CURRENT FEMINIST DEBATES ON WIFE ABUSE:

SOME POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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This paper centers on violence against women in marriage-like relationships, which I will call "wife abuse." First, I will introduce the prevalence of wife abuse in Canada and its resistance to change. Then, I will discuss some methodological and theoretical debates on the issue. I will end with some policy implications of these debates, including those that have relevance for university teaching.

In Canada, two massive national studies of violence in intimate relationships were conducted in the past few years. Although using quite different samples and strategies, both concluded that such violence is disturbingly common: more than one in four women experience at least one incidence of physical abuse at the hands of a current or former partner.

In contrast to the agreement in numbers, there are ongoing disputes about conceptualization of the topic and methodologies for study. Most noteworthy dissensions center around the definitions of abuse as physical and sexual versus all other controlling, subjugating and degrading behaviours. Moreover, how culture and ethnicity factor into intimate violence is not clear, especially since Canada has a sociopolitical commitment to preserving rather than questioning cultural diversity. There are additional controversies around dealing with women’s own abusiveness. A number of these feminist debates have provided unintended ammunition for antifeminist factions.

The aforementioned debates have numerous implications. For example, how abuse is defined is imbricated with its perceived seriousness, and how resources are likely to be allocated to its remedy and eradication.
How abuse is defined also shapes whether it is dealt through the criminal justice system or through wider resources (shelters for women and children, self help-groups, community development programs, remedial programs for the abusers, etc.). In terms of cultural sensitivities, one set of values (ie. ethnocultural) may be upheld at the expense of another (ie. safety of women). These complexities may cripple attempts to find unified solutions.

I will end by exploring a possible role for higher education institutions in general and women's studies programs in particular. There are deep fissures between those who engage in academic debates and those who partake in front-line efforts. Explorations of tensions between ideals and reality, ideas and action, and theory and practice will conclude this paper.

CURRENT FEMINIST DEBATES ON WIFE ABUSE:

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In the last two decades, there has been much scholarly, public, and policy attention to the problem of wife abuse. In Canada, the most undisputed form of wife abuse is physical violence against an intimate partner that fulfils one of the Criminal Code definitions of an assault (sections 244-246). Statistics Canada (1994, Table 40, p. 72) reports that in a single year, there were 4,060 assaults against a female spouse or an ex-spouse. This number is four times greater than the number of assaults women have suffered from strangers (N=1,050) in the same year. As grim as they are, official statistics about criminal justice processing reflect only the tip of the iceberg. Current Canadian national studies on women’s victimization show that one out of every four marriage or marriage-like arrangements is tainted by physical forms of violence (Canadian Panel on Violence, 1993; Rodgers, 1994; Violence Against Women Survey, 1993, see Tables 1-3). In the United states, victimization of women by their current or former spouse yields almost identical rates (WAC Stats, 1993). However, there are legitimate fears that the suffering of most women still remains officially unaccounted for, and politically unrecognized.

Dilemmas about definitions:

In contrast to the relative clarity of the Criminal Code definitions, there are ongoing debates about what constitutes wife abuse and how it is the
same or different from other manifestations of violence. A number of
Canadian social scholars prefer to define abuse as the conglomeration
of physical, sexual, psychological and economic control and subjugation
of women (DeKeseredy and Hinch, 1991; DeKeseredy and MacLean,
1990; MacLeod; 1980; 1987; 1995). They acknowledge that abuse is
clear in physical injuries such as cuts, bruises, lacerations, rips, tears
and broken bones, and many women even lose their lives (Bean, 1992;
Campbell, 1992; Chimbos, 1978a; 1978b; Crawford and Gartner, 1992;
Daly, 1992; Johnson, 1988; Johnson and Chisholm, 1990; Mercy and
Saltzman, 1989; Radford, 1992; Stout, 1992). However, they insist that
the not-so-visible effects of humiliation and degradation also take their
toll.

In my own interviews, the damage done by non-physical abuse never
seizes to startle me. A woman I will call Ann (pseudonym), is now
deemed "legally disabled" due to repeated physical beatings. She was
calm when she described her severe head injuries requiring
hospitalization. Yet, she broke down completely when she recalled the
non-physical degradations. Of many shocking examples, the partner
used to order her to squirt herself with a water-bottle, starting from her
face, moving to her breasts and crotch. These episodes exclusively took
place when his drinking "buddies" were in the house. To Ann, who
happened to be a very private and deeply religious person, they felt like
"gang-rapes" although she was not touched.

Regardless of noble intensions, some feminists are reluctant to define
non-physical attacks on a woman's personhood also as "violence" and
prefer to remain within the legal definitions of assaultive behaviour
(Johnson, 1988, Smith, 1989). They fear that including amorphous
concepts such as "psychological" abuse will dilute the very serious
nature of the social problem. There is also the fear of a backlash from
non-feminist or anti-feminist segments of the society. Will the inclusion
of psychological abuse open the flood-gates to the "suffering of men"
who may also be victims of words? (see recent media articles about
"men's pain" due to partner abuse (Toronto Star, November 13 and 20,
respectively, 1995:A17, also see Steinmetz, 1978 for the academic
variation of these sentiments). Will we provide ammunition for those who
trivialize and marginalize women's suffering through de-gendering their
experiences? These are serious concerns, and simplistic answers will
not provide satisfactory solutions.

Dilemmas about methods:

The choice of methods of study are not dissociable from the current
theories and paradigms. Not surprisingly, there are unresolved debates
about the methods which are best suited to the study of wife abuse
Some researchers prefer counting the incidence of abuse, while making sure that the measures are "reliable." For example, the frequently utilized Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) developed by researchers from the New Hampshire School (Gelles, 1979; 1985; 1987; 1994; Gelles and Cornell, 1983; Gelles and Straus, 1988; Straus and Gelles and Steinmetz, 1980; 1986), operationalizes abuse as hits, slaps, kicks etc., according to a preconceived order in severity. The most recent Canadian victimization survey also utilizes a more gender-sensitive version of the CTS (Violence Against Women Survey, 1993). Indeed, there is an alluring rationale for such parsimonious efforts since numbers provide data for direct comparisons and give a mathematical "legitimacy" to the elusive social phenomenon of abuse. Nevertheless, problems arise in terms of "validity" and the propensity for its misuse. For example, the founders of the CTS measures have repeatedly found equivalence between men and women in their use of abusive acts (Gelles and Straus, 1979; Steinmetz, 1978; Straus and Gelles, 1986). Despite their disclaimers and qualifications, the gender neutrality findings in abuse have taken a toll by fuelling negative attitudes and suspicion against women targets of such abuse. Feminists ask: can abuse be adequately captured by piecemeal counts of slaps or kicks without due recognition of the imbalances in power, strength, privilege, intent, motive, damage and terror that surround those acts? (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Kurz, 1993; Pagelow, 1985; Yllo, 1988). The core of the debate is not about sheer methodological preferences toward quantification versus qualitative research, but one toward contextualizing the suffering. The debate is also about taking responsibility for how research findings may be used (Dobash, 1992; Dobash and Dobash, 1988; Yllo, 1988). Contrary to what the "fathers" of our disciplines have tried to make us believe, social research cannot and should not be devoid of social responsibility (Dobash, 1992; Spender, 1981).

Dilemmas about cultural differences:

There are debates about whether abuse proclivities of men are rooted in different cultural norms and values. Immigrant women and men ascribe to norms, values, and expectations cultivated in another land that may be woefully different from those the host society values. Moreover, the dislodged individuals may lack access to social comparison processes, while relatives and kin may attempt to "preserve" marriages at all costs, as their own customs demand. Lack of language proficiency may reduce individual experiences to a social mystery (Dworkin, 1993). Even people who are "trained" to extend a helping hand may fail to understand the subtleties in cultural expectation. The help-providers are likely to be far removed from the realities of the immigrants' lives (see Chalmers and
The legal system may reflect the biases of domination: as majority against minority, rich against poor, men against women, intact family against other forms, etc. (Ferraro, 1989; MacKinnon, 1993).

Unlike some countries that are weary of cultural differences in their midst, Canada takes sociopolitical pride in encouraging its immigrant population to uphold its ethnocultural diversities. Canadian sensitivities are probably the most visible in the reluctance to classify people by race or ethnicity, especially in the area of crime and punishment. The outcome, unfortunately, is two pronged: On the positive end, no ethnocultural group gets isolated and scapegoated in terms of its propensity for crimes (general or against women). On the other hand, the special needs of immigrant women, their disproportional social isolation and economic dependence, and their legal rights also remain invisible. Despite the crusade against intimate violence against women, educators, law-enforcement agents, health-care and helping professionals are sometimes unwilling, and often unable to tackle the issues that overlap with culture, ethnicity and race. Despite good intentions, violence against immigrant women may be obscured by sympathy for ethnocultural variations, while women continue to carry a double burden. As women, they have much to fear from their abusers, but as cultural outsiders, they have much to gain from the interpersonal links that bind them to their abuser. What is equally important is the possibility of women's own internalization of the "misogynist" norms and values. I call this possibility the "cult of self-sacrifice" and see its manifestations as shame, guilt and self-blame in those who are repeatedly abused by their mates.

I will use two recent tragedies from the Canadian media to show the complex infusion of cultural sensitivities and issues of violence against wives. The first is the story of Nafisibibi Shaikh, an immigrant from India. Nafisibibi's husband took her to India under the auspices of visiting her family, leaving their 21 month old son with his parents in Montreal. The husband then returned to Montreal, leaving Nafisibibi without money and without her immigration documents. Without money or documents, it took Nafisibibi one year and four months to convince the Canadian High Commissioner in New Delhi that she was indeed a landed immigrant. Only after a media expose and a Canadian public outcry was she allowed back, to a husband who has repeatedly abused her in the past, to in-laws who actively took part in her degradation, to a child who was brought up without knowledge of her existence, and to a community which upholds her husband's rights as absolute (Toronto Star, June 5, 1995: A9). Lawyers working with immigrants state that they know of dozens of similar cases where the wife's legal, economic and even
Another tragedy involves nine members of a British Columbia family from a Sikh community, gunned down by the estranged husband of one of the daughters. The assailant also took his own life (Toronto Star, April 7, 1996, A1). The marriage was an arranged one, and abusive from the very beginning. Although there were numerous complaints to the police about beatings, threats and stalking, the wife had refused a police investigation. She was reluctant to shame her family in an ethnocultural milieu that shuns publicized marital discord and disintegration.

Sadly, both the community leaders and a number of academics attempted to dissociate these events from any ethnocultural link. The community leaders defended the "legitimacy" of arranged marriages within the eastern tradition, and the academics tried to prevent a backlash against visible minority groups in general and the Sikh community in particular. Thus, the low status of women, their culturally restricted choices, their expected self-sacrifice to uphold the family name and how all these may link to spousal abuse and femicide got buried in ensuing debates. The rampage which cost 10 lives was thus transformed into the doings of a "crazy man" (see Caputi's 1987 analysis of individualization that obscures issues in homicide).

There appears to be a link between culture and etiology of wife assault. Some cultural prescriptions versus proscriptions will encourage or harness what men will eventually do. In some cultural contexts, men's behaviour toward their partners will feed on pre-existing negative views of women and wives, and find a sanctioned rationalization for the abuse they inflict (Viano, 1992). However, political tendencies in Canada is to deemphasize the role of the cultural patterns in this equation, inadvertently denying additional risks some minority women experience.

Similar dilemmas are also configured into the workings of the criminal justice system. For example, until the late 1970s, victims themselves were expected to lay charges against their abusers, which also meant that they could drop those charges for love, fear or shame. This ominous responsibility now belongs to the police (Burris and Jaffe, 1983), a shift which feminists have inaugurated and celebrated. However, the issue is less than settled, since the police force remains predominantly white (and male). Increasingly, advocates of immigrant women are asking for the reversal of the process (Toronto Star, January 18, 1996, p. A21). They claim that some women get even more severely abused if they call the police, because of the profound distrust ethnic enclaves hold for the workings of the justice system. So, it is argued, women endure very high levels of abuse endangering their lives, without contacting the police.
Canada is by no means alone in the explosive intersection of race/ethnicity and gender. In England, for example, Krishna Sharma and Balwant Kaur, suffered years of violence in the hands of their husbands. Both broke their cultural silence by asking for police protection in order to free themselves from violence, but neither received the help and protection they needed since family violence is still seen as a private matter. Both women were eventually killed by their husbands (Two Struggles, 1992). Again, the British version of the contention between race and gender is captured in the following excerpt from the Southall Black Sisters (Two Struggles, 1992: 313):

For black women, challenging an issue like domestic violence within our own communities and challenging racism of the police at the same time is often fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, we are involved in campaigns against brutality, deaths in police custody and immigration fishing raids. On the other hand, we are faced with daily beatings, rape, sexual harassment. We are forced to make demands of the police to protect our lives from the very same men along whose side we fight in anti-racist struggles

In the United States where racial conflicts are rampant, black (and native) women are much more vulnerable than their white sisters against their abusers, as well as against police and the court system. The latter are woefully inadequate to conceptualize the transectionality of abuse, gender and race. Some even hold blatant sexist and racist attitudes (Collins, 1993; Grant, 1992; Matthews, 1993). A chilling example of the divide was the O.J. Simpson's trial for Nicole Brown's murder. The vast majority of the black community (men and women, including the jurors) interpreted the issue as one of framing a "successful black man" by racist police. Conversely, the majority of the white community, although acknowledging racism among the police officials, saw O.J. as a wife abuser and a probable killer. Sleek defense lawyers played the race card, and managed a not-guilty judgment despite the overwhelming evidence (Toronto Star, October 8, and 13, 1995, and March 3, 1996: A2, A28 and A12 respectively).

Different experiences that divide white/non-white also create fissures among the feminists themselves. Despite the unifying goal to eliminate maltreatment of women, feminists from different racial origins are increasingly accusing white feminists of shortchanging the racial agenda. In turn, white feminists who perceive themselves as diligently trying to combat violence against women, feel misunderstood and unappreciated, and even uneasy to be confronted by their own racism (Radford, 1992).

**Dilemmas about the conspiracy of silence:**
An additional dilemma feminists face is to combat violence against women on their own or to solicit and lobby for men's help. For example, some Canadian shelters accept volunteer help from men, but are reluctant to assign them either Board or counselling positions. Recently, the Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick asked "respected" men to join ranks and "push for change" (Toronto Star, May 7, 1993: A3). However, an initiative by prominent men called the "white ribbon campaign" (against violence against women) received reviews ranging from criticism to suspicion (Toronto Star, December 3, 1992: A26). A recent sparsely attended march in Toronto (60 men) sponsored by the Labour Council of Metro Toronto also engendered divided views (Toronto Star, May 5, 1996: A7).

It is my contention that excluding men from efforts to resolve issues of violence is not possible. Whether we like it or not, they are a part of the tapestry of abuse, on one hand as abusive fathers, sons, husbands, lovers, and on the other hand as holding positions of law makers, prosecutors, judges, educators, politicians, and workmates. They are still over-represented in the patriarchal medical system (Stark et al., 1979; Warshaw, 1993), and exclusively dominate the military and sports conglomerates (Messner, 1989; Russell, 1989, also see Toronto Star, May 12, 1994: A2 for sexual harassment in the military; and Toronto Star, February 23, 1996: A26 for abuse by a sports hero).

Despite increased publicity, abuse remains enveloped in a "conspiracy of silence" even among those who personally may find physical violence against women distasteful. There are many examples of blatant ignorance and escapism even at the level of the "delivery of justice." In 1954, G.H. Hatherill, a commander of Scotland Yard stated "[t]here are about 20 murders a year in London and not all are serious -some are just husbands killing their wives" (cited in Toronto Star, December 11, 1995: A17). Lest we think this is dated, here are recent attitudes and behaviours from men who occupy key positions: 1. A Nova Scotia provincial court judge, Ronald MacDonald resigned after assaulting his wife. Prior to a public outrage, he was given an absolute discharge for being a respectable member of the community (Toronto Star, October 6, 1989: A13). 2. Five federally appointed judges were reprimanded for regrettable conduct including telling a victim of spousal abuse that her request to attend a pre-trial hearing was "silly" (Toronto Star, January 25, 1995: A2). 3. A Quebec Superior Court Judge, Justice Jean Bienvenue declared that when a woman "decides to sink, she unfortunately does to a depth that the vilest of men would be unable to attain" (Toronto Star, December 13, 1995: A2). 4. A Toronto Judge, Walter Hryciuk is appealing his removal from office, despite the fact that he had French-kissed one and made lude remarks to a second assistant crown attorney. He had also grabbed the buttocks of a female judge and
penetrated a female stenographer's vagina with his finger. His behaviour was referred to as a "tantamount to sexual assault" (Toronto Star, November 8, 1994). 5. A Michigan court Judge, Joel Gehrke "told a man convicted of spousal abuse to roll up his shirt sleeve, then punished him with a three-finger 'slap' on the wrist and said 'Don't do that'" (Toronto Star, January 18, 1996: A13).

Recently, a successful business executive (Earl Joudrie) was shot six times by his estranged wife. During the trial, their marriage was portrayed as a cradle of repeated abuse and degradation, which was well known among the business associates of Joudrie. Yet, as one of the executives stated "Obviously, many companies have found this person to be very constructive and positive. His life -his private life- is respected as being private... and so it should be" (Toronto Star, May 6, 1996: A3).

There are simply too many of these incidents to be written off as isolated cases. Dismissing the importance of women's personhood, and trivializing wife abuse are part of the matrix of abuse. Yet, regardless of the surge of information about violence against women, there has not been an analogous change in attitudes and behaviour of the male guardians of the justice system or other patriarchal institutions.

**Dilemmas about women's own agency:**

The richness the feminist thought has brought to social scientific research is precisely because of its courage to recognize the multiplexity in social phenomenon rather than accepting at face value the artificial justifications of "rationality" or "objectivity" (Bart, 1971; Spender, 1981). Reflexivity compels asking sometimes difficult sometimes even divisive questions, and continues to mould our approach toward the problem of abuse of women by their mates and the ways in which we attempt to ameliorate its consequences.

One of the most troublesome debates pertains to women's own agency. In early feminist formulations of wife abuse, women were always seen as "victims." The shelter movement of the 1970s in most of the Western world has been the logical outcome of this early conceptualization. Later developments have emphasized the behaviour and responsibility of men, a shift spearheaded by the Duluth project which summons punitive measures for the offenders through the criminal justice system (Pence and Paymar, 1983). More recently, researchers are emphasizing the resilience of women through terms such as "survivors" (Hoff, 1990), "empowerment" (Fine, 1993) and the like.

Gains from the maturation of feminist efforts are countless.
Nevertheless, there is a gnawing fear that the earlier efforts may have inadvertently and ironically reduced women to passive social actors. In other words, women/victim and men/abuser polarities are only partially helpful constructs. This is not to dismiss the complex processes within which women are indeed victimised. Numerous researchers from varying parts of the world report that in approximately 90-95% of the cases, violent crimes were directed at and injurious for women and are perpetrated by their current or former male partners (Brush, 1993; Browne, 1987; Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Berk et al., 1983; WAC Stats, 1993). Nevertheless, women are social agents, sometimes extraordinarily resilient, sometimes provocative, other times abusive themselves. Even under the most extraordinary conditions, they weigh alternatives, try out strategies, often but not always protect their children and combat sheer helplessness.

Exclusive focus on women's differences from men has unmuzzled loud criticisms from non-feminist factions who are ever ready to stick another pin into the effigy of women's troubles. However, a constructive resolution of these debates must transcend simplistic gender-neutrality views. The latter is hardly reflective of the real world and may even engender a backlash against women (see Berk et al., 1983; Brush, 1993; Pagelow, 1985). Instead, both the "neutrality" and "women's victimization" arguments can be replaced by simultaneous analyses of privilege, power, and responsibility trajectories. Within the latter contextualization, how the more powerful oppress, subjugate, exploit and hurt the vulnerable without suffering consequences will be the research focus while the rungs of power may change according to gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and/or disabilities of the victims/perpetrators. Moreover, wife abuse must be placed within the socio-cultural and historic vortex of overall violence, since it is rooted in and ultimately contributes to the continuum of violence (Counts, Brown and Campbell, 1992; Davidson, 1977; Gordon, 1989; Kelly, 1976; MacKinnon, 1993; WAC Stats, 1993, Walker, 1990).

Conclusions and Implications for Higher Education:

Perhaps, our accomplishments as feminists, intellectuals, and activists are best captured in the fact that we give words and numbers to women's screams. To name a few, the discernable insights have occurred in terms of -emphasis on women's capacity to survive rather than their victimisation, -emphasis on the race/gender/class/sexual orientation multiplexities rather than a unidimensional analysis of "patriarchy, and -emphasis on women's own agency and empowerment.

The opposite side of the coin is the trials and tribulations encountered in this relentless pursuit of speaking with intellectual authority, while at the
same time, patching the lives of women who are caught in violence. The source of tension between the academics, educators on one hand, and the front line workers, activists and the victims of abuse lies within this pursuit. The issues of abuse that fuel feminist passions are also capable of kindling divisions among practice, abstract theorizing and research. For example, there may be an ironic and unintended satiation toward aberrant and abhorrent behaviour (such as wife abuse) once the magnitude of the aberration is unearthed by national studies. The 1970s emphasis on sheltering the victims of abuse may have inadvertently resulted in ignoring the perpetrators and the patriarchal nature of the institutions that tolerate their crimes. The shift toward increased criminalization of the abusers of the following era may have deflected from a social investment to the healing of the victims themselves. Engulfed in the day-by-day survival needs of many, there may be little time or energy left for seeking rupturous reconfigurations of the oppressive systems. Although issues pertaining to wife abuse have remained in the core, thanks to the efforts of the grass-roots activists and academics alike, consolidating solutions to the discussed dilemmas remain out of reach.

In an era where the economic pressures are threatening to dismantle social responsibilities, those who are committed to women's issues are faced with additional challenges. There is a looming resurrection of conservatism in most developed societies. Particularly, in the United States and in a milder version in Canada, the social safety nets are under unprecedented siege. The relentless welfare system purges, and economic cut-backs spear-headed by conservative governments have wide ranging implications for women in general, but especially for women in violent relationships. Already, there are shelter closures and budgetary cut-backs despite the fact that shelter use is at an increase (Toronto Star, December 8, 1995: A3). There is dismantling of women's organizations and help-lines (Globe and Mail, November 21, 1995; Toronto Star, December 7, 1995: SC2). These are additional hurdles for those who want to escape their abusers.

Within globalized economic-busts, it may become harder to keep violence against women in general, and especially the insidious form of wife abuse as a core social problem. We must continue to find creative ways to prevent socio-political satiation and indifference. While making sure that temporary shelters remain available for women in immediate danger, we must also search for more encompassing ways to help women to take steps to breaking the cycle of abuse. One way is to re-link women to the existing community resources (SWAN, 1996). Economic self-sufficiency augmented by easy access to higher education, quality child-care, safety and health management can be tools in breaking abusive cycles. Isolation and temporary protection
have not served women well in the past as the revolving-door use of shelters attest to. Without simultaneous efforts to reverse patterns, protectionism is likely to fail in the future, even if we erect new shelters. I also fear that punitive measures buttressed solely on the incarceration of men are reductionist solutions. Most women I interviewed told me that they "loved" their abusers, they did not want to leave them or to send them to jail. They just wanted the abuse to "end." As contrary as their views may be to basic feminist sentiments, we must struggle against the paternalistic trap of "knowing what is best for them." Neither should we stop augmenting attitudes, behaviour, interpersonal skills on the one hand and reversing rewards for aggression and denigration of women at all levels. We must break the conspiracy of silence (Curran, 1996). We must carefully assess the success outcomes of the legal/incarceration route versus therapy/training methods for abusers (Dobash et al., 1995), as well as engender change in the perception and delivery of justice (starting from a trained and sympathetic police force not dominated by white men alone). We still have to find ways to untangle the multiplexity among class, race/ethnicity, heterosexism and gender, rather than seeking unilateral solutions on gender alone. Although we must unite in our stance to stop the violence rather than ad hoc patching up the lives it shatters, we must also have the courage and freedom to split voices when necessary (Fine, 1992: 285).

In the described milieu, the role of higher education in general and women's studies related programs are of utmost importance. First, they can serve as research centres, providing funding as well as legitimacy to work in the area of abuse. Second, academics can bring added respectability to the issue by making safety of women a core thread in their teaching. Courses on women and safety; women, race and class; women and work and feminist methods function as bastions that make women visible. Third, academics can act in liaison with community based programs, to learn from the experiences as well as to contribute to the conceptual complexities among different factors that are imbricated in the malaise of spousal violence. It is crucial that from the beginning, the community-based efforts and the contribution of higher education are conceptualized as qualitatively different but equal in their social value. Otherwise, the chasm between the abstractions and the human faces behind the day-by-day experiences will provoke alienated worlds among committed women instead of leading to their unified accomplishments. Links must also be forged with the mass media. Without falling into the trap of sensationalism, academics can indeed serve as relentless public educators in the battle against violence. In my own experience, there are also benefits to crossing levels of educational boundaries. I heard some of the most animated discussions about partner abuse during my high-school guest speeches as opposed to the more politically tame university forums. I also learned to recognize experiences that my theoretical biases leave unexamined. Sometimes,
talking to real people about the things academics think they know is a humbling experience. Last but not least, through unrelenting commitment, academics can be the role-models for a new generation of academics and activists who will carry the torch of inquiry into the future.

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