Identifying and Depicting Culture in Intimate Partner Violence Cases

Remla Parthasarathy
University at Buffalo School of Law

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/bjglsp

Part of the Criminal Law Commons, and the Law and Gender Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/bjglsp/vol22/iss1/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Buffalo Journal of Gender, Law & Social Policy by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact lawscholar@buffalo.edu.
IDENTIFYING AND DEPICTING CULTURE IN INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE CASES

REMLA PARThASARATHY, ESQ.1

INTRODUCTION

In the seven-month period between November 2008 and June 2009, New York State's Erie and Niagara counties witnessed the homicides of approximately thirteen intimate partners.2 Each one of these murders was a tragedy. However, two murders that took place in January and February of 2009 are of particular interest, not because of the horrific details and similarities, but for the varied responses they elicited from the media and the public.3

In the first case, the female victim was stabbed forty-nine times by her husband. Multiple knives were used, and the victim was attacked with such force that three knife blades snapped off in her body.4 In the second case, the female victim was stabbed over forty times by her husband, and

---

1 Clinical Instructor of the Women, Children & Social Justice Clinic, at SUNY Buffalo Law School. This article is a combination and expansion of my workshop (titled, "The Role of Culture in Domestic Violence Cases") at the 2012 National Coalition Against Domestic Violence Conference, in Denver, Colorado, and my presentation (titled, "Differentiating Between Culturally-Driven Violence Against Women and Girls, and the Role of Culture in Domestic Violence Cases") at the Clinic's 20th Anniversary Conference in Buffalo, New York, in 2012. I would like to express appreciation and gratitude to Valerie Stanek for her invaluable research and editing assistance; Kathryn Exoo and Amanda Sullivan for supplemental research assistance; and Suzanne Tomkins and Susan Vivian Mangold for their unwavering support and advice.


3 The author apologizes for the inclusion of graphic details about the women's deaths. It is not intended to sensationalize the murders, but rather to illustrate how two such strikingly similar cases can be interpreted very differently depending on how identity is construed and labels are assigned.

two hunting knives were identified as the murder weapons. In the first case, the victim’s throat was cut from ear to ear, and the husband nearly separated his wife’s head from her body. At the defendant’s sentencing, the Assistant District Attorney prosecuting the case said that the nature of the killing demonstrated the husband’s “hate and rage for his wife.” The Assistant District Attorney stated, “[i]t was a morbid work of art . . . and he was not going to stop until she had paid for four years of not loving him.” In the second case, the husband was successful in completely separating his wife’s head from her body. An expert was quoted as saying that the nature of the murder “suggests that the murderer want[ed] to separate his victim's mind from her body, he d[id] not want to hear what she ha[d] to say, he want[ed] her mute, beyond what duct tape c[ould] do and he want[ed] her completely severed, disassociated from her ability to flee.”

Despite the obvious parallels in both of these murders, the ways in which they were perceived by the public and treated in the media were vastly different. The first case was commonly considered a domestic violence homicide after the victim’s husband was arrested. Details of the murder, specifically how the victim was killed, were not disclosed in the media until months later when the defendant was at trial and again during sentencing. By contrast, specifics of the murder in the second case were revealed almost immediately. Although the word “decapitation” was

---


6 Id.


8 Id.


Identifying and depicting culture

Initially used to describe the way in which the victim lost her life, the word was quickly changed to "beheading" and the domestic violence homicide was deemed an "honor killing." While the first case received some coverage in the local news, the second case garnered considerable media attention both locally and nationally, and commentary on various blogs was substantial.

The first homicide was that of Ahkenya Johnson, a 32-year old mother of two, who was killed by her husband, Robert, on January 17, 2009 in Niagara County. The second homicide was that of Aasiya Zubair Hassan, a 37-year old mother of two, who was killed in Erie County less than a month later on February 12, 2009 by her husband, Muzzamil Hassan.

Why was one case accepted as an intimate partner violence homicide and the other labeled as an honor killing? The experts who spoke

13 See, e.g., Williams, supra note 9; see also Man Charged with Wife's Gruesome Death, supra note 12.


16 See, e.g., Man Charged with Wife's Gruesome Death, supra note 12 (story was broadcast on a local N.Y. television station); Broughton, supra note 14 (CNN is regarded as a national news source); Shirin Sadeghi, Guilty: The Decapitation of Aasiya Zubair, WORLD POST (Feb. 9, 2011, 8:54 PM), www.huffingtonpost.com/shirin-sadeghi/guilty-the-decapitation-o_b_821121.html (author brings Aasiya's murder to an international news platform).

17 Prohaska & Fischer, supra note 4.

18 Tan, supra note 5.

19 Both Aasiya and Ahkenya will be referred to by their first names to distinguish them from their husbands.

about Aasiya’s murder consistently referred to the brutal way in which she was killed as the reason behind the designation.\textsuperscript{21} It is more likely, however, that the experts and general public considered this murder an “honor killing” because of the couple’s ethnicity and religion - two details that were not included in news coverage of Ahkenya’s murder and subsequent trial.\textsuperscript{22} Despite Islamic leaders vehemently stating that their religion did not support this murder, the media and public continued to emphasize the couple’s religion and ethnicity.\textsuperscript{23} The different treatment of the two cases suggests that the term “beheading” was used to characterize Aasiya’s killing precisely because of the religious and cultural connotations and the judgment and stereotyping associated with them. A comparison of these two cases reveals the importance of understanding the role culture plays in intimate partner violence cases.

In this article, the understanding of the word culture will be reviewed, how culture plays a role in every case of intimate partner violence will be discussed, and a distinction between honor violence and intimate partner violence will be drawn. The importance of culture and a victim’s various cultural identities will also be considered in the context of developing an anti-essentialist perspective of intimate partner violence.\textsuperscript{24} The Power and Control Wheel developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project\textsuperscript{25} and the various attempts to reflect culture within this Wheel will then be reviewed. A proposed revision of the traditional Power and Control Wheel, which adds “using culture” as a core tactic and takes into account clients\textsuperscript{26} various identities in relation to systems of power and

\textsuperscript{21} See Williams, \textit{supra} note 9.

\textsuperscript{22} Subsequent photographs published with various news reports reveal that Ahkenya and her husband, Robert, were both African American, and Ahkenya’s online obituary includes information that she was an active church member of Christ Redemption Tabernacle, a Christian church in Niagara Falls, New York. \textit{Ahkenya Thornton Johnson, Legacy}, http://www.legacy.com/Obituaries.asp?page=lifestory&personid=123118188 (last visited Sept. 20, 2013).


\textsuperscript{24} The terms “domestic violence” and “intimate partner violence” are used interchangeably.


\textsuperscript{26} In this paper, the terms “victims” and “clients” both refer to victims of intimate partner violence. The term “clients” is used specifically when the context
oppression, will be presented. Finally, the article will address how a broader understanding of culture, and the utilization of the proposed new wheel, could enhance service delivery to domestic violence clients.

I. CULTURE, ESSENTIALISM, AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Scholars in the area of intimate partner violence are recognizing the importance of culture in shaping victims’ experience of violence. This recognition is seen as “giving voice to battered women from a wide range of formerly excluded and ignored communities” and providing insight into the specific issues that confront members of minority groups who encounter intimate partner violence. Scholars have recognized that different cultures define domestic violence differently and “have documented culturally unique forms of abuse.” Although some progress has been made, many domestic violence scholars still struggle to understand the role that culture plays in every victim’s experience of violence and abuse.

A cursory review of the literature regarding intimate partner violence and culture reveals a noteworthy lack of a definitive definition of the word culture. Occasionally the word culture is set-off with quotations marks signifying that the definition of the word is ambiguous or involves the provision of services to victims by attorneys, social workers, advocates, or other professionals.

27 The World Health Organization states that intimate partner violence is mostly perpetrated by men against women. See Violence Against Women: Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Against Women Fact Sheet, WORLD HEALTH ORG., http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/ (last updated Oct. 2013). This article will be addressing women’s experience of abuse in acknowledgment of the historical and present realities.


31 Sokoloff & Dupont, supra note 29, at 42.

32 Yoshioka & Choi, supra note 28.

33 Sokoloff & Dupont, supra note 29, at 45.
controversial.\textsuperscript{34} Even a textbook used in a master's degree program in mental health counseling entitled, \textit{Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice}, does not specifically define the word.\textsuperscript{35} Where definitions are provided, there is no consistency, and vagueness is sometimes acknowledged. Professor Nancy Kim states that anthropologists lack a universal definition of culture, with some viewing “culture as practices or behavior that have evolved for a specific purpose” and others seeing it as a “set of control mechanisms” for governing behavior.\textsuperscript{36} Yet Kim also acknowledges that there seems to be an agreement that “culture is undefinable yet identifiable, constantly in flux yet traditional by nature.”\textsuperscript{37}

Dr. Gerald Doppelt cites Will Kymlicka and Charles Taylor as defining culture as “the shared language, institutions, customs, traditions, social roles and conventions, and moral rules of everyday life which enable persons and groups to form identities, to know who and what they and others are, and to communicate such representations to one another.”\textsuperscript{38} Additionally, comparative law scholar Oscar Chase states culture plays the crucial role of being “a short-hand way of acknowledging commonalities in practices, values, symbols and beliefs of groups of people that form some sort of collectivity,” yet describes culture as being “inherently vague.”\textsuperscript{39} Implicit is an understanding that the meaning of the word is universally known. Some domestic violence professionals understand that cultural contexts are critical and always applicable when discussing intimate partner violence, as everyone has a cultural identity.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{34} See, e.g., Leti Volpp, \textit{The Excesses of Culture: On Asian American Citizenship and Identity}, 17 ASIAN AM. L.J. 63 (2010) [hereinafter \textit{The Excesses of Culture}] (discussing the societal perceptions of the Asian culture versus the actual cultural practices of Asian Americans).


\textsuperscript{37} Id.


\textsuperscript{39} Oscar G. Chase, American “Exceptionalism” and Comparative Procedure, 50 AM. J. COMP. L. 277, 278 (2002).

\textsuperscript{40} Culture & Gender-Based Violence, ASIAN & PAC. ISLANDER INST. ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, http://www.apiidv.org/violence/culture.php (last visited Sept. 16, 2013) (stating “[c]ultural contexts are critical to the analysis of gender-based violence and are always applicable, since everyone has culture, not just people of color or from specific identity groups”).
The word culture, especially when used in reference to "cultural competency," has been used to refer to immigrants of color or racial minority groups who live amongst the predominantly White population.\(^1\) The word culture is still fused with the concept of ethnicity.\(^4\) Often, it is used expansively to include African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgendered individuals, the elderly, and the disabled. Words such as "cultural diversity" or "multi-cultural" are also used to connote a broader inclusion.\(^3\) However, as Dr. Sujata Warrier states, our understanding of culture traditionally comes from Western colonialism and has been used "to justify the processes of marginalization and inclusion" so that the West can be seen as superior to minority groups.\(^4\)

When discussing intimate partner violence, domestic violence scholars emphasize that "culture should not be confused with patriarchy," and they also recognize that "patriarchy operates differently in different cultures."\(^4\) For example, practices such as female genital mutilation, dowries, female infanticide, foot-binding, polygamy, marriage by capture, or the forced use of purdah are not culture, but patriarchal customs.\(^6\) However, this distinction is often lost in the general understanding of domestic violence and culture.

When violence occurs within an immigrant community, the group’s faith or culture is commonly seen as being automatically attributable to that violence. There is an assumption that the cultures of immigrants of color or those belonging to “Third World” communities are more patriarchal than

\(^1\) Mary Helen McNeal, Slow Down, People Breathing: Lawyering, Culture, and Place, 18 Clinical L. Rev. 183, 205 (2011). The term “White” is used in its colloquial sense to mean Americans or those of European descent.
\(^3\) Adele M. Morrison, Changing the Domestic Violence (Dis)Course: Moving from White Victim to Multi-Cultural Survivor, 39 U.C. Davis L. Rev. 1061, 1069 n.22 (2006); Sue & Sue, supra note 35.
\(^5\) Sokoloff & Dupont, supra note 29, at 47.
\(^6\) Rhea V. Almeida & Ken Dolan-Delvecchio, Addressing Culture in Batterer’s Intervention: The Asian-Indian Community as an Illustrative Example, 5 Violence Against Women 654, 667 (1999); see also Leti Volpp, Feminism versus Multiculturalism, 101 Colum. L. Rev. 1181, 1185, 1187-90 (2001) [hereinafter Feminism versus Multiculturalism] (discussing contrasting narratives of patriarchy in different cultures).
Western cultures, and that other cultures are far more accepting of violence against women than mainstream American culture. Additional concern has been voiced that when culture is invoked as part of domestic violence advocacy, there is a reliance on group-based stereotypes, regardless of whether these stereotypes reflect client’s individual experience. While it is important to be aware of the distinct cultural heritage of various communities, such as Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino/Hispanic Americans, this awareness can inadvertently lead to a monolithic view of minority group attitudes and behavior. Failure to recognize individual differences can lead to considerable problems, including that of overgeneralization.

Professor of Law and scholar Leti Volpp writes extensively about culture and domestic violence. Several important points can be gleaned from her various works. First, when domestic violence occurs outside the mainstream community, in what she calls “devalued and less powerful groups,” culture is to blame. For example, dowry deaths are considered a part of Indian culture while domestic violence murders are not viewed as part of American culture, even though the Bureau of Justice indicates a third of female homicide victims in the United States are killed by intimate partner violence. Volpp describes giving “cultural explanations” for fatal forms of violence in Third World communities as “death by culture” - a phrase coined by philosopher Uma Narayan. Second, the behavior of mainstream American society members is believed to be fashioned by “rational acts, political forces, and psychological pressures.” When mainstream members resort to violent behavior, individual psychology is used to explain the conduct. Those acts of violence and sexual subordination are seen as “exceptional, as reflecting the behavior of a few deviant individuals - rather than as a part of Western culture.” By contrast, when incidents of violence occur in less powerful

47 See Sokoloff & Dupont, supra note 29, at 41.
49 See On Culture, Difference, and Domestic Violence, supra note 42.
50 See SUE & SUE, supra note 35, at 206-07.
51 Id. at 207.
52 On Culture, Difference, and Domestic Violence, supra note 42.
53 Feminism versus Multiculturalism, supra note 46, at 1187 & n.23.
54 Id. at 1187.
55 The Excesses of Culture, supra note 34, at 66.
56 See On Culture, Difference, and Domestic Violence, supra note 42, at 395.
57 The Excesses of Culture, supra note 34, at 65.
Identifying and depicting culture

Communities, culture has an "influential explanatory power" and violence is thought to characterize the culture of the entire nation. As Volpp states, "Those with power appear to have no culture; those without power are culturally endowed." When "the same act is understood as the product of [an immigrant] culture in one case, but not white American culture in the other," it is clear that the "identity of the actor shapes how the act is perceived." Volpp refers to this phenomenon as the "selective blaming of culture.

Additionally, by assuming culture is responsible for the behavior of members from less powerful groups, the implication is that these less powerful groups are more culturally determined, meaning mainstream society believes they have to behave in certain way because they have to follow cultural dictates. Suggesting that individuals from non-mainstream communities have no capacity to exercise their own will, to make individual choices, or even to engage in reasoning, unlike their White Western counterparts, allows the powerful group to dehumanize members of the other groups. It also ignores the ways in which women exercise agency within patriarchal systems.

Finally, the mainstream community's attitudes suggest that they see these less powerful groups not only as more sexist, but also as engaged in fixed, traditional cultural practices that have "failed to change across time and space." Culture is seen as a "noun, a fixed and static thing" not as an "adjective modifying particular practices."

All these erroneous thought processes - selective blaming of culture, death by culture, believing communities of color are fixed and more culturally determined - are the result of mis-associating the term culture to non-mainstream American communities. Scholars, practitioners, and members of the mainstream culture have generally chosen to look at the behavior of those who are White as "individual" rather than "cultural" while defining the behavior of those who fall outside of the mainstream as

58 Sokoloff & Dupont, supra note 29, at 46.
59 The Excesses of Culture, supra note 34, at 65.
60 Feminism versus Multiculturalism, supra note 46, at 1192.
61 The Excesses of Culture, supra note 34, at 65-66.
62 Id. at 67.
63 Id.
64 On Culture, Difference, and Domestic Violence, supra note 42, at 394-95.
65 The Excesses of Culture, supra note 34, at 70.
66 See Feminism versus Multiculturalism, supra note 46, at 1181.
67 The Excesses of Culture, supra note 34, at 64-65; Feminism versus Multiculturalism, supra note 46, at 1191.
68 On Culture, Difference, and Domestic Violence, supra note 42.
“cultural” rather than “individual.” The mainstream or powerful communities are “depicted as having no culture, other than the universal culture of civilization.” Associating culture solely to non-mainstream groups not only promotes stereotypes, such as the belief that immigrants are inferior to their American counterparts, but it also minimizes the fact that White Western communities are not immune from engaging in oppressive and patriarchal practices. Not associating the word culture with White individuals obscures the reality that violence within the United States is an epidemic and a major cause of concern. This mis-association also reinforces mainstream American society’s belief that violence against women is limited to “minority ethnic communities, lower socioeconomic strata, and individuals with dark skin colors.” Viewing these beliefs in the context of inequality and oppression, the failure to perceive the behavior of White individuals as cultural affirms their inherent privilege, and always attributing culture to the behavior of minority groups reinforces the dominant group’s power to define the oppressed.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines “culture” as:

5 (a): the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations,

(b): the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; also: the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life} shared by people in a place or time,

(c): the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization, [and]

(d): the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic.

This broad definition of culture - reflecting beliefs, values, and practices derived not just from one’s race or ethnic background, but also from social

69 See Feminism versus Multiculturalism, *supra* note 46, at 1190-92.
71 See Dasgupta, *supra* note 48, at 58.
73 Id.; see also Dasgupta, *supra* note 48, at 61
IDENTIFYING AND DEPICTING CULTURE

This includes the understanding that each individual belongs to more than one culture and has multiple cultural identities. Further, each individual is born into a cultural context of existing beliefs, values, rules, and practices based on these reference groups, which exercise a strong influence over one's worldview. Dr. Warrier contends that culture refers to the shared experience and commonalities based on a multitude of factors such as race, ethnicity, national origin, sexuality, gender, religion, age, class, disability status, immigration status, education, geographic location or space, rural/urban, time, and other axes of identification. Having this more comprehensive perspective of culture can help avoid the dangers described by Volpp, because it gives a cultural dimension to the behaviors of all individuals, including those in the dominant mainstream community. Importantly, it also helps to understand that behaviors within a cultural group cannot be generalized because the culture an individual experiences as a member of a particular community will be specific, while also being affected by our age, gender, and status within other communities or cultural groups.

Creating this common understanding of culture may be challenging. Even defining the mainstream culture - or "what it means to be White" - seems easier when one is not a member of that group. This is not surprising, as privilege is difficult to see when one has it, easy to recognize when one does not, and by definition precludes having to recognize one's own culture as the norm. Scholars agree that we cannot generalize all White women and assume their responses to intimate partner violence are uniform. In fact, it is recommended that intimate partner violence researchers "explore diversity among White or European Americans," specifically Polish, Italian, or German Americans - groups that are associated with the mainstream White American culture. By ensuring that multicultural discourse always includes a discussion of the mainstream culture, it will help prevent groups that fall outside of the mainstream from

---

76 See SUE & SUE, supra note 35, at 7.
77 Sujata Warrier, "It's in Their Culture": Culture, Competency, Outreach and Domestic Violence, (Apr. 20, 2007) (unpublished PowerPoint presentation) (on file with author) [hereinafter It's in Their Culture].
78 Feminism versus Multiculturalism, supra note 46, at 1192.
80 See It's in Their Culture, supra note 77.
81 Sokoloff & Dupont, supra note 29, at 53.
82 Carolyn M. West, Domestic Violence in Ethnically and Racially Diverse Families: The "Political Gag Order" Has Been Lifted, in Domestic Violence at the Margins: Readings on Race, Class, Gender, and Culture, supra note 48, at 157, 170.
being perceived as monoliths and dismissing the experiences of their individual members as homogenous. Doing so also helps service providers be more aware of how their own cultural identity can affect their interaction with clients.83

Having a broader, expansive understanding of culture would be aligned with the movement against gender essentialism and towards embracing intersectionality in domestic violence discourse. Gender essentialism is “the ascribing of certain attributes to women,” and seeing these essential attributes as universally shared by all women.84 Many scholars have discussed why “[f]eminists brought gender essentialism with them into the battered women’s movement.”85 Some domestic violence scholars acknowledge that the decision to universalize women’s experience of abuse by their partner in the rhetoric of “every woman can be a victim” was “an intentional and strategic move to avoid the stereotyping of those who use violence and the women who experience it.”86 Unfortunately, this decision led to “every woman” becoming the White, middle-class, heterosexual woman87 - White, middle-class, able, heterosexual woman, in fact. The unintended consequence was that it silenced the voices of women who were already marginalized.88 Although “women of color and white women have very different experiences of abuse,”89 the experience of the most powerful voices in the movement “became the standard around which law and policy were crafted.”90 While this solidified interest in the issue from the elite and well-resourced communities,91 it further disadvantaged

83 See Warrier, supra note 44.
84 Christina Pratt & Natalie J. Sokoloff, Introduction to Part I: Frameworks and Overarching Themes of Domestic Violence at the Margins: Readings on Race, Class, Gender, and Culture, supra note 48, at 15, 19.
85 LEIGH GOODMARK, A TROUBLED MARRIAGE: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE LEGAL SYSTEM 23 (2012). But cf. GOODMARK supra at 141-45 (arguing that “[a]n anti-essentialist legal system would base its judgments on the stories of individual women...without forcing them to fit within the stock narrative of the battered woman”); BETH E. RICHIE, ARRESTED JUSTICE: BLACK WOMEN, VIOLENCE, AND AMERICA’S PRISON NATION (2012) (noting that the anti-violence movement got trapped in the legislative process and “attention to race and class got lost to a more simplistic set of arguments about gender in equality”); Gabriel, supra note 30, at 454 (describing the “tensions between the idealized version of a battered woman, created at the beginning of the civil rights movement, and the reality of its many different types of victims”).
86 RICHIE, supra note 85, at 90.
87 Morrison, supra note 43, at 1081-82.
88 See RICHIE, supra note 85, at 90-92.
89 Morrison, supra note 43, at 1081.
90 GOODMARK, supra note 85, at 23.
91 See RICHIE, supra note 85, at 90-91.
the most vulnerable. Essentialism ignores the reality of the various types of victims.

Intersectionality, a concept pioneered by Kimberlé Crenshaw,\(^\text{92}\) acknowledges that individuals exist within a system of power and oppression - power by nature of our "race, class, gender, and sexual orientation," for example, and oppression experienced in forms such as "prejudice, class stratification, gender inequality, and heterosexist bias."\(^\text{93}\) The importance of considering intimate partner violence in the context of race, class, and gender is increasingly being acknowledged.\(^\text{94}\) "Intersectionalities color the meaning and nature of domestic violence, how it is experienced by self and responded to by others, how personal and social consequences are represented, and how and whether escape and safety can be obtained."\(^\text{95}\) It determines a victim’s “vulnerability to violence,” “societal perceptions toward the victim,” and the “victim’s access to help.”\(^\text{96}\) While the rhetoric “every woman can be a victim” still applies, a woman may view herself differently, be judged differently, experience different forms of abuse, and choose different methods of escaping the abuse depending on how she identifies herself culturally. The experience and options for a middle-class, White woman, for instance, may differ significantly from those of a poor woman of color, a refugee who does not speak English, a rural Jewish housewife, a migrant farm worker, the wife of a political leader, or a police officer. While essentialism masks differences, intersectionality focuses on the variations in experiences, highlighting the personal not just the social, the individual’s experience, not just the group’s experience.\(^\text{97}\) Understanding intersectionality helps reveal the various types of discrimination that are experienced by an individual as a result of having multiple, layered identities.\(^\text{98}\) While domestic violence is a “manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and

---

92 See generally Kimberlé Crenshaw, Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, And Violence Against Women of Color, 43 STAN. L. REV. 1241 (1991) (describing that “intersectionality might be more broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics”).


94 Sokoloff & Dupont, supra note 29, at 39.

95 Bograd, supra note 93, at 26-27.

96 West, supra note 82, at 171.

97 Chrenshaw, supra note 92 (suggesting the “need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed”).

98 See It’s in Their Culture, supra note 77.
women,\textsuperscript{99} it cannot be prevented without addressing all other forms of oppression, including classism, racism, and heterosexism.

The intersection between oppression and power plays a significant role in defining the identity of an individual woman. Culture is both a part of identity and the context in which identity is shaped.\textsuperscript{100} By understanding the theory of intersectionality and accepting the broader definition of culture, it becomes apparent that culture is very much a part of the experience of every domestic violence victim. Culture shapes an individual's experience of violence.\textsuperscript{101} The victim's cultural identity impacts how she perceives the abuse perpetrated against her by her partner, how she judges herself, how she thinks others will judge her, whether she is likely to seek help, and, if so, what kind of assistance she receives.\textsuperscript{102} For example, a woman's real and perceived options differ based how she identifies herself as a member of a family and in relation to her community,\textsuperscript{103} and her cultural socialization may impact the way she responds to, expresses, and ameliorates the abuse.\textsuperscript{104} It also influences her strategies of resistance.\textsuperscript{105} Culture impacts what tactics of abuse an individual uses against his partner. It can determine the type of intervention and how the perpetrator responds.\textsuperscript{106} In addition, an individual's cultural identity may affect their interaction with the legal system.\textsuperscript{107}

Alexis Chavis and Melanie Hill state there is a "movement in multicultural and feminist psychology to take into account a client's context."\textsuperscript{108} In order to provide culturally competent services, uniformly considered a best practice standard in agencies, this must be accomplished. "Cultural competence requires an understanding of the cultural differences of clients, as well as the particular cultural and structural needs that


\textsuperscript{100} See, e.g., McNeal, supra note 41, at 192-98.

\textsuperscript{101} See It's in Their Culture, supra note 77.

\textsuperscript{102} See Morrison, supra note 43, at 1063 & n.5.

\textsuperscript{103} Yoshioka & Choi, supra note 28.

\textsuperscript{104} Dasgupta, supra note 48, at 67.

\textsuperscript{105} See, e.g., Margaret Abraham, Fighting Back: Abused South Asian Women's Strategies of Resistance, in Domestic Violence at the Margins: Readings on Race, Class, Gender, and Culture, supra note 48, at 253, 254-71 (addressing "all the tactics that a woman uses to challenge her abuser's power and control and prevent her abuse").

\textsuperscript{106} See It's in Their Culture, supra note 77.

\textsuperscript{107} See Gabriel, supra note 30, at 451-507.

\textsuperscript{108} Alexis Z. Chavis & Melanie S. Hill, Integrating Multiple Intersecting Identities: A Multicultural Conceptualization of the Power and Control Wheel, 32 Women & Therapy 121, 133 (2008).
different communities have."109 A culturally competent professional is aware of his or her own assumptions, biases, and personal limitations; attempts to understand the client’s worldview; and practices appropriate, relevant, and sensitive intervention strategies and skills.110 The Empowerment Model, practiced by most domestic violence service providers, not only restores decision-making and control to the client, but it also “recognizes cultural experiences”; “respects racial, ethnic, class, and gender differences”; and builds on the client’s “strengths, resourcefulness, and survival skills.”111 Knowing that culture plays a role in every intimate partner violence case, whether the victim is an undocumented immigrant or an upper middle-class professional, is part of being culturally competent and supports the Empowerment Model. This understanding is essential for the provision of individualized client-centered services and for effectively ensuring the safety of victims of intimate partner violence.

Balance is the major challenge. Communities need to analyze and critique their own cultures and those of others, without blaming or rejecting them.112 Just as the battered women’s movement advocated for societies to move away from “victim-blaming,” similar efforts are needed to avoid “culture-blaming.”113 This is particularly important for those representing Western society when discussing other countries’ cultures.114 Acknowledging and accepting without judging or blaming may seem to be an extremely difficult task, but domestic violence professionals are called to do this with each of their cases. It, therefore, cannot be too much to ask scholars to do the same in their theoretical discourse.

II. AASIYA AND AHKENYA: “HONOR KILLING” VERSUS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDE

Intimate partner violence is commonly defined as a coercive pattern of behavior where one individual uses tactics of fear and intimidation to gain and maintain power and control over their intimate or former intimate

109 Sokoloff & Dupont, supra note 29, at 51.
112 Culture & Gender-Based Violence, supra note 40.
113 Erica Burman et al., ‘Culture’ as a Barrier to Service Provision and Delivery: Domestic Violence Services for Minoritized Women, 24 CRITICAL SOC. POL’Y 332, 335 (2004).
114 See generally Tracy E. Higgins, Anti-Essentialism, Relativism, and Human Rights, 19 HARV. WOMEN’S L.J. 89 (1996) (discussing how efforts to impose Western norms on the international stage are seen as cultural imperialism).
These tactics can include emotional, economic, psychological, sexual, and physical abuse, as well as spiritual abuse and reproductive abuse.

Honor killing, or honor violence, is a subset of violence against women and has overlapping characteristics with intimate partner violence. Honor violence has been defined as:

[A] form of violence against women committed with the motive of protecting or regaining the honor of the perpetrator, family or community. Victims of honor violence are targeted because their actual or perceived behavior is deemed to be shameful or to violate cultural religious norms...Honor violence involves systematic control of the victim that escalates over a period of time and may begin at a young age...It can take many forms, including verbal/emotional abuse, threats, stalking, harassment, false imprisonment, physical violence, sexual abuse, and homicide.

One of the unique aspects of honor violence, which differentiates it from intimate partner violence, is that honor violence is often not perpetrated just by one individual; in fact, it can take the form of "a group campaign of harassment and violence committed by an entire family or community." While honor violence is perpetrated by male family members, including the father, uncles, and brothers, in many cases

---


116 Id.


119 The term “honor” violence is considered controversial, but is used here for clarity because it is the most familiar term to express the concept.


121 Id.

female members of the victim’s family also engage in acts of abuse and violence against her.¹²³

At the heart of honor violence are three core beliefs: that the reputation, status and image of the family - its honor - is of utmost importance; that the behavior of females has a direct impact on the family’s honor; and that if a female is perceived to act in a way that may bring shame to the family, she must be punished in order to regain the family’s honor.¹²⁴ Women and girls are expected to conduct themselves with decorum.¹²⁵ Any act they commit that can be viewed as shameful or less than respectable is seen as tarnishing the family’s reputation and bringing the family’s honor into doubt. There is an expectation for females to be chaste, pure, modest, and to hold themselves to the highest moral standards.¹²⁶ Deviation from these expectations results in the approved use of abuse and violence against the offending female, and she is seen as causing the violence because of her own actions. Depending on the extent of her digression, she may be shunned by her family, and possibly ostracized by her entire community, held in isolation, or treated violently until the family honor is restored.¹²⁷ She and everyone around her believe that she deserves the abuse. In some cases, the family believes their honor cannot be restored unless the victim is killed.¹²⁸ Perpetrators of this violence do not express remorse; they hold strong to the belief that they are justified in their abuse against her in the name of honor. Honor violence is seen as necessary in order to preserve the integrity of the family, particularly that of the male members.¹²⁹

Cases of honor violence usually involve “conduct such as resisting an arranged marriage, seeking a divorce,” wearing modern clothing, and “having friends of the opposite sex.”¹³⁰ In other words, females are

¹²⁴ See John Alan Cohan, Honor Killings and the Cultural Defense, 40 CAL. W. INT’L L.J. 177, 191-99 (explaining that the practice of honor killing grows from “patriarchal norms of male superiority and control and female inferiority and obedience”).
¹²⁵ Id. at 192 (“mottives for honor killing, however, have started to expand beyond female adultery, targeting women for enjoying basic freedoms”).
¹²⁷ Honor Violence, supra note 120.
¹²⁸ See Plant, supra note 123, at 112.
¹²⁹ Vandello & Cohen, supra note 126.
¹³⁰ Honor Violence, supra note 120.
punished for adopting practices that are perceived as belonging to the Western culture.\textsuperscript{131}

Honor violence is a real phenomenon and it does occur in the Western societies.\textsuperscript{132} Although a complete explanation of honor violence is outside the scope of this article, it is critical that providers and scholars first acknowledge and begin to identify these types of cases of violence against women and girls, and then understand that the unique characteristics of honor violence necessitate a specialized approach by law enforcement and service providers.\textsuperscript{133}

Honor violence is associated with certain cultures. Canadian activist, Aruna Papp, refers to honor violence as a form of "culturally-driven violence" against women and girls.\textsuperscript{134} She earnestly appeals to those committed to multiculturalism to accept that "certain forms of violence against women that are embedded in specific cultural values and beliefs"\textsuperscript{135} and that some cultures are indeed more violent than others.\textsuperscript{136} This seems to contradict what Leti Volpp and her colleagues say.\textsuperscript{137} However, the essential elements of these two viewpoints can be reconciled. First, identifying and naming an issue accurately is essential to the formulation of an appropriate intervention. Honor violence is not the same as domestic violence, and taking a stance that it is, does not help end either. Second, if it is argued that certain forms of violence against women are embedded in specific cultural values, then every culture must be similarly critiqued and all cultural practices that drive violence against women must be acknowledged. This must be done even with the dominant or mainstream cultures. Just as there is no hierarchy of oppression - a fundamental tenant of oppression theory\textsuperscript{138} - no culture can be deemed better than another. Finally, violence against women is recognized as a "violation of basic

\textsuperscript{131} Id.
\textsuperscript{133} See Honor Violence, supra note 120.
\textsuperscript{135} Id. at 114 (footnote omitted).
\textsuperscript{136} See Culturally Driven Violence Against Women, supra note 132, at 9.
\textsuperscript{137} See supra pp.75-85.
\textsuperscript{138} AUDRE LORDE, There is No Hierarchy of Oppression, in I AM YOUR SISTER: COLLECTED AND UNPUBLISHED WRITINGS OF AUDRE LORDE 219 (Rudolph P. Byrd et al. eds., 2009).
human rights.\textsuperscript{139} Invoking this concept unifies and strengthens these various causes and lends power to these social justice efforts in a formidable way.

Papp has developed a list of examples she has collected throughout her work distinguishing honor violence from other forms of violence against women.\textsuperscript{140} When experts labeled Aasiya Zubair Hassan's murder an honor killing, none of the distinguishing factors were considered, and they overlooked the similarities to Ahkenya Johnson's case, or that of other domestic violence homicides. Those experts disregarded the history of violence Aasiya experienced at the hands of her husband, the repeated calls to police, and the fact that she filed for divorce and sought an order of protection a week before she was killed.\textsuperscript{141} Instead, the only details they considered were the couple's ethnicity and religion, and how brutally her husband killed her. This is particularly disconcerting as some of the experts specialized in the areas of honor violence, domestic violence, or women's issues.\textsuperscript{142}

The erroneous labeling of Aasiya's murder as an honor killing opened the door for individuals to promote their anti-Muslim and xenophobic attitudes. The murder was called "a barbarous act," and there were calls challenging religious pluralism and tolerance, which suggested that even the most "assimilated" Muslims were threats to the security of the United States.\textsuperscript{143} The case garnered national and international attention. Muslims, arguably the group "subject\[ed\] to the most violent expulsion" post September 2011\textsuperscript{144} and under the most scrutiny, had their entire culture and religion condemned because of the act of one of its members - something that is not done when a member of the mainstream society commits a similarly heinous crime. The Islamic Society of North America wrote an open letter to the leaders of the of United States Muslim communities condemning Aasiya's killing, taking a strong stance against domestic violence, and calling upon religious and community leaders to protect victims.\textsuperscript{145} Despite this display of concern that went far beyond what the leaders of other Western religious groups have expressed under

\begin{enumerate}
\item[139] Gabriel, supra note 30, at 498.
\item[140] Conspiracy of Silence, supra note 134, at 116.
\item[141] Gulley, supra note 20.
\item[142] See Williams, supra note 9.
\item[143] Whittington, supra note 10.
\item[144] The Excesses of Culture, supra note 34, at 78.
\end{enumerate}
similar circumstances, the words expressed by Muslim leaders and the motivations behind them were frequently distorted. The phrase "honor killing" has been used to bolster claims that "Islam is evil, and that the worst fate imaginable is to be born female into a Muslim family." The selective belief that this murder was caused by culture - a foreign culture - took hold, and it provided an excuse for the proliferation of misinformation, false stereotyping, and an increased level of hatred.

The way the murders of Aasiya and Ahkenya were viewed closely parallels Volpp's comparison of how the murders committed by a Hmong immigrant, Khoua Her, and that of Andrea Yates were viewed. In describing "the process of selective blaming of culture" Volpp illustrates how Her's killing of her six children and subsequent failed suicide attempt was explained to be a result of a "culture clash." It was thought that Her was pulled between the American concept of being an individual versus the "Hmong orientation of putting the group first." The Hmong community was then scrutinized and the behavior of its members criticized as a whole, ending with the declaration, "Those people should either assimilate or hit the road." On the other hand, Volpp states that Yates' killing of her five children was primarily explained as a result of mental illness. Though her cultural beliefs were a large part of her life, psychology was the explanation for her behavior. Yates' religious and cultural beliefs influenced her living in a school bus left by a traveling preacher. Her beliefs also explained her strict obeisance of her husband, who had traditional conservative "family values," and led her to have five children in eight years and to home-school them. Yet her behavior was understood through the lens of psychology, and her mental illness, use of medication, and suicide attempts were emphasized. Yates' killing of her children was

---

146 See, e.g., The Global Muslim Brotherhood Daily Report, ISNA Responds to Wife Beheading by U.S. Muslim Leader, FAM. SECURITY MATTERS (Feb. 17, 2009), http://www.familysecuritymatters.org/publications/detail/isna-responds-to-wife-beheading-by-us-muslim-leader (noting that various Muslim leaders "have endorsed various forms of corporal punishment for wives").

147 The Excesses of Culture, supra note 34, at 79.

148 See On Culture, Difference, and Domestic Violence, supra note 42, at 395-96.

149 Id. at 395

150 Id.

151 Id. at 396.

152 Id. at 395.

153 Id.

154 Id.


156 On Culture, Difference, and Domestic Violence, supra note 42, at 395.
not understood as a product of White American culture, and her behavior was never generalized to represent all American society in the same way. Her's behavior was seen to reflect all of the Hmong community. While Aasiya’s murder cannot be examined solely through the lens of culture, it is important to acknowledge that culture played a role in her life and death. Only Aasiya could reveal the extent to which culture shaped her experience of abuse. Aasiya’s ethnicity and religion may have impacted how she perceived the abuse and whether she defined her husband’s behavior as abusive or illegal. Her participation in a social or cultural group may have influenced whether she sought help, and to whom she could turn for assistance. Aasiya’s cultural network may have discouraged her from seeking outside legal assistance, or they may have offered her encouragement and support. Her status as a middle-class professional woman may have hindered her attempts to be safe, or it may have provided her additional resources to escape. Aasiya’s husband may have misused and exploited her various cultural identities as a way to exert his control over her and keep her in the abusive relationship.

In a similar way, culture played a role in Ahkenya’s life. Ahkenya’s religion, race social-economic status, place of residence, and association with a community shaped her experience of domestic violence as well. These factors influenced whether or not she perceived the treatment of her partner as abusive, if she felt shame, guilt, or embarrassment, if and where she sought help, and how she tried to keep safe. However, like Aasiya, only Ahkenya would have been able state to what extent these cultural factors had an impact.

It is important for professionals who work in the field of domestic violence to be familiar with the differences and similarities between honor violence and intimate partner violence. A basic understanding of this could have prevented the egregious mislabeling of Aasiya’s homicide, and will help service providers accurately identify cases of honor violence that appear in the guise of partner abuse.

III. THE POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL—THE NEED TO DEPICT CULTURE

The Power and Control Wheel (the Wheel) was developed in 1984 by Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar, members of the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) in Duluth, Minnesota. It was created as a way to represent the lived experience of women who were abused by their male partners and helped describe battering to “victims, offenders,

157 See id. at 394-96.
158 Power and Control Wheel, supra note 25.
practitioners in the criminal justice system, and the general public."\(^{159}\) The Wheel focused on the lives of female victims as violence against them was, and still is, a predominant social problem, and it depicts the power imbalance women encounter throughout the world. Women from three different survivor groups were interviewed over several months, and the Wheel was designed as a visual representation of their experiences of abuse.\(^{160}\) Held together by an outer ring depicting physical and sexual violence, the spokes of the Wheel reflect the various tactics of abuse the women’s partners used against them.\(^{161}\) The center of the Wheel contains the words “Power and Control” to illustrate that when there is a pattern of behavior in which the tactics of abuse are utilized against the female partner, the male partner obtains and maintains control over his female partner.\(^{162}\) The tactics of abuse are not necessarily utilized by the males with the intention to dominate their female partners; men use them because they felt privileged or entitled to do so.\(^{163}\)

In an interview, Pence acknowledges that they recorded many more tactics of abuse, but they did not include them in the Wheel as they “didn’t display well.”\(^{164}\) The ones included were what they considered “core” tactics.\(^{165}\) These eight core tactics are: using coercion and threats; using intimidation; using emotional abuse; using isolation; minimizing, denying, and blaming; using children; using male privilege; and using economic abuse.\(^{166}\) These tactics were used by almost all abusers, and “if every woman in the room had a story that fit . . . then [they] knew it was a core tactic.”\(^{167}\) This is the reason why the Wheel is successful in achieving its goals - it shows all victims that their experience is shared and, therefore, can be understood. Knowing they are not alone - one of the founding blocks of the battered women’s movement - helps victims immensely, and it creates a social understanding of spousal abuse.\(^{168}\)

The Power and Control Wheel is ubiquitous in the field of intimate partner violence. Advocates use the Wheel with clients to help them make sense of their experience and to realize they are not alone. Often clients are

\(^{159}\) Wheel Gallery, supra note 25.

\(^{160}\) Ellen Pence, Battered Women’s Movement Leader, YOUTUBE (Dec. 9, 2009), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9dZOgr78eE (transcript available at www.powerandcontrolfilm.com/the-topics/founders/ellen-pence/).

\(^{161}\) Power and Control Wheel, supra note 25.

\(^{162}\) Id.

\(^{163}\) Pence, supra note 160.

\(^{164}\) Id.

\(^{165}\) Id.

\(^{166}\) Power and Control Wheel, supra note 25.

\(^{167}\) Pence, supra note 160.

\(^{168}\) See RICHIE, supra note 85, at 68.
given the Wheel and asked to highlight or mark the forms of abuse they have endured at the hands of their partner. This not only instigates more substantial conversations with counselors and advocates, but it also helps other professionals, including attorneys, obtain a better understanding of the tactics of abuse used by their client’s partner. The Wheel can then help these professionals determine what civil and criminal offenses can be charged. Expert testimony about the Wheel has been admitted in court and has been offered into evidence at trial. Beyond direct service work, the Wheel is an essential tool to educate professionals and the public about intimate partner violence. It is regularly used in trainings to help members of the legal system understand how the tactics of abuse, reinforced by the perpetual threat of physical and sexual violence, successfully keep women in violent relationships.

The DAIP also developed a Culture Wheel. This wheel depicts how violence against women does not happen in a vacuum. The circles surrounding the Culture Wheel represent institutions and cultural components that support the existence of domestic violence and what must be changed in order to prevent domestic violence’s occurrence. Together with the Power and Control Wheel, it can be used to understand how social change on the individual, institutional, and societal levels are necessary in order to eliminate the prevalence of intimate partner violence.

Many adaptations of the original Power and Control Wheel have been designed to reflect the experiences of special communities, or what can be characterized as different cultures. There are wheels for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender victim, the Muslim victim, the immigrant victim, the hearing impaired victim, the elderly victim, the teenage victim of dating violence, and the disabled victim. Each of these special populations have characteristics that set them apart from the mainstream. These characteristics can be seen as areas of vulnerability by abusive partners who then use specific tactics to exploit these vulnerabilities.

For example, the elderly face unique challenges such as social isolation, mental impairment, and dependency on caregivers for daily care needs such as mobility, access to funds and medication, and, in some cases,
the basic need for food, clothing, and shelter.\textsuperscript{174} The Domestic Violence in Later Life Wheel\textsuperscript{175} shows how these vulnerabilities are abused by perpetrators in the forms of “[a]buse of dependency, neglect,” and “[r]idicule of values” - categories that are not included in the original Wheel.

Although there does not appear to be a separate wheel for women in rural communities, their special needs and challenges are publicized in both domestic violence websites\textsuperscript{176} and publications.\textsuperscript{177} This demonstrates that there is a rural culture that may influence the experience of a victim from that community.\textsuperscript{178}

Sacred Circle, an organization to end violence against Native American women, uses a triangle instead of a circle to illustrate the pattern of violence experienced by a Native American victim of intimate partner abuse.\textsuperscript{179} The Wheel has also been adapted for when the perpetrator is a member of the police\textsuperscript{180} and the military.\textsuperscript{181} The creation of these occupation-based wheels are evidence that culture - shared norms, values, beliefs, practices, and attitudes - exist in a community simply based on one’s occupation.\textsuperscript{182}


\textsuperscript{175} Brandl, supra note 111, at 40.


\textsuperscript{178} See id. at 392 (writing that rural communities are associated with a social life considered “traditional,” meaning that there is a “greater commitment to shared values,” “less tolerance of diversity, less anonymity and privacy,” and that the “influence of religion, particularly fundamentalist Christian religion, is strong and reactionary especially regarding the roles of women”).


\textsuperscript{182} See generally Gabriel, supra note 30, at 451-507 (presenting a bibliography of works describing the cultural attributes of various minority groups, and a useful introduction for practitioners and researchers).
and support the multicultural perspective that understanding an individual’s cultural background will help gain new insight into the issues members of these cultures face.\textsuperscript{183}

As mentioned previously, the essential “every woman” who could be a victim of intimate partner violence became the White, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied woman. The Power and Control Wheel reflects this essentialism, and hence, the need to develop separate wheels for different cultures. Each specialized wheel was developed with the intent of enlightening outside cultures to issue that are of primary concern to victims of that group. Although practitioners are encouraged to explore within-group variations, the specialized wheels have the unintended consequence of further marginalizing and “othering” those cultures that are not considered mainstream. These adapted wheels are in fact imitations of the original Wheel; they are essentialized depictions of violence within a culture. The specialized wheels encourage the false notion that members of the same culture experience intimate partner violence in the same way. Therefore, while they shed light on important and considerably different victim context, they inadvertently promote cultural stereotyping and neglect to highlight within-culture differences.

For example, consider the Immigrant Power and Control Wheel, which is generally used by service providers and domestic violence advocates working with that population of clients.\textsuperscript{184} The added tactics in the Immigrant Power and Control Wheel that make it different from the original Wheel are all tactics that assume the immigration status of the victim is tenuous, and that the victim has limited knowledge of English. It is misleading. It does not take into account the victim’s level of assimilation, or that status can be anything other than precarious. It is true that an immigrant woman’s experience of violence and the options available to her differ from that of a non-immigrant victim, but the Immigrant Power and Control Wheel disregards important factors that cause this difference, such as whether the victim is a “highly acculturated citizen,” whether the host society has a large “cultural community in terms of geography and population,” whether the victim is a refugee “relocated to a small cultural community,” or a “member of a community that has been subjugated across generations.”\textsuperscript{185} As necessary as the Immigrant Power and Control Wheel is, and while it does accurately reflect the experience of many immigrant victims, it unintentionally gives the impression that all

\textsuperscript{183} Id. at 455.


\textsuperscript{185} Yoshioka & Choi, supra note 28, at 514-15.
immigrants have status issues and a language barrier. In other words, it implies that the tactics in that wheel are “core” tactics experienced by all immigrant women, which is inaccurate at best.

Two other variations of the Power and Control Wheel are notable because of their attempt to challenge the essentialism reflected in the original wheel. The first is used in the Cultural Context Model (CCM), a paradigm established by Rhea V. Almeida and Judith Lockhard. Rooted in the principles of social justice and universal human rights, CCM is a system of clinical theory and practice that engages men who use violence, helps women who are battered, and dismantles and restructures the power imbalance between men and women. This is done by placing “gender, skin color, ethnicity, spiritual practice, sexual orientation, age, and socioeconomic class” at the core of family intervention, and situating the conversations of domestic violence within the large social context of privilege, power, and oppression. As part of CCM, families are involved in a socioeducation process where clients are presented didactic materials to raise their consciousness around issues of “gender, race, culture, and sexual orientation.” A variation of the Power and Control Wheel is utilized in this process. The wheel, the Power and Control toward People of Color Wheel - Public Context, is used to “identify the ways in which the family is subjected to the violence of racism by society.” It specifically addresses what a person of color may experience because of a lack of power and privilege due to racism or colonialism. For example, the economic abuse spoke contains bullets such as “slow upward mobility” and “poor paying jobs,” while the sexual abuse spoke includes “dark skin depicted as less attractive in the media.” The male privilege spoke - a core tactic in the original Wheel - is replaced by “white privilege” with items such as “privilege of white culture over others,” and “controlled access to schools and safe jobs.” This Power and Control toward People of Color Wheel -

---


187 Id. at 302.

188 Id.

189 Id. at 305.

190 Id. at 307.

191 Id.

192 Id.
Public Context, along with movies and educational discussions, are used to help shift clients’ awareness.

The second notable wheel adaptation, the Multicultural Power and Control Wheel, created by Chavis and Hill, highlights how the intersection of one’s personal, cultural, and structural identities may individually, or in combination, influence women’s experiences of intimate partner violence. It was developed because of limitations within the variations of the original Wheel, including the CCM wheel, which was acknowledged as the only wheel that attempted to address multiple identities. Chavis and Hill’s major point of criticism of the variations is that they focused on only “a single dimension of identity,” thereby inadvertently replicating the original Wheel and suggesting that one form of oppression fully explains a victim’s experience. The CCM wheel was criticized for failing to acknowledge the full range of women’s experience, such as ability, class, and age, and for its inadequate attention to intersectionality of identities.

Chavis and Hill’s Multicultural Wheel contains a small version of the original Power and Control Wheel with the eight core tactics. Rings indicating various forms of oppression: “racism/ethnocentrism, ageism, classism, sexism, ableism, spirituality/religion oppression, and heterosexism” surround the small wheel. The order of the rings was randomly assigned so as not to rank oppression. Similar to the original Power and Control Wheel, physical and sexual violence is depicted on the outermost ring. Accompanying the wheel is a table giving examples of how each of the core power and control tactics can be experienced by a woman depending on the form of oppression. Chavis and Hill recommended further research to verify if their wheel accurately “reflects and addresses the experiences of a diverse range of women.”

---

193 Id. at 307-08 (discussing how movies such as Straight Out of Brooklyn (which depicts a working-class Black family struggling with poverty and racism), The Wedding Banquet (which focuses on Taiwanese, Euro-American and Japanese cultures), The Joy Luck Club (which focuses on Chinese culture), and Mississippi Masala (which focuses on African American and Asian Indian cultures in the South) are used “to emphasize the universality of patterns of domination and control that are often misnamed culture”).
194 See id. at 310.
195 See, Chavis & Hill, supra note 108, at 138-42.
196 Id. at 137.
197 Id.
198 See id.
199 Id. at 134.
200 Id.
201 Id. at 140 tbl. 1 & 142 (noting that due to space limitations, these tactics could not be included within the Multicultural Wheel).
202 Id. at 142.
All these variations of the Power and Control Wheel demonstrate both the acknowledged importance of the influence of culture in intimate partner violence cases and the need to reflect this influence in one of the most utilized tools of domestic violence service providers. If scholars and professionals working directly with clients agree with Chavis and Hill that “one unified, integrated model is needed to reflect the impact of multiple intersecting identities for victims,” then perhaps what is needed within the Power and Control Wheel is a spoke which specifically captures the concept that culture can be used and manipulated as a core tactic of abuse.

IV. THE PROPOSED “INCLUSIVE IDENTITIES POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL”

The primary modification to the original Power and Control Wheel is the inclusion of a spoke entitled “Using Culture” (see Figure 1). This spoke captures the specific ways abusers can manipulate their victim’s culture to maintain power and control in their relationship. This “Using Culture” segment can contain the following forms of cultural abuse: using religious texts and doctrines to control her behavior; controlling which cultural or societal norms to adhere to; ostracizing victims from her community or cultural group; using cultural practices or beliefs to prevent the victim from accessing support and help; belittling her cultural beliefs and her cultural identity, such as religious, ethnic, class, sexual identity; making her feel inferior because of her cultural beliefs and practices; and undermining her cultural traditions. The words “community,” “social norms,” and “cultural identity” are used to allow for the broader definition of culture.

Instead of the standard solid lines, the lines differentiating the core tactics of abuse are dotted in order to signify that the examples of abuse within one segment can also apply to another. For instance, “belittling her cultural beliefs and identity” is both a form of “Using Culture” and “Emotional Abuse,” and “making light of the abuse” can apply to the tactics of “Minimizing, Denying and Blaming” as well as “Privilege.”

---

203 Id. at 138.
204 The author would like to thank her colleagues, Brooke Densing, Laura Gurbe, Kristen Luppino-Gholston, and Suzanne Tomkins for assisting in naming this wheel. Heartfelt gratitude is extended to Donald Trainor at the University at Buffalo Teaching & Learning Center for his graphic design expertise. His patience, kindness, and attention to detail when transforming hand-drawn sketches into the new wheel are much appreciated.
205 These examples were developed based on the author’s and her colleagues’ work with clients. Due to space limitations on the wheel’s image, not all of these forms are included within the spoke.
Figure 1 Inclusive Identities Power and Control Wheel

Surrounding the wheel is a circle with the terms race, age, class, gender, religion, sexual identity, ability, and ethnicity, which represents the system of power and oppression that mold the victim’s experience. All the core tactics of abuse are directly affected by these categories; the arrows in the diagram are an explicit reminder of this influence. The outer two circles are

---

206 Adapted, with permission, by the author in consultation with the Erie County Coalition Against Family Violence. Based on the Power and Control Wheel and Culture Wheel developed by the Duluth Abuse Intervention Project. For an electronic reproducible image, contact the author at remla42@gmail.com.
virtually identical to the outer two wheels in the DAIP's Culture Wheel, and are intentionally included with this proposed wheel to reinforce that intimate partner violence exists in an environment and in a society that supports, condones, and allows it to occur through both informal and formal systems. It is a reminder that intimate partner violence is more than a problem between two individuals; it will not end without social change on the individual, institutional, and societal levels, thereby promoting a social justice approach to this human rights issue. By placing intimate partner violence in context, it helps both victims and service providers understand the additional systemic challenges that victims face in seeking help, maneuvering within the legal system, and attempting to be safe.

The direct inclusion of a culture segment to the Power and Control Wheel would not negate the need for specialized wheels. Instead of "othering" these populations, however, the Inclusive Identities Power and Control Wheel would naturally include them. It does not devalue differences or generalize the experience of a special population or group, but acknowledges that depending on the level or types of oppressions one is subjected to, the experience of intimate partner violence varies. It will allow victims to feel that important parts of their identity are being acknowledged and addressed. This is a major strength of the Inclusive Identities Power and Control Wheel.

The Inclusive Identities Power and Control Wheel would help prevent the mislabeling of cases like that of Aasiya Zubair Hassan. It shows that the tactics of abuse she experienced fits directly in the rubric of intimate partner violence. The new wheel may also help identify when cases of intimate partner violence are in fact honor violence cases. Service providers can draw attention to the "Using Culture" spoke, specifically the tactic of ostracizing the victim from her community or social group, to begin dialogue regarding how the client's culture impacts her ability to access services and stay safe. Once "Using Culture" is identified as a form of abuse experienced by the client, service providers are encouraged to follow up with questions such as:

- Do you feel pressure from your community to stay with your partner?
- Have they threatened to exclude you from your community if you were to leave or seek help?
- What would happen if your community finds out that you are seeking help?
- Has your partner contacted a cultural or religious leader to prevent you from coming forward?

See Culture Wheel, supra note 172.
- What would that do to your reputation? How does that harm you?²⁰⁸

It is important that all clients are asked these items.

A comprehensive understanding and use of the Inclusive Identities Power and Control Wheel can potentially improve client-centered service delivery to victims. First and foremost, by placing the issue of culture in the mainstream understanding of intimate partner violence, it encourages those working with victims to routinely screen all their clients around cultural forms of abuse. The additional tactics of abuse identified help create a more accurate reflection of the client’s experience, and encourages more nuanced safety planning addressing these forms of abuse. If the client indicates that their cultural and social communities in fact are areas of strength and support, this too leads to improved safety plans. Importantly, when different forms of cultural abuse are identified as tactics experienced by the client, it can help professionals ascertain if the violence experienced by their client is in fact a form of honor violence, which would necessitate extra resources to help with client safety.

As an educational tool, the Inclusive Identities Power and Control Wheel can help enhance both practitioners’ and the general public’s understanding of intimate partner violence. The simple visual emphasizes how institutional practices and societal beliefs can affect victims’ experiences, and how victims in turn may perceive and interact with the legal system and the other systems created to help them escape abuse. The wheel not only can help professionals recognize additional barriers to service clients may encounter, but it also serves as a visual explanation of why the solution to end intimate partner violence lies in social change.

Finally, the Inclusive Identities Power and Control Wheel can help promote culturally competent practices within agencies. The wheel reminds professionals that each of us has multiple identities, and that the traditional "essentialist" notion of the White, middle-class battered woman is not the norm. This wheel includes, instead of marginalizing, the diverse population - which may be its biggest strength.

CONCLUSION

While the primary cause of domestic violence is gender inequality and male dominance, it no longer can be considered without taking the

²⁰⁸ These questions can also be included in service providers’ intake and screening forms. The author thanks her colleague Shea Post, Director of the Athens Area Homeless Shelter, and former Victim Services Advocate at the International Institute of Buffalo, for her assistance in developing this list of questions.
intersectionality of other forms of oppression including race, class, sexuality, ableism, and ageism into account. Culture plays a role in the development of everyone’s identity, and the intersectionality of these various identities significantly shapes the experience of those who are abused. The Power and Control Wheel should reflect these multiple dimensions.

A proposed new wheel, the Inclusive Identities Power and Control Wheel, includes “Using Culture” as a core tactic of abuse, as all victims have cultural identities, which can be exploited by their abusive partners. Circling that wheel within forms of oppression that directly impact the victim reflects the concept of intersectionality, and it helps assess the multiple identities victims possess. Finally, by encircling this image within the outer wheels of institutions and societal factors that further influence the victim’s experience and support the existence of violence against women, the Inclusive Identities Power and Control Wheel offers a visual representation of the relationship between the personal and the social.

The Inclusive Identities Power and Control Wheel more accurately reflects the experience of victims and helps clients feel that their multiple identities are being acknowledged and respected. It can help clients better comprehend their personal experience of abuse, and understand why it has been challenging to seek outside assistance. It can also help both the clients and their service providers discover clients’ areas of strength, resiliency, and support. Asking questions specific to culture is a way of listening to the voices of women, accounting for their experiences, and respecting their individuality and differences, which harkens back to one of the core principles of feminism.

Plans are underway to conduct research into the effectiveness of the Inclusive Identities Power and Control Wheel. Focus groups with survivors from diverse backgrounds will be used to see if this new wheel speaks to their experience of intimate partner violence, and if they identify additional forms of abuse not reflected in the original Power and Control Wheel. Advocates will also be surveyed to determine if they were able to identify different forms of abuse experienced by clients, and if this discovery serves as a stepping stone for deeper conversation and better understanding of the abuse their clients endured. This in turn could enhance their ability to offer client-centered services.

Culture needs to be a part of the regular discourse about intimate partner violence. Failure to do so does an injustice to clients domestic violence professionals serve. Learning more about the role culture plays in

209 See generally Higgins, supra note 114.
210 A grant was obtained from the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy to conduct this research.
intimate partner violence cases is essential to develop appropriate and relevant resources for clients.

The initial reaction of the mainstream community to the murder of Aasiya Zubair Hassan was outrage and abhorrence, wrongly directed at the Muslim community and Islamic faith for purportedly condoning such violence. Indignation and activism ought to be the reaction when every victim of intimate partner violence is killed. It is the responsibility of every culture, every community, and every social group, including those of mainstream American society, to end intimate partner violence. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of culture needs to be a part of the Anti-Domestic Violence Movement's education platform. As scholar and social activist Shamita Das Dasgupta states:

\[ \ldots [M]ulticulturalism without an understanding of culture or cultural nuances is bound to yield decisions that reek of society's misogyny, xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and racism. Ignoring culture, of course, leads to a form of generic justice that has little resemblance to justice. The remedy may lie in a thorough campaign of education and training.^{211} \]

---

^{211} Dasgupta, supra note 48, at 67.