a range of epistemologies and research questions" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 99) to address and illuminate under-researched, yet critical areas of knowledge.

B. Part II: The Research Procedure

In keeping with Braun & Clarke's (2006) method of conducting thematic analysis that looks for themes latently, a constructionist thematic method of investigation and interpretation was adopted for the current study. Data from South Asian blogs were sampled to "identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations—and ideologies—that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (2006, p. 84). Based on this analytic framework, the actual research procedure for the present study is explained in the following sections, including the process of blog sampling and data collection, data management and analysis using a qualitative data analysis (QDA) application, the scheme of coding, roadblocks of the emergent design, ethical considerations and finally, the limitations, feasibility and validity of the study.

1. Data corpus selection and sample

The underlying criteria for collecting the data corpus of blogs on the issue of domestic violence against immigrant South Asian women was to look for South Asian blogs that contain threaded discussions on varied general-interest topics (politics, culture, society, etc. including domestic violence) pertaining to this ethnic migrant community. Based on a *selective sampling* procedure similar to that carried out by Herring, Kouper, Paolillo, Scheidt, Tyworth, Welsch, Wright, & Yu (2005), the first part of the data collection phase involved the sampling of four South Asian blogs that matched the selection criteria from an Internet blog search engine.

Selective sampling of materials is a common ethnographic data gathering method where the investigator decides to collect from a selective group or location, and/or seek out specific types of people, being guided more by rational thought and judgment, rather than ease or preconception. This kind of selective sampling does run the risk of limiting the results and descriptions only to the identified sample, however, "a close analysis of a sub-part of a large network can be suggestive of some properties of the whole" (Herring et al., 2005, p. 4).

The second phase of the data collection process was to find the remaining blog sample that fit the selection criteria, from the *blogroll* of the four primary South Asian blogs that served as access points. This selection technique is "based on the reasoning that the average blogger does not connect to blogs randomly, but rather through established patterns of links" (Herring et al., 2005, p. 4). A selective sampling procedure using blogrolls as "jumping off points" (Herring et al., 2005, p. 4) may ensure a greater chance of finding other blogs on related issues and common topical concerns, thereby aiding to establish a sense of community among a selective genre of interlinked blogs. Following is the *mandatory selection criteria* that was used for obtaining the blogs sampled for this study:

i. The explicit or implicit presence of the word/s 'South Asia' or 'South Asian' or *Desi* (Hindi/Urdu word used as a general reference for people of South Asian origin, mainly in North America and Europe) in the About Us, Home Page, FAQ, or History section of the blog, in lieu of which the mention of the particular South Asian community, or nationality, or major religious group can also be accepted (example: India/Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladesh/Bangladeshi, or Sikh, Islam/Muslim etc.).

ii. A 'Search' or 'Tags' option within the blog, which yields at least one entire blog thread for the search phrase 'domestic violence/abuse,' or 'intimate partner violence' or 'spousal violence/abuse' or 'violence against women' pertaining to the South Asian community.

iii. Openly or publicly accessible blogs and blog posts, that is, blogs/blog threads that are not password protected.

In addition to the mandatory criteria that was used for selecting the blog sample, an *optional selection criteria* was also utilized, from which at least one condition had to be present in each of the selected blogs:

i. The explicit mention of the word/s 'Diaspora' or 'immigrant' in the About Us, Home Page, FAQ or History section of the blog.

ii. The name/URL of at least one similar general-interest South Asian blog or a blog from this study's sample, present in the 'Blogroll' or 'Links' section of this particular South Asian blog.

iii. Multiple blog authors for the primary South Asian blog.

In keeping with Herring et al. methodology (2005), the four initial blogs that have been selected for this study were retrieved using the online search engine Technorati.com (2012), a popular blog-hosting site by using the key phrase 'South Asian.' As on February 2, 2012 the number of blogs yielded that matched the above mentioned selection criteria were 207. It should be mentioned here that the real names of the blogs, as well as the real and/or user names of selected bloggers and commentators have been changed for reasons of privacy and security. Of the 207 South Asian blogs displayed by Technorati, the four *primary blogs* selected were (i) South Asian

Bloggers Forum (ii) SA'Goodwill Mission (iii) The Chapati Society and (iv) Indo-American Inquisitors.

Interestingly, not all of the four initial blogs retrieved through Technorati.com had inherent blog rolls (*Indo-American Inquisitors* had no external blog links). The South Asian blog that did have a *Tags* segment with embedded hyperlinks to similar areas of interest (*South Asian Bloggers Forum*), did not have hyperlinks to other South Asian blogs. Of the four, *SA'Goodwill Mission* and *The Chapati Society* served as the two main access points leading me to the rest of the sample via their blogrolls. A thorough selective sampling process was followed till saturation to find the remaining South Asian blogs. A total of seven *secondary blogs* that suitably matched the selection criteria were obtained from the *blogrolls* of two *primary blogs,* between February 10 and March 12, 2012. The blogs making up the rest of the sample were (v) Way to Wisdom, (vi) Chai with Chaitali, (vii) Masala Spot, (viii) A Brown Battleground, (ix) The Gurdwara Galleria, (x) Desis against Domination, and (xi) Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu? On further review, *Chai with Chaitali* was rejected due to the content of its selected blog thread being judged ambiguous and insufficient for the study. *Figure 1* below illustrates the inter-relationship between the primary and secondary blogs sampled for this study, and *Table I* represents the systematic process through which the final sample of ten South Asian blogs was selected.

Figure 1. Graphic illustration of the inter-relationship of sampled South Asian blogs

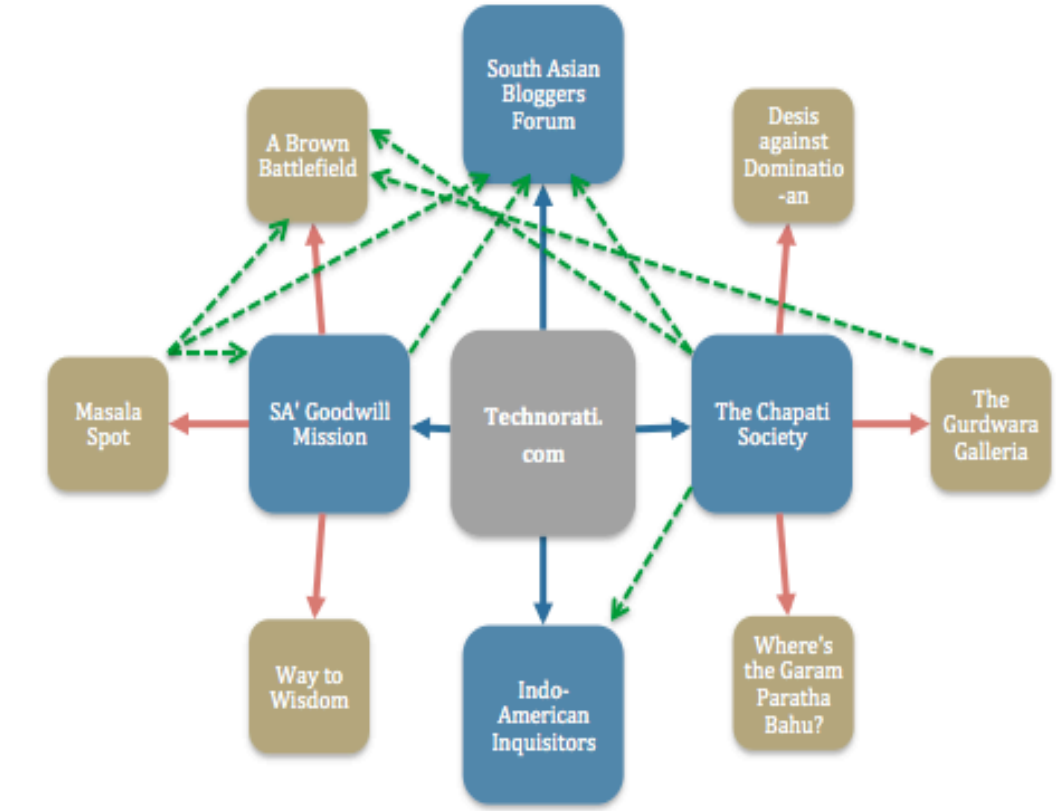


TABLE I

MANDATORY AND OPTIONAL SELECTION CRITERIA FOR THE SOUTH ASIAN BLOG SAMPLE

	'South Asian' or *Desi* in the *Home/ About /History FAQ*	*Search* or *Tags* yielding threads on 'DV/Abuse' or 'IPV' or 'Spousal Abuse/Violence'	Open or Non-password protected blogs/threads	'Diaspora' or 'Immigrant' in the *Home /About /History/FAQ*	Point of access to similar or sampled SA blog/s	Multiple authors for the primary blog
South Asian Bloggers Forum	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓
SA' Goodwill Mission	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓
The Chapati Society	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓
Indo-American Inquisitors	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓
Way to Wisdom*[1]	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×
Masala Spot*	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓
A Brown Battleground*	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓
The Gurdwara Galleria*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Desis against Domination*	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓
Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?*	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓

[9]

[9] These six blogs were secondarily obtained from the *blogroll* of two of the primary access blogs, as per the study's methodology. However, extraneous to the analytical goal of this study, some of the secondarily accessed blogs contained *blogrolls* or links to other related South Asian blogs, including a few of the South Asian blogs sampled for this study.

2. **Data set and data item collection and filtering**

After collecting and selecting the primary blog data corpus, the next few steps involved the selection and filtering of relevant blog threads that contained parent/primary blog posts and the following list of appropriate comments, using specific selection criteria. It should be mentioned here that the selection principles followed for obtaining the *data set* of selected blog threads and each corresponding *data item* within it, that is, each of the selected parent posts and comments, is a method of convenience that I have selected to make the process of final sample selection more suitable to the study.

The selection criteria used for filtering relevant blog threads are as follows:

i. The blog threads selected from the sampled blogs are written in English (with some words or phrases in regional South Asian languages), and are dedicated to the topic of domestic violence against the South Asian community in the US/North America.

ii. There are at least two participants per blog page/thread, which includes the primary blog author/s, and a commentator (a minimum of at least one commentator having written at least one comment).

Given that the sampled data set, that is the blog threads selected for the study already adhere to the topic of domestic violence within the South Asian community, the selection criteria used for filtering relevant parent posts and comments are as follows:

i. Parent posts and comments are primarily text-based.

ii. Parent posts and comments where the blogger or commentator self-identifies as being below eighteen years of age are not included in the sample.

iii. Parent posts and comments where the blogger or commentator answers in Yes/No, or makes unsubstantial comments, are not included in the sample or analysis.

iv. Parent posts and comments selected for the final sample have been published no earlier than January 1, 2002.

The blog parent posts and comments sampled for this study were first examined online. As mentioned earlier in the selection criteria, only those parent blog entries and comments that were made public by bloggers of the selected discussion threads were considered for this study. After initial review, the selected blog posts and comments were copied and pasted onto MS Word documents, retaining the real names of each blog. I had to exhaustively read through the length of each of the sampled blog threads to ascertain that the selection criteria were being met. Many of the blogs spanned numerous years of publishing content and many of the parent posts had several comments. However, the purpose of the data filtering process was not to select each and every comment that followed a particular parent blog entry, but to select those few that contributed relevant material and information, and were published within the last ten years.

Each blog thread with the accompanying parent post and selected comments were stored as password-protected MS Word files on my personal computer, which recorded the parent entry and following comments in reverse order. For parent posts and comments that were very lengthy or digressive, I chose to select and eventually paraphrase (to maintain confidentiality in the findings and analysis chapters), only parts of the entries that appeared most relevant to the topic or theme being discussed. Also, once the resultant blog sample was ready for further investigation, the real names of the blogs were changed and the usernames/names associated with the selected blog posts and comments were not identified. After closely following the blog thread and post/comment search criteria, out of a total of 40 blog threads that had been initially obtained from the unfiltered data corpus of 11 blogs, 36 threads were finalized as the sample for analysis from ten South Asian blogs, with a combined total of 199 parent posts and comments,

all of which were selected after several close readings. The publication dates of all the data items selected, range from January 1, 2006 to January 31, 2012, thereby adhering to the timeframe requirement of the study sample.

Some of the sampled South Asian blogs, such as *Desis against Domination* and *A Brown Battleground* were found to have several discussion threads (as many as 11 blog threads devoted to the topic of domestic violence), while some others had just one thread devoted to the issue, as in the case of *South Asian Bloggers Forum* and *The Chapati Society*. The sampling of the study may be biased as it contains multiple blog threads on the topic of domestic violence from the same South Asian blog site, and only a few relevant threads from others, thereby compromising the representativeness of the sample. However, it should be mentioned that the purpose of this study is not to statistically validate its findings, nor to solely highlight the quantitative frequency of abuse against South Asian immigrant women, but to delve into a deep understanding of the context, people, places, times, conditions, events and themes of oppression that emanate from interactive discussions of the issue. It is also not possible to corroborate the real/physical identities of the bloggers, and neither is it the desired goal of the study. Correspondingly, this study will only consider the online identities and testimonies presented in the blog posts and comments.

3. **Management and analysis of data**

Following data collection and sampling, the blog threads containing blog posts and selected comments were uploaded from the MS Word documents where they were initially stored, to Dedoose (SCRC, 2011), an online qualitative data analysis application. Dedoose is a cross-platform, web-based application for organizing, managing and analyzing data for qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods research. Data could be numbers, scale scores,

demographics, stories, field notes, vignettes, blog-generated data, interview or focus group transcripts, photos, etc. and they may denote individuals, belief systems, settings, culture, relationships, and so on (Dedoose, 2011). Data are safely encrypted and protected by this QDA application, and are organized as resources, descriptors, excerpts, and tags.

Resources are the primary units of analysis, or qualitative *data items* such as interviews, blog posts and comments, field notes, stories, focus group transcripts, audio files, videos, and photos (Dedoose, 2011). *Descriptors* are the demographics, quantitative variables, test scores, and other identifiers for each case, person, and transcript, to help organize and qualify the data. Dedoose is particularly useful for coding excerpts and creating hierarchical categories, which are meaningful segments of information from the resources. *Excerpts* can be described in a memo, given any number of codes, and, if the study requires it, can be rated based on any rating or weighting system that the researcher may have defined for a code (Dedoose, 2011). *Tags* refer to the meaningful categories that the excerpts are coded as, and visually show up as a tag cloud. These tags or themes that emerge from close readings of the coded and organized data about the individuals, stories, groups, or settings become the main focus of qualitative research (Dedoose, 2011).

This part of the data analysis process closely follows the *data familiarization* phase suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006) where interpretive "immersion usually involves 'repeated reading' of the data, and reading the data in an *active* way - searching for meanings, patterns and so on" (p. 88). Each of the 36 blog threads with the parent posts and comments were entirely read. To make sense of each comment that was written in response to the parent post, and perhaps in response to the comment/s before it, I had to track back and literally begin reading from the end of the blog thread. Because of the reverse-chronological ordering of blogs, this

process was itself cumbersome. While some blog entries had only one comment in response, some parent posts had as many as 172 comments in response. But, given the scope and purpose of the study, only those comments were chosen that seemed to fit the selection criteria the most and were closely relevant to the topic. A total of 199 posts and comments were selected and uploaded to Dedoose QDA application for further reading and coding.

4. **The coding process**

Using the qualitative categorization and analysis features of Dedoose, the sample of 36 blog threads containing a total of 199 posts and comments were re-read, re-examined, and coded. Throughout this process, online *memos* (Dedoose, 2011) were maintained to document emerging codes and coding modifications as themes were generated, collated and/or discarded. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), the *initial code generation* process is an important part of thematic analysis as the researcher is *identifying* and *organizing* the data into significant categories most of which will end up as themes relevant to the study.

First, each of the 36 blog threads uploaded to Dedoose were read completely in their reverse-sequential order following which, the parent post and selected comments from each thread were separately coded as individual, self-contained *data items*. Each data item was further qualified by the explicit or implicit presence of four *descriptors* (Dedoose, 2011) that are explained below:

i. Year of Publication: I looked for evidence of the year of publication of the blog post or comment. Even if an exact date (in mm/dd/yyyy) was mentioned in the actual blog post/comment, that information is not disclosed for reasons of privacy and security.

ii. Gender: I looked for evidence of the blogger or commentator's gender, if mentioned in the post or comment, or apparent through the username/id.

iii. Religion: I looked for evidence of the religion or religious beliefs of the victim/perpetrator and/or religious context of the crime/narrator/narrative, in the primary blog entry or comment, if mentioned or apparent.

iv. Nation: I looked for evidence of the country or nationality (with special emphasis on India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) of the victim/perpetrator and/or national context/origin of the crime/narrator/narrative, in the primary blog entry or comment, if mentioned or apparent.

Once the initial data coding is done, the researcher concentrates on identifying and noting the comprehensive area of themes that emerge from the categories that have been used to mark the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Every time a *data item* was coded into single or multiple thematic categories, a *data excerpt* was created. A total of 443 excerpts were created from 199 blog posts and comments. Of primary interest to this study are not only the analysis of individual themes, but also the way new, emerging codes have overlapped in each of the data items, revealing some form of potential thematic intersectionality. Using this form of coding and analysis gave me an opportunity to view each data item individually as an autonomous *unit of analysis*, as well as in the context of the threaded discussion.

Compared to parent posts, which were mostly unique and straightforward in terms of the content and/or questions they posed, the comments were more complex and challenging to code and analyze, as they often seemed to either implicitly adhere to a particular theme, or explicitly relate to several overlapping ones, even directing me to new and unexpected emerging themes. This phase of analysis for the study began once the sub-themes had been identified and involved the further refinement of those thematic categories into larger principle themes. Sub-themes are basically "themes-within-a-theme," which according to Braun & Clarke "can be useful for giving

structure to a particularly large and complex theme, and also for demonstrating the hierarchy of meaning within the data" (2006, p. 95). For instance, the recurrent presence of significant phrases or meaningful sentences, such as "stigma subject," "taboo" "people don't get that this still takes place" in many blog comments helped me to code this category as a sub-theme named "Underreporting DV Cases," referring to the communal denial or covering up of instances of domestic abuse against immigrant South Asian women.

Following this logic, the emergent coding process was continued till saturation, and until commonly found themes and larger meanings across data items or *resources* (Dedoose, 2011) could be grouped or *tagged* from patterns of sub-themes. *Figure 2* below is a graphical presentation of a tag cloud (Dedoose, 2011) containing all the identified sub-themes for this study, detailed descriptions and definitions of which will be provided in the next chapter. My principal advisor examined all the major decision-making steps of the data management and analysis process to look for inconsistencies. This process of data corroboration by a qualified social science researcher ensured increased legitimacy while coding and analyzing blog posts and comments.

Figure 2. A tag cloud revealing the sub-themes identified in the data set

5. **Roadblocks to the emergent process**

It has been pointed out that using a theme-based mode as the sole method of categorizing and analyzing data runs the risk of homogenizing personal experiences by keeping the categories consistent for ease of analysis. In the case of this study, the emergent categorization scheme also had its limitations since the initial list of categories that were applied to the blog data occasionally fluctuated as I read and re-read the collected textual sample. Coding data for qualitative analyses such as thematic analysis is a repetitive process, which works on the unstated assumption that "you may have to adjust the definition of your categories, or identify new categories to accommodate data that do not fit the existing labels" (Powell & Renner, 2003). Building on this criterion, the present study focuses on the most persistent or recurrent themes in these experiential online discourses, with expectations to expose, simplify and explicate issues that are otherwise complex, intersectional, and controversial.

Because of the Internet's volatile nature and structure, the study's emergent methodology was more convoluted than initially expected. All ten of the final blogs, as well as the 36 blog threads included in this study were available online and active till the end of the data analysis phase. However, on revisiting some of the blogs online it was seen that many embedded hyperlinks to related information in posts or comments might have been removed, changed or redirected. Accordingly, to keep it simple, I refrained from using or publishing the embedded content of many posts and comments that may have been important to the overall threaded discussion, but were either technologically inaccessible, or a potential threat to the safety of the blogger or commentator. Since qualitative researchers of online textual phenomena can only capture and report variable, temporal moments in a fixed format, quite a large part cannot be captured so far as the fluidity and dynamics of online subjectivities and identity progressions are

concerned. Perhaps this roadblock will help Internet researchers to eventually address some of the methodological drawbacks within the areas of CMC and new media studies.

6. **Ethical and privacy concerns**

Concerns of privacy protection, appropriate use of digital materials and copyright issues in online research indelibly point to some pertinent ethical questions. What constitutes public and private information or data in the virtual medium? Is it imperative for blog researchers to obtain permission from bloggers or the blog hosting software to cite their published materials? Some social scientists argue that since online archived material is publicly available and accessible, consent of the authors/participants is not required (Sudweeks & Rafaeli, 1995; Walther, 2002). Conversely, some researchers assert that online comments and posts, although available to the public, operate with expectations of privacy that should be honored by Internet researchers (Elgesem, 2002; Scharf, 1999). According to Hookway (2008), who adopts middle ground, blog researchers should follow the "fair game–public domain" position, as weblogs are primarily located within the online public realm, which should call for a waiving of consent to make their use for furthering research an essentially ethical endeavor. Moreover, since "Blogging is a public act of writing for an implicit audience," the "exception proves the rule: blogs that are interpreted by bloggers as 'private' are made 'friends only'. Thus, accessible blogs may be personal but they are not private" (Hookway, 2008).

In this case, since the textual content of blogs dealing with a sensitive, community-specific issue has been sampled for thematic analysis, I have ensured maximum privacy by following certain steps. I have only selected those blogs and blog threads that are open to public access and viewing, and are not password-protected. The fact that I was not a direct or indirect participant in any of the sampled blog threads, but a non-participant observer, has ensured further

security. Moreover, the online data used for this study is published, open-access, textual content that only required me to do multiple close readings, but did not require me to individually interact or participate with the bloggers and/or commentators. To ensure further anonymity, this study does not use any username or real name associated with the selected blog posts and comments. For each of the blog threads obtained in the sample, the names of the blog forums from which the posts are retrieved have been altered, their web addresses (URL) have not been disclosed, and the usernames of the bloggers and commentators have been anonymized. As an added privacy measure and also to ensure that they are not easily retrievable using Internet search engines, I have paraphrased some selected excerpts from parent blog posts and comments to demonstrate the prevalence of the study's thematic findings. Finally, the collection and coding of blog data started after the Institutional Review Board of the University of Illinois at Chicago approved the study.

7. **Study's limitations, viability and validity**

The study's prime limitation is that only those blogs, which are publicly accessible, have been selected for this study. Moreover, since these are blogs belonging to members of a specific ethnic community, the bloggers and commentators participating here may have shared stories, expressed opinions and held expectations in ways that are different than those that are communicated in personal blogs, or than those South Asian users of online social media who are trying to raise awareness about the issue of domestic abuse, but who may not be active bloggers or blog readers or commentators. Correspondingly, this dissertation exemplifies and focuses on this specific population of blogs in the sample.

The other constraint of this study is the assumption that the parent posts and comments exemplify accurate narrations of the bloggers' and commentators' concerns, experiences, stories,

and opinions. Nevertheless, given the structure and topical content of the blog threads being studied, there is no practical way of knowing or verifying if the information provided in the blog posts/comments are factual. Moreover, since the sample has many instances of bloggers and commentators who have fearlessly discussed their experiences of abuse, and openly shared pertinent information to advocate against this human rights violation, this study also assumes that the blog authors have provided veritable identities and authentic narrative presentations.

As a way to validate qualitative research, Braun & Clarke (2006) have underscored how important it is for a researcher to subjectively focus on the socially created context of the issue being investigated. The use of thematic analysis as the present method of investigation has provided the means to methodically read, understand and identify topical narratives of experience, along with their socio-cultural and historical contexts. By using "analytic processes that help us detect the main narrative themes within the accounts people give about their lives, we discover how they understand and make sense of their lives" (Thorne, 2000). It is good to keep in mind that a significant reason for using a qualitative approach like thematic analysis to read South Asian blogs on domestic abuse was to voice those stories, identities and themes that have so far been excluded, marginalized or unheard.

According to Denzin (2006) triangulation in qualitative, social scientific research helps increase the validity of the findings, with the concept of *theory triangulation* comprising the use of more than one theoretical framework for explaining and verifying the issue. Moreover, Howitt & Cramer (2007) claim that to increase the validity of a qualitative study that uses thematic analysis, researchers can furnish "numerical indications of the incidence and prevalence of each theme in their data," such as the percentage or number of analytic units that exemplifies a specific theme. The present study tries to rigorously include triangulation by grounding the

analysis on both the gendered theory of intersectionality, and the social-psychological model of behavior change, along with providing supporting quantitative evidence for each major qualitative finding. The interpretive results of this study have been further verified through external review, that is, by being periodically corroborated by my principle advisor.

C. Summary

Thematic analysis can primarily be understood as a foundational, though under-defined qualitative research method in which the social science researcher listens to/reads the stories of the subjects, tries to interpret data within the framework of their occurrence by identifying, noting and analyzing themes and patterns within it, and attempts to explain the relationships between people's experiences and their socio-cultural contexts by reporting theorized, relevant and organized thematic findings in rich detail. As previously mentioned, this study's data analysis method has followed an interpretive and inductive design. This kind of a qualitative approach is repetitive and can fluidly move through the phases of theme identification, data coding and categorization, checking for soundness of the data, and recognizing and eventually reporting larger patterns and meanings that emanate from themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Subsequently, the methodology applied in this study also underwent these cyclical steps. Even though the focus was largely inductive, I had to occasionally deduce patterns of meanings that emerged from an analysis of the data set of principle themes and sub-themes. Being an emergent methodological design, this back-and-forth procedure went on until the data sample was saturated and the emerging themes, patterns and meanings were decided. The three major sets of findings will be reported in detail within the following three chapters.

IV. FINDINGS I

The purpose of this study is to do a thematic analysis of South Asian blog threads devoted to the issue of domestic violence faced by women from this ethnic community in the United States to further our understanding of the diverse themes, how they interconnect to form a pattern, and the key meanings they create about the messages and the medium. I have used a non-participant observation approach to gather and analyze the blog-generated data, primarily depending on multiple close readings of the textual sample and the systematic theme-based categorization of it using a QDA application. In this chapter, I will name the principle themes and sub-themes identified for the first major pattern found, define them suitably and describe them in detail, while closely adhering to the study's guiding research questions. I will also provide appropriate examples from data items that relate to each of the identified emergent themes.

Part I of this chapter includes a brief summarization of each of the ten South Asian blogs that have been sampled for this study. I have acquired the background information from biographical sections that are embedded within each of the ten blogs, as well as from an inclusive evaluation of the sampled threads. Identifying information has not been provided[10].

Part II of this chapter includes the first pattern of findings entitled "Blogger and Commentator Roles and Identities" that is related to the first research question "What roles do the bloggers and commentators play within these South Asian community blogs?" This part will

[10] The names of all the South Asian community blogs sampled for this study have been changed from the original for privacy reasons.

name, explain and provide examples for all three theme-based blogger and commentator roles that have been identified for this study, including (1) Advocate/Supporter, (2) Advisor/Information Provider, and (3) Actor/Information Seeker.

A. Part I: The Blogs

This part briefly describes each of the ten sampled South Asian blogs, including an enumeration of the number of discussion threads on domestic violence that were retrieved from each of them. I have created this short summarization of blogs based on information obtained from the 'About Us' and/or 'History' section of the blogs, as well as from an overall reading of parent posts and comments of the sampled threads.

1. South Asian Blogger's Forum

South Asian Blogger's Forum is written by a group of bloggers living in North America, most of them being of South Asian descent who belong to various media, publishing and legal professions. This community blog largely discusses all things South Asian, including latest news, economic and political developments, cultural and social happenings, etc. as well as discussions on violence against women belonging to this ethnic diaspora. One blog thread with the parent post written in 2008 that relates to the discussion of domestic violence against South Asian women was retrieved from this blog.

2. SA 'Goodwill Mission

SA 'Goodwill Mission is a blog written by a few South Asian second-generation immigrants living in North America who belong to various educational, non-profit, healthcare, legal, and liberal arts professions. This blog fosters discussions on various general interest topics pertaining to South Asian North Americans, with a particular focus on the community paying more attention to goodwill and advocacy for several human rights issues. One blog thread with

the parent post written in 2010 devoted to the discussion of domestic violence against South Asian women was retrieved from this blog.

3. **The Chapati Society**

The Chapati Society is a relatively recent general interest blog authored by multiple South Asian bloggers, which primarily began as a forum for women to share stories and reflections, participate in communal discussions, and interact with each other. Although this blog invites participation from people of all genders and ethnicities, the bulk of its space in meant for South Asian women, many of whom are deprived of discursive opportunities both virtually and/or face-to-face. One blog thread with the parent post written in 2009, and dedicated to the discussion of domestic violence against South Asian women was retrieved from this blog.

4. **Indo-American Inquisitors**

Indo-American Inquisitors is a blog with several contributors, most being of South Asian origin. This is also a recently initiated general interest blog that focuses on the dynamics of the South Asian immigrant identity in the context of globalization. This community blog looks for possible online intersections of social, cultural, political, religious, ethnic and transnational issues as portrayed through the interactions of bloggers and readers. One blog thread with the parent post written in 2007 devoted to the discussion of domestic violence against South Asian women was retrieved from this blog.

5. **Way to Wisdom**

Way to Wisdom is a blog written by a South Asian immigrant in the United States who works as an advocate for women from the same community who have been victims of violence. This blog tries to generally address several political, legal, economic and socially pressing issues concerning South Asians, including familial violence faced by legally dependent

women, and tries to encourage members of the South Asian immigrant community to stand in solidarity against these human rights violations. Two blog threads with parent posts written in 2011 that relate to the above discussion were retrieved from this blog.

6. **Masala Spot**

Masala Spot is a largely general interest blog authored by multiple bloggers of South Asian origin. It is a public discussion forum initiated by a state-run organization, which supports those issues that impact the South Asian immigrant population in North America, including advocacy for the community's adoption of social justice measures to fight inequality and discrimination. Three blog threads with parent posts written in 2010 that discuss domestic violence against South Asian women were retrieved from this blog.

7. **A Brown Battleground**

A Brown Battleground is a South Asian community blog with several contributors, of whom the bulk are of South Asian lineage. Although this is a general-interest blog that caters to all matters South Asian, its primary focus is on cultural and transnational issues pertaining to this ethnic immigrant community. Three blog threads with parent posts written between 2008-2009 that are about domestic violence against South Asian women, were retrieved from this blog.

8. **The Gurdwara Galleria**

The Gurdwara Galleria is largely a general interest community blog authored by multiple bloggers of South Asian Sikh origin. This discursive forum is devoted to political discussions, cultural deliberations, and social perspectives relating to South Asians living in North America, particularly those who belong to the Sikh faith. Ten blog threads with parent

posts written between 2007-2012 that relate to the discussion of domestic violence against South Asian women were retrieved from this blog.

9. **Desis against Domination**

Desis against Domination is a general interest community blog with a principle focus on philanthropy and advocacy and is authored by multiple bloggers of South Asian origin. It's a non-profit, discursive space that primarily strives to gather advocates, volunteers, victims and survivors, along with the rest of the South Asian community to create awareness about gender violence and also to provide collaborative online help to those afflicted. Ten blog threads with parent posts written between 2008-2010 that discuss the issue of domestic violence against South Asian women were retrieved from this blog.

10. **Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?**

Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu? is a South Asian blog with several contributors, all of whom are of South Asian origin. This socio-culturally focused community blog pertains equally to people living in South Asian countries, as well as the South Asian diaspora. It also tries to encourage discussions on news, issues and current events that may impact South Asians in foreign countries, particularly in terms of the role they play to enrich or complicate the politics of transnationalism. Four blog threads with parent posts written between 2006-2008 that relate to the discussion of domestic violence against South Asian women were retrieved from this blog.

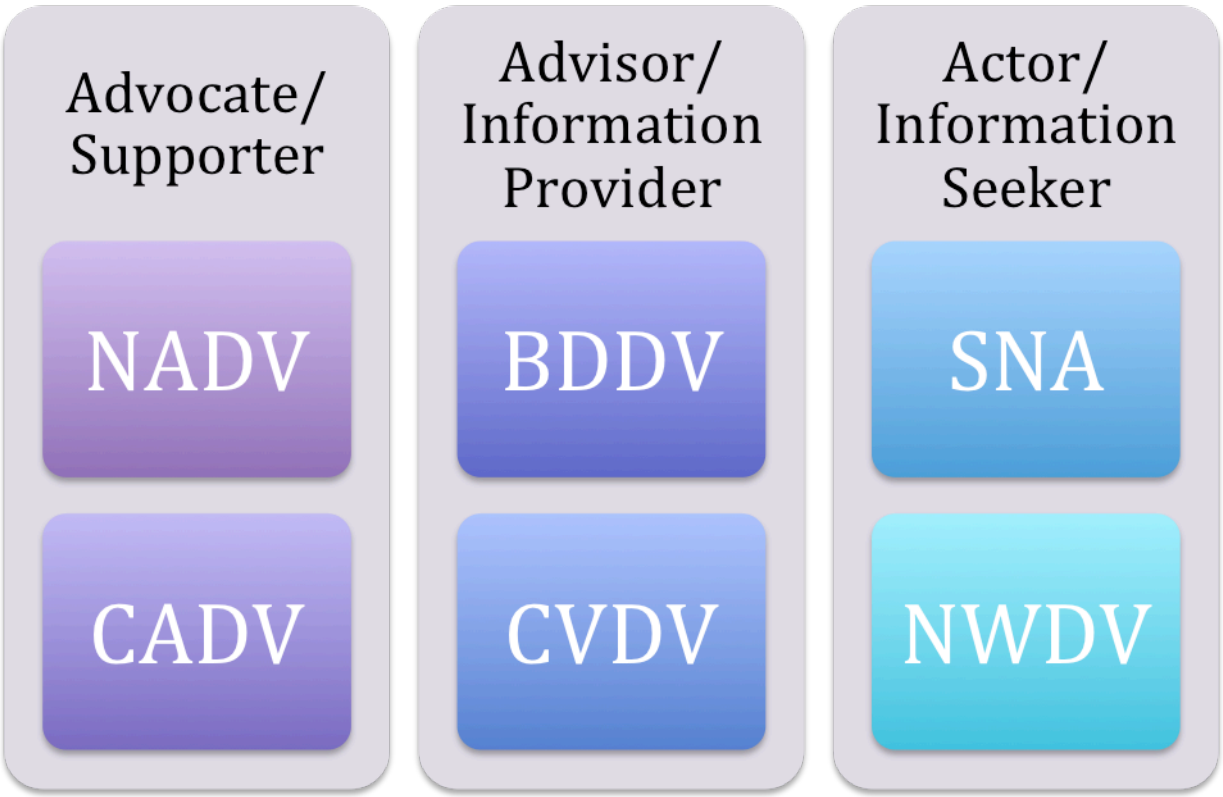
B. Part II: Blogger and Commentator Roles and Identities

This section seeks to answer the first research question by looking for themes related to the implicit or explicit identities of the bloggers and commentators, and the roles played by them within the discussion threads. Specific sub-themes that were based loosely on the blog selection

criteria became the preliminary context for categorizing data in terms of blogger/commentator identities, and then were subsequently combined to form larger thematic codes or roles. At first, six theme-based identities were classified for all excerpts taken from the 199 selected blog posts and comments: a) Narrator – witness of domestic violence (NWDV); b) Narrator – advocate of domestic violence (NADV); c) Character – victim/survivor of domestic violence (CVDV); d) Character - advocate of domestic violence (CADV); e) Broad discussion of South Asian domestic violence (BDDV); and f) Self-narrative of abuse (SNA). These were later combined to represent three principle blogger and commentator roles: 1) Advocate/Supporter; 2) Advisor/Information Provider; and 3) Actor/Information Seeker (See Table II below).

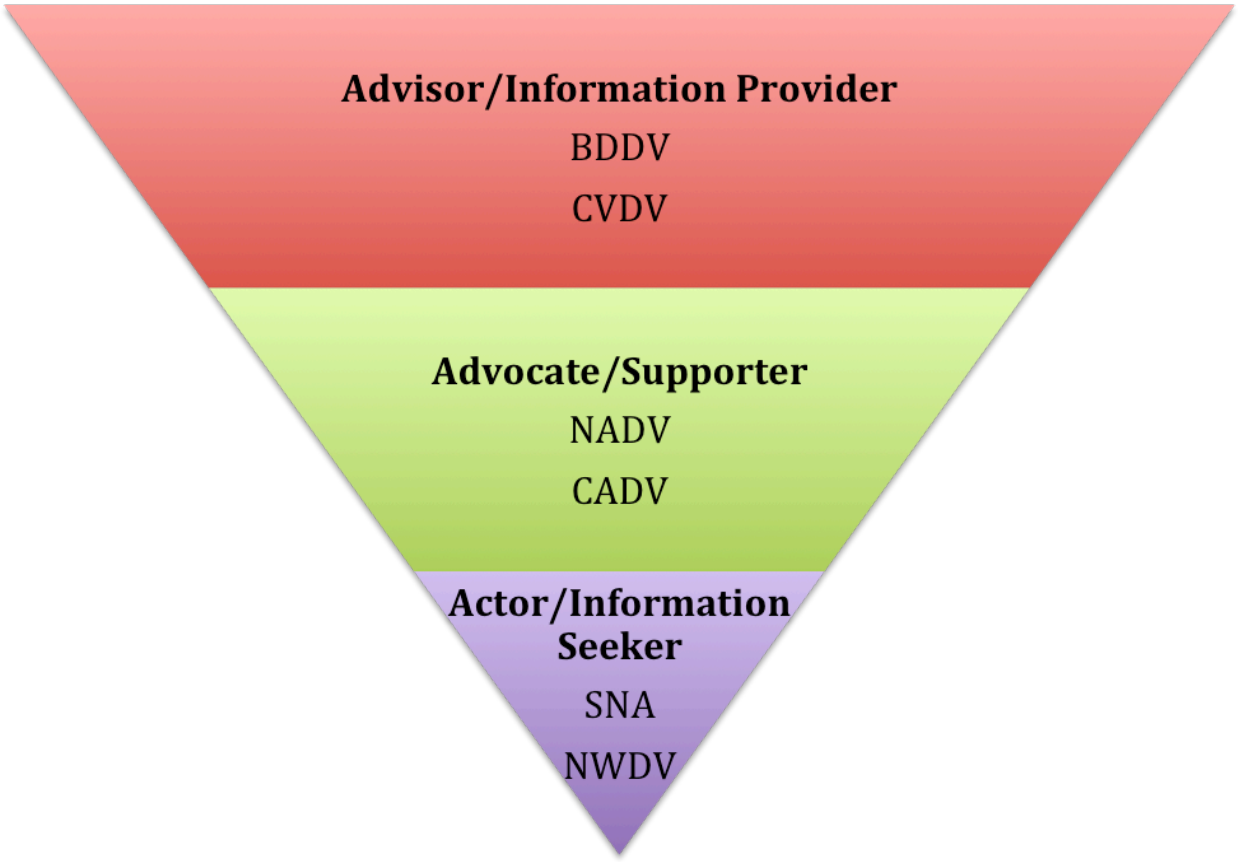
TABLE II

ROLES AND IDENTITIES OF BLOGGERS AND COMMENTATORS



It should be mentioned that the thematic roles identified above have often been found to overlap other roles in several individual blog posts and comments during the coding process. Bloggers and commentators in the sampled South Asian blogs have participated in each of the above-identified roles rather fluidly, and many parent bloggers have been proactive about following up on comments through prompt responses, thereby revealing continuous levels of participation. Bloggers and commentators have interchangeably played central roles in the discussion threads, thereby demonstrating the presence of non-peripheral and heterogeneous, yet communally mediated interactions online. However, based on an enumeration of the number of cases observed the following diagram shows the hierarchy of roles played by parent bloggers and commentators, starting with the most commonly found identities to the progressively lesser found ones (See Figure 3 below).

Figure 3. Hierarchy of blogger and commentator roles and identities



1. **Advisor/information provider**

Certain parent bloggers and commentators are advisors and provide relevant information in the form of a broad discussion on the subject of domestic violence within the South Asian immigrant community. Some also describe experiences of other South Asian female victims/survivors of spousal abuse. These bloggers and commentators mostly share broad-based beliefs, contexts, histories, norms, information, statistics, advice, judgment, cases, vignettes or responses to questions posed by other bloggers and commentators.

a. **Broad discussion of South Asian domestic violence (BDDV)**

In this role, the blogger/commentator is involved in a broad discussion of domestic abuse against South Asian women (The parent blogger or commentator will be referred to as the blog entry's "narrator"). This identity primarily applies to those blog posts and/or comments where the author is writing about the issue in a more general sense, perhaps discussing the context, people, places, theories, background, laws, supportive information, recent news, developments, and statistics that help, hinder or explain the cause. In this case, the accounts may or may not cite specific cases/examples of domestic abuse against immigrant South Asian women in North America. For instance, a parent blogger in *Way to Wisdom* informs:

> Now, I am happy to talk about Sakhi for South Asian Women, an outstanding community-based organization in New York dedicated to putting an end to violence against women from the South Asian community in North America[11] (2011).

This is followed by in-text hyperlinks provided by the parent blogger for readers to gain access to Sakhi's website for further information. Corroboration to the information provided in the parent blog post above comes from a commentator of the same thread in *Way to Wisdom*:

[11] All the blog-generated quotes in this chapter have been modified from the original for privacy reasons; however, the name of the DV organization in this particular quote has not been changed, as this information is publicly available and may prove helpful for potential readers.

> This New York based, non-profit South Asian DV shelter is remarkable. I personally know some people who have done their internships there (2011).

Related to this and in response to a commentator's question from another discussion thread in *Way to Wisdom*, the parent blogger responds with a possible context and theoretical explanation of why this human rights abuse against South Asian women takes place:

> It is probably an internalization of power by people of a culture who have been distressed by struggle, death and obliteration for decades.
> It is a condition where men and others affected become violent because of their own internalized feelings of helplessness, because they lack control and a reasonable autonomous course through which they can express their own voice (2011).

In a similar way, a parent blogger in *Masala Spot* tries to shed light on the prevalence of honor killings in South Asian immigrant communities, when a woman is killed for restoring her family's tainted honor:

> Though our society may state it loathes this form of gender abuse, it goes unsaid that there is no practical way of finding out how widespread such instances of honor killings are. Since our community cannot even openly discuss issues such as domestic abuse or substance abuse, I can't even begin to think how far we still have to go in terms of learning about those South Asian women who have been honor killing casualties (2009).

Of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded as BDDV, almost 40% religious beliefs of the narrator or that of the victim/perpetrator could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to accounts of the Sikh religion (37%)[12], followed by the Hindu (9%), Muslim (8%), Christian (4%), Jain (1%), and other religions (1%) consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Buddhism. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, a broad discussion of the subject was done most by females (53%) compared to male bloggers/commentators (29%), and participants whose gender remained

[12] All the numerical figures represented in percentages (%) in this chapter are approximate values. The figures that have a decimal value of .5 or greater have been rounded off for ease of representation.

unidentified (18%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the excerpts that were marked as BDDV, did not clearly mention the nation in question (52%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (39%), Bangladesh (7%) and Pakistan (3%).

b. **Character – Victim/survivor of domestic violence (CVDV)**

In this role, the blogger/commentator cites experiences of a particular South Asian immigrant woman who has been a victim of domestic violence (The female victims, survivors and/or advocates mentioned in the blog entry will be referred to as the "character/s"). For further clarification, it should be mentioned that the narrator may or may not be South Asian or a woman, but the "Character" referred to must belong to the South Asian immigrant community, and be a woman. Also, the character mentioned will be a victim of domestic abuse. For instance, a commentator in *A Brown Battleground* cited an example of a South Asian woman who was abused and murdered by her husband:

> Recently, another South Asian woman died in a western state in the US and the law enforcement authorities are not still sure if it is a homicide or a suicide ... (hyperlink to related article) … the woman who was killed had an arranged marriage. Issues of dowry had led to a bad marriage, but she had never complained of being abused by her spouse, up until she suddenly turned up dead. Also, her husband has left the scene and is not available for questioning, turning all suspicions on him (2008).

A probable explanation in the form of a response follows from a commentator in the same thread of *A Brown Battleground*, who tries to theorize the perpetrator's mindset in the context of the same South Asian woman's homicide discussed above.

> Woefully, it still happens that Indian wives are seen as material property, a condition that is very easily misused by overbearing Indian men…to trivialize her murder as the action of a psychopath is to overlook the role of culture and society, and not give him accountability for his misdeed…
> Her husband may have had anger problems, but it can be firmly said that he had no respect for his wife's life, and went crazy when she tried to get away from his violent and oppressing behavior (2008).

Of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded as CVDV, almost 35% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (28%), followed by the Christian (16%), Muslim (15%), and Hindu (7%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion on CVDV was done most by females (71%) compared to male bloggers/commentators (10%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (19%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts that were marked as CVDV, pertained to people of Indian origin (45%). About 41% blog data did not clearly mention the nation in question. The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to Bangladesh (9%) and Pakistan (6%).

2. **Advocate/supporter**

Certain parent bloggers and commentators support the cause of fighting domestic abuse against South Asian women by taking on the identities of narrators who may be advocates or supporters of domestic violence, or by writing about characters who are advocates or supporters of domestic violence. They primarily encourage other bloggers, readers and commentators (victims, activists, others related) to stand up against abuse, share their stories and experiences, and make them feel safe to voice their dilemma within the community blog. Some bloggers/commentators seem to endorse steps that have already been taken (domestic violence laws, shelters, services, interventions, accountability, etc.) through their blog narratives.

a. **Narrator – Advocate of domestic violence (NADV)**

In this role, the blogger/commentator acts as a narrator who advocates against domestic violence within the South Asian community and bases the post/comment on acquired knowledge and self-experiences of domestic violence advocacy, or on the experiences of some abused victim whom he/she knows or has heard of. Bloggers and commentators in this role (who may or may not be South Asian) are usually seen to narrate their advocacy and support by applauding others on their successful escape from violent marriages/intimate partnerships, or by encouraging bloggers/activists/survivors to keep furthering awareness of the issue through their online and offline activism. For instance, a commentator in *The Chapati Society* applauds the disclosure of abuse by a South Asian woman who has written a previous comment in the same blog thread:

> Thanks a lot for disclosing your past abusive experiences with us, and I praise your bravery for voicing the truth and exposing the misdirected and misinterpreted notions of righteousness, dishonor, and unfaithfulness that go hand in glove with violence perpetrated against women in the Sikh community. Even more inspiring is the fact that you exposed and communicated your experiences of abuse with the rest of the community members who will read this blog (2009).

A parent blogger in *Desis against Domination* advocates on behalf of South Asian immigrant women who have undergone spousal abuse:

> A lot of us have personally known domestic violence victims in our South Asian community, have heard stories about others who have faced such violence, or even faced it personally on some level… I greatly admire and applaud those women who have survived. We all should learn from their painful experiences and remember how very crucial it is for us to jointly advocate a safe, supportive space for our family, friends, and friends of friends (2008).

Similarly, a parent blogger of another sampled thread in *Desis Against Domination* self-identifies as an experienced South Asian domestic violence advocate:

> According to me the key move for ending violence against women is to instruct oneself and one's community… That said, I pose these questions to the readers and

> commentators of this blog: What steps can we correctly take to inform the South Asian immigrant community and end this kind of gender abuse? Irrespective of the effects being major or minor, in what ways can we advocate to put an end to this violence? (2008).

A commentator from the same thread in *Desis Against Domination* is seen to encourage this attempt at online advocacy against spousal abuse within the South Asian community:

> I believe that the perfect response to your query is communication. As you yourself mentioned, reaching out to related resources and associated groups is most important at the present time. Via this channel more awareness on the issue of domestic violence can be created and spread. I know you are doing a wonderful thing by encouraging these interactions and I believe that a great deal of value will be added though this blog discussion (2008).

Of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded as NADV, almost 35% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 33% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim religion (18%), followed by the Christian (7%) and Hindu (6%) faiths consecutively. Little to no data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism and other religions (1%). In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (65%), compared to male bloggers/commentators (18%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (17%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts that were marked as NADV, did not clearly mention the nation in question (55%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (26%), Bangladesh (11%), and Pakistan (8%).

b. **Character – Advocate of domestic violence (CADV)**

In this role, the blogger/commentator primarily writes about characters who are advocates or supporters of domestic violence within the South Asian immigrant community and bases the blog post/comment on the experiences of these characters' knowledge, experiences and work with abused DV victims, whom they know or have heard about. For further clarification, it should be mentioned that the "narrator" may/may not be South Asian or woman, but the "Character" referred to must belong to the South Asian community. Here the character could be an agent or advocate (including a survivor who has turned to advocacy) of domestic abuse. For instance, a commentator in *Desis Against Domination* expresses her admiration for a fellow advocate of domestic abuse:

> …I am so happy that you are a courageous woman who is from the same Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant community… I am elated at your efforts to publicly express all those privately faced and professionally experienced examples that may help to break the silence that keeps many abused women from voicing their pain. Keep it up and I congratulate you for the work you're doing here! (2008)

A parent blogger in *South Asian Bloggers Forum* writes about an Indian American activist who states how important it is for US law enforcement to be mindful of cultural traditions when dealing with abused women of color and their families:

> An Indian DV advocate states that she has known many instances when the cops get upset that they cannot take the perpetrator into custody, but the problem lies with them not being aware of the Indian cultural mindset. If the law enforcement people undergo cultural sensitivity training, they will recognize that an abused Hindu woman who indicts her spouse will be answerable to her own family, her marital family, and the community at large. She may even risk her unmarried siblings (if any) not finding a suitable match for marriage because of the shame associated with her pressing charges against an abusive husband (2008).

Of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded as CADV, almost 45% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 36% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or

implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim religion (12%), followed by Hinduism (7%). No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (81%) compared to male bloggers/commentators (14%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (5%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts that were marked as CADV, did not clearly mention the nation in question (45%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (43%), Bangladesh (10%) and Pakistan (2%).

3. **Actor/information seeker**

The third principle role played by a blogger/commenter is that of being a seeker of information/advice, either by narrating experiences of one's own abuse, or as a witness to someone else's. These bloggers/commentators turn to other participants within the selected South Asian blogs, in order to seek advice, information and potential help to get out of their own or another's violent and unhealthy circumstances.

a. **Self-narrative of abuse (SNA)**

The self-narrative of abuse primarily applies to those parent blog posts and comments where the blogger/commentator (referring to a South Asian woman, since the focus of the study is on South Asian female victims of abuse) is or has been a victim/survivor of domestic violence. In this case, the blogger could be relating an abusive experience in her life (past/present), or she could be describing the reasons, forces, context and the consequences of the abuse that she encountered, or even the larger issues surrounding it. She could also be

seeking related information, help and advice to get out of her abusive partnership. For instance, a self-identified South Asian victim of spousal abuse shares her predicament and seeks counsel from other blog participants in *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?*:

> I did request legal advice a few times, but the attorneys were not keen on taking up my case … my husband is very adept at abusing me psychologically, monetarily and orally. He had also been physically violent in the past.
> I am physically and emotionally tired because of his abuse, and I am desperate to find legally sound help to get out of this situation. My husband has of late also threatened to make a case against me and that he will take away everything that I have.
> Thanks all for your advice. I still need to do a lot of finding out and need to get in touch with people of legal influence who can get me out of this mess (2007).

Another brave example of self-disclosure came from an immigrant South Asian Sikh woman from *The Gurdwara Galleria* who ultimately found her peace in religion and discourse:

> I still get shivers down my spine while thinking about it. While I was still pursuing my higher education, my partner of many years had sexually molested me. I remember being ashamed of what had happened and very, very upset. Till this day I try not to think about that horrible experience, but it often comes back to me. It was only recently that I felt liberated when I shared my experiences at the workshop dedicated to adult gender violence in the Sikh immigrant community. I felt very close to my god and my religion when I heard others like me talk about their experiences of abuse and received compassion from others in return (2012).

Of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded as SNA, almost 35% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (25%), followed by Jain (15%), Muslim (10%), Christian (10%) and Hindu (5%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussing SNAs was completely done by females of South Asian origin (100%), as that was one of the pre-requisites of the study. In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, half the blog

excerpts that were marked as SNA did not clearly mention the nation in question (50%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (40%), and Bangladesh (10%). No blogger and commentator made explicit or implicit reference to Pakistan while writing self-narratives of abuse.

b. **Narrator – Witness of domestic violence (NWDV)**

In this role, the blogger/commentator primarily writes posts and comments where he/she is, or has been a witness of domestic abuse. Being a witness in this case could mean directly witnessing the act of domestic violence on another, or indirectly witnessing the act in terms of noticing the signs of abuse on a victim. For instance, the blogger and/or commentator could be a family member (child, parent, or other relative) or friend who has witnessed his/her mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, aunt, friend etc. being physically or mentally abused while the act was taking place, or has seen the results of abuse (cuts, burns, bruise marks, signs of depression, fear, post traumatic stress disorder, battered women's syndrome etc.) on the person, whose experiences of domestic violence he/she is narrating in the blog. For instance, a parent blogger from *Way to Wisdom* recounts being witness to a friend's trauma at being abused by her spouse:

> I know a young Indian woman who was facing terrible emotional, mental, spoken and physical cruelty from her husband … despite that she did not want to end the marriage because in so doing, she would have to return to her country. Even her own family members were not willing to take her back and were not supportive of her getting divorced. As someone who knew her personally I was not able to help her, feeling totally powerless against the pressures of society and the idea of shaming the community (2011).

A commentator in one of selected blog threads from *A Brown Battleground* admits witnessing the act of domestic abuse and eventually reporting it to the authorities:

> When I had witnessed my close relative beating his wife, I opposed all my family members and reported him to the authorities. Ironically, the entire family reprimanded me

> as the wife retracted the domestic violence charges and returned to him. Even after all this, if the need arose I would do it again without thinking twice (2008).

A parent blogger from another discussion thread in *A Brown Battleground* wrote about her horror and her community's condescension at the so-called normalcy of wife beating:

> I remember going to a party in a big US city with my parents when I was just a small kid and seeing my aunt with a bandage around her leg. When I asked my mother what had happened to her, my mother very coolly mentioned that my uncle, that is the lady's husband had done that to her. I was alarmed to know the truth, but was probably more taken aback at the nonchalance of my mother, the aunt with a broken leg, and her husband who was responsible for it.
> …I kept on hearing similar incidents of husbands thrashing their wives from my parents and later from my Pakistani friends in school (2009).

Of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded as NWDV, almost 42% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data equally pertained to narratives about the Christian (16%) and Sikh religions (16%), followed by the Muslim (13%), Hindu (10%) and Jain (3%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (84%) compared to male bloggers/commentators (3%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (13%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts that were marked as NWDV, pertained to people of Indian origin (48%). About 39% blog data did not clearly mention the nation in question. The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to Pakistan (10%), and Bangladesh (3%).

C. Summary

Using the first research question as one of the guiding principles of this study helped me to find, classify and explain the roles and identities taken on by bloggers and commentators within the sampled South Asian community blogs. The findings yielded interesting results in terms of the fluid interchangeability of roles between the bloggers and commentators. Overall, the comments not only acted as corroboration to the parent posts, but helped create a sense of conversational continuity. This was made more complex because of the presence of comments by parent bloggers who sometimes would provide feedback to preceding comments. It was evident that several commentators were routine readers, followers and/or contributors, and many even had their own blogs with hyperlinks provided for other bloggers and commentators to access. Many parent blogs and comments turned into long communal conversations between bloggers and commentators, surpassing well over the 22 selected comments for one particular blog thread that was sampled for this study. Where parent bloggers did not seem proactive about providing feedback to previous responses, the number of comments written by other blog participants was comparatively less in number, the least being one.

Finally, the examples of blog posts and comments provided in this chapter have been paraphrased in order to maintain anonymity. As an added privacy measure, each paraphrased blog excerpt was searched online using Google to make sure that it does not conform to the web address from which it was originally obtained. The act of paraphrasing partially takes away from the original intention of the quote. However, to remain true to the intended meaning of the sampled data, all blog excerpts were coded in their unaltered format using the QDA application, and only the ones cited as illustrations in this study were paraphrased post-analysis.

V. FINDINGS II

In this chapter, I will name the principle themes and sub-themes identified for the second major pattern found, define them suitably and describe them in detail, while closely adhering to the study's guiding research questions. I will also provide appropriate illustrations from data items that relate to each of the identified emergent themes.

The second pattern "Typology of Blog Themes on South Asian Domestic Violence" includes the findings related to the second research question "What themes, concerns, and explanations emerge about the issue of domestic violence against South Asian women in the US, as evidenced in the selected South Asian community blog threads?" The following sections of the chapter will describe the typology of principle themes and contained sub-themes that have emerged from a thematic data analysis of the South Asian community blog sample, including (a) meaning making (b) conflict maintenance (c) local vs. transnational debate (d) consciousness creation and (e) change and action contemplation.

A. Typology of Blog Themes on South Asian Domestic Violence

In response to the second research question, parent blog posts and comments were coded into 25 sub-themes that primarily emerged from a close reading of the blog data. These emergent categories were further examined to group them under larger themes that constitute the primary findings of this particular research question. Accordingly, five principle themes emerged. The typology of South Asian Domestic Violence-related blog themes are (1) meaning making (2) conflict maintenance (3) local vs. transnational debate (4) consciousness creation and (5) change and action contemplation (See Table III).

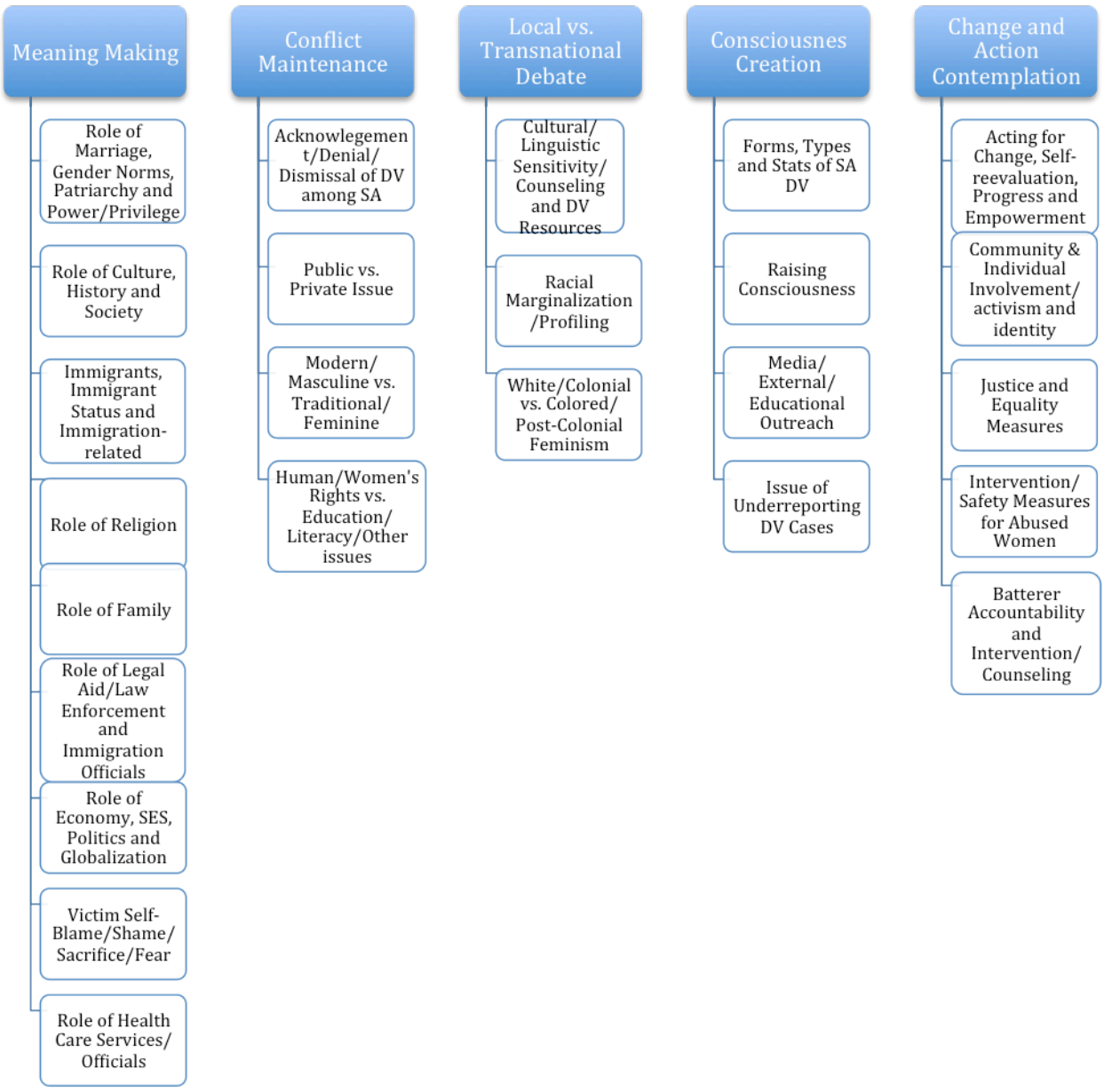
This study's sample is a tiny microcosm of the entire South Asian blogging community that is rather big and virtually active. It only signifies one particular topical part of the larger

socio-political, economic and cultural discussions that take place within such general-interest community blogs. Irrespective, the domestic violence-related entries of the South Asian bloggers and commentators highlight several questions, concerns and opinions that are by-and-large censored within the South Asian immigrant community in North America.

To reiterate, discussions around domestic violence are highly taboo within the South Asian community, immigrant or not, but it is still a very widespread issue that unfortunately affects many South Asian families worldwide. As the findings will reveal, these emergent blog themes not only furnish the historical context for the perpetration and maintenance of such abuse, and provide advice and help for victimized South Asian women to get out of violent situations, but they also advocate, inform, and empower all participants within the topical South Asian blogging community to spread awareness and act for change. The themes identified below have often been found to overlap other themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. Based on an observational enumeration of the number of blog cases studied, *Table 3* below lists the thematic findings related to domestic abuse among South Asian Americans. It not only reveals the emergent sub-topics under each of the five principle themes, but also ranks them starting with the most commonly found ones to the progressively lesser found.

TABLE III

TYPOLOGY OF BLOG THEMES ON SOUTH ASIAN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



1. **Meaning making**

The principle theme of *meaning making* was achieved on multiple levels, by the bloggers, readers/commentators and by me, in order to understand an issue, give meaning to it through analytical representation, and substantiate the steps taken (or lack of it) through rationalization. Simply speaking, it refers to the act of ascribing meanings to the forms, prevalence and impact of domestic violence against immigrant South Asian women, providing reasons for its dominance within this diasporic community, furnishing the context for its occurrence against women from an ethnic minority, as well as eliciting the history behind its prevalence/sustenance in the US.

a. **Role of marriage, gender norms, patriarchy and power/privilege**

This emergent, sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators discussed and dissected how marriage, patriarchy and gender norms help to perpetrate domestic abuse against South Asian women, and also maintain this cycle of power, privilege and control that is at the base of such abusive behavior. Explicit and implicit references to various marital and patriarchal institutions such as arranged marriages, forced marriages, gender-role-based marital expectations of husbands/partners and in laws, as well as the stigma of divorce/separation within the South Asian community were often discussed themes that emerged from the threaded blog discussions. This theme also includes instances of gender disparity that causes such behavior in many cases. In *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?* a commentator exposes the double standard of South Asian gender and marriage norms, including the hegemony of male privilege which leads to various forms of abuse against women:

> The South Asian-American society boasts of some gender prejudiced practices such as separating women to be seated opposite from men in the Sikh Temples. The women are often financially manipulated by their husbands and are considered economically non-adept by their male partners… A Sikh American woman is scowled upon to openly attend

> a club or bar if she wanted to… While the men can go to nightclubs, stay out all night, and are allowed to freely solicit non-South Asian women, their wives are forced to stay at home. The male-dominated Sikh American society has created these ill-informed conceited norms when it comes to so-called gender roles … there is nothing called gender equality if you are a South Asian immigrant woman … the men hold all the power … unlike Sikh men, the women are presumably to be virgins when getting married, which also is supposed to be an arranged one, to some man of the same race, caste and class (2007).

On a more positive note this theme also refers to the need for gender equity and balance that may rework the dynamics of *who* holds the power and privilege in marital relationships. A blogger in *The Chapati Society* recognizes this need for marital equality within the South Asian community:

> Since this month is dedicated to the international elimination of violence against women, it is undoubtedly a suitable time to think about gender equality and communal justice… I am thinking deeply about spousal abuse within the Sikh population in America. The primary Sikh religious text [*Shabad*] should be remembered as it exemplifies our very own religious leader's [Guru] groundbreaking foresight to free Sikh women and make them equal in every respect. However, given that these original messages of gender equity were distorted by patriarchy, I realized how much work as a society we have to get done to learn from these teachings and empower us women in our married lives (2009).

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 43%[13] religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 28% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim religion (12%), followed by Hinduism (10%), Christianity (7%) and Jainism (1%). No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the

[13] All the numerical figures represented in percentages (%) in this chapter are approximate values. The figures that have a decimal value of .5 or greater have been rounded off for ease of representation.

gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (53%) compared to males (30%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (17%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts pertained to people of Indian origin (44%). About 39% blog data did not clearly mention the nation in question. The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to Bangladesh (9%) and Pakistan (5%).

b. **Role of culture, history and society**

This emergent sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators discussed and dissected how South Asian cultural, historical and social expectations and norms occasionally become deterrents for victims and advocates of domestic violence from getting justice. Explicit and implicit references to various cultural and social practices such as dowry, bride price, honor killings, gender stereotyping, family honor, gender-bound socialization processes, language barriers etc. were often made, as a way to make sense of the causes or forms of abuse against South Asian women.

In some cases, as the blog excerpts below reveal, such cultural and social norms, procedures and customs are also used to explicate, justify or predict (on occasion), the prevalence of this form of partner abuse against South Asian women. For instance, in *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?* an Indo-American advocate of violence against women in the South Asian immigrant community admitted to generalizing certain socio-cultural practices as reasons behind the prevalence of domestic abuse:

> A few traits of the Indo-American society and cultural norms embolden men to victimize women, such as expensive dowry sums to the groom's families and the preference of male infants compared to females (2006).

Similarly, a blogger in *Desis against Domination* explains the theoretical context that looks beyond the socio-psychological causes, and posits the tolerability of spousal abuse as rooted within the social structure.

> …DV is not a hushed-up, personal issue, but a byproduct of the larger domains of economic and gender disparity in our social circle. Consequently, a husband abusing his wife is not a failure of our social framework, it is not an abnormality, but … interestingly it is a confirmation of a specific cultural order, that develops from the socially conditioned principle that men are more important than women, who in essence have less value in our society and thereby are not authorized to gain gender equality. In the case of immigrant women from Bangladesh the added misreading of religious principles and various cultural prohibitions adds to the married woman's subservience, being bolstered by illustrative dictates such as 'your paradise is beneath your husband's feet' and 'the fragment of you that is struck by your husband will be heaven-bound' (2008).

Interestingly, a commentator from *The Gurdwara Galleria* touches upon the same socio-cultural nerve while discussing the problem of domestic abuse, but approaches it skeptically by reprimanding the South Asian community's tendency to blame it all on culture:

> Labeling each occurrence of spousal homicide as honor killing ... it means permanent injury for the entire South Asian Sikh population. Why does culture have to be blamed for all cases of domestic violence that takes place … nothing is criminal about your culture or society or your religion...
> DV is a crime, and should be regarded as a crime in and of itself (2009).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 32% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (28%), followed by the Hindu (21%), Muslim (13%), Christian (4%) and Jain (1%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done

most by females (58%) compared to males (28%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (14%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts pertained to people of Indian origin (47%). About 37% blog data did not clearly mention the nation in question. The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to Bangladesh (13%) and Pakistan (4%).

c. **Immigrants, immigrant status and immigration-related issues**

This emergent sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators primarily made explicit or implicit references to immigrant women who have faced or been affected by domestic violence, as well as discussed immigration-related issues such as fraud marriages as a factor for understanding, tackling and analyzing the occurrence of this human rights aberration against South Asian woman in the US. For instance, a commentator in *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?* throws light on the epidemic of fraud marriages that has left many women abused, and affected many families within the South Asian diaspora in the US:

> The problem of fraud marriages is getting progressively bad in the South Asian immigrant community… We would like to expose this issue to the public. This could add to marital violence in the Indo-American community, as migration based on marriage is quicker and easier to achieve than other entry avenues.
> It's almost like a booming industry for some, including exploitative husbands who just come into the country to become permanent residents using their Indian-origin, but US citizen wives as ladders and then abuse them... I myself have gone through this being an American citizen of Indian descent… Once my spouse got his residency through me, he abused and abandoned me. I have tried, but failed to get justice (2006).

In some instances, as the blog excerpts below reveal, the dependent visa status of abused South Asian women were also taken into consideration to explicate, justify or predict (on occasion), the prevalence of this form of partner abuse. For instance, a blogger in *Way to Wisdom* argues about

the complex problems that immigration creates for South Asian women in the US who have been abused by their husbands/partners:

> The problem is further complicated for migrant South Asian women because if they want to divorce their abusive husbands, they also often lose their legal status in the US and will have to forcibly return to their own nation - be it Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, or some other country. These women will have to manage to run away from the abuse, get enough finances to catch a plane back home, and safely reach their families, which is also not completely safe for them as they have to face the plight and stigma of their family and community (2011).

Ironically, as this parent post from *South Asian Blogger's Forum* indicates, the immigrant status of South Asian women in the US is a double edged sword creating more spousal abuse on one hand, while also proving to be the only way they can still live in this country in case their own families back home don't accept them:

> For the reason that certain immigrant Indian women hang on to their spouses for maintaining their lawful status in this country, VAW activists advised law enforcement officers to think about alternatives to perpetrator arrest when countering domestic abuse cases in South Asian families (2008).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 51% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (23%), followed by the Hindu (9%), Christian (9%), Muslim (5%), and Jain (3%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (60%) compared to males (17%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (23%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime,

narrator or narrative, majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (59%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (37%), Pakistan (3%) and Bangladesh (2%).

d. **Role of religion**

This emergent sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators wrote about the role that various South Asian religions and religious teachings play in perpetrating, or opposing violence against women.

A parent blogger in *The Gurdwara Galleria* explains the role played by religion to cover up violence against women in the South Asian immigrant community:

> It is true that most of my Hindu community members hate the idea of DV but very few speak up against it. …when an Indian American woman who had a history of being abused by her marital family suddenly vanished, the local temples did not cooperate with the authorities to set up her posters as a missing person and even refused to plead with their worshippers to come up with information in case she was seen or found (2009).

A parent blogger in *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?* attempts to counter the oppressive role that religion sometimes plays by describing the help that local South Asian religious institutions and leaders can offer to female victims of domestic violence:

> "We are going to call upon Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious forerunners…It's time that we all did something to address domestic violence" [hyperlink provided]…
> At a North American Sikh temple, the president revealed that recent increase in marital abuse has rattled the community and impacted the religious leaders to reconsider their position as spiritual role models.
> "There is a need to have talks on the issue of spousal violence, and provide support and advise to those affected. The temple should also find advocates to conduct workshops and provide help like food, clothes and money … local religious heads can't manage to lead the whole anti-DV movement in this corner of America, but they will definitely try to help where possible and now is the time to do it" (2006).

Symbols of religious reverence also appear to serve dual roles, with one strand justifying wife battery to the South Asian community at large, and the other strand proving to be a spiritual

coping mechanism for many abused women, as can be evidenced in the following blog comment from *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?*

> There is an inherent connection, yet contradiction between the Hindu symbol of the mother goddess and the current, dreadful situation that abused women are in.
> In all honesty, the term *mother goddess* has an orientalist ring to it. I am aware that this term invokes the self-sacrificing feminine nature through the channels of several Hindu woman goddesses such as Sati, Lakshmi, Savitri, etc that abused women also try to imbibe as a way to accept their abuse … the same way that the symbol of Virgin Mary denotes a virtuous and nurturing persona … however ironically this cannot be applied to the way women are actually treated in their marital households… Obviously, beliefs in religious teachings have often been used to validate particular social mandates, but the issue of spousal abuse has roots much deeper than that (2007).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 9% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (65%), followed by the Hindu (12%), Christian (7%), Muslim (4%), and Jain (4%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (51%) compared to males (35%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (14%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts pertained to people of Indian origin (60%). About 35% blog data did not clearly mention the nation in question. The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to Pakistan (4%) and Bangladesh (2%).

e. **Role of family**

This emergent sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators highlighted the role that the abused South Asian woman's family (biological, marital, children), or the related stakeholders play (friends, relatives, colleagues, advocates, etc.) to either compound or alleviate the abuse that she has faced. For instance, a parent blogger in *Way to Wisdom* explains the role an abused South Asian woman's family members play to compound her predicament:

> One more dilemma that abused women face is social pressure that most frequently comes from people in her own family to keep the marriage intact and not let the family break apart, although she's a victim of domestic abuse… Of course, to add to the problem, if the South Asian woman has a child, it becomes next to impossible for her to divorce her husband because of the tremendous pressures that she faces from her family and the stigma created around divorce within her social circle (2011).

In *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?* a commentator throws light on the cycle of violence that is maintained, not just by an abusive spouse, but by extended members of her marital and biological families:

> Speaking of spousal abuse and marital domination of immigrant Indian women, it should be noted that the part played by other related women is often overlooked. Ironically, it is the woman's mother-in-law and/or sister-in-law who incites the household abuse, and in many instances ends up being the reason behind dowry related deaths. Also, I totally get it that that women relatives help to instill and maintain this cycle of marital abuse, including biological mothers who tell their own daughter to be patient and endure the abuse for the sake of family (I essentially have known of this sort of ridiculous, self-obliterating conversations taking place among my own family members)... Of course, we shouldn't forget that these women are themselves the by-products of a male-controlled socialization order (2007).

A concerned parent comments in *Desis against Domination* about the potentially helpful role that a victimized woman's family can play to stop the marital abuse:

> Very well done with this blog! I expect that you all will be successful in raising awareness to the extent that all anxious Bangladeshi parents recognize the significance of domestic violence and are able to pre-instruct their female offspring on the severity of the problem in the US. …the crucial step will be to persuade all marriageable Bangladeshi

> women that they should leave their husbands in case of abuse, not thinking twice about what their financial situation and what the family, society and Islam would think of their decision. It is equally imperative that they recognize the initial signs of violence and depart immediately instead of continuing the marriage or partnership with hopes that the abuse will eventually cease - unfortunately, that is never the case (2008).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 36% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (26%), followed by the Christian (18%), Muslim (12%), Hindu (6%), and Jain (2%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (72%) compared to males (10%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (18%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts pertained either to people of Indian origin (44%), or did not clearly mention the nation in question (44%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to Bangladesh (12%). No blogger and commentator made explicit or implicit reference to Pakistan while discussing the role of family.

f. **Role of law enforcement and immigration officials**

This emergent sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators discussed the various hindrances to justice that abused South Asian immigrant women face as a result of non-cooperation by US laws, police personnel,

legal aides and immigration officials. Explicit and implicit references to various problems such as cultural/linguistic barriers, immigration status, racial profiling, lack of proof that violence occurred, and lack of legal or indicting documentation were often found themes that emerged from the threaded blog discussions. A commentator in *South Asian Bloggers Forum* informs others of the steps taken by some leading organizations that work to end violence against women, to increase cultural and ethnic sensitivity among law enforcement and immigration officials that deal with abused women and their families.

> A New York City based anti-DV non-profit has organized workshops with the help of various city groups and DV survivors to expand police authorities' understanding and appreciation of different South Asian cultural norms… With the help of a grant received in the early 2000s from a US state mayor to fight domestic abuse, we helped to fund a community meeting and held a few focus groups among South Asian DV survivors to hear about and assess their experiences with members of the police force… The DV survivors in the focus group pointed how important it was for cops to understand and respect the socio-cultural significance of marital family members such as in-laws, as well as noted how language often caused hurdles to seeking help from authorities. Whereas all the focus group participants pleaded others in similar situations to call the cops, there was only a handful that said that even though some were assigned DV police officers and immigration lawyers, only a few called them back to follow up (2008).

A Bangladeshi Muslim activist in America shares her views in *Desis against Domination* on how an abused South Asian immigrant woman can get help from a conscientious law enforcement infrastructure:

> The key step for fighting domestic violence is to reconsider roles… Furthermore, the change in status quo must happen from within the South Asian population including receiving help from the police, immigration lawyers, courts of law, adjudicators, to various community heads (2008).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 54% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be

identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim (17%) and Sikh religions (17%), followed by the Christian (10%) and Hindu (2%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (66%) compared to males (15%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (20%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (63%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (22%), Bangladesh (10%) and Pakistan (5%).

g. **Role of economy, SES, politics and globalization**

This emergent sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators primarily reviewed the impact of the current economy, the politics of globalization, the socio economic status and financial conditions of the victim/perpetrator, or the larger immigrant community, on the perpetration and maintenance of spousal violence against South Asian women. An Indo-American female commentator admits she is being abused by her spouse, but also expresses her dilemma at being financially dependent on her abusive husband, in *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?*:

> I am a South Asian woman living in America … my husband verbally insults me on a constant basis. He has beaten me up many, many times in the last few years, and says that he assaults me because I am the one to blame. His own legal status in this country is questionable... He says that he has control over my finances, but even if I tried to I couldn't take his because it is not in this country... So, I cannot even report him to the police and have him detained as he repeatedly intimidates me that he will leave me penniless (2007).

Another commentator in *A Brown Battleground* correlates the prevalence of domestic abuse within South Asian communities to the socio-economic status (SES) of the affected families:

> I believe there is a major co-relationship between the incidence of spousal abuse and families that may have single parents, not high educational levels and belong to a relatively lower SES. Of course, some of these issues cannot be ascribed to the Indian immigrant population in America, but can be found more among some other East Asian, South Asian and South East Asian migrant groups, including families from Bangladesh (2009).

Explicit and implicit references were made to various economic policies that affect the abused immigrant women/perpetrators/family, particularly those that impact members of a transnational diaspora in the US, in addition to discussions about the political contexts within which the abuse or interventions occur. For instance, a parent blogger from *Way to Wisdom* explains the economic and political backlash that South Asian women in the US may face on reporting their spousal abuse:

> Abused South Asian immigrant women have it worse, with several who encounter linguistic difficulties, economic problems, as well as the anxiety of political exile - and therefore they are all the more timid to tell the cops, the DV safe houses, judges, or social welfare organizations (2011).

Another parent blogger from *The Gurdwara Galleria* correlates the rise in reporting cases of domestic abuse, to the current economic crisis:

> …The Sikh Society Wellbeing Services has received more appeals from DV victims and survivors in the last several weeks. A Punjabi-American women's advocate ascribes the increase in spousal abuse partly to the current economic downturn. "It may happen that when husbands get laid off from their jobs, they get exasperated, get drunk, and then inhumanly take it out on their wives" (2009).

Dissent in the form of an anti-colonial, localized perspective to the homogeneous way the issue of violence against women is dealt with by South Asia-focused domestic violence services in the US comes through in a scathing comment found in *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu*?

> The South Asian advocacy organizations aren't really as radical, and if questioned, I don't believe that they would admit that their foundation is grounded in the politics of

> America... However, their altruistic service stance is rooted quite a lot within the present "liberal" convention of US politics … that is, encouraging pro-employment pro-migration policies that leads to these human rights violations in the first place … policies that lie at and stem from the very core of capitalistic globalization (2008).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 40% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (22%), followed by the Muslim (20%), Hindu (13%), and Christian (4%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (60%) compared to males (20%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (20%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (42%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (38%), Bangladesh (16%) and Pakistan (4%).

h. **Victim self-blame, shame, sacrifice and fear**

This emergent sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators revealed the common tendency among many South Asian domestic abuse victims for blaming themselves for the abuse, feeling ashamed, being fearful of the community's response, and trying to save the perpetrator/s and their families by denying the spousal violence at the cost of sacrificing their own wellbeing. For instance, a commentator in *Desis against Domination* exposes the misconstrued ideas of victim blaming and

sacrifice that several South Asian women have to endure as a way to abate the fear of facing more spousal violence:

> South Asian women are fearful of divulging their abusers' names, most of whom are family members, including husbands. It also perpetually happens that in a patriarchal ethnic community, the implications of certain events are frequently slanted, to the extent that a man often will claim that wife battery happens for a suited reason, most presumably being her own fault … thereby very cunningly overturning the blame on the abused woman. Also, if this misdirected accusation is circulated within the community, the affected woman may encounter more abuse and hence is afraid to set the cycle of violence in motion that will devastate her own life the most … and of course, no victim would like to get repeatedly abused (2008).

Another commentator in *Desis against Domination* agrees with the above explanation noting how many abused South Asian women often internalize the feelings of self-blame and shame as a misdirected way to justify spousal violence:

> I completely understand what you're saying. In the case of the Bangladeshi Muslim society incidents of violence against women are also hushed up. Also, because the women feel a sense of 'shame' for the violence they themselves face … it was their fault. They are the ones to blame. Undoubtedly, this is all supported by the dictates of our very own patriarchal community (2008).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 49% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh (21%) and Muslim religions (21%), followed by the Hindu (7%), and Christian (3%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (76%) compared to males (21%), and participants whose gender remained

unidentified (3%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (59%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to Bangladesh (24%) and India (17%). No blogger and commentator made explicit or implicit reference to Pakistan while discussing the role of victim self-blame and self-sacrifice.

i. **Role of health care services and health officials**

This emergent sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators considered the help and understanding, or lack thereof, that South Asian female victims of domestic violence have received from healthcare services and medical officials. For example, a parent blogger in *Way to Wisdom* informs blog readers of the varied facilities the South Asian domestic violence services offer to abused women in the US, including easy health access:

> Sakhi has helped several South Asian women to avail of inexpensive or free physical and psychological health services, which are also available in major South Asian languages and adapted to suit the medical requirements of the victims (2011).

Contrarily, a commentator in *A Brown Battleground* admits being a victim of domestic violence who was flouted by a health official in North America:

> I am a Jain woman living in North America who was abused frequently by my spouse and when I finally approached the local health services, the health official that assisted me refused to believe me when I related what had happened (2009).

Another commentator in *A Brown Battleground* picks up on this insensitive stance that abused women from minority communities often face from health services and proposes a more ethno-culturally sensitive approach:

> …I wish that our South Asian welfare groups could organize workshops or health seminars that treat areas related to domestic violence, starting from the effects of migration, to receiving healthcare services. On this note, I made the effort to request the presiding committee members at my Indo-Christian Cultural Club and the local churches to come up with some plans to address the health related concerns that abused women from our South Asian Christian congregation often face (2008).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 55% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (18%), followed equally by the Christian (9%), Muslim (9%) and Jain (9%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (73%) compared to males (9%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (18%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (73%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (18%) and Bangladesh (9%). No blogger and commentator made explicit or implicit reference to Pakistan while discussing the role of health care services and officials.

2. **Conflict maintenance**

Emerging themes that have kept alive the major areas of dispute, negotiation and controversy throughout blog conversations dedicated to domestic violence within the South Asian immigrant group, are found to *maintain conflict* within these topical ethnic blogs. Interestingly, as evident in some findings related to this principle theme, even as parent bloggers and commentators try to create a space for shared views on these community blogs that are mostly regulated to ensure non-threatening, respectful, and sensible debate, they (read: their beliefs) often encounter individual commentators who either do not agree with the general line of

discussion, or pose a direct threat to the unwritten norm of relatively fair communication that such community blogs follow.

a. **Acknowledgement or denial of domestic violence among South Asians**

This emergent sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators discussed the South Asian immigrant community's tendency to either ignore and dismiss, or to admit that the problem of domestic violence exists and affects the female victims and those related. For instance, a commentator in *The Gurdwara Galleria* explains the apparent denial of the problem of domestic violence within the Sikh Punjabi immigrant community:

> Across numerous workshops conducted on the issue of DV, I have occasionally noticed that in spite of those attendees having the required material that is given to them on a silver platter, they still choose to reject its prevalence and how serious a problem it is in our immigrant community (2007).

Similarly, a parent blogger in *A Brown Battleground* provides a befitting response to another commentator within the blog thread who seems to refute the fact that spousal abuse is a major problem within the South Asian community, that should be addressed:

> As the moderator of this thread, I have labored intensely to ensure that this is a secure forum for debate. All the bloggers here have diligently set filters to eliminate threatening content and all kinds of unsuitable questions…moreover, we all MUST be mortified by the occurrence of such human rights violations in our Indo-Christian community. Like you, if we all also start regarding DV as fallout of some sort of 'emotional disorder' or an isolated 'abnormality', then we are doing the victims and most importantly ourselves a disservice. I just can't imagine the amount of rejection of DV that people have done in this online discussion thread via several comments from different people… we must remember that DV affects ALL, but it disturbs all societies differently…I can't even list how many women in my family were abandoned, battered, mentally tortured, unfairly deported and threatened to be murdered by their respective husbands or in laws. So please, don't attempt to deny its prevalence … you and your family may have had a close escape from this crime, and thank god for that. However, most of us have not been so fortunate, and neither will be other South Asian victims of spousal violence if our community goes in circles trying to justify and provide defenses for it (2008).

A parent blogger in the *Masala Spot* sheds light on the same kind of denial that abounds on the topic of dating violence within the South Asian diaspora:

> …Dating violence also happens within the South Asian immigrant population, and is also similarly ignored, denied, or unaddressed. Within the Pakistani diaspora, including the second-generation'ers who grew up in the US, the shame related to family, work-related and intimate partner violence has always been among the worst obstacles to getting help. I believe that the taboo topic of dating violence against women is the combined result of the migrant mentality, the model minority status, and the dearth of awareness programs and intervention services for abused Pakistani American women (2010).

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 42% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 27% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim (8%), Hindu (8%), Christian (7%), Jain (5%) and other religions (3%). No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Buddhism. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (68%) compared to males (23%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (8%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (57%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (33%), Bangladesh (7%) and Pakistan (3%).

b. **Public vs. private issue**

This emergent sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators considered the socio-cultural discourse and political

debate surrounding the issue of whether domestic violence against women is a public or private problem that should be disclosed and openly discussed within the South Asian community, or kept under wraps. For instance, in *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?* a parent blogger delineates the attitude of the South Asian immigrant community towards treating violence against women as a private problem:

> According to a Sikh-American legal advocate, DV is increasingly becoming an endemic problem among members of his population…it is a terrible societal and immoral setback that our people have not addressed in public. We know the history of its origin, which can be traced to the quintessential subjugation of Punjabi-Sikh women, but we chose to be quiet about it. He also added that certain members in the Indo-Sikh diaspora are so caught up trying to maintain their so-called clean public image that they don't admit to atrocities like DV and neither do they reach out for help for those concerned … several people within the South Asian community think that this a private problem that should be solved within domestic confines, without attracting public attention (2006).

A commentator in *A Brown Battleground* also agrees that spousal violence is rampant in the South Asian diaspora that needs to be publicized more:

> I absolutely support the view that the problem of intimate partner abuse is a major public concern within the Pakistani-American community that warrants a lot more attention and open debate (2009).

On a similar note, another parent blogger in *Where's the Garam Paratha Bahu?* touches on how this public-private dichotomy that surrounds the topic of domestic abuse is actually a smoke screen that prevents the victims from getting real justice:

> It is true that spousal abuse within the Hindu South Asian group in America is largely kept under wraps being considered a so-called 'private' problem. However one should keep in mind that it is very much a communal problem. Just from recent memory I will be able to name a handful of abused women who I know quite closely. God only knows how many more incidents of domestic violence are purposely silenced? (2006)

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme,

almost 42% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 27% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim (15%), Hindu (6%), Christian (3%), Jain (3%) and other religions (3%). No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Buddhism. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (64%) compared to males (27%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (9%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (49%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (18%), Bangladesh (9%) and Pakistan (6%).

c. **Modern/Emancipated/Masculine vs. Traditional/Colonized/Feminine**

This emergent sub-theme was implicitly or explicitly present in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators shed light on the debate posited between so-called modern 'male' freedoms (gender, economic, social, cultural, etc.) that grants women comparative emancipation in such areas, and the so-called traditional expectations that reduces women to a state of (neo-) colonial subjugation in the same areas, while giving men the upper hand. However, the irony lies in the internal contradictions of both sides of this modern/traditional debate. For example, a commentator in *The Gurdwara Galleria* plays on the feminine-masculine dispute that often complicates the gender expectations of abused Punjabi-Sikh women in the US:

> One is bound to find Indian women in America who follow the 'warrior-saint' religious teachings of Sikhism, often labeled as the strongly masculine Punjabi-Sikh 'Kaur'

> women, many of whom also seem to have a very tough time within their own homes where they are constantly humiliated and degraded. So, are we forbidden to regard them as Sikh women since they are a part of such abusive households? Must we rid them off their Sikhism because they also live in terror, shame and incarceration? Can't they be called Sikh because some members of their community have conveniently relegated them to the area of 'feminine fragilities' just because they were not able to withstand the abuse... I do agree that the idea of gender equality that Sikhism preaches is wonderful, yet the way this decree is unfairly used by the Sikh community is barely similar (2009).

A parent blogger in *The Gurdwara Galleria* attempts to theoretically explain the modern vs. traditional dichotomy that lies at the heart of understanding why such abuse takes place, and the idea that freedom is as elusive a concept for abused South Asian women, as is the so-called notion of gender equality within the Sikh diaspora.

> Through the arrival of the modern age, the techniques of abusing women became more indirect and obscure. Women have been successfully persuaded by this so-called messiah of modernism that they can be emancipated if they imbibe all aspects of masculinity. Almost as a form of neo-colonization, modernism has produced a forced subservience in women. Consequently, these women get ensnared within the spiral of gender-role swapping. On one hand, they want to show that they are equal to men in all respects, while on the other this very practice is stripping them of all the liberty and ingenuity that is inherent to the female identity… Women who live as immigrants in a Western country are especially imprisoned in this malicious spiral: Primarily, as members of ethnic-minority populations they are tremendously insecure of the controlling socio-cultural models, and also as women, they ironically seem to be in the same position as the rest of the so-called 'contemporary' and 'emancipated' women, of course liberated only to be colonized by men… Let me ask this of all of you: Which way should abused South Asian women go in that case? Should they return to their traditional roots and expectations that can often be as unfair a stance for these women as is modernism, the former with all its tried-and-tested, and the latter with all its novel forms of exploitation? (2009)

On a similar note, a parent blogger in *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?* finds fault with Hinduism's self-sacrificial ideal of deified "femininity" that the community uses to justify the abuse that Hindu women in America face at home, regarding it instead as a mythicized excuse that undermines the fact that domestic violence does take place in all known communities across the globe, no matter what their distinct cultural, social, economic, gendered or religious origins are:

> …Every time someone talks of Indian women who are abused by their husbands in western countries, almost invariably they are abstracted as these traditional and 'mother goddess-like' women whose spiritual destiny it is to be controlled and oppressed by men (not thinking for once that many of the hundreds of millions of Hindus may not even worship their female deities, let alone try to transpose them to household instances of violence against women) (2007).

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 63% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 25% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim (8%), and Hindu (4%) religions. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, around 50% of the discussion on the subject was done by females, compared to males (46%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (4%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts pertained to people of Indian origin (54%). About 33% blog data did not clearly mention the nation in question. The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to Bangladesh (13%). No blogger and commentator made explicit or implicit reference to Pakistan while debating the masculine/modern vs. feminine/traditional gender divide.

d. **Human/women's rights vs. education/literacy/other issues**

This emergent sub-theme was implicitly or explicitly present in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators touched on commonly found

philanthropic debates about soliciting support for socio-cultural causes, and for increasing awareness on the issue. As evident in certain blog excerpts, causes such as education, literacy, welfare, civil and/or social issues are often given more importance within the South Asian community than are gender and/or women's rights issues. For instance, a parent blogger in *SA 'Goodwill Mission* presents an interview with a social service advocate who works with abused women in South Asian countries as well as from the diaspora, and explains how much work has to be done to convince the community that domestic abuse is very much a human rights problem that needs to be addressed:

> I believe that within the last ten or so years the South Asian diaspora in North America is showing more inclination towards humanitarian causes, but there is still a long way to go. There are specific types of concerns and causes for which it is simpler to motivate the South Asians to donate and volunteer.
> However, it's rather difficult to mobilize this ethnic diaspora to fund and back up women's or human rights concerns contrasted to literacy and education issues. Interestingly enough, it's been simpler to receive community backing for our efforts to address domestic abuse in the South Asian countries compared to getting encouragement from the diasporic population in the US to fight for race- and immigration justice (2010).

A commentator in *The Gurdwara Galleria* explains why human rights and women's causes have not been supported enough and the potential steps that can be taken to rectify this under-concern:

> History is witness that the basic human rights of women have repeatedly been disrupted, be it through domestic violence, female feticide, or war rape. State-backed agendas in the US such as the Sikh Society Well-being Council are indispensable to the empowerment of abused women and also to give them access to their fundamental human rights (2009).

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 35% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 30% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data

pertained to narratives about the Muslim (22%), Christian (9%), and Hindu (4%) religions. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (74%) compared to males (9%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (17%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts pertained to people of Indian origin (57%). About 22% blog data did not clearly mention the nation in question. The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to Pakistan (13%) and Bangladesh (9%).

3. **Local vs. transnational debate**

Several themes have emerged from selected blog posts and comments that touch upon issues particular to the dynamics of immigration and how that impacts the prevalence of domestic abuse within the South Asian diaspora in the US, all of which can be combined under the principle theme of *local vs. transnational*. The scenario of being a female from an ethnic minority and an immigrant in a Western country who has undergone partner abuse, makes one think and talk about added dimensions such as racism, cultural distancing and altered perspectives on feminism, all of which inevitably become a part of the discourse on domestic violence within that particular ethno-cultural community.

a. **Need for cultural/linguistic sensitivity, counseling and domestic violence resources**

This emergent sub-theme was present in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators pointed to the requirements of abused South Asian women to find available resources, services and information that they may be unaware of. For example, a

commentator from *Desis against Domination* explains the need of abused Bangladeshi women in America to be aware of ethno-culturally adjusted counseling services:

> I am a Bangladeshi Muslim woman who lives in North America. I regret to state that spousal abuse is a huge issue within the immigrant Bangladeshi population here. Of course there are services and interventions offered, yet they don't seem to be availing those. Why? Because, they believe that western-centric help providers will not understand their language, their customs and their problems… You can find many affected women with physical and mental problems, but what they don't know is that they are fallouts of their abuse… Thanks a lot for at least shedding light on the need for these ethnic women to reach out (2008).

Explicit and implicit references were made to a victim's or advocate's need for cultural, religious and /or linguistic sensitivity from law enforcement, shelters and services, and advocates from different backgrounds. In the same vein, a commentator in *A Brown Battleground* explains:

> …Several times it is seen that broad-based DV services in the US don't carry either the amenities, or the staff which will be able to address the various cultural, linguistic, social, economic and religious concerns that lots of South Asian immigrant women may have as a result of being abused by their spouses (2009).

In answer, a parent blogger from another thread in *A Brown Battleground* delineates the collective attempt of a number of online and offline advocacy groups that are assembling a political agenda that may help to find extensive help from various South Asian American publics:

> - Provide funding for agendas that are intended to tackle and block violence against women within the South Asian diaspora.
> - Create and maintain programs for South Asian women survivors of spousal abuse, which offer language appropriate and ethno-culturally adapted services (2008).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 46% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog

data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (33%), followed equally by the Muslim (13%), Hindu (6%) and Jain (2%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Christianity, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (63%) compared to males (23%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (15%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (67%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (23%), Pakistan (6%) and Bangladesh (4%).

b. **Racial marginalization and profiling**

This emergent sub-theme was present in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators uncovered the racial stereotypes and ethnic marginalization that still exists against communities of color including South Asians in the US, thereby compounding the problem of domestic violence against women of this racial minority. For example, a commentator in *A Brown Battleground* argues passionately against the internal (intra-community) and external (host nation's) racial profiling that intensifies the problem for abused South Asian women in North America:

> I am not saying that DV is not a major human rights violation that plagues my Indo-Jain community or for that matter any other culture, because I know that if our community refuses to address the issue, it will refuse many of the people that I have personally known the fair scope to escape a violent household. However, I absolutely detest the racial stereotyping that is done around this topic, which is completely inappropriate and actually multiplies the abuse faced by these ethnically marginalized women (2009).

Explicit and implicit references were made to racial profiling done by law enforcement, added stringency about immigration, increased apprehensions of people of color and of a lower SES, growth of state policies that legitimize and institutionalize racial profiling against Islamic and

South Asian populations in the US, as well as the prevalence of internal caste based racism (intra-communal differences that sometimes work to ostracize certain members from within the community). For instance, a parent blogger in *Masala Spot* mentions the work done by Arizona South Asians For Safe Families (ASAFSF) and the Muslim American Society (MAS) to combat increasing racism in the state of Arizona ever since the enactment of the SB 1070 law that randomly, and often repressively profiles people to show proof of legal status:

> ASAFSF tries to help legally dependent South Asian women, several of whom are domestic violence survivors, and who may be considered for residential visas via legal channels such as asylum measures, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), and the Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA). For this reason, the ASAFSF and MAS are majorly troubled with the passing of SB 1070 since they fears that their employees may be tried for aiding the women they help in getting legal and health-related support. Moreover, they also fear that their clients will be scared to report their spousal abuse because of the way they look, their accented and restricted knowledge of English, all of which could very well lead to further political persecution and police interrogation related to their immigrant status in this country, not to mention increasing their chances of more domestic violence (2010).

On a similar note, another parent blogger in *Masala Spot* notes how our current political context is marred with increasing immigrant-xenophobia and the resounding impact that it is has had on several South Asian survivors of domestic abuse, particularly those belonging to the Islamic and Sikh faiths:

> With the growth of national policies that legalize and institutionalize racism against South Asian and Islamic societies … the women belonging to these ethno-religious groups are constantly expected to defend and maintain the communal image (especially, in the current context of external racial profiling of Pakistani Muslim males as being 'aggressive' 'fundamentalists' 'the adversary' etc.), all the time attempting to keep quiet about their the gendered-racism and violence that they encounter indoors (2010).

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 44% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh

community. About 20% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Christian (12%), Muslim (8%), Jain (8%) and Hindu (8%) religions. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, about 36% of the discussion on the subject was done most by males, compared to females (32%) and participants whose gender remained unidentified (32%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (52%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (40%) and Pakistan (8%). No blogger and commentator made explicit or implicit reference to Bangladesh while discussing the ills of racism and ethnic profiling.

c. **White/colonial vs. colored/post-colonial feminisms**

This emergent sub-theme was present in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators upheld the debate between the *white* feminist movement that stresses solely on gender equality (understood in most cases as the success of the first/second wave, western, neo-colonial, middle class feminist ideology) versus the *colored* or *post-colonial* feminist movement (understood in most cases as the success of the third wave, indigenous, post-colonial, peripheral feminist ideology) that questions the homogenizing, gender-equality focused tendency of white feminism, turning instead toward diversity, and often observing how feminism has failed to include women of color. For instance, in *Masala Spot*, a Pakistani-American advocate blogs about the debate surrounding possible punitive options for abusive South Asian men that essentially divides the argument into two distinct feminist camps:

> …Compulsory rules for arresting DV perpetrators were set in action for last many decades, of course mostly by benevolent first wave feminist supporters, who in all probability had good relations with the law enforcement people because of their white-bourgeois status. However, many third wave feminists have argued against these kind of homogenizing intervention measures, exposing how this 'mandatory arrest' policy has done more harm than benefit to abused women from various ethnic diasporas in the US, first, by ensuring many more apprehensions of colored minorities, immigrants and people of lower SES, secondly, by leading to a decrease in asking for help, and finally, by victims refusing to call the authorities fearing that it would result in capture (2010).

Similarly, a commentator in *A Brown Battleground* appeals for a more culturally adapted definition of domestic abuse, one that does not fall into the white-colonial feminist paradigm:

> The main fact that I am concerned with is the creation of well defined and ethno-culturally shaped explanations of what DV is, and the knowledge that South Asian feminisms differ substantially from Western-centric ones, the former also having evolved into more diverse, post-colonial versions (2009).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 37% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime was either unidentified, or pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (37%). From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim (16%) and Hindu (11%) religions. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, about 42% of discussion on the subject was done most by males, compared to females (26%) and participants whose gender remained unidentified (32%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts pertained to people of Indian origin (42%). About 37% blog data did not clearly mention the nation in

question. The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made equal references to Pakistan (11%) and Bangladesh (11%).

4. **Consciousness creation**

Through discursive participation, marginalized communities have often created awareness about factors that lead to their oppression. As evident in the emergent themes that make up the principle theme of *consciousness creation*, bloggers and commentators seem to be creating consensus by making others within the South Asian blogging community conscious of the various forms and types of domestic violence that are perpetrated on women. The thematic findings also reveal how these bloggers are attempting to raise awareness of the impact and interventions of/for domestic abuse, first, by promoting the idea of external outreach for furthering its cause, and second, by shedding light on how the South Asian immigrant community in the US underreports such abuse.

a. **Raising consciousness**

This emergent sub-theme was present in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators were found to praise the creation of consciousness and increased awareness, by/among victims, activists, community, law enforcement and advocates/services, about the prevalence of domestic violence within the South Asian diaspora. For instance, a parent blogger in *SA 'Goodwill Mission* applauds the work that is being done by an Indian-American activist of violence against women, to raise awareness about domestic abuse on a global scale:

> Groundbreak is a South Asian human rights association based in India and USA that has made use of new media, and popular culture outreach to increase consciousness about several social justice causes including anti-racism, women's rights, illegal immigration and AIDS. The CEO and president of this organization is also an active member of Sakhi, a service shelter for abused South Asian women based in New York. She is indeed an

> exceptional humanitarian and an ideal community exemplar for spreading awareness about DV and getting the community involved (2010).

A commentator in *The Gurdwara Galleria* commends the efforts of the Sikh activist community in North America for organizing a gender-issues conference that brought to light several taboo areas, including that of domestic violence:

> Very recently, I was one of the attendees at the North American-Sikh Conference on gender identity and it was completely eye opening. I really liked the fact that hitherto unspoken issues were being frankly discussed and also believed that it was rather cathartic to be able to finally talk about topics like the immigrant Sikh woman's status and her silenced experiences of spousal abuse (2012).

On a similar note, another commentator in *The Gurdwara Galleria* seconds the need for more awareness to be created around the emotional effects of spousal and intimate partner violence that primarily perpetrates sexual abuse, within the Sikh diaspora:

> I believe that we should not only raise consciousness about the physical and sexual violence that Sikh men are perpetrating on their wives/partners, but we also have to verify that the Sikh immigrant community fully comprehends what victims of violence actually go through from every aspect. Voices have to be raised much more to address the emotional toll that these horrific instances have on abused women. Our Sikh community must fathom that the psychosomatic problems that domestic violence creates will perhaps haunt the victim her entire life. Perhaps, in that scenario, our people will finally begin to understand how existent and pathetic sexual violence within the Sikh diaspora is (2007).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 37% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (35%), followed by the Muslim (12%), Christian (8%), Hindu (6%) and Jain (2%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (66%) compared to males (22%), and participants whose gender remained

unidentified (12%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (46%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (43%), Bangladesh (9%) and Pakistan (2%).

b. **Forms, types and statistics of South Asian domestic violence**

This emergent sub-theme was present in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators exposed the different forms, types, and figures related to the occurrence of domestic violence cases in the South Asian immigrant community, including the ones that had been reported or not reported, an example of which can be seen in the following parent post from *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?:*

> As per a South Asian community survey conducted in Southeast Michigan, "It is estimated that about one in four South Asian women in the U.S. experiences domestic violence" [Link provided]. This study done by the University of Michigan's School of Social Work also found:
> 64% SA women agree that DV does take place in their community
> 54% said that they themselves or some other South Asian they know has faced DV
> Of those who knew a DV victim/survivor, the bulk (71%) mentioned that they had spoken about the problem with the survivor(s). Of those who had not, they mentioned their motivation for not talking about it as:
> • "It's taboo to speak about it."
> • They said that did not feel "comfortable" as they didn't know the survivor very closely.
> • They did not think it was their prerogative to "get involved" in another's "personal matters."
> The study also revealed results of some other reasons that resulted in a general tendency to underreport DV instances that happen within this ethnic community in the US:
> "What barriers do South Asian survivors of domestic violence face when seeking help?"
> • 66% mentioned "Shame"
> • 61% mentioned "Fear"
> • 60% mentioned "Family Honor"
> • 46% mentioned "Family Reaction"
> • 42% mentioned "Effects on Children"
> • 33% mentioned "Financial Limitations"
> • 34% mentioned "Lack of Legal Knowledge"
> "What are the causes of domestic violence?"
> • 70% mentioned "Male Dominance"

> Some other reasons mentioned included disrespect for partner/spouse, tension within family, monetary stress, and seeing DV as a child [Link provided] (2006).

Explicit or implicit references were made to various physical (hitting, pulling, pushing, punching, bruising, kicking, boxing, breaking limbs/bones, tearing, burning, strangling, homicide/murder), sexual (rape, sexual torture, etc), mental (immigration related threats, threats of abduction/harm to self and children/family, etc.), and verbal (insults, threats related to life, money, family, food) kinds of abuse against South Asian women. For instance, a parent blogger in *Masala Spot* reveals dating violence within the South Asian community in the US as a growing form of abuse, along with a listing of its symptoms and potential interventions:

> Our community should also focus on the growing trend in dating violence among the South Asian young adults. Can you all suggest ways in which this form of intimate partner violence can be addressed? Try to keep watch for cautionary symptoms of dating violence that you or someone you know may be in:
> - Life-threatening possessiveness
> - Seclusion from family, friends and/or colleagues
> - Monitoring the partner's finances and spending habits
> - Abusing (physical, mental, emotional, sexual, verbal, etc.) partner at home or outside
> - Dishonoring/insulting/threatening and distrusting the partner
>
> You should support this cause, warn anyone who may be going through this and encourage them to make others aware of the different types of IPV that there can be and request specialized help from DV services (2010).

In *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?* another parent blogger discloses different kinds of abusive treatments of Indian immigrant women by their partners/husbands:

> A battered Sikh woman who is secretly seeking help from a South Asian DV shelter mentions that abusive spouses don't let them attend supportive sessions as another form of perpetrating violence. She also said that South Asian immigrant women who are legally dependent on their spouses are incarcerated in every way, as they are not supposed to keep any social contact or even get employment so that they can be financially self-sufficient … she's very afraid of what else is in store as there are so many types of abuse that husbands use that people in our community have no idea of (2006).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an

observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 36% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (30%), followed by the Muslim (15%), Hindu (9%), Christian (8%), and Jain (3%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (79%) compared to males (10%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (10%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (48%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (37%), Bangladesh (10%) and Pakistan (5%).

c. **Issue of underreporting domestic violence cases**

This emergent sub-theme was present in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators exposed the problem of underreporting cases of domestic violence against South Asian women as one of the primary reasons that the problem stays unnoticed or unaddressed, as evidenced in the following parent post from *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?:*

> DV within the South Asian diaspora is also not an often-reported crime in the US because many times the abused women remain quiet about it. Several muted stories are of South Asian women who have been physically, verbally, emotionally, psychologically, and sexually exploited by their husbands. Several are silenced because they fear their family's and community's reactions. These abused women feel mentally and materially helpless. They neither have the economic nor the social means to take themselves away from this abusive and horrific domestic condition. Many times, when these women have children, it becomes much harder to leave… Not to mention the other forces that incarcerate them: the cultural taboo of separating or divorcing their spouse, the socially unheard practice of raising their kids in a single parent household, and lots of other problems (2006).

Explicit or implicit references were made to different ways in which marital abuse is overlooked including the abused woman's prerogative to defend her husband/in laws, her family's reluctance to expose the crime for preserving family 'honor,' and/or the larger community's denial of the problem to maintain the South Asian community's model minority image, an instance of which can be found in the following comment from *A Brown Battleground:*

> As far as I know, the issue of marital rape is not an accepted crime within Muslim communities the world over. I believe that figures in the US on the prevalence of marital rape as a form of domestic abuse against Muslim women of South Asian descent also reflect similar findings, justifying why there is so much communal underreporting of this form of violence against women here (2009).

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 40% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 25% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data equally pertained to narratives about the Muslim (10%), Jain (10%), other (10%) and Christian (5%) religions. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Buddhism and Hinduism. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (80%) compared to males (10%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (10%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts pertained to people of Indian origin (55%). About 35% blog data did not clearly mention the nation in question. The remaining posts and comments explicitly or

implicitly made references to Bangladesh (10%). No blogger and commentator made explicit or implicit reference to Pakistan while discussing the issue of underreporting domestic abuse cases.

d. **Media, external and educational outreach**

This emergent sub-theme was present in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators wrote about recent outreach attempts like the use of various physical, multi- and new-media channels to further awareness, workshops and conferences to help encourage activism, and educational tools to reach out to victims in need and sensitize all those concerned within the South Asian community about the ills of this human rights abuse. For instance, a parent blogger in *SA 'Goodwill Mission* describes the media and educational outreach that is being done by certain South Asian philanthropic organizations to create awareness around several human rights issues:

> Groundbreak's approach is to produce progressive media on several social injustices and humanitarian causes. It has been done in the shape of campaigns using multimedia and social networking channels to address issues like women's rights and HIV concerns, or even by mobilizing men folk to challenge the prevalence of domestic abuse. They have even created online videogames that draw attention to the issue of unfair political expulsion of immigrants within the US. Moreover, we sincerely try to educate the South Asian community, both back home and in the US, on taking a stand against human rights violations (2010).

Another parent blogger in *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?* informs readers of the counseling and educational outreach that is being done by certain South Asian religious societies to create awareness around domestic violence:

> Philanthropic centers like certain local women's social service organizations have a very long wait-time for helping those women who have been abused at home…so, many of the volunteers are currently doing outreach workshops at the local Hindu temples and during several South Asian socio-cultural events…
> The problem is that the abused woman's terror at the reaction of her marital family, their own relatives, and the so-called *samaj* [society], along with the fear that she has nothing to fall back on being a legal dependent of her spouse are all areas that our community members should be educated about (2006).

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 50% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 40% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim (8%) and Hindu (3%) religions. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (76%) compared to males (18%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (15%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (53%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (42%) and Bangladesh (5%). No blogger and commentator made explicit or implicit reference to Pakistan while discussing the role played by media, education and outreach in the case of domestic abuse against South Asian immigrant women.

5. **Change and action contemplation**

When knowledge and awareness of certain detrimental conditions, such as domestic abuse are increased, people sometimes contemplate changes in outlook and action as a way to progress towards altering either their own behavior as victims/survivors of abuse, or that of others by acting as empowering agents. As evident in the emergent themes that make up the principle theme of *contemplating change and action*, many bloggers and commentators seem to

be mobilizing people at the community level to get involved and/or at the individual level to take action, which includes empowering the desire for change and self-reevaluation, the potential for increased justice and equality measures, more intervention and safety options for abused women, as well as making batterers accountable for their abusive behavior.

a. **Acting for change, self-reevaluation, progress and empowerment**

This emergent sub-theme was present in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators referred to a volunteer's, an advocate's or even another blogger' s empowering initiative for changing the state of domestic violence prevalence or perpetration. It also refers to blog instances where a victim/survivor is seen to contemplate steps towards self-reevaluating her identity/situation, actively changing, and/or even spreading initial awareness about the need for change, progress and empowerment, all of which can be found in the following parent post in *The Gurdwara Galleria* that describes the efforts of a South Asian American survivor of abuse, who not only rediscovered herself through artistic expression, but did the same for other South Asian victims of domestic violence:

> Her canvases have become an "open" space for the communication of her previously "unspoken" feelings from her pre-divorced and post-marital separation phases. Once her horrific tryst with an abusive husband and equally sadistic in-laws resulted in divorce… In fact, a wonderful painting called the "Ring of faith" is a powerful symbol that only women can empower other women who have undergone similar abuse. A particularly extensive painting known as "Healing Discourses through Cities and Villages" raises the active need for group communication sessions that should be more readily accessible for the many people who are suffering silently. Several of her canvases exhibit valued messages from the primary Sikh book of religious teachings, most of which have helped her to re-evaluate her life and take the eventual decision to move away from all the violence … through her creative pursuits for progress, she has become an empowering role model for other abused Sikh American women. Even after facing so much abuse, her motto has always been, "Do not criticize, and do not justify, simply act" (2009).

Similarly, on a community level, a commentator in *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?* provides quantitative corroboration to the work being done by certain South Asian CBOs in the diaspora

to address domestic abuse and to provide welcoming arms to those victims who need protection, and also to start the process of de-stigmatizing this issue and making active change:

> Great to find that the South Asian American community is supporting and mobilizing around the issue of domestic violence. Sakhi for South Asian Women in New York has seen a substantial increase in the number of help-line calls for reporting instances of DV within the last few years, to be precise a tripling of call volume from 201 in 2001 to 727 in 2007. Of course, this number does not necessarily signify an increase in the frequency of DV in the South Asian immigrant community, but rather indicates that this ethnic minority is better able to fathom what DV is, the fact that it should be reported to the correct disciplinary authorities, and the self-realization that one has to find a way out of violence and into a safe and progressive space… It's obvious that we all should take action as a community to stop this human rights violation against women (2008).

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 41% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 31% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim (17%), Hindu (6%) and Christian (5%) religions. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (69%) compared to males (13%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (19%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (59%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (25%), Bangladesh (11%) and Pakistan (6%).

b. **Community and individual involvement, image and identity**

This emergent sub-theme was present in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators commented on the individual's or the South Asian community's involvement within the area of domestic violence against women. Specifically, this sub-theme could refer to the offline and online community's activism, or even an individuals' involvement in creating identity, and supporting the issue (financially and philanthropically). A commentator's post from *Desis against Domination* applauds the effort made by a fellow South Asian victim of domestic abuse to counter it, who in turn, also discloses her own painful experiences, expresses her brave stand as a survivor-advocate, and also exposes the duplicity inherent in the Bangladeshi immigrant community's alleged sanctified 'image':

> Congratulations! I admire your courage for speaking up against the abuse you faced. I know how you feel, as I myself am a highly educated career woman originally from Bangladesh who also had the courage to get a separation from her abusive husband. I have also faced the wrath of my so-called prominent, traditional and prejudiced rich family on getting a divorce, so I DO know how culturally 'forbidden' and socially 'shameful' a subject it is for the so-called sophisticated highborn Bangladeshi diaspora to admit, not to mention that the abuse is as much psychological, implicit and obviously undeclared (2008).

Similarly, a parent blogger in *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?* delineates the work being done by several South Asian-American CBOs to rally for a 'one policy platform' that will help support various social and human justice issues within the ethnic-immigrant context, including domestic violence against women:

> Questions can be raised as to whether South Asian American reformists and extremists should settle for 1) activism based on identity or 2) activism based on issue, or 3) activism based on ideology, including if the causes they adopt should be executed in a 1) unified way or a 2) distributed fashion. However, in real life, actively fighting for a cause doesn't end up being a black or white area… In reality, all these South Asian activists, as their policy platform makes apparent, have to tackle millions of intersectionalities, the same way as the ones suffering have to face a plethora of intersectional violations (2008).

Explicit or implicit references were made to the community's or concerned individual's attempts at either alleviating and encouraging anti-violence ideology, awareness, and campaigns, or even at downplaying the problem in order to maintain an image of communal sanctity, as is evident in the following post by a parent blogger in *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?*

> DV in the North American society is overall a very grave issue. However, that said, I also believe that disclosure of such abuse is more repressed within the South Asian ethnic community here. Also because of this suppression, instances of DV keep on happening. Generally, the problem of DV is consigned to some areas of human rights activism to tackle, such as non-profit organizations, safe homes, and various advocacy programs. However, these are but surface level remedies of the problem. We have to keep in mind that the general mindset about domestic abuse is more deeply grounded within the community's efforts to keep hidden anything that will taint its image. So, at a time when the victim is struggling to keep her identity from getting obliterated, when all she wants is to be safe and away from more abuse, at that moment she will neither have the time nor the energy to think about how far-reaching, community-based interventions can be affected. The time to act will be right then and there, and hence change has to come from each individual (2006).

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 47% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 36% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Hindu (7%), Christian (7%) and Muslim (3%) religions. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (60%) compared to males (22%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (17%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the

blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (61%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (33%), Bangladesh (3%) and Pakistan (3%).

c. **Justice and equality measures**

This emergent sub-theme was present in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators commented on possible punishment options for the perpetrator/s of domestic violence. This sub-theme also refers to justice measures sought for the South Asian female victims of spousal violence such as rights to gender, social, cultural, and economic equality. For instance, a parent blogger in *South Asian Bloggers Forum* directs our attention to alternative punitive measures that could be used to hold abusive South Asian husbands responsible for their violent actions:

> Even though I have theoretically been involved in advocating against DV within the South Asian diaspora, there is something I wasn't aware of till practically coming into the field: to apprehend an Indian woman's violent husband during the heat of the incident can actually worsen the situation for the wife.
> Instead, (and also to the surprise of many senior police officers) law officials in the US are now being increasingly asked to resort to a *no-abuse mandate* that is used as an arrest alternative, and it functions like a warning to the perpetrator by informing him that if the violence does not cease, then the cops are likely to get even more intensely involved to restore justice. According to a senior law enforcement official most DV training stresses on the importance of mandatory arrest. However, in accordance with many South Asian CBO initiatives, he also concurs that it may not be the best or the culturally appropriate option, and he also understands why an abused Indian wife may not like this justice option (2008).

Explicit or implicit references were made to restorative, punitive or some other form of justice for the victim of marital abuse in quite a few blog posts and comments, an example of which can be found in the following parent post from *Masala Spot*:

> In that case, please offer some justice options for women who have been wronged. Also in what ways can we hold responsibility as a conscientious community, separate from what the law's punitive measures will be for the violent behavior related to South Asian patriarchy, male-hegemony, and the inflexible creation of gender inequality? I have

> known of a few ground-breaking instances of diasporic groups acting in unison to ensure the DV survivor/victim's safety, engage in the fight for equality, and also encourage batterer liability. It should be mentioned that a few of these instances are grounded in Transformative and Restorative Justice measures. South Asian community based services that use these equality and justice measures are dispersed throughout the US, in most major urban centers, and more work is being done in these areas to make certain that these recuperative measures are appropriate for addressing DV problems among the South Asian and Islamic population, as they badly require innovative solutions to battle this long-standing crime (2010).

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 35% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator either pertained to the Sikh community, or did not clearly mention the religious following in question (35%). From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim (15%), Hindu (10%) and Christian (5%) religions. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (63%) compared to males (20%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (18%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (55%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (33%), Pakistan (8%) and Bangladesh (5%).

d. **Intervention and safety measures for abused women**

This emergent sub-theme was present in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators informed readers of the existence (or lack thereof) of critical interventions and safety plans for abused South Asian women in the US. A commentator

in *Indo-American Inquisitors* provides very useful information, using supportive facts from the Domestic Violence Act (2006) to let survivors and readers know of the possible steps to take to ensure safety:

> It is probably common sense that an abused woman must absolutely lodge a complaint with the law officials, immediately get medical help, after which she should request an order of protection or a restraining order against her abusive partner to be put up for court appeal:
> In fact, all this information that I'm providing here is a simple summary of facts that are stated in the DVA:
> "(1) There shall be a section at every police station which shall, where practically possible, be staffed by at least one police officer with relevant expertise in domestic violence, victim friendly or other family-related matters.
> (2) A police officer to whom a complaint of domestic violence is made or who investigates any such complaint shall-- (a) obtain for the complainant, or advise the complainant how to obtain, shelter or medical treatment, or assist the complainant in any other suitable way; (b) advise the complainant of the right to apply for relief under this Act and the right to lodge a criminal complaint: Provided that, where a complainant so desires, the statement of the nature of the domestic violence suffered by the complainant shall be taken by a police officer of the same sex as that of the complainant.
> (3) A complainant who is not satisfied with the services of a police officer to whom he or she has reported a case of domestic violence shall have the right to register a complaint in accordance with any procedure prescribed for that purpose under section 19"
> …Abused women should do everything possible to create their own safety plans (2007).

Explicit or implicit references were made to the need for crisis intervention, including continuing emotional comfort, support groups conducted in regional South Asian languages, obtaining bona fide legal representation, receiving health services, civic benefits, and free or low cost housing. Blog excerpts also showed evidence of the need for safety measures for abused women such as police protection from violent husbands/partners, supervised visitations, translation aid during court hearings, culturally-sensitized healthcare visits, etc. For example, a Pakistani-American commentator in *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?* suggests potential interventions and safety measures that fellow victims of domestic abuse may resort to:

> You have described your experiences of abuse in a way that it seems that you have been trapped and controlled, and I personally know the type of violence that you are talking about… I would like to know if you have directly approached the lawyers or if you went

> through any DV organization? Because, if you haven't, then the South Asian CBOs may be able to provide you with a safe house to be in temporarily, or be able to provide you with the correct interventions. Also, did you find help to get a divorce or legally apply to get a part of his assets that you would be entitled to? (2007).

A parent blogger in *Way to Wisdom* informs readers and those interested of the work being done by South Asian community-based organizations (CBOs) in the US to create ethno-culturally appropriate interventions for women from this community who are victims of domestic abuse:

> Luckily, CBOs like Apna Ghar, Sakhi, ASHA, etc. offer specific assistances for South Asian immigrant women, including crisis intervention, continuing emotional support groups, regularly scheduled support sessions in regional South Asian languages like Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Gujarati, Urdu, etc., support to access bona fide legal help, aid in approaching medical services, welfare benefits, and safe temporary housing, along with CBO/court appointed translation support during hearings, accompaniments during healthcare appointments, during public aids, welfare organizations and visitations. Even by possessing the knowledge that there is a safe place that you can access when you're trying to escape a violent situation, and also a supporter who is listening to you and helping you, will be the biggest intervention you can get.
> These CBOs also do outstanding work to help DV victims/survivors to become economically independent (2011).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 49% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (30%), followed by the Muslim (16%), Christian (3%), and other (3%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (62%) compared to males (19%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (19%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime,

narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (60%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (27%), Bangladesh (11%) and Pakistan (3%).

e. **Batterer accountability and intervention**

This emergent sub-theme was present in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators referred to the acknowledgement, or denial of accountability to batterers who commit spousal abuse. This sub-theme also includes references to the need for batterer interventions and possible physiological or social counseling for understanding the circumstances in which such violence takes place. Domestic violence is often ascribed to other reasons such as SES, alcohol and drug abuse, family or social history, and so on, allusions to which were made explicitly or implicitly in certain blog excerpts, either in agreement or in contradiction. For instance, a commentator in *Desis against Domination* explains the environmental factors and personality traits that may explain a batterer's propensity for wife-abuse:

> There are various social and individual dynamics that can lead to spousal abuse among South Asians, and interventions to address batterers should be accordingly created. Amid the social factors, those that top the list are a predisposition to physical battery, financial need, dowry from wife's family, and unstable legal status, all of which may be compounded by low SES, divorce and re-marriage, meddlesome in-laws and/or abusive family history. Some other reasons could be (a) an aggressive personality of the man that makes him angry over little things, such as, if his wife did not make and serve fresh, hot meals every day, or if she did not do what she was asked to do; (b) doubting his wife's loyalty to him; (c) inability to see his wife being financially or socially independent; (d) threatening his spouse to do debauched or sexually unspeakable things, and (e) committing adultery himself. Alcoholism and problems of gambling are also seen as possible grounds for domestic violence in many cases. In a recent study that surveyed abused South Asian immigrant women in North America, many respondents have admitted that their husbands often battered their wives after being inebriated, or after losing a bet [Link to the study]…About half the sample of participants indicated that their husband's adultery was one of the major problems that led to instances of violence. The results showed that infidelity was more predominant among South Asian families of a lower SES… However, it can also be true that infidelity is also quite present among

> immigrant families of a higher SES, but may be underreported owing to the humiliation it may cause to this model minority (2008).

Contrarily, a commentator in *A Brown Battleground* drives a nail through these socio-psychological excuses for domestic abuse, as the ones delineated above, arguing that these attempts to contextually theorize the act of battery actually takes away from batterer accountability and serves to justify the abuse:

> All advocates of DV can undoubtedly state that DV is not a result of psychological disorder ("the batterer was mad"), lack of rational senses ("he could not control it"), distrust, something his wife did to anger him ("the wife is to blame"), substance abuse, alcoholism, social conditioning, witnessing family abuse from childhood, or any other JUSTIFICATION that our so-called righteous community uses to save its honor. DV is a conscious decision made by a perpetrator to be intimidating, aggressive and dictatorial over the actions of his/her partner, so that he/she can exert power and control over their lives…achieved through the use of bodily, sexual, spiritual, verbal, emotional, psychological, financial, informative, health-related and/or other tactics.
> The first, second and currently even young adults of the third generation of South Asian immigrants in the US have been both the perpetrators of DV, as well as the susceptible victims...To this end, many of our active community members, including local South Indian Churches have conducted seminars on intimate partner abuse during various South Asian religious and cultural events. It is true that most of the community members keep quiet about this issue, but talking about it will be the only way to give justice to the abused women. Please, I urge you all to undo the 'model community' myth, give batterers' the accountability for their violent behavior, help the victims to get justice, do not maintain silence and openly discuss it in public forums, and most importantly educate our future generations about the damages caused by this human rights aberration (2008).

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 37% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 17% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim (23%), Christian (20%) and Hindu (3%), religions. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism and other

religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator about 54% of the discussion on the subject was done by females, compared to males (31%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (14%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, the majority of the blog excerpts pertained to people of Indian origin (43%). About 34% blog data did not clearly mention the nation in question. The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to Bangladesh (23%). No blogger and commentator made explicit or implicit reference to Pakistan while discussing the issue of batterer accountability and intervention.

B. Summary

By using the second research question as one of the main guiding principles of this study, I was able to locate, define and describe the nature of blog-generated themes on the master topic of domestic violence against South Asian immigrant women in the US. The thematic breakdown of this core topic yielded interesting results that led to a further categorization of 25 emergent sub-themes into five major thematic areas that seemed to be invariably present in all ten sampled South Asian blogs. This finding indicates that although these community blogs had their own discursive specificities and unique expectations of participation, all of them were bound by certain common attitudes and a sense of shared community for the ways in which they addressed the topic, as well as the disregard they displayed for insensitive dissenters and those who posed a threat to the overall altruistic equilibrium of the discussions. However, for the bloggers and commentators to establish their topical stronghold as a single community of believers within the South Asian blogosphere, they probably need to heighten their networks of inter-connection with other South Asian general interest blogs that discuss the said issue with similar passion and commitment, initial evidence of which has already been found in this study.

Although indication of the emergent typology of domestic violence-related themes was found in each of the ten selected blogs, there appeared to be a difference in the degree of topical participation between bloggers and commentators among them. For instance, *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?*, *Desis against Domination* and *The Gurdwara Galleria* yielded the maximum number of sub-themes pertaining to this research query, while *Indo-American Inquisitors* and *The Chapati Society* yielded the least number of conversations with respect to the emergent typology of domestic violence related sub-themes. Across the sample, the most discussed sub-themes relating to the second research question have been the 'Role of Marriage, Gender Norms, Patriarchy and Power/Privilege,' followed closely by the 'Role of Culture, History and Society,' while the least discussed sub-themes for this part of the finding have been the issues of 'White/Colonial vs. Colored/Post-Colonial Feminism' and 'The Role of Health Care Services and Officials,' among others. Also, majority of individual parent posts and comments ended up being coded into multiple sub-themes relating to domestic abuse against South Asian women, thereby demonstrating the presence of thematic intersectionality in most discrete data items. There were as many as 36 blog instances where two particular sub-themes related to the second research question were found to intersect, and as little as one instance of two sub-themes co-occurring. As an example, the sub-theme 'Immigrants, immigrant-status and immigration related issues,' was found to intersect with the sub-theme 'Forms, types and statistics of South Asian domestic violence' in as many as 32 post/comment excerpts, while the sub-theme 'Victim self-blame, shame, sacrifice and fear' was found to intersect with the sub-theme 'Human/women's rights vs. education/literacy/other issues' in only one blog comment excerpt.

Finally, the examples of blog posts and comments provided in this chapter have been paraphrased in order to maintain anonymity. However, in a few instances the names of certain

South Asian community based organizations in the US, as well as data related to some published statistics/facts have not been changed as they may prove to be helpful material for readers, and also because they are considered accessible information meant for public knowledge and welfare. As an added privacy measure, each paraphrased blog excerpt was searched online using Google to make sure that it does not conform to the web address from which it was originally obtained. It is true that the act of paraphrasing partially takes away from the original intention of the quote. However, to remain true to the intended meaning of the sampled data all blog excerpts were coded in their unaltered format using the QDA application, and only the ones cited as illustrations in this study were paraphrased post-analysis.

VI. FINDINGS III

In this chapter, I will name the principle themes and sub-themes identified for the third and final major pattern found, define them suitably and describe them in detail, while closely adhering to the study's guiding research questions. I will also provide appropriate examples from data items that relate to each of the identified emergent themes.

The final pattern "Consequences and Uses of Blogging" includes the findings related to the third research question "Do the selected South Asian blog posts and comments show evidence of 'awareness of the consequences of this new way of communicating via blogs'? In other words, in what ways do bloggers and commentators use these blogs to narrate their experiences about the issue of domestic violence?" The following sections of the chapter will define, explain and provide examples for all three principle thematic uses and consequences of blogging that have been identified for this study, including (1) creating awareness, (2) forming community, and (3) expressing opinion and identity.

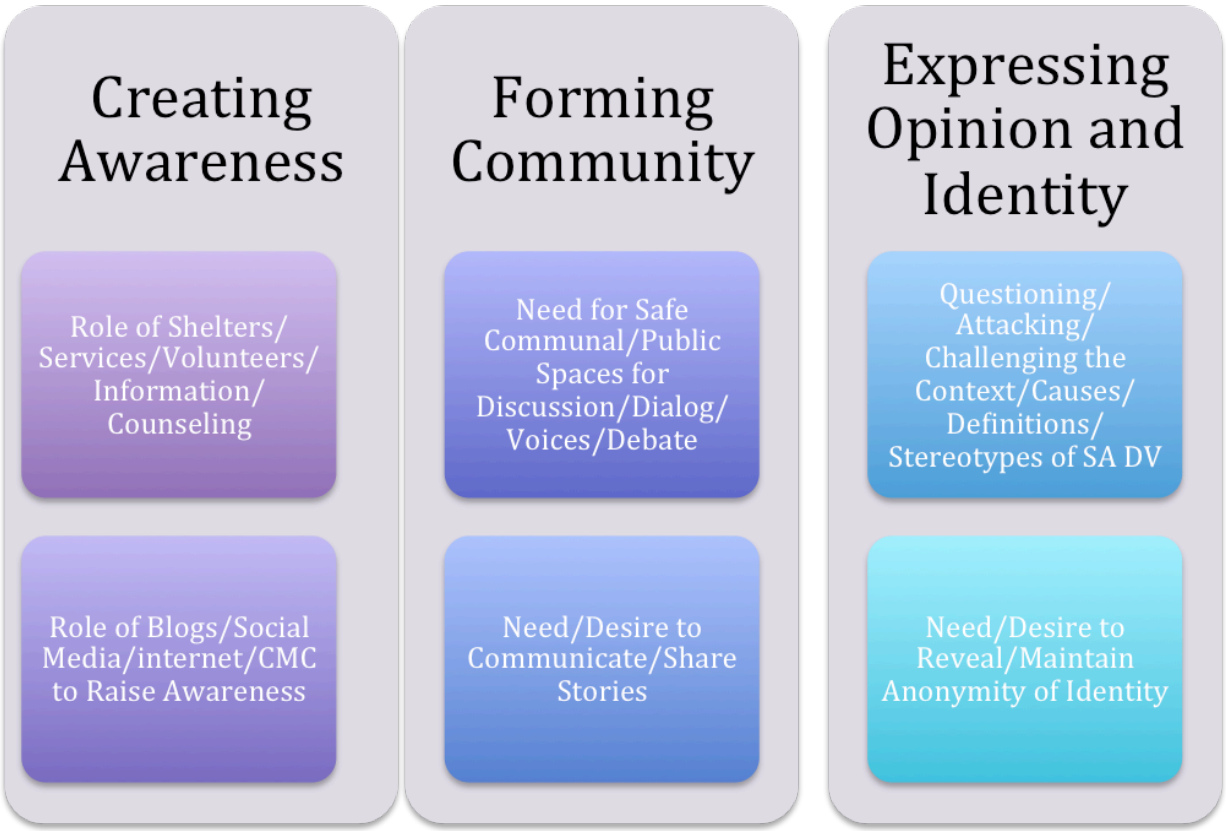
A. Consequences and Uses of Blogging

In response to the second research question, I looked for themes that related to the various uses of blogs by the bloggers and commentators, and/or evidence of any implicit or explicit awareness of the consequences of blogging through their participation in the sampled discussion threads. Correspondingly, parent blog posts and comments were coded into six sub-themes that primarily emerged from a close reading of the blog data, including (a) Role of Shelters, Services, Volunteers, Information and Counseling, (b) Role of Blogs, Social Media, Internet and CMC to Raise Awareness, (c) Need/Desire to Communicate and Share Stories, (d) Need for Safe Communal/Public Spaces for Discussion, Dialog, Voices and Debate, (e)

Questioning, Attacking and Challenging the Context, Causes, Definitions and /or Stereotypes of South Asian Domestic Violence, and the (f) Need/Desire to Reveal or Maintain Anonymity of Identity. These emergent categories were further examined to group them under larger themes that constitute the principle findings of this particular research question. Accordingly, three principle themes related to the *uses and consequences of blogging* emerged out of the 199 selected blog posts and comments, including (1) creating awareness, (2) forming community, and (3) expressing opinion and identity (See Table IV)

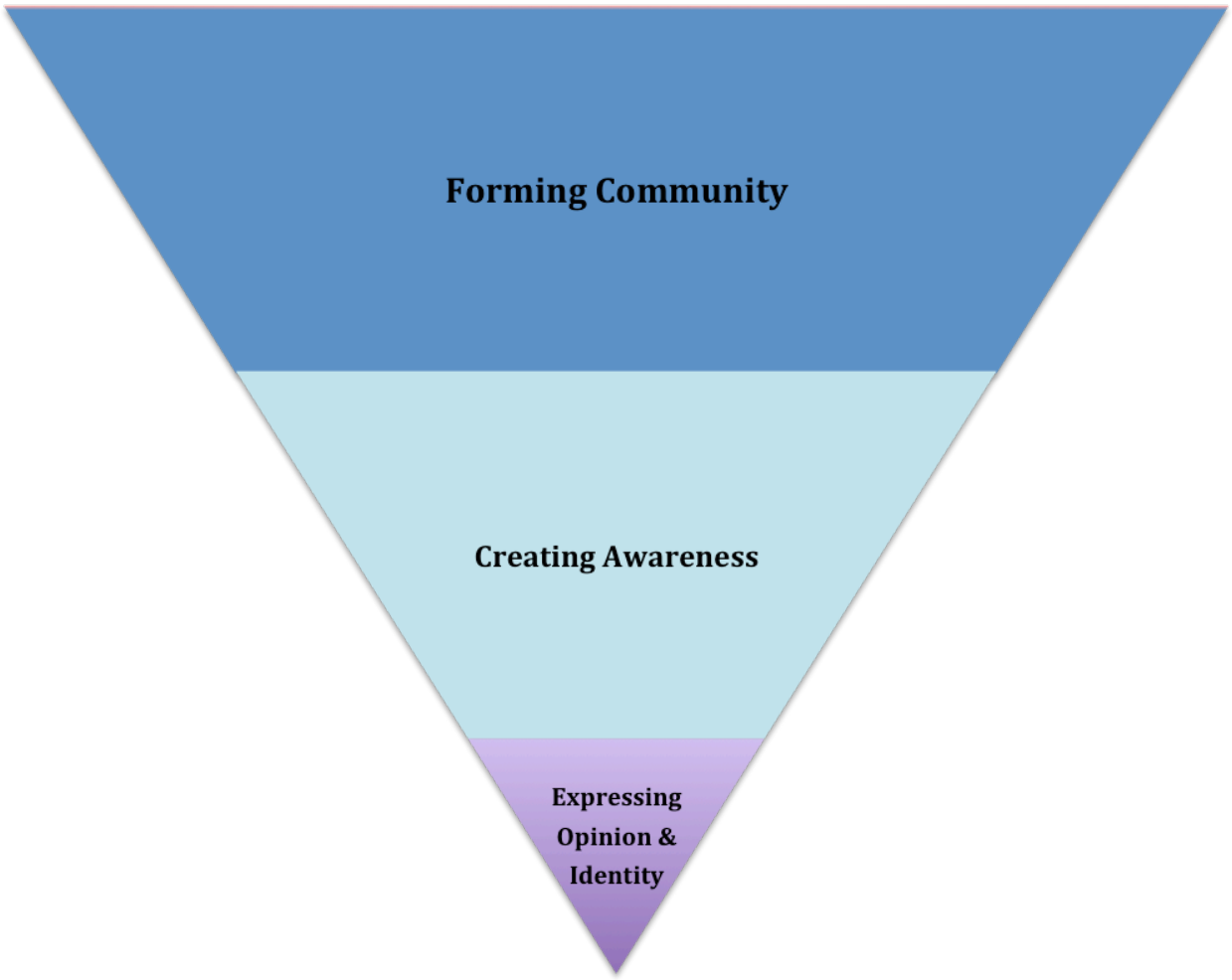
TABLE IV

USES AND CONSEQUENCES OF BLOGGING



The themes identified above have often been found to overlap other themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. Bloggers and commentators in the sampled South Asian blogs have often been found to use these blogs in more than one of the above stated ways, and many parent bloggers and frequent commentators have explicitly revealed the consequences that blogging can/has create/d for its participants through the mobilization of an open platform for discussing a socio-culturally taboo topic. However, the uses and consequences of this recently popular form of digital communication by the South Asian online population is considered particular to the topic of domestic violence that is being discussed within such general-interest ethnic community blogs. Based on an observational enumeration of the number of blog cases studied, the following table of thematic findings related to the uses and consequences of blogging ranks the three principle themes, starting with the most commonly found blog use to the progressively lesser found one (See Figure 4 below).

Figure 4. Hierarchy of blog uses and blogging consequences



1. **Forming community**

Many parent bloggers and commentators used these blogs to form community around the topic of domestic abuse within the South Asian diaspora, both within the internal discursive space of their blogs, as well as by providing links to external sources of community support, including the local South Asian CBOs that assist survivors of domestic violence to find communal help. Several bloggers and commentators displayed their awareness of the consequences of blogging by acknowledging the act as a safe practice that allows one to indulge in communication about issues that have been silenced so far, and also create opportunities for people from similar ethno-cultural backgrounds to come together by sharing stories.

a. **Need for safe communal/public spaces for discussion, dialog, voices and debate**

This emergent, sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators used the blog for displaying the victims, advocates, and their own need for a safe public space (online and/or offline) where they can voice their experiences, be heard, listen to stories of abuse, and discuss the forms, debates and interventions related to domestic violence against South Asian women, all for the purpose of creating a community of support for those affected. For instance, a commentator in *A Brown Battleground* responds to a comment posted by the parent blogger who acknowledges the former's need for disclosing his story:

> "Cheers for voicing what you went through, dear commentator…"
> …A heartfelt thank you for providing me with a safe space to discuss my experiences in (2009).

In *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?* a commentator uses the blog as a safe forum to publish useful information and encourage other blogger/commentators to engage in public dialog on the topic of domestic violence within the South Asian American community:

> My intention is to dedicate an entire blog thread to the discussion of helpful hyperlinks for services that South Asian domestic violence survivors and advocates can reach out to in all geographical areas known to me, within North America and South Asian nations. Also, I would encourage you all to contribute what you may know in terms of interventions, so that I can include all of that within the post. I urge you all to freely voice your experiences and share helpful information so that others can find safety (2006).

A commentator from *The Chapati Society* commends the parent blogger's disclosure of being a victim of spousal abuse:

> I would like to congratulate you for ensuing this debate on the issue of violence against immigrant women in the South Asian community and I applaud your guts to be able to voice the past abuse that you have endured, thereby dismantling the erroneous and misinterpreted ideas of righteousness, dishonor, and infidelity that are part and parcel… You also created public dialog around this issue by openly sharing what you went through … and I fully agree with your belief that our community needs to start the curing process from within, by truly admitting that DV happens in our families and by forming safe spaces for such tribulations to be discussed and examined (2009).

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 42%[14] religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 35% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim religion (11%), followed by Christianity (6%), Hinduism (4%) and Jainism (1%). No data could be found about blog posts and comments

[14] All the numerical figures represented in percentages (%) in this chapter are approximate values. The figures that have a decimal value of .5 or greater have been rounded off for ease of representation.

referring to Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (66%) compared to males (20%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (14%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (59%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (28%), Bangladesh (10%) and Pakistan (3%).

b. **Need/desire to communicate and share stories**

This emergent sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators used the blog to reveal their own need/desire, as well as the need of other victims and advocates to communicate and share stories related to the problem and prevalence of domestic violence within the South Asian community in the US. For instance, a parent blogger in *The Chapati Society* points out that communication lies at the heart of the problem, where the primary need of a victim is an empathic ear:

> The first step is to listen attentively. The act of listening is very important as it creates a bond of faith between the victim and the advocate and also produces a space wherein such communication can flourish (2009).

Explicit and implicit references were made for the need/desire to communicate successfully with spousal abuse victims, with volunteers/service providers for domestic violence, and also (if required) with the perpetrators, as evident in the following parent blog in *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?*

> Soon after her husband killed Mrs. Singh, a number of women in similar DV situations started calling a particular North American *Desi* radio station to get guidance on how to find assistance … the manager of the radio station said that the reaction to Mrs. Singh's murder was so tremendous that the phone-in radio show devoted exclusive air time to address the issue of DV within the South Asian immigrant community and once more a number of women from the community called in to share their stories about being DV

> victims… However most of them did not want to disclose their identities or go directly on air … the radio manager mentioned that many of these women callers said that they had attempted to get out and get help, but ended up enduring more intimidations and were scared that if their husbands and in laws got to know about it, they would be abused more (2006).

Awareness of the consequence of blogging about self-narratives of abuse within the sampled South Asian blogs was apparent through the desire/need of battered women to communicate with other women who have had experiences similar to them, or are empathetic to their situation, as evident in the following parent blog from *The Chapati Society:*

> The times when I have actually felt safe sharing my own stories of being a DV survivor, it almost invariably was communicating within a space with a person who was really a good listener. The key to successful communication is to be able to *listen* in the real sense, to someone else's story (2009).

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 41% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 32% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim religion (12%), followed by Hinduism (9%), and Christianity (7%). No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (67%) compared to males (20%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (13%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (54%). The

remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (33%), Bangladesh (10%) and Pakistan (3%).

2. **Creating awareness**

Several parent bloggers and commentators used these blogs to create awareness about the issue of domestic violence as a primary way to mobilize dialog within the South Asian blogging population about this often-sidelined issue. Many bloggers and commentators displayed their knowledge of the practical consequences of blogging by making other participants within the blog thread aware of the role played by external DV shelters, services, volunteers, information and counseling. In other instances, bloggers and commentators displayed a more philosophical consequence of blogging by writing about the role that new media tools such as blogs, social media, Internet, etc. are playing to further awareness about the issue, its prevalence and ways to contain it.

a. **Role of shelters, services, volunteers, information and counseling**

This emergent, sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators used the blogs to refer to the victims, activists and their own need for advice and information on domestic violence shelters, CBOs, services, safe houses and counseling, all of it catered to the South Asian immigrant community in North America, as evident in the following parent post from *The Gurdwara Galleria* that enquires about the availability of domestic violence services for elderly South Asian women in the US who have been victimized at home:

> As an immigrant South Asian woman in North America I am questioning what DV shelters, services and activists are doing to tackle the problems of spousal abuse that senior women from the South Asian community face here. I know that the support and interventions that anti-DV campaigns and services offer usually help younger women and their children to escape violent households… I don't know if their policies are geared more that way, but I believe that younger South Asian women use these services more

> often, not necessarily because they endure DV much more than elderly women or because they are more likely to be on dependent visas, but I feel this is the case as older women may be more timid to seek help given their age. Nonetheless, I am curious about the kind of DV services these women's CBOs offer to support elderly South Asian women, in particular, abused elderly Sikh women who are immigrants to the US? …It is true that the reasons for immigration of elderly Sikh women to North America are in many ways comparable to reasons that younger South Asian women immigrate, but in many cases they are also very diverse. Influences that lead to these distinctions start with the lengthy time frame of elderly women being married to their spouses who have already immigrated to the west, to living with their son/s, daughter-in-law/s and grandchildren…sometimes, older couples immigrate to strengthen their financial situation, to get resident status in the US, and to help out their children and families in the US or in India/Pakistan. Some elderly couples also immigrate to the US on a sponsorship backed by their kids who are already US citizens, and come here to get some form of employment and to add to family savings (2007).

Several bloggers and commentators also revealed their awareness of the role that blogging can play to make others in the community aware of the presence, or absence thereof, of such services and information, as found in this comment from *A Brown Battleground:*

> Great to know that there are services and support structures present that play an active role to advocate against DV, but this is a major problem within the South Asian American community that requires A LOT more notice. This also involves providing help to those, who are helping the victims of spousal abuse: be that in a professional way such as supporting CBOs that offer anti-DV services, or in a personal way by spreading their message and the work that they do through social networking sites. We should not forget that this is a problem that impacts every possible South Asian community, irrespective which country, nation, SES, immigrant status or *samaj* one comes from…one just cannot escape it…
> I have posted a number of helpful links in this blog [Link included]… Most of the links are to DV services for abused South Asian women in North America … please feel free to contribute more information about available DV resources within this thread (2009).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 52% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (33%), followed by the Muslim (6%), Hindu

(6%), and Christian (2%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (75%) compared to males (6%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (19%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (67%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (27%), Bangladesh (4%) and Pakistan (2%).

b. **Role of blogs, social media, Internet and CMC to raise awareness**

This emergent, sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators used the blog, essentially as an awareness-creation tool. For instance, a commentator in *A Brown Battleground* represents another South Asian blog that primarily focuses on the problems, solutions and interventions faced by South Asian women victims of domestic violence in the diaspora:

> To all the readers and commentators that have inquired about and invited a blog that is solely dedicated to the discussion of DV within the South Asian population, I'm glad to inform that such a weblog and association is in fact there! (Our DV-related work and organization has also been mentioned in the past by bloggers in A Brown Battleground) Desis against Domination [Link Provided] is an NPO that is dedicated to offering collaborative online services in order to gather advocates, helpers, victims/survivors and stakeholders within the South Asian diaspora for engaging in conversations and dispersing information about gender violence.
> The official website for Desis against Domination also functions as a web-based hotline for abused women, permitting them to secretly ask for advice and also allows them to find immediate help by providing a list of possible solutions and services (2009).

Many bloggers and commentators explicitly and implicitly disclosed their awareness of the consequences that virtual communication such as blogging, social networking, online activism,

etc. can have in directing attention to stigmatized issues like domestic violence within the South Asian diaspora, as found in the following parent blog post from *A Gurdwara Galleria:*

> Just stop for a moment and reflect on the remarkable mobilization that is happening within the South Asian American community, particularly by the younger generation, regarding Punjabi-Sikh women's problems. I don't know if this is because of a substantial increase in the number on Internet resources or online social media that discuss these issues or whether our community is finally being more attentive to the issue of DV. Irrespective, the good thing is that there are now more communication mediums and public spaces for debate, thereby instructing men and women to interact and have a dialog about a very crucial human rights issue that affects a huge population the world over. I will also publish a blog post about some groundbreaking work that is being done online and offline by members of our South Asian diaspora to bring attention to those unspoken issues that affect immigrant Sikh women in the diaspora…
> It is apparent that Punjabi-Sikh women, also need a safe public forum to talk about issues that openly involve and influence their lives. Be they discussions about fashion, salons, individuality or advocacy around DV: there has to be a space that is tailored to this population and allows them to unite around common interests and shared stories. This kind of amity cannot be stressed enough as it immensely influences a person's sense of values and self-regard. With the takeoff of our blog Sikhista.com and the instantaneous uploading of relevant hyperlinks all over Facebook and other much-read South Asian blogs, one will be blind not to see how much of a need and backing there is for this kind of a discursive space… The weblog is not only targeted at Sikh women and young girls for discussing everything from fashion and movies to possible interventions for gender abuse victims. …but, it also enthusiastically invites and involves Sikh men to contribute in these discussions and possibly the hope is that through these kinds of a cross-gender discourse, Sikh males will also learn to understand and appreciate how really motivated and proactive Sikh women in the diaspora are! (2011)

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 50% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (39%), followed by the Muslim (5%), Christian (5%), and Hindu (2%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or

explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (64%) compared to males (18%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (18%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (61%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (34%) and Bangladesh (5%). No blogger and commentator made explicit or implicit reference to Pakistan while discussing the role of blogs, social media, Internet and CMC to raise awareness about the issue.

3. **Expressing opinion and identity**

Several parent bloggers and commentators used these blogs as a way to provide their opinions about domestic abuse against South Asian immigrant women, particularly by way of questioning, attacking and/or challenging the context, causes, definitions and /or stereotypes associated with the issue. Similarly, with the revelation of stories, feelings, ideas, opinions, and emotions each parent blog entry and comment becomes an online conduit for identity-expression, whether implicit or explicit. Given the sensitivity of the topic of discussion and also that in numerous instances the blog thread participants, who were either female survivors/victims of domestic violence in the US or were those associated with them, seemed to have purposefully revealed or concealed their *real* identities being aware of the consequences that blogging may have (had) in their specific case.

a. **Questioning, attacking and challenging the context, causes, definitions and /or stereotypes of South Asian domestic violence**

This emergent, sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators primarily used the blog as a communication channel to

probe, confront and defy the probable causes, reasons and systemic explanations of domestic violence against South Asian immigrant women, as can be found in the following parent post from *Desis Against Domination*:

> …The key is to be able to ask the important questions … of course there isn't any better method for understanding something, than to learn how to question it… By this, I do not say that the right kind of question to ask is if someone is facing abuse or not … but to probe deeper so as to come up with a well thought out solution (2009).

On the same note, a commentator in *Desis Against Domination* questions the misdirected notions of shame, honor and sacrifice that still exists within many South Asian cultures to justify the perpetration of domestic gender abuse:

> …One more reason that such problems exist in the South Asian diaspora is because its members don't want to question others for fear of that there may be gossip. From stuff that I have seen, there are many instances when women want to get help from support services for various reasons, but are scared that if the community finds out, they will involuntarily assume that she is a victim of violence ... this also harks back to that entire spiel about family honor and sacrifice that stills exists in many South Asian families... Ironically, it appears that keeping quiet and not questioning this abusive behavior is the moral way for a South Asian woman… If that's the misconstrued case, then, is it righteous for a South Asian man to batter his female partner to begin with? (2008)

Many bloggers and commentators seemed aware that one of the important consequences of blogging is a revelation of the intersectional rationales, histories, and contexts that explain the perpetration of such gendered abuse, as apparent in the following comment from *Way to Wisdom*:

> I completely agree with you that DV on immigrant Pakistani women is an intersectional issue: accordingly, it is our duty to question the systemic and institutional reasons that lead to these types of gender cruelty (2011).

Continuing the trend of questioning this mindset that overlooks domestic gender abuse within the Pakistani Christian diaspora, a commentator in *A Brown Battleground* explains her experiences as a South Asian advocate of gender violence in the US:

> Very recently, I began to help out at a South Asian DV organization in the East Coast that offers temporary housing, legal help and other services to DV victims and their children. During the volunteer coordination event, the members of the organization stressed that DV embraced all thinkable societies, faiths and families. However, one the other hand, our instruction booklets also revealed the diversity of feelings that a particular community can hold on the issue of DV. These attitudes comprise, but don't stop at: horror, rejection and tolerance. As a Pakistani Christian woman who has been raised here in the US, sadly enough, I have understood and positioned my cultural group in the category of triviality/tolerance in the case of safeguarding women and those related to them from the ills of spousal abuse (2009).

The emergent sub-theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 34% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator pertained to the Sikh community. About 28% of the blog data did not clearly mention the religious following in question. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Muslim religion (17%), followed by Hinduism (11%), Christianity (8%), and other religions (2%). No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Jainism and Buddhism. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, around 45% of the discussion on the subject was done by females, compared to males (36%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (19%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (42%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (34%), Pakistan (15%) and Bangladesh (9%).

b. **Need/desire to reveal or maintain anonymity of identity**

This emergent sub-theme was found in parent blog posts and comments where the bloggers and/or commentators used the blog to either reveal or conceal identity, and

even engaged in discussions of how to confirm online anonymity as no channel of purported secure communication is completely infallible, an instance of which can be found in the following comment from *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?*

> … I mean it genuinely, when I applaud you for sharing your experiences of DV… However, here is a vital piece if information that all of you posting here should keep in mind:
> Internet use can be observed and it is not possible to keep all online activity completely anonymous. So, in case you are concerned that your online activity might be policed, do please go to a securer location for computing, or make a phone call to your local hotline or the National Domestic Violence Hotline [numbers provided]…
> In fact, I should mention here that I had once visited a European website that caters to female victims of spousal abuse for seeking help, and there was a tab in the navigation menu of the homepage that could be checked on, and would essentially keep their web participation/access anonymous, and would help to guard them from being discovered by their abusive partners, just in case. This is food for thought as it would be horrific to imagine that a woman could be additionally ill treated for requesting support from a website that in the first place was created to save her from DV (2006).

Since one of the consequences of blogging is the possibility of online anonymity, explicit or implicit references were found where some bloggers and commentators within the South Asian blogs chose to maintain anonymity and refrained from *real* identity disclosure, in particular South Asian women victims/survivors of domestic abuse, as evidenced in the following parent post from *A Brown Battleground*:

> …You heard about my story. …now, let me write about the instances of abuse that I have seen among my own people, who will also not be named: this Indian man I know closely who battered his wife … this *desi* guy who stalked his girlfriend (2009).

Some bloggers and commentators also spoke of the need that many abused South Asian women have to continue the strain of anonymizing identity in *real* life, for the sake of preserving family honor and a hallowed community image, as apparent in this parent post from *Desis against Domination:*

> …It is true, that the cultural, religious and social customs fundamentally structure a woman's decision to voice or keep silent about her abuse. Several of the women who I interviewed for my work on DV within the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant population

> were high-paid and super-qualified professionals from higher socio-economic backgrounds, but reluctant to name the abuse or even disclose their own or their husband's real identities. Unfortunately, this mindset is a resultant of the fact that DV is not acknowledged as crime within this diasporic community and is still considered a shameful act that should not be publicly disclosed (2008).

The emergent theme identified above has often been found to overlap other emergent themes in several individual blog posts/comments during the coding process. However, based on an observational enumeration of all the blog post and comment excerpts being coded under this theme, almost 47% religious beliefs of the narrator or the victim/perpetrator crime could not be identified. From the rest of the explicit or implicit religious implications, majority of the blog data pertained to narratives about the Sikh religion (37%), followed by the Christian (11%), and Muslim (5%) faiths consecutively. No data could be found about blog posts and comments referring to Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and other religions. In terms of the implicit or explicit reference to the gender of the blogger/commentator, discussion of the subject was done most by females (67%) compared to males (20%), and participants whose gender remained unidentified (13%). In terms of the nationality of the victim/perpetrator or the national context of the crime, narrator or narrative, majority of the blog excerpts did not clearly mention the nation in question (63%). The remaining posts and comments explicitly or implicitly made references to India (32%) and Bangladesh (5%). No blogger and commentator made explicit or implicit reference to Pakistan while desiring to reveal or maintain anonymity of identity.

B. Summary

By following the third research question as the final guiding principle of this study I was able to understand, categorize and elucidate the various uses and consequences of blogging for parent bloggers and commentators within the sampled South Asian community blogs. The thematic analysis yielded interesting results by generating three primary ways that these South

Asian community blogs were used, a finding that is essentially comprised of six identified blogging consequences that bloggers and commentators have implicitly and explicitly demonstrated their knowledge of. Bloggers and commentators used the blogs to form a keen sense of community though the length of the threaded discussions on the topic of domestic violence against immigrant South Asian women, with explicit or implicit references to the increased 'Need for Safe Communal/Public Spaces for Discussion, Dialog, Voices and Debate,' and a 'Need/Desire to Communicate and Share Stories' being the most often found consequences of blogging. The findings reveal that the use of blogging to form community was primarily done on a micro-level, within the scope of the internal topical threads. However, for creating a larger community of bloggers who believe in the power that blogging holds to create a sense of community around the topic of domestic violence within the South Asian diaspora, the bloggers and commentators would have to interlink to similar topical blogs within the South Asian blogosphere on a much broader scale.

Even though sub-themes related to the uses of these blogs were found throughout the sample, there was a difference in the degree of awareness among bloggers and commentators within each of the selected blogs with regard to the consequences of blogging. Once again, *Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?*, *Desis against Domination*, *The Gurdwara Galleria* and *A Brown Battleground* yielded the maximum number of sub-themes pertaining to this research query, while *SA 'Goodwill Mission* and *South Asian Bloggers Forum* yielded the least number of conversations with respect to the emergent consequences and uses of blogging. 'Raising Awareness' (found in 92 data excerpts) was another important function performed through the act of blogging and commentating, with close to 50% of this primary theme being devoted to discussing the 'Role of Blogs, Social Media, Internet and CMC to Raise Awareness' (found in

44 instances of the 92 data excerpts), a sub-finding that is particularly important for the analytical scope of this study.

Interestingly, albeit ironically, the least discussed sub-theme for this part of the analysis has been the use of blogging to express the 'Need/Desire to Reveal or Maintain Anonymity of Identity.' Other than the presence of anonymous usernames, or absent usernames that were associated with several sampled parent posts and comments, only 19 data excerpts out of 72 instances of 'Expressing Opinion and Identity' made explicit or implicit references for the need to maintain anonymity for those who were directly or indirectly impacted by the ills of domestic violence. The unexpected insignificance of this sub-theme, that is, the neutral discursive attitude about the issue of online anonymity and security that has been displayed by bulk of the bloggers' and commentators' was further substantiated by several posts and comments where blog participants openly discussed their horrific experiences of abuse, within what they essentially considered a safe, public space for sharing their stories with other empathic writers and readers.

Finally, the illustrations of blog posts and comments provided in this chapter have been paraphrased in order to maintain anonymity. As an extra privacy measure, each paraphrased blog excerpt was searched online using Google to make sure that it does not conform to the web address from which it was originally obtained. It goes unsaid that the act of paraphrasing partially takes away from the original intention of the quote. However, to remain true to the intended meaning of the sampled data, all blog excerpts were coded in their unaltered format using the QDA application, and only the ones cited as illustrations in this study were paraphrased post-analysis.

VII. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to do a thematic analysis of blog posts and comments on the problem of domestic violence against immigrant South Asian adult females in the US as evidenced in South Asian community blogs, with a particular intention to explore what the consequences of this recent way of communication are for bloggers and commentators who've found a new space for sharing experiences of their own and/or another's abuse. Blogs have mostly been researched within various political, economic, social, interpersonal and structural areas of inquiry, yet new media literature has ignored the importance of social awareness that is ethno-culturally created and reiterated by participants who blog about their knowledge of sensitive issues, in this case domestic abuse faced by immigrant South Asian women.

The first half of this chapter will provide the analysis and discussion for each of the three guiding research questions. The latter half will chart the trials and tribulations that were faced while conducting the study, followed by a detailed discussion, future research recommendations, and a holistic conclusion delineating the overall significance of this dissertation.

A. Analysis and Discussion for Research Question One (RQ 1)

The first research question seeks to enquire, "What roles do the bloggers and commentators play within these South Asian community blogs?" Out of the six theme-based identities that were classified from all of the 199 selected blog posts and comments, three theme-based blogger and commentator roles were identified, including (1) Advocate/Supporter, (2) Advisor/Information Provider, and (3) Actor/Information Seeker. In their roles as *advisors/information providers*, the bloggers and commentators mostly shared their general beliefs, information, figures, recommendations, findings, examples, illustrations or reactions to statements and queries posted by parent bloggers and/or other commentators. In their roles as

advocates/supporters, the bloggers and commentators chiefly motivated other bloggers, readers and commentators (including, victims, activists, others related) to challenge domestic violence, share their stories, and made them feel safe enough to express their experiences and opinions within the public space of the community blog. In their roles as *actors/information seekers*, the bloggers/commentators turned to other participants within the selected South Asian blogs in order to seek advice, information and potential help to get out of their own, or another's violent and unhealthy circumstances.

Although this finding about blogger/commentator roles and identities has overall a more practical and denotative structure, a close analysis of the role of actor/information seeker reveals semblance with available literature on contemplation of action (Brown, 1997). Jody Brown (1997), who builds on the transtheoretical model of behavior change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984), argues that battered women use the stage of contemplation to find out how to get out of their abusive situations, including looking for social encouragement, affective support, or even seeking ways to become financially independent. In fact, during this phase the victims can name their abuse, are aware that they need to make behavioral changes, and go on to become 'actors' who actively seek advice and information about what they can do to make social, economic, emotional, physical, and lifestyle changes.

The first set of findings for this study reveals that in the role of actors/information seekers, quite a few South Asian women bloggers and commentators within the selected blog sample who self-identified as immigrant victims of domestic violence, shared their abusive experiences and sought advice from other blog participants. For instance, if a parent blogger or commentator wrote about her difficulty in finding adequate legal representation in the US to help her get out of her abusive marriage ("Where's the Garam Paratha, Bahu?" 2007), another

commentator (or a follow-up response from a parent blogger, if not the same person) would write about the availability of legal resources or domestic violence services that can help with counsel. Interestingly, none of the units of analysis yielded any self-narrative of abuse from an immigrant woman of Pakistani descent reflecting current literary findings in the same field, which says that the dynamics of several Pakistani Muslim families in the US function on a "repressive, non-communicative, top-down, and male-dominated," politics where women's voices most often remain unheard, or their identities get self-obliterated (Alkhateeb, 1998).

The analysis of blog-generated thematic identities produced rich results by demonstrating the smooth interchangeability of roles between the bloggers and commentators. The comments not only corroborated the parent blog posts, but also aided in forming a sense of conversational circularity. This was made more complex because of the presence of comments by parent bloggers who sometimes would provide feedback to preceding comments. Also, because of the flexible structure of blogs and the fact that many of the South Asian community blogs do not require the commentators to log in with legitimate email information, makes them an ideal platform for participants to maintain anonymity, and yet have unhindered community interactions.

It became evident that many blog commentators were regular visitors, followers and/or contributors on a single blog, and many even had their own blogs with hyperlinks provided for other bloggers and commentators to access. Moreover, given the common topic of discussion for all the selected blog threads, it is very possible that a particular commentator posted comments on multiple blogs with the same topic (including the ones sampled for this study). However, given that most of their usernames were anonymized, or the fact they could be participating in

different blogs using different email addresses and alternate usernames, their identities would be extremely difficult to trace.

Many of the blog threads turned into long collective dialogs between bloggers and commentators, with as many as 22 comments selected for one of the sampled threads. In some threads, where parent bloggers did not appear overtly particular about following up with supporting comments, the number of responses written by commentators were relatively fewer, but of a more personal, sympathetic or congratulatory nature. In any case, overall findings reveal that the roles meted out to parent bloggers and commentators in the course of this study appeared to be fluid identity categories where the same blog participant could easily switch from being an *advocate/supporter* of the cause of domestic violence in one instance, seek advice as an *actor/information seeker* for her own or other/s abusive situation in another instance, while concurrently taking on the role of an *advisor/information provider* to those seeking counsel within the topical blog community.

B. Analysis and Discussion for Research Question Two (RQ 2)

The second research question seeks to enquire, "What themes, patterns, and explanations emerge about the issue of domestic violence against South Asian women in the US, as illustrated in the selected South Asian community blog threads?" Out of 25 sub-themes that primarily emerged from a close reading of the blog data, a typology of five principal blog themes relating to South Asian Domestic Violence in the US were identified, including (1) meaning making (2) conflict maintenance (3) local vs. transnational debate (4) consciousness creation, and (5) change and action contemplation.

1. **Meaning making**

Meaning making was done on numerous levels by parent bloggers and commentators of the selected blogs who ascribed meanings, contexts, causes and potential explanations for the predominance and continuance of domestic violence in the South Asian diaspora. Analysis of the study's blog sample revealed that the most discussed sub-theme relating to the second research question has been the 'Role of Marriage, Gender Norms, Patriarchy and Power/Privilege.' Findings suggest that the importance of this sub-theme for *meaning making*, which in itself was the most frequently occurring pattern of discussion across blogs, is also clearly mirrored in available literature on the impact of marriage and patriarchy on gender-role expectations for South Asian women (Abraham, 2005; Das Gupta, 2006). Abraham (2005) argues that in some cases:

> These gender role assumptions take the form of power and control by the husband over the wife…[and] This is particularly the case if they have come to the United States as dependent immigrants, with almost no support structure of their own. (p. 436)

The 'Role of Culture, History and Society,' was also a highly debated sub-theme from the principal theme of *meaning making*. Several bloggers and commentators made direct and indirect allusions to various cultural and social dictates and stereotypes that try to justify the causes or forms of abuse against immigrant South Asian women. As literature on the same corroborates (Goel, 2005; Das Dasgupta, 2007), while this kind of antiquated idealization of cultural stereotypes bind South Asian Indian women in a sort of "culture-freeze" on one hand, causing more self-harm than good, their internalization of cultural myths may sometimes act as empowering agents in a context where they are physically and mentally isolated (Goel, 2005).

'Immigrants, Immigrant Status and Immigration-related Issues' was another topical area that imbued potent meaning to the extent and intent of IPV perpetration. While discussing the

impact of immigration on globalization, Stalker (2000) delineates the rapidly changing character of the former, arguing, "migrants can move back and forth much more readily and rapidly – and can keep in regular contact with their homes, even if these are on the other side of the globe. As a result the flows are more diverse and complex" (p. 7). Although this ease of movement makes the skilled South Asian immigrant class a primary site where local and global processes congregate, their replacement also becomes a space of contradiction, rendering their migration "not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement" (Maira, 2005, p. 227-228). According to Lessinger, whether immigrants can entirely and successfully function in two cultures over a long period of time remains an open question, as does the dilemma of whether second-generation Indian [and South Asian] immigrants can be considered transnational in the accepted sense of the term (2003, p. 172).

The 'Role of Religion' and the 'Role of Family' surface as two other widely discoursed sub-themes, with several parent bloggers and commentators affording varied familial and religious meanings for the perpetration, continuation and interruption of spousal and marital abuse on immigrant South Asian women. Sikhism interestingly surfaced as the prime religion of context within bulk of the blog sample wherein the religious following of the narrator, narrative, and/or of the crime were/was identified. Starting from the highest percentage of self-narratives of abuse for the identified religious faith of the victim and the role of religion in matters of domestic abuse against women, *to* the need for safe communal spaces for discussion, dialog, voices and debate, as well the tendency of questioning, attacking and challenging the context, causes, definitions and stereotypes of South Asian domestic violence, Sikhism and its teachings emerged as the common mitigating area of digital discussion. As supported by extant literature

about the impact of South Asian religions and family structures on psychosocial behavior, scholars have argued, “Extended families must stop covering up abuse, violence, and incest in the name of ‘preserving the family honor,” and in the guise of following their religious teachings (Alkhateeb, 1998; Padayachee & Singh, 1998; Gangoli, Razak & McCarry, 2006).

According to a Sikh immigrant community leader, Sikhism does condemn domestic violence on all accounts, reinstating that “Sikhism has an egalitarian view of women and men and…[is] much against forced marriage, believing that if it did occur, it was within uneducated communities” (Gangoli, Razak & McCarry, 2006, p. 30). This naïve belief of his is bolstered by the uninformed claim that domestic violence does not occur in the Sikh diaspora as “‘no one has come to temple and asked for help,’” thereby attempting to *consciously* obfuscate the essentially omnipresent, and unconsciously simplify the complex realities of spousal abuse against Sikh migrant women, regarding it instead as “a woman’s issue…[where] if any cases were presented, they would be dealt with by the women’s committee” (Gangoli, Razak & McCarry, 2006, p. 30). From this perspective it was refreshing to find so many blog narratives of abuse and testimonies of advocacy by self-identified Sikh women who also, ironically seemed to find strength in their religious beliefs, and went on to hypertextually express that “from the beginning of the Sikh religion, women have played central roles in the religion that has helped shape the Sikh faith…[and] Sikh women are truly a part of the backbone of history in educating, fighting etc.” (“Sikh Missionary Society,” 2013). Moreover, as quantitatively evidenced by the total absence of ‘self-narratives of abuse’ by Pakistani Muslim women within the study’s blog sample, many researchers in the field argue that immigrant South Asian women in the US, primarily those who follow Islam “need to improve their knowledge of their own faith, and then reclaim their right to define themselves in the light of the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*, instead of by customary practices,

traditions, extremist viewpoints, or those who believe Muslim women need to be saved from themselves" (Alkhateeb, 1998).

As further analysis reveals, what is required is a shared space for South Asian women of the Islamic, Hindu, Sikh, Christian and other religious faiths to express themselves, their experiences of abuse, and their religious beliefs, without fear of reproach: be that within their own families; within the extended Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Jain or other religious gatherings; within religious institutions like mosques, temples, *gurdwaras*, churches; within social service agencies that cater to battered women and children; or even within accessible, public forums like blogs. It is up to the religious leaders and community members (primarily those who can advocate against DV) to raise consciousness about its prevalence in the Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and immigrant groups of other faiths, to initiate changes, provide ethno-religious domestic violence training to volunteers, as well as spiritual counseling to those women who have been hurt as a result of family violence.

Ironically, 'The Role of Health Care Services and Officials,' from the principal theme of *meaning making* has been the least discussed sub-theme related to the second research question, thereby resonating that there is a pressing need for much more dialog around this issue. Literature on health intervention and domestic violence (Abraham, 1995; Hurwitz et al., 2006) also agrees that healthcare providers should be trained in culturally sensitive ways, and mandatorily refer South Asian patients for IPV screening, practices of the kind that have recently be seen in healthcare centers catering to Asian American victims of physical and mental violence, through counseling and culture-sensitive nursing practices (Weil & Lee, 2004).

2. **Conflict maintenance**

Emergent themes that reflected the principal areas of debate, negotiations and differences throughout blog exchanges dedicated to domestic violence within the South Asian immigrant group, were seen to *maintain conflict* within these topic-specific, ethno-cultural blogs. In particular, the sub-themes of 'Acknowledgement or Denial of Domestic Violence among South Asians,' and 'Public vs. Private Issue' were the two most debated issues for the principal theme of *conflict maintenance.* Analysis of the study's findings reflects dominant literature on cross-cultural and postcolonial theories of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1994; Mohanty, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997, 2005), which essentially believes that several communities, including the South Asian diaspora in the US, mostly deny the existence of domestic violence within their society in their imprudent attempts to avert ethno-racist pigeon-holing, as well as in their hypocrisy of safeguarding a sanctified 'public' image.

The fact that this portends politicized debates, both online and off, among advocates and victims of IPV about the unjustified relegation of a *public* problem like domestic abuse to a conveniently unacknowledged *private* realm is also, no surprise. Some new media scholars argue that relatively unrestricted social participation on the Internet has partially helped many users to transgress the public-private divide of socially constructed gender identities, and with it has also helped them to transgress the domestic and systemic boundaries within which such identities and information are created, disseminated and maintained (Gregg, 2006; Youngs, 1999). South Asian social media researcher Mallapragada (2006) uses the example of SAWNET (a web forum that covers information about various human rights issues affecting the South Asian diaspora, and their corresponding interventions) to argue that such digital communities not only rupture the

public-private politics of gender and race, but also represent thematic spaces that "transgress national borders" (pp. 219-220).

3. **Local vs. transnational debate**

Numerous themes emerged from the study's sampled blog posts and comments revealing problems that are particular to the *local vs. transnational* politics of immigration and the ways in which that exacerbates the prevalence of domestic abuse against South Asian immigrant women in the US, particularly the problem of racial marginalization or profiling, and the subsequent need for culturally and linguistically sensitive information and counseling from available IPV resources. As literature on the same holds witness, Kasturirangan et al., (2004) point out that many domestic violence organizations and counseling services misunderstand cross-cultural scripts thereby reinforcing racial stereotypes, and inadvertently force abused immigrant women to find ways to cope in religion, shared practices/beliefs, extended families, etc., factors which can equally help them through, or make worse their predicament.

In addition to the "loss of socioeconomic status during the resettlement period [that] creates financial instability," the lack of knowledge of English (in some cases), social isolation, and the assumption that domestic violence services don't exist make it difficult for South Asian immigrant women to voice their predicament or even get actual help (Kasturirangan et al, 2004, p. 323). Also, "the option of leaving her abusive spouse, often viewed as the most desirable decision by those who work in the domestic violence field, may seem irrational to a woman who depends on her spouse to provide companionship and a connection to her country of origin" (Kasturirangan et al, 2004, p. 323). Part of this dichotomy stems from a contradictory value-clash between the home culture and the dominant host culture, which may multiply stress levels for migrant South Asian women who are trying to get acculturated to their displaced lives.

Interestingly, one of the least debated sub-themes from this principal theme has been the issue of 'White/Colonial vs. Colored/Post-Colonial Feminism.' This is surprisingly revelatory given that there is demand for more awareness to be built around the gender politics of post-colonial, developing nation populations, so that one can arrive at a better understanding of the heterogeneities and unique cultural identities of battered women of color from immigrant groups, such as this study's population. Cultural identity, according to Kandiyoti (1994), cannot be understood as celebratory dialogs of difference and diversity, unless and until women (in particular, immigrant women of minority cultures) are freed from the Western feminism-centric, colonial reigns of "cultural particularisms" (p. 382).

4. **Consciousness creation**

As evident in the emergent themes that make up the principal theme of *consciousness creation*, many bloggers and commentators within the sampled blogs were seen to create consensus by making others within the South Asian blogging community conscious of the various forms, facts, figures and types of domestic violence that are perpetrated on women from this ethnic minority, along with engaging in discussions about the current and potential interventions and outreach options.

The sub-theme 'Raising Consciousness' was rampantly found in parent posts and comments where one person's public admission of oppression became the point of departure for another person's testimony of a similar repressive experience, and yet another person's call to create public agency against such oppressions. As literature on the process of consciousness-raising holds witness, this sort of circular dialog exchange functions as "a cathartic mechanism for the writers who can share the private thoughts that may have caused them anguish and agony in the course of determining how to resist oppression, objectification, and exclusion" (Sowards

& Renegar, 2004, p. 542; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984; Davis, 1995; Brown, 1997). This cyclical process of raising consciousness against subjugation encourages the creation of alternate feminist counter-voices and a critical community of advocates, a process that makes *public* those *private* stories that were most often silenced, censored and subverted.

Another sub-theme that was taken up by the sampled South Asian blog community, but unexpectedly not as much as it should have been was the 'Issue of Underreporting DV Cases.' In fact, this particular sub-theme of *consciousness creation* was also among the least discussed themes in the overall sample. Given that the problem of underreporting domestic abuse crimes by the victims, community members, and affected families is one of the major factors that leads to more IPV perpetration, not to mention further silencing of battered women, it seemed a bit incongruous that not too many parent posts or comments directly tackled the topic (although many issues relating to domestic violence, including its causes and consequences were discussed at length in the sampled blogs). Further analysis of this finding reveals that this area, although partially addressed, needs much more discursive attention and proactive resolution.

5. **Change and action contemplation**

Finally, as reflected by the sub-themes that constitute the principal theme of *contemplating change and action*, several bloggers and commentators were seen to activate people at the community level to get involved and/or, at the individual level to take action. Analysis of the findings reveal that many parent blog posts and comments hold explicit or implicit evidence of the desire for change and self-reevaluation, the potential for increased justice and equality measures, more intervention and safety options for abused women, as well as making the batterers accountable for their abusive behavior. As supported by literature on the socio-psychological effects of IPV, which believes that battered women go through various

stages and processes of behavior change in their journey to escape domestic violence, Brown (1997) argues that only if advocates, health officers, IPV volunteers, social services and victims accept this idea of continuing *process- and phase-based intervention* for interrupting abuse, then only can they truly understand and help to assuage the impact of familial and systemic restraints that battered women face while trying to actively change their violent situations.

The sub-themes of 'Community and Individual Involvement, Image and Identity,' and 'Justice and Equality Measures,' were also found to be popular discursive topics co-creating the pattern of *change and action contemplation.* Sociologists and legal scholars opine that the *model minority image* that South Asians in the US boast of creates intervention impediments, both for the battered and the batterers in such patriarchal, tradition-bound and culturally circumscribed communities (Goel, 2005; Das Dasgupta, 2007; Abraham, 2005). Furthermore, analysis of the blog themes on justice and equality measures for domestic abuse revels that constructive correctional options for batterers such as those under the restorative justice (RJ) paradigm may be idyllic for societies that advocate gender-neutrality, but they cannot account for power imbalances within South Asian marital relationships, which largely do not support "consensus-based" resolutions such as group or family discussions that are common negotiating strategies of this system, requiring instead stronger punitive alternatives (Goel, 2005).

6. **Research question 2a (RQ 2a)**

In response to Research Question 2a, "Is there thematic evidence in these blogs that the problem of domestic violence within the South Asian immigrant community in the US is an intersectional problem?" the findings revealed the presence of thematic intersectionality in majority of the 199 discrete units of analysis. For instance, a sub-theme for *change and action contemplation,* namely 'Community and Individual Involvement, Image and Identity,' was found

to intersect with a sub-theme for *consciousness creation*, namely 'Raising Consciousness' in as many as 27 parent post/comment excerpts, while a sub-theme for *meaning making* such as 'Role of Health Care Services and Health Officials' was found to intersect with a sub-theme for *local vs. transnational debate*, namely 'White/Colonial vs. Colored/Post-Colonial Feminism' in only one blog comment excerpt.

Moreover, support of this part of the analysis can be found in extant literature on the *transversal* strain of the intersectional theory, which claims that the issue of domestic violence against minority women of color has to be understood from an intersectional perspective. It cannot it analyzed in isolation, but transversally across racial, ethnic and gendered areas, specifically the marriage of intra-cultural abuse (IPV within the South Asian community) and extra-racial (mainstream white feminist politics) constraints on South Asian women, where their minds become doubly *colonized* (to use a post-colonial metaphor) and their bodies the site where "systems of race, gender and class domination converge" (Crenshaw, 1994). Overall, the analysis of the first sub-part of research question two reveals that bulk of the participating bloggers and commentators of the sampled blog threads simultaneously discussed more than one theme, pattern or explanation pertaining to domestic violence within the South Asian immigrant community in the US, thereby demonstrating that this human rights problem is intersectional in historicity, causation and scope.

7. **Research question 2b (RQ 2b)**

In response to Research Question 2b, "Do the selected blog posts and comments show any thematic evidence that the immigrant status of South Asian women in the US adds to, or leads to domestic abuse?" the findings revealed that from the entire data set of 199 units of analysis, 65 excerpted instances were found where the victim's immigrant status and/or visa

dependence (her own or her spouse's) were directly or indirectly termed as deterrents to a violence-free life in the US. Corroboration has also been established for this particular finding within present literature on the subject of transnationalism and immigration, with social studies scholar Monisha Das Gupta (2006) pointing out that "the subordination of women in their families is not just the result of individual patriarchs but also of a patriarchal state that privileges marriage and produces, in this case through immigration laws, norms that govern that arrangement" (p. 83). Visweswaran (2004) also urges researchers to address the intersecting forces of society, culture, ethnicity, gender politics and human rights when re-thinking intervention strategies for abused South Asian women, arguing that while it is true that various cultural norms undeniably "reflect upon women's status, for gender-based asylum cases the emphasis may be more effectively placed upon a particular political system's denial of women's rights, or on the interface between culture and the political system, rather than upon "culture" itself (2004; p. 483).

Shaila Kelkar, who is the services coordinator at the Asian Women's Self-Help Association (ASHA) in the Washington DC area, says that in 2001 alone over 50% of the South Asian women survivors ASHA helped were on H4 dependent spouse visas. In spite of many of them being professionally qualified, their economic dependence and immigrant status makes them, often unwillingly, rely on the financial and legal mercies of their partners, a debilitating condition that prevents them from seeking help externally ("Women Abuse in America," 2008). Overall, the analysis of the second sub-part of research question two provides substantial practical and theoretical evidence that in many cases the immigrant status of South Asian women in the US intensifies, or results in further domestic abuse.

8. **Research question 2c (RQ 2c)**

In response to Research Question 2c, "Is there thematic evidence of blogging as a way of "contemplation of action" for abused South Asian immigrant women?" the findings revealed that from the entire data set of 199 units of analysis, 64 excerpted instances were found where a self-identified victim/survivor was seen to contemplate steps towards self-reevaluating her identity/situation, actively changing, and/or even spreading initial awareness about the need for change and progress, including excerpts where the parent blogger or commentator referred to a volunteer's, an advocate's or even another blogger' s empowering initiative for changing the state of domestic violence prevalence or perpetration.

Further analysis of this finding also reflects current literature on the transtheoretical model of behavior change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984), which was adopted by Brown (1997) to suggest that women in violent relationships cannot be coerced into changing their behavior abruptly, as that may result in essentializing and de-contextualizing their distinctive experiences of domestic abuse. They can only be assisted and inspired to recognize that they are in a violent relationship that they should try to actively come out of. Overall, the analysis of the third sub-part of research question two reveals that the parent bloggers or commentators who have self-identified as victims of domestic abuse are sharing their stories or asking advice within these digital community spaces, thereby arriving at the stage of 'contemplation of action' where they have consciously made the first move to seek information and help, whether they actively move forward or not.

The inclusive analysis of the second research question indicates that although these ethno-cultural community blogs have their own patterns of conversational participation and distinct rules of membership, all are interconnected by some shared values and a 'sense of

community' for the manners in which they tackle the topic of domestic violence, as well as the disdain they show for thoughtless dissidents and those who intimidate the general philanthropic balance of their dialogs. However, the sample of this study is a microcosmic representation of the larger South Asian blogging community that is quite substantial and digitally dynamic, and indicates one of the many cultural, social, political and economic topical discussions that happen within such general-interest communal weblogs.

To recap, deliberations on domestic violence are extremely censored among the South Asian population, diasporic or otherwise, yet it undoubtedly is a rather pervasive problem that negatively impacts several South Asian people globally. Overall, the analysis has revealed that emergent blog themes related to domestic violence within the South Asian diaspora in the US have not only presented the historic framework for the execution and continuation of such violence, and furnished guidance and assistance for battered South Asian women to escape their abusive circumstances, but in most cases the parent bloggers and commentators have also advocated, informed, and empowered all contributors/readers of this topic-specific South Asian blogging community to create consciousness and act for positive change.

C. Analysis and Discussion for Research Question Three (RQ 3)

The third research question inquires, "Do the selected South Asian blog posts and comments show evidence of 'awareness of the consequences of this new way of communicating via blogs'? In other words, in what ways do bloggers and commentators use these blogs to narrate their experiences about the issue of domestic violence?" From a total of 6 sub-themes that emerged from an in-depth reading and coding of the blog data, three principal blog themes relating to the consequences and uses of blogging were identified, including (1) forming community, (2) creating awareness, and (3) expressing opinion and identity.

1. **Forming community**

Most parent bloggers and commentators were seen to make use of these blogs to *form community* through various thematic discussions of domestic violence against South Asian immigrant women. As evidenced in the study's sample, a sense of community was proactively created within the inner conversational space of blogs, as well as by the textual presence of information and hyperlinks to external social services, including that of South Asian CBOs that aid IPV victims and their families to find community support.

Analysis of the study's blog sample revealed that the most identified use of blogging related to the third research question has been the 'Need for Safe Communal/Public Spaces for Discussion, Dialog, Voices and Debate.' This need for publicly accessible and safe, communal spaces that facilitate dialog and debate, particularly among marginalized populations echoes extant literature on the sense of alternative community that is created in the context of shifting social relations, culturally reconfiguring identities, and mutating spatial concepts. Social scientists for quite some time have questioned if digital communal interactions can truly bring people together in the present era of globalized localities and networked individualism through processes of identity negotiation and creation of a 'sense of community,' both mediated online (Tomlinson, 1999; Castells, 2004; Sassen, 2006; Fernback, 2007). I believe that by proposing an alternative relational framework for shifting notions of place, relations and identity, online blogging communities can be used as effective models of contemporaneous communication that explain the ways in which, "globalization fundamentally transforms the relationship between the places we inhabit and our cultural practices, experiences and identities" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 106).

In their attempts to *form community*, parent bloggers and commentators also show awareness of another major consequence of blogging through sample-generated evidence of their 'Need/Desire to Communicate and Share Stories' within the South Asian community blogs. Fernback (2007), who studies online social relationships, argues that people symbolically imbue their communities with meaning and substance, rather than form and structure, thereby deriving a sense of cultural vitality and identity from them. Scholars of South Asian cultural studies also believe that battered women may collectively share their experiences through such communal participation, and may motivate each other to rally against IPV on grounds of a common understanding of their experiences of domestic abuse (Kasturirangan et al., 2004; Das Dasgupta, 2007).

2. **Creating awareness**

In response to Research Question 3a, "Is there any thematic evidence of awareness-creation about the issue of domestic violence in the sampled South Asian community blog threads?" the findings revealed that from the entire data set of 199 units of analysis, 92 excerpted instances were found where parent bloggers and commentators raised awareness about the issue of domestic violence in implicit or explicit ways. In fact, the second powerful way that these ethno-cultural community blog threads were used was to *create awareness* about the prevalence and problems of domestic abuse, showing awareness that the act of blogging may be one of the few effective methods of mobilizing conscious interchanges within this microcosm of the South Asian blogosphere, about a socially-taboo topic.

On one level, these community blogs were used to elicit the 'Role of Domestic Violence Shelters, Services, Volunteers, Information and Counseling,' in assuaging or worsening the situation of battered South Asian women in the US. Parent bloggers and commentators were also

seen to use the textual space of blogs as an 'informational kiosk,' wherein information related to the availability of IPV services, safe houses, news and counseling was intermittently presented. Literature review of community-based organizations (CBOs) in the US reveals that there is a need for cultural competency when social service volunteers deal with abused women from minority ethno-racial groups, or colored communities. These CBOs need to initiate structural challenges and changes *from within* the very "dominant cultural and patriarchal structure that oppresses minority immigrant women," of the kind that is being done on one level by South Asian Women's Organizations (SAWOs) in the last two decades (Abraham, 1995, p. 465). The double marginalization that they endure as immigrants and as women from a minority ethnic culture requires community-support and counseling from "Indian women themselves, through the work of groups such as Manavi, Sakhi and Apna Ghar, because these fellow Indian women best understand the constraints that other Indian women face." (Goel, 2005, p. 661).

There is no doubt that these SAWOs in the US are providing the form of culture-specific and ethno-sensitive support and guidance that South Asian immigrant women require, within a familially isolated and culturally alien context. However, there are still some unanswered questions that loom large. Most importantly, *how* does an immigrant South Asian woman, who is physically/mentally/sexually abused, culturally silenced, socially distanced, racially discriminated, economically deprived, legally-unstable and domestically incarcerated, manage to share her predicament and seek communal help?

To answer the question, the need of the hour is awareness-creation at the very basic level, through the recognition of a gender-neutral (if not gender-equal) multicultural space of interaction. In talking about LiveJournal, danah boyd (2005) argues that blogging is an important self-expression mechanism, especially among abused and susceptible peoples and it "supports

some of the most at risk individuals, the most explicit subcultures…and therefore acts as something of a social service within the wider community" (as cited in Gregg, 2006, p. 154). In corroboration, analysis of the study's findings suggest that bloggers and commentators used these community blog threads to blatantly and subtly highlight the very 'Role of Blogs, Social Media, Internet and CMC to Raise Awareness' about an ethno-culture specific human rights violation. Using public spaces to share private discourses, via both online and offline modes of communication, functions as a process of consciousness-raising, not just for advocates who want to spread awareness about the issue at hand, but primarily for battered women who find release through the act of sharing (Campbell, 1973; Brown, 1997; Shah, 2001; Valdes, 2001; Austin, 2002; Lantigua, 2002; Sayeed, 2002).

One of the evidenced consequences of blogging has been the surfacing of traditionally censored debates and discourses regarding domestic violence, and has added to its usefulness as an asynchronous consciousness-raising medium. An analytical breakdown of the act of blogging reveals the behavioral sub-processes of consciousness-raising at work, including self-reevaluation, environmental reevaluation, emotional relief and social liberation (Brown, 1997). The study's third principal pattern of findings provide substantial evidence that many parent bloggers and commentators engaged in the act of *self-reevaluation* by reassessing their own or another's perceptions and feelings, particularly in relation to their behavior and difficult situation, in addition to conducting an *environmental reevaluation* of the effects that the perpetrators' violent behavior has on their own/other's environment ("The Gurdwara Galleria," 2011). Simultaneously, several parent bloggers and commentators have been found using these community blogs to provide *emotional relief* by aiding in the victims' desire for active behavior change, providing accessible treatment options or answers, as well as facilitating chances at

social liberation by using the blogs as vehicles to increase awareness of this domestic crime and potentially reduce its prevalence in the victims' lives and societies ("A Brown Battleground," 2009).

3. **Expressing opinion and identity**

The third effective way that parent bloggers and commentators used these South Asian community blog threads was for *expressing opinion and identity*. There was ample evidence of the democratic and polyphonic consequences of blogging, as the sampled blog participants textualized their opinions about domestic abuse against South Asian immigrant women, primarily by way of questioning, attacking and/or challenging the context, causes, definitions and/or stereotypes associated with the issue, and secondarily by manifesting their alternative and intersectional identities.

Analysis of the sub-theme 'Questioning, Attacking and Challenging the Context, Causes, Definitions and /or Stereotypes of South Asian Domestic Violence,' reflects literature on intersectionality and consciousness-raising, the strains that emanate directly from postcolonial cultural studies and third wave feminisms (Mani 1992; Mohanty, 1994; Spivak, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997, 2005; Heywood & Drake, 1997; Rosen, R., 2000; Dicker and Piepmeier, 2003). The participating bloggers' and commentators' open admission that the intra-communally mediated ideas of 'shame, honor and sacrifice' ("Desis Against Domination," 2008) actually intensifies the abuse being perpetrated on immigrant South Asian women, also seems to provide an effective answer to Spivak's question (1994) that dismally inquires "Can the subaltern speak?" Although, due credit should be given to Spivak for questioning the colonial tendency of elision and erasure of marginal voices, one needs to ask other questions such as "Which groups constitute the subalterns in any text? What is their relationship to each other? How can they be

heard to be speaking or not speaking in a given set of materials?" (Mani, 1992, p. 403) but most importantly, as I believe, *can the subalterns be heard to speak in their own voices*?

The current project's blog-generated voices that are seen to intersectionally question, attack and challenge the context, causes, definitions and/or stereotypes associated with IPV within the diverse South Asian immigrant community goes against the grain of 'cultural essentialism' that is oft unconsciously done by post-colonialism. In doing so, this study tries to avoid the tendency that many cultural studies academics and second wave feminists have, of taking away from the particular histories of colonialism, post-colonialism and feminisms, homogenizing cultural differences in the name of gender parity, and implying (however erroneously) that all forms of colonization and racism are pretty much the same, with similar realities and implications. In contrast, the voices of younger activists; political and historical specificities; multiple feminisms in response to multiple forms and forces of oppression; ethno-racial questions left unanswered by second-wave consciousness-raising feminists; and intersecting alignments of multicultural identities, are all agendas of the third wave consciousness-raising praxis (Heywood & Drake, 1997; Rosen, R., 2000). According to third wave feminists Dicker and Piepmeier (2003), "the third wave has less to do with a neat generational divide than with a cultural context," instead, consisting of those "who have developed our [their] sense of identity in a world shaped by technology, global capitalism, multiple models of sexuality, changing national demographics, and declining economic vitality" (p. 14).

Talking about the ambivalence of socially performed CMC, which permits anonymous interactions of participants, Turkle (1997) argues that these performative acts can allow users to interchange their real and virtual identities at whim, in a way that is perhaps only viable in the

context of our physically disjointed, yet technologically globalized existence. Such performances of identity online run the risk of either subverting the sense of offline identity, or converging the multiple virtual personas and so-called real identities, to form an unconscious intersection. Analysis of this study's findings have revealed that only a few bloggers and commentators used the blog space to either disclose or suppress their identities, and fewer informed other blog participants of ways to ensure digital anonymity for reasons of safety.

However, given that the potential for anonymity maintenance and identity presentation is an often considered consequence of blogging and CMC, it was quite unexpected to find such little explicit awareness about the 'Need/Desire to Reveal or Maintain Anonymity of Identity,' among parent bloggers and commentators. Does this indicate that not all blog users were (are) technologically aware of the possibilities of anonymity that the Internet offers? While it could be one way to explain this particular under-addressed consequence of blogging, the other explanations could point to the possible precariousness of some victims/advocates of IPV to openly and safely share their 'real' identities, or their knowledge of the technological volatility of the medium itself, or even, their taken-for-granted belief that the Internet by default promises a basic assurance of anonymity. In other words, the element of safety differs in degrees for different participants. Even so, as the overall findings related to blogging consequences among this ethnic online community has demonstrated, compared to FtF support groups or social forums, blogs are 'safer' spaces to discuss issues of a sensitive or controversial nature, with minimal fear of being 'found out'.

4. **Research question 3b (RQ 3b)**

In response to Research Question 3b, "Is there any thematic evidence that the South Asian bloggers consider these community blogs "safe" public spaces for voicing private

stories?" the study's overall findings related to blogging consequences reveals that the use of blogs to create a 'safe' sense of community was predominantly carried out internally, within the microcosm of the topical blog threads. But, for creating a macrocosmic society of blogs that can discursively mobilize a *sense of community* around the so-called private issue of domestic abuse against immigrant South Asian women, parent bloggers and commentators would have to internetwork with comparable topic-specific blogs within the South Asian blogosphere to far greater lengths. In other words, the ethno-cultural blogs in this study's sample do surface as relatively safe communication spaces that discursively invite *public* disclosure of *private* dilemmas with higher assurances of safeguarding identities. To summarize the findings related to the uses and consequences of blogging, it can be said that blogs are easily and freely accessible, their norms of participation are more flexible and democratic, blogger and commentator roles are more interdependent and non-authoritative, topic-specific discussions are also intersectional and polyphonic, and expectations of continued membership for commentators and readers are much lesser.

D. Trials and Tribulations

The emergent method used for the current study proved more complex than originally anticipated because of the unpredictability of online research. In order to perform a close reading and shortlisting of blogs applicable to the study, the first part of the data collection and pre-coding process was done manually. This resulted in reasonably extending the expected time frame for the entire process of blog thread selection and consequential coding of the sampled units of analysis using the QDA software. Second, on revisiting some of the sampled blogs post-data analysis, it was found that quite a few in-text hyperlinks to associated information had been altered, deleted or redirected by some bloggers or commentators. For the sake of simplicity, I

tried to avoid focusing on, or reproducing the embedded content of many parent posts and comments that may initially have been considered imperative to the holistic meaning production of the topical thread, but were either technically isolated, prone to eventual removal, or could have become a latent risk to the blogger's or commentator's expectations of safety and ethical participation within the blog community.

In order to satisfy the needs of ethically sound research, only those South Asian community blogs that are open to public access have been selected as the study's sample. Furthermore, because these are weblogs authored by members from a particular ethno-cultural group, the sampled blog participants could very well have communicated experiences, provided information and held beliefs in modes that are distinctive than those expressed in private weblogs, or than those South Asians who do interact via digital social media to create consciousness about domestic violence, yet may not necessarily indulge in the practice of blogging, nor read or comment in them. Keeping these limitations in mind, the current study only represents and spotlights this microcosmic sub-population of the South Asian blogosphere.

Since investigators of qualitative research on virtual social interactions are technologically equipped to document and explain only those adaptable, time-sensitive instances that appear within the format of a secure design, it's rather obvious that they cannot record the total picture, particularly in cases where they are trying to study the variability and subtleties of digitally mediated identities and shifting value systems. I hope this methodological drawback will prompt social media and CMC scholars to turn their attention toward creating more technologically sound QDA software and newer methods of doing qualitative Internet research that allows for the simultaneous extraction of affective and structural data for analysis.

Because of these methodological and technological trials and tribulations, many blogs and subsequent blog threads could not be included in the study sample. For instance, the blog search engine Technorati.com yielded such few blogs and blogs threads that specifically mentioned domestic violence in relation to certain sub-populations of the South Asian immigrant populace in the US, such as the Nepalese, Sri Lankans, Bhutanese, Afghanis, etc., that individual attention could not be paid to these diverse ethnic sub-groups of the South Asian diaspora. Hence, it is not known if they encounter any additional forms of marital abuse or systemic constraints, different from that faced by Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in the US, several instances of which have been furnished and analyzed in the current project. Also, to make it comprehensibly simple, it was my attempt to find basic commonalities in the ways that bloggers and commentators made general sense of and raised consciousness around the issue of marital abuse against women within the larger (unified) South Asian diaspora in the US, while acknowledging that in-group ethno-cultural diversity is a given when undertaking research of this kind.

The underlying assumption for this study was that the intended or affected victim/survivor of domestic violence as discussed in the blog threads has to be an adult, immigrant woman in the US who is of South Asian origin. To corroborate this criterion, the sub-finding 'self-narrative of abuse' had to apply only to women bloggers and/or commentators who self-identified as South Asian female victims/survivors of abuse in the US, while the rest of the blogger/commentator roles and identities could apply to men and women who could be South Asian immigrants or otherwise. However, as the study's findings have revealed, there is no way of substantiating if those bloggers or commentators who did not identify themselves as marital abuse victims, were not indeed affected by spousal violence themselves, or vice versa. Also, it is

quite possible that my understanding and proposed definitions of what constitutes domestic violence (and its derivatives, as mentioned in this study), may not find resonance with other social science researchers, victims, or advocates.

Since the topic under scrutiny is a sensitive one, and because the research questions, theories and method adopted to analyze the sampled blog threads stress on anonymous discursive content rather than identified structures of authorship, it would be a very arduous task to authenticate if the information provided by parent bloggers and commentators is indeed accurate. The related consideration of this study is the supposition that the threaded blog discussions represent truthful narratives of the blog participants' accounts, understandings, questions and attitudes. Because the study provides several examples of parent bloggers and commentators who have openly shared their stories of violence and freely voiced relevant knowhow to oppose domestic abuse, one of the inherent assumptions is that the contributors have delivered evidence of genuine identities and reliable accounts within their blog discourses.

The units of analysis for this study are blog-generated textual excerpts that have been anonymized, and the intent of analysis is a thorough review of its thematic content. Even so, a lot of thought had to be given to privacy measures, ethical usage of online resources and copyright affairs. Concerns about what comprises public and/or private knowledge on the Internet, and whether it is an ethical necessity for social media researchers to acquire consent for using and publishing data from blogs or blogging software are some pertinent questions I had to dabble with through the entire process of data collection, coding and thematic analysis of the coded data.

Distinct from other narrative methods of inquiry, thematic analysis has frequently been reproached for stressing on uniformity across results that many qualitative researchers believe

makes data interpretation rather unidirectional. Moreover, among the principal unintended disadvantages of using thematic analysis as the chosen qualitative methodology is the fact that it is sufficiently under-addressed and inadequately demarcated, in spite of being frequently used in cross-disciplinary analyses. However, I trust that the theories of intersectionality, contemplation of change and consciousness raising, as well as the qualitative method of thematic analysis will generate perceptive answers to this study's guiding research questions and thereby rework few of the inadequate, singular, ahistorical and stereotypical insights that we have so far created, disseminated and maintained about this human rights issue.

E. Future Research Recommendations

This study has been designed to specially reflect on that fraction of the South Asian diaspora in the US who know how to use or have access to an Internet enabled computer or mobile device, for taking advantage of its connective possibilities. Undoubtedly, there are several forces that digitally divide the South Asian diaspora by depriving one section from the benefits of CMC. Yet from the evidence generated there is no doubt that a sizeable proportion of this immigrant ethnic minority have adopted (and optimistically, will keep doing so) online channels of social interaction for self-expression, encouragement and activism. It was beyond the scope of this study to tackle the social and cultural implications of digital divide issues within the immigrant South Asian sub-communities, and neither was it the intention. However, in the current historical moment when Web 2.0 Internet tools and community standards are seen giving way to the dominance of inexpensive mobile Internet technologies, freely available mobile-centric networking applications, and increasingly user-friendly "produsing" social media options (Bruns, 2006; McKenzie, 2012), this study provides opportunities for future researchers to not only address how digital divide concerns play out among peripheral and oppressed peoples in

terms of their access to alternate channels of knowledge production and consumption, but also how technological distancing can result in social, affective and human distancing.

Close reading of literature on three subject pools related to new media, consciousness-raising and cultural studies has revealed that research in these areas is yet to touch on the ethno-cultural impact that online social media has on *communities of consciousness* being created around human rights concerns. This intersectional study was a particular case-based attempt to fill-in that research gap. However, there are still research questions that loom large, namely questions that cannot settle for linear answers, but ask for a series of complex correlated discourses to be studied in intersections. For instance, are those who are racially and sexually marginalized using this public platform to reinstate their ethnic background? Are the rewards of finding sympathetic people who have similar cultural values, more than the costs of interaction with unnamed strangers who may be sharing your deepest, darkest thoughts and feelings? Online studies have focused on inter-cultural and inter-group similarities and differences (Sink, 2006; Mitra, 2006), but new media research should focus more on intra-communal and in-group comparisons and disparities within online communities, particularly over cultural, social and emotional issues.

As previously mentioned, the question of whether online relations are more or less viable than offline relations is a redundant proposition, as is the oft-discussed academic contention that virtual friendships cannot compare to *real* friendships. Given that we live in a spatio-temporally fragmented age, where communication via technology is taken for granted and where the notions of friendship, reality, socialization, etc. are essentially relational signifiers, as flexible as we choose to make them, the best bet for us is to resort to ways of connecting to people that seems the most workable and contextual at the time. For years, philosophers, political theorists,

sociologists and communication scholars have dabbled in the spatio-temporal dynamics of offline public interactions (Habermas, 1989; Sennett, 1992; Carey, 1989), stressing how a group of people make sense of shared events, experiences and histories not as singular outcomes made up of discrete instances, but as a combination of correlated factors that simultaneously exert influence, be so in varied degrees.

In the same circular way, *relationships* within online networks are interconnected, the *online networks* themselves are interconnected, and the *meanings* that create and are created by these relations and networks are made up of interconnected parts, a proper understanding of which requires an approach that looks into *what* those component parts are and *how* they connect. Life is not simple, relationships are not simple, and neither are their causes, consequences and interstices. Uni-causal answers to questions of *how* and *why* certain phenomena occur or recur is tedious at best, and implausible at worst. Complex approaches, complex forces and complex problems all call for analytical dismantling, which can only happen if one looks at how certain mediums give us the opportunity to view the autonomy of the individual parts, as well as discern how they come together and intersect to create the complexities. Following this logic, what weblog researchers have yet to determine are the role of blogs as both products and producers of a topical intersection of social, cultural, economic, political, gendered, sexual, racial, ethnic, moral, ethical, aesthetic, and welfare discourses. In other words, can such topical blog discussions be thematically reflective of our complex and intersectional physical existence? I believe that this qualitative study on the uncharted potential of blogging for ethno-cultural currency- and human rights awareness-creation is the first step in this direction.

F. Conclusion

Is it not enough to hear the shocking statistics that one of three women are victims of violence in the United States, or that 1.3 million women here are victims of IPV, or that we may further add to the 85% of females in this country who are not safe from their own male partners or marital families? While these figures represent violence against women throughout the country across mixed races and ethnicities, including the South Asian population, it does not even begin to capture the real picture of its extent because most of the cases get brushed under the carpet. Our bleakest irony is that we are part of the cultural and religious legacy where the mythicized female gods are worshipped, while their so-called human representatives are battered, raped and killed.

The *public* space has taken its first few steps towards mobilizing the conversation about safeguarding a woman's life, identity and integrity. That is reassuring, to say the least. Yet, we can't sit sung in our own spaces of comfort thinking the wheel of change has completely been set in motion. The change should also come from within our private spaces. There has to be a way to initiate the same protective and proactive dialogs within the *private* areas of human interaction, as those are the habitual spaces where we are introduced to the basics of cultural, social, ritual and behavioral learning processes, receiving or rejecting them as we grow in more ways than one. Sadly though, as current statistics on domestic violence perpetration has revealed, it doesn't seem adequate anymore to simply instruct the men folk in our families that they should treat their women with love, respect and equality. This instruction has to be spread to the women of our community, both the ones who face the abuse and the ones who are in some way responsible for her co-gendered family member's abuse. Battered women have to learn to be resilient, they have to learn to counter it, and they have to know the avenues of available help in case of marital

violence. If we don't guide them to proper public channels of communication, catharsis and comfort, then irrespective of the cultural, familial, social and official monitoring that goes on or hopefully increases within the tight-lipped South Asian immigrant community, not much can be done to actively alter the gender-biased system that still reigns strong in our not-so-minor ethnic minority in the US.

On this note, it is indeed imperative that studies on domestic violence in immigrant or ethnic communities should consider and create culturally adapted community intervention, of the kind that can raise consciousness and community support around the issue, while soliciting ethno-culture specific help and advice from victim services and batterer intervention programs. Comprehending the inter-relationship between South Asian women's own patriarchal attitudes and their views on domestic violence will help activists, as well as the state to develop policies that will likely "facilitate women's help-seeking behavior by enhancing realistic awareness of one's locus, the capacity to analyze critically, and the ability to make informed decisions leading to empowerment" (Ahmad et al., 2004, p. 278).

Many scholars and feminists have argued that isolation due to immigration is an important form of domestic abuse against many South Asian women in the US (Goel, 2005; Abraham, 2000). In addition, proliferation of the forces of racism, sexism and *shame* disempower victimized women and their families from narrating their stories to their offline communities, for fear of being socially cast out (Goel, 2005; Das Dasgupta, 2007). Knowledge of these legal, transnational, financial and immigration-related impediments is crucial for understanding the historical and social underpinnings of domestic violence within the South Asian community in the US, and blogs may be one of the most accessible new media channels in

the present era of globalization that disseminate intersectional narratives and create a sense of community around human rights awareness.

The transnational experience of skilled South Asian immigrants has to be analyzed in the context of a globalization that is not just predicated on the dynamics of economic advantages and disadvantages, but through the politics of dislocation, made all the more blatant by periods of economic uncertainty and the accompanying policy changes and socio-cultural challenges that come with it. It is particularly during times of global economic slump that the political resistance to immigration for employment becomes more acute. It is no surprise that during such periods, skilled immigrants in advanced countries like the US feel particularly vulnerable about their economic, legal, political and cultural status. In such a climate, transnationalism as a global and local process advocates a commercial and cultural hybrid life that helps immigrants, such as South Asian migrants on H-1B visas to balance this uneasy tug-of-war between professional and ethnic dynamics that they encounter in the US, with the neoliberal economic policies that globalization has made rampant.

Transnationalism also weakens the place-bound practice of national/local economic activity, thereby making the political and economic climate ideal for the movement of skilled labor (Sanchez, 2004), especially to countries with multi-ethnic populations like the US. However, in this present era of uncertainty, political opposition to immigration and labor flows has subdued this process and has broadened international differences by changing the flows and patterns of global migration. Also, the creation and perpetuation of this very mythical image of the US as a melting pot of different cultures, overlooks (or masks) ethno-racial differences, culturally perpetuated gender disparities, and the trials and tribulations involved in the process of immigration itself (Sanchez, 2004). It ignores, for instance, the double subordination that

domestically abused women from minority communities often face, both as a result of the internally perpetuated, intimate violence and the externally operative, exclusionary politics of immigration, a consequence that comes across blatantly through the recently adopted communicative vehicle of blogging.

According to Bruns and Jacobs, (2006) what separates blogging from the outmoded email lists and personal web pages is the user's control of a personalized narrative space, while still being able to reach out to a large audience for exchanging information, debating issues, deliberating ideas and offering opinions. A unique sense of community is seen developing within and around the discursive space of blogs, a space that is powerful in the way it affects its participants, and as mobile in its rules of participation. Given that the antiquated and static concept of place-based community is something we need to dissociate from, adopting the notion of community as something people continually form, sustain, participate in, and feed off of, is an alluring proposition. In fact, "The ways in which individuals can read and write to achieve credibility and significance within their society, that is, their "literacy" in that society's forms, underpins a richer understanding of blogging" (Matheson, 2009), and therein a better understanding of the power and advantages that it has over other digital forms of communication and community-formation.

I started this research project wondering if it would make sense to question if community blogs also serve to reconstruct the public-private dichotomy in terms of gendered spaces and racial divides, or if at all they have the potential of complicating these notions by creating a counter-public that can foster safer discursive communities around the issue of South Asian domestic violence through critical online participation. Based on the study's literature review, methodology, findings and analysis, and as informed by leading theories, current research trends

and limitations, I do believe that the role of blogs and blogging research in contemporary societies have the potential to challenge (and if at all in the future, break down) the socio-politically constructed boundaries of gender, race, culture and public-private spaces and discourses. Interestingly, as the study's analysis reveals, any one, or an intersection of theoretical frames pertaining to intra-cultural communication, identity-negotiation, sense-of-community, public-private knowledge, and gender/feminist discourses can be equally used to evaluate the role these new media channels are performing to problematize and break down the intersectionality of gender, race, culture and sexuality (in addition to challenging social, class and religious constructs) that have surfaced in these blog narratives about violence against immigrant women of color.

As discussed earlier, a major problem that adds to the issue of underreporting domestic violence within this ethnic community is also the absence of representative national-level estimates for its incidence and prevalence. In fact, cases of domestic abuse that are reported against South Asian women in the US represent only a very minor portion of the crime when compared with prevalence data. This particular issue, according to Garcia (2004) is known as the "iceberg" of domestic violence, wherein only the severest instances of domestic abuse against women and homicide of women by their spouses/partners signifies just about the tip of the iceberg. As Garcia (2004) rightly points out, "According to this metaphor, most of the cases are submerged, allegedly invisible to society. It is clear that better quality prevalence data are needed, because the available statistics do not reflect the pervasiveness of the problem" (p. 536).

One of the selection criterions for my study's sample of parent posts and comments was that they could not have been published earlier than January 1, 2002. However, when the final sample was obtained after several close readings, the publication dates for all the data items

selected ranged from January 1, 2006 to January 31, 2012. What would have enhanced the veracity of the study is if there was a way to track the rise and/or fall of domestic violence cases being reported nationally ever since the 2002 quantitative study on IPV against South Asian women in the Greater Boston area that was conducted by Anita Raj and Jay G. Silverman, a survey that is still held as the statistical yardstick by scholars who research this paradigm. The closest one can get to a longitudinal comparison of domestic violence statistics within this population is the 2011 report on the lifecourse experiences of IPV and subsequent help seeking by Filipina, Indian and Pakistani women in the San Francisco Bay Area, by Mieko Yoshihama, Deborah Bybee, Firoza Chic Dabby, and Juliane Blazevski.

Out of 56 Indian and Pakistani women who met the selection criteria for the Yoshihama et al. (2011) study, more than 80% had immigrated (non-US born) to the United States, revealing that the percentage of domestic abuse is higher among immigrant South Asian women. Moreover, 55.4% of Indian and Pakistani women had informed the police (including placing restraining orders on abusive spouses), 60.7% had sought legal help, 41.1% had approached DV programs and shelters, while 57.1% had availed of non-shelter DV services (Yoshihama et al., 2011). When compared to McDonnell and Abdulla's (2001) study on IPV perpetration against South Asian women in the Washington, D.C. area, where only 15.7% of abused women reported to the police, 9% took help from DV services, and 6.7% called a DV hotline or shelter, as well as Raj and Silverman's (2002) finding that only 11.3% of the abused South Asian women in the Greater Boston area who had encountered IPV in their current relationship had sought counseling from DV services, it is clear that the 2011 report by Yoshihama et al. shows a marked increase in help-seeking and service-extending behavior by South Asian female victims and advocates of domestic violence in the US.

Could this pattern of increased domestic abuse reporting within the South Asian immigrant community be attributed to increased awareness creation? Although, there is no study till date that can statistically corroborate if the relative increase in help-seeking behavior is due to increased consciousness and action among community members, victims and domestic violence advocate/service providers, it could very well be considered a contributing factor. Further, whether new media channels such as blogs also create that increased awareness is at present just a subject of conjecture that particularly warrants further research and analysis. In fact, as Garcia (2004) points out, "prevention policies would also benefit from data monitoring indicators of social silence, inhibition, and tolerance," a future research endeavor that can be done by "monitoring changes in the number of cases reported by those who know about the violence (neighbours, relatives, friends, health or law enforcement personnel), as well as changes in social attitudes (such as victim blaming, balance of power between men and women in relationships, or zero tolerance attitudes)" (p. 537).

In recent times, there have been substantially self-organized protests carried out via social networks, from the Arab Uprisings, Put People First (PPF) in England, 15M in Spain, and the Occupy movement in the US, as parts of socially connective processes that have been termed 'Connective Action' by Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2012) to "describe the uses of social media in contemporary protest movements" ("Connected in Cairo," 2012). The concept *connective action* builds on the acronym DNA (Digitally Networked Action) used by the authors in their article (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) to differentiate "connective action social movements from collective action social movements," as two distinct logical forms that organize political protest and consciousness-raising movements ("Connected in Cairo," 2012). In case of the

former, the networking logic of *collective action* builds on heightened organizational connections and the creation of group identities around a common cause, while the still nascent networking philosophy of *connective action* is "based on personalized content sharing across media networks. In the former, introducing digital media do not change the core dynamics of the action. In the case of the latter, they do," or at least, I believe, they have the potential of initiating change through a process of transmedial *collective connection*, per se (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 739). It may not be much in the order of online protest movements, and more to the tune of being an early version of *digitally networked action*, but the Division of Violence Prevention (DVP) in the United States that works to prevent domestic violence and its ill effects has recently started using online social media tools like Facebook and Twitter for advancing the importance of prevention and control, thereby playing on their potential for large scale social outreach ("Violence Prevention & Social Media," 2012). However, it is only when the actual statistics of incidence support our assessment about social media furthering knowledge and awareness of the severity and prevalence of domestic violence within this ethnic population (Garcia, 2004), would we also understand the ways in which new media is actively involved in changing attitudes and empowering South Asians to stand against domestic violence against immigrant women.

In the beginning I had mentioned that at the very basic level, it is a question of communication. Indeed it is. Before any kind of physical action can be taken to report and resist domestic violence, one has to recognize it, name it, hear others talk about it, voice their own abuse, believe that there is a way out, be informed of the options, and reach out for support. We are members of multiple communities: social, cultural, religious, gendered, racial, economic, national, geo-political, online, offline, and the list goes on. Yet, many of us find ourselves alone and disjointed, communal only in parts. When you add basic human rights defilement such as

domestic violence to the mix, the sense of spatial and temporal belonging and the fundamental freedom of communication also get obliterated for the ones abused. What they need is a space to communicate in safely, accessibly and informatively, a space that has been evolving for a while now within the discursive interstices of blogs. The current study has provided answers to its guiding research questions by substantiating the nature and culture of blogs as those unsung spaces where, the initial knowledge of immigrant South Asian women's experiences of domestic violence are raised, where consciousness of the extent, forms and effects of such abuse have been thematically textualized, where oppressed and contemplative identities have found agency, and where women and men from within the South Asian immigrant community are seen to create a public forum of consensus and empathy around the issue of domestic violence to hear, heed and help those affected.

The sampled blogs for this study have also discursively demonstrated that resisting repression through consciousness-raising is an act of emancipation. It is said that during the stage of contemplating behavior change, victims of domestic violence often resort to modes of communication that involve oral, written and active listening skills as primary modes of consciousness-raising (Sowards & Renegar, 2004; Brown, 1997). The stages of contemplating, disclosing and reacting to personal experiences of abuse, censure and silencing eventually morphs into the process of consciousness-raising that is simultaneously done by domestic violence victims, and encouraged by advocates. As revealed by the study's sampled blog discourses, in this process of consciousness raising the intersectional factors that can lead to and/or prevent domestic violence against immigrant South Asian women are openly discussed, group awareness about the issue is improved and change is imminent, thereby encouraging community proactivity and individual empowerment.

Moreover, by using the under-defined method of thematic analysis that is suited to the investigation of online blog interactions, I consider that another layer of complexity has been added to this study of digital hypertexts as systems of symbolic thematic intersections that have re-formulated and democratized relationships between the authors, commentators and readers (Riessman, 2002; Lindeman, 2005; Landow, 2001). I believe that it is the ritual, communal and intersectional nature of digital hypertext that gives blogs the potential to be *alternate* discursive communities that many South Asian women, activists and oppressed others can use as online 'safe spaces' to publicly voice her own and another's struggles as immigrants, victims, and advocates of domestic violence and other modes of oppression.

It is also true that the technological volatility of the medium, in addition to the precariousness of its archived structure and shifting norms of participation cannot give its members the promise of permanence, or continued communal solidarity. Yet, as this qualitative study holds evidence, it is my hope that future research on the socio-cultural currency of blogs will also continue to establish its untapped importance as an online social practice that fosters a culture of understanding, and gives marginalized and minority voices an open and legitimate pulpit. I believe this study can stand alone as a counter-historical narrative to the official history (read: ahistorical, to quite an extent) of domestic violence within the South Asian diaspora in the United States to which most of us have been uni-directionally indoctrinated thus far, not to mention evidentially stand as a qualitative *statement of power/s*, both for individual and collective voices. Of course, research in this direction can further develop the democratic, mobile and polyphonic potential of blogs as online *public* communities that make a tangible socio-cultural impact by addressing *privatized* human rights issues, across locally and globally divergent cultures. And, of course, the imperative question to ask in the near future would be if

some of those South Asian bloggers addressed in this study were indeed able to *counter-voice* their fractured offline experiences and maintain their sense of power through online consciousness-raising and intersectional identity negotiations?

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M.A., Northern Illinois University, Communication Studies, 2007
Thesis: Rhetoric of the Gaze: Gendered Roles in Colonial India as depicted in Satyajit Ray's *Devi* (The Goddess 1960), *Charulata* (The Lonely Wife 1964) and *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World 1984).
Chair: Richard Holt, Ph.D.

M.A., Jadavpur University, Comparative Literature, India, 2003
Thesis: Dialectic of the Inside and the Outside: Spatial Imagery of Confinement and Freedom in Ambai's *A Kitchen in the Corner of the House* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*.
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Mukherjee, I. (2011). The masala of globalism: Repositioning 'dis/placement' in the films of Mira Nair. *Studies in South Asian Film and Media*, *2*(2), 85-106. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/safm.2.2.85_1

PRESENTATIONS: **Mukherjee, I.** (2011, November). *Online voices, Offline Violence: Blogs as safe spaces for domestically abused South Asian immigrant women*. Paper accepted at the NCA 97th Annual Convention in New Orleans, LA. (In the session entitled, *Color me empowered: The quest for a transnational feminist voice in social and conventional media*)

Mukherjee, I. (2011, October). *The 'third' community and the rhetoric of violence: Performing desired identities in South Asian blogs against domestic abuse*. Paper accepted at the 12th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), Seattle, WA.

Mukherjee, I. (2011, April). *My husband doesn't know I'm blogging: In search of safe spaces online*. Paper accepted at the *Theorizing the Web Conference*, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

Knight Steele, C., Lucchesi, E., **Mukherjee, I.**, & Schandorf, M. (2010, May). Kids, books, and dogs: Reading into race and class in Chicago. Paper presented at the University of Illinois Communication Conference, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Urbana-Champaign, IL.

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Barnhurst, K., Benjamin, Z., Griffith, M., Mastarone, G., **Mukherjee, I**. & Quinn, K. (2008, November). *UnConventional political Visions: The state of visual research within political communication*. Poster presented at the 94th annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Scholar-to-Scholar Session, San Diego, CA.

Griffith, M. & **Mukherjee, I.** (2008, October). *Advertising identities: Convergence of commodification and identification*. Paper presented at the 9th annual meeting of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), Copenhagen, Denmark.

Jones, S. G. & **Mukherjee, I.** (2008, April). iThou: Ethics, friendship and the Internet. Paper presented at the Ethics and Evil in the Public Sphere Conference at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.

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Mukherjee, I. (2013). Blogs on Domestic Violence against Immigrant South Asian Women: A Thematic Analysis

The study explores intersectional themes on the issue of domestic violence against immigrant South Asian women in the United States, as evidenced in general-interest South Asian blogs.

Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois
Master's Thesis
Mukherjee, I. (2007).

Rhetoric of the Gaze: Gendered Roles in Colonial India as depicted in Satyajit Ray's *Devi* (The Goddess 1960), *Charulata* (The Lonely Wife 1964) and *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World 1984).

Conducted a critical rhetorical analysis of three Indian films by international filmmaker Satyajit Ray, which explores the position of its female protagonists' as the cinematic intersection for nationalism, sexuality and early feminism based on postcolonial, gaze theories.

University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Research Assistant
Department of Communication, UIC

Worked with professor Steven G. Jones, Ph.D. on ongoing projects that explore the impact of ethnic media on immigrant populations in urban Chicago.

Edited and formatted seminal out-of-print communication treatises as part of a publication revival project.

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Masters Thesis

Mukherjee, I. (2003). Dialectic of the Inside and the Outside: Spatial Imagery of Confinement and Freedom in Ambai's *A Kitchen in the Corner of the House* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

Explored spatial and metaphorical images of pre-colonial, cross-cultural gender role expectations as depicted in early Indian and North American feminist short fiction works.

EXPERIENCE:

Telematics and JPEG Labs, Department of Communication Studies, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL

Computer Lab Assistant (August 2005 – August 2007)

- Managed and oversaw departmental computer labs
- Updated department website and copyedited department web content.
- Copy wrote web-based and print-based user manuals for the department computer labs.
- Designed web graphics and coded HTML for lab websites
- Troubleshot related PC/Mac issues for students, faculty, and staff.

WYSIWYG Communications Pvt. Ltd.
Graphic Design Studio
Kolkata, India

Marketing Communications and Graphic Design Intern (June – August 2006)

- Copy wrote and copyedited materials for public relation campaigns and advertisements
- Researched, created and updated websites for corporate and NPO clients
- Created digital and offline advertorials and brochures for products and promotional campaigns

Dulal Mukherjee and Associates Pvt. Ltd.
Architects and Engineers
Kolkata, India

PR and Communications Specialist (Jan, 2004 – March 2005)

- Created architectural project brochures as part of a team involved in research, copywriting and copyediting.
- Teamed with the web design firm to create and update the company website
- Worked as a team to create press articles, project presentations and portfolios, internal messages, email promotions, executive and departmental updates, changes in management, as well as company communication policies, etc.
- Participated in intra-organizational changes and marketing initiatives, suggested best strategies for intra-corporate communication messages, as well as determined appropriate marketing tools and delivery channels based on content, significance, and clientele.

Mrittika Foundation Trust
Bengal Craft and Folk Art NPO
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Communication and Design Coordinator (January 2003 – April 2005)

- Worked as part of an entrepreneurial design team that has set up this non-profit crafts organization devoted to the revival of near-lost folk arts and artisans of rural West Bengal (Eastern India).
- Created communication programs for female artisans involved in the NPO, with a focus on economic, health, social and gender empowerment.
- Volunteered as an advocate to create awareness about the dying arts, crafts and artisans of West Bengal.

- Facilitated self-sustainability workshops among the charity's artisans to help them improve their living conditions.

SERVICE:

Colloquium Committee, Department of Communication, University of Illinois, 2008

Communications Research Volunteer, Sit, Stay, Read Inc., Chicago, IL
Jan 2010 – May 2010

- Researched curriculum, correspondence, promotional and grant documents using the method of document analysis to help enhance the community image of this childhood literacy-driven NPO in urban Chicago.
- Conducted semi-structured interviews, transcribed qualitative data, and managed database using QDA software.
- Analyzed, summarized and reported results based on qualitative and quantitative research and test results.
- Implemented effective communication plans to increase the organization's constituency and donor base.
- Advised organization members and their constituents on active ways to promote the cause of childhood literacy.

AFFILIATIONS:

National Communication Association, 2009
Association of Internet Researchers, 2009-2011
American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA)

FUNDING:

Teaching Assistantship, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2011-present
Research Assistantship, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2009-2011
Teaching Assistantship, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2007-2008
Teaching Assistantship, Northern Illinois University, 2005-2007

AWARDS, HONORS, CERTIFICATES:

40-Hour Domestic Violence Training Certificate, Apna Ghar, Chicago, IL
Spring 2011

Carl J. Couch Internet Research Award, 2011
Paper entitled "*Third* space and the intersectionality of violence: Symbolizing community and performing identities in South Asian blog interactions against domestic abuse," selected as the Second Place award recipient.

Clifford G. Christians Ethics Research Award, 2011
Jones, S. G. & Mukherjee, I. (2010). "iThou: Ethics, Friendship and the Internet." In R. Fortner & M. Fackler (Eds.), *Ethics and Evil in the Public Sphere: Media, Universal Values and Global Development*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
Award received for excellence in research in the areas of digital ethics, mass communication theory, and the relationship between media, technology and culture.

National Dean's List Nomination, 2006-2007
Distinction on Masters Thesis, Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, August 2003.

SKILLS: Desktop Applications: Microsoft Office
Data Analysis Software: Dedoose Social Scientific Research Software, WEFT QDA, TAMS QDA, and SPSS
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