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REFLECTIONS ON DOING RESEARCH

By Margaret Abraham

(Ed.'s note: This contribution was solicited by section council member Linda Vo).

A decade ago there was considerable research on domestic violence in the United States, but a serious paucity of material on its prevalence in ethnic minority communities. It was during this period that I decided to explore marital violence in the South Asian immigrant community in the United States. Interestingly, in the early stages of this research, I found myself being asked by some South Asian activists whether my work as a sociologist would be accessible to a larger audience than academics. This question, together with discussions with academics, friends, and activists about community identity construction, particularly in the context of violence against women, influenced me to critically reflect on my roles as a sociologist and as a South Asian immigrant woman working in the United States.

Though my entrée in the field of domestic violence was primarily as a researcher whose main goal was to contribute to the discourse on domestic violence, I was surprised to see how this goal became much more concrete than I had initially envisioned. Over the years I have increasingly come to see myself as a sociologist engaged in "action research" (Dobash & Dobash) committed to bridging the gap between scholarship and activism. I believe that doing research on violence against women involves integrating

theoretical and methodological rigor within a socio-political context. Theoretically, action research entails a commitment to continuously examine the commonalities and differences that exist among women and men based on the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and nationality.

Methodologically, action research recognizes that issues such as where the research takes place, the types of questions asked, data collection strategies, interpretation, dissemination, and the relationship between researcher and respondent are intrinsically socio-political in nature.

I feel very fortunate, albeit at times a bit overwhelmed, that my research has allowed me as a sociologist to contribute to the discourse on domestic violence while simultaneously providing an important avenue to apply it more concretely in the struggle to end marital violence against South Asian women in the United States. There are three main ways in which I have been engaged in action research. The first way is as a scholar. Writing on marital violence has allowed me to include the voices of abused South Asian immigrant women in the discourse on domestic violence. It allowed me to be one among the growing number of sociologists to integrate ethnicity, gender, class and citizenship as categories of analysis and connection in understanding power relations, especially as it pertained to domestic violence. Drawing upon what I call an ethno-gender approach enabled me to explore the commonalities and differences in the sources, manifestations and outcomes of power for abused South Asian women at the inter-personal, community and macro-institutional levels. My intent is to show how each individual woman's oppression is closely interlocked with cultural and structural oppression in the

United States. In addition I aim to draw attention to the pivotal role played by South Asian women's organizations in defining domestic violence in the South Asian community as a social problem.

The second way that I have been engaged in action research is as a public speaker. Some of the South Asian women's organizations encouraged me speak about marital violence at various public forums in addition to my writing about it. These have included speaking at universities, South Asian functions, and at events sponsored by law enforcement agencies. Public speaking on marital violence allowed me an important avenue to share my ongoing research with a broader audience than academics. It provided a mechanism both for the dissemination of my research and to contribute to the vital work that South Asian Women's organizations do in shifting domestic violence from a private individual problem to a public social issue. Researching these organizations and working closely with Sakhi for South Asian Women in New York, also provided important sociological insights into the complex linkages between ideology, structure, goals, strategies, decision making, and outcomes for South Asian Women's organizations addressing violence against ethnic minority women. My interactions with South Asian abused women, with activists and the various audiences at my public talks have been extremely informative and empowering, both from a sociological and personal perspective.

Lastly, I have been able to offer my services as a domestic violence expert in cases where South Asian immigrant women have sought recourse through the judicial system. I have been able to draw upon my research and that of other scholars to explain the complexity of cultural and structural

factors in the South Asian immigrant woman's experience of marital violence in the United States. Depending on the case this has varied from testifying in courts to providing written documentation or oral input to judges or lawyers. To me this has been a very important aspect of my action research as the courts still lack a comprehensive understanding of the heterogeneity of women's experiences of marital violence.

Today as a sociologist I can truly say that writing and working in ethnic communities that have been historically marginalized or relegated to the ambiguous "third" position in a traditionally dichotomous society such as the United States has sensitized me to the socio-political context within which my research is done and applied. It has also highlighted the fact that although domestic violence research has clearly established the need to draw upon women's experiences, we still need to more effectively capture ways to address the subtleties of culture and the different situational, structural, and historical contexts within which ethnic minority women experience domestic violence. As sociologists who conduct research in Asian and Asian-American communities, it then becomes imperative that we deconstruct stereotypes of our communities and help in shifting issues pertinent to Asians and Asian Americans from the margins to the center. To do this we have to build better bridges between sociologists and activists, both national and transnational, while critically reflecting on and sharing our research. I believe that, in the years to come, more collaborative, comparative sociological analysis will help us address both the homogeneity and heterogeneity in the global pervasiveness of violence against women.

(Write to Margaret Abraham at
Margaret.Abraham@Hofstra.edu)

FACULTY POSITIONS

University of California-Santa Barbara.

The Department of Sociology invites applications for anticipated lecturer appointments in 2000-01 in the following areas: Introductory Research Methods; Social Stratification; Urban; Gender; Race/Ethnicity; Sexualities; Social Change and Development. Appointments will normally be for one year, but shorter appointments are possible. Reappointment for a second year is dependent on performance and departmental needs. Applicants must possess a Ph.D. in Sociology and be prepared to teach introductory research methods, have an emphasis in one or more of the substantive areas noted above, and have at least one year of teaching experience. Please submit vitae, teaching evaluations, and three letters of reference by March 30, 2000 for primary consideration to: Chair, Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-9430.

Vanderbilt University. The Department of Sociology invites applications for an assistant professor of sociology, tenure-track faculty position, commencing August, 2001. The candidate will be expected to teach graduate statistics courses. Preference will be given to candidates with expertise in one or more of the following areas: medical, organizations, education, gender, or stratification. Applicants should submit a letter of interest in the position, curriculum vitae, and any supplemental material (e.g. reprints, pending manuscripts, teaching evaluations) indicating promise or evidence