Adequacy of current theories of domestic violence in cross-cultural practice: a case study of a Latino immigrant family

Alma Iris Buschelman
San Jose State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_projects

Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.d52e-narh
https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_projects/1109

This Master's Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses and Graduate Research at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Projects by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@sjsu.edu.
Adequacy of Current Theories of Domestic Violence in Cross-Cultural Practice: A Case Study of a Latino Immigrant Family

by

Alma Iris Buschelman

A Research Report Presented to
The Faculty of the College of Social Work
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

May 1998
Abstract

The purpose of this case study was to examine how well current theories of domestic violence explain the experiences of a Latino woman in regard to the influence of culture, the immigrant experience, and the impact of acculturation. Through personal interviews and direct observations of family interactions, the researcher was able to discern how the impact of the immigrant experience had either hampered or helped the immigrant woman to deal with family violence. It was this researcher's contention that current theories of domestic violence did little, if anything, to reflect the impact of these additional stresses on the dynamics of family violence. In the end, this case study gave testimony to the great need for additional research to be conducted within the immigrant Latino community in relation to issues of culture, religion, and acculturation and its impact on family violence.
# Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction ......................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2: Literature Review ................................................................................................. 4

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework ......................................................................................... 8
  General Systems Model of Wife Battering .................................................................. 8
  Cycle Theory of Violence ......................................................................................... 11
  Social Learning Theory ............................................................................................ 13
  Summary ................................................................................................................. 14

Chapter 4: Methodology ...................................................................................................... 16
  Study Design ........................................................................................................... 16
  Study Population ..................................................................................................... 16
  Study Site ................................................................................................................ 16
  Sampling Plan .......................................................................................................... 17
  Measures ................................................................................................................. 17
  Operationalization of Concepts ............................................................................ 17
  Limitations of Study ................................................................................................. 18
  Human Subjects ....................................................................................................... 18
  Summary ................................................................................................................. 18

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion ....................................................................................... 20
  General Systems Model of Wife Battering .......................................................... 20
  Cycle Theory of Violence ......................................................................................... 24
  Social Learning Theory ............................................................................................ 27

Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusion ................................................................................... 30

References ........................................................................................................................... 32

Appendix A ......................................................................................................................... 33

Appendix B ......................................................................................................................... 35
Chapter 1: Introduction

Domestic violence is a problem that affects everyone in our society, regardless of class, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity. Before the ramifications of domestic violence can be discussed, it must first be defined. According to Carden (1994), four types of domestic violence directed at women have been clinically observed and defined as follows:

1. Physical violence involves the use of physical force by a man to control his female intimate partner (e.g., pushing, grabbing, slapping, biting, punching, or assault with a weapon);
2. Sexual violence involves forcing a female intimate partner, through the use of verbal or physical threats of intimidation, to participate in sexual activities against her will;
3. Property violence includes breaking some symbolically meaningful or favored possession, punching holes in walls, breaking down doors, or throwing things; and
4. Psychological violence consists of verbal or nonverbal behaviors intended to isolate, humiliate, demean, or control a female intimate partner. (p. 547)

Women are the primary victims of abuse. In 1990, of the 6,008,790 crimes of violence against persons aged 12 and older reported in a national crime victimization survey (U.S. Department of Justice, 1992), 39% were perpetrated by a member of the victim's family or by a person in a relationship with the victim. Less than half of these crimes were reported to the police. Fifty-eight percent of those reported involved the spouse or the ex-spouse of the victim (Carden, 1994, p.541). One in seven women ever married will experience marital rape and 1.8 million women annually are abused by a spouse (Carden, 1994, p. 542). Immigrant
women facing domestic violence in the home are at increased risk because of the limited number of resources available to them because of their undocumented status in this country.

This study's purpose was to examine the experiences of a Latino immigrant woman who is undocumented, the additional hardships faced because of the immigrant experience, and the ever-present stressors due to acculturation. Essentially, the point of this case study is to determine whether or not additional research in the field of domestic violence needs to be initiated in regard to the experiences of Latino immigrant women dealing with domestic violence. The findings of the case being investigated will provide evidence necessitating the need for further research with this target population.

Carden (1994) has explored the cultural reasons for domestic violence in this country, that is women have not achieved their social independence that would empower them to leave violent relationships. Although this statement appears to be valid, it does not speak to the lack of social independence of many Latino immigrants, male or female, let alone the persecutory nature of the government against documented or undocumented Latino immigrants. The Latino women dealing with violence in the home who are not citizens of the United States cannot hope to qualify for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families because they are not in this country legally. Programs that would help women learn the skills to achieve self-sufficiency are not available to this segment of the population, whether the government wishes to acknowledge them or not. Bandura (1963) states that issues of religion and culture do maintain the behavior and create a predisposition toward violent behavior in the intimate settings (Carden, 1994, p. 554). However, immigration and acculturation issues are never addressed throughout Carden's study.
The results of this study will serve to call attention to the lack of research being devoted to the better understanding of the role of the immigration process upon women of Latino origin who must also contend with violence in their homes. This study will contribute to knowledge by addressing specific needs of this target population that have been neglected in terms of where research on family violence should next be expanded. Throughout my work with Latino families dealing with family violence, family systems and social learning theories have provided some assistance, but this researcher has always had to compensate with her own experience in dealing with immigrant families. Research has never spoken directly about the immigrant experience in relation to family violence.

Chapter 2 will be a literature review that explores current studies that examine domestic violence. Chapter 3 will refer to the current theories of domestic violence this researcher has used in her capacity as a therapist with the client. Chapter 4 will introduce the methodology used to examine the case under investigation. This section will include a study design, information about the study participant, and the study site. Chapter 5 will review the results of the study and then offer a discussion of the study’s findings. In Chapter 6, summary and conclusions will be offered.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature on domestic violence focusing on the victim is extensive, but does not specifically expand on details describing a woman's sociocultural background. More specifically, it impresses upon the reader that domestic violence can happen to anyone and therefore does not distinguish among the different backgrounds of women who experience violence in the home.

Forte, Frank, Forte, and Rigsby (1996) empirically tested a symbolic interactionist theory that attempted to explain the batterer's insensitivity to their partners. Further, battered women's management of interpersonal predicaments in relationships characterized by socially induced power differentials were also examined. Analysis of the data revealed that in contrast to men in non-violent relationships, batterers were unlikely to take the role of or to empathize with their partners. When discussing the social roles of women, the majority of the battered women studied had "little social power, meager economic resources, precarious employment, exclusive responsibility for young children that limited their mobility, and few supportive others" (Forte et al., 1997, p. 116).

In their discussion of their findings, the authors felt that they had contributed to the literature on domestic violence by providing empirical support for a model that explained conflictual relationship dynamics in terms of interconnected social, structural, interactional, and intrapsychic factors. They also established that male batterer's minimal role-taking inclinations and abilities should be central to understanding and reducing family violence. They further stated that any self-defeating perceptions or actions of battered women are common to all people facing dangerous and uncontrollable interpersonal situations. "Long-
term involvement in hostilities severely challenges the sense of self of soldiers, police officers, slaves, prisoners of war, and battered women” (Forte et al., 1996, p. 70). The authors argue that the way battered women cope with the chronic violence and abuse should be viewed from a strengths perspective, rather than seen as faults within the woman herself. The woman’s lack of power is a result of society’s structure which unfortunately relegates women to a low status. This is not a reflection of the woman’s own personal failures.

According to this study, role-taking is described as a skill used to balance relationships of unequal power. It is societal power differentials and not personal deficits that are key causal factors. Battered women often experience troubling emotions about self-esteem and these probably hinder efforts to mobilize for constructive change. This team of researchers implicates

... societal gender stratification, cultural norms supporting male violence, and social policies limiting women’s access to economic resources as central to the social problem. They further call for changes in women’s powerlessness. They recommend efforts to enhance the social status of women so that they will have firmer socially based status shields to ward off aggression. (Forte et al., 1996, p. 70)

The bargaining model presented by Farmer and Tiefenthaler (1996) provides a rational explanation for why some women use services even when they have no intention of leaving and proposes that women who use services as signals may be better off even if they return to the relationship. This finding calls into question the notion that the measure of success is a woman who leaves her abuser; rather, these services may be successful in improving her life even when she returns home.
The theory assumes that the man's positive sense of self is enhanced by the acts of violence. Because the man receives positive rewards from violence and marital specific capital, all of which is greater than the utility he would have if he were single. Inversely, as the man's violence increases, the woman's utility decreases. As her external utility level, or threat point, outside the relationship increases, the violence levels should decrease in the home. Farmer and Tiefenthaler's study showed that as the threat points increase, which may occur due to the availability of resources, so does the violence decrease. The threshold levels are different depending on the type of woman. In choosing between these two levels, the man weighs the probability that she will leave against his additional utility from inflicting the higher level of violence.

[Moreover,] the model suggests that some women use services to facilitate leaving the relationship, while other women use the services even though they are not in a position to leave. These women use the services [either] to bluff or misrepresent their threat points in order to decrease the violence. That battered women use services as bluffs is supported by the large number of women who use services only to reconcile with the abuser and the large number of women who repeatedly use the same services. (Farmer et al., 1996, p. 278)

Findings from previous studies indicate that women who go to shelters and return home experience significantly more violence if they exhibit no other help-seeking activity. (Berk et al., 1986) However, for each additional help-seeking activity undertaken, (e.g., a previous shelter stay, trying to get a restraining order), the threat of leaving is more credible and, therefore, the violence decreases. Consequently, while non-credible threats result in
more violence, women who bluff but have a more credible threat are successful in controlling the violence to some degree.

Although Farmer and Tiefenthaler’s model indicates that services may be harmful for some bluffers, these potential negative effects of service use may be outweighed by the positive effects of service availability. Simply making valuable services available to battered women is an effective way of reaching battered women because the existence of services increases their threat points and therefore, improves their lives even if they never use the services. “Increasing threat points leads to both more women leaving and less violence for women who stay” (Farmer & Tiefenthaler, 1996, p. 279).

In conclusion, Forte and his fellow researchers assert that the perceived self-defeating behaviors of battered women are not inherent weaknesses of character. They further state that these behaviors are common to all people experiencing the same type of chronic violence for prolonged periods of time. The societal power differentials contribute to the difficulties women face in trying to change the violence in their lives.

As for Farmer and her colleague, they assert that women who use shelters but return to their abusive partners, still have an advantage over women who never utilize the shelters in their communities. They claim that the perceived threat of possible loss of the woman is sometimes enough to reduce the escalation of violence in the abusive home. Current trends believe that the shelter intervention is a failure upon the woman’s return to the abusive partner. This study negates this belief and provides evidence that use of the shelter facilities is enough to de-escalate the violence, rather than adding increased risk of harm to the battered woman.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This exploration of theoretical frameworks will examine three models of domestic violence beginning with a General Systems Model of wife battering (Giles-Sims, 1983). The Cycle Theory of Violence (Walker, 1984) will also be explored in depth as well as Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and its relationship to family violence.

General Systems Model of Wife Battering

The General Systems Model is divided into five separate stages that clearly delineate the homeostasis that is maintained by the individuals within the family system. Because this theory contends that all family members have an integral role in the family dynamics, the concept of victim is not used, but rather, it is the “victim” that is usually the one most in control in terms of tolerating and maintaining the status quo in the family.

In stage one, the establishment of the family system, the foundation is laid down in terms of the dynamics of the relationship and the way violence will be dealt with within that relationship. To begin with, how did previous patterns established in other systems affect the new family system? Each person brings well established patterns of behavior learned from their family of origin or in previous relationships. Typically, the individual has experienced violence in their environment. The reaction to the violence in the past will influence and sometimes determine the way the person approaches the violence in future relationships. If violence was tolerated in the past, it is much more likely to be acceptable in subsequent relationships.

The second question relates to the commitment that establishes the boundaries of the new system/couple. Often times, women are aware of a history of violence in the man’s past.
Generally, women are sympathetic, rather than wary . . . applies to revelations of violence in a man's previous marriage or relationship. The women in these cases did not consider, at first, the prior violent behavior might have any influence on their relationships . . . This pattern of dismissal or sympathy means the women did not focus on past violence as a warning signal for future violence. (Giles-Sims, 1983, p. 123)

Even when the violent behavior has been experienced by the woman herself, she continues with the relationship, moves in with him, and even marries him. The woman receives negative feedback for her desire to leave and positive feedback if she stays. The anger from the first incident seems totally out of the norm and the man becomes extremely apologetic and she feels it was a freak occurrence. The return to normal activities invalidates her desire to flee and only reinforces the relationship. Finally, what are the rules of dominance and how will they be enforced? When the initial conflicts arise over control in the relationship, the batterer will use physical violence to gain the advantage. When the woman gives in to his wants to stop his behavior, she is giving him positive feedback. The next time there is conflict, he will return to this same pattern because it was effective in giving him what he wanted.

Stage two, the first incident of violence, strongly overlaps with the last point. Positive feedback is the most influential criteria for the continuation of violent behavior. Similarly, the vast majority of women do not seek outside help after the first violent incident. Typically, the incident is ignored and life returns back to normal without any outside intervention. The fact that the woman does not seek help is a form of positive feedback to the perpetrator. This lack
of action renders the behavior acceptable, thereby increasing the probability of the violence recurring.

In stage three, stabilization of the violence, the pattern of behavior becomes fixed. The man has established his dominance and becomes violent when his authority is questioned. To prevent escalation of the violence, the woman learns to give in to the man's demands. However, once escalation has occurred, she is not able to stop the process. It is at this point that she seeks outside help. Unfortunately, she usually receives negative feedback from those outside the system. Police are still reluctant to arrest the perpetrator. Women are still being told by their relatives that they married for better or worse. The women learn to hide their circumstances and the couple system becomes closed and impermeable to outside influences. Furthermore, there are some bright spots in the relationship; the women feel that the potential for change is there and they continue to hope that the situation will improve. "The man's . . . contrite periods encourage the woman to stay in the system even after the pattern of violence has become well stabilized" (Giles-Sims, 1983, p. 132).

In stage four, the choice point, the woman begins to believe that the battering is no longer tolerable, whether because of escalating violence or other unacceptable circumstances. Usually, it is a deviation from the typical pattern of violence that forces the woman to react; even within the violence, certain rules have usually existed like not hurting the children, or not in front of the children or people outside the family system. When the rules are broken, the woman has reached a critical incident. She may now take steps to leave the relationship or she may fall back into the pattern of previous violence.
Stage five, leaving the system, only becomes possible when the woman is able to establish a relationship with someone outside the system. Once new perspectives are introduced into the system, she can receive positive feedback for her desire to leave the relationship. This friend then becomes the bridge across the span of isolation to reintegration into society. As the system becomes more permeable, the woman is able to acknowledge other possibilities. As the women explore possibilities from supporting agencies, they receive positive feedback for their desire to leave which is further reinforces their desire to leave and to leave the system. Granted, many women do not successfully separate from the system even after working with shelters for battered women. However, the women are now more likely to seek help the next time because they that the support exists when they are ready to try again.

The final stage, resolution, after the shelter, does the woman return home with a new set of rules, leave for good, or simply return to previous patterns? All three options are possible. According to this theory, leaving for good is extremely difficult and the woman is not typically supported: if she has children and was counting on the batterer’s income, many times she is forced to go on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. If and when she establishes a new relationship, it is still difficult for her to not fall into the same previous traps. For the woman who returns and tries to change the rules, more often than not, she is subjected to the same old patterns. The woman who returns with no hopes of change continues the same pattern with additional escalation of the violence.

Cycle Theory of Violence

Walker’s (1979) theory of the cycle of violence was developed based on a series of intensive interviews with more than 120 battered women. The patterns she discovered later
became the basis for the cycle theory of violence which will be described further. In phase one, known as the tension building phase, tension begins to mount as the abusive partner increases his threats of violence; “there is a gradual escalation of tension displayed by discrete acts causing increased friction” (Walker, 1984, p. 95), often calling the woman names and pushing or shoving her. During this phase, the abused woman will often make increasing efforts to please the abuser to calm him down. Usually, though, her efforts to prevent the battering are useless and only serve to postpone the violence. This phase is marked by the woman’s denial of the impending violence.

Phase two, or the acute battering incident, is “characterized by the uncontrollable discharge of the tensions that have built up during phase one” (Walker, 1979, p. 59). Violence erupts as the abuser throws objects at his partner, hits, slaps, kicks, chokes, or beats her with his fists. He may also abuse her sexually at this time. The use of weapons such as belts, knives, or guns is not uncommon. At this point, the woman’s denial of the man’s responsibility for what is happening is extremely strong.

Phase three, the loving contrition phase, is a time when the abuser is extremely apologetic, expressing his guilt and shame. He promises that the violent behavior will not happen again, often buying gifts. “The batterer himself may believe that he will never allow himself to be violent again.” (Walker, 1984, p. 96) Sometimes the abuser will minimize the violence or blame it on the woman, saying that it never would have happened if the woman had not said or done something to anger him.

Although the three phases remain fairly consistent throughout the violent relationship, the trend that seems to occur most often is that the tension building phase seems to become
shorter, the acute phase more violent, and the honeymoon phase all but disappears as the cycle of abuse continues throughout the years. The violence becomes much more entrenched in the relationship, and the need for the honeymoon decreases.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory explains violence in terms of behavior that has been modeled and later imitated. Many batterers have extensive histories of family violence in their childhood, their own violent behavior as children, and later criminal records of their own. These children learn that physical violence is an acceptable way of reinforcing their power.

Similarly, girls learn that violence is a natural part of an intimate, adult relationship. Men who have witnessed marital violence as children are much more likely to assault their wives than men who were not raised with violence in the home.

According to Bandura’s social learning analysis of aggression (1963), witnessing inter­parental violence may predispose some boys to abusive behaviors in their adult intimate relationships with women. That is,

social learning theory maintains that violence is transmitted from the family of origin to the adult intimate dyad through the vicarious reinforcement of interpersonal violence as a method of conflict resolution and a means to the maintenance of power and control in intimate relationships. (Carden, 1994, p. 554)

Bandura further stated that in addition to external reward/punishment contingencies, that the following self-regulatory mechanisms modulate the self-recrimination processes by neutralizing aggressive behaviors.

1. justification of the behavior on the basis of some higher authority (scripture);
2. comparison of the behavior with more serious violence;
3. projection of the responsibility for the behavior onto drugs, alcohol, work stressors, or the provocation of the victim;
4. normalization of the behavior as a common and socially acceptable occurrence;
5. depersonalization of the victim through the use of disparaging labels; and
6. minimization of the consequences (Bandura, 1977, p. 156).

As a rule, one or more of the aforementioned tactics have been observed in batterers who were in treatment.

Summary

The research question being posed is how helpful are current theories of domestic violence in explaining the case of an immigrant Latino woman who is dealing with issues of family violence in her home. The family systems theory helps to explain the infrastructure of the family and how the initial patterns of family functioning are established. It does not, however, help to explain the additional stressors of being an undocumented resident and the fears of being deported to the country of origin if the battered woman does not comply with the role that has been delineated for her by her spouse.

Similarly, Walker's cycle theory of violence accurately illustrates the day-to-day experiences of the family being studied, but does not endeavor to explain the reasons for staying in the violent relationship. Issues of culture, legal immigration status, and religious backgrounds are not mentioned. Finally the social learning theory does expound on the backgrounds of both the batterer and the battered, but does not specifically mention the individuals in terms of a social context, such as being a marginalized member of society due to
language barriers, economic barriers, legal status barriers, and barriers to accessing community resources because of an ineligible legal status.
Chapter 4: Methodology

Study Design

A case study design was used to examine the adequacy of current theories of domestic violence in cross-cultural practice in regard to a Latino immigrant family. Data collection techniques consisted of clinical interviews with a Latino client and her children. Copious notes were taken of weekly one-hour sessions over a two-month period of time. The researcher observed the mother alone as well as in family sessions with her three children.

Study Population

The case/client under investigation consists of a 35-year-old woman, recently emigrated to the United States from Nicaragua. She has three children: the oldest boy aged 10, the middle son aged 8, and the youngest daughter aged 7. This client has been dealing with violence in the home since the first time she became pregnant over 10 years ago. In addition, this woman is an undocumented citizen in this country and is dealing with issues of acculturation as well. This client does not have a support network of any kind outside of the services she receives at a local mental health clinic. The case is opened under the name of one of her children in order to provide services under the umbrella of children's mental health services in the county.

Study Site

The study is being conducted at Mission Family Center, an outpatient county mental health clinic that primarily serves both under-insured clients and uninsured clients. Services are offered in English and Spanish and the majority of the staff is bilingual.
Sampling Plan

The researcher is a social work intern at Mission Family Center and the participant is part of her client caseload. This client was being seen for individual and family therapy was selected for this case study given the issues she presented.

Measures

The measures consisted of clinical notes taken during weekly interviews with the participant. These notes consisted of background information about the spouses, the history of violence and its progression throughout the marriage. The client’s perceptions of her experiences were also duly noted. Information regarding her children’s behavior was collected as well.

Operationalization of Concepts

Domestic/Family Violence --- violence between partners in a marriage, where the aggressor physically hits, punches, throws, slams, or causes any kind of physical trauma to his conjugal partner.

Undocumented Citizen --- a person who has entered the country without legal permission. This person does not have the right to seek employment or services that are reserved for legal residents of this country. If an undocumented citizen is discovered, he/she would be deported to his/her country of origin. The individual is not eligible to receive any but the most minimal of social services like emergency health care. The individual is not eligible to receive money or services from federal, county, or city agencies unless the city has been deemed a “safe” place to go for sanctuary (e.g., San Francisco).
Limitations of Study

The limitations of the study consist of the following: (a) the sampling procedure is limited to the one family being investigated; (b) the data collection techniques are limited to the information the participant wished to divulge and the veracity of that information must be taken at the client’s word; and (c) the study site was limited to the clinic where the interviews were conducted. Potential threats to validity again arise from the veracity of the information provided by the participant as well as being subject to the interpretation of the researcher.

Human Subjects

The client’s identity was kept confidential. The only person who had knowledge of the identity of this client was the researcher, who was also the therapist for the client. Pseudonyms were used in lieu of any identifying information in order to protect the identity of the participant under investigation along with her family. A request for approval of the study was submitted to the human subjects review board at San Jose State University. The board then sent a letter of approval (see Appendix A). Agency approval was also necessary and has been granted in order to complete this study (see Appendix B).

Summary

This chapter outlines the design of a case study that is being done to determine the adequacy of current theories of domestic violence in cross-cultural practice, in regard to a Latino immigrant family. The participant was deemed appropriate for the study because her experiences lent themselves to helping analyze the aforementioned question. The participant is part of the researcher’s current caseload at Mission Family Center. Data collection techniques consisted of extensive interviews of the participant and her children regarding their
experiences with violence in the home. The study is limited to the case under investigation and the findings apply only to that family as the sample consists of one. Human subjects describes the methods used to guarantee the anonymity of the participant and her children. Both the agency and the human subjects review board gave their approval to conduct this case study.
Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

This section will review the theoretical frameworks and how they have lent themselves to the case under investigation. Each theoretical framework will be applied to the case and a discussion will ensue following each theory. This chapter will closely parallel the structure of Chapter three.

General Systems Model of Wife Battering

The first theory examined was a general systems model of wife battering (Giles-Sims, 1983). In stage one, the establishment of the family system, the foundation is laid in terms of how violence will be dealt with within the relationship. With the family being investigated, violence did not become an issue until two years after the inception of the marriage beginning during the first pregnancy. Prior to this event, the client makes no mention of any marital discord, let alone any incidents of violence. However, each individual brings previously established patterns of behavior from their family of origin. The client was raised in an abusive environment, both physically and emotionally damaging. The client did not witness spousal abuse in the home, but suffered greatly at the hands of her mother. This theory presupposes that the individual has experienced violence in their environment which has proven to be the case with this woman. Further, the theory states that the violence in the past will influence and sometimes determine the way the person approaches the violence in the future. This woman internalized the pain of the abuse as a child and attempted suicide at the age of ten by trying to hang herself. Essentially, the client reacted as a helpless individual with no possible way out other than taking her own life.
When establishing her own boundaries with her spouse, the message of the marriage being a lifelong commitment is deeply ingrained. Her own mother, extended family, and her community have firmly inculcated the fact that once one is married, one must accept all of the consequences that result from the union, that is taking the good with the bad. The intensity or severity of the bad is irrelevant; ending the marriage is never an option. Essentially, the boundaries established around the violence in this union is that although the violence is painful and damaging, it will be tolerated and accepted, and will definitely not harm the integrity of the marriage.

In stage two, the first incidence of violence, positive feedback is the most influential criteria for the continuation of violent behavior. The vast majority of women do not seek help. This client was not just trying to minimize the incident to protect her husband. She was newly arrived in this country, pregnant, alone, and unable to speak the language, with extremely limited resources to say the least. She felt she had no other option available to her as an undocumented citizen of this country. She certainly was not about to challenge her husband or seek any type of restitution either legally or otherwise. She apologized profusely for having angered her spouse so, and swore that she would never displease him again. The client took the blame for the violence, and absolved her spouse of any responsibility. This stage establishes the positive feedback loop for violent and aggressive behavior and sets the pattern for violent behavior in the relationship to be perceived as acceptable.

In stage three, stabilization of the violence, the pattern of behavior becomes fixed, and according to the theory this is the point at which the woman begins to seek outside help. The violence established itself in her marriage soon after the birth of her first child. Now even with
less options open to her, this woman was not about to seek outside help as is predicted by this theory. Her undocumented status is even more threatening because her child is now an American citizen. She would be deported without her baby. The expected behaviors of this stage just do not apply to this individual’s particular circumstances.

In stage four, the choice point, the woman begins to believe that the battering is no longer tolerable, whether because of escalating violence or other unacceptable circumstances. This individual arrived at this stage after ten years of escalating violence, the birth of two other children, and caring for a disabled elder parent. Throughout this time, this woman’s mother has constantly told her that the violence is something she has to accept because this was the man she lost her virginity to, the father of her children, and that her commitment before God must be honored above all else. The police intervened only because the neighbors called them. It was the police that suggested she seek outside help not for herself, but for her children who were angry with her for having their father arrested. This woman was only concerned for her husband’s release, her children’s blame directed toward her, and not very much else.

Stage five, leaving the system, only becomes possible when the woman is able to establish a relationship with someone outside the system. Once new perspectives are introduced into the system, she can receive positive feedback for her desire to leave the relationship. Unfortunately, this stage does not begin to apply to the case under investigation. It was the batterer who left the system because he could not forget nor forgive his arrest which he blamed on his wife. Further, when he left, my client was extremely ambivalent about his departure and wanted to go after him. It was only through extensive crisis intervention
with the client, that her suicidal ideation was diverted. Her depression was great when her
husband left. In addition, the husband had arranged his legal status and actually became a
citizen of this country. He, however, did not do the same for his wife. She was terrified that
he would have her and her mother deported and that her three children would be left here,
thousands of miles apart. Granted the mother does have legal recourse, but she is not aware
of the laws that can protect her. As her therapist, education proved to be an extremely
important component in the therapeutic alliance.

In the final stage, resolution, it is assumed that the woman has gone to a shelter and
that now, she will either return home with a new set of rules, leave for good, or simply return
to the previous patterns. Again, this stage cannot explain any of the circumstances that
occurred to the client being studied. Her depression was great, and only with constant
support from her therapist, was the client able to move forward. The fact that her husband no
longer wanted anything to do with her greatly accelerated the process of separation. She was
able to receive financial assistance through the general relief fund, and other community
agencies were instrumental in establishing legal residence so that she could begin looking for
employment.

Although the systems model of wife battering gives a good approximation of the
experiences this woman suffered, it does fall short. The issues of immigration, acculturation,
and language barriers are not addressed by this theory of domestic violence. The psychosocial
factors faced by this immigrant woman cannot possibly be explained if one simply uses this
model as a guide in working with this mother. If the clinician does not seek to understand the
impact of these issues on the client, then the intervention will be ineffective. Clearly, this
theory needs to be developed further in order to incorporate these psychosocial factors which greatly impact the decision making abilities of this battered woman.

**Cycle Theory of Violence**

Walker’s (1979) theory of the cycle of violence will be the next theory to be examined in the context of the immigrant woman under study. Within this theory, there are three phases which describe the patterns that the violence follows throughout the relationship. Each phase will be analyzed according to the experiences of the immigrant woman.

In phase 1, known as the tension building phase, the woman feels as if she must walk around on eggshells, making sure to not provoke the man in any way. She walks around in constant fear and anticipation, wondering just what will start the violence again. The participant in this study describes her own experiences in very much the same way. She would recount many instances of trying to stop the children from disturbing their father, and being almost obsessive in her need to anticipate her husband’s moods in order to circumvent the violence for as long as possible. She described living in a constant state of alert. The client also made sure to state that her husband was under a great deal of pressure and that she must do her best to be a dutiful wife. She confided that she was sure she would not fail the next time; she would be able to keep his violent temper at bay and it all depended on her. Part of the pattern of this phase is specifically related to the woman’s state of denial as to her husband’s responsibility for his own violent and aggressive behavior. As a result, the client would see the impending violence as her own responsibility and would blame herself for being inadequate when the next act of violence occurred.
In the beginning, the client describes this tension building phase as lasting a long time, several weeks or months. As the years passed, the client sadly stated that this period of time became much more unpredictable, and that her efforts at staying the violence became less and less effective. This description is echoed by Walker’s theory which states that over time, the three phases remain relatively unchanged but the duration of each phase definitely follows a set pattern. Phase one is supposed to decrease over time, depending on the frequency and severity of the violence.

Phase two, the act of violence, is the next step. The tension has finally erupted in an act or episode of violence. Initially, this phase is explosive and over quickly. The violent incident is usually more stunning than physically damaging. The immigrant woman describes being thrown against a wall, or bruises from being grabbed so hard. In her words, they were not a big deal and easy to hide. She would minimize the violence and quickly find excuses for the behavior, and blame was not attributed to the batterer; she attributed it to herself. As previously stated, the sequence of the phases remains constant, only the duration of each specific phase changes over time. The violent phase, which according to the client, happened once every several weeks or even months, begins to happen with much more frequency and the severity of the violent episodes becomes greater. The initial bruises became black eyes, bloody noses, and severe bruising on the body. The client is not able to recall when the change began. She was quick to point out that the level of stress her husband experienced at work also increased as the violence increased. She was adamant that her husband be understood and not blamed for what happened.
Walker points out that denial of the batterer’s responsibility is extremely strong during this phase. In fact, as the next phase comes into play, the honeymoon phase, the woman becomes extremely protective of her husband and he becomes extremely apologetic and swears that it will never happen again. These are the words that battered women long to hear. They become quite forgiving and just cannot seem to remember that it was not long ago that they were experiencing the same scenario under similar circumstances. This duration of this phase goes through the most amount of change over time. The honeymoon period becomes shorter and shorter and can even disappear altogether during the most advanced periods of family violence after years of abuse. The immigrant woman came to describe the violence as occurring several times per week for longer periods of time. The honeymoon phase that she used to look forward to became an increasingly rare and strained period of time with her husband.

Walker’s theory of the cycle of violence gives an accurate description of the way violence played out throughout the immigrant woman’s relationship with her husband. However, describing the everyday dynamics of the violence is quite limiting in understanding the inner workings of this family as a whole. When looking at this particularly family, it is almost impossible to distinguish it from any other family dealing with domestic violence and spousal abuse. This theory completely removes the family from a social context and because it is so general in its view of the family, it fails to examine any of the specific details that renders each and every family unique. In this theory’s effort to be all encompassing, the opposite seems to occur. The issues of acculturation, immigration, and language barriers are never even mentioned, let alone explored. In order to truly understand the dynamics of
domestic violence, one must be able to see the family from a social context, such as being a marginalized member of society due to language and economic barriers, legal status barriers and barriers to accessing community resources because of an ineligible legal status. On the other hand, this theory does prove useful as a tool in helping the client understand the dynamics within the family itself.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory explains violence in terms of behavior that has been previously modeled and then later imitated. Many batterers and battered women have extensive histories of family violence in their childhood (Bandura, 1963, p. 70). The future batterers learn that physical aggression is a way of asserting their power and control. Girls learn that violence is associated with what it means to be a family and they come to expect it in their own families as adults. In addition, boys that witness inter-parental violence as children will be much more likely to be abusive in their own intimate relationships as adults (Bandura, 1963, p. 122).

The immigrant woman in question is married to a man twenty years her senior. She knows that he was in a previous long-term relationship prior to their marriage but does not know why the relationship ended. The client is from Nicaragua and her husband is from Colombia. The client states that she has never met her husband’s family and did not have any information to offer regarding his childhood or any early exposure to family violence.

How, then, can this theory be applied to this family when such little background information is known about the batterer? In truth, this case supports this theory quite well. Three children have been born to this family: the oldest is a 10-year-old male, the middle child is an 8-year-old boy, and the youngest is a 7-year-old girl. All three children are physically
aggressive with one another. In family sessions, any time there seems to be a dispute, all children get up from their chairs and start pushing each other down in dominance over the other children. The girl tries to assert her own authority, but her size makes her an easy target for the other children's aggression. Her affect is characterized by frustration as she looks to mother for assistance. Unfortunately, the mother sees the behavior as normal and tends to minimize the violent tendencies in her children. The behavior is also manifested outside the home. The respective schools complain of the boys' lack of respect for their female teachers. They do not acknowledge their teachers' authority, just as they tend to ignore their mother's attempts at quelling arguments and disputes in the home.

What about the mother's background? Although she did not witness spousal abuse in her home because of an absent father, she was aware that her aunts were occasionally covered in bruises and would stay out of sight for days at a time. The client would question her mother about their appearance. Her mother would state that they had made bad choices when they selected their husbands and that it was now their responsibility to take the bad with the good. The message was reinforced by her mother, by her aunts' continued "acceptance" of the violence, and the overall community's lack of interference in "family matters." In Nicaragua, male dominance is the norm in the home, and female subordination is a fact of life. This is not to say that spousal abuse is a common occurrence and that all women from Latin America are automatically relegated to a life of abuse and control. However, physically abusive behavior toward children as a form of discipline is quite common. This is where children are exposed to violence, and the dynamics of fear, learned helplessness, and physical aggression as a way of asserting control in the home. The stretch from disciplining children to
disciplining your wife is not very wide. Physical violence is a way of asserting power and control.

Social learning theory also states that the batterer will use self-regulatory mechanisms to modulate any possible self-recriminatory processes by neutralizing aggressive behaviors. The client tried to assure me that it was not her husband’s fault that he treated her the way he did. She repeatedly stated that the men in Colombia are all physically violent with their wives and that his behavior simply reflected a cultural norm. The client was quite proud of the fact that she had not had to go to the hospital because her injuries had never been so severe and considered herself quite lucky. The husband would depersonalize the client by reducing her worth to that of an animal who should be happy that he bothers with her at all.

This case accurately reflects many of the dynamics presented by the social learning theory. In particular, family background and early exposure to family violence appears to be a good predictor of having to contend with family violence in future intimate relationships. It is important to note that this theory also includes the impact of extended family, community and culture into the understanding of family violence. However, like Walker’s theory of the cycle of violence, this theory fails to take the impact of social stressors like immigration, acculturation, and language barriers into account. These are new stressors to the family that were not faced in childhood by either one of the spouses. Both were raised in their countries of origin, speaking the language, understanding the customs, and being able to negotiate their worlds knowledgeably.
Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusion

A case study was conducted to examine the adequacy of current theories of domestic violence in cross-cultural practice in regard to a Latino immigrant family. Data collection techniques consisted of extensive interviews of the family members sans the batterer. The one-hour interviews were conducted on a weekly basis over a two-month period. Sessions with the mother alone consisted primarily of crisis intervention and family sessions with the children dealt primarily with the violent behavior displayed by the children as well as their own feelings regarding the loss of their father. Information was gathered through copious note-taking; the information gathered from the interviews will be destroyed upon completion of this case study. The case presented in this report offered an important opportunity to examine domestic violence and its relationship to the immigration process. The study was conducted at Mission Family Center, which is a community mental health outpatient clinic. The researcher is a social work intern at the aforementioned agency and the participant is a part of her caseload consisting of multi-problem families. The client was being seen for individual and family therapy at the agency. This is a case study of an individual family, and as such, its findings are only relevant to the case under investigation. The client’s identity will be kept confidential. The theoretical frameworks used in this study are the general systems model of wife battering, the cycle theory of violence, and the social learning theory.

The research question posed in this study asked if current theories of domestic violence had any relevance to the experiences presented by the client under investigation, inclusive of the immigrant experience. The conclusion was that all three theories had relevance to this woman’s experience of violence in the home. They each addressed specific
dynamics of violence and how they were manifested within the context of this family. The general family systems theory reflected how the foundations of the violent relationship were laid and spoke to the emerging patterns of violent interaction within the marriage.

The cycle theory of violence presented the day-to-day patterns that would actually lead to the violent episodes. Further, the three phases although fairly constant, do change over time in terms of duration of the actual phases. This theory accurately described the experiences faced by the immigrant woman throughout her marriage of twelve years. The social learning theory incorporated the backgrounds of each spouse and explored the impact of early experiences on future relationships in terms of how violence would be dealt with in the home.

All three theories proved to be useful tools in helping to guide the intervention with this family in therapy. However, all three theories were unable to take the social context of this family into account. As each theory is explored to guide the analysis of this particular family, the issues of immigration, acculturation, language barriers, and legal dilemmas never surfaced. It is clear that these theories were not able to uncover a major component in the life of this woman and her family. Without knowledge of these issues facing the family, positive intervention would prove very difficult to achieve. It is clear that further research into the impact of immigration, acculturation, language barriers, and legal dilemmas would prove extremely useful in offering guidelines for interventions for those clinicians who have not experienced the difficulties of immigration in order to work with this population.
References


Appendix A

Human Subjects Internal Review Board
TO: Alma Buschelman
26 Del Monte St.
San Francisco, CA 94112

FROM: Serena W. Stanford
AVP, Graduate Studies & Research

DATE: March 2, 1998

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

"A Case Study to Identify the Adequacy of Current Theories of Domestic Violence in Regards to a Latino Immigrant Family"

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to any and all data that may be collected from the subjects. The Board's approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Serena Stanford, Ph.D., immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma and release of potentially damaging personal information.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (408) 924-2480.
Appendix B

Agency Approval Form
San Jose State University
College of Social Work

Field Agency's Approval of Research Project Prospectus

Instructions: This form must be completed by all students participating in University-related research projects, including S.W. 298 projects. The form should be completed and submitted to the student's S.W. 298 instructor or faculty sponsor. All students are expected to advise their agencies of the content of their research projects as well as plans related to their proposed methodology, data collection, and data analysis activities. Completion of this form does not remove the obligations of students to complete other college, university, or agency research review and approval procedures/policies.

If significant changes are made in the project a new form must be completed and submitted. All S.W. 298 students must complete and submit this form prior to commencing their actual research work with data collection or clients; and in any event before the end of their first semester of study.

The field instructor's or other agency representative's signature certifies that the student has discussed and shared their plans with the agency, and that the agency is not in opposition to the project. The S.W. 298 instructor and/or other college officials should be contacted if there are any concerns, questions, or objections.

Name of Student: Alma Buschelman
Name of Agency: Mission Family Center

Field Instructor's Name: Esperanza Echavarri LCSW
F.I.'s Telephone #: 415-695-6955

SJSU Instructor's Name: J. Merighi, Ph.D.
Semester(s): Fall '97- Spring '98

Proposed Topic: Case Study of a Family dealing with Domestic Violence (Latino)

Brief Description of Project – Timelines, Sample/Subjects, and Methodology:
Based on direct observation of client, this study is to reflect the adequacy of current theories of domestic violence, or lack thereof, to this Latino family and whether or not additional research needs to be done to better accommodate the special impact of culture, religion, and immigrant experience to a Latino family dealing with issues of domestic violence.

Signature of Student: Alma Buschelman
Date: 2/3/98

Signature of Field Inst./Agency Rep.: Esperanza Echavarri LCSW
Date: 2/3/98

Signature of 298 Instructor/College Rep.: J. Merighi
Date: 2/9/98