The "Unique" Experiences of Domestic Violence of Immigrant Sikh Women through

Films

by

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Abstract

The larger context in which minority groups such as the Sikh community make sense of domestic violence, and assign meaning to abuse, has seldom been explored in intimate partner violence research. Current literature, regardless of racial background, tends to homogenize the multiple experiences, perceptions and understanding of domestic violence survivors. With South Asians, specifically those of Sikh descent, being one of the largest growing minority groups in Canada, it becomes necessary to understand how this ethnic group experiences, perceives and makes sense of domestic violence. By utilizing a qualitative approach of content analysis, an analysis of two South Asian films, *Heaven on Earth* and *Provoked*, is conducted. Moreover, this research uses an intersectional approach of culture, gender, religion, public policy and immigration status to illustrate the multidimensional experience, perception and understanding of domestic violence by the representation of the Sikh community in films.

Key words: domestic violence; women; Sikhism; intersectionality; content analysis

Dedication

To my loving parents, Jagtar and Mohinder. Your support and encouragement throughout my educational journey has taught me that anything I put my mind to is achievable. All of your guidance during these difficult times has reminded me that "the sky is the limit."

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1.0 Chapter One: Statement of the Problem

The women's movement during the early 1970's reformed the way in which domestic violence was recognized and understood in society (Abraham, 1995). Such a movement brought about an increased awareness and helped situate incidents of domestic violence as a larger social problem (Sev'er, 2002; Barker, 2006; DeKeseredy, 2006; Landau, 2006). While the women's movement in the 1970's laid the ground for many future studies on woman abuse, research still remained limited in addressing domestic violence in non-main stream religious and cultural groups, especially battered immigrant women. The impact of the women's movement was not felt around the globe since the lobbying groups narrowly focused on issues particular to main-stream women groups. Those women included those who were Caucasian, from middle class families and resided in North American and European countries. In essence the women's movement in the 1970's was not inclusive because it did not voice the concerns of many women from underrepresented groups around the world including immigrant women.

This focus, while beneficial to the larger cause of women equality, did not encourage research on domestic violence and immigrant communities. The literature that does exist on domestic violence in immigrant communities focuses more broadly on the limitation of programs that are offered to escape abusive relationships (Abraham, 1995; Zaman, 1999; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002), the barriers faced by immigrant women in seeking state protection (Latta & Goodman, 2005; Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra and Weintraub, 2005), and patterns of disclosure (Ahrens, Isas, Rios-Mandel and Lopez, 2010; Bui, 2003; Abu-Ras, 2007). Much of these studies, create a static, homogeneous

dichotomy between dominant and immigrant groups, not realizing the uniqueness of the experience of various ethno-racial groups.

Despite the increase in domestic violence literature on marginalized groups in western societies, there still remains a limited understanding of how various cultural and religious groups perceive, understand and come to terms with incidences of domestic violence. The experiences of domestic violence do not occur in a vacuum. There are a multitude of identities such as culture, gender and religion which shape the experiences of domestic violence. Multiple identities work to position individuals within a larger context (Rummens, 2003; Raj and Silverman, 2003; Cottrell, 2008) and allow the experiences of domestic violence to differ between different social groups (Ammar, Orloff, Dutton and Hass, 2012). These identities intersect creating inequalities which as a result impact life circumstances, social opportunities and personal outcomes (Rummens, 2003; Sokoloff, Dupont, 2005; Abraham, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). The framework of intersectionality becomes central to understand how various identities interact, distinguish how different groups make sense of the issues surrounding domestic violence and make informed decisions regarding their situation. This theoretical approach deconstructs the blanket approach to understanding domestic violence and attempts to recognize how incidents of abuse have some commonalities and yet differ from one group to another. An intersectionality perspective provides engagement with a deeper understanding of the diverse experiences and perceptions of domestic violence, especially within minority communities where the explanations have reified culture as the incubator of all behaviours of minorities and immigrants. To overcome such a stereotypical view other factors such as gender, religion, public policy and immigration status need to be

considered, as culture in isolation is not the only underlying factor that shapes the experiences of domestic violence.

Canada has been labelled by many scholars as a very diverse and multicultural society (Esses & Gardner, 1996; Garcea, Kirova & Wong, 2008; Johnes, 2008; Pilon, 2007). However, despite this claim, the existing scholarship on domestic violence that focuses on the various multicultural experiences is sparse. For example, the Sikh community's experiences, according to Mutta and Kaur (2003) go unnoticed in the scholarship about domestic violence. This indeed is surprising, given that the Sikh community is considered to be one of the fastest growing minority populations, specifically within the South Asian community. It is well documented that South Asians are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in Canada (Shariff, 2008). Immigration patterns suggest that the Canadian Sikh population has also increased by 89% in the decade between 1991 to 2001 (Janhevich & Ibrahim, 2004). Despite this growth specifically in the Sikh population, scholarship on Sikhs is scarce, especially in respects to how domestic violence is experienced and understood in this community. Research that has considered the multiple layers of domestic violence have focused more so on the broader community of South Asians both in Canada and the U.S. (Dasgupta, 2000; Ayyub, 2000; Raj and Silverman, 2002; Gill, 2004; Jiwani, 2005). By concentrating on the larger South Asian community the experiences of the smaller ethnic Sikh group are often overlooked and presumed to be the same as the wider South Asian community.

However, the identities that interact in shaping the Sikh perception of domestic violence are much different from the larger South Asian group just as the latter's dynamics of domestic violence differ from the Canadian mainstream community. As

Sandhu (2004) suggests the identities of Sikhs depart from the broader South Asian community based on "spiritual tradition, customs, cultural behavioural patterns and stages of development upon arrival in the host country" (as cited in Thandi, 2011, p. 178). In light of these differences, it becomes necessary to extend the discussion of domestic violence from within the broad South Asian community to a specific discussion that relates to Sikh women and the Sikh community.

In an attempt to respond to the gaps found in the existing literature, this thesis conducts a content analysis, using the framework of intersectionality to focus on how domestic violence is experienced, understood and perceived in the Sikh community through the representation of films. The emphasis here underscores that not all South Asians experience violence in a similar manner. By focusing on the film representation of the Sikh community, this research makes an effort to create awareness, encourage future research and provide the information that is necessary for agencies and policy makers in the Canadian context. The end goal of this research is to explore the meanings Sikh women assign to acts of domestic violence and the decisions they make in regards to their domestic violence experience.

To address these concerns two films, *Provoked* (2006) and *Heaven on Earth* (2008), both of which are based on true stories and reflect the experiences of domestic violence in the Sikh community, are examined. These films, according to many reviews, reflect the struggles many Sikh women endure upon leaving their home country. Moreover, these films provide evidence of how cultural and religious beliefs may construct an atmosphere of domestic violence. The exploration of these two films examines the key research question of how Sikh women experience, perceive and make

sense of domestic violence in the West?   More specifically, the following sub-questions are addressed in the analysis of the films:

1) What types of abuse did the women in the film face?

2) Do Sikh women deny the existence of domestic violence? If so, why?

3) Does gender socialization shape the way domestic violence is experienced, resisted and/ or displayed?

4) How do cultural and religious beliefs instigate acts of domestic violence?

5) What role does collectivism (i.e., extended family members) play in an abusive relationship?

6) What are the barriers that prevent Sikh women from seeking help in incidence of domestic violence?

In order to recognize the meanings Sikh women assign to acts of domestic violence, it is important to understand the influences of broader cultural and religious beliefs. Although gender, cultural beliefs and religious ideologies are individual features, they intertwine and contribute to the shaping of the more unique experiences of domestic violence in the Sikh community. An in-depth understanding of cultural norms and religious ideologies allows for broader understanding of how domestic violence is experienced, understood and perceived in the film representation of the Sikh community (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005; Crenshaw; Andersen & Collins, 1995 as cited in Mehrotra, 1999).

This thesis is organized in 5 chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research problem. Chapter 2 examines domestic violence in the broader context of the academic literature

and the global setting. By examining current literature, I outline in Chapter 2 the definitions used in this thesis of domestic violence, the broader cultural norms, gender expectations, religious ideologies as they relate to domestic violence and public policies. These various definitions are described as they relate to the Sikh community. Furthermore, I illustrate how some cultural views in the Sikh community vary from the normative cultural values found in Canadian society.

In chapter 3, I discuss the methods for this study. More specifically, chapter 3 discusses the unique features of qualitative research and the significance of examining cinema through the lens of content analysis. While highlighting the importance of analysing cinema, I outline how film "influences" public opinion and "reflect" current issues in society (Macnamara, 2008). This dual role of cinema will be discussed in relation to the Sikh community. Furthermore, in this chapter, I will present the sample and the mode of analysis used to examine the films.

In chapter 4, I present the results of my analysis. The results expound on the individual identities and factors that shape the experiences of domestic violence in the Sikh community within the framework of the research questions posed earlier.

In chapter 5, I provide a discussion about the results and conclusions of the study by connecting together the various themes explored in the body of the thesis. I discuss how individual identities and factors such as culture, gender, religion, public policy and immigration status intersect to shape the perceptions, experiences and understanding of domestic violence. By building upon pervious literature, I illustrate how the main stream normative Western precepts tend to generally blame the victim for not leaving abusive

relationships and more particularly blame the culture of the victim if she is a member of a minority community. Despite the limited amount of research in this particular area, this study presents systematic research on how the experiences of domestic violence in the Sikh community differ from the larger society in Canada, which is dominated by western ideas and values. Lastly, in this chapter I discuss the limitations of my research and provide recommendations for future studies.

2.0 Chapter Two: Overview of the Literature

Placing the Research on Domestic Violence Within a Broader Context

The Term "Domestic Violence"

2.1 Defining "Domestic"

In an attempt to agree on the basic elements of the term domestic violence, there has been much debate in recent scholarship (Dobash and Dobash, 1992). The debates have resulted in the construction of numerous definitions and various acts being defined under the umbrella term of domestic violence. As Kelly (1999) outlines, the overarching definition of domestic violence covers a wide range of deviant or unacceptable behaviour which arise in ones' family in the form of emotional, psychological, verbal, and physical abuse. Although this definition of domestic violence covers a wide range of behaviour, there is a lack of agreement on what constitutes a domestic unit or a "family" (Landau, 2006). For example, violence in the family may include abuse perpetrated by parents against their children, or by children against their parents (Gill, 2004). On the other end of the spectrum, domestic violence in the family may include violence inflicted by either a spouse against step children or blended family members (Landau, 2006, p.73).

Since the term "domestic" varies according to the broader cultural context, there is no universal understanding of what constitutes a family. For example, within the South Asian community there is a strong sense of collectivism which includes in-laws, uncles, aunts and cousins as immediate family members (Fernandez, 1997). In contrast, in Canadian society, generally, the dominant norm of a domestic unit is the nuclear "family" structure, which consists of a pair of adults and their children either biological,

adopted or step child(ren) (Landau, 2006). With the aim of understanding abuse

experienced by Sikh women inflicted by their spouses and family members, "domestic"

violence in this research is defined as violence "perpetrated on a woman by her male

spouse or extended kin" (Abraham 2000; Uppal 2005; Izzidien, 2008 as cited in Thandi,

2011). Despite the fact that both males and females can be victims of domestic violence,

much of this research focuses on the experiences of women, who experience the large

share of abuse relative to their male partners (Saunders and Barron, 2003). To fully

understand the dynamic behind domestic violence it is important to recognise the term

"abuse" to mean domestic violence.

2.1.1 Defining the Term "Abuse"

The lack of general agreement on the basic features or components of domestic

violence has constructed many barriers to a universal understanding of domestic violence

and recognizing such cases (Dobash and Dobash, 1992).In view of this, it is important to

understand that the actions defined under the term domestic violence are not consistent

across different societies (Vandello and Cohen, 2003). What is defined as domestic

violence in Western society, such as in Canada, may not be seen through the same lens

within the South Asian community. For example, as Wilson and Daly (1992) discuss,

many cultures have formal traditions which allow a man to abuse his wife in response to

infidelity (Wilson & Daly, 1992). These cultures exclude forms of abuse that occur due to

a lack of religious belief or ones disloyalty to a moral obligation (Wilson & Daly, 1992).

On the other hand, many cultures cherish the concept of "honour" and allow certain

forms of abuse to exist when family honour is at stake (Vandello and Cohen, 2003).

Classic examples of such cultures include those from the Mediterranean such as Greece,

Italy, Middle Eastern and Arab cultures (Ammar, 2000; 2006; Vandello & Cohen, 2003).

These cultures assign such high value to prestige and honour that forms of abuse such as

violence, death threats, and even gruesome murders are excused in the name of "honour".

Many of these communities do not recognize such behaviour as abusive; they perceive

the behaviour as justifiable. On the other hand, similar acts in the Canadian context are

perceived as "abuse" or crimes, which cannot be excused under any circumstance.

In an attempt to adopt a definition that is broad and inclusive of the

multidimensional context of domestic violence, "abuse" is operationalized by using the

definition provided by the World Health Organization which reads, "the intentional use

of physical force or power, threatened or actual…that either results in or has a high

likelihood of resulting in physical injury, psychological harm, neglect or deprivation"

(WHO, 2002). This definition of abuse was selected as it covers a wide range of

behaviours that are not limited to only physical abuse. It has also been approved by the

nation states who are members of the global community of the United Nations.

2.1.2 Unpacking the Social Problem of Domestic Violence

Internationally, the presence of domestic violence was once viewed as a private

matter (Montalvo-Liendo, 2008). This implied that intimate partner violence or violence

within the household was a domestic issue that required a family based solution. The

failure of the justice system to recognize domestic violence as a social problem resulted

in women experiencing multiple layers of victimization. Women were first victimized by

the abuser and then were victimized again by the justice system which failed to intervene

in incidents of domestic violence (Landau, 2006). The social support programs needed

for victims to leave abusive relationships were also scarce. (Tierney, 1982). As Tierney (1982) noted, the first widely documented shelter for battered women (Chiswick Women's Aid) was first opened in London, England, in 1971. Before the establishment of Chiswick Women's Aid, women were required to seek their own resources to escape an abusive relationship. Although shelter homes have become a feasible option in many places in the 21st century, these institutions still present many problems in addressing the needs of immigrant women. Common problems include language barriers, diverse staff members, trust issues, fear of deportation, fear of reprisal and racism (Raj and Silverman, 2002a). These problems create an environment of further abuse leading many immigrant women to return home to an abusive partner in order to avoid the negative treatment at mainstream shelter homes.

The change from viewing domestic violence as a private matter to a larger social problem was brought forth by the introduction of many polices around the globe. As Richie (2006) outlines it was not until the 1970's that the transformation began in viewing domestic violence as a social problem which required attention at the government level. Throughout the next 30 years, several countries witnessed the emergence of new policies and laws which were aimed at protecting women from abuse. The United States began by passing the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994. This Act attempted to respond to the failure of the justice system in prosecuting violent offenders and provide financial and other support to both women from the main stream culture, minorities and immigrants (Ammar& Orloff, 2007). Moreover, The Intrafamily Violence and Prevention law was passed in Guatemala and El Salvador in 1996. China followed the trend by enacting the Domestic Violence Ordinance law in 1997. Colombia

also made amendments and amended the penal code to include the Intrafamily Violence in 2000. Japan enacted the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of the Victims in 2001 (International Herald Tribune 2007 as cited in Montalvo-Liendo, 2008). Despite the increase in intimate partner violence laws, there still remains great disparity in the ways in which each country's police act in regards to domestic violence (Ammar, 2000).

2.1.3 The Multi-Dimensional Nature of Domestic Violence

Although domestic violence is seen as deviant behaviour and recognized at the global level there still remains great variation in the ways in which countries enforce and evoke laws pertaining to spousal abuse. Many countries have discarded certain acts of abuse that are well recognized in other countries as unacceptable behaviour. For example, Asma Jehangir, a criminal lawyer expresses concern in the functioning of Pakistan's Criminal Court as she states "…judges are lenient in honour killing cases. Under the Pakistan Penal Code, it is a justifiable offence and killers rarely serve more than two years in prison" (Griffin, 1996, as cited in Kidwai, 2001, p.8). In 1997 the Human Rights Watch Group found there to be over 215 "stove-deaths" reported in local newspapers in a small town in Pakistan; however, during the same period only six suspects were apprehended (Human Rights Watch, 1999, p.2). This exemplifies the lack of enforcement on serious violent acts that are viewed under the definition of domestic violence in Western society.

On the other hand, in Canada, behaviours such as stalking and deprivation are viewed as acts of domestic violence that are punishable under the Canadian Criminal

Code (Department of Justice, 2001). However, in countries such as Pakistan and India,

acts of depriving a spouse from family income is rarely viewed as a form of domestic

violence or given public attention (Rabbani, Qureshi, Rizvi, 2008). A study conducted by

Rabbani and his colleague's (2008) on the perceptions of domestic violence found,

through an in-depth interview with 13 participants, that 39% of women in Karachi,

Pakistan suffered from economic abuse and 90% of women kept quiet about their abusive

experiences (Rabbani, Qureshi, Rizvi, 2008). Economic abuse has almost become a norm

in many parts of India and Pakistan.

A similar trend is also present in regards to sexual abuse and marital rape. In

Canada, Bill C-127 was passed in 1983 making marital rape a criminal offence (Criminal

Code, 2011). This perception of marital rape being a form of abuse does not hold a

universal boundary. In India and Pakistan, many South Asians fail to recognize martial

rape as abuse (Kidwai, 2001). Dasgupta's analysis of domestic violence in the South

Asian community revealed that many women firmly hold onto the belief that the status of

being married takes away their right to refuse sexual contact (Dasgupta, 2000, p178).

Dasgupta further asserts "marital rape" is viewed as an alien concept to many South

Asians (Dasgupta, 2000, p.178). The ideology of marital rape being "non-deviant" is

reinforced with the perception that a husband has a right to engage in sexual contact with

his wife at his desire (Dasgupta, 2000). As Abraham affirms, it is only when sexual

torture or sexual perversity surpasses sexual control is when South Asian women

perceive marital rape as abusive behaviour (Abraham, 1999).

This perception of martial rape and sexual abuse not being seen as a form of

domestic violence is reflected in the lack of enforcement of marital rape laws in India and

Pakistan. Women are often socialized with the ideology that a woman's purity reflects her respect, honour, and loyalty to her future husband (Abraham, 1999). A woman breaches her loyalty to her husband in the eyes of the community if she engages in sexual relations prior to marriage or has an affair (Abraham, 1999). This perception of a woman's purity and loyalty is reinforced in sexual abuse and martial rape cases in India and Pakistan. Women are often faced with gender based discrimination from the justice system when attempting to seek justice for abuse perpetuated by the hands of their loved ones. For example, as Amnesty International cites a man murdered his wife claiming she had a sexual relationship with another male in Pakistan. When the matter was brought before the court system, the sentencing judge stated, "when he took the extreme step of taking her life giving her repeated knife blows on different parts of her body, she must have done something unusual to enrage him to that extent" (Amnesty International, 1999, p.50). The statement made by the judge explicitly blamed the victim for the abuse, and the perpetrators abusive actions were justified due to her lack of "commitment".

Furthermore, under the Hudood Ordinance, a form of law in Pakistan which is derived from Islamic law the concept of marital rape is non-existence. Under the Hudood Ordiance law, "rape" is defined as "sexual intercourse without the consent or will of the victim of where the sexual offender was aware that he was not married to the victim" (Zia, 1994 as cited in Kidwai, 2001). This definition fails to consider sexual abuse committed by females and further excludes forms of marital rape. Much of the inconsistency in enforcing and evoking laws pertaining to domestic violence is a result of the different perceptions about the role of women and the a-symmetric power relations between men and women. Although the issue of domestic violence is well recognized,

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the ways in which countries enforce and evoke laws is in accordance with their own set of perceptions about the status of women. This inconsistency in the perceptions of domestic violence is further complicated in a society as diverse as Canada.

2.2 Domestic Violence in the North American Context

2.2.1 The Current Law Regarding Domestic Violence in Canada

The inconsistency in domestic violence related laws across the world are heavily influenced by the perceptions held by locals. When examining a social problem as concealed as domestic violence it is important to consider how perceptions shape spousal abuse in a society with a population as diverse as Canada. Statistics Canada estimates as of April 1st, 2011, Canada houses a population size of 34,349,200 (Statistics Canada, 2011). Amongst this population, there exists much diversity in terms of ethnicity and religion. In the 2006 Census, Canadians reported belonging to over 200 ethnic origins (Canadian Heritage, 2011). The population born outside of Canadian boundaries has also reached a 75-year high making up 19.8% of Canada's total population (Canadian Heritage, 2011). The 2013 Census forthcoming results will most certainly show a higher level of immigration to Canada since 2006. As Canada diversifies as a result of increased immigration, many immigrants bring along different perspectives on various issues including the issue of domestic violence.

Despite the increasing diverse perceptions, under the Canadian Criminal Code, acts of domestic violence are punishable offences. Since the Government of Canada has the constitutional power to amend and make criminal laws, the Criminal Code equally applies to every citizen and non-citizen residing in Canada (Department of Justice, 2001).

When examining spousal abuse through the lens of the Canadian Criminal Code, many forms of abuse are captured under the broad term of domestic violence. Although the Canadian Criminal Code does not have a specific "domestic violence" offence, perpetrators of spousal abuse can be charged with applicable offences (Department of Justice, 2001; Sev'er, 2002). These Criminal offences include, sexual assault, criminal negligence, homicide, criminal harassment, uttering threats, assault, kidnapping, forcible confinement, abduction, mischief, intimidation and breach of a court order (Department of Justice, 2001; Sev'er, 2002). Through this Canadian understanding of domestic violence, spousal abuse has been a growing criminal justice problem in the past decade.

2.2.2 Prevalence Rate of Domestic Violence in the Canadian Context

Recent scholarship has shown that domestic violence is an endemic problem which requires great attention (Sev'er, 2002; Bancroft, 2002; DeKeseredy, 2009). Studies have indicated that one of two women will be battered at some point in her life by her current or former partner (Walker, 1984). Although the true extent of domestic violence is unknown due to underreporting and the dark figure of crime, the Canadian Panel on Violence against Women stated that 27% of the 420 women they interviewed reported being a victim to physical abuse by either a current husband, live-in partner, boyfriend, or a date (Haskell & Randall as cited in Agnew, 1998). More recent research has shown domestic violence to occur at striking rates. One of the methods that have been used on the national scale to measure the extent and nature of domestic violence between intimate couples and spousal relationships is the General Social Survey conducted by Statistics Canada (Landau, 2006, p.73). Keeping the limitations of the General Social Survey in mind, responses indicate that both males and females experience similar levels of

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violence in their intimate relationship. However, a deeper investigation illustrates that women are more inclined to more serious and repeated forms of violence and have greater reparations than do males (Landau, 2006). For example, sixteen percent of the women reported sexual assault to be the most serious form of violence they experienced from the hands of their loved one, the number of males that identified sexual assault as the greatest form of abuse they experienced was too small to provide a reliable estimate (Landau, 2006). A similar gender trend is found in the number of incidents of abuse experienced by males and females. While 21 percent of women reported experiencing violence more than 10 times by their spouse, 11 percent of males reported experiencing similar level of violence (Landau, 2006).

Given that women experience greater levels of violence than men, it is not surprising that women are at greater risk than their male counter parts. For example, women have been found to be 3 to 5 times more likely to be killed by their spouse (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2007). Furthermore, women reported six times more likely to be sexually assaulted, five times more likely to be choked, and two times more likely to report being beaten than men. This data was derived from the 1999 General Social Survey on Victimization. Although it may be slightly out-dated, the department of Justice reports that this survey presents one of the "most complete information about the extent of spousal abuse in Canada…" (Department of Justice, 2001). The findings of the 1999 General Social Survey on Victimization are the latest statistics available on domestic violence since an updated fact sheet has not been released.

2.2.3 South Asians in Canada

The South Asian community is one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in Canada. The broad classification of South Asians refers to those who identify as having familial ties to the Middle East, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, or Sir Lanka (Ayyub, 2000; Statistics Canada, 2007). With mass opportunities for employment and the spread of globalisation, many South Asians have migrated to Canada for a better life (Merali, 2009). Since the early 1990's, an average of 225, 000 immigrants have arrived in Canada each year to obtain a better standard of living (Statistics Canada, 2010). Among this vast intake of immigrants, South Asians make a large proportion of the migrant population. Statistics Canada notes, in 2006 alone there were 1.3 million South Asians residing in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2010). This number is projected to increase between 3.2 to 4.1 million by 2031 (Statistics Canada, 2010). Making up 25% of the nation's visible minority group, South Asians now represent the largest recognized immigrant population (Shariff, 2008).

As settlement patterns have indicated, South Asians have been found to cluster in certain parts of Canada (Shirwadkar, 2004). Historically, the presence of South Asians has been strongly felt within two provinces: Ontario and British Columbia (Shirwadkar, 2004). Historical records have further indicated that within these two provinces, South Asians have constructed small pockets of settlements which resemble small ethnic enclaves. For example, the largest concentration of South Asians was found within the city of Toronto which housed 554,900 Indian immigrants representing 4.9% of Ontario's total population (Shirwadkar, 2004). Furthermore, as Grant suggests by 2030 "Canada's population growth will stem solely from immigration" (Grant, 2007). Since South Asian

countries are a major source for new comers to Canada and this research focuses on a sub-group within this community, it warrants that the South Asian perception of domestic violence is examined in order to grasp a better understanding of the multidimensional nature of spousal abuse.

Before examining the prevalence of domestic violence within the South Asian community, it is important to understand that the South Asian population itself is very diverse. There exists much heterogeneity amongst the South Asian population in terms of religious beliefs and culture (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Khan, 2000; Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001; Peek, 2005 as cited in Couture, 2011). The dominant religious beliefs amongst South Asians are Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism (Janhevich & Ibrahim, 2004). Amongst these religious domains, Sikhs make up the smallest proportion of the total South Asian population. In 2001 there was 278,410 self-identified Sikhs residing in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2001). This was an 89% increase from the 1991 Census when there were only 147,440 self-identified Sikhs in Canada (Coward & Hinnells and Williams, 2000). The growing rate of the Sikh population makes it a relevant group to study. Since the Sikh population is under represented in the domestic violence scholarship, and they are often included under the broad heading of "South Asian," this study attempts to fill this gap in research by exclusively focusing on the Sikh population (Sundari, 2011). For the purpose of this research the Sikh community consists of those "who follow the Sikh religion, which was founded in 1469 with the birth of Guru Nanak" (Thandi, 2011, p.178).

2.2.4 Prevalence of Domestic Violence in the South Asian Community

Scholarship on domestic violence within the South Asian community indicates high levels of abuse and violence among immigrant woman (Brownridge & Halli, 2002; Raj & Silverman, 2003; Tjaden &Thoennes, 2000 as cited in Sundari, 2011). However, many studies have failed to recognize the diversity amongst the South Asian population. For example, prevalent studies conducted in the United States often construct homogenized groups which categorize the various religious and cultural beliefs as "Asian Americans" to compare with the dominante group such as "White Americans" (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). This approach fails to recognize the "simultaneous, multiple and interlocking ways in which culture intersects with structural inequalities…and erases variations within diverse minorities such as South Asian women" (Sundari, 2011, p.1261). Due to these measurement issues, the Sikh population has been grouped together with Hindus and Muslims constructing a larger group known as "South Asians". Little is known about the perceptions and prevalence of domestic violence within the Sikh community. As Mutta and Kaur (2003) note, there is "a dearth of scientific research studies undertaken within the Sikh community in Canada to determine the extent of violence against women" (Mutta and Kaur, 2003, p.4).

The studies that have attempted to measure the prevalence rate of domestic violence in the Sikh community have been small scale surveys conducted by local social workers (Mutta and Kaur, 2003). For example, a group of counsellors from Rexdale Women's Centre, Malton Neighbourhood Services, India Rainbow Community Services of Peel, Catholic Family Services of Peel-Dufferin, Family Services of Peel and Catholic Cross Cultural Services found one in four Sikh women has experienced or experiences

abuse ("Sad State of Affairs in the Sikh Community in Canada"). The team of counsellors also found that the severity and the intensity of abuse experienced by Sikh women needs to be given immediate attention as the abuse is greater than other communities ("Sad State of Affairs in the Sikh Community in Canada"). Furthermore, a study conducted by Mutta and Kaur (2003) with Sikh women found wife abuse was recognized as a chronic problem by 75 percent of the participants (Mutta and Kaur, 2003). Aside from these few isolated studies, there remains an absence in the literature about the rate of domestic violence in the Sikh community.

Although there are few studies that have attempted to grasp the occurring rate of domestic violence within the larger mainstream community of South Asians, the British Crime Survey attempted to address the variation of domestic violence among various ethnic groups (Walby and Allen, 2004). The results found little to no variation in the prevalence of domestic violence amongst different ethnic groups (Walby and Allen, 2004). However, this study is not without its limitations. The definition used in the survey limited the definition of abuse to only present and former partners (Sundari, 2011). This excuses forms of abuse perpetrated by extended family members which is frequent amongst many ethnic communities (Fernandez, 1997).

The community-based studies that have explored the rate of domestic violence in the larger community of South Asians further suggest greater attention needs to be given to the social problem of domestic violence as it occurs at alarming rates. In Ayyub's (2000) analysis, she found that one of four South Asian immigrant women has experienced abuse by her partner and fails to disclose due to social stigma. Ayyub's (2000) findings further coincided with Dasgupta's (2000) analysis in the United States as

she attempted to explore the link between education and spousal abuse by conducting a survey with highly educated South Asian women. She found the prevalence rate to be significantly high with 35% of participants reporting physical abuse and 19% reporting experiencing sexual abuse by their current spouse (Ahmad, Driver, McNally and Stewart, 2009). Moreover, Raj and Silverman (2002) found the prevalence rate to be even higher in their study conducted in Boston. The findings of their survey indicated that 41% of South Asian immigrant women have been victims of physical abuse (Raj & Silverman, 2002).

The increasing rate of domestic violence is also found in the Canadian context. In 2004, Ahmad et al. (2009) attempted to measure the prevalence rate of domestic violence among immigrant women in Toronto. Their analysis, which encompassed a Wife Abuse Screening Tool, found 67% of participants experienced stress as a result of intimate partner violence. Among the women who tested positively for stress, 34.5% reported being a victim to emotional abuse, 24% of the participants reported experiencing physical violence and 17% stated they have been threatened by their partner (Ahmad, Riaz, Barata & Stewart, 2004 as cited in Ahmad, 2009). All these community-based studies indicate that domestic violence within the South Asian community is a problem of epidemic proportions that needs to be given greater attention. In order to understand the startling rates of domestic violence among the Sikh community, greater attention needs to be given to the issue through the recognition of intersectionality. In the following section, the framework of intersectionality will be discussed as well as the multidimensional domains that shape the Sikh perception of domestic violence.

2.3 Domestic Violence and the Intersectionality Approach

Scholarship has shown that domestic violence in the Sikh community is influenced by many elements and occurs due to multiple reasons (Mutta & Kaur, 2003). In other words, there is no singular factor that solely causes or influences domestic violence. Although there has been an increase in research pertaining to intimate partner violence in the South Asian community, the research relating to domestic violence remains inadequate due to the lack of investigation considering how multiple factors intersect in shaping the Sikh perception of domestic violence. The second limitation in present research is the failure to recognize the heterogeneity amongst the South Asian group. The ethnic group of Sikhs has not been examined in isolation; rather, Sikhs have been examined as a larger South Asian group (Sundari, 2011). This implies "a one size fits all approach" and fails to recognize how domestic violence differs between Sikhs and other South Asian groups. To address these drawbacks in current research, the framework of intersectionality will be used as the theoretical framework in this thesis. The framework of intersectionality recognizes that multiple factors interact and shape the meaning various groups attach to the social problem of domestic violence.

As Crenshaw emphasizes, when exploring a social problem, such as intimate partner violence, one cannot allude to gender as a single cause of abuse (Crenshaw, 1991). Domestic violence does not occur in a vacuum nor are the victims identical in their experiences of abuse and situations (Crenshaw, 1991). Rather, the experiences of abuse differ from one ethnic group to the next and further vary according to one's gender, cultural beliefs and religious ideologies. The framework of intersectionality recognizes the downfall of considering one factor in isolation and stresses the importance of

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examining multiple domains and their interacting effect to fully understand domestic violence. This holistic nature of inmate partner violence is supported by Andersen and Collins as they proclaim, "abused women occupy various locations within the multiple and interconnected social systems of race/ ethnicity and social class etc, which constitute the "matrix of domination" that entails privilege and oppression" (Andersen & Collins, 1995 as cited in Mehrotra, 1999). This implies one factor alone does not cause or explain the abuse women experience; rather multiple elements contribute to the social problem of domestic violence. This is further supported by Ayyub (2000) as she states, "to understand the issue more fully, one must look at the basic characteristics of this community, immigration issues, religious and cultural factors, and their impact on the domestic violence phenomenon" (Ayyub, 2000, p.237).

Understanding the cultural differences between Sikhs, those of European decent, and other South Asians, becomes central to uncovering the multiple layers that shape the Sikh perception of domestic violence. Many factors are often influenced and shaped by broader sociocultural factors. For example, as Dasgupta (1998) states gender roles are often stimulated and shaped by culture (Dasgupta, 1998). These cultural ideologies assign vigorous gender roles and further outline which type of acts are viewed under the lens of abuse. Culture can be viewed as one of the central hubs which fluctuates the perceptions of intimate partner violence between various ethnic groups. For example, within the Japanese tradition it is considered abusive to dispense liquid over a woman's head (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). This act is not viewed under a similar lens in Western society. Although pouring liquid over a woman's head may be viewed as inappropriate by women of European decent, it does not carry over the same meaning of "abuse" from

the Japanese tradition to the Western context (Department of Justice, 2001). This highlights the significance of examining culture in relation to gender, religion, public policy and immigration status when attempting to unmask the Sikh perception of domestic violence. Since the Sikh culture varies significantly based on individual perception, culture must be explored to recognize the cultural specific forms of abuse (Abraham, 2005).

The framework of intersectionality understands the diversity in domestic violence by acknowledging the various features which shape the perceptions of intimate partner violence. By failing to recognize the various layers of interacting effects, only parts of the larger social problem are understood. To address this issue the framework of intersectionality attempts to grasp the broader picture by understanding the multiple origins of domestic violence (Crenshaw, 1991). This multi layered approach in understanding the perceptions of domestic violence is summed up by Dwyer (2000) as she states, "it is recognized that the lives of…. are inscribed by gender relations and class structures as well as racialised discourse" (Dwyer, 2000 p.476). This is not to say that the greater consideration should be given to gender, class and race over other factors. As Bograd (2005) suggests, intersectionality does not give greater consideration to one factor over another, rather it attempts to understand how certain characteristics interact thereby allowing individuals to experience and perceive abuse differently. In relation to Sikh experience, this research will explore the intersecting effect among culture, gender, religion, immigration status, and policies, in attempt to explain how domestic violence is understood in the Sikh community.

2.4 Culture

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of domestic violence the role of culture must be examined to determine how different values, norms and beliefs of the Sikh community can supress or provoke incidents of spousal abuse. The term culture, like domestic violence, has many definitions which vary according to professional disciplines and individual perceptions (Raj and Silverman, 2002). A review of scholarship suggests "culture" is a social doctrine by construction which is held by a group of individuals (Raj and Silverman, 2002). These groups can be arranged according to race, class, age, gender, sexual orientation or even region (Raj and Silverman, 2002). For the purposes of this thesis, culture will be defined based on the religious beliefs of Sikhism.

Although much of the recent literature has focused on how culture directly and indirectly influences domestic violence, it is important to understand that culture can also have many protective factors (Raj and Silverman, 2002). The positive and negative relationship of culture is expressed by Raj and Silverman (2002) as they argue, "cultural ideologies can help increase respect for women and consequently decrease the likelihood of abuse (e.g. respect for a mother), these ideologies can also serve to disempower women and increase the likelihood of abuse" (Raj and Silverman, 2002, p.369). The double sided nature of culture is heavily based on the perceptions of what is "culturally deviant" and what is "culturally acceptable". When culturally acceptable boundaries are crossed, many Sikhs feel their abusive attitudes are justifiable. This is supported by Raj and Silverman (2002) as they state, "studies of Asian and Middle Eastern immigrant communities indicate that both men and women feel that if women do not stay within

their prescribed roles, it is culturally acceptable for men to discipline them using physical abuse (Ammar, 2000; Huisman, 1996; Kulwicki & Miller, 1999; Song, 1996; Tran, 1997 as cited in Raj & Silverman, 2002, p.369). Following in line with the framework of intersectionality, the following section will explore how culture and gender interact to shape the Sikh perception of domestic violence. The areas that will be explored are as follows; (1) general roles and patriarchal values; (2) collectivism; (3) and the "model minority" approach.

2.4.1 Gender Roles and Patriarchal Values

The vivid gender roles and patriarchal values in the South Asian community are strongly shaped by broader cultural beliefs (Mahapatra, 2012). These intersecting factors create many inequalities for women, as they are culturally required to follow "appropriate" gender roles (Sundari, 2011; Gill, 2004; Mahapatra, 2012). Women in the Sikh community are traditionally ascribed a passive role which limits them to remain within the domestic sphere (Ghuman, 2003). Furthermore, femininity in the South Asian community implies submissiveness, being dependent on the male figure in the household, and giving priority to family needs (Shirwadkar, 2004). From an early age of adolescence, cultural barriers limit the contact women have in the social arena to reduce the risk of premarital sex, as a woman's purity reflects her husband's or future husband's honour (Abraham, 1999). In other words, traditional cultural values prohibit women from being sexually active before marriage and having multiple partners (Abraham, 1999). The passive role assigned to women is also reflected in the practice of dowry. Prior to marriage many South Asians believe that the females side of the family should provide the male's family with gold, cash, land or some sort of asset which resembles the

"compensation for the transfer of the woman's burden to her marital family" (Fernandez, 1997). This practice reflects the subordinate status of many Sikh women.

On the other hand, the traditional South Asian culture encourages male dominance and sexual proficiency (Raj and Silverman, 2002). As Abraham (1999) notes, within the South Asian culture open sexuality is highly linked to construction of masculinity (Abraham, 1999). From a young age men are socialized to believe that a "real man" is defined by his ability to control, engage in sexual activity, protect the family and maintain authority within his immediate household (Abraham, 1999). A male that does not uphold these culturally specific gender roles is seen as less masculine.

These cultural beliefs reflect what activities are culturally tolerated for each gender. For example, Ghuman (2003) found that women are often socialized by multiple family members from early childhood to believe that they are to presume the role of a caretaker within the immediate household. This assigned gender role is reinforced by Ghuman (2003) as he states women are "socialized into their traditional roles of obedient daughter, caring mother, dutiful housewife and somewhat authoritative grandmother in the house" (p.25). These domestic duties are customarily associated with the cultural ideology of "sewa" (Shirwadkar, 2004). As Swati Shirwadkar (2004) notes the principal of "sewa" reflects the practice of selfless service which includes the activities of efficiency in cooking traditional food, taking on the role of a caretaker, maintaining respectful relationship and upholding a "good wife" image, entertaining guest and providing a flow of gifts (Dube, 2001 as cited in Shirwadkar, 2004). If these culturally recognized gender roles are breached, many men believe their abuse is justified (Shirwadkar, 2004).

2.4.1.1 Consequences of Gender Roles and Patriarchal Values

These domestic duties assigned to Sikh women have many long term impacts which in many cases provoke and shape the experiences of spousal abuse (Abraham, 2000). As Shirwadkar (2004) notes, "deviation from these gender role expectations is likely to meet with different forms of abuse and give some justification to domestic abuse as an inevitable part of marriage" (Shirwadkar, 2004, p.862). For example, Helweg and Helweg (1990) found in their analysis that even professional women strongly upheld the belief that certain duties were gender specific and resulted in different forms of abuse. In Helweg's (1990) research women often reported feeling isolated at home as their husbands worked long hours and expected their spouses to cook fresh meals with little to no leisure time (Helweg & Helweg, 1990). The abuse in the form of isolation is further supported by Abraham's (2000) study which found that the isolation experienced by immigrant women was intensified as males often segregated women to stay within the domestic boundary and limited their contact so the only social interaction a wife had was with her husband (Abraham, 2000).

The isolation experienced by many Sikh women also coincides with the patriarchal beliefs within the Sikh community. Ahmad et al. (2004) attempted to uncover the link between patriarchal beliefs and spousal abuse by conducting a telephone survey with 47 South Asian women. Ahmad et al. (2004) found those respondents who strongly accepted patriarchal norms as a part of their culture were less likely to identify a woman as a victim of spousal abuse in a vignette read to them. A similar pattern was found in Vandello (2003) study which investigated how the breach of cultural ideologies impacts spousal abuse. By running a logistic regression with 623 participants; Vandello (2003)

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found that those who held strong beliefs of family honour and viewed a woman's actions to impede the reputation of the family were more likely to be supportive spousal abuse (Vandello, 2003). Based on these findings, Raj and her colleagues (2005) concluded that those who hold more traditional beliefs are more likely to support violence as a means of restoring cultural values.

Although ascribed gender roles do stimulate incidents of spousal abuse in the South Asian community, the broader cultural values also shape the perceptions of spousal abuse. An interview conducted by Gill (2004) with 18 women revealed all women had a general understanding of what spousal abuse consisted of and why it was perceived as deviant. However, in many incidents discussed, the women interviewed did not perceive getting slapped for the first time as a form of abuse (Gill, 2004). It was only after repeated incidents of physical and emotional abuse, that it was viewed as acts of domestic violence (Gill, 2004). These views reflect the broader cultural ideology of a wife being obedient; females being the holder of a family's reputation and male supremacy (Shirwadkar, 2004). These views contradict the Western understanding of spousal abuse as any physical contact that is not voluntary or violent is viewed as a form of abuse (Greenspan & Rosenberg, 2006).

Moreover, Raj and her colleagues (2005) found patriarchal norms within the South Asian community had a significant impact on women's sexual health. By conducting a survey with 210 battered women and in-depth interviews with 23 women who self-identified as South Asian, Raj et al. (2005), found 23 women had experienced marital rape. The study further revealed that the male partner controlled his wife in regards to when the couple should conceive children. In 14 cases, the husband forced his

wife to have an abortion without considering any input from his spouse (Raj et al., 2005).

The broader patriarchal norms present in the South Asian community were cited to be the

main reason behind why males felt they had the right to decide when the couple should

be conceiving children. Raj et al. (2005) also stated that the 23 battered women felt their

husbands did not perceive marital rape to be an act of spousal abuse as they viewed their

wives to be their "property." This perception also clashes with the more recent

Westernized understanding of marital rape as one of the extreme forms of domestic

violence (Department of Justice, 2001).

The study conducted by Raj and colleagues (2005) also corresponds with

Mehrotra's (1999) analysis of how cultural beliefs filter down to spousal abuse. By

conducting in-depth interviews with 28 women, and two men, from the South Asian

community, Mehrotra (1999) found over half of the research subjects were not able to

identify the abuse they were experiencing. After probing the participants to discuss their

experiences of abuse, almost all the women identified their abuse to occur in the form of

control and manipulation. This form of abuse was further justified by the cultural belief

that women are subordinate to men (Mehrotra, 1999). The studies conducted by Raj et al.,

(2005) and Mehrotra (1999) clearly indicate that gender roles and patriarchal values in

many cases impact spousal abuse. The Sikh community has many mechanisms in place to

ensure the enforcement of these gender roles and patriarchal values.

2.4.1.2 Enforcement of Gender Roles and Patriarchal Values

One of the areas in which these gender roles are enforced is within religious

institutions. Temples are one of the main hubs for socialization, networking, acquiring

fundamentals of religion, seeking emotional and spiritual support. In recent times, there

has been a growth in the number and functions of temples in the South Asians

communities in Canada (Ghuman, 2003). Within these Sikh temples (as in most other

religious institutions), gender roles are strictly enforced and monitored in accordance to

broader cultural beliefs. The segregation of gender is evident as soon as one enters the

temple as women are required to be seated in a section that is isolated from men

(Ghuman, 2003). Moreover, the presence of gender roles is also evident in the duties

performed in temples. For example, Ralston (1988) conducted an in-depth interview with

16 women and found they were often assigned duties in accordance to their gender

(Ralston, 1988). These activities included performing domestic duties such as cooking,

cleaning and playing the role of a caretaker within religious institutions (Ralston, 1998).

These gender roles in turn crafted the perception that a woman's obligation is to fulfill

the requirements of her husband by conducting domestic duties (Ralston, 1998).

Another profound way in which gender roles are enforced is through community

appraisal. The concepts of "shame" and "honour" are central in the South Asian culture

(Farah et al., 2009). Maintaining family honour and a respectable image in the public

arena are of great significance to many women in the South Asian community as they are

viewed as the keepers of the "family honour" (Abraham, 2000). The essential role of

honour corresponds with the cultural ideology of "izzat" which is ones reputation in the

community. "Izzat" can be "an intangible asset" which is heavily based on the

community's perception of an individual. The reputation of an individual can be fractured

when acts of "shame" and "dishonour" become publicly known. (Brandan and Hafez,

2008 as cited in Toor, 2009, p.243). The idea of izzat places a sense of responsibility on

South Asian females to follow certain social scripts and abstain from engaging in culturally defined deviant behaviour (Toor, 2009). As a result many women fail to challenge culturally specific gender roles due to the stigma the community attaches to women who are non-conventional (Farah, et al., 2009). The enforcement of gender roles by community evaluation is supported by the study conducted by Farah and colleagues (2009). By conducting an open-ended discussion with three focus groups, which consisted of 42 South Asian women, Farah et al. (2009) attempted to discover the multiple reasons offered for why women delayed the process of seeking help from professionals for their injuries. The findings revealed that the dominant reason offered for not immediately seeking help was due to the social stigma the community attaches to the label of "abused women" (Farah et al., 2009). A woman who is battered is viewed as less credible since it is perceived that the abuse was triggered due to her failure to uphold suitable gender roles (Farah et al., 2009).

2.4.1.3 The Disparity Between Eastern and Western Perceptions on Gender roles and Patriarchal Values

Contrary to the Western belief that assigning gender specific duties such as domestic work oppresses women, many South Asian women perceive such assertions as misguiding (Ghuman, 2003, p.26). Many South Asian women believe their roles as domestic servants compliments the role of their male partner (Ghuman, 2003). Ghuman's (2003) analysis found that it is perceived that these duties help maintain the stability of the whole family and is not a form of abuse. This is supported by Seymour's twenty four year longitudinal study which found that gender roles such as domestic duties are not perceived as a form of abuse in the South Asian community (Seymour, 1999). Seymour

(2003) further notes "to view (East) Indian women simply as subservient and 'oppressed' as Western literature had tended to do is a serious misrepresentation of these women's lives, feelings, and personal attitudes" (Seymour, 2003, p.101).

Furthermore, opposing the Western belief that the gender-segregated and the hierarchical family structure in which many South Asian women reside contributes to forms of abuse, many Sikh women fail to classify such situations under a similar light (Ghuman, 2003). This is supported by Gill's (2004) and Mehrotra (1999) analysis, which found many South Asian women do not believe the male authority in the household is abusive unless the level of control and manipulation becomes excessive. The contrasting perception of the link between family structure and spousal abuse is further supported by Ghuman's (2003) review, which found the hierarchical family structure in the South Asian culture is not perceived as a burden. Rather, women felt they still held significant amount of power in other areas such as family matters and decisions in regards to kinship (Ghuman, 2003; Shirwadkar, 2004; Rauf, 2001). These views conflict with the Western understanding of spousal abuse as any level of control or situations which privilege gender specific authority are viewed under the umbrella terms of spousal abuse (Sev'er, 2003).

2.4.2 Collectivism vs. Individual Orientation

Contradictions exist between the Sikh community and Western society family structure. The South Asian culture is deeply rooted in a strong sense of collectivism which places the needs of the family prior to individual desires (Ayyub, 2000). Within this collectively orientated identity, the immediate family and close relatives formulate

the basic functioning of society (Triandis, 1991 as cited in Ghuman, 2003; Triandis, Mccusker & Hui, 1990). This "group orientated" structure in the South Asian community encourages the characteristics of cooperation, endurance, self-control and achievement in relation to the broader family structure (Ghuman, 2003; Triandis, Mccusker & Hui, 1990). In this regard, the collective identity shapes how one perceives themselves in relevance to the larger social group. For example, Witkin and his colleagues (1971) assert that group orientated individuals are heavily accompanied by the ideology of "field-dependency" which is a belief system that one must follow existing social norms and regulate their behaviour by using social cues (Witkin et al., 1971; Witkin and Berry, 1975).

The collective arrangements found in the Sikh community further emphasize family unity and formulate the identity of many South Asian women. Roland's (1988) analysis, in which 12 battered women were interviewed, found that the majority of the South Asian women (9 in total) classified themselves a part of a larger family (Roland, 1988). This clearly shows the family is the focal point in the South Asian tradition. Moreover, Ayyub (2000) points out that South Asian women are almost expected to identify themselves as a part of a family by appealing to be a "mother, daughter, niece, sister, and so on" (Ayyub, 2000, p.243). Any labels outside of these family structured titles are seen as unacceptable and deemed as deviant. This is clearly illustrated in Ayyub's (2000) analysis as she states, "identities outside of these relationships may seem inconceivable and support is not often given to those women who do not fit traditional roles e.g., single women, battered women, lesbians, and divorced women" (Ayyub, 2000, p.243).

In contrast, Western societal norms as practiced in the Canadian context emphasize an individualistic orientation where individual needs and desires are given priority over the requirements of the greater family (Ghuman, 2003; Vandello & Cohen, 1999). As Triandis (1991, as cited in Ghuman, 2003) exemplifies in his model, the individual orientated society encompasses the ideology of being competitive, self-regulating and viewing achievement in the context of self-glory (Triandis, 1991 as cited in Ghuman, 2003). These views contrast sharply with group-oriented people, who are inclined to act in accordance to the broader family structure. Moreover, the individualistic orientation implies children make personal decisions in the sphere of marriage, education, friend selection and personal interests (Ghuman, 2003). Within this context, the nature of living becomes independent as children entering adulthood are expected to move out and begin their own immediate family (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993, p.37). Within the group-oriented structure, the complete opposite holds true as many children reside with their parents and grandparents (Ghuman, 2003) and are expected to take care of both the older and the younger members of the family.

2.4.2.1 The Collective Identity and Domestic Violence

The collective identity found within the Sikh community alters the broader context in which domestic violence is understood. Although the Canadian Criminal Code makes no reference to the type of relationship needed to classify acts as abuse (Sev'er, 2003); domestic violence in the Sikh community are in many cases a product of harm perpetrated by extended family members (Frenandez, 1997). The collective structure found in the South Asian community in many cases allows for family members to be perpetrators of abuse (Fernandez, 1997).

Many studies have found that the individual provoking incidents of domestic violence extend beyond the male and female relationship in the Sikh community. For example in Fernandez's (1997) analysis, she attempted to determine how female kin such as mother-in-laws contributed to the violence many women face. By conducting an in-depth interview with 15 battered women from Bombay, India, Fernandez (1997) found that of the 15 women interviewed, nine reported their mother-in-laws directly or indirectly participated in the abuse they experienced (Fernandez, 1997).

Fernandez's (1997) findings further reflect those of Raj et al. (2006) who explored how in-laws contribute to the abuse Sikh and South Asian women experience in the United States. By conducting a logistic regression with a sample size of 169 participants and in-depth interviews with 23 battered women, Raj and his colleagues found 23.1% of the respondents reported being abused either emotionally or physically by their in-laws (Raj et al., 2006). Furthermore, Raj et al (2006) found abuse was carried out through control, isolation, economic barriers, verbal abuse, complaints about dowry, domestic servitude, denied access to food, and physical abuse (Raj et al., 2006).

Also by conducting interviews in a small village in Pakistan, Rabbani et al. (2008) found that in many extended families, spousal abuse is provoked or initiated by the mother-in-law, and carried through by the actions of the husband. Although abuse was commonly reported to be carried out by the husband, all five women interviewed stated the violence was first influenced by the mother-in-law (Rabbani et al, 2008). This study highlights how violence is passed down from in-laws to one's spouse crafting a hierarchal structure. These studies indicate that many episodes of abuse are a manifestation of the collective identity found in the South Asian community. Although

the abuse experienced by women is carried out through numerous perpetrators, many

Sikhs continue to deny such problems exist. The rationale behind why many Sikhs

continue to deny such problems will be explored in the next section.

2.4.3 The "Model Minority" Approach

Despite the tremendous progress in research indicating the presence of domestic

violence in the South Asian community, many women continue to hold onto the belief

that they are immune to such problems (Khan, 2000). The denial of such difficulties

combined with the fear that exposure to the community will result in abandonment from

family and friends leaves many women to be secretive about their abusive relationships

(Sheenan, Javier & Thanjan, 2000 as cited in Couture, 2011). The denial of such

problems is further intensified with the "model minority" perception amongst many

South Asian women that domestic violence is a problem that is mainly associated with

the West (Abraham, 2005; Ayyub, 2000; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996). Abraham (2005)

and Ayyub's (2000) analysis revealed that many South Asian women believe that cultural

privileges protect them from spousal abuse (Abraham, 2005; Ayyub, 2000). Moreover,

another reason behind the denial of such problems can be drawn to the process of

assimilation and integration (Abraham, 2005). Many South Asians feel their community

needs to maintain an image to the native born that they are free from delinquent

behaviour and internal problems (Abraham, 2000; Ayyub, 2000). These cultural values in

turn may shape women's perceptions of spousal abuse, as immigrant women may

perceive that the disclosure of domestic violence will impair the community image

(Abraham, 2000).

2.5 Religion

Many partners in the South Asian community believe their abusive nature is excused by the way in which religious scripts are translated (Ibrahim & Abdalla, 2010). Since many South Asians resort to religion to solve marital problems, it is important to examine how religion influences perceptions of spousal abuse. Scholars such as Clark (2004) have cited religion to be a contributing factor to spousal abuse in the South Asian community. On the other hand, scholars like Pyles (2007) have cited religion to be a protective factor against spousal abuse. Given the inconclusive discussion about the role of religion this section explores how religion shapes the perceptions of spousal abuse in the Sikh community by examining 1) the origins of Sikhism and the construction of gender, and 2) how cultural values are generally misinterpreted as religious beliefs.

2.5.1 The Origins of Sikhism and the Construction of Gender

Many Sikhs are devotees of Sikhism which is the youngest organized religion in the world. Sikhism was established in 1469 with the birth of Guru Nanak (Murphy, 2007). It has been said that Sikhism is the lost or "forgotten tradition" (Juergensmeyer, 1979, as cited in Jakobsh, 2006). The literature on Sikhism and women is sparse (Jakobsh, 2006). More specifically, academia is silent when it comes to addressing the gender identity of Sikh women. However, the very scripts found in the Guru Grant, the holy book of Sikhs, speaks to the issue of inequalities and in many forms rejects gender-base discrimination (Singh, 1993).

According to Nanak, women are a part of the earthly creation of humanity and as a result cannot be seen as unequal to men (Singh, 1993). This world view is clearly illustrated in the Guru Grant as it suggests those who hold ill-conceived views towards women lack purity of the heart (Singh, 1993). By actively repressing customs such as dowry, female infanticide and female veiling, Guru Nanak attempted to originate a new religion that created "new possibilities for the weak and the oppressed" (Singh, 2000, p.67). Therefore, the very origin of Sikhism preaches gender equality and liberation for oppressed women. This is clearly expressed by Nikky Singh (2000) who states the "Sikh faith opened up a wide horizon for all women, irrespective of their caste, class, or marital status." (Singh, 2000, p.69). The principles of fairness and equal opportunity were later embedded into the *Sikh Reht Maryada* (Sikh code of conduct) which Sikhs must follow as a part of their religion (Sandhu, 2009 as cited in Thandi, 2011). As found in many other religions, many cultural views are misunderstood as religious beliefs. The interacting effect between culture and religion will be explored in the next section.

2.5.2 The Misinterpretation of Religious Beliefs

While the framework of Sikhism addresses the importance of gender equality, traditional values and practices commonly oppose such views and separate each gender (Uppal, 2005, p.5 as cited in Thandi, 2011). As W.H. McLeod claims, although the religion of Sikhism is deeply entrenched in the equality of men and women, in reality, the practice of placing women subordinate to men still exists (McLeod, 1989, p.108-109). For example, McLeod (1989) outlines that in *gurdwaras*, the positions of power such as sants and granthis are solely held by men (McLeod, 1989, p. 108-109). These practices occur due to the cultural belief that women are "dependent persons" (Rauf, 2001). These

cultural ideologies are carried out in practice as *gurdwaras* disallow women to take part in Amrit (initiation) rituals, without the presence of their husband (Jakobsh, 2006, p.188). Furthermore, as Kaur highlights many women in *gurdwaras* are forbidden from entering the designated rooms which hold the Guru Granth Sahib generally referred to as the *Sach Khand* (G. Kaur as cited in Jakobsh, 2006). The Sach Khand is generally a small room which is chosen to hold the Guru Granth Sahib after the days prayers are read (Jakobsh, 2006). In accompanying this claim, Jakobsh (2006) argues while many Sikh women break the cultural blockades of gaining a position of power within the domain of *gurdwaras*, the position of authority is only limited to the "confines of the *istri sabha* or all-women's gathering" (Jakobsh, 2006, p.188).

These cultural beliefs that are assimilated into religious practices at *gurdwaras* have often formulated the beliefs of the Sikh community. The term "Sikh" can accurately be translated to mean "student" and defined as learners "…of ten Gurus or teachers from Guru Nanak" (Murphy, 2007, p.348). Since many Sikhs have proclaimed they do not completely comprehend the Sikh religion and attempt to make up for this lack of knowledge by attending *gurdwaras* on an occasional basis (O'Connell, 2000), much of the "learning" process takes places within these religious institutions. For example, BBC's synopsis on religion notes that in Britain 39% of Sikhs attend *gurdwaras* on a weekly basis (BBC News, 2009). As *gurdwaras* are becoming a central hub for education for many Sikhs, much of the cultural practices are being transcribed as religious beliefs. Hence, it is not the religion itself that supports patriarchal norms, rather the practices found within religious institutions. The perception of domestic violence is not only shaped by these religious institutions but further formed by public policy and

immigration status. The next section will explore how public policy and immigration

status influences the perceptions and experiences of domestic violence in the Sikh

community.

2.6 Public Policy and Immigration Status

Public policy and formal laws have been found to have a significant impact in

shaping the public's perception of domestic violence (Alaggia, Regehr & Rishchynski,

2009). According to Inwood (2004, P. 200) public policy can involve "conscious choices

by governments that lead to action or inaction" which takes the forms of "passing a law

or regulation, spending or raising money….". Since formal laws govern a wide range of

behaviours and apply a certain view of what is deemed as "deviant" and "acceptable"

onto the general public, it is important to understand how public policy contributes to

shaping the Sikh perception of domestic violence. This following section explores how

different laws that govern the Sikh communities influence their perceptions of domestic

violence and guide their decisions to disclose abusive behaviour. The following section

examines the areas of (1) immigration laws (2) barriers to seeking help (3) the interacting

effect between culture and law.

2.6.1 Immigration Law

Due to the prevailing pattern of marriages where men are the ones who either

come first to Canada and then bring their families or are already in Canada and go home

to have an arranged marriage, they are often the initiators of the immigration/residency

process for their wives and children. This process in immigration law, spousal

sponsorship, is the first legislation women are often governed by, upon entry into Canada

(Alaggia et al., 2009). Since the South Asian culture is deeply rooted in arranged marriages, as dating is generally discouraged, it becomes central to understand how spousal sponsorship shapes the perception of Sikh women (Alexander, Garda, Kanade, Jejeebhoy & Ganatra, 2006; Abraham, 1999). Although both males and females use spousal sponsorship to gain permanent residency in Canada, these policies work to restrict women from disclosing experience of domestic violence (Alaggia et al., 2009). Before exploring how spousal sponsorship acts as a barrier to disclosing acts of domestic violence, it is important to understand how the law itself operates.

Individuals applying to sponsor a spouse have to comply with the rules and restrictions set under the family class laws (Regehr & Kanani, 2006). As a sponsor, the family class law requires an individual to be responsible for providing basic necessities of life for three years or 1080 days within a period of five years. This implies that a sponsored person will not collect any social assistance from the government, and in cases where financial aid is available the sponsor is entitled to repay the cost. The basic necessities a sponsor is required to provide is shelter, care and financial resources. These mandatory rules apply even if a married couple chooses to reside in different vicinities (Alaggia, et al., 2009).

In recognition of increasing rates of intimate partner violence in immigrant communities, the family class law allows abused spouses to collect social assistance if a separation has occurred due to violence (Alaggia et al., 2009). This clause attempts to protect immigrant spouses by assisting them in escaping abusive relationships. To be considered as a candidate under this section, applicants must apply for a humanitarian

and compassionate assessment and a permanent residency evaluation (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008).

However, the battered spouse clause is not without its limitations. The decision if the sponsored person should be granted permanent residency in an abusive situation is completely a subjective judgment made by an immigration officer (Alaggia et al., 2009). The complexity of deciding whether an abused spouse should be granted permanent residency is written into the instructions of the application which reads "a humanitarian and compassionate decision is more complex and more subjective than most other immigration decisions because officers use their discretion to assess the applicant's personal circumstances" (Statistics Canada, 2006a). Despite the subjective decision, applicants are not granted the right to appeal a decision if their case has been rejected (Statistics Canada, 2006a). Although these laws are put in place to prevent immigration fraud and help battered spouses to leave abusive relationships, they construct barriers in disclosing incidences of domestic violence. The following section will outline how immigration laws create barriers for immigration women in seeking help.

2.6.2 Barriers to Seeking Help

As many studies have illustrated immigrant women are less likely than non-immigrant women to seek legal or medical help in incidents of domestic violence (Ammar et al., 2005; 2012; Bhaumik, 1998; Dutton et al., 2000; Gondolf, Fisher, & Mcferron, 1988; Krishnan, Hilbert, VanLeeuwen, & Kolia, 1997; Kulwicki & Miller, 1999; Perilla, 1999; Perry et al., 1998; Rimonte, 1989; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). What is more devastating is the fact that South Asians are further less likely to disclose

incidents of domestic violence than other immigrant groups such as African Americans and Hispanics (Yoshioka, Gilbert, El-Bassel, & Baig-Amin, 2003). In addition, studies from U.S. samples show that once the need for help is recognized, South Asian women seek it at a lesser rate than other victims of domestic violence. A comprehensive study conducted by Raj and Silverman (2002) found over 6.3% of South Asians reported the need to seek professional help, however only 3.1% contacted support agencies. This rate is considerably lower than the general public as 11.1% of citizen's reported seeking formal help in the Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (Hathaway et al., 2000).

The low turnout rate for seeking help can be can partially explained by immigration laws which place many South Asian women in a dependent state (Merchant, 2000 as cited in Ahmad, 2009). As Abraham (2000a) notes, immigration policies construct an atmosphere of isolation as power is given to the spouse residing in Canada or the United States. Since immigrants from India or Pakistan normally have to wait until their partner decides to sponsor them, immigrant women are placed in a passive position before leaving their native country. Abraham (2000a) further notes that once immigrant women arrive to Canada or the United States, all social ties with, friends, family, and social support mechanisms from their native country, are broken (Abraham, 2000a). In some cases, the isolation women experience is further intensified as the abusive partner deems physical, spatial and financial control (Shirwadkar, 2004).

Moreover, language barriers accompanied by the fear of deportation and the breakdown in communication with extended family members results in isolation and prevents immigrant women from seeking help from authorities (Alaggia & Maiter, 2006; Bui, 2003; Mehrotra, 1999; Miedema & Wacholz, 1999; Morash et al, 2007; Shirwadkar,

2004). A study conducted by Ahmad and associates (2009) in Metropolitan Toronto with three community based agencies, found that the reason women refrained from seeking help was because they felt isolated and social support of extended family members was lost with immigration (Ahmad et al, 2009). Another independent study conducted by Merchant (2000) found that the feeling of isolation is amplified with immigration since many South Asian women are legally dependent on their male partner (Merchant, 2000 as cited in Ahmad et al, 2009).

In addition to the isolation, many women are simply unaware of the protective laws put in place. In situating domestic violence laws in a broader context it is important to remember that many South Asian immigrants come from countries that are silent regarding intimate partner violence laws. In these countries, many women rely on religious, traditional and societal organizations for security and shelter (Ammar et al., 2005; Dutton et al., 2000). However, these mechanisms are replaced with formal laws and agencies in North America which leaves many women misplaced when attempting to seek support (Dutton et al., 2000; Haile-Marium & Smith, 1999).

Furthermore in a study conducted by Alaggia, Regehr and Rishchynski (2009), it was found that the most frequent response given by participants for not seeking help was the lack of information (Alaggia, Regehr and Rishchynski, 2009). Part of this unawareness can be explained by the weak outreach efforts put in place by domestic violence agencies (Huisman, 1996). Many services offered for battered women are simply inadequate in reaching immigrant communities (Huisman, 1996). Even when battered women are aware of their options in seeking help they refrain from contacting

authorities due to cultural norms. The following segment explores how the intersecting effects of culture and immigration policies prevent women from disclosing abuse.

2.6.3 Culture and Immigration Policies

Cultural norms and values in many cases prevent abused women from seeking help from formal agencies due to the structure and functioning of social services. As Raj and Silverman (2002) report many social services are not culturally sensitive to meet the needs of the South Asian community (Raj and Silverman, 2002, p.386). Immigration policies attempt to apply a blanket approach to resolve the problem of domestic violence. However, many immigrant communities fail to understand or are simply less accepting of the terminology used by these programs (Huisman, 1996). For example, the terms "batterer" and "rape" are seen as alien concepts to many immigrant communities (Huisman, 1996 as cited in Raj and Silverman, 2002, p.386). Despite the terms used by social services, many shelters refuse to offer immigrant women support as they require proof of citizenship and fluency in English as basic requirements for admission (Ammar & Orloff, 2007; Jang et al., 1990; Dutton et al., 2000; Sorenson, 1996 as cited in Raj and Silverman, 2002). Those women who do take the first steps in seeking protection are turned down due to their lack of documents and language barriers. Although the refusal of service is against federal law, Raj and Silverman (2002) suggest it still remains a common practice in the United States.

Moreover, cultural norms prevent many immigrant women from disclosing incidents of abuse since many South Asians firmly hold onto the belief that domestic violence is a private matter which should not step out of the sphere of immediate family

(Abraham, 1995). The ideology of domestic violence being a private matter and the resistance in contacting authorities can be partially explained by the experience of South Asian women and the justice system in their native country (Shirwadkar, 2004; Abraham, 1995). In India, there is a shortage of programs that specifically speak to the issue of domestic violence (Shirwadkar, 2004). Much of this shortage is driven by the low level of importance assigned to issues of domestic violence by local police and government agencies (Shirwadkar, 2004). For example, Niaz (2002) compared the stories of domestic violence in local newspapers to those registered by the local police in India and Pakistan and found police stations did not formally register all claims about rape, gang rapes, and physical assaults (Niaz, 2003). Furthermore, the Supreme Court Justice criticized government shelters for "being run like brothels" ("Government Shelters Are Like Brothels," 2001). The lack of outside systems of support in the heritage country leaves many South Asian women to resolve issues of domestic violence internally by relying on family, friends and religious institutions (Abraham, 1995; Shirwadkar, 2004). This perception of domestic violence being a private matter carries over with immigration and impedes the working relationship between authorities and battered women (Abraham, 1995).

2.7 Significance of the Study

Based on the aforementioned, this research on Sikh women becomes important for three main reasons: First, the larger South Asian group encompasses many different faiths and religions. Instead of seeing the South Asian community as a homogeneous population, this research recognizes the diversity found within this larger ethnic group, and attempts to understand how domestic violence is experienced and perceived amongst

Sikhs. Second, the majority of the literature emphasizes the patriarchal culture as the root cause of intimate partner violence within South Asian communities. In order to gain a more holistic understanding of domestic violence, this thesis examines other factors such as gender, religion, public policy and immigration status that may also be relevant with regards to the domestic violence experienced by Sikh women. Third, the justice system employs a "blanket approach" to resolve issues of domestic violence. This research draws attention to the fact of how the current "cookie-cutter" justice system approach is not an effective tool for all women survivors of domestic violence and may in fact create additional barriers to the help-seeking process. Finally, this research is a starting attempt to remedy the existing gap in the scholarship on Sikh women and domestic violence issues.

3.0 Chapter Three: Methodology

I conduct a qualitative investigation of the portrayal of domestic violence in South Asian films. More specifically, I use the research technique of content analysis to provide an objective and systematic analysis of the two films *Provoked* (2006) *and Heaven on Earth* (2008); both speak to the topic of domestic violence within the Sikh community in the West.

Qualitative research is rich in its diversity as it cuts across multiple disciplines, fields and subject matters (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). As Denzin and Lincoln (2008) note there is no conclusive definition of qualitative research as its merits change according to time, place and research. Despite this complexity, in generic terms qualitative research can be viewed as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible." (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). In other words, qualitative research is non-numerical and allows for a richer analysis, whereas quantitative research emphasizes the power of numbers over words (Babbie & Benaquisto 2002). The non-statistical focus of qualitative research is deeply rooted in the quality of analysis as the primary goal is to understand how social experiences are crafted and given connotation (Babbie & Benaquisto 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.14). This differs from the quantitative approach which is numerical in nature and is heavily embedded in comparing, aggregating and summarizing data to understand the relationship between different variables (Babbie & Benaquisto 2002; Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p14). Despite the different approaches to understanding the same social problem, it is important to remember that reality can never be objectively comprehended (Flick, 2002). An

understanding of a social phenomenon is only achieved through representations and verified through tools of validation (Flick, 2002).

To examine how South Asian cinema portrays domestic violence and understand the multiple layers that shape the perception of spousal abuse in the Sikh community, this study used the framework of qualitative research. Qualitative research was selected as it allows us to critically examine and understand how South Asian cinema conveys a certain perception of domestic violence to the wider audience. By providing us with a rich description of the underlying messages portrayed through the scenes, pictures, characters, emotions and the main storyline in the films *Provoked* (2006) and *Heaven on Earth* (2008), qualitative research will allow us to understand how media outlets construct a certain meaning that is associated with spousal abuse in the Sikh community. By focusing on how domestic violence is perceived in the Sikh community and illustrated through the outlet of South Asian cinema, this research is mainly focused on the context through which meaning is crafted and portrayed to the general public.

3.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis is one of the most widely used research methods in the social science arena (Macnamara, 2003). As Neuman (1997) explains content analysis is a non-reactive research methodology, which allows one to gather and analyze the content of texts (Neuman, 1997). The "content" aspect of this definition refers to "words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes or any message that can be communicated" (Neuman, 1997, p.272-273). On the other hand, "text" is described as "anything written, visual, or spoken that serves as a medium for communication" (Neuman, 1997, p.272-273). This

allows content analysis to serve a dual purpose where researchers are able to study the deeper message being portrayed and the means through which that message is conveyed. The versatile nature of content analysis has allowed it to be used to study a broad range of "texts" found in interviews, films, TV programs, newspapers and magazines (Macnamara, 2003).

The adaptive characteristic of content analysis has made it the fastest growing research method in mass communication (Neuendorf, 2002, p.1). The growing usage of this type of methodology is illustrated through Riffe and Freitag's (1997) analysis which found the number of publications in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* using the method of content analysis increased from 6.3% to 34.8% between the years of 1971 to 1995 (Riffe & Freitag, 1997). Although content analysis is widely recognised as a comprehensive tool for conducting social science research there are many ways in which the framework can be engaged. As Berelson (1952) outlines, content analysis can be used to explain the deeper characteristics of a message, the form in which the message is presented, the underlying message the producers are attempting to deliver to the audience, how the message is being understood by the larger audience, and calculate the impact of the message (Berelson, 1952).

Neuendorf (2002) further elaborates on Berelsons (1952) five core principals and states content analysis has three distinct features which are descriptive, inferential and predictive (2002, p.53). The "descriptive" aspect fulfills the purpose of describing the issue being portrayed, the manner or viewpoint in which the story is told and who is addressing the subject. The "inferential" feature of content analysis allows researchers to identify the particular viewpoints and dispositions of the audience and speaker(s). Lastly,

the "predictive" characteristic of content analysis carries the purpose of predicting how certain messages craft certain perceptions on a given issue (Neuendorf, 2002, p.53). Due to the strong focus of how messages are crafted and portrayed the form and content become the central focus of analysis (Hall, 1975). By examining the form and content researchers not only examine the components that are present but also look for the elements that are missing (Alat, 2006). Based on these tools researchers are able to use this method as an explanatory and interpretive tool to examine and understand the facets of content (Hall, 1975).

For the purposes of this study, the primary focus was to understand how Sikhs perceive, understand and make sense of acts of domestic violence. By examining the content qualitatively, I attempted to uncover the underlying messages being conveyed and how culture, religion, and gender were used to make sense of incidents of domestic violence. I further explored which aspects were absent from the films and how the issue of domestic violence was framed within the larger Sikh community.

3.2 Content Analysis in Relation to Films

Content analysis is a well-recognized research methodology that is a subdivision of qualitative analysis (Macnamara, 2008). Harold Lasswell (1927) first introduced content analysis in the early 1900's as a research method to study mass media in society. Since then content analysis of films has proliferated as a research methodology with the introduction of the television, and the tremendous growth in cinema (Macnamara, 2008). The increasing use of content analysis was inspired by the work of Max Weber who anticipated that the investigation of media content helps recognize and screen the

"cultural temperature" in society (Hansen, Cottle, Negrine & Newbold, 1998, p.92). As Harold Lasswell (as cited in Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p.12) notes content analysis of media helps us understand "who says what through which channel to whom with what effects".

Understanding the deeper messages embedded in cinema become important due to the central role the media plays in the lives of individuals. Research has found "next to sleep and work, our next most time-consuming activity is attending to media" (Barr, 2000, p.16). The amount of time spent around media outlets is also found to be increasing as technology progresses. For instance, Macnamara (2008) argues traditional means used to create social awareness such as religious institutions and local communities have steadily declined in Western society and have been replaced by media and entertainment (Gauntlett, 2002 as cited in Macnamara, 2008). This "new" wave of mass media in the form of cinema and entertainment severs to educate the public by providing information and images which "creates social awareness, attitudes and identity" (Macnamara, 2008, p.4).

Media outlets operate in two distinct ways (Lull, 2000) to shape public perception and influence public policy (Surette, 2007 as cited in Macnamara, 2008). The first way mass media operates is by "reflecting" current issues, perceptions and options found in society (Lull, 2000). The reflective feature of mass media is supported by the analysis conducted by Maxwell and colleagues (Maxwell, Huxford, Borum and Hornik, 2000). In their analysis, Maxwell et al. (2000) found the number of domestic violence stories reported in newspaper increased after the O.J Simpson incident (Maxwell et al, 2000).

This clearly exhibits how media outlets configure a story line to reflect current issues or viewpoints present in society.

Another profound way in which media impact society is by "influencing" public perception and options (Lull, 2000). Macnamara's (2008) literature review found media coverage can have both large and small scale impact on the functioning of society. On the larger scale, media has shown to affect the stock market, impact the rate in sales, cause corporate collapses and even impair the images of the President (Macnamara, 2008, p.4). On a smaller scale, mass media helps flourish political debates, influence public policy, creates awareness of consumer products and shapes reputation (Macnamara, 2008, p.4).

In terms of violence, films in particular have been found to have a significant impact on attitudes and deviant behaviours. Cross-sectional surveys conducted within a timeframe of 40 years reveal aggressive attitudes, physical behaviour and violent thoughts are linked to the amount of violence watched in films (Chaffee, 1972; Comstock, 1980; Eysenck & Nias, 1978; Huesmann & Miller, 1994). As for long term effects, Anderson and Bushman's (2002) longitudinal study involving 5,000 participants found violence viewed in films and television promoted aggressive behaviour later in life. Although there are several types of media outlets, films and television shows have been found to have the largest impact on aggressive behaviour (Craig, Berkowitz, Donnerstein, Huesmann, Johnson, Linzm Malamuth and Wartella, 2003). In a comprehensive study conducted by Craig and her colleagues (2003) they found the impact of media is "clearest within the most extensively researched domain, television and film violence" (Craig et al, 2003, p81). Based on these studies we can conclude that media, in particular films, influence certain types of behaviours by shaping perceptions and attitudes.

To explore the multidimensional nature of domestic violence, this study explored the ways in which domestic violence is perceived in the Sikh community through the lens of films. By studying films through a framework of content analysis, we can distinguish how the perception of domestic violence in the Sikh community is different and consistent with the Westernized understanding of spousal abuse. Furthermore, we can understand how films portray acts of domestic violence of the Sikh community. To fulfill these objectives, I analyzed popular films that are based on true stories about domestic violence in the Sikh community. In analyzing these films, all external sources such as reviews by individual authors, awards and filming budgets were omitted from the analysis. The rationale behind excluding all outside sources was to isolate the "reflective" and "influential" aspects of the films.

3.3 Data Collection

To determine how domestic violence is understood in the Sikh community, this study focused on two South Asian films as the foundation of analysis. The rationale behind the selection of films instead of other methods of media was because of the nature of communication. The film industry, more specifically Bollywood is considered to have a larger audience than other forms of media such as newspapers and television shows (Thussu, 2008). On an annual basis, Bollywood attracts 4 billion viewers internationally and produces more films than the United States and other leading countries in the film industry such as China, Hong-Kong, and even Germany (Thussu, 2008, p.98-99). In addition, Bollywood has an international viewership in comparison to local television shows and newspapers. In 2000, the Bollywood Oscars were streamed live to over 122 countries and reached a viewership of 6000 million (Thussu, 2008, p.102). With mass

immigration and globalization, Bollywood has become one of the largest competitors in the film industry and reaches viewers all across the globe (Thussu, 2008).

Despite the tremendous growth in the film industry, Bollywood was selected because of its reflective nature. Bollywood produces films in multiple languages such as Hindi, Punjabi, English, Tamil, Bangla, Telugu, Malayalam, Urdu and many others (Thussu, 2008, p.98). By reaching across multiple groups on the basis of language, Bollywood is reflective of the diversity found within the South Asian population. Furthermore, Bollywood was selected due to the legitimacy shown in the films. Bollywood has a strong reputation for publicly showcasing current issues affecting the South Asian community. For example, in 1947, the era of the partition, films were used as a means of social critique, to highlight problems around class and traditional values (Jones, Arora, Mishra & Lefort, 2008, p.7). Due to the authenticity behind Bollywood cinema more individuals from the South Asian community find it easier to identify with the conservative content found in Bollywood films rather than Hollywood's westernized portrayals (Jones et al., 2008, p.8). Hence, Bollywood cinema was selected due to the emphasis placed on the South Asian community.

The analysis consisted of Bollywood films that addressed the issue of domestic violence within the Sikh community between the years of 2006 and 2009. This time span was selected because it coincided with several high-profile incidents of domestic violence that occurred in the Sikh community. These cases involved those of Amandeep Kaur, Mona Gill and Amanpreet Kaur Bahia (Aulakh, 2009; McMurray, 2011; CTV News, 2011). The inflection in domestic violence cases during this time influenced the attorney-general of British Columbia to label domestic violence as a "cancer" in the Sikh

community (Sidhu, 2008). All other films that did not fall within the time-frame of 2006 and 2009 and did not represent Sikhs were dismissed from the analysis.

3.4 Sample

In selecting the specific sample, key words such as "domestic violence", "violence in the Sikh community" and "family violence" were used to find films that depict the social problem of domestic violence. I employed the Bollywood search engine as a major source of data since it included detailed feedback on all the films that have been released, news pertaining to Bollywood cinema, movie titles, reviews and synopsis of films. This initial review was intended to provide a concrete sample of films that directly relate to domestic violence. The findings revealed two films; *Provoked* (2006) and *Heaven on Earth* (2008) and one television documentary on Sikhs and Hindus that spoke to the topic of domestic violence. It has been noted (Abu Lughod, 2004) that these two genres of media are different, serve different purposes and have different impacts. As such for consistent units of analysis the documentary was removed from the analysis.

The films *Provoked* (2006) *and Heaven on Earth* (2008) were included in the analysis on the basis that they both were based on true stories, were associated particularly with the Sikh community, and highlighted the cultural clash between the beliefs present in the Sikh community and of those of Western society. Both films attempted to provide a realistic portrayal of how domestic violence affects Sikh women residing in Western society. Although some alterations were made to the original story to capture the life-long events of Amandeep Kaur and Kiranjit Ahluwalia in media format, these films still reflect and influence the Sikh perception of domestic violence. The

accessibility to both films was not influenced by market availability as a local movie store had both films in DVD format.

3.5 Coding and Method of Analysis

To examine the content presented in the films *Provoked* (2006) and *Heaven on Earth* (2008), I obtained both films from a local movie store called *Movie Time*. I watched both films a total of five times between June and October of 2012. During each viewing I closely examined each aspect of the film in relation to the larger social problem of domestic violence. In the course of the first viewing I focused on the main story line by debunking the crucial origins of the films. This included an in-depth analysis that allowed me to summarize the various themes found in the plot, identify all the characters in the film and understand where the film was directed.

Throughout the second observation, I concentrated on the characters in the films by exclusively focusing on their roles. I identified those characters that were labeled as heroes/ heroines, victims, family members, friends, those apart of the larger social cohesion, and those characters that were defined as outsiders in the films. The main focus of the second analysis was to identify how the various roles of the characters were intertwined to construct the main story line.

The third viewing was more narrowly focused on the acts of domestic violence in both films. This comprised of examining the various forms of abuse, how violence was defined by different parties, the participants involved in the abuse, the severity of the abuse, the cultural definitions used to explain the abuse, the different perceptions of domestic violence and the reasons used to justify the abuse. I also concentrated on how

the victim reacted to the abusive behaviour and the placing of the situation in a larger cultural context. After this stage of viewing each abusive scene shown in the films was related to the broader themes of the films.

During the fourth showing, I concentrated on the non-physical forms of violence against women and the other scenes of violence. I closely examined how certain scenes were constructed by focusing on the substance included in the background. More specifically, I focused on the tone, background images, the setting of certain scenes, camera angles, the parties involved and included in scenes that portrayed acts of domestic violence. The purpose of this viewing was to debunk the indirect meanings portrayed through background images and scenes.

Throughout the last viewing I isolated the scenes of domestic violence and focused on the nature of abuse. In accordance with the literature discussed earlier on how Sikhs perceive acts of domestic violence, I examined each scene of abuse through four frames of analysis:

1. The cultural frame which examines how the contradiction between cultural values in Canada contributes to acts of domestic violence and more importantly shapes the perceptions of what is deemed acceptable and unacceptable.
2. The feminist approach which views acts of domestic violence as a broader problem of gender inequalities.
3. The religious lens that focuses on how religion is used as a means of justifying abuse and an explanation for residing within an abusive relationship.

4. The public policy framework and immigration status which shape domestic

   violence perceptions, and understanding for many immigrant women

   experiencing abuse.

Following the intersectionality perspective, I focused on how the various elements of culture, gender, religion and laws shape the perception of domestic violence. I primarily focused on the abused victim who in both films was female, to understand how they defined, reacted and handled the abuse they were experiencing. I also explored how the films described domestic violence within a social context. For example, I focused on whether the films portrayed domestic violence as a private issue or public matter.

I also analyzed the various parties involved in the abusive behaviour and how the victims and perpetrator's actions were described throughout the films. Through this approach, I observed whether the perpetrators actions were portrayed as abnormal or ordinary forms of behaviour. For the different characters in the film that had contradictory views of domestic violence, I explored why such inconsistencies existed. In the next section I demonstrate the findings of my study.

4.0 Chapter Four: Results

This chapter discusses the content analysis results that have been derived from a critical analysis of two films, *Provoked* (2006) and *Heaven on Earth* (2008). Rather than seeing abuse as homogenous, both films illustrate the unique experiences of Sikh women. The findings from the qualitative analysis reveal similarities and differences between the two films. With respect to similarities, both films show how culture, gender, religion, public policy and immigration status shape the victims' experiences and perceptions of domestic violence within the portrayal of the Sikh community. Despite these thematic similarities, the film *Provoked* (2006) predominantly focuses on the legal aspects that address issues of domestic violence. *Provoked* (2006) illustrates the multiple barriers that Sikh women face when contacting legal authorities and the weaknesses of the justice system in responding to issues that impact minority groups. An exploration of both films made it evident that differences did indeed exist in how domestic violence is perceived by Sikhs and the non-South Asian/Sikh community. The detailed results of the analysis highlight the complexities of domestic violence dynamics in the portrayal of the Sikh community. The results emphasize the following themes: (1) the multiple forms of domestic violence, (2) multiple reasons behind the denial of domestic violence, (3) gender roles in the Sikh community, (4) cultural and religious beliefs as influencing factors of domestic violence, (5) the role of collectivism in abusive relationships and (6) barriers that prevent Sikh women from seeking help. Prior to addressing these themes, the following section will provide a brief film synopsis of both *Provoked* (2006) and *Heaven on Earth* (2008).

4.1 Overview of Films

4.1.1 Synopsis of the Film Heaven on Earth

Heaven on Earth (2008) was based on the story of Chand Dhillion who migrates to Brampton, Ontario after her pre-arranged marriage with Rocky Dhillion. Coming from a very small traditional family, Chand was excited to begin a new chapter in her life with her husband and his immediate family members. Upon arrival at Pearson Airport, Chand was introduced for the first time to her new husband Rocky, his parents Mr. and Mrs. Dhillion, his sister Aman and her husband Baldev, along with their two children, Kabir and Loveleen. With all members of the family living together in a small two bedroom house, Chand immediately began to realize there was a collective frustration that could be attributed to her husband Rocky. Unable to support the family financially and weighted down by strict family obligations, Rocky began abusing Chand as a means of releasing stress (Mehta, Chopra & Hamilton, 2008).

The abuse began immediately after Chand's arrival as she was physically assaulted during her own honeymoon. Rocky began controlling Chand by not allowing her to go to the mall, have access to her family income, or denying her the right to contact family and friends. As time goes by, Chand was forced by her mother-in-law to perform domestic duties, work in a laundry factory for a salary that was directly given to her husband and babysit Loveleen. After many years of abuse and not being able to please Rocky, Chand decides to leave her abusive husband and return back to India (Mehta, 2008).

4.1.2 Synopsis of the Film Provoked

Provoked (2006) was based on a true story of a Sikh woman, Kiranjit Ahluwalia, who migrates to London, England following her arranged marriage to Deepak Ahluwalia. Upon arrival in the host country, Kiranjit wanted to continue her studies and begin a new life with her husband and two boys, Sandeep and Rajeev. As time elapsed, her ambitions appeared obscured by an increasingly abusive and controlling husband. Kiranjit became a victim of physical violence, forced household labour, financial abuse, isolation, and marital rape. These forms of abuse were intensified with Kiranjit's immigrant status as her social support mechanisms were weakened with her migration to London, England. After tolerating various forms of abuse for nearly a decade, Kiranjit sought revenge by setting her husband on fire while he was sleeping at night. As a result of this dramatic episode, Deepak surrendered to his injuries at a local hospital and died. As a result a judge sentenced Kiranjit Ahluwalia to life in prison for first degree murder. With the help of a non-profit organization Kiranjit was released from prison in 3-and-a-half years under the "battered woman" clause and reunited with her two children (Mundhra, 2006).

4.2 Multiple Forms of Domestic Violence That Sikh Women Face

The results from the film analysis indicated that Sikh women endorse various forms of abuse. Although many forms of abuse were non-physical in nature, such incidents were shown to inflict a wide range of harm. On one end of the spectrum, domestic violence in the film representation of the Sikh community was shown to cause emotional and mental harm, whereas on the other end, more severe consequences resulted, such as death. This section of the results will elaborate on how Sikhs as shown

in both films perceive, understand and make sense of domestic violence by discussing: (1) the various forms of abuse shown in both films, and (2) the culturally specific forms of abuse that Sikh women face.

4.2.1 The Various forms of Abuse in the Sikh Community

After analyzing the films *Heaven on Earth* (2008) and *Provoked* (2006) the results of the analysis indicated that Chand and Kiranjit were both victims of forced labour, physical abuse, control, financial abuse, isolation and marital rape. Although each of these dimensions of domestic violence were used at varying degrees, the following section will expand on the various forms of abuse in the representation of the Sikh community, to the least likely used methods of abuse respectively.

4.2.1.1Forced Labour and Control

The film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008) portrayed six distinctive scenes that showed Chand being a victim of forced labour. Throughout these six scenes, the theme of control emerged as Chand's daily activities were organized and controlled completely by her spouse Rocky (Mehta, 2008). For example, Chand was forced to work in a fabric company and conduct domestic duties that were predetermined by her spouse Rocky. Even though Chand expressed her concerns of working in an environment that was against her will, Rocky and his family told Chand that she must comply with their instructions. In this sense, Chand was a victim of forced labour as she was required to work long hours in an organization that she did not favor. After working half the day at a fabric company, Chand was then required to come home and cook for the entire family.

A clear illustration of Chand being a victim of forced labour was clearly seen through two distinctive scenes. In the first scene, Chand was shown having a discussion with Aman about her employment options. During this conversation, Chand told Aman that she was over qualified to be working at a fabric company and that her education should put her in a better position. Aman was shown replying sarcastically by telling another co-worker that Chand thinks "jobs grow on maple trees" (Mehta, 2008). Through this scene, it became overtly clear that Chand disliked working at the fabric company and wanted to seek employment at another facility. In the following scene, Aman continued her discussion with Chand about work and was heard saying to Chand that she should continue her employment since the manager is a very close friend of Rocky's (Mehta, 2008). This scene reinforced the idea of forced labour as Aman was indirectly telling Chand that she should continue working in such an environment despite her disapproval. Both these scenes were the ultimate depictions of forced labour as Rocky and Aman kept coercing Chand to work at the fabric company.

Moreover, domestic violence in the form of control was also overtly expressed in the film *Provoked* (2006). Although Deepak was shown controlling Kiranjit's behaviour by forcefully dictating her life throughout the entire film, three distinctive scenes expressed domestic violence in the form of control (Mundhra, 2006). For example, at the beginning of the film, Kiranjit was told that she would be able to continue her education after her marriage with Deepak. However, such visions were shattered as Deepak limited Kiranjit to domestic duties and prohibited her from continuing her educational career. By Deepak restricting Kiranjit from continuing her education, such actions reflected an act of domestic violence. In other words, Deepak controlled Kiranjit's activities by making

decisions on her behalf. A similar pattern was evident in the ending of the film as Deepak controlled the activities Kiranjit engaged in during her leisure. Any time Kiranjit wanted to go out or attend a social she had to ask Deepak for permission. Such level of control constitutes as an act of domestic violence.

4.2.1.2 Physical Abuse

Following the use of control, the next form of abuse that was commonly used was physical abuse. In the film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008) there was six particular occasions where Chand was physically attacked by Rocky and members of his family. An in-depth analysis of each incident revealed that the physical abuse was very trivial in the beginning and then became more severe towards the ending of the film. For example, the first incident of physical abuse occurred at the very beginning of the film. In this scene, Rocky slapped Chand across her face on their honeymoon night, leaving Chand with a minor bruise on her face (Mehta, 2008). During the second incident of physical abuse, Chand was violently thrown to the floor and kicked repeatedly; once again she was scarred with bruises to her face in addition to her ribs (Mehta, 2008). By comparing the second incident of physical violence to the first one, it became apparent that the physical harm was escalating and the injuries were becoming more severe and frequent as time elapsed. The increasing severity of the physical abuse was undoubtedly evident in the last scene when Chand was physically assaulted and had suffered from several bruises, including a wound on her face and a swollen wrist.

Similarly, the same pattern was found to emerge in the film *Provoked* (2006). Throughout the viewing of the film, six scenes of physical abuse were identified. The

physical harm caused by each of these assaults remained consistent throughout the film. In other words, the level of physical assaults was not found to escalate in severity as the film progressed. A pattern that was identified throughout these six scenes was that the physical abuse was becoming more frequent towards the ending of Kiranjit's and Deepak's relationship. For example, in the beginning of the film Deepak was portrayed as a loving character (Mundhra, 2006). This was evident in the first few scenes of the film as Deepak is shown consistently hugging and surprising Kiranjit with gifts. Such behaviour dramatically changed halfway through the film as Deepak started physically assaulting Kiranjit. The film displayed Deepak relying more heavily on physical abuse as he continued to get away with such behaviour (Mundhra, 2006). For example, in one scene, towards the ending of the film, Kiranjit was shown remembering her past experiences of victimization. During this scene, Kiranjit was shown recalling all her abusive experiences in chronological order. The flashbacks of these abusive incidents were shown slowly at first and then rapidly began to speed up. The background tone also started to accelerate and gradually get louder signifying the increase in frequency of such incidents (Mundhra, 2006). This scene clearly showed how the number of physical assaults started to incline as Deepak's pervious behaviour went undetected and unchallenged.

4.2.1.3 Financial Abuse

The third most frequent act of domestic violence observed in the film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008) was financial abuse. There were three distinctive scenes in the film which directly portrayed Rocky perpetrating this level of violence (Mehta, 2008). However, within these three scenes, the act of financial abuse was expressed in many different

forms. For example, Rocky perpetrated such behaviour by taking complete control of Chand's earnings. He dominated the family's income and limited Chand's ability to access her own earnings. This was demonstrated in the beginning of the film as Rocky told Chand's employer to directly deposit Chand's earnings to his personal bank account (Mehta, 2008). Although Chand contributed to the family income, she was not allowed to access the family finances. Such a level of restriction appeared in the scene where Chand had to ask Rocky for some money to buy postal stamps. By Chand not having enough money to buy postal stamps, this scene clearly showed the financial restrictions emplaced upon this female character.

The film, *Provoked* (2006) also revealed similar results as did the film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008). Similar to Rocky in the film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008), Deepak was shown perpetrating acts of financial abuse by controlling the family income and limiting Kiranjit's ability to access her earnings. Deepak firmly held onto the belief that Kiranjit did not contribute to the family income because she was unemployed. In other words, Deepak did not view Kiranjit's domestic duties as a contribution to the family income, and therefor he strongly believed her unemployment status forfeited her right to access the family income. The manifestations of such beliefs were evident through Deepak's remarks as he told Kiranjit, "this is my house and it's my money" (Mundhra, 2006). Through this quote, it is evident Deepak was taking complete ownership of the family income, while at the same time illustrating his authoritative position in the family.

4.2.1.4 Abuse in the Form of Isolation

One of the latent forms of abuse observed in the film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008) was isolation. Although abuse in the form of isolation was expressed through various forms, the sole purpose of such behaviour was to make Chand fully dependent on her abuser, Rocky. Throughout the film, Rocky attempted to disconnect Chand from the wider society to assure her commitment to the marriage. Since Chand's escape routes were fortified through her isolation, Rocky created an environment that was accepting and prone to the use of domestic violence. One of the ways in which Rocky attempted to isolate Chand was by limiting her abilities to contact her parents (Mehta, 2008). Since Chand was a new immigrant to the country, she was unfamiliar with the process of making long distance calls, thereby forcing her to rely heavily on Rocky to contact her parents. On several occasions Chand was shown asking Rocky to call her parents. Despite the several requests made, Rocky would dismiss the issue by telling Chand he would allow her to communicate with her parents at a later date. By delaying Chand's communication with her family, Rocky attempted to isolate Chand.

Another way in which isolation was expressed in the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008) was through Chand's confinement to the household. Throughout the film, Rocky restricted Chand from leaving the immediate household and pursuing any leisure activities (Mehta, 2008). Such restrictions were enforced by Rocky and his family by placing time restrictions on Chand. Rocky and his family allocated Chand with just enough time to go straight to work and come back home. These restrictions were further intensified as Chand was required to be accompanied by her sister-in-law when travelling to and from work. By being confined to the household and imposed with such restrictive

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boundaries, Chand was unable to go to the mall, make friends outside of the family unit and pursue any activities of her desire. Chand's confinement to the household was clearly visible in the scene were Aman told Chand to lock herself in the bedroom (Mehta, 2008). During this incident Chand told Aman that she was unable to attend work due to sickness. After telling Chand that she would not be paid for sick days, Aman was heard saying "alright just lock yourself in your room…" (Mehta, 2008). Such words illustrated the remoteness Chand was subjected to by her extended family.

Moreover, the film *Provoked* (2006), also illustrated how isolation was a form of domestic violence. In contrast to the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008), the film *Provoked* (2006) demonstrated how such forms of abuse can be perpetrated by extended family members. For example, Deepak's mother was shown isolating Kiranjit from her family and friends. One scene clearly expressing the segregation that Kiranjit was subjected to was when Kiranjit's mother-in-law denied her the right to see her own children. In this scene, Kiranjit was shown calling her children from prison. After Kiranjit's mother-in-law became aware that Kiranjit was attempting to contact her children, she disconnected the phone. When Kiranjit's children asked their grandmother who called, Kiranjit's mother-in-law replied "It was nobody" (Mundhra, 2006). By denying Kiranjit the right to talk to her children, the mother-in-law attempted to isolate Kiranjit from her own children.

4.2.1.5 Sexual Abuse

Another form of abuse entrenched within the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008) was sexual abuse. Although the film did not place much emphasis on this form of abuse, there

were two scenes in particular that showed Chand being a victim of marital rape (Mehta, 2008). The first scene showed Rocky forcing Chand to engage in sexual activities. During this scene, Chand was shown being in discomfort as the camera showed her looking away from Rocky. As the scene progressed, Chand was then shown resisting Rocky by discussing a topic of a different nature. Although the act of marital rape was not committed, Rocky's coercive behaviour suggested he had the intent to commit such a crime. For example, Rocky was heard telling Chand "to get undressed" despite her lack of consent (Mehta, 2008). These words clearly illustrated Rocky's dominating and forcible behaviour. Moreover, Rocky's compelling sexual behaviour was further evident in another scene which showed Chand being a victim of repeated rape. In this particular scene, Rocky was coercing Chand to engage in sexual activity. When Chand expressed her lack of consent, Rocky was heard saying "do you want me to sing you a song" (Mehta, 2008)? As evidenced through the discourse in this scene, Rocky was insulting Chand by mocking her level of resistance.

On the other hand, the abuse of marital rape also appeared in the film *Provoked* (2006). Throughout the whole film, one scene confirmed the existence of marital rape. In this particular scene, Kiranjit was shown recalling her past experiences of sexual abuse. While reminiscing about her past, Kiranjit recalled being chased throughout her entire house by her husband Rocky. Eventually, Kiranjit attempted to lock herself in her room to protect herself from marital rape. However, the scene showed Rocky breaking open the door and sexually assaulting Kiranjit. Kiranjit's lack of consent was emphasized in this scene, as she was heard pleading for her life. In the latter half of this scene, Kiranjit was heard saying "please think of the children" (Mundhra, 2006). These words illustrated the

drastic measures that were utilized by Kiranjit to stop Deepak's abusive behaviour. In spite of these multiple attempts made by Kiranjit, Deepak continued raping her.

Despite the various levels of abuse Chand and Kiranjit experienced, both films brought to light the existence of different forms of abuse that were specific to the Sikh community. The next section will discuss culturally specific forms of abuse that are present in the film representation of the Sikh community.

4.2.2 Culturally Specific Forms of Abuse That Sikh Women Face

Accompanying the multiple forms of abuse that Chand and Kiranjit were subjected to, there also appeared to be certain behaviours that were identified as abusive in both films. For instance, in the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008), there appeared to be a strong sense of collectivism that placed great emphasis on reputation, family honour and respect. When the dimensions of reputation and family honour became at the forefront of being verbally attacked, many characters in this film perceived such forms of behaviour as abusive.

The importance of maintaining a good reputation was illustrated through multiple scenes shown in the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008). For example, during the concluding segment of the film, Rocky's family was shown verbally assaulting Chand's reputation for allegedly having an affair and brining dishonour to the family name. When Chand asked for forgiveness, Rocky replied "only your lover can save you now" (Mehta, 2008). Rocky's response was an indirect attack at Chand's reputation as he attempted to diminish her reputation through labelling Chand as an adulteress. To save her reputation, Chand had to engage in a cultural practice which involved her taking a poisonous snake

and wrapping it around her neck. The philosophy behind this practice was that if Chand was lying she would be attacked by the snake (Mehta, 2008). Although such behaviour posed extreme danger, Chand felt her reputation was more important than her physical well-being. To protect her reputation, Chand was seen in the ending of the film holding a king cobra over her head. This scene clearly demonstrated the symbolic importance of maintaining family honour and how an attack on one's reputation was perceived as a form of domestic violence in the film portrayal of the Sikh community.

Furthermore, diminishing one's family honour was seen as one of the gravest forms of abuse in the film representation of the Sikh community. Throughout the viewing of the film *Provoked* (2006), Kiranjit's character revealed that a woman is often seen as the keeper of the family honour. In other words, Kiranjit's reputation was seen as a reflection of her family honour. One of the ways in which Deepak abused Kiranjit was by attacking her family's reputation. For example, Kiranjit was shown recalling the occasion where her husband questioned her about the family income (Mundhra, 2006). Shortly after, Deepak accused Kiranjit for spending "his" money on making long distance calls to her brother overseas (Mundhra, 2006). He further stated "I can't afford to pay your long distance bills…. Why don't you ask your brother who you call all the time to pay..." (Mundhra, 2006). Deepak knew Kiranjit's family was financially strained especially since they were residing in a developing country where employment opportunities were limited. By telling Kiranjit to ask her brothers to pay for their phone bill, Deepak was mocking Kiranjit's family and their financial situation at the same time. By making these remarks, Deepak was attempting to abuse Kiranjit by verbally attacking her family's financial abilities.

Although Chand and Kiranjit were both subjected to various forms of abuse, each woman denied the existence of domestic violence. The next section will discuss the individual factors that prevented Kiranjit and Chand from openly admitting they were victims of domestic violence.

4.3 The Multiple Reasons Behind the Denial of Domestic Violence

Throughout the viewing of both films, the findings of this study revealed that both Kiranjit and Chand supressed their experiences of domestic violence. Both women suffered in silence in order to maintain their public image and uphold their family honour. Individual factors that contributed to the denial of domestic violence amongst Sikh women were consistent in both films. These factors include the significance attached to the concept of (1) "model minority", (2) the pyramid of honour and (3) the different perceptions that surrounded acts of domestic violence. Each of these factors will be discussed in greater detail below.

4.3.1 "Model Minority"

The representation of the Sikh community was found to be heavily concerned with how they are perceived in the wider society. The fear of a negative perception was one of the primary reasons why Sikh women denied the existence of domestic violence. The film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008) demonstrated that many Sikhs attempted to portray themselves as the "ideal" community to the general public. In order to sustain this "ideal" image, the film portrayal of the Sikh community was found to conceal issues of domestic violence. To elaborate, Sikh women were shown to classify issues of domestic violence

as a private matter in order to demonstrate to the wider public that their ethnic group was immune from such problems.

Such a pattern was clearly observed in the scene were Chand was hiding her abusive relationship from her fellow employees (Mehta, 2008). During this scene, Chand's acquaintance, Rosa saw bruises on Chand's face and advised her to contact the police if she was ever a victim of abuse. Immediately after Rosa made the suggestion to Chand, Aman stated "in our community we deal with problem in home" (Mehta, 2008). Aman's remarks exemplified how the issue of domestic violence was contextualized and seen as a private matter. Aman's statement also suggested that the involvement of the local police was not a feasible option in the Sikh community, mainly because the affiliation with authorities in domestic affairs damages the public image of the community. By categorizing issues of domestic violence in the private context and refraining from contacting the police, the Sikh community was attempting to preserve the image of an "ideal ethnic group".

In addition, the classification of domestic violence as a private matter was also observed through Kiranjit's role in the film *Provoked* (2006). After being sent to the state penitentiary Kiranjit was shown to withhold information about her abusive relationship with Deepak. For example, during the murder trial the defence lawyer, Miriam Tailor told Kiranjit to take the stand and publicly speak out about her victimization. Such suggestions were met with resistance as Kiranjit told Miriam Tailor that she is too "ashamed to speak out" publicly about her domestic matters (Mundhra, 2006). By masking her abusive relationship, Kiranjit firmly believed that issues of domestic violence should not escape the domestic realm. Kiranjit feared that the involvement of

authorities would impair the Sikh community's "ideal" image. Such an ideology was clearly evident in Kiranjit's speech as she referenced community honour as one of the initial reasons for why she suffered in silence (Mundhra, 2006). Since Kiranjit was heavily concerned with how she was perceived in the wider society, the film *Provoked* (2006) demonstrated that the fear of being stigmatized was one of the reasons why Sikh women in the film did not disclose their victimization.

4.3.2 The Pyramid of Honour

The results from the film analysis indicated that the film depiction of the Sikh community assigns a significant value to the concept of honour. The Sikh families in both films were shown to be heavily guided by the cultural value of "izzat," when translated means respect and honour. Both films demonstrated how Sikh families were extremely concerned with their public image and how they were perceived in their community. This idea was observed in the film *Provoked* (2006) in a scene where Kiranjit refused to testify in court, primarily because she felt her participation in the justice system would damage her family's honour. The importance of honour was highlighted in Kiranjit's words when she stated, "I cannot be exposed to the court... it's a family problem... its very shameful for me to testify" (Mundhra, 2006). Through these words, Kiranjit was implying that her participation in court would be deemed as disgraceful by the Sikh community, which on one hand would diminish her honour, and on the next, impact her family's honour. *Provoked* (2006) reinforced the concept of reputation through the scene where Ashwani Chopra, who was a news reporter, asked Kiranjit "is your reputation more important than your freedom" (Mundhra, 2006)? Immediately after Ashwani asked the question, Kiranjit froze in a moment of silence, emphasizing the significant value assigned to honour and

public image. The film illustrated that many families in the Sikh community will attempt to uphold this "ideal" public image by any means possible, which in some cases means the denial of domestic violence.

To maintain this "ideal" public image, each family member played a distinctive role to uphold the family honour. In other words, each family member was given a certain amount of authority which was largely dependent on their status within the family structure. Within the family structure, the cultural value of "izzat" was demonstrated through a chain of commands. This chain of command was shaped like a pyramid type structure, whereby the parents were situated at the very top, followed by the eldest son and then the daughter/ daughter-in-laws at the very bottom. Through this arrangement, the daughter-in-laws were given the least amount of authority which prohibited them from contesting the orders or judgments made by any family member of a higher ranking. Since daughter-in-laws were at the lowest ranking of the pyramid- shaped structure, they were required to submit to the demands of their husband as well as their in-laws. This arrangement also implied that women had to portray their abusive spouse and extended family members under a positive light in order to maintain a respectable family image amongst the wider Sikh community. Since women in the Sikh community generally identified with their marital family, many women had to deny the existence of domestic violence to ensure her reputation, which mirrored their family's reputation, was well protected. As both films demonstrated, this often meant many women denied the presence of domestic violence in their marital relationship to protect their family's reputation and honour.

Moreover, the concept of "izzat" not only coerces women to conceal their victimization, but in many cases it also contributed to acts of domestic violence. Failure to comply with the structure of authority, or pyramid of honour, results in regulating this infringement through acts of domestic violence. To illustrate, in the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008), Chand was required to take care of her in-laws and follow their orders without any opposition. During the opening scenes of the film, Rocky consistently reminded his parents that they held the position of authority and told Chand that she was to respect their decisions without any opposition. This power structure was clearly reinforced in the scene where Rocky told his mother, "even though I am married… you are still my first priority" (Mehta, 2008). In addition, the film also illustrated that when there was conflict between the parents and the spouse, the son's loyalty to his parents was often reinforced through his use of domestic violence. There was a strong indication of the presence of domestic violence in the scene where Chand was verbally abused by her mother-in-law for not meeting her cooking expectations. In this scene, the mother-in-law screamed at Chand, questioning her ability to cook. To avoid confrontation, Chand used her hand to gesture a passage way out of the kitchen, making physical contact with her mother-in-law. Upon doing so, Chand's mother-in-law dramatically fell to the floor and started screaming for her son. When Rocky entered the room, he began to physically assault Chand without acquiring further knowledge of the situation. Since the parents were positioned at the top of the honour hierarchy, Chand was advised by her sister-in-law to ask for forgiveness, even though she did not initiate the situation (Mehta, 2008). This particular scene encapsulated how domestic violence was manifested through Chand's resistance in reaction to her mother-in-law's probing questions.

4.3.3 Different Perceptions that Surrounded Acts of Domestic Violence

The findings from this study further revealed that the women in both films which depicted the Sikh community denied the existence of domestic violence, mainly because certain forms of abuse were perceived much differently in the Sikh community than in the North American context. One type of abuse that is perceived differently in the Sikh community than it is in North America generally was marital rape. The film *Heaven on Earth* (2008) showed that Chand failed to classify marital rape as an act of domestic violence. Although Chand was aware that she was being forced by Rocky to engage in sexual activities, she failed to categorize such behaviour as abusive. This perception of marital rape was evident in the scene where Rocky and Chand were in Niagara Falls (Mehta, 2008). In this particular scene, Rocky demands that Chand remove her clothes and lay in bed. Although Chand attempted to ward off such demands by altering the conversation, she continued to follow Rocky's commands. Chand's rationale for submitting to such demands was based on the belief that a good wife provides sexual gratification to her husband when requested. This idea was also shown in the beginning of the film when Chand was having a discussion with Aman. During this conversation, Aman told Chand a riddle which theoretically meant that a woman must provide sexual satisfaction to her male spouse when requested (Mehta, 2008). This scene clearly showed how the concept of marital rape was non-existence in the portrayal of the Sikh community.

These findings however were not observed in the film *Provoked* (2006). Throughout the viewing, the analysis revealed that Kiranjit gradually began to identify marital rape as a form of abuse. In the beginning of the film, Kiranjit was shown being

repeatedly raped by her spouse Deepak. Despite Kiranjit's victimization she remained in the relationship and failed to classify marital rape as a form of abuse. This perception was found to change as Kiranjit was processed through the federal penitentiary. As Kiranjit assimilated and learned the norms and values of England, she began to identify marital rape as a form of domestic violence. This change in perception was observed mid-way through the film when Kiranjit was shown having a conversation with her cellmate. During this scene, Kiranjit was shown waking up from a nightmare and telling her cellmate she was raped by her husband Deepak (Mehta, 2008). This was the first scene in the film in which Kiranjit identified marital rape as a form of domestic violence. Prior to this, marital rape was exempted from the categorization of domestic violence. Kiranjit's adaptation to the prison environment and education in law was evidently the prompting factor that made her realize marital rape was a form of abuse.

4.4 Gender Roles in the Sikh Community

The traditional gender roles found in the portrayal of the Sikh community were also found to alter the ways in which domestic violence was experienced, resisted and displayed. Both males and females were expected to follow "appropriate" gender roles which were enforced through various means. The following section will discuss (1) traditional female gender roles, and (2) traditional male gender roles that are found in the Sikh community. This section will also shed light on (3) gender socialization in the Sikh community, and (4) the enforcement of gender roles through *gurdwaras* as shaping one's experiences of domestic violence.

4.4.1 Female Gender Roles

Within the film portrayal of the Sikh community, men and women were expected to follow certain gender roles which have been crafted through broader cultural beliefs. Both films exhibited how men and women were required to perform certain types of duties that were assigned in accordance to their gender (Mundhra, 2006; Mehta, 2008). These vivid gender roles governed the way in which men and women behaved in the social domain and identified which types of actions were deemed as normative. Through the analysis of the film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008), the results indicated that traditional gender roles defined women's duties as cooking, cleaning, nurturing and other domestic chores. These gender roles were visible throughout the film as Chand was portrayed as a domestic slave. Through Chand's character, it became evident that women were ascribed a passive role, encompassing the role of domestic duties. This was clearly shown in the beginning of the film when Chand was ordered by her mother-in-law to get refreshments for her husband and father-in-law. The discourse of Chand's mother-in-law emphasized the enactment of gender roles as she stated "Rocky now that you're married you don't have to serve yourself, Chand will…" (Mehta, 2008).

The analysis of both films also revealed that when these gender roles were breached, males often resorted to domestic violence as a means of reinstating the traditional gender roles. The breakdown of traditional gender roles and the display of domestic violence were shown in the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008). In one relevant scene, Chand was cooking dinner with her mother-in-law while she was being criticised for not knowing how to properly conduct her domestic duties. As the scene progressed, Chand's mother-in-law called Rocky over to the kitchen because Chand was not conducting her

domestic duties as expected. As Rocky enters the kitchen he physically attacks Chand and tells his mother "break her legs next time she does this…" (Mehta, 2008). This scene demonstrated how Rocky used physical violence to impose expected gender roles on Chand. The dialogue also illustrated how physical violence was the preferred method for establishing and enforcing traditional gender roles.

Similarly, traditional gender roles were also articulated through the film *Provoked* (2006). One scene in particular that demonstrated this point was when Kiranjit was ironing a shirt and was physically attacked for not fulfilling her domestic duties correctly (Mundhra, 2006). In this scene, Deepak was shown walking into the house and having a discussion with his spouse. Although Deepak was speaking to Kiranjit, his attention was completely directed at the ironing board and on his shirt which had a minor burn mark. Before asking Kiranjit what had happened, Deepak violently grabbed Kiranjit and began to physically attack her (Mundhra, 2006). This attack was motivated by Kiranjit's failure to conduct domestic duties appropriately. This scene illustrated how acts of domestic violence are in many incidences motivated by the shortfalls of expected traditional gender roles.

4.4.2 Male Gender Roles

Similar to female gender roles, this film analysis revealed that males were governed by a set of gender expectations as well. After observing and critically analyzing both films, the results indicated that male characteristics were defined as authoritative, brave, independent, confident and in control of the domestic domain (Mundhra, 2006; Mehta, 2008). Any male that was unable to fulfill his gender expectations was

stigmatized and viewed as being less masculine. This level of stigmatization was shown in the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008) as Baldev's masculinity was diminished for his failure to be independent and in control of his immediate family. Since Baldev resided with his in-laws he was viewed as being dependent and less authoritative. This situation created an environment where Baldev was frequently reminded by his mother-in-law that he was not a "real man". This idea was also evident in the scene where Rocky's mother told her daughter, Aman that she has to move out because a woman "should not be a burden on her parents after marriage" (Mehta, 2008). This scene was indirectly questioning Baldev's masculinity as the camera shows Baldev's mother-in-law looking directly at him while she was speaking to Aman. The scene showed Baldev looking down which suggested he was ashamed by the comment directed towards him.

The disappointment following Baldev's failure to be independent was further reinforced through the scene where Baldev told his wife "a man dependent on his in-laws is worse than a dog" (Mehta, 2008). This statement highlighted Baldev's frustrations of not being able to follow the traditional gender role of independence. The scene emphasized Baldev's distress by focusing exclusively on his emotions. The camera concentrated on Baldev as he was shown looking down in disappointment. This scene captured the shame and humiliation that accompanied the failure to follow traditional male gender norms. The results of this study also indicated that there were many mechanisms within the Sikh community that enforced these gender roles. In the next section I will discuss my findings of how gender roles are enforced in the Sikh community.

4.4.3 The Enforcement of Gender Roles through the Process of Socialization

The results from the film analysis indicated that one of the ways in which gender roles were enforced in the film portrayal of the Sikh community was through the process of socialization. Both films showed women being socialized from an early age to follow a certain structured lifestyle (Mundhra, 2006; Mehta, 2008). This structured lifestyle included getting married, having children, engaging in domestic duties, following the commands of the male spouse and prioritizing the family needs before individual desires. This traditionally destined lifestyle was displayed through Kiranjit's character as she was seen discussing her childhood with her friend Veronica Scott. In their conversation, Kiranjit stated she wanted to become a lawyer, however her family insisted that she "get married, have children and be a proper Indian woman" (Mundhra, 2006). Kiranjit also mentioned in this conversation that she had to shadow this life course if she wanted to avoid being labelled as deviant (Mundhra, 2006). This scene clearly highlighted how Kiranjit was socialized from an early age to believe that a "respectable" Indian woman is one that follows this predetermined life structure. This scene also portrayed the message that women who fail to follow this patterned lifestyle are socialized to believe that their actions are clashing with "normative" behaviour.

Furthermore, the results uncovered that Kiranjit and Chand were nurtured into the belief that woman are to accept male dominance and refrain from contesting the commands of their spouse. The upbringing of Kiranjit and Chand showed they were constantly reminded by their family that a woman's marriage was her fate and divorce was never an option. Due to the negative label associated with divorce, Kiranjit and Chand were expected to stay in their abusive relationships and endure the various forms

of violence they experienced. When incidents of domestic violence did arise both women were told by family members that the violence they experienced was a part of marriage life. Kiranjit and Chand were also reassured that their passiveness and commitment to their spouses and families was the appropriate behaviour for women.

This method of socialization was captured in the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008) as Chand was regularly reminded that she is to cater to her husband's dominance. In the beginning of the film, Chand and Rocky were shown at their honeymoon destination. A few minutes into the scene, Rocky's mother arrives and chooses to spend the night with her son and Chand. Due to the limited space available, Rocky told Chand to stay with his mother while he sleeps in the car. Chand responded by asking if they should reserve another room. At this point, the camera froze on Rocky as he proceeded to slap Chand for her suggestion. After Rocky left the room, Chand's mother-in-law attempted to justify her son's abusive behaviour by saying "don't worry, this is normal in marriage life" (Mehta, 2008). In this scene, Rocky's mother attempted to articulate to Chand that she should accept her husband's violent behaviour. This exemplified how Rocky's mother attempted to socialize Chand to accept husband abuse as a normal behaviour in marriage.

The socialization into appropriate female gender roles was also exemplified a scene where Chand was told by her mother in-law not to criticise the authority or reputation of her husband. In other words, Chand was told that women in the Sikh community are supposed to be obedient and loyal to their husband despite the conditions of the marital relationship. This socialization process was seen in the film when one of Chand's co-worker's asked her if her husband was having an affair. Instead of letting Chand answer the question, Aman interrupted and said "no he is not" (Mehta, 2008).

Later in the scene, Aman told Chand that she should accept her relationship and must protect Rocky's reputation. This scene also showed how Chand was being socialized to protect her husband's reputation by being silent even if she disliked Rocky's behaviour in order to protect him.

The idea of a female having to protect her male spouse's image was further reinforced in the scene where Chand was prevented from exposing her abusive relationship. In this scene, Chand was asked by a co-worker about the bruises on her face. Once again, Chand was prevented from answering the question as Aman told the co-worker that Chand "had walked into a door" (Mehta, 2008). After various episodes of being prevented from speaking out against Rocky's behaviour, Chand internalized the idea that she should protect her husband's image. This was apparent at the ending of the film as Chand told her co-worker that her relationship was improving and she does not want to call the local authorities. This scene tied together the two scenes discussed previously as they all followed in a chronological order showing Chad's socialization process. To clarify, in the first two scenes presented, Chand was prepared to disclose her abusive relationship with Rocky in order to seek help and obtain advice from fellow co-workers. However, every time she attempted to inform her co-workers, she was stopped by Aman and was told that her actions are "deviant" and out of the norm. Closer to the end of the film, Chand began to protect Rocky's image by keeping his abusive behaviour a secret from the general public. The film attempted to show how such actions were learned from Aman and her family. These three scenes reflected how the gender roles of being passive and a loyal wife were enforced through the process of socialization. The

following section will now discuss how the placement of *gurdwara's* and local temples are another means through which gender roles were enforced.

4.4.4 The Enforcement of Gender Roles through Gurdwara's

Throughout my analysis, I found that *gurdwara's* often promoted and enforced certain gender roles. In both films, the *gurdwara's* were seen as the site of education and religious worship (Mundhra, 2006; Mehta, 2008). Within these religious institutions, males and females were responsible for certain duties that were assigned in accordance to their gender. For example, the films showed all the positions of power and authority being occupied by males. Such findings were seen in both films as all the *granthies* (teachers) of the religious scripts were males (Mundhra, 2006; Mehta, 2008). To illustrate, in the film *Provoked* (2006), Kiranjit and Deepak were shown at a *gurdwara* listening to religious scripts which were led by a male figure. Throughout this scene, a woman was not once observed holding a position of power or accompanying a *granthy* in leading the religious prayers. Since all the *granthies* were males, these religious institutions were indirectly portraying the message of male dominance. Since women were required to listen to the *granthies*, the latent message that was being sent to the larger audience was that males hold superior knowledge about religion. The systems practiced in these religious institutions were reflective of patriarchal values as women were required to seek knowledge from males.

In contrast to male gender roles, the *gurdwara's* were also shown to allocate certain duties and roles to females. In both films, females that were present at the *gurdwara* were shown cooking, cleaning and supervising the children (Mundhra, 2006;

Mehta, 2008). These assigned responsibilities reflected the value that females are supposed to be nurturing, caring and caregiving. The film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008), overtly expressed these gender roles in the scene where Chand was seen at a local *gurdwara*. Just before Chand's marriage she was seen in a room with another female taking care of a younger child. This scene was conveying the message that women are supposed to be the primary caregiver.

These findings correspond with the film *Provoked* (2006), as the male characters were never shown supervising or playing the role of a caretaker. The enforcement of such gender roles through religious institutions was seen through a scene where Kiranjit and Deepak were shown at the *gurdwara*. In this scene, the background images showed that all the children were being supervised by females (Mundhra, 2006). Based on this scene, the expectation that women must play the role of the caretaker was extended beyond the home and reinforced through the religious institution.

Furthermore, the enforcement of gender roles by *gurdwara's* was also found to extend beyond the parameters of the religious institution. The analysis of the film, *Provoked* (2006), indicated that within the Sikh community there are many temporary religious sites. One of these sites was shown to exist within the establishment of the federal penitentiary. Although the physical setting of this temporary religious institution did not mirror that of a *gurdwara*, the gender role of male dominance was still being enforced. Such methods of enforcement were observed in the scene where Kiranjit was shown attending a religious ceremony at the local prison. During her attendance, Kiranjit was shown listening to the male *granthy*. This scene showed Kiranjit at a slightly lower position than the *granthy* which indirectly implied the message of male authority. This

scene further emphasized Kiranjit's dependence on the male *granthy* as she was shown

bowing down to the Guru Grant Sahib and the religious script reader. Although the

religious teaching required all followers of Sikhism to worship and bow down to the

Guru Grant Sahib, the camera angle in this particular scene showed the religious script

and the male *granthy* at the same level. In other words, when Kiranjit was shown bowing

down, the camera was angled at such a position that Kiranjit was shown bowing to the

male *granthy* (Mundhra, 2006). This behaviour and positioning implied the message that

females are subordinate to their male counterparts. Next, the section below will examine

the Sikh's culture and religion, by specifically discussing how cultural and religious

beliefs in the Sikh community influence acts of domestic violence.

4.5 Cultural and Religious Beliefs as Influencing Factors of Domestic Violence

An in-depth analysis of the films, *Heaven on Earth* (2008) and *Provoked* (2006),

revealed that there are many individual factors which influence acts of domestic violence

within the Sikh community. These instigating factors consisted of (1) patriarchal values

found in the Sikh community, (2) resistance to assimilate to Western lifestyle and (3) the

misinterpretation of religious beliefs. The balance of this chapter explores these themes in

greater detail.

4.5.1 Patriarchal Values

Through an in-depth analysis of the films *Heaven on Earth* (2008) and *Provoked*

(2006), the results showed strong representations of patriarchal values entrenched in the

film representation of the Sikh community. The main protagonist in both films, Kiranjit

and Chand, were seen as subordinate to their male partner (Mundhra, 2006; Mehta,

2008). This secondary status was reinforced by cultural practices seen throughout the films. For example, in the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008), Chand was required to give a 20 thousand dollar dowry to her marital family. This dowry was seen as compensation for the transfer of the woman's burden to her marital family. Accompanying this large dowry, Chand was also shown in this scene being integrated into her marital family. When Chand first arrived to her new home, she participated in a cultural practice in which she was required to wait at the door until her mother-in-law poured oil on the side of the door step (Mehta, 2008). This cultural practice signified a welcoming gesture, which was perceived to bring good luck as the woman becomes a part of her marital family. Moreover, this traditional practice illustrated Chand's inferior position as she was shown leaving her own family and joining her marital family. Since a woman in this case was the one that was required to leave her own family and move in with her marital family, the cultural practice was a means of enforcing a woman's subordinate position.

Moreover, patriarchal values were also observed through the management of finances. In both films, the male spouse was in complete control of the family income (Mundhra, 2006; Mehta, 2008). Although Kiranjit and Chand contributed to the family income, they were denied access to their own earnings. The questioning of these patriarchal values was a major catalyst to perpetrating acts of domestic violence. For example, in the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008), Chand worked full-time and was unaware of her salary. In one scene, Chand needed money to make a collect call to her parents back home. When she approached her manager to ask him about her pay schedule and hourly rate he replied by stating "your earnings go directly to your husband as he requested" (Mehta, 2008). This scene illustrated Chand's subordinate position as she had

minimal to no control over her own earnings. When she asked her husband if she could have a certain share of her earnings to go shopping, her husband began verbally abusing her while denying her the right to her own income. This passage of the film illustrated how the resistance to patriarchal values is a pre-dispositional factor to incidences of both verbal and physical abuse.

Although the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008) indirectly exemplified how many women in the Sikh community do not have equal access to their family income; the film *Provoked* (2006) provided a richer understanding of how patriarchal values pertaining to family income lead to acts of domestic violence. Throughout the film, Kiranjit had minimal to no access to the family income. This was evident in one scene, where Kiranjit withdrew money from the bank to feed her children and in doing so Deepak violently attacked her for not obtaining his permission first (Mundhra, 2006). Through Deepak's response, it became clear that the physical attack was instigated by the breach of patriarchal values pertaining to who controls the family resources. This particular scene showed Deepak calmly asking Kiranjit if she withdrew money from their account. When Kiranjit told Deepak she had taken the money to feed their children, Deepak reacted impulsively by stating "that money was mine bitch you had no right" (Mundhra, 2006). When Kiranjit accused him of spending their family earnings on a woman he had an affair with, he violently grabbed her by the hair and held an iron to her face while stating "this is my house, my money, if I want to spend it on another woman I will…who's going to stop me? You (Mundhra, 2006)?

This scene illustrated, through Deepak's conversation, that a female's unauthorised access to family income is a transgression on cultural norms, which in turn

compels the commission of domestic violence. By Deepak claiming a monopoly over the family assets, he was stressing his power position vis-a- vis the secondary status of women when it comes to ownership. The subordinate status of women was further stressed through Deepak's words as he stated "you're a woman, you're nothing… a cunt less than nothing" (Mundhra, 2006). These words implied the a-symmetrical status of men and women in the film portrayal of the Sikh community.

In addition to the media portrayals of the Sikh population, the results of this study indicated that males in the Sikh community have more authority in the decision-making process than females. Both films revealed that the collective decisions that were made in the household were ultimately approved by the male spouse (Mundhra, 2006; Mehta, 2008). This male dominated world is clearly reflected through Kiranjit's words as she repeatedly made reference to living in a "jail," where all decisions regarding her life were made for her (Mundhra, 2006). Both films illustrated how Chand and Kiranjit as women had minimal input in family decisions, the activities they pursued during their leisure, personal appearance and individual health (Mundhra, 2006; Mehta, 2008).

To further illustrate this idea, in the film *Provoked* (2006), Kiranjit had to obtain permission to go to the doctor after being physically abused by Deepak. As the scene progressed, the film revealed that Kiranjit was scared to tell the doctor what had happened and allowed Deepak to answer the questions for her (Mundhra, 2006). Once the doctor asked if "everything was alright" Deepak immediately grabbed Kiranjit's arm and told her to leave (Mundhra, 2006). It was apparent in this scene that Deepak had ultimate control over Kiranjit's life and her personal well-being. In addition, male dominance was further reinforced in the scene where Kiranjit was denied the right to continue her

education. Although Deepak had agreed before the marriage that she could continue her education, Deepak restricted her movement to the domestic sphere. Kiranjit was not allowed to attend school or social gatherings as Deepak controlled her movement. Both of these scenes are a clear indication of the male dominance norms and values that persist in the portrayal of the Sikh community.

Male dominance was also found to be one of the underlying themes in the film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008). Through Rocky's character, it was evident that the male spouse in the household was always in the position of authority. This is reflected in one of the scenes where Rocky told Chand he needed to sell her jewellery to support his extended family (Mehta, 2008). Although the jewellery belonged to Chand, Rocky showed his dominance by telling Chand what to do with her personal assets. These patriarchal values motivated acts of domestic violence. Associated with these patriarchal values were a set of gender roles which are governed at the community level. The next section discusses how men in the film representation of the Sikh community use acts of domestic violence to restore traditional cultural values when community folkways have been breached.

4.5.2 Resistance to Assimilation to Western Lifestyle

Resistance to assimilation, especially to the Western lifestyle was consistently evident throughout the viewing of these films. For the victims, having a desire to assimilate with society at large resulted in grave consequences, in this case, domestic violence. In both films, the victims of domestic violence, Kiranjit Ahluwalia and Chand Dhillion were expected by their husbands to follow certain cultural beliefs without questioning or criticizing them. Any deviation from these cultural beliefs were viewed as

signs of assimilation to a Western lifestyle and resulted in acts of domestic violence. For example, in both *Heaven on Earth* (2008) and *Provoked* (2006) the nonconformity to the cultural beliefs of dressing traditionally, refraining from cross-gender communication and being dependent on the male spouse were viewed as signs of assimilation. Both husbands, Rocky and Deepak viewed assimilation as being wrong, and perceived it as neglecting the "Indian culture" and adapting to Western norms, values and customs. Such behaviours were found to trigger acts of domestic violence. The various themes that emerged in relation to the resistance to assimilation into Western lifestyle will be discussed below by presenting the findings of each film individually.

Heaven on Earth

In the film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008), it became apparent that Rocky wanted Chand to appear "natural" and "traditional" to the wider society (Mehta, 2008). In order to meet such expectations, Chand was required by Rocky to dress in traditional outfits and avoid the usage of cosmetics and fragrances (Mehta, 2008). The use of non-traditional attire and beauty products were viewed as signs of assimilation. Rocky attempted to deter Chand from using such products by abusing her. Such behaviour was clearly evident in the scene where Rocky violently expressed his anger against Chand's usage of perfume (Mehta, 2008). The use of fragrance was not seen as normative in the Indian culture. When Rocky became aware of Chand's usage of scented products he immediately began to question her. After probing for an answer as to why she used the product, he told her she is Indian and she should refrain from using cosmetics and scented fragrances. In attempt to justify herself, Chand stated her friend from work had sprayed some perfume on her. After a moment of silence, Rocky aggressively smashed the plate

he was holding against the floor (Mehta, 2008). For Rocky, throwing the plate was an attempt to express his disapproval of such behaviour and his way of reminding Chand of his ultimate control on making such decisions.

Moreover, acts of domestic violence were found to be triggered by cross-gender communication. The film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008), illustrated that within the Sikh community, cultural beliefs prohibit women from interacting and communicating with males. The only contact that females were allowed to have with the opposite sex was in the domain of the immediate family. The communication with males outside of the family unit was again perceived as the adoption of Western norms and values. Such level of communication was controlled through acts of domestic violence. This is evident throughout the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008) as Chand was required to work in an all-women environment (Mehta, 2008). In one particular scene, Rocky was shown physically attacking Chand for communicating with other males. Although Chand did not converse with any males outside of her immediate family, Rocky continued to physically attack her for this perceived transgression. This scene suggested that cross-gender communication was viewed as a form of assimilation and as such triggered acts of domestic violence to regulate this process and keep Chand within the cultural norms of her heritage (Mehta, 2008).

A final theme that emerged in relation to the resistance to assimilation into Western culture, was in regards to the level of authority offered to women. *Heaven on Earth* (2008) showed how cultural beliefs in the Sikh community embraced patriarchal values. These patriarchal values positioned women as subordinate, with their opinions and viewpoints regarded as secondary to their male partners. As shown in the film, when

women attempted to curb some of these patriarchal values, males often resisted this change through acts of domestic violence. Such practices were demonstrated in the beginning of the film when Chand attempted to offer her input when her mother-in-law unexpectedly arrived at Chand and Rocky's honeymoon destination. Rocky reacted to Chand's suggestions with violence by slapping her across her face. In an attempt to justify his abusive response, he stated "who asked you" (Mehta, 2008)? Within this scene, it became clear that Rocky opposed the idea that his wife had the authority to offer input or question his decisions. However, Chand felt that her move to Canada would offer her more rights and authority in the domestic sphere. This is depicted through Chand's riddle at the end of the scene which translates to mean:

> A young woman asks the water: Where are you going? The water answers: Beyond the seven seas to the 8th land; in the 8th land, blooms a magical garden. In that garden is a tree made out of gold which is guarded by a cobra (Mehta, 2008).

Through this riddle Chand attempted to provide an analogy to her situation. Chand strongly believed that the physical distance from one's native country cannot escape the cultural norms that persist in the Sikh community. Even though Canada's female gender norms are very different (in some instances more empowering of women), Chand illustrated through her riddles that the transcending from one belief system to another is regulated and controlled through the "frightening " forms of abuse. All of these themes were symbolically represented in Chand's riddle. For example, the seven seas represented the migration process to a foreign land, the magical garden represented a land of opportunities, which in this case is Canada, and the golden tree symbolically represented cultural norms that are different from the Sikh community. These cultural norms are then protected by a scary snake that attacks those who attempt to gain access to or appropriate

this golden tree. Through this riddle, it is communicated clearly that domestic violence is the tool by which the guardian of the culture, the spouses or other men in place of authority, use to safeguard the heritage culture from being appropriated by the larger culture, which in this case is the normative Canadian culture.

Provoked

As observed in the film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008), the themes of traditional appearance, the restrictions of cross-gender communication and male supremacy were also evident in the film *Provoked* (2006). The film *Provoked* (2006) illustrated that Deepak also guarded what he perceived as the heritage cultural norms by the tool of domestic violence.

One of the cultural values that Deepak wanted to preserve in the host country was that of traditional appearance. Deepak expected Kiranjit to maintain a traditional and pure appearance. Such expectations were observed through Deepak's dialogue as he consistently reminded Kiranjit to be a "proper Indian woman" (Mundhra, 2006). When Kiranjit deviated from these expectations, Deepak was shown using various forms of abuse to restore the cultural value of purity. A clear illustration of such expectations was visible in the scene where Kiranjit showed Deepak an outfit she wanted to wear to a social event. This outfit was a multicolored blazer, which Kiranjit selected because she wanted to blend in with members of the larger social group. After seeing her outfit, Deepak immediately responded "what are you wearing... you shouldn't try copying white girls… it doesn't look nice" (Mundhra, 2006). Through this scene it became obvious that

Deepak wanted Kiranjit to be the "ideal" Sikh woman and to adhere to traditional clothing.

Another theme that persisted throughout the film, *Provoked* (2006), was the restrictions placed on women from interacting with members of the opposite sex. Deepak expected Kiranjit to remain in the domestic sphere and refrain from interacting with males that were not members of the immediate family. Cross-gender interactions were perceived as the adaptation to a Western lifestyle. Such beliefs were displayed throughout the film as Deepak consistently reminded Kiranjit that migrating to the Western world did not mean she could forfeit the cultural values of the Sikh community (Mundhra, 2006). A situation that clearly expressed opposition to cross-gender interaction was a scene depicting the social gathering that Kiranjit and Deepak attended. During the event, Deepak's friend Ravi dedicated a song to Deepak and Kiranjit, encouraging the couple to dance. However, Deepak responded by refusing to dance, stating he could not dance, but insisted that Ravi should dance with his wife instead. Although he had given Kiranjit permission to dance with another man, he ridiculed her behaviour after the party. As is noted in this scene, Deepak mentioned, "you seem to kick it off with Ravi pretty well, the way you were flirting with him you should have married him" (Mundhra, 2006). Kiranjit commented back by stating, "he is just a friend, stop being childish" (Mundhra, 2006). Her response resulted in a violent outburst as Deepak slapped Kiranjit in the face.

In addition, Deepak firmly believed that women from the Sikh community should adhere to patriarchal values (Mundhra, 2006). The film *Provoked* (2006) illustrated that Kiranjit was expected to acquiesce to the commands of her husband. In this regard, Kiranjit was not permitted to question the authority or choices of her husband. This

compliance was prominently displayed in the scene where Kiranjit called her husband at work to inquire about his work schedule. Deepak, insulted by this curiosity, approached Kiranjit with rage and stated, "you call me at work and embarrass me" (Mundhra, 2006)! Deepak then proceeded to choke his wife out of anger. The underlying factor instigating this episode of domestic violence was that a cultural norm was not followed; women should never question their husbands. In relation to the resistance to assimilation, the following section will discuss how the misinterpretation of religious beliefs is a catalyst to acts of domestic violence.

4.5.3 The Misinterpretation of Religious Beliefs

The analysis of the films: *Heaven on Earth* (2008) and *Provoked* (2006), revealed that the misinterpretations of religious beliefs were one of the contributing factors behind acts of domestic violence. Both films exemplified how many individuals belonging to the Sikh community firmly held onto the belief that Sikhism condones acts of domestic violence (Mundhra, 2006; Mehta, 2008). In other words, there was a misconception that acts of domestic violence are justified through religious scripts and beliefs. Although the films did not directly convey the message that Sikhism is supportive of acts of domestic violence, the background scenery of both films suggested that such acts are acceptable when gender roles are breached. Even though such beliefs are contrary to the fundamental principles of Sikhism, the films showed how cultural views are often misinterpreted as religious beliefs to support acts of domestic violence.

The misinterpretation of religious beliefs was evident in the film *Provoked* (2006), as the majority of the scenes which depicted acts of domestic violence had

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religious artifacts on display in the background. For example, this was clearly visible in the scene when Kiranjit was physically attacked for using the family income (Mundhra, 2006). In this scene, Kiranjit was arguing with Deepak about the distribution of the family income. Throughout this argument, the camera repeatedly focused on religious pictures of Guru Nanak in the background. As the scene progressed the conversation turned abusive and Deepak began physically attacking Kiranjit. While this was happening, a picture of the Golden Temple was displayed in the background right in line with the camera's view. During this abusive scene, the camera blanked out all other background scenery and heavily focused on Kiranjit and the religious artifacts. With such religious imagery being showcased in the background, these scenes were indirectly portraying the message that religious beliefs were supportive of such behaviour (Mundhra, 2006).

There was a similar portrayal of religious beliefs that was observed in the film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008). Throughout the film, acts of domestic violence were discussed and presented in relation to religious beliefs. The film was found to be portraying the message that religion and acts of domestic violence were interrelated. As evidenced through the positioning of the camera and the various fixtures included in each scene, the film was indirectly portraying the message that religious beliefs are supportive of acts of domestic violence. The representation of such ideologies was evident in the beginning of the film when Chand's mother-in-law was discussing the assigned gender role of domestic duties (Mehta, 2008). Throughout this part of the film, a religious picture was shown repeatedly in the background of the scene. The positioning of the camera explicitly focused on Chand's mother-in-law and then two religious pictures in the

background. By filtering out all additional images from this scene and focusing exclusively on the religious pictures and the discussion of gender roles, this segment of the film was relaying the message that religious beliefs are supportive of such gender roles.

4.6 The Role of Collectivism in Abusive Relationships

Throughout the film analysis, it became apparent that the collective family structure found in the Sikh community played a significant role in the way domestic violence was experienced, perceived and understood. Contrary to settlement patterns found in Canada, the film representation of the Sikh community was found to place great emphasis on family unity. This section will discuss the role collectivism played in abusive relationships by discussing: (1) the collective identity, (2) the collective frustrations as an instigator of abuse, (3) reputation within a collective structure and (4) abuse perpetrated by extended family members.

4.6.1 Collective Identity

In contrast to the Canadian context in which family structures are more individualistic in nature, the Sikh community emphasizes the collective identity symbolized foremost by family unity. Such a focus on unity is reflected in the settlement patterns found in the film representation of the Sikh community. For example, many Sikhs tend to reside with extended family members even after marriage in order to maintain the collective arrangement. This collective identity was clearly found in the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008) whereby Rocky, Chand, Baldev, Aman, Kabir, Loveleen and Rocky's parents all resided in a small two bedroom bungalow home. Although Baldev is

married to Aman and has two children, Kabir and Loveleen, they all reside with the larger family unit (Mehta, 2008). This extended family residence pattern can be attributed to economic conditions in the immigrant country. However, the more influential factor within this context is that the collective family lives together as a result of cultural norm rather than an economic necessity.

A similar theme was also present in the film, *Provoked* (2006), as Deepak's mother was greatly involved in her son's relationship. This was evident throughout the film as Deepak's mother was consistently shown being an active participant in her son's family. For example, in one scene she was shown teaching Kiranjit how to cook and conduct various domestic duties (Mundhra, 2006). During this scene, the mother-in-law's involvement in Kiranjit's family was clearly exemplified as Rocky was heard discussing the family affairs with his mother. The involvement of extended family members in both films *Provoked* (2006) and *Heaven on Earth* (2008) demonstrated how the Sikh community values collectivism which is symbolized first and foremost by family unity.

4.6.2 The Collective Frustrations as an Instigator of Abuse

The collective family arrangement was found to be a contributing factor leading to domestic violence. As shown in the film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008), the collective frustrations of the family unit were generally placed on the eldest son of the family. For example, throughout the film it became apparent that the combined responsibilities of the family were all placed on Rocky (Mehta, 2008). Being the eldest son, Rocky was expected to be the sole provider and was expected to sponsor his younger brother and his wife Chand's family from India. Rather than seeing the sponsorship as an individual

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desire, Rocky believed being a sponsor and the family breadwinner were his duties and obligations. In other words, Rocky presumed that he had to sponsor and provide for his extended family members to fulfill his role and responsibility in the collective family structure. When Rocky became aware that his application to sponsor his brother was denied, his frustrations began to escalate. This was evidenced in the scene where Rocky went to the immigration office and was informed that his application was denied (Mehta, 2008). At the end of the scene, Rocky was very disappointed for not living up to his family's expectations and presumed responsibilities. The director of the film emphasized Rocky's frustration by presenting the scene in black and white with no sound in the background. Within this scene, Rocky was shown grabbing his hair and leaning his head forward towards the steering wheel of his car (Mehta, 2008). This scene highlighted Rocky's frustration by focusing exclusively on his emotions.

The collective frustrations of the family being placed on Rocky were further demonstrated in a scene where Chand was discussing the family situation with her husband. In this scene, Chand was attempting to determine the underlying cause of the problems in their relationship. After asking Rocky why he was distancing himself from her, he replied "what does this family want from me…nobody can help me" (Mehta, 2008). These words display the frustrations Rocky was experiencing from the weight of his responsibilities to the larger family. During this scene the director focused the camera on Rocky, highlighting the strain experienced from his family responsibilities.

The increase in frustration from family responsibilities was also found to be an instigator of abuse. For example, during the climax of the film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008), Rocky began blaming Chand for his failure to live up to his family's expectations. Rocky

felt that Chand was an additional burden to the family structure and the primary cause for his failures. Although Chand attempted to help the family out financially by working long hours in a fabric company, she was verbally abused for expenses imposed on the family that were beyond her control. A clear example of this was shown in the scene where Rocky needed money for his younger brother's sponsorship. Although Chand had no input into the sponsorship decision, Rocky was heard saying "I need your jewelry… for Gurpreet's (Rocky's brother) sponsorship" (Mehta, 2008). After Chand agreed, she asked him "why do you do this to me…as if you don't care for me" (Mehta, 2008)? Rocky exploded in anger and began blaming Chand for being a burden on the family. After violently grabbing the blanket off Chand, Rocky was shown leaving the room expressing his anger towards his wife. The director exclusively focused on Rocky's emotions as his anger was illustrated through his aggressive behaviour and raised voice. This scene illustrates how one's failure to meet the expectations of the collective family norms influences acts of domestic violence.

4.6.3 Reputation within a Collective Structure

The reputation of the collective family unit was also found to be one of the motivating factors of domestic violence. As evidenced in the film *Provoked* (2006), Deepak's mother-in-law was greatly involved in Kiranjit's marital relationship. When Kiranjit told Deepak's mother about her son's affair with another woman, Deepak (the son) became extremely angry because he believed his image was of extreme importance, and now his image of being a "responsible son" was impaired. A good portrayal of this is noted in the scene where Deepak violently choked Kiranjit to prevent her from disclosing his adulterous lifestyle which in turn would tarnish his image (Mundhra, 2006).

Deepak felt if his mother was made aware of his infidelity, his "family image" would be destroyed. The fear of having Kiranjit expose such information to his mother was again evident in his statement, "don't you get my mother involved in this" (Mundhra, 2006). Although Deepak's mother attempted to stop the abuse by intervening in the physical violence, Deepak attempted to justify his actions by blaming Kiranjit for her involvement in his work related matters. Even though the initial reason for the abuse was to prevent Kiranjit from disclosing information, Deepak attempted to change the topic in order to justify his actions. This scene illustrated how the disclosure of information that impacts the individual's reputation negatively within the collective family unit can instigate acts of domestic violence in the Sikh community.

4.6.4 Abuse Perpetrated by Extended Family Members

Another finding that persisted throughout the film analysis was that the Sikh community tends to perceive acts of domestic violence as a phenomenon derived from the larger family structure. In other words, the media portrayal of the Sikh community suggested that many Sikhs believed acts of domestic violence were not only limited to occur between intimate partners, but that such forms of abuse could be perpetrated or instigated by extended family members. This ideology contradicts the North American understanding of domestic violence, which commonly defines acts of spousal abuse in the context of intimate partners. The wide-ranging nature of domestic violence was clearly evident in the film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008), as much of the abuse experienced by Chand was perpetrated by Rocky's family. For example, in the beginning of the film Chand was shown being aggressively pushed by her spouse's nephew (Mehta, 2008). The execution of domestic violence by extended family members were also reinforced in the

scene where Chand's mother-in-law was shown verbally abusing Chand in the kitchen. These scenes clearly demonstrated how domestic violence in the film representation of the Sikh community expanded beyond the realm of intimate partners.

The perspective of domestic violence being carried out by extended family members was also highlighted in the film, *Provoked* (2006), as Kiranjit's mother-in-law significantly contributed to the abuse Kiranjit endured. For example, in one scene Kiranjit was shown washing the dishes when her husband entered the room, fuming with rage, and started choking her. The mother-in-law actively assisted the level of violence as she blamed Kiranjit for aggravating her husband (Mundhra, 2006). When Kiranjit's mother-in-law was asked to recall the event in the court of law, she denied witnessing the incident (Mundhra, 2006). Shortly after, Kiranjit's lawyer asked the mother-in-law to comment on the night Kiranjit was vigorously attacked by Deepak. The mother-in-law justified Deepak's actions by stating Kiranjit agitated and controlled her husband by placing restrictions upon him (Mundhra, 2006). Throughout this scene, it was evident that Kiranjit's mother-in-law contributed to the abuse Kiranjit faced as she attempted to normalize the violent incident. Although women in the film portrayal of the Sikh community faced multiple layers of abuse from their extended family members, many women failed to seek help. The next section will discuss the barriers that prevent Sikh women from seeking formal help.

4.7 The Barriers That Prevent Sikh Women from Seeking Help

Chand and Kiranjit were both victims of domestic violence. However the escape route for both of these women differed significantly. Chand submitted to various levels of

abuse before deciding to leave her abusive husband. To escape the circle of violence and disengage from her spouse Rocky, Chand ultimately ended up migrating back to her native country. Alternatively, Kiranjit pursued an avenue of revenge by igniting her abusive husband on fire. As a result, Deepak succumbed to his injuries and Kiranjit continued her life with her two boys after serving her sentence at a federal penitentiary. Regardless of the different approaches taken by Chand and Kiranjit to escape their abusive relationships, both women delayed the process of seeking help. The following section will discuss the individual factors that impede Sikh women from contacting authorities. The themes that will be discussed include: (1) weakened support mechanism, (2) the weaknesses of service providers, (3) language barriers, (4) victim blaming and (5) cultural sensitivity.

4.7.1 Weakened Support Mechanisms

An obstacle that was found to prevent Sikh women from seeking formal help in incidence of domestic violence was the weakened support mechanisms that accompanied migration. In the film, *Heaven on Earth* (2006), Chand was presented as an immigrant woman that just arrived to Canada through a marriage sponsorship. In a foreign country, Chand was found to have no family or friends and was financially dependent on her spouse Rocky. The lack of networks limited Chand's ability to acquire knowledge regarding the formal process of seeking help. The state of isolation caused Chand to be heavily dependent on Rocky's family as they were the only family she had in Canada. To assure Chand did not contact the police regarding incidences of domestic violence, Rocky's family made Chand inaccessible to family and friends, leaving her with no resources of acquiring knowledge of the legal system in Canada. Chand's lack of

knowledge about Canada's justice system was evident through the scene were Chand

asked Rosa what 911 was (Mehta, 2008). This scene confirmed that many immigrant

Sikh women fail to seek help because they are simply unaware of the support

mechanisms that are in place.

Furthermore, the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008) revealed that the family support

mechanisms that persisted in Chand's native country were also weakened as her family

was not able to support her without physically being in Canada. Due to the physical

distance that existed between Chand and her family, the support mechanisms that were

established over time started to decay after she migrated to Canada. Since Chand's family

were not familiar with the functionality of the Canadian justice system, their capability of

providing support was limited. In many cases, Chand's family were found to offer advice

that was culturally relevant in India. Such guidance was found to contradict the advice

offered by the Canadian justice system. This is clearly shown in the scene were Chand

calls her family in India to tell them about her abusive experience. During this

conversation, Chand's mother ignores her request for help, advising her to stay in a

relationship that has proven to be abusive (Mehta, 2008). This scene illustrates how

family support mechanisms from abroad can begin to deteriorate over time due to the

physical distance that exists.

The decline in family support was further evident in the film, *Provoked* (2006).

Through Kiranjit's character it became evident that not only does family support begin to

weaken over physical distance, but rather starts to repeal against the individual seeking

help. In Kiranjit's case, her family began to neglect her when she hinted at obtaining a

divorce. Instead of providing support, Kiranjit's family told her that marriage life was

one's fate and cannot be escaped through divorce (Mundhra, 2006). The concept of divorce was very negatively perceived in the portrayal of the Sikh community that Kiranjit's family forced her to remain in an abusive relationship. In this case, not only was Kiranjit's resources limited in England, but she further risked losing her only support mechanism if she went against her family's will and chose the path of getting a divorce.

4.7.2 The Weaknesses of Service Providers

Another barrier that was found to prevent Sikh women from seeking formal help in incidence of domestic violence was the inadequate response of the justice system. Although both films demonstrated how service providers discouraged Sikh women from formally seeking help for their victimization, the film *Provoked* (2006) illustrated how the justice system created additional barriers for immigrant women. By focusing on the results derived from this film, this section will elaborate on the different responses Sikh women received from the justice system.

4.7.2.1 Language Barriers

Throughout the viewing of the film *Provoked* (2006) Kiranjit's character revealed that many Sikh women fail to contact authorities due their language barriers. For example, during Kiranjit's trial, she was shown without an interpreter despite her difficulties with the English language. Even when James O'Connell, a police constable, told the investigating officer that Kiranjit's first language was not English, he failed to provide her with an interpreter (Mundhra, 2006). Due to Kiranjit's limited ability to communicate in the English language, she was unable to effectively communicate to the

police officer her experiences of victimization. As a result, Kiranjit faced a second layer of victimization by the same system that was set out to protect her.

Moreover, the language barriers that Sikh women face were further evident in the scene where Kiranjit confessed to her husband's murder. During this scene, Kiranjit was being questioned by an investigating officer about Deepak's death. Although Kiranjit did not understand her rights and was unaware of what was being asked of her, the investigating officer believed Kiranjit's conversation about her victimization was a form of a confession (Mundhra, 2006). From Kiranjit's perspective, she felt that she had to disclose all of the information to the investigating officer due to his level of authority. Examining this scene from a cultural standpoint, it became apparent that there was a difference in perception. For example, the investigating officer was only asking Kiranjit questions about her victimization to obtain a confession, which would make a finding of guilt easier during the court procedure. On the other hand, Kiranjit felt if she answered all of the questions that were being asked of her she would be able to obtain the help she needed. This segment of the film clearly showed how the police officer and Kiranjit had different intentions of the justice system which stemmed from a language barrier.

4.7.2.2 Victim Blaming

The inadequate response of the justice system was not only found in the early stages of the police investigation but was also found in the court proceedings. The film *Provoked* (2006) revealed that the trial process engaged in a practice called victim blaming. Such a practice consisted of the criminal justice blaming Kiranjit for the victimization she experienced. In other words, individual actors in the justice system held

on to the idea that Kiranjit was partially responsible for the crimes that were committed against her. The practice of victim blaming was evident in the final stages of Kiranjit's trail. During this scene, the trial judge ruled out the plea of self-defence and provocation by stating Kiranjit was in no "immediate danger" (Mundhra, 2006). Despite being aware that Kiranjit was physically abused by her husband, on the night of the murder, the trial judge refused to consider the claim of self-defence or provocation. The trial judge offered his rationale by stating:

> The fact the most recent incident took place a full two hours before she (Kiranjit) poured or threw petrol over the deceased and then igniting it with a naked flame, this alone is not enough to consider the plea of provocation and self-defence (Mundhra, 2006).

In this statement the judge implied that Kiranjit had enough time to leave her abusive relationship. Instead of recognizing Kiranjit's past decade of victimization, the trial judge blamed Kiranjit for not leaving her abusive relationship. The trial judge's statement made it overtly clear that Kiranjit's failure to leave the abusive relationship within the two hour span between the murder of Deepak and her pervious victimization makes her responsible for the crime of first-degree murder and the oppression she experienced. By dismissing the ten years of abuse Kiranjit experienced, the trial judge indirectly blamed her for her victimization. The next section will expand on the topic of culture by discussing the lack of cultural sensitivity within the justice system.

4.7.2.3 Cultural Sensitivity

The findings from the film, *Provoked* (2006), illustrated that many Sikh women fail to seek formal help because they feel the justice system fails to understand their culture. The lack of cultural awareness was overtly apparent through this film as Kiranjit

was "Othered" by the correctional staff at the federal penitentiary. When Kiranjit was shown entering the federal penitentiary, the correctional staff failed to recognize the cultural values, beliefs and perceptions that were prevalent in the Sikh community. Since Kiranjit's behaviour and values did not draw similarities to dominant culture in the prison environment, she was "Othered" by correctional staff. The "Othering" effect was clearly visible in the scene were Kiranjit was being admitted into the state institution. During the intake process, the correctional guard attempts to pronounce Kiranjit's name and suddenly stops half-way (Mundhra, 2006). After another attempt the guard pointed her finger at Kiranjit and rudely said "you" (Mundhra, 2006). By singling out Kiranjit, the correctional guard formed a stereotype that certain types of names are associated with a certain cultural group. The correctional guard's preconception that all Sikh women have long difficult names, and her failure to attempt to understand how to pronounce Kiranjit's name exemplifies how the justice system needs to train its personnel to become culturally competent.

The justice system also expressed the lack of cultural sensitivity by failing to recognise the importance of religious material found in the Sikh community. The film, *Provoked* (2006), demonstrated that correctional officers did not understand the true meaning behind wearing a Kara (religious bracelet). Many members of the Sikh community wear a circular Kara on their right hand to symbolize their unity and faithfulness to the Guru's teachings. The correctional staff was unaware of these teachings and were found to single out Kiranjit for her religious practices. This was clearly evident in the scene were Kiranjit was stripped of her religious identity. To illustrate, when Kiranjit was shown entering the federal penitentiary, the correctional

guard was heard saying remove all of your "jewelry and clothing" (Mundhra, 2006). As the scene progressed, Kiranjit was shown taking off her Kara very slowly and diligently. The camera explicitly focused on the Kara as Kiranjit used both hands to surrender the religious bracelet to the correctional guard. When the correctional guard received the bracelet she was shown grabbing the Kara in a hostile manner (Mundhra, 2006). Her facial expression suggested she was irritated with the amount of time Kiranjit was taking to remove her jewellery. By the correctional guard failing to understand how significant it was for Kiranjit to remove such an important part of her identity, the scene relayed the message that many correctional officers do not understand the Sikh community's cultural practices. This divide in cultural understanding was one of the reasons why Sikh women felt they could not seek help from the formal justice system.

4.8 Summary of Results

The media portrayals of domestic violence in the Sikh community showed that conflicting cultural beliefs between the heritage and host cultures triggers and exacerbates the commission of violent acts against women in the domestic sphere. The violence is intended to be a response to control women from acquiring or totally assimilating the larger societal normative values, especially those pertaining to women's status in society. This does not mean that Canadian women have reached the status of total equality in their own society. However, it is the perception of this equality rather than its reality that creates this conflictual state of affairs within the Sikh immigrant community. The qualitative analysis of this study suggested that many Sikhs hold onto cultural beliefs that are deeply ingrained in patriarchal values and supremacy of the males. Much of these beliefs the films show were enforced and normalized through

religious institutions and the process of socialization. As many Sikhs immigrated to Canada, much of these cultural beliefs conflicted with the norms and values of the West. In order to re-establish cultural norms in a pluralistic society such as Canada, Sikh men, like Chand and Kiranjit's spouses resorted to acts of violence as a means of control and coercion.

Although much of the abuse experienced by Chand and Kiranjit was similar to other women around the world, there were many instances throughout the films when both of these women assigned a varied meaning to acts of domestic violence than the meaning more prevalent in the normative Canadian context. For example, acts of marital rape were not perceived as abuse. The women in the films felt that they were required to engage in sexual conduct with their spouse after marriage, whether they are willing or not. This practice clashes with the Western normative understanding of domestic violence, namely that non- consensual sexual acts are considered rape, within a marital relationship or outside.

In both films domestic violence was also found to be perpetrated out by extended family members. Such incidents suggested that domestic violence in the film portrayal of the Sikh community does not only occur between intimate partners. The films demonstrated how in-laws and extended family members are active participants in acts of domestic violence. Although the media portrayals of the Sikh community illustrated a strong presence of domestic violence, many women did not seek help due to the stigma the community attached to those who deviated from "appropriate" gender roles. The women who did seek help from service providers and the justice system were met with

culturally incompetent services. Many actors in the justice system blamed the victim for

their abuse and failed to help women escape from abusive relationships.

5.0 Chapter Five: Discussion

Previous literature, while scarce, suggests that domestic violence in the South Asian and more particularly the Sikh community is rampant. Examining the issue of domestic violence through the theoretical framework of intersectionality stresses the importance of recognizing the multiple meanings that various groups assign to a social problem. Applying this primary objective of intersectionality to the existing literature on domestic violence in the Sikh community, it is apparent that more information is needed on how Sikhs perceive domestic violence within their community. In this regard, the definition and understanding of domestic violence is not universal. The Sikh community interprets acts of domestic violence from their own viewpoint. To uncover how domestic violence is experienced, perceived and understood in the Sikh community, this research has demonstrated how the elements of (1) culture, gender, religion and immigration status intersect to shape (2) the experiences and perceptions of domestic violence, (3) contribute to the denial of domestic violence, and create an environment of (4) cultural conflict which thereby creates a (5) two- tier system that governs behaviour in the Sikh community. The (6) collective identity also shapes the experiences of domestic violence and many women fail to report these acts due to the (7) double layer of victimization that is perpetrated by the justice system. In attempt to addresses these issues, the following section will synthesise the results and discuss the findings in relation to previous literature. Within this section, I will also discuss some initiatives to end domestic violence, discuss the (9) strengths and weaknesses of this study and make a few suggestions for future research.

5.1The Intersection of Culture, Gender, Religion, and Immigration Status

Crenshaw (1991) asserts the experiences of domestic violence are not homogenous in nature. The framework of intersectionality acknowledges this downfall and suggests multiple identities or systems interact to form individual experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). These identities include but are not limited to race, gender, culture, social class and immigration status (Ayyub, 2000). The interplay between these various identities changes the experiences and perceptions of domestic violence from one group to another (Andersen & Collins, 1995, as cited in Mehrotra, 1999). Furthermore, intersectionality is not only about examining the intersecting effect between two or more identities; rather the framework recognises that each identity fluctuates in isolation (Andersen & Collins, 1995, as cited in Mehrotra, 1999; Bograd, 2005; Dwyer, 2000). These findings in previous literature are consistent with this study as both films *Heaven on Earth* (2008) and *Provoked* (2006) demonstrated how Chand and Kiranjit had multiple identities which shaped their experiences of domestic violence. More specifically, the identities of culture, gender, religion, and immigration status did not equally impact Chand and Kiranjit. Both films illustrated how Chand and Kiranjit assigned a significant level of importance to each of these identities. Needless to say, the variations of importance for each of these identities were specific to Chand and Kiranjit's life.

As exhibited in both films, the cultural identities varied for both Chand and Kiranjit. The films revealed that Chand and Kiranjit were governed by a different set of cultural beliefs. Although the foundations of these beliefs were similar, both Chand and Kiranjit's families were found to mix and match certain aspects of the Sikh culture to produce a culture that was relevant to them. For example, Chand was shown working

outside of the domestic sphere - deviating from the cultural belief that all women should be limited to the domestic area. On the other hand, Kiranjit's husband Rocky strongly believed that women should be limited to the domestic area and restricted her movement to their household. These two examples suggest that the cultural beliefs Chand and Kiranjit submitted to were not static. In other words, the level to which cultural beliefs were enforced and the degree to which Kiranjit and Chand believed in these cultural views were found to change. As a result, this suggests that cultural identity is not fixed as individuals vary in how they identify themselves with cultural beliefs.

With respect to gendered identity, all the characters were found to alter their behaviour in accordance to their gender and context. The importance of the gendered identity was found to shift depending on the context in which the character was placed. For example, at home Deepak submitted to the male dominance role as he controlled all the finances and made all the final decisions. When Deepak was shown in the public arena, his behaviour was found to drastically change as he was shown as a loving spouse. The change in identity in accordance to gender was also seen in the film *Heaven on Earth* (2008) as Rocky submitted to patriarchal values when he was accompanied by other individuals that were from the Sikh community. For example, Rocky felt that when he was at home his identity as a male had to be amplified to prove to his family he is following the traditional gender roles. Such a change suggests that the gendered identity and the emphasis on gender changes depending on the context an individual is placed in.

Moreover, the identity of religion was also found to vary depending on the characters religious views. The religious identity indicates that all characters applied a personalized meaning to the term Sikhism. For example, the characters in the film

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Heaven on Earth (2008) placed a stronger emphasis on religion, as majority of them wore turbans and kara's demonstrating their commitment to the principals of Sikhism. Alternatively, the characters in the film *Provoked* (2006) were shown to deviate from the principals of Sikhism as the main protagonist (Rocky) was clean shaven, drank alcohol, and did not wear a kara. Although Rocky did not commit to many of the principals of his religion, he still believed and identified himself as a follower of Sikhism. These two styles of living, suggest the religious identity is not fixed across characters, as individuals follow the principals of Sikhism to their own personalized degree.

In addition, the immigration status of the characters in both films was also found to impact each individual differently. Although both Chand and Kiranjit were immigrants, their immigration status contributed to their abuse at varying degrees. For example, Chand was able to work once she arrived to Canada. Such opportunity allowed Chand to create and maintain friendships, as well as acquire knowledge and familiarity with the functionality of the justice system in Canada. On the other hand, Kiranjit's immigration status in combination with her restrictive spouse limited her movement to the domestic sphere. Not being able to leave the household, Kiranjit was unable to make friends, and was also incapable of procuring the necessary information and/or support needed to help escape her abusive relationship. Her isolation was partially a result of her immigration status, as she was fully dependent on her abusive spouse. As exhibited through Chand and Kiranjit's character, the identity of immigration status does not equally impact everyone. In some situations one's immigration status may greatly restrict an individual, whereas, in other situations the restrictive effect may not be so stringent.

Overall, the findings of this research support the framework of intersectionality. Since the identities of culture, gender, religion, and immigration status each shape one's experience of domestic violence differently, this is a clear indication that all Sikhs are not identical. Depending on the emphasis placed on each identity and the interaction between these identities, the experiences and perceptions amongst Sikhs will differ significantly. In other words, the Sikh population in itself is very heterogeneous. The recognition of such identities is severely important for service providers and future research to uncover the multidimensional nature of domestic violence.

5.2 The Experiences and Perceptions of Domestic Violence in the Sikh Community

The findings from this research study suggests that women belonging to the Sikh community face the same types of abuse as do women of the larger population in Canada. For example, the film analysis revealed that Chand and Kiranjit were victims to forced labour, control, physical abuse, financial abuse, isolation and sexual abuse. These forms of abuse are all viewed as crimes of "domestic violence" in the Canadian context (Department of Justice, 2001; Sev'er, 2002). Despite the similar forms of abuse, Sikh women perceive and experience acts of domestic violence much differently than those of the dominant mainstream society. The Sikh population was found to have a very unique understanding of domestic violence that was specific to their community.

One of the differences in perception that was found to exist is in regards to the understanding of abuse. The results of this study revealed that Sikh women were at increased risk of experiencing domestic violence in the form of isolation and control. Despite this form of victimization, the representation of the Sikh community, especially

Sikh women failed to classify such behaviours as abusive. It was only after the level of isolation and control was intensified that Chand and Kiranjit began to identify such behaviours as a form of domestic violence. Such findings are concurrent with Mehrotra's (1999) study which found that half of the women in her study (14 respondents) were unable to identify the form of abuse they were experiencing. After probing each participant, the researcher found that 14 out of 28 participants (50 percent of respondents) recalled experiencing abuse in the form of control. Furthermore, these findings are similar to those obtained in Helweg and Helweg's (1990) study. Their analysis revealed even professional women in the Sikh community were susceptible to domestic violence in the form of isolation and control (Helweg & Helweg, 1990). Abraham's (2000) study supports these findings as her research suggested that abuse in the form of isolation and control is one of the most prevalent methods of domestic violence in the South Asian community.

Accompanying the various forms of abuse that Sikh women face, this study indicates that there are certain forms of abuse that are culturally specific to the Sikh community. For example, the film analysis revealed that within the Sikh community, verbally attacking ones family name or mocking a family's situation is perceived as one of the gravest forms of domestic violence. As seen in both films, Deepak and Rocky insulted their wives by mocking their family's finical abilities. Although such behaviour is not classified as an act of domestic violence in the Canadian context, in the film portrayal of the Sikh community, an insulting gesture to one's family name is perceived as one of the highest levels of abuse. These findings are consistent with Toor's (2009)

research study which found that an assault on one's family name is worse than physical abuse.

5.3 The Denial of Domestic Violence

In addition to the experiences and perceptions of domestic violence, many women denied being a victim of domestic violence to uphold the community's image. This study found that many women belonging to the Sikh community adhered to the concept of "model minority". The women in both films were found to deny the existence of domestic violence because they wanted to maintain an image of an "ideal" immigrant community. Since the women in both films were first generation immigrants, they felt they had to prove to the wider society that their ethnic group is immune from problems such as domestic violence. In order to fulfill this goal, both Chand and Kiranjit falsely portrayed to the wider society that they are in a happy, loving marriage. These findings coincide with Abraham's (2005) analysis which found that many South Asians are so ingrained with how they are perceived in the wider society, that they deny the existence of domestic violence. Many South Asians do this to demonstrate to individuals in the host country that their ethnic group has no problem assimilating and adapting to the norms and values associated with the West, in this case Canada.

Moreover, the cultural value of "honour" and "shame" was found to be a catalyst for why women denied the existence of domestic violence in the film portrayal of the Sikh community. This study suggested that the media portrayal of the Sikh community was deeply embedded in the cultural ideology of "izzat," meaning honour. The concept of "izzat" or honour was based on how a family unit was perceived within the wider

community. For many characters in the film, maintaining a good respectable image within the community was of great significance. Some characters were even willing to break the formal laws in place to help maintain or protect their family's honour. For example, Rocky and Deepak both engaged in domestic violence as a means to uphold their family's name. The high level of importance that is assigned to the concept of honour is supportive of previous research, as Farah and colleagues (2009) found that many women in the Sikh community sacrifice their personal safety in order to preserve their family's name.

Furthermore, this study indicated that many women denied the existence of domestic violence due to the fear that the disclosure of their victimization would impair their family's name. Throughout this study many characters made reference to women being the "keeper" of the family honour. Such a role implied that a women's behaviour was directly linked to the family's reputation within the community. If a woman deviated from cultural expectations, her behaviour was found to bring "shame" to the family's name. Due to this fear, many characters avoided seeking formal help because such actions were perceived as going against one's own family. Both Chand and Kiranjit believed that if they sought help from support agencies, their private matters would be publicly known. The characters expressed concern that once private affairs are made public, the family honour begins to deteriorate. The fear of being stigmatized from the community supressed these women from seeking help from agencies and the criminal justice system. For these women the risk of having their family honour diminished outweighed the benefits of seeking help. Such findings are consistent with Abrahams (2000) and Toor's (2009) analysis, which confirmed that the culturally ideology of

"izzat" is more heavily enforced on women as their behaviour has repercussions for the entire family.

The findings of this research study further suggest that many women belonging to the Sikh community deny the existence of domestic violence, because many acts of abuse are not classified as domestic violence. For instance, the act of marital rape was not identified and recognized as abusive behaviour amongst members of the Sikh community. It was apparent in the films, through Chand and Kiranjit's character's that many Sikh women hold on to the ideology that their husbands have the right to engage in sexual contact whenever he desires. This understanding is believed to originate from the cultural belief that a woman must provide sexual gratification to her spouse after marriage. This was clearly illustrated through the women in both films who experienced marital rape but failed to classify such behaviour as abusive. It was only Kiranjit who began to identify marital rape as a form of abuse when the level of violence severely escalated. Thus, the term "marital rape" was almost non-existent in the media portrayal of the Sikh community.

These findings are consistent with earlier research conducted by Dasgupta (2000) and Abraham (1999). In Dasgupta's (2000) research study, it was found that many South Asian women are unfamiliar with the term marital rape. Dasgupta's (2000) study further revealed that the crime or act of marital rape does not exist within the larger South Asian community. A similar pattern was observed in this study as both Chand and Kiranjit failed to classify marital rape as an act of domestic violence. Furthermore, Abraham's (2000) study found that many South Asian women only classify marital rape as abusive when sexual behaviour exceeds control. This same pattern was detected through

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Kiranjit's character as she identified herself as a victim of marital rape, only after Deepak's behaviour became excessive and she was made aware of the formal laws in place.

5.4 Cultural Conflict as an Instigator of Domestic Violence

Evidently the findings of this study reveal that domestic violence was a by-product of cultural conflict. All of the characters in the film were found to be governed by a set of cultural beliefs that were specific to their native country. These cultural beliefs allocated certain gender roles and supported patriarchal values. For example, in both films, the women were limited to the domestic sphere and assigned a passive role. Such restrictions were put in place to limit the contact women had with males outside of the immediate family. These restrictions were found to stem from the cultural belief that women need to be protected. A clear illustration of such expectations was observed through Chand's character as she was always accompanied by a family member when she left her household. These assigned gender roles found in the media portrayal of the Sikh community are consistent with the finding of other researchers such as Ghuman (2003) and Abraham (1999). Following Ghuman's (2003) analysis, he asserted that women in the South Asian community have been traditionally assigned a passive role. Such findings were also consistent with Abraham's (1999) research study which found that cultural beliefs in the South Asian community prohibit women from participating in the public domain due to the fear of premarital sex.

Although women in the film portrayal of the Sikh community were expected to follow traditionally ascribed gender roles, the migration process was found to create an

atmosphere of cultural conflict. For example, the ascribed role of domestic duties were widely accepted in countries such as India, where domestic violence laws were relaxed and gender roles were openly expressed. However, after migrating to Canada much of these cultural beliefs are reversed as the inequality gap between women and men are less ridged. As the data presented here suggested, women were often pressured to adapt to the cultural norms of Western society when they immigrated to Canada. For instance, the fear of feeling left out and being labelled as different pressured both Chand and Kiranjit to adhere to the latest fashion trends, socialize with males and use cosmetic products. The social surrounding normalized these types of practices and behaviours.

However, the idea that women are allowed to work outside of the household, use cosmetics and socialize with males were labelled as deviant behaviours in the film representation of the Sikh community. These actions were seen to go against the traditional gender roles that women were ascribed. The deviation from such gender roles were found to result in acts of domestic violence. In other words, the results indicated that males resorted to abusive behaviour in order to restore and maintain traditional gender roles. This was clearly visible through Rocky and Deepak's character as they both felt their abuse was justified as Chand and Kiranjit failed to comply with culturally specific gender roles. These findings are also consistent with previous research conducted by Shirwadkar (2004) and Ahmad et al. (2004). To compare, Shirwadkar's (2004) in-depth analysis of cultural conflict found that the deviation of culturally recognized gender roles are met with resistance and domestic violence in the Sikh community. The findings in this study also coincide with Ahmad et al.'s (2004) study on gender roles and domestic violence. Ahmad and his colleagues (2004) found that those who strongly support gender

roles as part of their culture are less likely to identify a woman as a victim of domestic violence in a vignette read to them. These findings obtained from previous research mirror the results in this study as both Rocky and Deepak felt their abuse was justified due to the breach in gender roles.

5.5 The Two-Tier System That Governs Behaviour in the Sikh Community

While cultural beliefs strongly support gender roles and patriarchal values in the Sikh community, there were found to be many mechanisms in place that governed individual behaviour. To begin with, there were the formal organizations that applied equally to everyone. These organizations consisted of the criminal justice system and the formal laws that were in place. Many characters, in both films, were shown amending their behaviour to follow the criminal code that persisted. On the other hand, the results from the content analysis showed that in the Sikh community there are many informal social control mechanisms that enforce gender roles and cultural values. The most common way in which gender roles and cultural values were enforced was through the process of socialization and one's participation in *gurdwara's*.

These informal social structures were found to support patriarchal values and convey the message that certain duties/responsibilities are gender specific. As noted in both films, women were often socialized from an early age to believe they are responsible for completing domestic duties. This socialization process occurs by immediate family members, who tell the younger female generations in the family unit that they are responsible for certain duties such as: cooking, cleaning and nurturing. From an early age, women were taught to comply with these gendered norms and were expected to

uphold these cultural values. This process of socialization was evident through Kiranjit's character as she repeatedly made reference to her mother telling her to have children and fulfill her domestic duties. Such findings are consistent with Gill's (2004) and Dasgupta's (2000) analysis which found that the meaning women attach to acts of domestic violence varied depending on their upbringing and social surroundings.

Another informal mechanism which governed behaviour in the film representation of the Sikh community was the *gurdwaras*. These religious institutions assigned duties in accordance to one's gender. In both films, duties such as cooking, cleaning and nurturing were predominantly occupied by females. Alternatively, the positions of power such as *granthies* were all held by males. Such a division within the *gurdwara* setting indirectly conveyed the message that females are subordinate to their male spouse. By assigning women certain duties, the *gurdwara* was a means through which gender roles were enforced. Such practices crafted a perception that religion is supportive of ascribed gender roles and patriarchal values. These findings support Ralston's (1988) and Jakobsh (2006)'s assertions that temples are often an instrument through which gender roles are imposed.

The informal systems mentioned above were often used as a justification for abusive behaviour. As the results in this study indicate, the perpetrators of domestic violence felt their abuse was justified when women deviated from their ascribed gender roles. Hence, not only did the Sikh community amend their behaviour in accordance to the criminal code, they also adjusted their behaviour to mirror the cultural expectations that were enforced through informal systems. These arrangements create a two-tier system through which behaviour is governed in the Sikh community.

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5.6 The Role of Collectivism in Abusive Relationships

Accompanying the difference in perception, the Sikh community has also been found to experience acts of domestic violence much differently than any other minority groups. Throughout this study, the theme of collectivism manifested as many Sikhs were found to reside with extended family members. The strong emphasis placed on family unity altered the way in which domestic violence was experienced in the Sikh community. For example, Chand and Kiranjit were both victimized by their extended family members. Incidences of abuse were found to be either directly carried out by the in-laws or instigated by the spouse's immediate family members. For instance, in both films there was a clear indication of the mother-in-law actively carrying out an act of domestic violence and in some cases she even encouraged her son to engage in abusive behaviour toward his spouse.

These findings mirror the results found in Fernandez (1997) and Rabbani, Qureshi and Rizvi's (2008) research analysis. Through in-depth interviews, Fernandez's (1997) concluded that within the South Asian community most of the abuse women experience is instigated by the mother-in-law (Fernandez, 1997). This was the case in both films as the abuse Chand and Kiranjit were subject to was often a product of what had been instigated by their mother-in-laws. In addition, Rabbani et al.'s (2008) research indicated that acts of domestic violence are often influenced by in-laws and carried out through the male spouse. These findings are further concurrent with the results of this study, where Chand's character has demonstrated that acts of domestic violence were often initiated by her mother-in-law however; the actual act of violence was carried out by her spouse

Rocky. Overall, the finding of domestic violence being perpetrated by extended family members is reflective and consistent with previous literature.

5.7 Double Victimization by the Justice System

If women pass the barriers of shame and honour and decide to contact the authorities, they face another layer of victimization from the criminal justice system which prevents them from seeking formal help. Results from this study revealed that many women in the film were first victimized by their spouse and then were victimized once again by the justice system. Although the women in the film illustrated great resistance to contact authorities in incidence of domestic violence, those who did take the route of seeking legal support were often blamed by criminal justice personnel for not leaving their abusive relationship. This process of "victim blaming" was one of the ways in which the criminal justice system was found to contribute to the abuse many of these women experienced.

For instance, in the film, *Provoked* (2006), Kiranjit was blamed by the investigating police officer and the trial judge for not leaving her abusive husband in the two hours between her previous victimization and the death of her husband, Deepak. The criminal justice personnel failed to recognise that Kiranjit, as with many other women who are abused, simply cannot leave an abusive partner as immigration polices position them in a state of dependence. Findings from this research study point out that many immigrant women were spatially and financially dependent on their sponsoring spouse, since their support networks were weakened through the process of migration. These findings are consistent with previous research studies conducted by Raj and Silverman

(2002), Abraham (2000), Ahmad et al., (2009) and Shirwadkar (2004) which have all found that many minorities choose not to disclose any acts of domestic violence due to their immigration status.

Accompanying this blame, the criminal justice personnel were also found to "Other" the experience of domestic violence that many Sikh women faced. This study suggested that the process of "Othering" occurred by police officers perceiving the victims of domestic violence to be less creditable; simply because they did not understand the functionality of the criminal justice system and were not familiar with the native language, English. Due to language difficulties and/or barriers, many of the women remained silent or briefly discussed their victimization when they were in direct contact with criminal justice personnel. Such language difficulties were often misinterpreted as acts of dishonesty. Police officers were found to dismiss claims made by these women as they perceived their silence as an indication of lying. These stereotypical perceptions contributed to the abuse these women experienced as they were turned down by the same system that was established to help protect them. These findings are consistent with Raj and Silverman's (2002) study which suggested that service providers fail to offer support to women who have language barriers.

5.8 Initiatives to Stop Domestic Violence in the Sikh Community

Based on the findings of this content analysis, there are many initiatives that can be taken to help prevent and/or respond to acts of domestic violence in the Sikh community. One of the areas in which the criminal justice system or even service providers can improve, is the representation of the organization. Both films indicated the

need for having an ethnically and religiously diverse organization. The women in both films demonstrated that it is easier for a Sikh woman to talk to a service provider who is familiar with their culture and religion. However, I am not arguing to have an organization which only consists of South Asian and Sikh service providers, I am mainly purposing there be an organization which consists of a diverse range of individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Throughout this analysis, it was apparent that many Sikh women are ashamed to talk about certain topics such as marital rape or divorce with those who are from the same community. In such cases, having a service provider that is from a different ethnic group may be more appropriate, and thereby create a comfortable atmosphere where these women can express their concerns of victimization.

Furthermore, this study indicated the need for more education programs for immigrant women. Many of the immigrant women in this study were not aware of the laws, programs and support services that were available to them. This lack of knowledge allowed for many spouses to continue their abusive behaviour without being detected. To avoid having woman suffer in silence, service providers and the criminal justice system needs to educate women about the rights they have as immigrant. One of the best ways to implement such practices would be to have a course all immigrants are required to take. Within this course, a list of resources and information about laws protecting individuals from abuse can be provided. By having such a program in place, Sikh women along with other immigrant women would have a center through which they can receive information.

Criminal justice personnel and service providers must also be willing and actively involved in the Sikh community. As evident throughout this study, many organizations work in a reactive manner, where a victim is first required to contact the police and only

then do the local authorities get involved. Instead of waiting until an act of domestic violence is committed, service providers and the justice system should proactively be involved in the Sikh community to prevent such acts of abuse before they occur. If service providers are working alongside community leaders, this initiative will help bridge the widening gap that is forming between the criminal justice system and the Sikh community. This method will help Sikh women in deciding whether or not they should contact the police about acts of domestic violence.

5.9 Strengths, Weaknesses and Future Direction for Research

As with any social science research this study was also embedded with many strengths and weaknesses. This research examined the Sikh community which has been categorized with the larger South Asian population. In attempt to isolate how Sikhs experience and perceive domestic violence, this study had to rely on a relatively small sample size. Since the availability of South Asian cinema that focused exclusively on Sikhs was very limited, it was not feasible for this research to have a large sample size. Due to this drawback, the findings of this research may not be generalizable to a larger population.

Furthermore, this study did not examine the diversity found within the Sikh community. Just as the Sikh community differentiates from the larger South Asian group, there is much difference found within the Sikh community. The Sikh community is deeply rooted in the caste system which may alter the experiences and perceptions of domestic violence. As such, it would be beneficial for future researchers to focus on the relationship between the caste system and domestic violence.

Although this study focused on the Sikh population, the relationship between the generation effect and domestic violence was not analyzed. Throughout my study I found acts of domestic violence stemmed from cultural conflict. However, the conflict in cultural norms may begin to disintegrate as generation in immigration status increases. As families begin to assimilate through generations of residing in Canada, the tension between Eastern and Westernized cultural beliefs may begin to decline. To test if there is a significant correlation between this relationship, future research should take into consideration the amount of time since one immigrated to the host country and examine the impact, if any, it has on domestic violence.

In addition, this study used media to understand how domestic violence is experienced, perceived and understood in the Sikh community. Even though both films analyzed were based on true stores, there is the possibility of media over emphasizing and moderating some aspects of reality to capture a real life event in a certain time frame. Although the findings in this study were contrasted with previous literature, it would be useful for future research to conduct in-depth interviews with a reasonable sample size with women who have experienced domestic violence in the Sikh community. This method would not only allow researchers to minimize the possibility of any distortions of reality but also provide rich qualitative data that can be used to create and implement new initiatives to help combat acts of domestic violence.

In attempt to obtain a more accurate understanding of how domestic violence is shaped in the Sikh community, it would also be useful for future research to research the "other side" of abuse-the perpetrator. Much research has examined domestic violence or intimate partner violence from the survivors' perceptive, which most often is a female. In

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attempt to understand the deeper dynamics of domestic violence, it may perhaps be useful to understand the perceptions and viewpoints of the perpetrator or the male perspective. Possibly, it may be beneficial to obtain a sample to interview males from the Sikh community who have engaged in acts of violence and understand their definition of the situation. By adopting both the survivor and perpetrators definition of the situation it will allow for a much broader and holistic understanding of these very sensitive issues that haunt the Sikh community.

5.10 Final Thoughts

Domestic violence is a universal issue that impacts women from various cultures, religions and even ages. Recent statistics have indicated that domestic violence is a growing epidemic in Canada (Landau, 2006; Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2007; Department of Justice, 2001). With Canada being multicultural society, it is important to understand how the experiences and perceptions of domestic violence differ from one group to another. One of the groups that has been understudied and often categorized with the larger South Asian population is the Sikh community. Although previous research has shown that domestic violence is widespread in the South Asian community (Sundari, 2011; Ayyub, 2000, Dasgupta, 2000; Ahmad, Driver, McNally and Stewart, 2009), the Sikh community has been marginalized in recent scholarship. Adopting the framework of intersectionality which suggests multiple identities and characteristics differentiate the experiences from one group to another (Crenshaw, 1991; Mehrotra, 1999; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005), this research focused on how domestic violence is experienced, perceived and understood in the Sikh community. The results have indicated that the Sikh community assign a meaning to domestic violence that is unique to their

community and perceive acts of abuse much differently than other racialized groups in society. This research has also suggested that service providers and the criminal justice system contribute to the abuse many Sikh women face by failing to address their needs. To effectively counter the escalating rate of domestic violence in the Sikh community, service providers and the criminal justice system need to become more culturally sensitive and aware of the unique experiences and dilemmas felt by these women, ultimately helping to make their lives better.

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