Constructing Dependence:
Visa Regimes and Gendered Migration in Families of Indian Professional Workers

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THESIS
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. **CGFNS**  
   Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools
2. **DHS**  
   Department of Homeland Security
3. **EB**  
   Employment Based
4. **DoL**  
   Department of Labor
5. **FAIR**  
   Federation for American Immigration Reform
6. **ICHP**  
   The International Commission on Healthcare
7. **IMMACT 1990**  
   Immigration Act of 1990
8. **MPI**  
   Migration Policy Institute
9. **IIRIRA**  
   Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act
10. **IT**  
    International Technology
11. **NINA**  
    National Indian Nursing Association
12. **NIW**  
    National Interest Waiver
13. **OCI**  
    Overseas Citizenship of India
14. **PBS**  
    Public Broadcasting Services
15. **PIOC**  
    Person of Indian Origin Card
16. **SBTPE**  
    State Board Test Pool Examination
17. **USCIS**  
    United States Citizenship and Immigration Services
18. **U.K.**  
    United Kingdom
19. **U.S.A.**  
    United States of America
SUMMARY

In my dissertation, I examine how visa policies of United States affect Indian transnational "high-skilled" migrants and their families in the United States. I specifically focus on two family forms: a) male-led migrant families or families of Indian high-tech workers; b) female-led migrant families or families of Indian nurses. The “high-skilled” workers migrate for employment on skilled workers visas (H1-B) and their spouses migrate on dependent visas (H-4). The dependent or the H-4 visa, restricts the spouses of skilled workers to find legal employment in the United States or possess any kind of U.S government issued identification in the United States as long as they hold dependent visas. Using extensive qualitative methods - in-depth interviews with 85 family members and 15 immigration experts, observations in the migrant Indian communities and archival data, I argue that the visa regimes governs more than just mobility of the transnational subject. Visa policies reconfigure identities and notions of the self for visa holders and impose constraints on relationships, family, belonging and migration. The visas shape family structures and familial relationship for high-tech workers by reinforcing a patriarchal family form with the man as the breadwinner and the woman as the homemaker. This benefits the private sector labor market at the cost of the well-being of migrant families. Furthermore, when women are the breadwinners, my analysis shows the power of gender as a structure as men try and reclaim power by overt expressions of masculinity and women concede to the patriarchal arrangement by performing subordinate femininities. These findings show how the apparently gender-neutral visa policies of United States take on heavily gendered meanings when translated into everyday interactions in families bound by such policies. By identifying the multi-layered gendered and racialized hidden underpinnings of visa laws, I empirically show that visa structures of the state create a web of dependence for migrant subjects.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It was 1997. My cousin Trina had been recently married and was leaving for the United States on what she called a “dependent visa.” It was the first time I heard of a dependent visa. I was a college student in India. Trina was a smart, dynamic young woman who had grown up in Bangalore, India’s technological capital. She had an MBA from one of India’s top universities and was working as a consultant in a large multinational firm in Mumbai. She met her future husband on one of her business projects. He worked in a large Indian IT company, which was also a “body shopping agency,” which meant that his company exported Indian IT workers to other parts of the world (Xiang 2011). He received a promotion four months after their marriage, which came with better pay; but, it also meant he would have to work for a U.S. firm for three to six years. He left for America and soon thereafter my cousin followed.

The decision to move to the U.S. wasn’t easy. She was trading a prestigious job in a bustling Indian city to be with her husband in rural Washington; but, her friends and family had convinced her that with her qualifications she would not have to worry about finding something appropriate as soon as she landed in “America, the land of opportunities.” She knew that her visa prohibited her from obtaining legal paid employment; but, she was not completely aware of the difficulties that finding a job that would convert her visa would entail.

When she decided to move to the U.S., her husband’s company endorsed her application for a dependent visa and paid the visa fees and travel expenses. She left
India with mixed emotions, excitement, and trepidation. She was determined to make something of her life in the United States. Unfortunately, as the years passed, her hope and determination began to deteriorate. She shared with me her sense of loss, her decline in self-worth, and that she had become severely depressed. She described her situation as “the effacement and invisibility of the person” that she was. Six years after first migrating to the U.S., she returned to India with a two-year-old daughter. She remained chronically depressed, having gone through a difficult divorce. I will never forget her words: “Never go to that country on someone else’s visa. Only go if you have your visa, or you will become a basket case like me.”

When I asked my cousin for her permission to share her story in my project, she said:

Let me know if the women you talk to feel as helpless as I did, or if it was just me. It was so hard to express why I was so unhappy. I did not have a bad husband or life or anything. I just couldn’t take being no one and nothing beyond being the spouse of so-and-so and, in my unhappiness, I made him miserable. It was a train wreck and clearly the trauma has not left me yet. I just want to find out if it was just me.

She now lives with her daughter in Bangalore, works in a bank as a financial analyst, and still blames her broken marriage on the U.S. government.¹

The technology boom of the 1990s and the Immigration Act of 1990 (IMMART 1990) introduced the distinctive category of non-immigrant H-1B and other H visas. This opened the floodgates for a migration of skilled high-tech (computer engineers and programmers) workers to the U.S. from all over the world. Indian and Chinese workers were the top recipients of H-1B visa (Jachimowicz et al. 2002). According to a Migration Policy Institute report on temporary skilled

¹ I obtained consent from my cousin to share her story in this project.
workers (Jachimowicz et al. 2002), almost half of the H-1B petitions approved in 2000 were granted to Indian applicants. Immigration reforms in 1990 made it possible for skilled workers to bring their spouses and children on what was called the dependent visa.

Since 1990, there has been a steady flow of Indian high-tech workers into the United States. Men, by and large, have dominated the migration. The migration of skilled high-tech workers from India has become a part of the public discourse (Brader et al. 2008, Jachimowicz et al. 2002, Smith 2011, Surowiecki, 2012). What has garnered less attention is the migration of Indian women who have been migrating to the U.S. on immigrant visas as a result of nursing shortages in the U.S. (George 2005). These women also became recipients of the non-immigrant H visa system and have been arriving in the U.S. on H1-B and H1-C visas.

The professional men and women workers subsequently bring their spouses and children to the United States on dependent visas, or the H-4 visa. According to 2011 U.S. Department of Homeland Security statistics, a total of 138,431 Indians were in the U.S. on H1-B visas and a total of 55,335 Indians were on H-4 visas. A total of 57,371 H1-B visas were issued to Indian workers in 2010, 25% of the total number of work visas issued for the year.

The “dependent visa” puts many restrictions on the spouses of skilled workers. It disallows dependent visa holders to work for pay until the lead migrant

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2 “The H-1B Non-Immigrant Work Visa may be issued to applicants seeking temporary work in a “Specialty Occupation” which requires the skills of a professional. “Specialty Occupations” include: accounting, computer analysts, programmers, database administrators, web designers, engineers, financial analysts, doctors, scientists, architects and lawyers. H1-B/H-1C are issued to foreign nurse going to the U.S. to perform nursing services in medically underserved areas for a temporary period up to three years, extendable to six years. (http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/nivhlo.html)

has gained permanent residency in the U.S., a process which can take anywhere between five and fifteen years. While studies indicate that women and children are the majority of H-4 dependent visa holders (Copeland & Norell, 2002; De Verthelyi, 1995, Hardill & MacDonald, 1998; Kim 2006; Meares 2010), the migration of nurses as the lead migrant suggests that some husbands are also migrating to the U.S. as dependents. Very little research has examined how these immigration laws and visa policies affect migrant families and individual visa holders. There is absolutely no research comparing male-led migration in the case of high-tech workers with female-led migration in the case of nurses.

As an Indian immigrant woman in the United States with close associations with individuals and families who are immigrants and have different visa statuses, my dissertation is inspired by my personal investment in understanding how immigration and visa laws affect immigrant families. My research is also spurred by an intellectual urge to explore if and how gendered patterns of migration further complicate these experiences. My dissertation is a comparative exploratory study of the experiences of Indian professional migrant families that are male-led (high-tech workers) and female-led (nurses). Specifically, I focus on how such gendered migration influences the individual and family experiences with immigration and visa laws and the ways in which this impacts their everyday lives.

**Theoretical Framing of the Study**

In this dissertation, I study global labor migration and its consequences for families. I build on four bodies of literature to frame my project: a) governmentality, state power and visa regimes; b) globalization and gender; c) gender structure; d)
gender and race regimes, particularly focused on Asian American immigration. In order to understand the consequences of what political scientists have termed as “visa regimes” (Salter 2004, 2006, Hollifield 2004, Koslowski 2012) in organizing the lives of families of professional migrants, I use Foucault’s (1984) concept of governmentality to analyze visas as structures of governmental power that have consequences for people’s intimate lives. Foucault argues that governmentality is the tactic used by government and its agencies that allows for the “the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private” (p. 221). I use this concept to analyze the migrant individual’s interactions with the power of visa laws.

Foucault provides the lens to understand the mechanism of state power in the form of visa laws. I review the literature on gender and globalization to illustrate how the global migration of labor hinges on gendered migration of labor from the global south to the north. I also illustrate how paid and unpaid domestic work and carework done by women is instrumental in sustaining the global market (Acker, 2004; Desai 2007; Glenn 210; Guevarra, 2011; Hoschchild, 2001; Mohanty, 2009; Ngai, 2004; Ong, 1999; Parreñas, 2001; Rodriguez, 2010; Sassen 1996, 2003, 2008). The feminist critique of globalization suggests that globalization has created structures to marginalize women of color and sometimes men of color in global markets. To analyze how state power influences gendered subjectivities in transnational families in the context of globalization, I place Risman’s (1998) gender structure theory in conversation with gender and race regime theory (Mohanty 2003). Risman argues that gender should be analyzed as a dialectical relationship
between the individual level (self), interactional level (social and cultural expectations and performances of gender), and institutional level (organizations as gendered). I use this framework to analyze how visa laws at the institutional level of the state affect gendered selves and interactions in the context of the family. To analyze the complexity of the state as a gendered and racialized institution, I use Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s (2003) conceptual categories of gender and racial regimes. Mohanty contends that the "construction of immigration and laws" are gendered, (hetero)sexualized, and racialized as state practices that include immigration laws are anchored in globalized “multinational capitalism” (p. 67). This is a particularly useful framework to analyze the mechanisms of immigration laws and their consequences for migrant subjectivities, particularly in relation to dependent visas that support patriarchal family forms. I combine gender structure theory with gender and racial regimes to analyze how gender and race operate in transnational labor migration.

**Methods**

This study is based on extensive qualitative methods that include in-depth interviews, ethnography and archival research. My goal is to understand how visa policies of the United States affect migrating individuals and families. I entered the field in the summer of 2009 and collected data until the summer of 2011. My fieldwork primarily involved conducting ethnography in communities of Indian professionals in the Chicago area, as well as conducting in-depth interviews. I studied two very distinct communities. The first were Indian high-tech migrant

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4 See chapter 2 for details.
workers, with a male wage earner and lead migrants. The second community was Indian nurses, with female wage earners and lead migrants.

I conducted life-course interviews with couples exploring their lives prior to migration, their experiences with the migration process, their understanding of their own visas and their description of and satisfaction with everyday lives after migration. Each of the spouses was interviewed separately followed by joint interviews. A total of 45 couples (N=90) were interviewed: 20 high-tech workers and their wives and 25 nurses and their husbands. I also interviewed 10 immigration experts (e.g. lawyers, activists, and policy makers) to understand their views on visa policies and on the immigration of high-skilled workers. A total of 100 individuals were interviewed for the project. I also conducted over 300 hours of ethnographic observation at various community and public events to observe family and gender dynamics. These events and spaces ranged from religious services, to parties, to religious and cultural festivals, to potlucks, to children’s birthday parties. I also attended gender-segregated events such as high-tech workers’ amateur weekly cricket games, or church activities run solely by husbands of nurses, as well as women’s only gatherings and events, which were attended by nurses and wives of high-tech workers. In these settings, I observed families’ division of labor, discussions that men and women have about their work and family lives, and interactions among the spouses.

To gain a deeper understanding of visa (H1-B, H-4, EB-3) laws and how and why they have changed over the years, I conducted archival research. I examined congressional committee reports concerning high-skilled migration and public
debate reports from both congressional and public hearings about the passing of relevant visa laws from the 1990s to the present.

**Overview of Chapters**

This dissertation is divided into six chapters, beyond the introduction. Here, I present an overview of the chapters starting with chapter one.

In chapter one, I describe the theoretical frames used in this research, establish why and how they relate to my empirical analysis, and review the literature on Asian and Indian migration to the U.S. I use Foucault’s theory of governmentality, Risman’s (1998) gender structure theory, and Mohanty’s (2003) gender and race regimes theory to frame my research. I review the literature that suggests that immigration has been and is a gendered and racialized process (Baldoz 2004, Guevarra 2010, Lowe 1996, Mohanty 2003; Purkayastha 2002). I review the literature that shows how transnational labor migration has been part of the gender regime that constructs women from the global south as universal dependents and Asians as “ideal workers” and “model minorities.” I then survey the literature on Indian labor migration to the U.S. with a focus on Indian high-tech workers and nurses in the United States (Banerjee 2006, Chakravartty 2005, George 2005, Radhakrishnan 2011, Xiang 2011). This literature shows that gender and race have been the central organizing factors of the labor migration process.

In chapter two, I present my methodological techniques: ethnography, in-depth interviews, and archival research. I explain the process of building rapport and gaining access to my communities. I describe my recruitment and sampling of participants and provide a detailed description of my sample. Chapter two ends
with a discussion of my perspectival standpoint. I focus on my social location as a middle-class, educated Indian woman in the U.S. who experienced being on dependent visa for a short period of time. I explain how sharing an “insider” status with some of my participants, especially the women, provided me both access and a nuanced understanding of the experiences of my women participants. At the same time, my gender acted as a challenge and made me an “outsider” when connecting with my male participants. My religious and regional background of being a non-Christian, non-Malayalee speaking north Indian made me an “outsider” to the community of nurses. In this research, I often found myself delicately negotiating multiple statuses in relation to my participants.

In chapter three, I describe the forces in India that lead to out migration of high-tech workers and nurses. I describe the processes of the recruitment of IT workers (the majority of my high-tech participants are IT workers) by U.S. companies and the procedures they go through to procure H1-B visas. I then describe the process they use to procure an H-4 dependent visa for their spouses. I also define and describe legal entailments of each of visas my participants hold. Finally, I describe the recruitment and visa procuring experiences that the nurses and their husbands undergo. This chapter provides a background for the analytical chapters that follow.

In chapter four, I address how the many social actors in my study negotiate their visa statuses with particular attention to the category of “dependent visas.” The social actors in question are the spouses who are on dependent visas, their partners, the main “skilled-worker” migrant and immigration experts. Given the
centrality of visas in the lives of my participants, I focus on the nuances of
dependent and work visa law and the consequences for migrant families. I pay
particular attention to the impact of dependent “H-4 visas” on women and men who
hold them and the dominant understandings of these visas in the public discourse. I
find that visa regulations govern every aspect of my participants’ lived experience.
Dependent visa laws reconfigure identities and notions of the self for those who
hold them. Further, they shape the visa holder’s interactions in the public sphere
and alter family structures and familial relationships. This chapter uncovers the
complex contradictions that visa policy creates for the migrant subjects,
problematizing the scope of dependency in their lives.

In chapter five, I use gender structure theory (Risman 1998) to analyze how
institutional legal factors such as state policies reshape and alter gendered behavior
of individuals and among couples at interactional level. In families where men are
the main breadwinners, traditional gendered patterns are intact, as women perform
gendered femininities even as they resist state-imposed housewifery status. The
women are forced to change their identities from being professionals to wives as the
visas impose gender traditional norms on them. In families where women are the
breadwinners and men are dependents, the gender-neutral state policy does not
alter the traditional gendered division of labor except in the context of childcare. I
find that dependent men take on responsibility for childcare. The type of gendered
interaction varies by class and regional backgrounds of the migrant families, but the
expectations of household work remain largely gendered.
In the concluding chapter, or chapter six, I highlight the unintended negative consequences of visa policies for the migrating individuals and challenge the popular belief that skilled workers and their families have positive in the United States. I show how immigration policies constrict the lives of labor migrants. Finally, I outline the policy implications of my research and suggest ways in which the policies that govern migration of skilled labor can be reformed to make them more effective.

In summary, this dissertation privileges the voices of immigrant women and men with dependent visa status. Past research on visa regimes and policies have ignored these voices. I contend that visas, particularly the family/dependent visas (H-4 visa) that accompany the skilled worker’s visas (H1-B/EB-3), control the lives and behaviors of migrant workers and families. Visa policies reconfigure identities and notions of the self for visa holders and impose constraints on relationships, family, belonging, and migration. The visas shape family structures and familial relationship for high-tech workers by reinforcing a patriarchal family form with the man as the breadwinner and the woman as the homemaker. This benefits the private sector labor market at the cost of the well-being of migrant families. Furthermore, when women are the breadwinners, my analysis shows the power of gender as a structure as men try and reclaim power by overt expressions of masculinity and women concede to the patriarchal arrangement by performing subordinate femininities. These findings show how the apparently gender-neutral visa policies of United States take on heavily gendered meanings when translated into everyday interactions in families bound by such policies. By identifying the
multi-layered gendered and racialized hidden underpinnings of visa laws, I empirically show that visa structures of the state create a web of dependence for migrant subjects.
Chapter 2

Review of the Literature: Theory and Research on Transnational Labor Migration

“We asked for workers. We got people instead.”
---Max Frisch on immigration, Swiss literary writer.

My goal in this project is to critically examine the day-to-day effects of visa policies of the United States government on men and women in migrant Indian professional families. In the public imagination, visas are understood as inconvenient but necessary bureaucratic paperwork for traveling across international borders. Sociologists have largely ignored the analysis of visas as a construct. The broader social science literature, particularly political science, has traditionally viewed visas as technologies used by nation-states to secure their borders by allocating rights and restraints on internationally mobile bodies (Salter 2004, 2006, Hollifield 2004, Koslowski 2012). This body of research on visas concerns itself with the geopolitical context of visas and analyzes it at the macro level as they pertain to nation-states.

In my project, I veer away from this macro-level analysis of visas to use a sociological framework to explore the real, everyday consequences that visas have in organizing the lives of families of professional migrants. I use Foucault’s (1984) concept of governmentality to analyze visas as structures of governmental power that have consequences on people’s intimate lives. I privilege the voices of immigrant women and men on visa statuses as a response to past research on visa

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5 As gathered from conversation regarding the understanding of visas with my participants, friends, families and laypersons. I usually would ask people about what visas meant to them.
policies that has ignored these voices. In taking this approach towards understanding visas, I contend that visas, particularly family/dependent visas (H-4 visa) that accompany the skilled worker’s visas (H1-B/EB-3) operate as structural tools that the state uses to control the lives and desires of migrant workers and families.

To make this argument, I use four bodies of literature: a) governmentality, state power and visa regimes; b) globalization and gender; c) gender structure, gender and race regimes; d) Asian American immigration particularly in the context of Asian Americans and Asian-Indians. I build on these bodies of literature to argue that “governmentality” is a useful concept to understand the mechanisms of the visa regime. I argue that the framework of gender structure and gender regimes further problematizes the understandings of visa policies and exposes the invisible web of dependence that immigrant families struggle and negotiate with. I unite the poststructuralist understanding of state power (as understood through governmentality and visa regimes) (Foucault 1984, Salter 2004, 2006) and a transnational feminist framework of global migration (Glenn 2002, 2010, Guevarra 2010, Mohanty 2003, Parrenas 2001) to study global labor migration and its consequences for families. This chapter, therefore, presents a review of the theoretical literature used in this dissertation.

I begin with the section on governmentality and connect it with the literature on visas and visas regimes. Second, I present theories of gender and globalization and argue that to understand professional workers’ migration from the global south to the north we need to reframe governmentality and visa regimes as gendered and
racialized concepts. Third, I discuss the theories that help me analyze immigration policies as gendered and racialized process, using specifically the lens of gender structure and gender and race regimes. Fourth, I present the literature on racialization and gendering of Asian Americans, with a focus on the Asian India migration. In this final section, I also review the literature on migration of Indian nurses and Indian high-tech workers to the U.S. An important caveat is that given the limited literature on Asian-Indian families, the impact of technologies of migrations like the visa structures and unpaid labor in Asian Indian families, I depend heavily on the literature on immigration, families and gender to argue my case.

**Governmentality, State Power and Visa Regimes**

The structure that regulates the rights and access to resources as a “foreign national” or “resident alien” (as described by Immigration and Naturalization Services) for my participants is the powerful force of the visa status. Sociologists have rarely critically examined “visa statuses” as a structural force that co-constitutively constrains and affects material conditions of migrant workers and their families in the West. In my search for such scholarship, I have found no sociological studies that engage with the question of power and inequalities in day-to-day lives engendered by what some political theorists have called “visa regimes”. A few political theorist such as Salter (2004, 2006), Hollifield (2004) and (Koslowski 2004) have critiqued the technologies of international mobility as “global mobility regimes of passports, visas” (Salter 2004 p. 169) that organizes an international population within a paradoxical framework, one in which mobile bodies understand
themselves to be free and international and yet are controlled and constrained by the biopolitics of surveillance, documentation, biometrics and confessional imperatives (Derrida 2000, Kalm 2005, Salter 2006). Political scientists however have not studied how visas as tools of state control affect the everyday social lives of individuals involved. Foucault’s (1984) concept of governmentality contends that technologies of power used by the state ensnare the self to exercise control over their subjectivities. I use Foucault's theory of governmentality to understand how visas work as mechanism of power over the lives of the individuals and families I study.

In his lectures on the genealogy of governmental power and the problematics of the government, Foucault (1984) introduced the concept of governmentality. He defines governmentality as:

...the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population as its principal form of knowledge political economy and, as it's essential technical means apparatus of security (p 219).

In other words, governmentality is the way in which the state justifies and hence enforces its apparatus of disciplinary power through an institutionalized ideology that is directed at citizens or subjects of the state. The “mentality” aspect of governmentality lies in state subjects’ adopting this ideology to discipline the self and others according to the mentality of the state. Foucault further argues governmentality involves tactics used by government and its agencies that allows for the “the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private” (p. 221). This ability to
redefine (extend and shrink) the jurisdiction of the state power into the public and the private realm is dependent on a range of techniques developed by the state that systematically and pragmatically guide and regulate everyday actions and the material lives of private individuals (Ong 2006 p. xvi.). Foucault calls this the “technology of the domination” characterized by systematized, stabilized and regulated power relations where the subordinated persons have little or no room for maneuvering the relationship given that their “margin of liberty is extremely limited” (Lazzarato 2000, Lekme 2007 p. 219). However, Foucault argues that the techniques of domination in isolation cannot be the primary source of exercising power. The form of domination needs to be coupled with the “technique of the self” (1979) where the individuals are not coerced into doing what the government enforces but the self is constructed and disciplined optimally to frame their social and cognitive behaviors through consensus and dominant political and economic ideologies. The intersecting power relationship between techniques of the self and techniques of domination is what Foucault calls govern-mentality (Foucault 1993, 204).

The relationship between “techniques of the self and techniques of domination” are interlinked such that “techniques of domination” take recourse to processes by which individuals use control on one another and over oneself through surveillance and consensus. “Techniques of the self” become enforceable where they are integrated into the structure of coercion and punishment (Lekme 2006). This raises questions for individual freedom given that the ideology of the modern form
of democratic capitalist government hinges on the ideology of choice of the individual (Harvey 2007).

Burchell et al. (1991), Lekme (2002), Larner (2000) and Rose and Miller (2010) argue that the concept of governmentality presents framework to understand global capitalism as an expansion of economy in politics and vice versa. Foucault’s discussion of governmentality in the context of modern democratic government forms, according to political theorists like Lekme (2002), Larner (2000), and Rose (2010), foreshadows the analysis of governmentality in the context of globalization because it sets up a critical lens to understand how structural mandates translate into matters of individual choice and familial concern. Labor migration, particularly migration of professional families, presents a rich case to understand how governmentality works in this context. Visas as technologies of power severely regulate the rights and freedom of foreign nationals and their families but because these are the terms for migration, the oppressive structures of visa power that they create become unquestionable and normalized.

Political theorists provide insightful critique of the visa structure and how this structure constructs the “internationally mobile self” and disciplines it. However the “visa regimes” theory does not explicitly engage with the co-constitutive effects of the visa structure on the day-to-day lives and material realities of those living on these visas. The very nature of “visa technologies” creates conditions for differential treatment and mechanisms for control of an internationally mobile population. The word visa is derived from the French visé, which means, “having been seen” (Salter 2006). Visa as a technique of state
domination that regulates visitation and mobility of populations refers to "(1) the authorization given by a consul to enter or to pass through a country, and (2) the stamp placed on the passport when the holder entered or left a foreign country" (Salter 2006).

In contemporary times visa also refers to “the prescreening of travelers and represents a prima facie case for admission” (Salter 2006). The discriminatory structure of visa technology is compounded by the fact that visa policies and laws categorize the internationally mobile population as temporary bodies such as students, workers (high-skilled or low-skilled6), permanent and temporary migrants, dependents, refugees and tourists. Visas have a term and expiration. Visa tenures can last from one to more than twenty years. Visa statuses thus construct visa holders as temporal subjects in the host country. Two questions are important here: a) How temporary nature of visas shapes the public discourse? b) How visa holders grapple with the subjectivity of being temporary residents perhaps with aspirations of permanency and how its shapes their expectations from the host society or their aspirations as migrants has largely been absent in the social scientific literature.

I use the concept of governmentality to reanalyze the concept of visa regimes as presented by political theorists and label it “visa based governmentality”. My research analyzes how “techniques of visa structure” co-constructs the material realities of people who experience them. I further problematize this by inquiring

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6 The distinction of the high skilled and low skilled is the legal language used in the U.S. immigration fundamental (United States Immigration Fundamentals 10/10). These distinctions are problematic because of how skill is defined. However this discussion is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I intend to explore this in a journal article with more research on the topic.
how this structure is gendered and racialized. I challenge the gender-neutral reading of governmentality and visa regimes through my empirical explorations in the subsequent chapters. One of the key critiques of governmentality has been the lack of agency on the part of subjects when negotiating state power (Bevir 1999, McKee 2009, Rose et al., 2006). My research shows that individual agency can challenge the terms of visa-based governmentality. There is no in-depth research on the effects of visa policies, particularly the dependent visa policy – a policy that presents a complex story of governmentality mediated through the façade of individual choice and traditional family relations. I argue that the lack of research on effect of visa policies on people’s lives is a significant gap in the literature. I seek to fill this gap by presenting an analysis of immigrant subjectivities in relation to their immigration statuses in the context of transnational global migration of labor. A sociological understanding of the dialectics between “visa structures” and immigrant subjectivities and material realities will make for better policy. Through the study of the category of “dependent visas and the “skilled workers visas”, I explore how the temporality of the visa status regulates the subjectivities and behaviors of the visa holder as a temporary migrant, as an employer, as an internationally mobile body, as a spouse, as a parent, a minority and as an Asian-Indian migrant in the United States.

**Globalization and Gendered Migrations**

Immigration is a key mechanism of globalization. Some theorists associate globalization as facilitating uninterrupted flow of global capital, which includes labor, across geographical, political, and economic boundaries (Castells 1996, 1997; 1998).
Critical social theorists have critiqued globalization because it has intensified the negative aspects of global capitalism. They argue that migration becomes a tool that the global north uses to import labor from the global south to serve the profit goals of the northern elite in the global capitalist market (Eisenstein, 2005; Kellener 2001, Mohanty 2009, Ngai 2004; Ong 1999; Parreñas 2001; Guevarra 2010, Rodriguez 2010, Sassen 1998, 2008).

Kellner (2002), critiques this reading of globalization and argues for the problematization of globalization so that the contradictions and abstract ambiguities of globalization are brought to the forefront. He argues that this can be achieved by critically reviewing the ways that globalization is imposed from above by capitalist corporate structures and capitalist states and contested and reconfigured from below by individuals and groups negatively affected by globalization. He therefore argues for a critical theory of globalization that lays bare the contradictions and ambiguities of globalization highlighting the conflicts, struggles and crises that globalization fosters by its push for dismantling the welfare state and promoting privatization of the public sphere. Kellner points out that globalization also offers new technologies for the capital growth that individuals can also use for resistance. He urges scholars to theorize globalization as a process that is highly complex, and contradictory—run by powerful and undefined sets of social relations and institutions as well as marked by “flow of goods, services, ideas, technologies, cultural forms and people” (p. 3).

Feminist and postcolonial theorists further critiqued globalization by exposing its gendered and racialized aspects. Mohanty (2003) argues that in the
context of globalization, gender and race have taken new significance with the massive incorporation of “third world women” into a cheap labor force in the global markets and factories. Scholars such as Sassen (1998), Ong (1998, 2006), Parreñas (2001), Rodriguez (2010), Guevarra (2006, 2010) among others, have presented a feminist and anti-racist critique of globalization as a process that has largely exploited women’s labor and supported growing inequities in economies and families transnationally. These studies on globalization have focused on how low-paying jobs in the global economy have been feminized causing disproportionate transnational labor migration of women to fill these jobs. There has been a shift from a Catellian view of globalization towards viewing immigration and globalization through a critical feminist lens (Acker, 2004, Banerjee, 2006; Chakravartty, 2006; Desai, 2007; Guevarra, 2006, 2010; Mohanty, 2003, Parreñas, 2001; Purkayastha, 2004; Sassen, 1998).

Sassen (2003) argues that the master image of globalization in the media and policy circles have been about the “hypermobility, communication, the neutralization of place and distance and the highly educated, human-capital-intensive worker” (p.45). This discourse and image privilege the non-human aspects of globalization such as global information sharing, global mobility, transnational corporate cultures, over material support, the workers, the immigrant labor, the feminized low-wage labor force that makes the economic structures of globalization tick. She calls these human and material resources of the shadow economy that keep the machines of globalization running “alternative global circuits” (p. 51, 55) and argues that invisible female labor exported from the global south such as nurses,
maids, sex-workers, brides are the key part of the global circuits. She urges researchers to pay attention to these “alternative global circuits” because that will help understand how gendering of the global economy allows its “formation and viability (p. 56).

In another essay, Sassen (2008), argues that globalization is a process whereby the global North’s economic and political hegemony in international financial institutions weakens the economies of the global South. This facilitates gendered and racialized migration as struggling nations use strategic emigration to sustain their economies. Women from the global South become the “cheap” migrant labor who work in low-paying jobs, such as the carework and domestic service industry, and become essential tools for the functioning of the global neoliberal economy. Women working in low-wage jobs sustain the economies of the emigrating country by sending remittances while doing “infrastructure maintencance” for households in global cities. Sassen argues that their work, even though crucial to the functioning of the global economy, is kept invisible so as to keep production costs low and to reduce their agency to organize.

Freeman (2001) in her study of Carribean women informatic workers who also double up as higglers (suit case traders), presents a feminist critique of the mainstream theories of globalization. She contends that the gender theorization in the context globalization has adopted a dichotomous model where the grand macro-level theories are masculine and the local level theories of globalization are feminine. This dichotomy extends to other facets of globalization such as consumption (masculine) and production (feminine), global spaces (masculine) and
local spaces (feminine) and formal (masculine) and informal (feminine). She explains that in the analysis of the macro-structures of globalization such as transmission of capital, goods, information or global social and economic changes are de-gendered with little or no insights into how these structures affect and are affected by different groups of people, their material circumstances and their subjectivities. She argues that “the male” is the default standard in such narratives and women and other minority experiences are invisible and absent from the analytical frame. Freeman based on her in-depth ethnography about the lives of Carribean women who are are part of the informatics industry in the global market but also double up as higglers or suitcase traders in the Carribean selling Western consumer items to local people in their trips back, challenges the dichotomous reading of globalization as a concept. She argues that these Carribean women disrupt the notion that global spaces and the formal economies are traversed by men and the masculine and local spaces and the informal are women’s realms or that the notion that “third world women” are outside globalization or just the means of production. She argues that the case of these Carribean women, challenges us not only to think beyond the dualisms of globalization but also to dismantle the gendered assumptions of these dualisms. For instance, these globally mobile women, economically straddle global and local spaces as informatics workers and higglers, tread the formal and the informal economic processes and are tools of consumption and production simultaneously. These processes of globalization therefore lose their gendered and dichotomous significance when viewed in the context of the roles of these women in the globalized world.
Other scholars of gender and globalization remind us how feminist ideas can be and have been co-opted by global economic institution to further the exploitation of women as global labor (Eisenstein, 2005; Desai, 2007). Eisenstein (2005) argues that in the United States, global capitalist organizations have used feminist treatise of women’s economic independence to channel poor women of color into the global work forces such as assembly line labor in global factories. Salzinger (2003), in her ethnographic study of maquiladora workers in Mexico, shows how such discourses, along with discourses about third world women’s natural instincts of obedience and passivity that she calls the “transnational trope of productive femininity” are used to control women workers in the factories.

The critical theories and literature on globalization and gendered migration have revolved around economically disadvantaged women of color. The effect of globalization and gendered migration on professional women and middle class women and their families have been largely missing from this analysis. The analysis is also bereft of any discussion about whether third world men appear anywhere in the “alternative global circuits” and how that might alter the perception of globalization and gender.

**Gender Structure, Gender-Race Regimes and Immigration Policies**

Gender theorists such as Lorber (1995), Martin (2004), and Risman (1998) have provided a lens to view gender as a structure/institution that organizes our social, political and economic lives. Dependent visas exemplify the migration processes as embedded in gender inequality. Risman’s (1998) integrative theory of
gender argues that in order to better analyze and possibly reduce gender inequality, one needs to conceptualize gender itself as a structure “deeply embedded in society” (Risman 1998:432). This premise is based on a dynamic dialectical process of structure shaping individuals and individual's agency shaping and reshaping structure at multiple levels of analysis – the levels or dimensions being individual (internalized gender), interactional (gendered performance in social and cultural realms) and institutional (organizational practices organized to privilege gendered distribution of resources).

Gender structure theory frames gender as “deeply embedded as a basis for stratification not just in our personalities, our cultural rules, or institutions but in all these, and in complicated ways” (Risman, 2004, 433). At the individual level, Risman argues, gendered selves are formed through socialization and internalization of the internalization of binary gender identities and the personality attributes associated with these identities (e.g., Chodorow, 1978; Bem, 1993). At the interactional level of gender structure, gender stratification is based on sex categorization (West and Zimmerman 1987) that creates culturally bound gender expectations about women and men based in status expectations, cognitive biases (Ridgeway, 2011) that in turn influences how society interacts with each sex category and how they interact with each other (e.g., Garfinkel 1967; Goffman 1959, Ridgeway and Correll 2000). And, the third or the institutional level, Risman argues perpetuates gender inequality through a variety of structural processes including organizational practices, legal regulations and distribution of organizational resources that are gender specific (e.g., Giddens, 1984, Williams, 2000, Martin, 2004).
I argue that we can learn much by analyzing visas structures as embedded in the gender structures. Visas are policy regulations at the institutional level of the social world, which organizes the everyday interactions, and possibilities of individuals who hold those visas. An empirical question remains as to whether visas are so powerful as to shape the selves and subjectivities of their holders. Another empirical question is whether acts of resistance by visa holders can or will cause the state to change or revise the visa policies?

Visa laws are racialized in addition to being gendered. They facilitate labor migration from the global south to the global north as an inherently racialized process as it creates the ‘racially other’ category of the immigrant/transnational ‘alien worker’ (Mohanty, 2003, Ong, 1999, Glenn, 2002). Glenn (2002) points out that U.S. immigration laws and citizenship criteria have historically been determined by race and gender of the migrants. Glenn argues that being male (gender), white (race), and being productive in the paid labor force defines full U.S. citizenship and has excluded those who did not meet those criteria, at different historical moments. These criteria relegate my participants on dependent visas to a second-class citizenship status, as they are not considered as productive (employed in the public sphere and working for pay) part of the labor force. Further, the visa policies that facilitate family migration are based on a gendered and racialized assumption that families in the global south almost always have a patriarchal structure with women as dependents and men as providers (Mohanty 2003).

Mohanty (2003) argues that nation states are gendered and racialized regimes in the ways that state power disciplines subjectivities of women from the
global south. She argues that Euro-American States are masculine, racialized and
capitalist systems that organize power relations by regulating gender and sexual
relations through instituting immigration, fiscal and nationality policies that control
the family, the provision of child care, the population, the labor force, housing and
gendered and sexual behaviors and expressions. She contends that:

the fact that notions of sexuality (morality of women), gender (familial
configurations), and race (“Oriental”) are implicitly written into these laws
indicates the reason why this particular aspect of the contemporary state is a
crucial context for Third World women’s feminist struggles, and provides a
method of feminist analysis that is located at the intersections of systemic
gender, race, class and sexual paradigms as they are regulated by the liberal

She further contends that in western political and academic discourse, “third-world
women” are constructed as a monolithic universal dependent category. Mohanty
uses textual analysis to demonstrate the production of a particular cultural
discourse in western literary and often feminist texts about the “third world
women” by “colonizing the material experiences and historical heterogeneities of
the lives of women”. Implicit in this cultural discourse is the assumption that
women are an “already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and
desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, implies a notion of gender or
sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-
culturally” (p. 55).

Mohanty builds her concept of gendered and racial regimes as a criticism to
Connell’s (1987, 2002) theory of gender regime. Connell argues that gender is
institutionalized within the family, state and street such that “the patterning of
gender relations in these institution...provides the structural context of particular
relationships and individual practices” (Connell 2002: 53-68). Connell purports that within the family, relationships are gendered and heterosexualized in its power structures and divisions of labor; within the state control, authority, force and violence are organized along gender lines such that state become a hegemonically masculinist institution of power that organizes production and consumption, including the gendering of work and occupations and privileging paid work over domestic work. Connell argues that gender identities on the street are defined through culture and symbolism such as language, actions beliefs and attitudes.

Mohanty (2003) argues that Connell’s analysis of the state as gender-regimes is only partial (p.68) because she does not account for racial formations within the state.

I use both gender structure as an organizing theoretical tool and Mohanty’s concept of gender and racial regimes as complementary because the former aids my analysis of gender in the transnational process at the individual and interactional levels. Mohanty’s concept of states in the global north as gendered and racialized regimes informs my analysis of immigration laws and the transnational process of labor and family migration as a dynamic mechanism of an institution – the institution that is the state.

I find Mohanty’s discussion of the “third world women” as “universal dependent” particularly useful in framing my research. The category of the ‘dependent visa’ is a function of a globalized gender and racial structure that defines “third world” women as a dependent category, such that institutionalization of their ‘dependence’ through the visa law almost appears invisible and normalized. Paradoxically, however, the women in my study are highly qualified women,
educated in a Western education system, most working in high-paying jobs, and leading an independent life prior to migration on family reunification. The second category of women, the Indian nurses, who migrate on work visas as the main migrant and breadwinner, also challenge the discourse of dependence around third world women of color. Despite this assumption in the creation of the visa regime, an outcome of this policy is the category of “dependent men,” refuting the notion of third world woman as a monolithic dependent category. And yet, despite the perceived gender-neutrality of the visa laws, only a few men use dependent visas for migration. According to the U.S. Department of Labor statistics, the majority of those who come to the U.S. on these visas are women. Dependent visas are also given to dependent children – the official language being “visa for dependent spouse and children,” which resonates with the sexist political tendency of lumping women with children. I argue that the category H-4 visa is a system derived from the ideal of a patriarchal family structure that privileges an underlying premise of the gendered division of labor.

Several empirical studies have shown how immigration and emigration policies of the state operate as gendered and racialized regimes. Espiritu (1997) illustrates how gendered and racialized cultural images of Asian American men and women shape their material circumstances in the U.S. She analyzes the gendered images—“controlling images”—of Asian men and women in the U.S. media and public consciousness. These images have not only negatively impacted Asian American women’s pursuit for gender equality in the larger society and within their households but have also caused immigrant Asian men to suffer social and economic
losses in their transition to life in the U.S. She analyzes how, through the course of history of Asian migration, Asian Americans were gendered differently in order to suit the needs of American capitalism and imperialism.

Purkayastha (2002, 2005) presents a critique of the U.S. immigration policy for creating conditions of gender inequality. She argues that the immigration laws and their enforcement exhibit a gender bias. Purkayastha points out that, “According to the U.S. Department of Labor, “highly skilled” in the 1960s and 1970s referred to people with medical, engineering, science/research and informational technology training.” (2005: 186). China and India became main senders of white collar, “highly skilled” workforce to supplement the shortage of such workers experiences by the U.S. since the mid 1980s, especially after the Immigration Reform Act of 1990 (Bonacich, 1994; Fong, 1998). The disciplines categorized as “highly skilled” are largely male-dominated and hence the migrating population of workers to fill the highly skilled jobs was primarily men (Kanjanappan 1995). Purkayastha contends that the spouses of the highly skilled workers who were often themselves highly educated are “rarely classified as highly skilled” and were relegated to the undifferentiated category of “wife” (Purkayastha 2005:186) – a category that devalued her professional skills. Based on interviews with 25 highly qualified Indian women who came to the U.S. on dependent visas and later either re-entered the labor force, Purkayastha (2005) examines the experiences of these highly educated who migrated to the U.S. under family reunification clauses. The interviews were done in addition to quantitative data from a national study on occupation and earnings of Asian Indian women. She finds that most of the women
who come to the U.S. as dependent’s find it hard to rejoin the labor force even when they become permanent residents. They experience loss of professional networks and devaluation of credentials from unemployment and when they secure employment, they experience glass ceilings. Many women also fail to gain employment according to their qualification and hence do not go back to the labor market. Their primary identity becomes that of a wife or a highly educated but not highly skilled foreign woman. There has been very few research that has looked at how male-initiated migration affects gender and relational dynamics within the household.

In a similar study based on a group of Indian women from a particular region in India, Manohar (2009), examines the “migration and settlement of Tamil (an Indian regional group) professional women in Atlanta” (p. 2). Based on ethnographic and interview data with 33 Tamil migrant professional women Manohar explores how they negotiate their gender in the migration and settlement process and their identities of being upper caste/class women in India with their work-family circumstances upon migration. Manohar argues that the Tamil women’s migration is heavily structured by their social location in India of being upper class/caste women in a patriarchal family structure. The women have to reconfigure their “Tamil femininity” (p. 55) to bargain with their parents and spouses to be able to migrate as professionals in pursuit of a better life for themselves and their families. And yet after they migrate, the women assume what Manohar calls “integrated femininity” of being a professional, wife and a mother, performing each in various degrees of intensity at various stages of their immigrant
lives. Manohar shows that this integrated femininity is marked by increased involvement of husband in household labor, though not always equal and egalitarian decision making within the household. The women retain responsibilities for cooking and cultural labor such as ethnic socializing involving children. The women claimed that this gendered and unpaid household labor maintained their Indian identity as a family and was a resistance against culturally transforming into a White middle class American family. Manohar thus shows that much of the gendered work in the household was voluntarily adopted by the women, not forced on them. This defies the popular notion that women from the “third world” are an oppressed group with little or no agency in patriarchal family settings.

Many recent studies on Filipino migration has shown different dimensions of the gendered and racialized emigration and immigration processes. In her book, Rodriguez (2010), *Migrants for Export* turns the lens to the global south and shows the ways in which the nation-states in the global south such as Philippines are an integral part of the neoliberal system of globalization. The states in the global south facilitate outmigration of their labor force for the markets in the global north. She argues that Philippines has emerged as the largest exporter of human labor because the state through its labor brokerage system actively engages in the emigration process especially of women. Rodriguez shows how a racialized and gendered discourse of obedient, passive, loyal, domestic, family oriented, motherly and hardworking labor force has been touted to create and sustain the global market for filipino labor force.
In her book, *Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes*, Guevarra’s (2010), also contends that the Philippines, as a producer of an ideal gendered labor force for export, has become a powerful player in the global market. Through extensive ethnographic work and interviews with migrant workers (mostly Filipina nurses), labor brokerage agencies and government agencies, Guevarra argues that the state of Philipinnes has built an ideological discourse and infrastructural system to train and discipline Filipina workers to be ideal workers at home and overseas. Guevarra argues that the hegemonic narrative of the heroic or “the great Filipino” worker is so carefully built that the individual workers internalize the narrative and seamlessly reproduce it. The pervasiveness of the discourse of “labor export success” as the loyal, caring and nurturing female careworker mutes any expression of fear, frustration, alienation, ambivalence, guilt and loneliness that Filipina workers feel as migrant workers. And yet with more time spent as a woman migrant worker the invocations of the “great filipino worker” fades and what remains are the contradictory emotions of alienation, loneliness and guilt along with with the desire and aspirations and of better life for themselves for them and their migrant and home families.

In an earlier study of Filipina health care workers/nurses in San Diego, Espiritu (2003) finds that female-first migration has important ramifications for family and home making. Drawing from in-depth interviews of Filipino Americans in San Diego, Espiritu examines how a female-first migration stream affects traditional gender patterns. When women migrate first, they provide the legal and economic status to the family. A positive outcome of such migration may be that, responding
to the migration-related challenges, both husbands and wives become more interdependent and equal as they are forced to rely on each other and on the family for economic security and emotional support. However, the men who immigrate as their wives’ dependents experience downward occupational mobility in the United States. The interview data shows this status reversal does not lead to creation of egalitarian household in these families. On the contrary this often leads to men’s bitterness over not meeting their cultural expectations as primary breadwinners and may lead to family dissolution (Espiritu 2003, George 2005). In an attempt to sustain the family and the home, the women often try to overcompensate thus maintaining male privilege while “wage work adds to the women’s overall workload” (Espiritu 2003:95).

Despite a strong critique of gendered and racialized migration in this literature there is little focus on how immigration/visa policies in a globalized world affect families in a stratified migration system. Particularly, the literature on the consequences of dependent visas is scarce. The limited research on “dependent visas holders” has shown the oppressive nature of the “dependent H-4 visas” for women. In an article on female H-4 dependent visa holders, Shivali Shah (2007), illustrates how the nature of the H-4 visas creates situations of domestic abuse for women in transnational households in the U.S. Manohar (2009), in her research based on interviews with Tamil immigrant women in the U.S., writes that the women who had come on “dependent visas” found their inability to work legally constraining in attaining a desired standard of living in the United States. Based on 11 in-depth interviews with wives of Korean international students (KIS) in the U.S.
who are on student dependent visas (F-2), Kim (2006) argues that they are forced to do unpaid carework and are relegated to housewifery positions reproducing “gender unequal relations” (p. 163). The women are considered subordinate in the family, yet important for their husband’s professional success. Kim critiques the restrictive immigration law of F-2 visas on grounds that it legitimates a deep-rooted patriarchal ideology within the family and substantively reduces the citizenship status of the student wives so their own career ambitions are deprioritized for the sake of their husbands.

All of the research on dependent visas is based on small, limited samples and none attempt to analyze how immigration laws as a form of state power manufacture multifaceted dependence in immigrant families. The dependent visa is unique because it shows very specific ways in which global migration of labor and families are gendered and racialized. I build on the literature on gender and immigration to study how “visa techniques” as an institutional form of domination, shape the lived experiences of transnational populations from the global south. I analyze the dominant public discourses on dependent visas and the actual lived experiences of those whose lives are affected by the visa structure. I argue that “structures of dependence” are put in place to control and manipulate global migration of labor and the lives of their families for the benefits of a gendered and racialized global system.

**Asian Americans and Global Migration**

The current trend in migration of Asian Indians to the U.S. is continuous and growing. Both the receiving and sending States appear to be benefactors of this
process, as well as the immigrants themselves purport to want a “better life” when they decide to migrate (Jacoby 1979, Takaki 1989, Jensen 1988). However, the realities of the migration process are different for different groups. The migrating individuals from the global south are viewed by the state as a monolithic category - temporary workforce/guest work force and are legally termed as “non-resident alien” (Lowe 1996, Ngai 2004, Bhatia 2006). Lisa Lowe (1996) argues that this is emblematic of a state that has historically benefited from racializing Asian immigrant groups as the “Other” and the “foreigner”, yet at the same time burdened them with the expectation of “model minority.” For the state, immigrants serve a paradoxical function: as aliens, they help define Americanness; as workers, they meet the demand for cheap, exploitable labor. Immigrants are thus both solicited economically and ‘othered’ ideologically. The state thus simultaneously includes and excludes immigrants while producing racialized labor forces to push further its economic and political interests (Baldoz 2004, Lowe 1996, Mohanty 2003).

Lowe (1996) argues that immigrants can use their cultural resources to form local alliances and push back against exploitation. She says: “the contradictions through which immigration brings national institutions into crisis produces immigrant cultures as oppositional and contestatory, and these contradictions critically politicized in cultural forms and practices can be utilized in the formation of alternative social practices” (Lowe 1996:22). However, Lowe also warns that while hybridity, heterogeneity, and plurality can provide tools for resistance through the creation of local and transnational alliances, they are also byproducts of
globalization and can be used to promote further disenfranchisement of disadvantaged populations.

Ngai’s (2004) historical analysis of citizenship as a racialized project in the U.S. clarifies the construction of non-white immigrants as the category “other.” The 1924 Johnson Reed Act, for the first time, established numerical limits on immigration. The act assigned numerical quotas to European nationalities, disadvantaging some European citizens than others, but excluded all Asians from immigration, on grounds that they were ineligible for naturalized citizenship. This act also solidified the racial categories in the law and established a global racial and national hierarchy that favored white over non-white immigrants.

In the contemporary context of globalization, Ong (1999) argues for a theoretical understanding citizenship as “flexible citizenship” whereby globalization has given rise to a new generation of middle-class, mostly Asian migrants from the global south who are westernized and English educated, employed by multinational corporations who have a more “flexible cultural logic to citizenship.” This new class of migrant professionals reflects two kinds of flexibility: 1) they are professionally adjusted to a variety of situations and work force where technical competence is necessary, and 2) on the other side, they are culturally flexible regarding both western and Asian values. Ong calls these Asian migrants “cultural intermediaries” between the West and Asia. Ong argues that these mobile managers and technocrats have developed a kind of citizenship that is dynamic, not tied to any particular nation-state and reactive to the global market. Paradoxically, this kind of citizenship is also intensely regulated by the nation-state. This kind of flexible citizenship allows
professional Asian migrants to garner the benefits of globalization as it provides them agency to travel across the globe to increase their economic mobility and “circumvent and benefit from different nation-state regimes” (Ong 1999:112). At the same time, the concept of ‘graduated sovereignty’ a product of globalization, whereby the State is willing to allow corporate entities set the terms for regulating citizenship, makes Asian migrants a dispensable group. This has consequences, Ong argues, for different “regimes of rights, discipline, caring, and security” (Ong 1999:7).

The Indian migrant workers and their families in my study fall under this category of professionals with flexible citizenship. I study if and how, the Indian migrant tries to attain “cultural citizenship” (Ong 1996). Ong defines cultural citizenship as:

...the cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory. Cultural citizenship is a dual process of self-making and being-made within the webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society. Becoming a citizen depends on how one is constituted as a subject who exercises or submits to power relations... (Ong 1996: 738).

I explore how Indian migrant workers and their families negotiate “cultural citizenship” in the U.S. by being ‘ideal workers’ and adhering to the power structures of the state and corporations that allow them mobility but leave them vulnerable to corporate regulation of their citizenship, economic, and familial well being (Ong 2003). My research adds another layer to Ong’s idea of “flexible cultural citizenship” which she claims is available to high-tech and scientific workers, mostly from Asia, who are self-managing citizens, globally mobile and competitive in the
global markets and thus can claim cultural benefits of citizenship in any global market (Ong 2006). In my empirical research, I explore how the state, in conjunction with economic institutions influence what it means for Indian professionals to be visa-based residents and what are its consequences for their cultural citizenship. In the next sub-section, I review the on literature that examines gender and race in Asian-American migration with special attention to Asian-Indian migration.

**Review of Asian-Indian Migration with focus on families and labor force participation:**

The gendered and racialized aspect of migration is especially visible when the migration from the global south is driven by labor demands of the global north. Asian migration, particularly Indian migration in since 1965 to the global north, particularly to the U.S. has been to fill in the demands for skilled workers whether be high-tech professionals or healthcare workers (Khadaria 2002, 2007, Hawkes et al. 2009).

Most of the U.S immigration research has focused on European immigration, East Asian migration or Latin American immigration. Jacoby (1979), Takaki (1989), and Jensen (1988) however brought to light the processes of South Asian migration, particularly. Asian-Indians have been migrating to the United States since the 1820s in small numbers (Jacoby 1979). Between 1902 and 1906, over 800 Asian Indians arrived in the United States through Canada (Gonzales, 1986; Leonard, 1997). These immigrants were primarily agriculturalists without any formal education from the rural areas of the Punjab province in India, and arrived as single males or as married men who left their families behind. (Gonzales 1986). At this point, the U.S. required
cheap farm workers and the Punjabi-Indians were attracted to the employment opportunities, the high wages, the investment opportunities, and the possibility of purchasing or leasing agricultural land in the U.S. (Gonzales 1986). As the Punjabis began to move into farm ownership, there was rising anti-Indian and racist sentiment among the White Americans who called them the “tide of the turbans” (Takaki 1989). They were denied citizenship rights. At the turn of the century, the 1917 'Asiatic Barred zone' legislation worsened the situation. After World War II, migration from India and the rest of Asia was drastically curtailed. The passing of the Luce-Celler Bill in 1946 (Public Law 483), freed Asian Indians from the "Barred-Zone" immigration restrictions. The bill also gave them an immigration quota and granted them naturalization rights. As a result of these modifications in the immigration policies, a total of 6,371 Asian Indian immigrants were admitted between 1945 and 1965 (Gonzales 1986) as compared to only 800 between 1917 and 1944. This was the second phase of Indian migration.

In the third phase of immigration, post 1965, many Asian-Indians migrated to the U.S. to work in high skilled, professional jobs (Jensen 1988). Most of the migrating Indians were well-educated and well-qualified professionals. They were also more likely to have lived in urban parts of India; and arrived with the ability to speak, read, and write English (Gonzales 1986). The Immigration Act of 1965 also allowed family reunification, which facilitated the migration of Indian women and children to the U.S. Since 1965, there has been a steady flow of high-tech workers on "skilled workers visas" to the Unites States. From the early 1990s, Indians migrated to work as high-tech workers in multinational information technology firms as
computer programers. For some, the home companies in India sent them to the United States on work visas often as “body shopped labor” (Xiang 2007). Xiang (2007), claims that “body shopping” is an uniquely Indian phenomenon whereby, Indian IT professionals are recruited by a firm in India which then shops them out to international clients for a particular project for a period of time even when the firm itself is not involved with the project. Recruitment agencies play a key role in the process of body shopping as they negotiate the salaries of the workers, process their temporary visas and even arrange for their accommodation (p.4). Xiang argues that while “body shopping” has led to a flexible international labor supply and has created a highly mobile global high-tech labor force, this facilitates labor exploitation. The body shopped workers are usually low-paid as the real profit for their labor goes to their recruiting firms in India and their jobs are tedious and monotonous with “only body and no brain” (p.5). Additionally, there is no job security as they are temporary workers and the recruitment agencies can retrench them at any time at the bid of the international client.

Most “skilled workers” body shopped migrate on a temporary work visas extendable upto five to six years (Chakravarty 2006; Banerjee 2006, Manohar 2009, Radhakrishnan 2012). Many U.S. based firms apply for permanent residency for their migrant workers after three years but in most cases it takes upto 10 years for the permanent residency take effect (Sahoo et al, 2010). The body shopped workers often move to other companies before the expiration of their visa term so that they are not at the mercy of their parent company and the client (Chakravarty 2006; Banerjee 2006; Xiang 2007).
The migration of the high tech workers have mostly been a male-dominated migration flow (Poros 2001, George 2005). However, there has also been an influx of women who have come to join their husbands on the family reunification clause (Purkayastha 2005; Dicicco-Bloom 2004). In addition to the migration of the high-tech workers and their families, there has also been a migration of Indian nurses to the United States, mostly female led (George 2005). The work visas allow both the high-tech workers and the nurses to bring their legally married spouses to the United States on a dependent visa, but does not allow the spouse to work for the duration of the work visa, usually six to seven years (George 2005; Purkayastha 2002; Immigration & Nationality Act, section 101(a)(15)(H)). Such arrangement and reconfiguration of families upon migration is bound to produce complex gendered interactions within the families.

The issues of gender inequity within the household has been well documented in both the gender literature (Ferree 1990; Greenstein 1995; Hochschild 1979, 1989; Williams 2000) and immigration literature (George 2005; Moon 2003; Baluja 2003; Espiritu 2003; Min 1998; Park 1997). Hochschild (1989) introduced the concept of “second shift”, arguing that in a household with two parents working for pay, emotion work and carework is still often borne by women. Thus, women end up doing unpaid “second shift,” thereby creating gender inequality within the households. Greenstien (1996) adds to the literature by focusing on gendered ideology that sustains and reinforces gendered division of labor and gender inequity within the household.

Scholars like Bielby and Bielby (1992), Williams (2000) and Jacob and
Gerson (2004) and Acker (1998) have shown how organizational factors, such as the masculine model of the workplace, have contributed to the creation of work-family conflict. Such a model has also pushed women into shouldering more of the carework and household work as men are not eligible for paternity leaves in the U.S. (Williams 2000). However, some recent studies have also indicated gender convergence and the undoing of gender in the household. Deutsche (1999) conducts a study of households where both men and women share work equally, participate equally in carework and create gender egalitarian families. Sullivan (2006) focuses on the changing gender relations and practices within the family and argues that change may be theorized as incremental, slow, but multilayered and meaningful. She also argues that gender interactions in the families should not be viewed as interactions that remain fixed in a framework of inequality but should be viewed as small changes constantly occurring in response to changing economic, social, and cultural contexts.

The literature on immigrant families and gendered division of labor has focused on the gender ideology of the sending country and how it shapes gender within the households (George 2005; Moon 2003; Baluja 2003; Espiritu 2003; Min 1998). An important change that occurs with migration is that women often have to act as co-providers in the household, which is often not the case in their country of origin (Segura 1998; Min 1998; Kim and Hurh 1985; Glenn 1991; Moon 2003). Thus, migration may lead to improvement in women’s social positions because of opportunities for employment. Employment whether in low-wage jobs or professional jobs may provide women with more control over their earnings,
greater participation in making decisions in the family (Pessar 1984; Espiritu 2003; George 2005). Studies by scholars of immigration and gender (Moon 2003; Menjivar 2003; Chen 1999; Min 1998; Park 1997) suggest that even when immigrant women were working for pay, they still did majority of the household work. One important finding by Moon (2003) and Chen (1999) was that though there was not much change in the gender ideologies of men post migration, the husbands were still doing more household work indicating alteration in gendered practices from the home country. In her ethnographic study of Puerto Rican women’s migration Toro-Morn (1995), explores the experiences of married working and middle class women in the migration process. Her findings suggest that women in both groups migrated for family reunification and the major responsibility of these women was forming and re-creating the disrupted family life caused by the migration of the men.

There have not been many sociological studies examining gender within the households of Asian-Indian families. Kurien’s (1999) study of the ethnic communities of Hindu Indian families in the U.S suggests that even though migration was male-led in a patriarchal framework, the subsequent employment opportunities for women influenced the family structure toward more egalitarian patterns. She also found that that women played a central role in the religio-cultural organizations that were key to their community lives. The women became religious and cultural producers because they were responsible for transmitting Indian culture and ethnicity to their children. The women often reinterpreted “traditional gender images and constructs” (Kurien 1999:164) to present a more egalitarian
interpretation of Indian culture. Thus, women played an important role in the construction of ethnicity within the organization and families even if done informally.

Other studies on gendered interactions among South Asian families have primarily focussed on domestic violence (Abraham 1995; Ayub 2000; Dasgupta and Warrier 1996, Dasgupta 2007, Mehrotra 1999). In my earlier research (Banerjee 2008) on Bangladeshi Muslim women in Chicago, I show that migration alters the patriarchal framework of the emigrating social and familial structure and creates what I call “conjugal patriarchy” – where the husband remains the head of the household and the familial hierarchy of the home country is recreated in a less stricter form. My study also shows that when the women have access to institutional resources of social support and a widened social network, even if it is through religious institutions, they develop more bargaining power within the household thus mitigating male dominance in the family.

While migration, especially gendered migration, changes family structure (Espiritu 2003; George 2005; Kurien 1999; Kibria 1990), it also affects the identity of family members. When men are forced to engage in household work, which they devalue as feminine work especially in the context of classical and conjugal patriarchal systems (Kandiyoti 1988; Banerjee 2008), they sense a loss in their position and status (Min 2003; Espiritu 2003). Very few studies have explored how structural forces such as visa laws and state power influence gender relation of migrant families of migrant families, their spousal interactions and household and reproductive unpaid labor. No studies have compared issues of gender and unpaid household and reproductive labor particularly in families with women
breadwinners with households that have men as key breadwinners. Further, no studies have explored how immigration policies of the receiving State affects the configurations of immigrant families and communities.

**Research on Indian-Asian nurses and High-tech Wokers Migration:**

In the last three decades India has produced the largest number numbers of well-trained engineers and computer programmers in the world (Charavartty 2006, Mahalingam & Ramakrishnan, 2002). In the last twenty years, India has also produced the largest number of women engineers, computer programmers and healthcare workers (Mahalingam & Ramakrishnan, 2002). Indian professionals, mostly men but also women have joined the national and global high-tech and healthcare labor markets in unprecedented numbers since the 1990s (Mahalingam and Leu 2005). The demand for migrant Indian professionals in the global north is fuelled by the perception of Indians as flexible, cheap and skilled workers (Banerjee, 2006). Bhatia (2007) argues that “diasporic Indians” use this perception of the privileged minorities based on their class, educational and cultural backgrounds to mobilize their cultural resources to thwart the ‘racial othering’ that they experience as professional workers in the U.S. Some sociological studies in the past few years have specifically focused on the racialization and gendering of migrant Information Technology (IT) especially workers on skilled workers visas (H1-B).

Banerjee (2006) argues that in order to examine the different kinds of racialization of skilled workers, it is important to understand the immigration and visa policies of the U.S. because these policies "have simultaneously been about the
racial designation of immigrant and migrant workers as an exploitable workforce for the benefit of capital...(p. 432)”. Based on 40 interviews with Indian IT professionals in the U.S., on H1-B temporary visas, Banerjee argues that the interplay between flexible hiring and visa policies makes the Indian IT workers a vulnerable and marginalized group. The migrant high-tech workers are subcontracted and “bodyshopped” and hence can be fired any time. The insecurity of their employment status is compounded by the fact that these workers rely on their visa-sponsoring employers for their legal immigration status in the U.S., that is if fired they lose their legal status in the United States. The need to remain employed and legal, drives H1-B employees to accept severely exploitative work conditions, including wage cuts, deduction of commissions from hourly wages, lack of benefits, and frequent relocations. Banerjee further shows that the terms of employment and visa restrictions severely disadvantages women in the IT industry when compared to the men. Men outnumber women massively in the IT industry in the U.S because it is more difficult for women, especially women with families to relocate frequently and work for extendable hours. The few women who work in the industry struggle with often being the only female engineer from India on a given project and are not accepted as a legitimate expert in her field and have to constantly to “fight for her entitlements” (p. 441). Banerjee contends that U.S. immigration policies depend on racialization of immigration for labor exploitation in order to “sustain the exigencies of late-capital” (Banerjee 2006:38).

Another study by Paula Chakravartty (2006) on Indian migrant high-tech professionals in the U.S. on temporary visas who have applied for permanent
residency shows the multilevel structural inequalities faced by Indian high-tech workers in this industry. From her interviews with 121 Indian IT professionals (mostly men and a few women), she finds that while both men and women experience glass ceiling in terms of promotion and pay when compared to their American counterparts, they also experience isolation and segregation at work, including separate workspaces for American workers and Indian workers. Her study suggests that women experience more isolation and segregation not only because they are fewer in number in a predominantly male occupation but they also feel rejected by their Indian male colleagues as equals and co-workers. Another interesting finding is that many of the male IT professionals are married but due to restrictions on dependent visas, their often highly qualified wives were unable to work or pursue any education in the U.S. and were described as “frustrated housewives” by their husbands. In contrast, in few cases (N=2) where the woman was the professional and had a husband on a dependent visa, the woman was ready to re-locate to any other place within U.S. or outside, where her husband found a job even at the cost of her own.

In her recent book, * Appropriately Indian: Gender and Culture in a New Transnational Class*, Radhakrishnan (2011), presents another view of what it means to be a globally mobile, high-skilled and diasporic Indian. She discusses the ways in which gender, class, race and caste play into the construction of this Indianness.

Based on a multi site ethnographic study of Indian engineers in India, U.S. and South Africa, working in software and hardware sectors, Radhakrishnan argues that Indian information technology (IT) workers are valuable in the global market by
what the author calls “cultural streamlining” (p.6). Indian global IT workers, especially women IT professionals are believed to have an authentic Indianness, which is really a generic Indian identity packaged in strong traditional/Indian family values such as simplicity of character and the rejection of Western hypercosumerism. At the same time, they are considered to have the efficiency and skills to provide sophisticated technological services to a global market. Underlying this simultaneous maintenance of authentic Indian identity and the identity of a skilled global worker with finesse to manage geographically diverse clientele comes from “multiple layers of symbolic and material privileges” (p. 51) that the IT workers carry with them and often deny having. They hold such privileges by coming from the upper to upper-middle class and upper-caste backgrounds. Radakrishnan argues that the onus of maintaining the global Indianness disproportionately falls on the female workers as they reconfigure the notions of respectable femininity and “good Indian family”. Radhakrishnan further argues that given the material and symbolic privileges that Indians possess in the overseas markets, they are distinct from other migrant professionals and have the ability to move across borders and nations.

Studies of Indian nurses as the key migrant are scarce. Some studies have investigated the experiences of Indian migrant nurses in the work place (Thomas, 2006; DiCicco-Bloom, 2004). DiCicco-Bloom’s study of migrant nurses from Kerala, India illustrates the challenges and struggles that nurses faced as migrant workers. The nurses she interviewed “had their one foot here and one foot there” (p. 29) as they struggled with living in two cultures and countries as many of them traveled
back to Kerala often to maintain ties with their families including their spouse and children. Their struggles were compounded by the racism and marginalization they faced in their workplace from administrators and white patients.

George’s (2005) study of families where the migration is female-led shows that while it creates a reversal of gender order in the family in the aspects of caregiving, it also creates conflict as men try to maintain their power by controlling community resources. In her book, *When Women Come First*, George (2005:5) offers a “test case for the durability of patriarchy. She studies a group of 29 Christian nurses who immigrated to the United States from Kerala, India. Of the 29 nurses, 21 of them sponsored their husbands and children to join them later. The other eight nurses’ families had migrated to the U.S. either as a family or the men came first. All of the husbands and wives were raised in traditional households where the women did the cooking, childcare and household work and men were the breadwinners.

George had four key findings. First, the ability of the women to secure professional jobs as nurses and migrate before their husbands is a reversal of the traditional gender order and challenges definitions of femininity and masculinity in migrating Indian families. Second, and most significant, was the finding that men made compromises and adjustments in the household division of labor after migration. George argues that in households where women were the breadwinners, women had more power in making financial decisions and the men were actively involved in childcare, cooking and other activities traditionally in the domain of women and wives. In sharp contrast, in households (N=8), where both men and women had almost equal paying jobs, the household labor was strictly gendered. In
all types of households, men discussed how their wives could not care for the households as well as they did in India and remarked about their wives’ abilities to provide for the family. The women expressed missing the support of extended family members and the household help they had in India. Her third finding was that while stay-at-home husbands shouldered much of the household work, they also maintained strict control over community institutions such as churches, systematically excluding women from any positions of power or even from various church-community activities. This shows that the Indian women’s participation in the labor force, in this case, in high paying salaried jobs, provides them with some power within the household but does little to change the gender ideologies and expectations. George’s fourth finding revolved around the nurses’ experiences at the workplace. Similar to DiCicco-Bloom, George finds that the nurses faced everyday racism, sexism and discrimination at work. Many of them narrated the stories of discrimination but normalized and justified their experiences saying that for immigrant nurses of color with accents such occurrences were inevitable and their success as immigrants lies in ignoring these incidences and being good nurses.

Besides Sheba George (2005), social scientists have not so far examined the entire range of experiences that Indian nurses and their families go through as the sole employment-based female-led migration of Indian families to the U.S.

The literature on Indian labor migration to the U.S. points at the complexity of the process and builds an understanding of how this migration is racialized through visa policies and gendered in everyday interactions in the workplace and
families. The literature however is scarce and does not adequately how state/immigration policies affect the migrants, especially the migrant families.

**Conclusion:**

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature including theoretical frameworks that I build on. The feminist critique of globalization (Acker, 2004; Desai 2007; Guevarra, 2010; Mohanty, 2009; Ngai, 2004; Ong, 1999; Parreñas, 2001; Rodriguez, 2010; Sassen 1998, 2003, 2008) exposes the gendered and racialized nature of globalization that has created insidious structures of dominance to further marginalize women and sometimes men of color in the global markets. To understand and analyze how state power influences individual subjectivities and transnational families in the context of globalization, I put the post-structuralist concept of governmentality in conversation with critical feminist framework to suggest that a “visa-based governmentality” which is racialized and gendered, may influence gendered selves and subjectivities of immigrant individuals and help shape gendered actions and performances within migrant families as well as how social and economic institutions react to these migrants. This creates structures of dependency that is embedded in the immigration status of the families, as well as at the everyday interactions with social and economic institutions and even within the families. My analysis of institutional framework within the gender structure (Risman 2004) of “visa power” therefore uses a transnational and postcolonial perspective of gender and race regimes (Mohanty 2003) thereby illuminating the racialized aspect of a gendered structure of transnationalism and global migration.
The review of the literature on Asians and particularly Asian-Indian migration to the U.S. shows ways in which the complexity of gendered and racialized migration of Asian-Indian migration is compounded by the various social factors at the home and the receiving countries. Socio-cultural factors such as class, caste, gender, sexual and regional distinctions of the sending country and racial structures and immigration policies of the receiving country create contradictory circumstances for the migrant workers and their families. For instance, the research on Indian migration discusses how in its journey towards modernity, postcolonial India has invested heavily in a science and technology-driven higher education and has had a heavily subsidized higher-education system (Banerjee 2006, Chakravarty 2000, Chanana 2007, Radhakrishnan 2011). As India moved away from a socialist, toward a liberal democracy in the last decade of the 1990s, it joined the globalized market of exporting skilled workers, producing one of the world’s largest technocratic labor forces (Appadurai 1996, Basu 2008, Xiang 2007). In the last twenty years, this labor force has existed largely for export (Ong 2004). Despite the prevailing social and political ideology of separate spheres among men and women in India, middle class women have joined white-collar professional labor markets in large number in the last 30 years (Kumar 1993, Poster and Prasad 2005, Chanana 2007). The sense of self among the urban, Indian middle class men and women is largely built on their contribution to economic productivity, and women are still held accountable for being good mothers and wives. This raises an empirical

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7 According to the 2007 Government of India, Ministry of Women and Child Development Handbook, in 2005, about 3.52 million women were employed in the service sector or the professional sector of the labor markets in India, which is still only about 14% of the labor force.
question as to what happens to the sense of self when educated professional women are thrown back into a 1950s model of nuclear family on migration to the United States? And how is men’s sense of self affected when they are made dependents and made to take the economically dependent position – a complete shift from their social positions of power in India?

The literature on migration of Asian-Indians also illustrates the gendered aspect of such migration and emphasizes the ways in which professional migrants are gendered and racialized in the workplace (Banerjee 2006, Chakravartty 2006). However, very few studies have empirically analyzed the intricacies of state power as manifested through immigration policies and how these policies implicitly or explicitly influence and control day-to-day actions and interactions within migrating families. My research examines the effects of “dependent visas” on the lives and subjectivities of the visa holders and their migrant spouse. Based on my findings, I question the arguments of some scholars like Radhakrishnan (2011) and Bhatia (2007) who claim that Indians garner their cultural and educational capital to enjoy flexible citizenships and move seamlessly across borders in search of opportunities. In my two empirical chapters, I explore if it is indeed easy for Indian professional workers to move across borders? How do their migration and the terms of the family migration affect their dependents especially their highly educated spouses?

To preview my result, I find that dependent visas strip my participants from having basic citizenship rights by creating a webbed structure of dependence, which is deeply gendered. Each migrant struggles to negotiate their lives as they are governed legally and formally by the visa regime while also being embedded in a
gender structure. Visa policies are officially gender-blind but have gendered ramifications for the visa-holders and their spouses.

To evoke Max Frisch’s great quote I began this chapter with, on immigration of workers from the global south to the north, in this dissertation building on past research, I explore how the migrant subjects grapple with the identities of being workers and being people. I explore the dissonance between the perception of the state of migrant worker and the migrant subject’s negotiations being migrant workers from the global south but also being men and women (people) with desires, hopes, aspirations and family relationships.
Chapter 3

Methodology

"I told my house-guests, I have to talk to her, she is the only one who understands my position and has the patience to listen to me."

--Jaya, 2012 - a participant, a H-4 visa holder explaining why she decided to volunteer for a follow-up interview with me.

It was a cold, snowy morning in February of 2005. I was standing at the long, winding immigration queue at the Chicago airport with my luggage and a bunch of immigration forms. I knew the drill as I have been travelling to the United States for work for three years. It was slightly different this time. I was to begin graduate school in the fall of that year. But I had decided to come to Chicago a few months earlier because I wanted decided to settle into a new city and join my partner who already was living in Chicago before I stepped into the excitement of graduate school. Therefore, instead of arriving on a student visa, I applied for a dependent/student spouse visa (F-2) as it was too early to process the student visa (F-1).

As I went to the immigration officer’s booth, I extended my passport with a polite smile expecting the regular questions about where I was coming from and what was I here for. The immigration officer looked at my passport, looked at me, fingerprinted me and then without looking back at me again asked a volley of questions which had little to do with me. He asked for my husband’s name, his address and what he did. He then reminded me still without looking that as a dependent spouse of an international student I was not allowed to legally work in this country. Then he said, “welcome to America – hope you have good stay.”
Despite my own strong feminist identity and given that my real purpose arriving in the United States was to attend graduate school, the humiliation I felt at that moment, and for the next five months, remain a powerful experience. In fact, as I write my experience here today, I still have a strong memory of my affective state – the overwhelming feeling of invisibility and shame I felt during that period.

In the next couple of years, in Chicago and elsewhere in the United States, I came across Indian professionals, mostly information technology workers who were here on temporary skilled workers visas (H1-B). I also met more and more highly qualified women who were on dependent visas (H-4 visas) and in conversations, most of them expressed a sense of shame and alienation similar to the one I had experienced in those initial months. Many of them had been in the United States for more than five years. This spurred my academic interest in the topic of visas and how they affect people’s lives and subjectivities. This interest was strengthened by subsequently meeting a few families of another form of Indian professional workers in the U.S., trained nurses hired to fill the nurse shortage, primarily a female-led migration. Indian women nurses were migrating to the U.S. on skilled workers visas and sometimes bringing their husbands on dependent spouse visas. This provided a platform for comparing how visa laws affect the families of male-led migrants (high-tech migrant workers) where the wife was a dependent and families of female-led (migrant nurses) where the men were the dependents.

My personal and professional interests merged for this dissertation. I use qualitative methods to understand how skilled-workers visa policies of the United States, affect individuals and families migrating on those policies. I entered the field
in the summer of 2009 and remained in the field, collecting data until summer of 2011. I conducted ethnographic observations in both communities of Indian professional-workers and in-depth interviews with both spouses in families led by male-high-tech workers and by female nurses. I also interviewed immigration experts. To gain a deeper understanding of how and why visa (H1B and H4) laws have changed over the years, I conducted archival research where I examined public debate documents, including congressional and public hearings about the relevant visa laws.

This methodology chapter begins with a discussion of my archival research, to provide a background on the visa statuses my participants held. I then discuss how my social location as an immigrant Indian woman fostered access differently into the two forms of Asian-Indian migrant families. In discussing access, I focus on how my standpoint and my social location as an Indian middle class woman, also a graduate student from northern part of India, affected access to participants for interviews, as well access to the field for observations. I describe in detail the processes of recruitment, interviewing, observation, and description of my participants. I discuss the ways in which experiences in the field affected my research questions and my methodologies.

I conclude this chapter with a discussion of my epistemology, my standpoint and my insider-outsider status. In particularly, I grapple with what it means to be both insider and an outsider to the field and how these statuses shape the expectations of my participants from this research and my own expectations.
Archival Research and Data

My central research question for this project is to examine how visa policies affect migrant workers and their families. In order to understand the framing and construction of the visa laws and the legal and public discourse about such laws, I reviewed and analyzed documentation archived in law libraries about the public/congressional discussion on visa laws and bills in the Congress. I particularly focused on visa laws and bills concerning the following visa categories:

- H1-B or the skilled temporary non-immigrant workers visa
- H-4 and other forms of temporary non-immigrant dependent visa
- EB-3 visa the employer-based skilled worker’s immigrant visas
- Permanent Residency or the Green Card laws

Besides the H-4, I examined documentation on other skilled workers visas laws, particularly the H1-B, EB-3 and Green Card Laws to the extent that they influenced the H-4 visa laws. The H-4 visa laws are integrally tied to the skilled workers visas and had no existence without them, which is why it was important to examine those laws as well.

I made three trips to the Library of Congress (LoC) in D.C. between March 2011 to July 2011. LoC is the repository of all legal documents of any laws proposed or passed. I then requested a transfer of the immigration fundamental ledgers to the Northwestern Law Library in Chicago for two months so that I could finish the research in Chicago. I also consulted the immigration law librarians at the Library of Congress, at the Northwestern University Law Library and the University of Chicago Law Library. These ledgers archived the proposal of the visa laws, the congressional hearings, public discussions on the laws and the final version of the passed laws.
With their help, I searched and interpreted the legal language in both physical and electronic law ledgers since 1950 to the present. I also reviewed the changes made to the laws and the public discussions in subsequent years, particularly the 1990 Immigration Act. I found materials on public/congressional discussions on the H1-B visa, the EB-3 visa and the green card or permanent residency but I found very little on H-4 or the dependent visa. The law librarians I consulted suggested that I was not finding any data because there were no public debates on the passage of the H-4 visas.

To supplement the analysis on H-4 visas, I conducted a content analysis on the publically available transcripts of recent public debates on national television (Public Broadcasting Service) on the H-4 visa topic. One show was an hour-long panel discussion on the H-4 visas as a reaction to a documentary film made by an Indian woman who was previous on a H-4 visa. This panel discussion included an immigration lawyer (who I also interviewed), a representative from the Department of Labor, two Congresswomen, one immigration activist and the PBS moderator. I have used the data gathered from archival research in conjunction with my ethnographic data to present a fuller and more fine-grained understanding of the intricate dance between the legal structure and personal agency. The description of the visas and the recruitment process has been detailed in the next chapter.

**Access: Building Rapport**

The majority of my participants were parts of two distinct communities of Indian professional temporary/migrant workers in the U.S. The high-tech workers and their wives, were mostly from northern India, mostly Hindus and spread out
within the city of Chicago. The nurses and their husbands on the other hand were all from one State in Southern India called Kerala, were all Christians and mostly lived in Chicago suburbs (DiCicco-Bloom 2004, George 2005, Williams 1996). I picked Chicago for my fieldwork because Chicago has the third largest Asian Indian migrant population at 171,901 among the metropolitan areas in the U.S. and Illinois the fifth largest Indian population among all the U.S states (Census 2010). It also has large multinational firms and healthcare organizations that employ high-tech workers and nurses. I was based in Chicago during my doctorate degree, which made it pragmatic to conduct fieldwork in the area. The distinct nature of my participant groups made the process of relationship building rapport protracted.

**Rapport Building with High Tech Workers and their Spouses:**

I began to build relationships in the Fall of 2008 and continued through Spring of 2009. This included “hanging out” with the communities of Indian high-skilled workers in public events the communities organized. As an Indian international student my requests to be included in the mailing lists for such events was accepted easily. The events included public religious celebrations (mostly Hindu and some Muslim religious events), community picnics, potlucks and get-togethers. I also began volunteering in the organization of some of these events, which later became my observational sites. In these events, I tried to identity families where the man was on high-skilled work visas with spouses on H-4 dependent visas. I also tried to locate nurses and their husbands on these events but quickly realized that nurses were not present at these events. However, I began and
continued meeting many families of men high-skilled visa holders with spouses on dependent visas. In these events, I formed a few personal, friendship relationships with the women on H-4 visas who became highly invested in my research. These personal contacts began referring me to other women who were also on H-4 visas. The personal contacts said that they felt a personal investment in my project because this was the only way they can make their voices heard and possibly affect policy. They introduced me to women or high-tech workers who had a spouse on H-4 visa in these community events or over email if they were not at the event with strong emphasis on how important this research was and how crucial their participation was. The referring family, especially the woman participant then referred me to other families in similar ways.

I met most of my female participants, even the ones recruited through my personal contacts and other participants, at least twice informally in community events before I scheduled interviews. The men on skilled-worker visas were willing to participate but not as eager as their wives and needed more convincing. While my participation in community events helped me form camaraderie with some of the men who agreed to participate in the project as a "favor to a fellow Indian who was trying to make it as a student in the U.S" most of the men participated in the study because their wives convinced them. I began interviewing the women on H-4 visas and their spouses in the Fall of 2009.
Rapport Building with Nurses and their Spouses:

As I was conducting interviews with the high-tech workers and their wives, I began the process of relationship building in the community of Indian nurses. This process turned out to be longer and harder than I had anticipated. I found that most Indian nurses and their families were parts of Indian Malayalee ethnic churches\(^8\) and that there were about seven major churches in Chicagoland (city and suburbs). I picked three churches with large congregations (500 families or 3500 individuals), located in three different suburbs of Chicago to build relationships with families of nurses. My first foray into this community began with attending morning and afternoon Sunday masses in two of the churches consecutively. After the Sunday service, I made attempts to mingle with church attendees to identify families of nurses who arrived in the U.S. after 1990s and tell them about my research. However, after about a month I realized that my strategy was not working. Although most church attendees were nurses, they politely listened to me and asked me if I was Christian and a Malayalee and when I said no, they responded by saying “you are not Christian or Malayalee, why are you interested in us” and then ended the conversation with “let me think about it” only to strategically avoid me the following Sunday. I also found out that approaching the men, as a woman researcher was difficult in this community. Men sometimes gathered with other men in the church basement and sometimes outside the church premises after the service. Whenever I tried to approach the group, a woman member of the church whisked me away to

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\(^8\) Indian ethnic churches are often regionally based (Warner 1993, Kurien 1999, Williams 1996) and since most of the Indian migrant nurses in the United States are Christians from the southern state of Kerala (DiCicco-Bloom 2004, George 2005, Williams 1998), the churches are called Keralite or Malayalee churches based on the language of the region.
talk to the women attendees. When I managed to talk to the men, they often dodged me by saying something along the lines of “I am not sure what I could add to the research”. I realized that I needed an ally in this community to be able to find access. I decided to approach the pastors of each church and request them to announce my research after the Sunday sermons. To my surprise, they readily agreed and volunteered to add a note of support and approval. I began to realize that my being Indian was not enough for easy entrée in this community. My regional and religious identities of being from north Indian and non-Christian made me an outsider to the community. I found a UIC undergraduate student from Kerala, India, and who wanted some field research experience to assist me as part of the UIC undergraduate research-training program. She accompanied me to church every Sunday for about six weeks. The announcement by the church pastors and the presence of my research assistant with Keralite background made a difference in how church attendees reacted. The first day the priest announced my project, people who had deliberately avoided me, now came up to me and on seeing a co-ethnic, who vouched for my research were more interested in participating. The priests in all three churches continued announcing my project, sometime in Malayalee language, which I do not understand. These announcements often extracted laughter from the congregation and while I did not understand and could never find out what caused the amusement, it helped my case tremendously. Also, my 10 years of attending a Catholic school in India was viewed positively when I dropped so into my conversations.
After three months of church attendance, in the September of 2010, two nurses in one of the church agreed to be interviewed. It took many more phone calls to convince one nurse to let her husband also participate. However, during the interviews, I found out that not having my Malaylee research assistant hurt the process. Other church attendees also asked me if my “friend would be there for interview” and sounded disappointed when I said no. I had to wean myself away from the reliance on my research assistant for recruitment and relied instead completely on the pastors’ announcement. I also attended the National Indian Nursing Association (NINA) Conference in Houston, TX, in November 2010 and formed many important connections in Illinois and other parts of the country that became very important for recruitment.

By December 2010, I had access to this community. The first few participants introduced me to other potential participants and vouched that I was not asking for information that would compromise them in any way. This helped build trust within the community. The community grew less and less suspicious of my intentions. Two families in one of the churches “adopted” (terminology used by the participants) me as the Indian researcher that needed support and began introducing me other participants and invited me to all community events, particularly church events to conduct observations. In the second and the third church, two of the key players in the congregation were officers of NINA who I had met at the annual conference in Houston. They helped me find participants as well as invited me to community events in their parishes. I also did interviews in other states like New York, DC, Pennsylvania, Texas and Florida based on referrals from local interviewee. Getting
men to participate in this community was much more difficult than recruiting male
high-tech workers. The nurses often acted as gatekeepers, but once I was able to
convince them that I was not there to judge their families or the community, I
managed to gain access to the men for interviews and observations. Once I gained
entry, I conducted interviews and observations for about eight months in this
community until I reached saturation. This community did not have an investment
in my research but rather they were “helping an Indian student” and some also
explicitly told me that they hoped “this might turn me toward the Christian faith”.

Sampling and Recruitment

I entered the field in 2009 with the intent to conduct in-dept interviews with
about a hundred individuals. This numerical target included interviews with both
spouses in families of Indian temporary migrant high-tech workers and Indian
nurses and immigration experts. My design called for 20 couples in each group –
that is 40 individuals in each group and about 20 immigration officials or until the
point when no new information was being collected or “saturation.” One of the main
recruitment criteria for the families was that my participants should have arrived in
the U.S. after 1990 (the category of dependent visa as it exists today was introduced
in the Immigration Act of 1990). They had to be part of skilled-workers migration
and have a spouse who arrived as a dependent to be part of my project. My target
population to conduct face-to-face interviews was:

- Indian male high tech worker who are in the U.S. on a temporary high-skilled
  workers visa, usually referred to as H1-B visas. He had to be married to a
  spouse who came to the U.S. as his dependent on a H-4 visa. Here “high-tech”
  is defined broadly to include Information Technology (IT) professionals,
managers in the finance, banking, medical and technology industries and research scientists.

- **Wives of the high-tech workers who are on dependent visas and are not permitted to work legally in the U.S.;**
- **Migrant Indian female nurse who arrived to the U.S. usually on skilled workers visas given to migrant medical professionals (either H1-B visa or EB-3) and married to an Indian man who arrived to the U.S. as her dependent.**
- **Husbands of the Indian nurses who followed or came with the nurses are legally dependent on the nurse and not permitted to work legally in the U.S as long as they are on the dependent visa.**
- **Immigration experts in the U.S. such as immigration lawyers particularly those whose work is related to skilled-workers and their spouses; individuals from immigration think tanks and activism organizations that are on both sides of the immigration debate; political figures and legislatures known to have expertise on immigration issues.**

The presence of transnational and temporary highly skilled Indian professionals in the U.S. is well-established reality in the American reality. However, visas status is not usually visible. Identifying men and women on skilled workers visas and spouses on dependent visa required purposive and convenience-snowball sampling (see Becker, 1998 & Biernacki and Waldorf 1981) to recruit participants I built a few purposive and personal relationships with women dependent visa holders and nurses on skilled workers visas over a year. Below, I describe the sampling and recruitment strategies by groups:

**High-Tech Workers and Their H-4 Spouses:**

I built relationships with at least one contact in two communities with a concentration of high-tech worker and their families, one in the northern part of the city and one in the southern part. I wanted to ensure regional variation across India and variation by class and caste. This was done to tackle the issue of homogeneity in the sample that often occurs in snowball sampling unless one is careful about it (Hagedorn 1996). My primary contact in each area then introduced me to a few
other families who were on similar visa statuses, who then introduced me to yet other families. I was able to introduce variation in respect of class, caste, and region but given that my initial contacts were from North India⁹ most of the families of high-tech workers in sample were from various regions and states in the northern part of India. It is important to note that regional differences in the Indian context suggest cultural difference like language, food and customs. I had some variation in religion among the high-tech families – a few Muslim families and a few Christian families but most participants identified as Hindus. In terms of class, most participants belonged to middle to upper middle class to upper class families in India.

The recruitment process involved sending out an invitation to participate - email notice and recruitment flyer (Appendix D) in the project to my personal contacts – four women on dependent visas and one man on high-skilled visa. I requested my personal contacts forward the email notice to their contacts who might qualify as participants in the study. Each of my contacts also put up my recruitment flyers in their apartment building notice boards because Indian high-tech workers sometimes lived in the same apartment buildings. As the word spread, I received emails from prospective participants. Women holding dependent visa expressed considerable eagerness to participate in the study. In addition to this form of recruitment, I also recruited individuals (mostly women) in public events

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⁹ India is distinctly split into north and south India. For instance, states of Assam (north-eastern), Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra (north-western), Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal (north-eastern), are considered northern states and the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are considered South Indian States.
organized by the Indian community snowballed from there as well. Usually, the women participants then recruited their husbands to participate in the study.

**Nurses and Their Spouses:**

For sampling in this group, I built relationships with at least two contacts in three church communities with a concentration of Indian nurses in Chicagoland suburbs. These contacts then introduced me to other members of the community and those members to others. From reviewing of the literature on Indian nurses in the U.S., I had found that most Indian migrant nurses from India migrate from one particular State in Southern India and are overwhelmingly Christian (George 2005, Kurien, 1999). I however wanted some variation in terms of their class and regional (urban/rural) backgrounds and achieved some variation on those ground. I picked three different communities for sampling because these communities had the largest concentration of nurses and their families in the area. During this process, I found three different migration trajectories of families to vary in three different ways, for the spouses of the nurses – a) ones who were coming on dependent visas; b) ones who stayed back in India and maintained a transnational connection until their visas could be changed and c) ones who came as dependents of their nurse sister and were now married to a migrant nurses. I then used a second layer of purposive sampling method to identify a few families in each of the three trajectories.

Most of the recruitment in this population happened through the churches with the help of the pastor, church members and members of the national nursing organization NINA as described before under “access”.
**Immigration Experts:**

For the “immigration experts”, I used only purposive sampling because for this part of my research I needed to interview people who had expert knowledge on immigration and visa issues. As a result, I purposefully identified lawyers who worked on skilled workers visas and dependent visas across the country and contacted them for interviews. I also identified a few politicians and legislators who work or had worked on immigration issues. I identified a few immigration activist organizations on both sides of the isle – that is pro-immigration and anti-immigration and contacted personnel from this organization for interviews.

To recruit immigration experts, I sent out email notices (Appendix D) to heads of ten immigration law firms across the country that specializes in migration of skilled-workers and their spouses. Five of these firms agreed to have one of their lawyers do an interview with me. Additionally, I contacted Dr. Shivali Shah, a Washington DC based immigration lawyer (she insisted that her real name be used in this study) who has worked and advocated for women dependent visa holders for the last decade. She has written legal papers about it and appeared in numerous media interviews. I also contacted two major immigration policy think tanks, one pro immigration and one anti-immigration and asked to interview personnel from those organizations. After pursuing think tanks for about six months each one agreed to have one person interview with me. I recruited four other immigration activists from both side of the aisle. I also interviewed two government representatives, one a retired congressman and one a congresswoman running for reelection to talk about issues of dependent visas and skilled-workers visas. I picked
the retired person because he is known to have been instrumental in reforming skilled worker’s visa laws in the 1990 and the one person running was invested in issues of immigration generally. It was extremely difficult and time consuming to get government representatives to agree to provide their time for interviews, which is why I decided to stop at two. I supplemented direct interviews by analyzing publicly available opinions of government representatives (congress women and men, senators and labor department representatives) on the visa laws of my interest.

**Interviewing**

I began doing interviews with my first group of participants – the high-tech workers and their wives – in the fall of 2009. I conducted interviews with nurses and their husbands beginning in the summer of 2010 and concluded my rounds of interviews with immigration experts in the summer and fall of 2011. I was in the field for two full years. The interviews were conducted using interview schedules (Appendices E, F and G) as a guide. I constructed three interview schedules, one for participants on dependent visas and one for their spouses on work visas and one for immigration experts. The interview schedule served only as a guide and probes were added where and when necessary. I pre-tested the interview schedule with my personal contacts including an Indian nurse and her husband and a high-tech worker and his wife on dependent visa. The interview guide questions was influenced by what these participants thought were important to their migrant experiences, as well as questions they suggested for immigration experts.

All interviews were conducted in English though my participants sometimes used a sentence here and a sentence there in Hindi or Bengali (two Indian languages
I am fluent in). I obtained informed consent at the beginning of every interview before I began to record (see Appendix E). I tried to make sure that they understood my research. Participants were given a signed copy of the consent form for their records. The interviews were usually conducted in the homes of the participants. About four interviews were conducted in my home and another four (out the 90 interviews) were conducted either in coffee shops or community events. Of the 10 interviews conducted with immigration experts seven were conducted in the offices of the individuals and three were conducted over the phone.

The interviews with each individual on average lasted 90 minutes, ranging from one and three hours. The interviews with women in both types of families tended to be longer than with the men with a few exceptions. The interviews with immigration experts last about 30 minutes except for the one with Ms Shah, the H-4 expert and activist lawyer lasted for about two hours. All interviews were audio taped with the permission of the participants. The audio recording was immediately stopped, during the interview, if a participant requested.

I organized the timing of my interviews so that both spouses were interviewed on the same day but not in each other’s presence. The spouses were usually interviewed 15 minutes after each other. I interviewed them separately to ensure that confidentiality and so they did not influence each other’s responses. For the high-tech workers, I would usually interview the wives on H-4 visas right before the husband came back home from work and then interview the husband. I also conducted joint interviews with 10 couples where I asked them about their future plans vis-à-vis their immigrant status. The joint interviews were conducted after
individual interviews with both spouses were complete and lasted about 15 to 20 minutes. The joint interviews were conducted to observe the interaction between the couple.

My research schedule included questions about the life course and migration history of my participants, their work experiences, their household division of labor, and their views on visa policies. In my interviews with the immigration experts, I questioned them about the public and governmental discourse related to visa issues of interest.

I usually ended the interviews by requesting by participants to keep me updated if any major changes happened to their immigration/work/family status in the coming two years after the interview. I also asked the participants that I had interviewed in 2009 and 2010 if I could do follow-up interviews with them at the end of 2011 or early 2012. Most of my participants agreed to this. At the end of 2011 and early 2012, I conducted follow up interviews with 12 high-tech workers and their wives (a little more than 50% of the sample) and about five nurses and their husbands who I had interviewed in the summer of 2010. Many of these interviews, particularly those with the wives of high-tech workers, came about when they contacted me to tell that their situation had changed. These changes included return of three dependent wives to India, a divorce or some other change in visa or work status of the family.

Field Observations

Field notes during the interviews described the site of the interview, emotions expressed by participants, the refreshments offered and the participants’
interactions with other people/children if they were present. These field notes also
included my reactions during the interviews. In these field notes I described my
emotional reactions to certain situations, for instance, how I felt when a participant
cried or showed other strong emotional reaction, or when I felt I was being
patronized or sometimes subtly sexualized by the men I interviewed. My field notes
from the interviews were audio recorded by me immediately after leaving the
interview site. After completion of the interviews and the interviews field notes I
transcribed the majority of them. A professional transcriber transcribed a quarter of
the interviews.

I also conducted extensive participant observations in the migrant Indian
communities. I began my observations informally in 2008 but began recording
observation in field notes for analysis in the Fall of 2009 after I received the IRB
approval (Appendix C: IRB Letter of Approval). Most of the observations were done
while I attended public events, religious services, parties thrown by families in my
study, meetings of the Indian ethnic organizations in the city, community picnics or
sports events organized by men in both communities. My main sites for
observations for the high-tech workers were the major religious festivals celebrated
by Indian organizations in the city, weekend parties thrown by some of my
interview participants and picnics. I conducted observations at a few gender-
segregated events such as “girls afternoon out” with the H-4 wives, planning
meetings for Indian organizations which were often run by the women in the
community, baby showers which usually were attended only by women. I also
attended sports events and sport practices organized and attended by only the men
to have access to observe “only male” interactions. The male high-tech workers organized sports events like playing cricket and soccer on a weekly basis. They would have informal tournaments and practiced for them. I asked them if I could “hang around” during their practice matches and tournaments to observe how they spent time outside their work and families. The men were not overtly enthusiastic about this but allowed me to attend. I also accompanied them to drinks and meals after the games on a couple of occasions. However, my presence in these after parties seemed to be weighing on the conversations and actions. After the first few times I was not noticing anything new in these gatherings and so I stopped going.

In the communities of the nurses, I conducted most of my observations in the church events and social events, for example after sermon Sunday feast or weekly get-togethers arranged by some of my participants, weekly children group prayer meetings where all the parents in the community would bring their children for a prayer meeting with the pastor while the parents socialized. I also conducted observations at the NINA (National Indian Nurses Association) annual conference and other events organized by NINA’s Illinois chapter, attended mostly by women nurses. My attendance at this conference helped me confirm that most immigrant Indian nurses in the U.S are Kerala and Christians. I also attended church committee meetings of the nurses’ husbands.

I requested permission of each organization to let me participate in their events and meetings. I also asked a few of my participants to invite me to social events they organized, attended by families like theirs in terms of migrant status. Most of my participants were very generous with their invitations and attending
these meetings came with the added bonus of being invited to delicious feasts providing me many meals in an intense period of data collection.

During the participant observations, I focused on two issues. First, family gender dynamics including difference between the social events organized by the nurse’s families and the high-tech worker’s families. I observed who has control over what aspects of the social events, the division of household labor among spouses at the events, discussions that men and women have about their work and family lives and how men and women interacted with each other. Second, I also observed and listened for talk about immigration status or visa status. In each observations site I recorded hand-written field notes to ensure accuracy, chronologically recorded events, and noted future areas of potential inquiry. I also audiotape all my thoughts, feelings and emotional reactions while in the field soon after I had finished the participant observations and transcribed them later.

**Data Description**

I obtained extensive qualitative data that included 101 interviews and over 400 hours of observations. The 100 interviews included 45 couples (20 high-tech workers and their spouses and 25 nurses and their spouses). I interviewed 25 nurses because I was not reaching saturation, as I found distinctly different trajectories of migration of the husbands in this community. I conducted 10 interviews with immigration experts. My initial goal was to interview 20 experts but I reached saturation in my interviews with the lawyers due to the highly specialized information solicited in these interviews. I might have gotten more information if I had interviewed more governmental figures and activists but getting appointments
with them was difficult and since this is not the core of my data, I decided to complete this as a post dissertation project. In the rest of this section I describe the demographic description of my two main groups – the high tech workers and their spouses and nurses and their spouses (See Appendix A. Description of Data: Table 4 and 5). A shorter comparative summary has been provided in Table 2.

Hi-Tech Workers and Spouses (Appendix A. Table 4)

The average age of the men interviewed for this group was 36 and the women 34. In most couples both had a graduate degree. The wives usually had equivalent degrees to their husbands and some were more highly educated. The average range of family income for most families is $81,000 -100,000 annually. Most of the couples I interviewed identified as being Hindu (religion) from urban parts of Northern India. The last place of residence for most of the families before they left India was a large Indian metropolis. All the high-tech workers were in the United States on a professional work visa (H1B) and the women were on a dependent visa (H4) except for one couple where the man was on a student visa (F1) and his spouse was on a student dependent visa (F2). I included the couple in the interviews because their experiences were similar to most of my other interviewees and the man finished his PhD and about to begin a full time job on a H1B visa.

Nurses and Spouses (Appendix A: Table 5)

The average age of the men interviewed for this group was about was 38 and the women 35. All the women had at least a bachelor’s degree in nursing. The educational level of the men/husbands varied from high school graduates to having a Masters degree (N=2). The majority of the husbands were not college educated.
The average range of family income for most families is $71,000 – 80,000 annually. All couples I interviewed were Christians, half were Catholics and the rest were some denomination of Protestant\textsuperscript{10}. They all migrated from the Southern part of India and traced their roots to the State of Kerala in Southern India. Most of the individuals also grew up in rural settings. The women had moved to different cities in India to study and work before they migrated to the United States or the Middle East. Some of the families had come to the United States from the Middle East. The men had mostly migrated directly to the United States from their hometowns. The nurses and their families had three distinct paths to U.S migration. Of the 25 couples (50 individuals), I interviewed, I found only five families where the women had come on professional work visas and their husbands had come with them on dependent visas. The men stayed back in India, sometimes with the children, while their wives came to the United States to work as nurses. The entire family moved to the United States to join the working wife only when the men had legal documents so they were not “dependents”. This transnational arrangement lasted for different durations for different families. Depending on the job, the recruitment agency and the work organizations of the women, the time that it took for the men to get a work permit in the United States varied from a few months to five years. Many of the men decided to become homemakers for few years after arriving, because it was difficult for them to find employment and the children needed being taken care while their

\textsuperscript{10} I did most of my recruitments at the MarThoma Church (identified as protestant) and the Kanaya Catholic church, which is why my sample draws from these denominations. The few participants I had that were in other states also happened to be from the Kanaya Catholic church which in my sample is evenly spread between these two churches. The Malayalee Catholic churches are very different from other ethnic Catholic churches or even other Indian catholic churches. I have data on religious practices and how regionally diverse they are and how they change upon immigration from both groups of participants but that is beyond the scope of this dissertation.
wives (nurses) worked more than full time.

For the remaining 12 families, the men had arrived in the United States as young adults in the late 1980s on family reunification visas sponsored by older sisters who came to the United States as nurses decades ago. Once the men procured a permanent residency or citizenship, they went back to India and married a nurse (arranged marriages in all cases), which as one told me, was his “tickets to a middle class life in the U.S”. They married a nurse and returned to United States to start a family. None of men in this subgroup had a college degree and three of them taking care of children fulltime. The nine that were working only worked part time, in blue collar, low paid jobs. Half of the families of nurses in Chicago seem to have followed this last pattern of migration.

When I began the project, I assumed that I would find male and female led migrant families for a comparison between two, almost a natural experiment. However, as is the nature of ethnographic research (Becker 1991), my interviews showed unexpected patterns and pushed me to refocus my attention on why and how migration patterns were different for the two types of families despite similar legal options. This difference in itself became a finding in my research and provided some deep theoretical underpinnings (see chapter 4 and 5). A summary of the difference and similarities in the two family types are enumerated in Table 1 below.


Table 1. Summary of Characteristics of the Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGH TECH WORKERS AND SPOUSES</th>
<th>NURSES AND SPOUSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mostly from urban, metropolitan, northern part of India</td>
<td>Mostly from rural India and all from one particular State in Southern India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle to upper middle calls backgrounds in India</td>
<td>Lower middle to middle class background in India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both spouse proficient in English and had high human capital. Wives often had higher degrees than the professional “skilled” husband.</td>
<td>Nurses had mostly BSN degrees. The husbands were comparatively low on human capital. Most did not go to college and did were not proficient in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the families interviewed had the male spouse on temporary skilled worker’s visa and their wives on dependent visas.</td>
<td>All the nurses were on skilled worker’s visas or gained permanent residency at the time of interviews but not all their husbands had different trajectories of migration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-tech workers and their spouses were mostly Hindus or Muslims</td>
<td>All the nurses and their families were Christians with strong church affiliations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding and Analysis of the Data

I used the qualitative software Atlas ti to code and analyze my interviews and field notes. I coded the interviews by participant groups – for e.g. I first coded the interviews from the wives of the high-tech worker, then the male high-tech workers followed by the nurses and their husbands. I first did an open coding of the interviews where I identified some broad themes like “issues of access to community”, “decisions about migration”, “pre-migration stories”, “narratives about visas”, “household division of labor”, “regional differences”, “religious practices” etc.

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11 The husbands of the nurses were not proficient in English but they could still speak some English. I conducted the interviews in English and the responses were in broken English with a few Hindi words here and there.
I had about 30 such broad codes. Next I wrote short memos on most of these themes to figure out the question I want to answer in the dissertation (how visa policies affect migrant families). I then picked the broad themes that directly relates to this question and the themes that would indirectly inform my research. The other themes, I preserved for papers beyond the dissertation. Next I did multiple rounds of nested focused coding of the broad themes I picked. For e.g: under “narratives about visas”, I honed in on how each group were relating to the visas that they hold. So, the first round of focused coding for this broad theme was “experiences in procuring H-4/H1B/EB3 visas”, “experiences of men procuring H1-B”; “experiences of women procuring H-1B” (so on with the other visas). I then wrote an interpretive memo on these codes to find out what I would need to focus on next.

The second round of focused coding was nested under the first round of focused coding. Some examples these codes would be: “husbands’ reaction to their wives’ H-4 visas”; “wives’ reaction to their own H-4 visas” and so on. And then the third round of the focused coding was about how these reactions were gendered or classed or racialized or how the reactions were informed by visa holders’ interactions with the host society. There were anywhere between 50 to 100 codes for each broad code after multiple rounds of focused coding. Some of themes overlapped between codes but writing analytical memos at every step was instrumental in parsing the nuances of the data.

**Epistemology: Insider-Outsider Status and the Questions of Power**

I use feminist critical epistemology to carry out qualitative methods – in-depth interviews and participant observations (Sprague 2005, Wolf 1996). My
research participants are all highly qualified, high-income individuals and have a higher socio-economic status than many recent immigrants. In this context, I am not studying the poor or the downtrodden. However, I do recognize that as a researcher, I have power over my participants and in order to create a more egalitarian exchange for the research, I shared complete information about the nature of research with my participants. I also intend to share my research findings with my participants once my research is completed. Further, my research questions are formulated keeping in mind the experiences of the families who come to the U.S. as global migrants on dependent visas. I particularly focus on the struggles and negotiations that these families have to make as a consequence of the migration process and particularly the visa laws. One way I ensured that the concerns of my participants were addressed was by building the interview schedule in consultation with few of my participants during the pre-test and including questions they deemed as important to their lives. During the interviews I adopted a learner’s position and let my participants lead the conversation about their migration experiences. This often meant longer interviews but this was an important epistemological decision to allow the voices of my participants to be heard.

Further, it is important to locate my research question in the larger social and political context. I share the feminist goal of trying to reduce inequality through my research. It is my hope that this research will point at ways in which we will be able to reduce gender inequalities in the context of global migration of labor and their families. As an Indian woman in the U.S, who has experienced being on a dependent visa for a period of six months, I share an “insider” status with some of
my participants, especially the women on dependent visas. The women felt and often told me that I was among the very few people who understood their plight. At the end of my interview, one of the women told me “this was like a therapy session, who else would be so patient listening to my sad story”. The men, especially the husbands of the dependent visa holder and the nurses also felt a certain camaraderie with me given their status as a migrant in the U.S. They saw me as a student and yet believed that I would understand their lives at work as an immigrant worker because I was also a immigrant from India.

While the “insider status” provided me access and a nuanced understanding of the experiences of my women participants, my gender acted as a challenge and sometimes an impediment in connecting with my male participants who sometimes perceived me as feminist researcher on a mission to show that they oppress their wives. The women on dependent visas may also have felt a sense of difference, because their status as a dependent spouse is different from my current status as a researcher even though I may share their marital status, class location and a similar past experience. Further my status as a North Indian, non-Christian, non-malayalee speaking woman made me an outsider in the communities of nurses. This shows that Indians in the U.S. are not a monolithic whole and being an Indian (national identity) did not warrant me an automatic insiderness to all regional groups, particularly the Malayalee-Christian community. Malayalam is a radically different language from Hindi or Bengali (Indian languages I speak)\textsuperscript{12}. Malayalee-Christians also come from a small minority religious group, a minority even in Kerala.

\textsuperscript{12} It is a Dravidian language as opposed Indo-European that many of the north Indian languages has its roots in.
Therefore, I was as much an outsider to this community as I would be if I were studying a non-Indian South-Asian population like Sri-Lankans or Burmese. Therefore I had to carefully build trust and rapport in this community.

My interaction with my participants also often brought to surface my previous social activist self. During the interviews, I often found myself offering to help my participants with issues of self-worth, loneliness, volunteering and educational opportunities in which they may engage while on dependent visas. I saw this as a form of reciprocity for their involvement in the project. At the same time, this also illuminated my outsider position and to a certain extent a position of privilege given my social location that granted me more social and cultural resources they had.

Therefore I tread between multiple ‘status identities’ with my participants. As Beoku-Betts, (1994) argues researchers with “insider status” like myself may benefit from a degree of common experience with research participants not available to other researchers. However, there are other factors that separate the researcher from the participants and “shape participants’ perceptions of them as dissimilar (i.e., professional/class status, education, gender, marital status, religious and cultural history)” (Beoku-Betts 1994: 414). These identities probably make the researcher an “outsider within” – a status that accommodates the fluidity of the multiple identities that the researcher such as myself traverses vis-à-vis the research participants and even the research settings. However as Beoku-Betts, points out, the “subcategories within these identities complicate the interpretation of the research dynamics” (Beoku-Betts 1994: 414). As a feminist researcher, the
awareness and acknowledgement of these identities will be important in my analysis.

Power dynamics among the researched and the researcher problematizes the process of gaining access and being accepted in the field for field researchers (Guevarra 2006). Feminist scholars have pointed out that such relationships becomes more complex when the researchers shares racial and ethnic identity with the research subjects (Aguilar 1981; Bolak 1996; Ong 1995; Zavella 1997; Zinn 1979). Scholars like Zinn (1979) and Aguilar (1981) have argued that ethnic insiders may hold marginal positions among the ethnic population they are researching due to their academic training, education level and ideological inclinations. Wolf (1996) and O’Connell Davidson & Layder (1994) point out that being a woman may also become a challenge when researching men. I argue that since my participants are at par or even higher than I, in terms of class and social status, my position as a researcher somewhat makes me a “outsider within” in the context of my participants. I found that once I had built a basic level of trust and rapport, my “outsider-within” status made my participants in both communities, across gender, more comfortable about sharing their everyday lives with me because while I had a cultural understanding of their experiences, I did not threaten their identity or social position. I had somewhat different experience in each community. In the community of nurses they joked, that my not being from the community reduced the risk of me “gossiping”. Once of the nurses told me that it is easier to talk to me because she knew I would not judge her in the same way as some members of her community would. The higher social status of my
participants also made them less vulnerable in their interaction with me as the researcher. Many of the men high-tech workers and the nurses treated me like someone from the community that they needed to help.

My standpoint as an Indian woman who had undergone the experience of being on a dependent visa for six months in the United States provides me with an unique understanding of the experiences of the women and to an extent, the men on dependent visa in my study. As a sociologist studying gender and immigration and as an Indian woman who grew up in a traditional heterosexual, middle class patriarchal household, my awareness of the way gender is performed in a typical Indian household helps provide me a nuanced understanding of the lives of the people in my study, that DeVault (1999) argues is important to interpretive research. My research might not tell the stories of all immigrant families or even all Indian immigrant families, but it will provide an insightful comparative analysis of gender dynamics in traditional heterosexual families and non-traditional heterosexual families for an understudied immigrant group – namely Asian-Indians (Haraway 1989).

Further I have strived to use a critical feminist epistemological framework in my methods. I used archival research to understand the specific matrix of history, interests and political stakes involved construction of visa policies that affect people’s lives in intimate ways. I question why sociologists and social scientists have not yet explored how visas are gendered mechanisms of state control that affect everyday lives of migrants. Ethnography allowed me to engage with the meaning-making process in my exploration of the experiences of the families in my study.
Even though I was Indian and share similar material experiences with many of the women in my study, my status as a researcher put me in a different social location from my participants. Sharing national origin does not mean that I also shared ethnic and regional backgrounds with all my participants. I had more cultural commonalities with my north Indian participants than my participants from Kerala who were a religious and ethnic minority in India. This also put me in a different social and cultural location than my participants. Hence, I used a research technique that allowed my participants to question and argue with my research agenda, should they find it irrelevant to their experiences. I did this in three ways: a) by asking my participants to provide inputs in designing my interview guide; b) by letting them question the purpose of asking any particular question (I told them before the interview that they could do this); and c) I intend to share my research findings with my participants.

**Conclusion**

The use of a critical feminist epistemology for this study allowed me to focus on the subtle nuances and detailed descriptions that are necessary to understand gender ideologies and practices in everyday interactions of families whose economics are determined by the visas. In addition, this sort of ethnographic research enables social scientists to link everyday life to larger social and political institutions (Smith 2005)

The used of multi-pronged qualitative methods helped me triangulate my findings with interviews, archival research and ethnography. This triangulation of
research methodology ensures that I am able to crosscheck the validity of my research findings from the interviews with the data from the participant observations. In-depth interviews helped me explore the various facets of my participant’s lives pre and post migration and their relationship with the process of migration. My observations allowed me see if and how my participants’ perceptions about their lives and material experiences played out in their interactions with their spouses and other members of the Indian community. The experiences of my participants helped me to analyze theories about gender and immigration. My interviews with immigration experts and the archival research gave me an insight into structural/governmental logic of the migration process. As a researcher using critical feminist epistemology I go beyond the traditional theoretical repertoire of social scientific research. I bring to this research an investment to use the analysis to engage in a social movement or at least a discursive commitment for a more just immigration reform.
Chapter 4

Indian Professional Immigration to the U.S.: Description of Recruitment and Visa Processes

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"Getting to America is a process; it's a story, a full-feature film."

Aniket, participant

Indian migration to the United States increased exponentially after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. The act abolished national-origins quotas and made it possible for high-skilled immigrants, including Indians, to gain permanent residence and bring their family members to the U.S. The Immigration Act of 1990 bolstered this process by introducing the non-immigrant H-1B temporary worker visa category. This visa allows US businesses to hire foreigners with at least a bachelor’s degree in “specialty occupations” such as science, engineering, and information technology (IT) (Naujoks 2009). Another visa issued to Indians that is relevant here is the H-1C visa, which is issued to migrant nurses willing to work in areas of the United States that have an acute shortage of health care professionals. Apart from international student visas, short-term business visas, and tourist visas, there are five other categories of the short-term work visa\(^\text{14}\) that are issued to foreign nationals from countries besides the Western European countries and Canada. The family reunification clause of the Immigration Act of 1965 led to the creation of the dependent visa category for the spouses and children of temporary workers, and even for foreign students.

\(^\text{14}\) The six categories of visas are: H2A (Agricultural Workers visa); H3 "Trainee" (Not Medical or Academic) visas; L "Intra-Company Transfer" visas; O "Extraordinary Ability" visas; P "Performer" visas; E visa or employment bases immigration visas.
Immigration has been on the increase in the last century. According to the US Department of Homeland Security, more than a third of all foreign-born Indians in the U.S. came to the U.S. by 2000 or later. The number of Indian immigrants went from 27,000 to 85,000 between 1986 to 2005. In the same period, the proportion of Indians in total immigration rose from 4.4 to 7.4 percent. Indian citizens accounted for 5.7 percent of all persons obtaining lawful permanent resident status in 2008. Economist B. Lindsay Lowell (2001) observed that the number of Indian H-1B visa holders grew fivefold between 1989 and 1999 and peaked in 2001 with 160,000 issuances. In 2001, 82 percent of all computer-industry H-1B visas were given to Indians and 85 percent of all Indian H-1B beneficiaries were for computer related jobs. In addition to high-tech workers, India also accounts for a large percentage of the international students who migrate to the United States (2009 CGS International Graduate Admissions Survey Phase II). Many of these students obtain H1-B visa upon graduation.

According to the 2006 American Community Survey, men accounted for the majority of Indian-born population living in the U.S in 2006. There are no specific statistics available on the sex of lead migrants; but, nurses, who are almost all women, constitute one of the largest emigrant groups of women from India to the United States (Dicicco-Bloom 2004). The high-tech workers come from all regions of India and are varied in their religious affiliations although the majority are Hindus (Kurien 2001). The Indian nurses come from Kerala, a state in Southern India, and almost all of them are Christians as nursing has historically been a Christian occupation in India (Dicicco-Bloom 2004, George 2005).
The increase in the Indian immigration to the U.S., the U.K., and the Middle East was facilitated in the last decade by the policies of the Indian government. After the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991, as Indians abroad began to be economically and educationally successful. They began to be regarded to as “model minorities” by the United States. The Indian government instituted pro-diaspora policies (Bhat 2003, Dubey 2003, Prashad 2000). In 1999, India introduced the Person of Indian Origin Card (PIO card) and, in 2005, the Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI). Both policies grant Indians abroad, now citizens of their host country the rights as an Indian citizen except for permission to vote or run for office, or be a government employment. Remittances for those abroad may have been a reason for the Indian government’s softening attitude towards emigrating Indians, despite the worry of brain drain. Since 2003, India has been one of the world’s largest recipients of remittances from emigrants, defined as the inflow of private transfers. These remittances have risen since the 1990s. In 1990-1991, India received 2.1 billion U.S. Dollars in remittances through formal channels. By 2008, remittances had increased to 52 billion U.S. dollars (Chishti 2007).

As migration of foreign nationals from India and other parts of the world to the U.S. increased, the government over the years instituted different visa categories for the migration of temporary workers, permanent workers and their families. I describe the visa categories that my participants hold and their legal entailments below.

**Description of Visas Categories**

The three categories of visas that most of my participants arrived to the United States on were the temporary skilled workers non-immigrant visas or the H1-B visas, the dependent visa H-4 visa, the employment bases immigrant visa or the EB-3 visas and the
EB-4 visas or the family visa for spouses and children of EB-4 holders. Some of my nurse participants who married men who were U.S. citizens or permanent residents arrived on a green card or a permanent resident on the family reunification clause. Table 2 shows the number of participants on each of these visas statuses.

**Table 2. Number of Participants in each visa category**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visa Categories</th>
<th>High-Tech Workers</th>
<th>Wives of High Tech Workers</th>
<th>Nurses</th>
<th>Husbands of Nurses</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>H1-B</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled Workers Temporary non-immigrant Visa</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H-4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent non-immigrant Visa</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>8*</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EB-3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment based immigrant visa</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EB-4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment based immigrant dependent visa</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Green Card</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Residency</td>
<td>2**</td>
<td>2**</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 2 of the 8 husbands on H-4 visas primarily lived in India with a transnational family arrangement
** Not included in the analysis.

Below, I provide the basic information on each of the visas that my participants hold. A detailed description with sources of each of the visa laws can be found in Appendix B.

**Information on the Four Main Visa Categories:**

- **H1-B Visa Status:** The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 instituted the H-1 non-immigrant visa for U.S. employers seeking to hire foreign workers on a
temporary basis. The Immigration Act of 1990 amended the 1952 law, and created
the H-1B category with an annual cap of 65,000 visas given out to all countries (U.S.
GAO 2000) and in 2009, 75% of all H1-B visas went to Indian information
technology (IT) workers (Xiang 2011). H1-B is a non-immigrant temporary visa
status held by foreign professional workers who will fill a specialized knowledge
position in the United States. The basic eligibility for the H1-B status requires that
the job that the worker is applying the visa for is regarded as a “specialty
occupation”, meaning that it requires at least a Bachelors degree in the field and
may include but not limited to but not limited to, architecture, engineering,
mathematics, physical sciences, social sciences, medicine and health, education, law,
accounting, business specialties, theology, and the arts. The H1-B is usually has a
three-year term and can be extended to another three years after which the H1-B
holder is required to leave the U.S. for one year before being eligible for H1-B status
again. H1-B is a non-immigrant visa but has a pathway to immigration via the
permanent residency program. The Congress has made several revisions to the visa
since then. The H1-B category in its current form was introduced in The
Immigration Act of 1990. The demand and inflow for the H-1B worker has escalated
since the 1990s. Starting in 1990, the immigration law allows for a total of 85,000
new H-1B visas to be made available each government fiscal year. All the high-tech
workers (N=20) in my study held H-1B status and about eight of the nurses held H-
1B status.

• Dependent or H-4 visa: The family reunion clause of the Immigration Act of 1965
led to the facilitation of the “dependent visa status” for spouses and children of
temporary skilled workers which was revised to its current form and included spouses of foreign students in the Immigration Act of 1990s (Naujoks 2009). The H-4 dependent visa – the visa status that most of the spouses in my study held – allows the dependent spouse and children of any principal H-class visa holders’ entry to the United States. (Immigration Fundamentals, Rel. #31. 10/10). According to the Unites States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) descriptions of non-immigrant temporary visa dependents on H-4 visa are not permitted to be employed or receive compensation from any U.S. source. It is possible for the dependent to be offered a paid position, and apply for a change of status to an appropriate visa that allows employment. These opportunities are rare, however, and certain qualifications dictated by the visa type must be met before the visa status change is approved. In addition, employment may not commence until the USCIS approves the change, which can take up to six months. Recent statistics released by the Department of Homeland Security in 2010 show that there were a total of 141, 575 people in the U.S on the H-4 dependent visa category in 2010 and 55,335 of those were Indian citizens. The exact gender data is not available, but the Department of Homeland Security Reports on visa issuances in the last 10 years state that the majority of dependent H-4 visas go to women, followed by children and a small percentage go to men. All the wives (N=20) of the high-tech workers held H-4 visas and about eight of the husbands of nurses held H-4 visas.

• **EB-3 Visa for Nurses:** Like high-tech workers, nurses can also hold H1-B status because they fall under the “specialty occupation” category. However, due to the known shortage of nurses in the United States, nurses can bypass the H1-B non-
immigrant visa process and can apply for an Employment-Based Immigrant visa – known as EB-3. The EB-3 opens up a straight path to permanent residency for the immigrant worker. To be eligible for EB-3 visa, a nurse or a healthcare worker should have worked for at least 3 years in her/his area of expertise in an accredited and governmentally recognized health institution in the country of origin. The spouses of EB-3 holder may be admitted to the United States in E3-4 (spouse of a “skilled worker” or “professional”) categories and can apply for a work permit. Once the work permit is issued which can take up to 3 years, the spouse of the worker can seek employment. About nine of the nurses in my study held EB-3 status and their husband EB-4.

- **Employment-Based Permanent Residency or Green Card:** Green cards are employment-based immigrant visas are made available to qualified applicants from all national origins under the provisions of U.S. immigration law. Spouses and children of certain preference categories are allowed to accompany or follow-to-join employment-based immigrants. Several of the H1-B holders in my study had petitioned for permanent residency through their employers and were waiting for approval. About eight of the nurses in my study and their spouses who had arrived on EB-3 were now on green cards or citizens.
**Table 3. Summary of H1-B, H-4 and EB-3 visas characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>H1B OR SKILLED WORKERS TEMPORARY NON-IMMIGRANT VISA</strong></th>
<th><strong>H4 VISA OR DEPENDENT NON-IMMIGRANT VISA FOR FAMILY MEMBERS</strong></th>
<th><strong>EB3 EMPLOYMENT-BASED IMMIGRATION VISA</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visa for professionals in “Specialty Occupation” (SO) with at least a bachelor’s degree.</td>
<td>Spouse and children of any of the H (1, 2 and 3) visa holders can apply for a H4 dependent visa</td>
<td>Offered to foreign nationals with specialized training that U.S labor markets have shortage of such as nurses, healthcare workers, and skilled factory workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO include: accounting, computer professionals, engineers, financial analysts, doctors, scientists, architects and lawyers.</td>
<td>The term of the visa aligns with the term of the employed spouse</td>
<td>Must either demonstrate two years of work experience in related field before migration or job requires at least a U.S baccalaureate degree or a foreign equivalent and must be members of the profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issued for 3 years and extendable for another 3 years</td>
<td>H4 visa holder may not hold any kind of employment in the United States</td>
<td>Employer must process the first step of permanent residency for the migrant worker before arrival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1B workers are expected to make valuable contribution to American society</td>
<td>They may not have social security card or any kind of government issued identification.</td>
<td>Opens up straight path to permanent residency for both worker and spouse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer can choose to apply for permanent residency or not</td>
<td>The H-4 visa holders obtain permanent residency as when their spouses obtain it and are permitted to work after that.</td>
<td>Spouses of EB-3 workers arrive on E3-4 spouse visas and can apply for work permits immediately. EB-4 spouses are eligible to work with a work permit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Recruitment and Visa Process for High-Tech Workers**

Xiang (2011) provides a detailed description of the recruitment and emigration process of Indian high-tech, particularly information technology (IT) workers from India to U.S. firms, as well as to other parts of the world. My description of the recruitment and visa
process is based on Xiang’s work, on archival research, and on interviews I conducted. In
the interviews I conducted, participants detail their experiences with the recruitment and
emigration process before they arrived in the United States.

Most of my high-tech worker participants followed the route Xiang describes: IT
firms that hire workers in India facilitate the offshore recruitment of IT workers. The IT
firms in India, which are often informally referred to as “body shopping” agencies in the
industry, earn revenues by lending the bodies of IT employees to different companies
around the world. One of my high-tech participants described the body-shopping process
thus: “We, the IT workers, become international products that can be sold from project to
project. How do you think these giant companies make money? By renting us out, selling
our skills!” Most of the large “body shopping” firms liaison with the consulates of different
countries and procure a certain number visas that they hold for their workers. The “body
shopping” agencies compete with similar agencies in securing visas for their employees,
which ensures the number of workers they can export every year. The larger and more
powerful the firm, the stronger their networks with international clients in countries like
the U.S. and the U.K are. Some firms work only with U.S. companies supplying IT workers.
Every year Indian firms send up to 65,000\(^\text{15}\) IT workers to the U.S. Employees are selected
for offshore recruitment based on criteria such as: i) the expertise of the employee on a
given project; ii) the experience of employee working with off-site and international
clients; iii) the client’s demand for a particular employees; iv) the overall performance of
the employee. An offshore recruitment is considered to be a promotion for the employee
selected.

\(^{15}\) The official State Department current cutoff for hiring of H1-B workers from India is capped at
65,000 per year.
The structure of the IT firms in India is designed such that the promotion and advancement of the employees depends on an offshore assignment. Employees at entry-level positions called the junior coders are promoted to be senior coders and the next promotion is designated as offshore programmers. Almost everyone who is hired at an IT firm or “body shopping” agencies receive an offshore appointment and thereby a promotion. The employees who do not receive an offshore promotion or choose not to accept one for family or other reasons usually remain at the senior coder position with little pay increase. Even when they change jobs, there are minimal gains in terms of pay and promotions. The higher profile and higher salaried jobs in the IT industry usually go to IT workers who have returned to the country after their term at an offshore location. The most coveted offshore location for “body shopping agencies and the employees is the U.S. and the U.K. The reason for this is that, an offshore promotion in the U.K and the U.S. means more revenue for the company, relatively higher pay for the employee when compared to offshore recruitments in places like Singapore or South Africa or Latin America and the option of a permanent immigration particularly to the U.S. As mentioned earlier, the U.S. has included the option for H1-B holders to apply for permanent residency through their employment that the U.K. or the EU countries do not offer. The Indian IT firms tout the United States to their employees as the most desirable offshore promotion fostering competition among employees for an U.S. appointment. This is a common practice in almost all “body shopping” firms in India (Xiang 2011).

After the internal selection of employees for offshore projects is completed, the international client interviews the employees selected internally. According to my participants, most employees selected for offshore projects “sail through client interviews.”
Once a firm in the U.S. has agreed to contract a certain number of employees from a “body shopping” agency, their legal office sends out contract letters to companies stating the pay and the fringe benefits offered to the employee. The employee usually does not have any negotiation powers for pay or benefits: the “body shopping” process decides that for the employee. The agency receives monthly revenue for each of the employee they send out to their international clients in the U.S. Once paperwork is processed by hiring agency in the U.S., the legal offices of the Indian firm prepares letters of support for the employee to apply for a H1-B visa and sets up dates for visa interviews at the U.S. consulate in a city closest to the place of employment.\(^\text{16}\) Interview dates are available only three months prior to the travel dates. The documents required for a H1-B visa include the employee’s Indian passport, visa fees, paid by the company, visa forms (completed), a sponsorship letter from the U.S. firm, letters of support from the Indian parent company, the employee’s educational certificates, the employee’s C.V., current pay stubs, and a description of the project that the employee is being hired for. Since 2000, with reform in the H1-B laws, H1-B workers are no longer required to prove intent to return to the home country during the visa interviews.

The employee appears at the consulate on the day and time of the interview with the relevant documents. The employee’s company pays for the cost of traveling to the consulate. The employee has a face-to-face interview (or interviews) with a visa officer who usually asks the employee about their current employment firm in India, about the recruiting firm in the U.S., about the project they will be working on, and about the place they will be staying in the U.S. If the visa is granted, the consulate retains the passport and

\(^{16}\) All the major cities in India have a regional U.S. Consulate.
it is available for pick-up after 48 hours, or it is sent to the employee’s company via a courier service. If the visa is rejected, the passport is returned. One of my participants while describing his experiences said:

It’s nerve-racking. You are in this building made of steel with policemen carrying heavy weapons. The visa officer stands behind the bulletproof glass window and shoots all these questions. Most people are granted a visa; but, it is always a 50/50 chance and you are always nervous. People are always so happy once they are granted a visa and so sad when they are not. It’s hard to face your colleagues if you are denied a visa. It is as if you are a loser! 17

After the visa is granted, the employee prepares to leave. The company covers the passage money for the employees. The Indian firm also assumes responsibility for the employee during the travel and for any misconduct if committed by the employee at work during their tenure at the U.S. based firm. If the employee is married or has children, the company also applies for a dependent visa for the spouse and children of the H1-B worker. This process is described in the next section.

The minority of participants in my study, who were not IT workers but worked in U.S. companies on H1-B visas as financial analysts or research scientists, mostly held graduate degrees from U.S. Universities and, upon graduation, applied for jobs in the U.S. Upon getting a job, their employer petitions the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for an H1-B visa on their behalf. Once the visa petition is approved, they must return to India and go through the interview process just as did the IT workers. Once their visa is approved and stamped, they can return to the U.S. and begin their new job.

17 The few reasons put forth by my participants for denial of visas are: 1. Qualifications of applicants do not match the job description. 2. The paperwork from the hiring company or the sending company is incomplete or unsatisfactory. 3. Contradictory or shifty responses to interview questions. 4. Visa officer in bad mood.
The Recruitment and Visa Process of the Indian Nurses

The recruitment and visa processes for nurses in my study proved to be somewhat different. A third of my nurse participants arrived in the U.S. with a green card, having married a man with U.S. permanent residency or citizenship as described in chapter 2. The majority of my respondents came to the U.S. on a non-immigrant H1-B visa, or on an employment based immigrant visa called EB-3. Due to the shortage of nationally trained nurses in the U.S. and increased demand for registered nurse (RNs), there is mounting pressure by commercial recruiters and employers to ease restrictions on nurse immigration (Aiken 2007). The nurses mainly arrive on two types of visas: a) immigrant visas called EB-3 given to specially trained skilled workers who fill an acute labor shortage in the U.S.; b) In fewer numbers on non-immigrant skilled-workers visas or H1-A or H1-B (Nair and Percot 2007). In other cases, nurses come on H1-C visas, which are given to foreign healthcare workers migrating to areas with an acute nurse shortage. I did not have any nurses on H1-C visa because most I conducted my interviews in metropolitan areas.

In their critical exposé of the recruitment process of foreign nurses in the U.S, Khadaria (2007) and Pittman et al. (2010), provide a thorough description of how nurses are recruited to work in the American healthcare industry. These studies, along with the experiences my participants shared with me via interviews, form my description of nursing recruitment in India and the processes they follow to get a visa.

According to Khadaria, the high rate of emigration of Indian nurses was a result of the shortage of nurses in the wealthier nations of the world and the business interests of the recruitment agencies in India. In 2004 there were more than a 1000 accredited nursing schools in India, which collectively graduated about 142,2452 nurses per year (Khadaria
2007). In response to rising demand from wealthier nations for well-trained, English speaking, Indian nurses, many of these nurse graduates receive further training to be foreign nurses. Out of all the nurses trained each year, about 75% emigrate to different parts of the world. Most of these nurses migrate to the Gulf countries, U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, in that order.

With the rising demands for Indian nurses in the global markets, many Indian hospitals have developed themselves as “business process outsourcing” (BPO) (Khadaria 2007). These hospitals recruit and train Indian nurses and prepare them to take the foreign nursing examinations. The licensing and visa processes governing migration between these different countries vary markedly and require significant knowledge of the systems on the part of the BPO hospitals. For example, the waiting period for migrating to the United Kingdom is as short as 6 months, whereas for the United States it is up to 2 to 3 years. The training and recruitment of nurses for the international health care industry occurs across all the big cities in India. Still 85% of these nurses are Christians from the state of Kerala.

Since 2003, New Delhi is the hub of Indian recruiting agencies that partner with U.S. recruiters. The largest ones are ‘Max HealthStaff’, ‘Western International University’ (Mody Private group), ‘Escorts Heart Institute’, ‘the Apollo Hospitals’, and ‘Jaipur Golden Hospital’ (Khadaria 2007: 10). Khadaria (2007) found that these agencies invest an average of 4,700–7,000 U.S. dollars training each nurse, and earn as much as 47,000 U.S. Dollars when she is placed abroad. In recent years, the Indian government, much like the Filipino government, has started taking an interest in facilitating the international migration of nurses. Recruitment agencies, with the help of the government, have exponentially
increased Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) examination centers in India since 2004. According to Khadaria (2007) and Pittman et al. (2010), new government policy has increased nursing migration to the U.S. many times over. In the last decade, India has become the second largest supplier of foreign nurses to the U.S., after the Philippines. Between 2005 and 2009, the Indian recruitment agencies have exported about a 100,000 nurses to the United States (Pittman et al. 2010).

Most of my nurse participants arrived to the U.S. between 2000 and 2010 on H1-B visas or EB-3 visas. They came through a recruitment agency. The nurses who came here on a H1-B visa had Bachelors in Science (Nursing) degrees. Upon graduation they were recruited by a recruitment agencies and trained for employment in a foreign hospital. The recruitment agencies organized interviews for them with several U.S. healthcare firms on behalf of the nurses. Once selected, the nurses prepared for the CGFNS examination. It often took multiple attempts for some of my participants to pass the CGFNS examination. It could take up to two years for them to qualify the examination, or pass the examination in its entirety, and travel to the U.S.

After the nurses qualified the CGFNS examination, they were eligible to apply for a H1-B visa. The process for applying for the H1-B visa for the nurses is similar to the process for high-tech workers. The agency sets up an interview appointment with the U.S. consulate in the nearest city to where the nurses live. The visa interview requires the nurses to carry their passports, visa forms, their appointment letter from the U.S. hospital, CGFNS certification documents, their educational documents, and visa fees (which, in the case of the nurses, are not paid by the recruitment agency). The nurses told me that if their paperwork was in order, then they could expect not to be asked very many questions at
visa interview, except the name of the hospital they would be working at in the U.S., and the name of the place where the hospital was. Once the visa was granted, the nurses prepared to leave for the U.S. For my nurse participants, who were on H1-B, most were preparing to arrive to Chicago to join their jobs in various parts of the Chicago area. My participants told me that most of them had to arrange for their own passage money. Some were reimbursed by their work organization in the U.S.; but some were not, depending on the details of the contract that the Indian recruitment agency had drawn up with the U.S. organization.

The U.S. hospital that decided to hire them would send a contract for the nurse, typically for work spanning an eighteen-month to three-year time period, to the recruitment agencies. The nurses were bound by the contract to work with the U.S. hospital for the time period specified by the contract, up to a three-year period. If the nurses were to break the contract, the Indian recruitment agency was required to pay a penalty in the range of $10,000 to $30,000 to the U.S. hospital. To insulate themselves against this possibility, the Indian recruitment agencies drew up a contracts of their own, which required the nurses to pay up to $50,000 in penalty if they decided to terminate their contract with the U.S. hospital before the completion of their contract. My participants were of the opinion that the Indian recruitment agencies made profit “even from the contract fees.” According to Missy, one of my nurse participants, “If the hospital in the U.S. Wanted $20,000 to break the contract, the recruitment agency would charge us $50,000.” Most hospitals in the U.S., when recruiting H1-B nurses, offered to apply for permanent residency for their nurse employees after three years of employment under the National Interest Waiver (NIW), a program under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that allows for expediting the process of permanent residency for foreign workers in the
defense, biotechnology, or health care industries, considered short of trained personnel.

The minimum time required for an employee to be with an organization before they can file for permanent residency under NIW is three years. My nurse participants saw this both as a benefit and as a problem because it led them to a bind. Lily told me:

The only thing we bargain on during the hiring is so that we get a permanent residency fast; but that also makes us stay with the hospital we go to for three years. I wanted to leave my job even if I had to pay money. I hated my first job so much; but, I stayed on the three years for the green card. [...] Before coming you are not thinking of how it would be to work there, you are thinking of your family and your future; so, we make sure we have the green card thing in the contract. But sometimes it becomes, like, what you call it, “Catch-22” [...] situation.

Most of the nurses I found during my field recruitment, came to the U.S. not on non-immigrant H1-B or H1-C visas, but on an employment based immigrant visa called EB-3. EB-3 ensures a straight route to permanent residency in the U.S. When the employers of migrant workers apply for a permanent residency for their foreign employees in the U.S., they do so under different categories of employment based (EB) visas. EB-3 is one such category, and it can be applied to Indian migrant workers. Nurses and other foreign workers whose services are deemed important by U.S. government for “national interests” may be issued EB-3 visas for immigration before they have arrived in the U.S. (Pitman, et al. 2000). While the qualifications, requirements, and application processes for EB-3 visas are almost the same as H1-B visas, nurses must meet additional requirements in order to be eligible for EB-3 visa from India. The first additional requirement being that they need to demonstrate that they have three to five years of experience working in a world-class health facility as a full time registered nurse in India. Second they must produce a
“VisaScreen” certification.\(^{18}\) A “VisaScreen” certification is required by the Section 343 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (the IIRIRA) of 1996. It entails\(^{19}\): a) an assessment of the applicant’s education to ensure it is comparable to the U.S. graduate in the same profession; b) verification that all professional health care licenses that the applicant has ever held are valid and without conditions; c) the applicant must pass the U.S. English proficiency examination; and, d) verification that the nurse has passed either the CGFNS Qualifying Exam, the NCLEX-RN\(^{20}\), or the State Board Test Pool Examination (SBTPE). The International Commission on Healthcare Professionals (ICHP) issues the VisaScreen Certificate to indicate that nursing credentials meet U.S. standards. Applicants who successfully complete the VisaScreen receive an ICHP VisaScreen certificate, satisfying the Federal screening requirements.

When I asked my nurse participants who were here on EB-3 visa why they chose to come on EB-3 instead of H1-B, they said because it ensured a straight path to permanent residency not only for them but also their husbands. They also indicated that their husbands, more readily accompanied them if they did not have to come tagged as “dependent visa holders.” Spouses and children of EB-3 holders apply for EB-4 visas, which allow them to enter the U.S. as an immigrant migrating for reasons of family reunification. The EB-4 visa does not have the same restrictions on work as H-4 visas.

\(^{18}\) U.S. embassy, New Delhi Website: [http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/employment_based_visas.html](http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/employment_based_visas.html)

\(^{19}\) CGFNS International website: [http://www.cgfns.org/sections/programs/vs/](http://www.cgfns.org/sections/programs/vs/)

\(^{20}\) The NCLEX-RN is the examination that registered nurses are required to pass in order to obtain a nursing license in the U.S. This examination is administered at certain international locations including in New Delhi since 2005.
Given the many difficulties my nurse participants had to overcome to migrate, I asked them why they decided to migrate instead of working as a nurse in India. I received three overlapping responses, which were consistent with the past research on migration of Indian nurses (Walton-Roberts 2012, George 2005, Kurien 2002). The reasons my participants offered were: a) Nursing is a low-paid profession in India with low occupational prestige and slim chances of upward mobility within the occupation. Most of my participants cited the “much higher pay” as a foreign nurse as one of the primary reasons to emigrate; b) In India, culturally nurses are looked down upon as women who engage in dirty work of touching unclean bodies. Kurien (2002) assigns this codification of nursing as dirty work to Hinduism and Islam being, two of the major religions in India which consider body work as impure; c) The main reason put forth by my nurse participants for migration was the severe lack of opportunities in the State of Kerala where they came from. Kerala has been under the governance of the Communist Party of India since the last 20 years and has seen very little foreign investment or industrialization.

The economy is predominantly agricultural and there are very few jobs available besides farm work. Kerala has the highest rates of unemployment in the country. It also has the highest number of educated women in India and the highest rates of employed among educated women in the country (Mitra and Singh 2007). This leaves these women with little choice but to look for opportunities outside of the state. Most of the nurses and their husbands came from poorer, rural farming families. Christian women in Kerala over the last 40 years have taken up nursing to lift their immediate and extended families above the poverty level and lead them to upward social mobility (Kurien 2002, George 2005, Walton-Roberts 2012). This coupled with the demand for Indian nurses from wealthier nations
have made migration one of the most viable economic options for nurses from Kerala. As one of my nurse participants put it: “I only became a nurse so that I could get a job abroad and give my family, my children a chance to live better. It was very hard to leave but now parents, my brothers and sisters, my husband’s families all are doing better and my children will have a better future than me or my husband”.

The Visa Process for Dependent Spouses

The spouses of H1-B holders apply for H-4 dependent visa to be able to come to the U.S. as a dependent spouse. Recruiting agencies and firms advise that the dependent should apply for his or her visa when the lead migrant applies for his or her H1-B visa; but, most of my participants applied for a H-4 visa after their husbands or wives were already in the U.S. Most of my women participants, who applied for H-4 visas after their husbands had emigrated, coordinated with their husband’s mother company in India to organize the documents for the visa. In case of the wives of the high-tech workers, the visa fees and the passage money for the dependents of the lead migrant was usually borne by the firm. In case of the nurses’ husbands, almost in all cases except two, the nurses paid the visa fees and the passage money for their spouses.

The documentation that an H-4 visa applicant is required to have with her/him includes: a visa form, the passport of the applicant (which must clearly state that the H-4 applicant is married to the lead migrant), the original approved H1-B form (Form I-97) of the lead migrant, copies of the lead migrant’s passport, a letter from the lead migrant’s company certifying that the lead migrant worked in the company and that he/she is married to the applicant, a copy of lead applicant’s appointment letter, the lead applicant’s pay stubs and bank statements, marriage certificates and photographs of the wedding
showing the couple getting married in the presence of family and friends, and a cover letter stating that the H-4 applicant does not intend to seek employment in the United States.

My women participants on H-4 visas shared with me their experiences at the consulate during the visa interview. Most women said that they were advised by their husbands and other people with similar experience that they should wear Indian clothes (sari or salwar kameez) for the visa interview, as well as all markers of marriage based on their religion, such as a wedding ring for most, and/or vermillion and bangles for Hindu women.

At the visa interview, women participants had different experiences. The three women in my study who applied for their visas along with their husbands told me that the visa officers did not ask them any questions beyond their names and if the person accompanying them was their husband. The women who applied for their visas after their husbands emigrated had a range of experiences during the visa interviews. Some said they were barely asked anything during the interview beyond where they were going and where their husbands worked. Others said they were asked several questions. They were asked about their marriage. They were asked to identify people in the wedding photographs. They were asked if they intended to look for work in the U.S. Participants who faced a barrage of questions were more likely to have previously traveled to the U.S. for work or other business. Participants who faced more questions thought that once the visa officers were satisfied that the H-4 applicant did not have any intention to immediately work, they would grant them the visa. Alka, one the women who was asked many different questions, told me that when she was asked if she intended to work in the U.S. she replied, “Not at all. I want to go, take care of my family and have a baby as soon as possible.” Alka continued,
“And as soon as I said that I was like, ‘shit, now they’d think I want an anchor baby’, but thankfully they did not.” In very rare cases is H-4 visas denied. None of my participants knew anyone who was denied a H-4 visa. One of my participants was asked to return to the passport office after she corrected a problem with her paperwork: her passport did not indicate that she was married to her husband, and she needed to have that endorsed by the passport office before her visa would be granted.

The few men who applied for the H-4 visa required the same kinds of documents for the visa interview. Additionally, they were required to carry their wife’s CGFNS certification. The experiences of men applying for the H-4 visa were slightly different from the women H-4 applicants at the interviews. The men were almost never asked about their marriages or asked to show photographs of their wedding. Most of their questions centered around whether they intended to work in the U.S. and how would they spend their time upon migration. One of my participants, George, told me: “The insult starts right there. How am I going to spend my time? You tell me! I know that they see very few men applying for H-4, so they get anxious; but, it is quite insulting still.”

The men applying for EB-4 visas did not have to go through a visa interview. For all my nurse participants, the EB-3 and EB-4 visas for their husbands and children were processed together. The recruitment agency hired a law firm in the U.S. to apply for the EB-3 and EB-4 visas for the dependents of the nurses. The paperwork for EB-4 applicants was similar to those of the H-4 applicants. After the EB-4 was granted and the men traveled to the U.S., they would be interviewed by the immigration officials about the purpose of migration at the U.S. port of arrival before they were granted entry.
Conclusion

In this chapter I offered a detailed description of the recruitment process for jobs in the U.S. and the processes required to obtain the visas. Immigrants have to jump through several hoops to receive visas; but the nurses seemed to have had to go through more steps to be hired and to receive their visas than the high-tech workers. They have to pass the CGFNS examination and VisaScreen certification to obtain a visa. Additionally, the recruitment agencies the nurses had to go through were more exploitative than the body-shopping agencies that high-tech workers were parts of. The nurses however had the opportunity to become permanent residents of the United States much faster than the high-tech workers. Unlike the nurses, the high-tech workers did not have the option to apply for permanent residency before they arrived in the United States. The experiences of the H-4 applicants seemed to differ by gender during the visa interview process, a difference in experience that continued to persist even after they had migrated. Understanding the recruitment and visa processes for high-tech workers, nurses, and their respective spouses provides a peek into the experiences of migrant workers from India before they arrive in the United States. While the experiences were trying for some, these difficulties would just be the beginning of the struggles that they would face. In the chapters that follow, I explore how these various visas affect the different aspects of my participants’ lives as immigrants.
Chapter 5

“Not Valid For Identification: ”Gendered Migrations, Visa Structures and Invisible Webs of Dependence

We’re a nation of immigrants; but we are also a nation of laws.


It was a nippy, windy Sunday evening in Chicago, October 2010. There were an unusually large number of people, all clad in Indian ethnic attire, gathered on this Sunday evening at an urban college campus. For the Indian community in Chicago, it was not any ordinary Sunday. It was the last evening of a three-day celebration, organized by the city-based association for the Indian community in Chicago, that coincided with one of the most important religious festivals of the Hindu faith. Dussehra, or Durga Puja, is mostly celebrated in the northern and eastern parts of India. I am an Indian student and an immigrant woman in the U.S., and I had attended this event for the last three years, more to connect with a nostalgic cultural repertoire than for religious reasons; however, on this particular Durga Puja, I was conducting an ethnography for my dissertation research. I hoped to gain more insight into how visa policies affect Indian high-tech families living in the U.S.

As evening folded into night, the crowd began to thin. Some thirty men and women spread out in the two large performance halls for a post-dinner clean-up party. I sat on the floor in a circle with five Indian women, all in their thirties, who wore elegant silk saris as they counted the cash they made from selling food coupons at the event. This year’s Durga

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21 Presidential Address on Immigration 2006
22 Second Presidential Debate 2012
Puja had been a success. The women sat, counting their money, engaged in happy conversation with each other. They shared fond reminiscences of the festivities ‘back home’ and reflected humorously on the past two days of celebrations.

These five women had organized the three-day event, which attracted more than 800 people over its three-day span, down to its most meticulous detail. With support from a few others in the community, they had planned and executed the entire event from start to finish. They organized fund raising, managed the event’s finances, and oversaw publicity, catering, decoration, parking, and even the event’s website design. On top of all that, they had organized two evenings of cultural shows and collectively choreographed the arrangement for the elaborate worship rituals of the goddess.

Suddenly, one of the women burst into tears. “So, the last month and a half of sweat and fun is over!” She cried, “Now it is back to the boredom of leading the forced housewife life! I had almost forgotten over the last month what it is like to be on H-4!”

The others nodded in agreement with somber expressions. One woman turned to me and said with a sigh, “I am glad you are doing this research. I hope it changes something.” I understood her remark to be indicative of a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the conditions of life lived under dependent visa status.

The women I spent that weekend with in October were in the U.S. on “H-4 dependent visas.” H-4 dependent visas are given to the spouses and children of “high-skilled temporary migrant workers” who hold a H1-B visa. The H-4 exists so that family members can join the temporary-migrant worker in the U.S. H-4 visa status does not allow for the holder to work legally in the United States. All the five women, like many others with H-4 status, were highly qualified and most had high-paying, white-collar jobs in India.
One of the women in this group had an MBA and had worked in middle management for five years in India before coming to the U.S. Another had a PhD in Psychology from a top-ranked university in India. Another had been a journalist reporting the crime beat. One was a practicing lawyer in India, and another, who held a MS in Physics, had taught at a four-year college before joining her husband in the U.S. In spite of all of their degrees, experience, and qualifications, all of these women were legally bound to perform a family structure that simulated the 1950s model of white American middle-class family life: the wife remains dutifully at home while the man, the husband, provides for the family. The irony of this situation is, of course, that where for white American middle-class women in the 1950s there at least existed the option to pursue a more fulfilling existence beyond home servitude, for these women, highly educated and once working, such an option remains legally off-limits (Coontz 2011). All of these women told me that evening that the reason they had put their hearts and souls into producing a perfect community event was that they needed something to do that would make them feel like useful human beings again.

The Department of Labor reported in 2010 that the majority of the recipients of H-4 dependent visas are women. Only a small percentage of the H-4 visas go to men who accompany or follow their professional, “high-skilled” wives to the United States. Finding women who had migrated to the U.S. on the H-4 visa was relatively easy. I had to search for male participants who had similar visa statuses. Over the past 40 years, one of largest and most consistent migrations from India to the United States has been driven by women, specifically Indian migrant nurses. These nurses’ either bring their husbands with them, or their husbands follow them to the U.S. Like the women I met at the Durga Puja celebration,
husbands of migrant nurses enter to the United States under the H-4 visa; however, men on dependent visas were not as visible, nor were they as accessible as women with the same visa status. It is also worth noting that men living under H-4 reacted to the conditions of their dependent visa status very differently than the women.

In my search for men on dependent visas, I attended Sunday masses in two Indian ethnic churches for six months. In both of these churches, nurses and their families constituted the majority of the congregation; however, when I inquired about families with men on the H-4 dependent visa, I was consistently met with silence and found no success at all for a very long time. At a Sunday mass in the December of 2010, a week before Christmas, I requested that the pastor re-announce my research at the end of the sermon, just as I had for many weeks previously. After the sermon, I stood outside the chapel to talk to people. A petite woman in her early 30s came up to me and introduced herself as a nurse, then said in a hushed whisper, “my husband is here on dependent visa.” Calmly and discreetly, I asked if it would be possible to talk to her and her husband about this. She said she needed to convince her husband first; but, she would do it. “It is Christmas week after all,” she said. Two weeks later, I formally interviewed the nurse and her husband; but, it took several follow-up phone calls to convince the couple to talk to me.

In this chapter, I examine how the social actors in my study negotiate the category of “dependent visas.” The social actors in question are the spouses who are on dependent visas, their partners, the migrant worker who qualifies as a “skilled-worker,” and immigration experts. Many political theorists (Rose et al., 2007, Lekme, 2002, Larner, 2000, Harvey, 2007) have engaged with thought concerned with state power by using Foucault’s (1977) concept of “governmentality” to explain state domination as dependent on the
compliance of individual subjects through ideological self-disciplining. One of the technological mechanisms through which states have seamlessly controlled bodies and subjectivities has been the construction and enforcement of visa laws, referred to as “visa regimes” by Salter (2004, 2006).

Given the centrality of visas to the lives of my participants, I begin by analyzing the nuances of the visa laws, which I find to be implicitly gendered, racialized and protectionist. These hidden presumptions are embedded within the political justification of protecting borders, the economy, and the security apparatus. The main questions I ask in this analysis are: What is the impact of “dependent H-4 visas” on the women and men who hold them? If we understand a visa as a tool to control and/or foster the mobility of international bodies, what is the nature of such an understanding in the public discourse? If we view a visa as a structure of power, in what way does that power translate in the everyday life of the visa holder? What does this visa story tell us about larger socio-economic and political structures?

I argue in this chapter that visa regulations govern every aspect of the transnational subject’s life as a globally mobile entity. Dependent visas reconfigure identities and notions of the self. They construct particular notions of citizenship, belonging, and migration. Visa policy alters family structures and familial relationships, reinforcing a traditional, patriarchal family form: man as breadwinner, woman as housewife. When, in the interest of economic prosperity, visa policy requires there be a reversal in this traditional, patriarchal family structure – i.e. the “high-skilled” woman replaces the man as the breadwinner and the man takes up the role of the dependent homemaker – we find that here also there are
disorienting consequences that undermine identity and self worth. Dependent visas are closely tied with the employment status of the main migrant. Thereby it controls the economic resources and the legal standing of the individual worker and her family. The dependent visa and work visa statuses are so deeply entwined that it creates a dependence structure that extends beyond the family and spills into the work lives of the lead migrants.

The influences of visa policy are multiple and multidirectional, at the same time destabilizing and disorienting. The state of dependency migrant persons are subjected to under visa regimes is highly problematic and contributes to a high degree of complicated, contradictory feeling affecting even individual identity. For example, while migrant persons articulate exasperation at the unfairness of the visa regime, simultaneously they embrace and engage in rhetoric of individual choice and gendered scripts when describing their decisions to migrate. Illuminating contradictions like these will help as I begin to empirically demonstrate how the abstract mechanism of state power manufactures a concrete web of dependence for the migrant subject. To further this aim, I also report on how subjects act to disrupt this state of dependency, and how such acts of disruptions as I observed raise serious questions about the effectiveness of the “dependent visa” policy.

**Dependent Visas as Governmental Control of Transnational Families**

The idea that transnational migration is a free, unrestricted process leading from bondage to personal freedom is dubious at best, and, in the interest of securing an honest narrative for the individuals vitally engaged in the flow of people from one place to another, I will endeavor to subject this idea to an appropriate level of scrutiny. Certainly, such notions as these, of individual liberty persist in the subject’s register of ideological
narratives; but, it is more correct, I claim, not to imagine such identities as free standing. Rather, I suggest understanding conflicting ideological positions within the identity of the migrating subject as representative of the multiple, at times conflicting, forces that affect a migrating subject’s life. These multiple and conflicting forces precipitate paradox in the heart of the transnational subject. I claim that what is often characterized as a self-realizing identity based-upon unfettered global mobility for migrant laborers and theirs families is enmeshed in a matrix of dependence that is solely based on visa policies. Visa laws are mechanisms of control through which various state agencies attempt to frame the subjectivity of migrant laborers and their families. Visa laws, what rights and restrictions migrant persons must abide by, can be conceptualized as a technology that attempts to control every aspect of the transnational subject’s life, from employment, to marital relationships, to formal signs of personhood i.e. the documentation of citizenship status, etc. For example, one way that state force acts to frame and control migrant subjectivity is to enact controls that regulate the real time in which the subject is physically emplaced within the boundaries of the state’s power. Most migrants who are on visas have a finite duration of permitted stay. This immediately frames the migrants, their desires, and aspirations in terms of the temporary and transnational, creating conditions of dependence. State power in this context is exercised via the category of the “dependent or the H-4 visas.”

I rely on three theoretical frameworks to analyze these policies: a) Foucault’s (1984) concept of governmentality and state power; b) state power and visa regimes; c) gender and race regimes (Mohanty 2003, Glenn 2002, 1999). I conjoin these three strands to
develop an understanding of what I call “constructing invisible structures of dependence” based on gendered visa regimes.

Foucault argues that governmentality is a tactic used by government and its agencies that allows for the “the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private” (p. 221). Governmentality happens when the “techniques of domination” and “techniques of the self” operate simultaneously to produce coercive structures. In such structures, subjects discipline themselves and others into conformity. I use this concept to analyze individual interaction within the purview of the power of visa laws. My analysis shows that governmentality affects individual agency; but, governmentality also fuels contradictory reactions in the subject as she or he negotiates governmentality in the context of global labor migration.

I derive the second theoretical strand from the body of work that identifies state power as being manifested through “technologies of visa regimes” (Salter 2004, 2006, Hollifield 2004, Koslowksi 2012). I claim that visa policies created by the state apparatus to regulate migration have a false façade of gender and racial neutrality. Mohanty’s (2003) critique of the construction of “third world women” in the West as “universal dependents” who are bereft of agency helps explain the construction of the dependent visas as an implicitly gendered and racialized project (see Chapter 2). I also claim that visa policies created by the state apparatus to regulate migration have a false façade of gender and racial neutrality. Mohanty’s (2003) critique of the construction of “third world women” in

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23 See Chapter 2 for a detailed analysis of theory.
the West as “universal dependents” who are bereft of agency helps explain the construction of the dependent visas as an implicitly gendered and racialized project (see Chapter 2).

The third framework that I employ is Mohanty’s race and gender regimes theory. I use Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s (2003) concept of gender and race regimes to analyze the complexity of the state as a gendered and racialized institution. Mohanty builds her concept of gendered and racial regimes in a reaction to Connell’s (1987) gender regime. Connell argued that gender is institutionalized within the family, state, street, and organizations. Mohanty argues that though Connell successfully demonstrates that the Euro-American state is a regime that can be called “the primary organizer of power relations of gender” (p. 64), this analysis is only partial as it lacks a racial lens. I combine gender structure theory with Mohanty’s concept of gender and racial regimes to bolster my analysis of gender in the transnational process and to help me critically analyze immigration laws as gendered and racialized regimes.

Mohanty contends that the “construction of immigration and laws” are gendered, (hetero)sexualized, and racialized as state practices, including immigration laws, in contemporary times are anchored in globalized “multinational capitalism” (p. 67). This is a particularly useful framework for understanding the mechanisms of immigration laws and their consequences for migrant subjects. Dependent visa laws are particularly problematic as they hinge strictly and only on heterosexuality premise of family. These visas are available exclusively to legally married heterosexual couple. Visa policy is constructed under the assumption that internationally mobile workers from the global south have

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24 See Chapter 2 for a detailed analysis of theory.
domestic/dependent spouses, which engenders a gendered visa structure that assumes a traditional, male-led family status for mobile workers. My analysis to follow, which details how dependent visas impact the lives of visa holders and their families, concretely demonstrates where assuming a traditional family structure fails to meet reality. I identify moments where, through visa regimes, an implicit subjective contradiction between individual agency and state power becomes manifest. I also conceptualize governmentality as a gendered and racialized phenomenon that creates invisible webs of dependence and material struggles for global migrants.

**Analysis and Discussion**

In this chapter, I treat the individual – that is the visa holders and their spouses, or “migrant entities” – as the unit of analysis and examine their interactions with the visa structure, other social actors (the spouses, lawmakers and the community), and institutions (family and transnational employment structures). I understand all of these points of interaction as being bound by the structure. Using this analytic frame in tandem with data gleaned from multiple rounds of open and focused coding, I found four emergent themes that show the dialectical relationship between the visa structure and the individual’s negotiations navigating them. The themes are a) the deconstruction and reconstruction of the immigrant self; b) the reconfiguration of the family as defined by the visa structure; c) the social and civic consequences of dependent visas, and; d) the acts of disruption and policy implications. I have organized analysis around each theme below.
“H-4 Visa Identity” and the Construction of the Self

Dependent Identity and Women on H-4 Visas:

The phrase “Not Valid for Identification” (see fig 1.) on the driver’s license of one of my participants, a 32-year-old woman on H-4 visa status, stood out to me as she showed me her driving license.

“What does that even mean,” she asked with a hint of sarcasm, “an ID not meant for identification? Who am I, then? Who is this person? Whose picture is on there?”

I did not have an answer to these poignant questions; but, Shivali Shah, a JD immigration law from Duke University and a tireless advocate for the rights of H-4 visa holders, did. In a statement explaining what it legally means to be on a dependent visa, she told me:

I recognize it is a dependent visa; but, it is so, so dependent that it makes the woman not a person. Essentially, legally, it makes the woman the child of her husband, and she has as many rights in the U.S. as an average person’s child would in relation to the legal system and [...] the world outside the home.

In the practical sense concerning the driver’s license in question, this relegation of an adult into a child by legal definition means that one is allowed to drive by right of being of legal age to drive; but, one is not allowed to use the driving license for identification (as all other adult citizens as well as non-citizens on every other kind of visa do). This instance of legal absurdity vividly illuminates of the loss of self that consistently accompanies the experience of living under the H-4 visa, as well as and the corresponding, traumatic search for new identity. I observed a recurrent theme in the narratives of the participants in my study. In describing their relationship with the H-4 dependent visa structure, participants would often give testimony to the ways their relationship with the visa structure had
affected, altered, and reconstructed what many of the women called an “H-4 self:” an identity solely defined by the visa.

PBS organized a public talk show on the program called “On the Contrary” on the unfairness or fairness of H-4 visas with multiple stakeholders such as visa holders, activists, lawyers and lawmakers on April, 04 2009. The show was organized as a reaction to a documentary film called “Hearts Suspected” made by an H-4 wife on her life as a dependent wife. In an interview as part of this panel discussion, the filmmaker and a former H-4 visa holder, Meghna Damani, speaking about how she felt being on the visa status, said:

A lot of sense of self-worth, our meaning in life, comes from what we do; and, we have so many associations around that we don’t even realize until we don’t have it anymore. So, I think a lot of just who the person I was – I felt like I just left that person. Not even I left; but, like, that person was just cut off from me the moment I landed in this country.25

The sentiment Damani expressed in the phrase “that person was cut off from me” is a sentiment that almost all of the women participants on H4 visa status articulated in myriad ways. Most of the women used phrases like, “I did not know who I was anymore” or “my entire identity as person, a woman was taken away” to describe what they thought and felt about their H-4 status. When Mili attempted to answer this question, her voice quivered in what appeared to be an extremely strong emotional reaction. Her response to this question was not only poignant; but, it also expressed the shock she experienced finding herself ripped from what was her personhood. She said:

I landed in this country and what I was, what I became was just an H-4. I was just Ravish’s wife, a housewife, with no identity of my own. Yes, when I chose to come here on H-4, I gave up what was me. My work ID back in India that

25 Interview excerpt procured through publicly available transcript of the PBS talk show “To The Contrary” hosted by Bonnie Erbe on 04/09/09 on the fairness or unfairness of H-4 visas.
stated by name, what I did, who I was, was gone. I became invisible just like what my driver’s license says: *not valid for identification*. It took me a while to come to terms with it; but, I did.

For most of the women I interviewed, this loss of self seemed to emerge from a sense of shock in response to the reality of being stripped of certain basic rights. As educated, independent middle-class women in India, they were accustomed to these basic rights and understood them as being fundamental to personhood itself. This sense of shock was aggravated as they found their pre-migration imagination of a country (the U.S) incompatible with their post-migration experience. Pre-migration, they perceived America as it had been described to them: the “land of opportunities,” “the land of women’s rights,” “the land of liberty,” and so on. Post-migration, they experienced an America that was very different from what they expected: an oppressive regime for as dependent migrant women. Tona, in mocking her status in the U.S., said, “I was quite shocked to learn that the only liberty in this country for me is the statue.” The shock Tona evokes here was often directly traumatic for H-4 visa holders. In a follow up interview, Mili, who after five years of being on H-4 changed her status to an international student after becoming a full-time graduate student in 2012, said of her experience:

> It was very weird for me. I was very excited during the process; but, when it finally happened I felt nothing. I got a social security number, and my husband and my best friend were so happy; but, I was like, what is this number? I did not have it for five years and now I have it; and, it makes me a person again. It was very weird, and it was weird to change my driver’s license to a real license that was valid for identification. I felt like this one thing is making me visible from being invisible. And I somehow did not want to give away my old license. It was a part of me I hated so much; but, it had become my identity, my H-4 identity for 5 years, and I still feel like I am a H-4 even when I have identity now. I can earn my own money now and I am no longer on that visa. I hate it but I can’t get out of it. It is almost *traumatic for me.*
Almost all the women that I interviewed shared Mili’s “traumatic” relationship with their H-4 identities. They described the visa in the language of bondage and indicated that being under H-4 caused frustration, depression, and even thoughts of suicide. Mia, one of the women I interviewed, called H-4 status “paralyzing,” Survi called the H-4 visa a “prison visa,” and Pia called it a “death sentence.” When asked what she thought about being on the H-4 visa, Jaya, a woman who had worked in a high-level management position back in India, said:

I call this the vegetable visa... It is meant to take away all your identity and make you vegetate. See, I knew my husband before I married him; but, I have friends who had arranged marriages and hardly knew their husbands when they came here. [T]heir entire lives, whether they lived or died, ate or not all depended on this one man! You are constantly reminded that you are nothing without him! That is scary! Don’t you think?”

Mia, who called the H-4 visa “paralyzing” and “shameful,” shared concerns similar to Jaya’s, saying, “the funny part is my husband also feels very uncomfortable, guilty and ashamed that I have to be so dependent on him.” The sense of shame that Mia expresses, also shared by her husband, plagued most of the women and men on dependent visas. While the women had a community of other women who also had a H-4 visa status, there was overarching sense of isolation and personal struggle. There was a bond of silence among the women. Besides the occasional short-lived outbursts of frustration, which I observed at events where the women met to socialize, there was hardly any engagement with the topic of H-4 visa status; however, in interview, all of the women I spoke with told me H-4 was central to their lives. A sudden outburst usually ended in awkward silence until someone moved to topics of children or food. Women often actively denied their circumstances. When the conversation turned to careers and jobs, women talked animatedly about the ‘glories’ of their work lives in India; but, they avoided talking about present
disappointments, or concerns about how their careers had stalled. Consistently, there was a sense of shame in talking about the dependent status. Naureen, who held both an MBA and a law degree, confided that she was so ashamed of her H-4 status that she would absolutely not talk about it to other people, even to other women on H-4 visas. She felt that verbalizing her visa status made the issue real, made her husband look bad, and her made family appear as if it were troubled. She did not want to make herself more vulnerable than she already was. The sense of shame and isolation I observed in my participant subjects closely resembles what Kai Erickson (1976) describes as “collective trauma:” these women were all exposed to similar experiences resulting from state-imposed sanctions based on visa status and, collectively, they felt a deep sense of isolation and alienation. Most of the women even shied away from securing treatment for ailments related to their mental health. Who did seek out and receive help felt intensely guilty for “wasting their husband’s money.”

This complexity of shame and alienation is theoretically interesting on two levels. First, it prevents the women from forming a bond of solidarity or even a social support system for each other because the shame and alienation catalyzes a coping strategy based on silence. The struggle to cope with or change one’s situation immediately becomes an individual struggle, subject to one’s own individual responsibility.

Second, the collective experience of shame and alienation disrupts the hegemonic narrative of the U.S. being a leader in women’s rights because it challenges the western discourse of “third world women as universal dependents” (Mohanty, 2003). The accounts of angst and even anger clearly show that the Indian (third world) women participants of my study did not consider themselves as naturally dependents. In fact, they actively
resisted the label, even as they experienced “collective trauma” and crisis of self and identity. American visa regimes shoehorn independent, educated women from India into roles that the women’s rights movement in the U.S has fought to leave behind.

**Identity and Men on Dependent Visas:**

The power of gender in self-construction comes to the forefront when the accounts of the men who held H-4 statutes are examined. Men on dependent visas also shared the sense of alienation and shame; but, they expressed it in qualitatively different ways than the women. Some of the men expressed anxiety and shame as they shied away from talking about their personal experience under H-4. Instead, the male participants of my study were quite clear about their motivations for coming to the U.S. on an H-4 visa, claiming they accepted dependent visa status on moral grounds: it is what a man should do for the sake of his family. Others indicated that their visa status compelled them to actively withdraw from the transnational Indian, Keralite community so as to avoid questions and “sneers.” Others dealt with the shame and alienation by developing destructive habits: excessive smoking and or alcohol consumption. Some men became physically and/or emotionally abusive toward their wives because they perceived her as the immediate reason for their emasculation.

An encounter I had with a man (Johnny) at an ethnic church during my observations will serve as an illustration of this pattern. I was attending an after-sermon social lunch after one of the morning Sunday masses. Approximately 90% of the 400-person congregation in this particular church were either nurses or members of nurses’ families. Most people came to the Sunday mass in a family group. Earlier, during the sermon, I noticed a man sitting by himself. He held his head down, and sometimes swayed from side
to side. I could not tell if he was praying, sleeping, or inebriated. While one of the church members, a nurse, introduced me to some other nurses, the man came up to me and nudged me. He could barely stand straight and his breath smelled heavily of alcohol.

He said, “You want to hear about families of nurses, about men being on dependent visas? You need to talk to me.”

I was startled by his forthrightness because men on dependent visas did not often openly volunteer to talk to me. We arranged to conduct the interview immediately and in public view. I sat in an empty corner of the large prayer hall while the rest of the members socialized at the other end of the hall. Johnny was in his early 40s; but, he looked much older. He said:

I am sure you are pitying me. I am sure you are thinking what a loser I am. Well, you are right. I am a loser for coming to this country as a dependent, for letting myself do what a man should never do: be dependent on a woman... (garbled speech) She took my son and my daughter, turned them against me and threw me on the streets. She brought charges on me that I am alcoholic, I abuse her, beat her up. I am an alcoholic, was because of her – she kept being on my face with her money. I worked in the gas station; but, did not have papers, so they treated me bad. She told the police I would kill her and these good friends of hers, these other nurses told her to put me in jail... I spent 4 days in the jail. I come from a respectable family. Now I have nothing. I sleep here in the church. I can't go back to my village. Please write this in your report.

Johnny spoke explicitly about living in an abusive situation where he was the abuser, which was confirmed by his wife in a later interview. Other men in their interviews expressed indignation at their failure to adjust to the new life. Christian, who was on H-4 said, it has been a hard transition: “he says, back in Kerala, I was poor but was respected, here I have money but no respect and no friends”. The nurse wives of the men on H-4 often talked about the mental toll it took on them as they dealt with a “husband” who was either “depressed” or “angry” at “everything”.
H-4 dependent men usually avoided answering questions about the H-4 visa. Those who engaged with the topic indicated that they struggled with feelings of humiliation and loss of face, particularly when associating with other men in the community who were not dependent. Joseph, a 38-year-old man, bypassed the question of the H-4 visas and talked about how his transnational experience left him intensely lonely. He said that his new life “is a very alone life, like, you have no real friends, can’t talk to no one. I don’t like religion and I don’t like church. Indian people laugh at each other; but, even they all had same experience.” Some of the men on H-4 status spoke about alcohol as an escape from their situation. Alcohol was touted as a masculine way of dealing with the issue. Jijo, a husband on H-4, said, “If I were a woman I could cry; but, I am a man so I drink.” George, an emigrant who initially chose to stay in India while his wife worked as a nurse in the U.S., said, “I refuse to lead a life of a houseboy. I would rather live in my village than live in grand America with no honor.” Men on H-4 who talked about the dependent visa in terms of being humiliated, associating such humiliation with the loss of their male privilege, which in turn deprived them of male camaraderie or what Patricia Yancey Martin (2001) called the privilege of mobilizing their masculinities.

Dependent visa holders of both sexes consistently held three tropes in common: a) an intense sense of shame, alienation, and loss of identity causing “collective trauma” that thwarted the formation of solidarity groups; b) an assumption of personal and individual responsibility for coping, blaming, and/or possibly changing one’s situation, and; c) gendered frames of masculinities and femininities that both question and make sense of one’s situation. Most of the women, unlike the men, had the consciousness and the language to articulate the structural oppression of the visa order; but, in the final analysis,
women tended to readjust their actions to conform within the structure, while at the same
time training themselves to live with the trauma and the alienation. The men merely suffer
humiliation.

Rose et al. (2006), building on Foucault’s (1984) concept of governmentality, argues
that the success of the global capitalist structure lies in the successful transference of
discipline and disciplining from the jurisdiction of the state to individuals. Individuals
discipline themselves and each other so as to adjust to the hegemonic state order, thereby
rendering the structures of such oppression invisible (Guevarra 2011, Rodriguez 2010,
Harvey 2005). I argue that the arduous conflict faced by the women in adopting H-4
identities and their sense of self and denial of the same among men, were self-disciplinary
mechanisms; however, it is important to note that both men and women on dependent
visas resist becoming the “vegetables” that the visas require them to be. Resistance to
structural oppression in the form of visa regimes comes at a price: constant negotiations
with the contradictions that belie the lives of these women and men. While women agonize
over and resist becoming H-4 or helpless dependents in their minds, men reject the idea of
dependence claiming patriarchy through other assertions of masculinity. Women and men
resist state power through a gendered resistance. They actively avoid accepting total state
control of their selfhood; but, capitulate in action, often by way of manifesting a
performance of masculinities and femininities in the familial context. The effort and
performance required to negotiate such contradictions shrouds the unanticipated cost of
the transnational labor migration for the migrant and her/his family. As the individuals go
through this process, the mechanisms of how dependence is created and sustained
eventually become invisible.
Visas Regimes, Work Structures and Configuring Dependence

H-4 dependent visas holders unequivocally told me that the label of dependency harms their sense of self substantially. The label creates contradictions that require continuous negotiation; they attempt to reconstruct their identities around a visa-imposed dependency. The “techniques of domination” imposed by the dependent visa structure extend beyond the visa holder to effect the whole, including the work lives of lead migrants. This was true for the families of IT workers and nurses. The visa policies for the migration of skilled workers is supposed to provide skilled workers, and create opportunities for them to bring their families with them to the U.S.. All of the immigration experts that I interviewed claimed H-4 visas create stable families for professional migrants as well as opportunities for the worker. One expert from the office of a congresswoman said:

America has always been a land of opportunities. We have always given folks all over the world opportunities to develop their skills and talent here, opportunities that are lacking in their own countries. We benefit from their skills and they benefit from being here and most of them feel quite lucky. [...] We make sure that they can bring their families and focus on working.

A different expert from congress, active in immigration and visa issues, echoed this sentiment, explaining:

We need these people to work our high-tech jobs. We work with the industries to make that happen. This was the only and best way to let the workers have families here in the United States. I think this is a fair policy. We need stable families in the United States and this visa ensures that.

While popular discourse of “opportunities” and “stable families” may be well intended, I am left wondering if such rhetoric deliberately intends to obscure the problems inherent to these visa structures for immigrant workers and their families. My interviews with high-tech workers and nurses present insights into the problems of visa structures as they exist
today. In the following sections, I outline these issues, focusing specifically on their understanding of paid work and how visas constrain their families.

**High-Tech Workers, Work Lives and Visa Regimes:**

Not surprisingly, high-tech workers, the husbands of dependent wives were not as critical as their wives of dependent visas. While most men agreed that the dependent visa system is unfair, they said they were able to “objectively reason with the policy” from the perspective of the State. For example, a common sentiment I observed reasoned that it is not possible for the U.S. to provide jobs to everyone. Gopal, an IT professional, shared that:

> H-4 visas are not bad it itself. They are the easiest visas to get; but, they are bad because they create stupid tensions in the family. I will be sitting at work and worrying if my wife is getting bored and calling 15 times to make sure she is okay. That is stressful. Affects my work.

Men tended to express disapproval of the dependent visas because their wife’s dependent status affected their lives and not how the dependent visa negatively affected their wives. Most men reported that they were frustrated that their spouses were experiencing this loss of status and inability to work for pay; but, they were more concerned about their unhappy state affecting them at work and their image of a dedicated worker.

Another dimension of the structure of dependence of the visa order becomes apparent when the high-tech workers talk about their own visa categories – the skilled workers visa (H1-B) – in relation to the H-4 dependent visa. Banerjee (2006) and Xiang (2011) have argued that, in the recruitment practices of H1-B workers, labor migration is a racialized process and that H1-B status is used to exploit migrant high-tech workers through wage cuts, exploitative working conditions, lack of benefits, and frequent relocations, as well as and social alienation and isolation at work. The narratives of the
high-tech workers in my study expose similar exploitative and alienating conditions at work and further asserts that these conditions not only affect the workers themselves but also their families. When asked what his work and his visa status meant to him, Rex, a high profile financial analyst at a large consulting firm said:

If you ask me, slavery is not over. Before they would get black people on boats. Now they get us brown people on airplanes. The concept is the same: yes, they pay us for our work; but, it is much lower than what they pay American white workers. [W]e know that; but, what can we do. What we can do and cannot do in this country is tied to our work and our visas. Ok, I will say we are more like indentured servants, not slaves? I feel like an indentured servant who lives in an expensive company arranged downtown apartment but will lose all legal status if I am fired tomorrow. My family and I become illegals if I am fired. You can imagine how much pressure, fear and bondage that can create. And come to think of it, they not only own me and work, I feel like they also own my wife’s work. They paid for her visa and her passage and so they expect me to have no family obligations. I have a job that has me travel for five days a week and sometimes I am away for months. We have a four-year old. There is absolutely no recognition that I have a family that might need me, that I have responsibilities of being a father. One time, my wife was sick while I was in New York. I requested a two-day leave so that I could come back and take care of our son. I was denied the leave. I was not explicitly told that it was because I had a wife at home; but, it was like, “We don’t care about your family. You need to have that taken care of. We only care about how much work we can get from you.”

Most high-tech workers were highly reflective of their situation at work. They understood the pressure and, as Rex put it, the “fear of bondage” that their visa situation put into them. They commonly used the language of slavery and indentured servitude to describe their work and visa circumstances. Another overwhelming perception that accompanied this language of servitude among my high-tech worker participants was that the recruiting companies not only owned their labor but also owned the labor of their dependent spouses. One of the high-tech workers I spoke to, a computer programmer in a large bank named Shobhit, said:
...my company paid for my family to come here. Do you think that was for nothing? They expect us to be in office as long as they need us to there. They know I have a wife at home on a dependent visa who will take care of the family.

Sambit, who worked as a body shopped computer programmer in a large American insurance company, said:

I feel like a glorified servant. I have so little power to change my situation. The fact that my family was allowed here and my company paid for it – I got a job in Belgium in the same company and they don’t allow dependents to come – creates an additional pressure. It is as if now they own the entire family. I am grateful that I could have my wife and my kid here; but, nothing is free in this free market, you know? Everything comes for cost.

When I asked him Sambit if this sentiment was something that was coming from his bosses, which I found were usually white Americans, he said:

Not really, not in so many words; but, see we Indian IT folks usually have 12 hour work days: 8a.m to 8p.m. Our American bosses go home by 4p.m. and really we are supposed to only work till 5 p.m.; but, I know of three people in my company whose contracts were terminated on two days notice and they and their family had to go back to India within the week. They had not screwed up or anything at work. They just went home at 5 p.m. like the Americans and would not show up on weekends when called in, like we do, and BAM! They were gone. That is a lot of duress to work under. You are the single earner in the family; so, you are completely responsible their well being. My wife sacrificed her bright career for me and so I can’t fail even if that means being an absentee father and a husband. It’s not like I can find another job if I am fired. If I am fired my entire family loses legal status and we have to run back to India at the earliest. And if I am fired here, my mother company fires me too and I don’t get passage money back and I don’t have a job here or there. This is too stressful. And I also support my parents so I am pretty screwed! This is why you will find IT workers moving around with stressed out *ullu* (Hindi for owl) faces! (Sambit laughs) Not our fault though...

On a similar note, another high-tech worker, Akash, said:

I can’t say I am unhappy here. I don’t have to deal with the dirty corporate politics like in India; but, yes... If my white boss’s dog is sick, he takes off at midday; but, I can’t take off even when my baby is sick. They know I have a wife at home who will take care of the issue.

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26 Please refer to chapter 2 for explanation.
The theme of being an “absentee father” and husband came up several times as I interviewed high-tech workers; but, being an absentee father was typically seen as a necessary condition of being the “model migrant” worker. Sambit’s description of the consequences of getting fired points to how immigrant status is used to control labor time and illustrates that the dimensions of dependence migrant families are faced with are multiple. Just as being an absentee father was often seen as a necessary evil that helped ensure a degree of stability in employment, most high-tech workers viewed their dependent spouse’s unpaid labor as necessary to construct the image of the “ideal migrant worker,” an image which was uniformly perceived to be a key to success in the American high-tech market. Shobit said:

...it is a lot of work and stressful; but, the payback [...] is good I would say. I have gotten many quick promotions in the last 10 years that many of my counterparts, even Americans, have not; but, that is because I have not taken even a day of leave besides what I have [been] allotted, if that. I could only do this, of course, because my wife is on dependent visa and I don't have to worry on the house side.

Satya, another IT worker, thought it very unfortunate that his wife had to quit her job. Satya and his wife had the same jobs in India in the same company; but, Satya was offered the opportunity to take an offshore position and she was not. Still, he reasoned that, given the circumstances he encountered upon his arrival in America, it was probably a good thing that while one spouse worked the other was at home. The expectations his employers had concerning time commitment would have made it all but impossible for him to “chip in” at home and help with housework, cooking, or raising a toddler, which he recognized as a full-time job. He further explained:

I just see it as a sacrifice we as a family makes so that we can do well here and doing well means proving myself as a good and wanted employee. Why
do you think American companies like Indians so much? Because we do the least hanky-panky about family-time and all that. I go in and do my work, give the best I have and my bosses absolutely love me as an employee. You don’t want to bring a bad name to Indian workers and, yes, that means sacrificing family life to a certain extent; but, you do what you got to do...


The accounts presented by the male high-tech workers concerning how their visa status intertwined with their wives’ visa status clearly demonstrates that the perception of the “ideal worker,” or what it means to a be successful migrant worker, hinges on performing a narrative of the self that is both wholly free from family responsibilities in the work place and able to invest an unlimited amount of labor time. This purports an organizational expectation that is traditionally gendered, assumes a gendered family structure, and marks the boundary between men and women as the boundary between paid and unpaid labor (Williams 2000, Jacobs and Gerson 2004). Additionally, these visa regimes, which govern the lives of high-tech workers and their spouses, racialize the labor the workers and their spouses perform.

Visa regimes create multiple dimensions of dependence. These dimensions of dependence are embedded in the structures of power governing the lives of migrant workers. The presence of these dimensions of dependence indicates that there are
unintended yet insidious consequences stemming from state policies that aid the corporate
exploitation of migrant workers and their families.27

*Nurses, Work Lives and Visa Regimes of Dependence:*

Nurses communicated an understanding of dependent visas that was different in
general to the understanding communicated by the high-tech workers I interviewed. They
expressed guilt and angst because they felt they were the reason for their husband's
dependent status. Alma, speaking of how she felt about her husband being on a dependent
visa, said: “It eats me up. I hate it that he had to come as a dependent due to me. I feel
ashamed to say this to my friends and family. I try my best so that he does not feel it.”
Unlike the predominantly male high-tech workers, who did not view their wives’ decisions
to move to the U.S. on dependent visas as a sacrifice, almost all the nurses held that it was
because of their husbands “permission” and “sacrifice” that they were able to work and
have a career. For example, Mary said, “It was because he sacrificed and he gave me
permission that I could take this job. He did it for our family; but, I don’t know many men
who would make such sacrifice. I am very grateful to him.”

The sense of guilt and constraint that the nurses felt was further aggravated by their
immigration status and circumstances at their workplaces. About a third of the nurses I
interviewed came on H1-B visas, a third came on EB-3 visas, and the rest came as
permanent residents upon marriage with their current spouses. The nurses that arrived in
the U.S. on H1-B and EB-3 visas were recruited by commercial recruitment agencies.

Coming through recruitment agencies was not without cost. It often meant lower pay, hefty

27 The process of racialization of workers is especially clear where the high-tech workers talk about
their experience transitioning from the H1-B visas to permanent residency but that is beyond the scope of
this dissertation and will be analyzed as a journal article.
fees to recruitment agencies, and binding contract with employers. Penalties for breaking a contract are severe and can cost the employee anywhere between twenty and fifty thousand dollars. The high cost of breaking such a contract has been widely documented by other scholars studying the nursing migration (McElmurry, et al. 2006; Percot and Rajan, 2007; Pittman et al, 2010). It is also well documented that foreign nurses are often given salaries, assigned sites, shifts, and work days that are unattractive to other nurses, in spite of the fact that this practice is prohibited by legislation mandating equal pay for equal work (Brush, 1999, Jacox, 2003).

Missy’s story bears to testimony to how recruitment practices and visa structures controlled both the paid work and the families of nurses. I met Missy, a 27-year-old registered nurse, on the 23rd of December in the afternoon. Missy worked in a hospital located in a northwestern suburb of Chicago. I waited for her in the hospital’s lounge. It was my fourth attempt to meet Missy.

Missy was working extra shifts and extended hours during the holiday season because “American nurses” were on leave. Missy was assigned to an emergency patient during the time of the interview; so, I had to wait for her for more than an hour. Missy arrived in the U.S. in 2007 on EB-3 visa, which had been organized through a recruitment agency. She arrived clad in her blue nursing scrubs and appeared rushed. She asked me if it was okay if she ate her lunch during the interview: she had not had a chance to take a lunch break that day. Because I felt as though I was encroaching on her free time I asked if she would like to reschedule again; but, Missy told me that she would be working through
Christmas and the New Year, then would take a four day leave to visit family in Florida.

There would be not be a more convenient time to talk.

I asked her if she chose to work through the holidays and if she would be paid more for her time. In a hushed voice, continuously looking over her shoulder, she said:

Oh, no! You know we are immigrant nurses and since we are on visas we get the worst shifts no one wants! That was in our contracts with the agency. We work any shifts we are asked to. Right now, in my floor, there is only two nurse – me and another Filipina nurse – and today I was suddenly assigned to the emergency patient floor. It has been just crazy, you know? I want to leave this job; but, I can't for the next three years because otherwise I have to pay the agency $30,000. How will I pay them that money? I already gave them extra money to find me a job near Chicago because my aunty lives here. That was the term of the contract. You know, a friend of mine – you should talk to her – who worked with me in India and came with me through another agency was sent to a small hospital in a village in Texas and her working hours were even worse. She was forced to stay in an agency rented place with other nurses and she could not even bring her husband and children and she was also pregnant; so, she wanted to leave the jobs but she had to pay $50,000. They had to sell their house in Kerala to come up with the money. Now she works in city hospital and but her husband is still not here. I feel so bad for her, just talk to her...

Missy had two young children. Her husband emigrated to the U.S. on EB-4 visa. He was legally allowed to work as was permitted by his EB-4 visa; but, he decided to not look for a job and stay home for a few years to take care of the kids. Missy told me that, given her work pressures, his decision to stay home to help raise the children was the optimal choice because, first, though her husband would probably find an “average job,” sustaining her income was more important for the survival of the family. Second, she claimed that...

Without him at home, there is no way I could keep the hours I am keeping. It creates a lot of stress; but, I am lucky to have an understanding husband. Everyone is not that lucky and this is why the agency prefers nurses whose husbands are willing to come with them, or unmarried nurses, because otherwise this kind of work is just not possible.
In my conversation with Missy’s friend, who was on the H1-B visa, and some other nurses on H1-B, I found that H1-B nurses were harder to find as far fewer nurses preferred coming on H1-B visas as they generally experience more exploitative working conditions and have greater struggles balancing their work life and their family life. Rose, who arrived on a H1-B visa to work in a rural Texas hospital via a recruitment agency, told me that, according to her contract, she had to live with other nurses in housing arranged by the agency that required her to pay rent to the agency, which she found out was much higher than rent for comparable housing in the area. This stopped her from bringing her family: her husband and her three-year-old child. For fear that her contract would be terminated and she would have to pay exorbitant fees for breaking her contract, Rose did not tell her recruiters when she found out she was pregnant soon after she arrived in the U.S.; but, ultimately, she decided to terminate the contract and paid the fees. Then she changed jobs so that her husband and her child could come to the U.S.

I met Rose in her one-bedroom apartment in a city in Texas in October of 2010. Her apartment was unlike any of the nurses’ houses I visited. It was small and barely had any furniture besides a tiny dining table and two lounge chairs. The walls of her living room had multiple pictures of her daughter and one large picture of her herself with her husband at their wedding. On a little side table, in the space meant for a television, there was a shrine to the Virgin Mary.

Rose told me that her husband refused to come to the U.S. on the dependent visa; so, after she had her second child here, she went back and left the child with her husband in India. Her work schedule would not afford the time necessary to care for an infant. She said she could not afford childcare because she had hired a lawyer to expedite her “green card
process” (permanent residency). The goal was to ensure that her husband and children could come to the U.S. as soon as possible. Pointing to the shrine, she said:

I pray day and night that my husband and children can come here quickly. My heart bled to leave my tiny baby in India. They have the whole family, the grandparents, uncles, and aunts to take care of the; but, you know, children need their mother and I need them more. (Rose paused for a long moment, sobbing) I feel like a terrible and a heartless mother; but, I did this for my family. I know once they come they will have a good life. Kerala is so less developed and poor. The kids would have no chance there. They will be like me and my husband and I, when I have this chance, I want to give them better life. I wish my husband would come; but, you know, he is a man: how can he come as a dependent? He had no problem taking care of the children; but, he just does not want to be called dependent; but, I think God has listened to my prayers! I think they will be here in March! I hope so! (Rose smiles for a moment in silence) It is so lonely here, you know? My hospital has only one other Indian nurse and other nurses don’t talk to me. They say they don’t understand how I speak English. The patients are bad to me because it is natural that they don’t like foreign nurses and I am new; so, I am a little scared. And I always get the night shifts and extended hours and when I am home I feel so alone and tired. And then my family in India does not understand why I have to work night shifts! They think badly of me! I don’t know anyone here, I have no family, I can’t talk to anyone! I just come home and cry to God and then go back to work. (Rose begins to cry again) I am just waiting for my family to come.

Nurses on H1-B spoke about the exploitation, the isolation, and the overt racism they faced at work. Gina, who arrived on H1-B, said that her recruitment agency told her that she would be paid less than her American counterparts because, first, “that’s just the way it is,” and; second, nurses are expected to work their way to more pay. Another nurse, Rosy, told me that H1-B nurses usually get paid the minimum that is required for the H1-B visa, or $35,000 with benefits, “which is much less than what American-born nurses make.” Some of the nurses thought that if their employers knew they had spouses at home on dependent visas, they would make them work longer shifts and call them in at odd hours. Lily said,

I am always on call. I feel like H1-B nurses are always on call. They know we will not say anything because we Indians never say anything; but, it is also because we know if we say anything they will refuse to process our green
cards. And they also know that my husband is home and I can put my house responsibilities on him. One of the recruiter agents told, ‘this is why we pay for him to go’. They never do it to American nurses. They have their fixed shifts, holidays, and promotions. It is always us. And what can we say as foreign nurses? I should never have come on H1-B. I can’t wait for the three years to be over.

Another problem highlighted by nurses on H1-B visas was that if they did not abide by what was expected of them, they could be moved to another branch of the hospital in a more rural area or to a different location. The nurses wanted to avoid this because it would mean moving their families and being uprooted from the community they had formed through their churches in the Chicago area. At a national conference of Indian nurses in 2010, which I attended, much of the discussion centered around the exploitation of immigrant nurses on H1 and EB-3 visas, as well as unethical recruitment practices. Dr. Patricia Pittman, professor at the medical center in George Washington University, one of the keynote speakers, spoke about her work with the labor department to stop such practices. This was met with some resistance from the Indian nurses present because efforts to combat exploitation have carried the negative effect of the limiting nursing visas for Indians. One of the leaders of the nurses said, “this was further punishing the nurses instead of the corrupt agencies and hospitals.”

Nurses on work visas strongly felt that their visas largely shaped their experiences at work; but, they also very much affected their immigrant subjectivities. Nurses who were permanent residents or citizens also felt that their immigrant subjectivities were no less instrumental in shaping their experiences with their paid work. Jenny, a permanent resident, when asked about her experiences at work commented thus:

It is okay. I get more respect here as nurse than in India and more pay; but, we are still immigrant nurses. Even though I have a BSN, I have been a floor nurse and bedside nurse for years; but, I see when it is American nurse they
become administrators in two years. And then, you know, the patients hate us. They say, “We don’t want these brown nurses. They don’t know anything. They can’t speak;” but, we cannot be angry on them, we are there to take care of them. And whether we have visa or not, we always get the bad shifts! As immigrant nurses we are always threatened with firing and sending us to other location and as the main earner, I can’t take those risks. I can’t make my family suffer; so, we just let everything go.

Like Jenny, most of the nurses understood the expectation of work through a gendered and racialized lens, that is, as a woman nurse from South Asia, they are expected to be more nurturing and caring while taking care of their patients, even when their patients are unkind to them (Glenn 2010, Guevarra 2011, George 2005). Amy, a nurse who made house calls, told me that “the reason patients like Indian nurses was because they were so caring and went beyond the call of duty and even when they are bad to us we are not.” The level of conformity in performance to a particular professional identity – caring, nurturing, and so on – among the women I interviewed was so consistent that is was almost as if there was an organizational mandate concerning how Indian nurses must conduct themselves. At the national conference of Indian nurses, one of the keynote speakers invoked how “loving, caring, nurturing, and healing” were markers of Indian nursing ethics.

Despite their hard work, the nurses felt under-appreciated by their superiors. Sheila, another nurse, a permanent resident who arrived to the United States from Kuwait seven years prior to our communication, had been a nurse in Kuwait. She told me that even though she never complained and took care of her patients with all her heart, her boss, a white woman and an important administrator, had repeatedly mistreated her over a three-year span. Her boss assigned her to night shifts, insulted her, and laughed at her English and her lack of her knowledge of American culture. “It was almost as if she hated me,” she said. When I asked if she reported this to anyone, she told me:
I have not even said this to my husband. I just keep it all in me and pray that this woman leaves soon. My husband does so much for the family. I can’t burden him with this and if I tell him this, he will ask me to leave my job and I don’t want to do that. And then my hospital is so close to my home that I can come home on my breaks. I was working 45 miles away for five years and I don’t want to do that anymore. And it is hard for us immigrant nurses to get the job we like and where we like. And it is always that we immigrant nurses are first to be fired. If I said anything, I would be fired, and that’s the end of it; so, what’s the point?

Sheila’s experience was harsher than many other nurses; but, similar issues were common. Many experienced mistreatment and abuse by bosses and co-workers. Many identified the constant threat of being fired. Social isolation at work was a common experience among all nurses. In Carolyn’s words, “My American colleagues are more interested in their pets and pets of their friends than if I talk about my children. I don’t have pets and I don’t know how to respond to them so they think I am dumb. It is like I don’t exist.”

The immigration statuses of the nurses were not uniform in my study; yet, every nurse expressed that immigration status was still the primary lens through which they understood their experience as a migrant care worker in the United States. My analysis shows that nurses face more disadvantages than male professional workers in the workplace. For nurses, outcomes of being an ideal immigrant worker by way of being “always on call” were distinctly different than outcomes for high-tech workers. Even when visa status was used to control the labor time for male professionals, if immigrant men lived up to the ideal worker expectation, they were often rewarded with pay raises and promotions. Nurses, on the other hand, were expected to be “always on call” and also docile, obedient, nurturing, and kind. In issues relating to conditions of work, advancement, and pay, docility on the part of the nurses was especially crucial. If nurses show resistance they could be assigned to undesirable shifts, reassigned to undesirable locations, or fired.
Female migrant workers are consistently confined to the same position – that of floor, or bedside nurses – for years, while their American counterparts were promoted. The glass ceiling for the immigrant nurses is clearly much lower than it is for immigrant high-tech workers. I argue that while immigration status disadvantaged both the high-tech workers and the nurses, the nurses faced racism that was gendered. Being an Indian worker did not hurt the prospects of the male high-tech workers in the same ways it hurt the female nurses. Given the feminized nature of nursing work, the demands of the work from the nurses was more racialized and gendered than was the work of the high-tech employees. Additionally, the nurses were expected to do more domestic labor (as shown in the next chapter) than the high-tech workers. The nurses I observed in this study had to negotiate more layers of oppression and dependency when compared to the high-tech workers.

Narratives of struggle, readjustments, and conflict common to the experience of the lead migrants and their families conflict with the narratives of “opportunity, choice, and stable, transnational Indian family” prevalent in grand narratives of the American public and state. The families in this study clearly struggle to create and maintain a semblance of the structure of “stable Indian families” to fit the larger discourse. They do so by depending on the traditional trope of gendered scripts; but, this means putting up with gendered and racist workplaces out of fear of losing their immigration status. These struggles hide the multiple layers of dependence that migrants, particularly women immigrants, are subjected to in the course of the migration process.

**Governmental Discourse and Social and Civic Consequences of Dependent Visas**

The participant subjects I observed, especially the women with H-4 dependent status, often unabashedly expressed anger and frustration at how the dependent visas
shape their experiences and disenfranchise them in the American public sphere. Speaking candidly about her first experience on a dependent visa, Tona said:

You cease to exist right on the day of visa interview for dependent visa in India. After asking your name, they begin asking you about marriage, asking for marriage photographs and then it is all about the husband, where he works, where he lives, blah, blah, blah! And I am no longer a person anymore!

The disenfranchisement described by Tona was visceral and immediate, and was consistently experienced by my dependent-status participants when they stepped outside the home. An omnipresent reality, participants felt dehumanized, disenfranchised, and alienated in almost every encounter they had within the public sphere, from trying to procure a driving license, to buying alcohol, to attempting to find a job commensurate to their qualifications so that they might change their visa status.

The women on H-4 visas often produced rhetoric of “choice” when they explained their decision to migrate to the United States with their husbands. The often claimed that they “chose” to come to America on the H-4 visa for the sake of “keeping the family together.” This sense of “having a choice,” is complicated by the knowledge that their immigration status is deeply tied with the labor status of their husbands, creating a gendered labor regime for not only the migrant worker but the entire family.

Mili, describing her inability to work, said: “I feel so helpless and unhappy, I would work anywhere, even if it is illegally, like anywhere in Jewel or whatever, but Ravish (Mili’s husband) is a chicken. He won’t let me. He says I will someday get us deported or jailed.”

Jaya, like Mili and many other highly qualified women in my study who are on dependent visas, expresses frustration at the State imposed sanction on her right to work. She alludes to the fact that the oppressiveness of the dependent visa is multiplied because
it is so intrinsically tied to the work visa and legal status of the family as a whole. I asked her if she tried finding a job in the U.S., given that she had an MBA and was a certified accountant. Jaya said:

I did [attempt to find a job] for three years; but, with the economy tanking it was hard. Also no company was ready to sponsor my visa. I was so frustrated I often thought of working illegally in one of those accountancy offices in the South Asian enclave; but, I don’t want to jeopardize my husband’s job status and get us all thrown out of country. My poor little boy (indicating her son) has done no wrong. That would be selfish of me. No?

Global capitalist discourses posit the global north, particularly the United States, as the coveted fruit of global labor migration (Connell 2010, Escobar 1995, Spivak 1988, Sassen 2000). Before coming to the U.S., most of the women did not think it would be difficult for them to change their dependent visas into work visas, especially given their educational accomplishments and America being the “land of opportunities.” Suchitra, a PhD in mathematics from India who was a faculty member in math and statistics in a four-year college before she came to the U.S., had been in the U.S. for five years on the dependent visa status at the time of the interview. She said she “chose” to come the U.S. despite knowing about the restrictions on H4 status because she perceived “America as the land of milk and honey.”

Disappointment like Suchitra’s, wrought from facing repeated barriers to opportunity, failures in her efforts to change her visa status, and the realization that the “milk and honey” of America is only “available to people that is wanted by the American markets,” is an experience shared by the majority of highly-qualified female participants of my study. Suchitra, like many other women, could not change her visa because “none of the
employers were ready to sponsor a high-skilled workers visa for them.” Most often, these women appeared to be baffled and disheartened by this response.

I interviewed Shivali Shah, an immigration lawyer and expert on the laws surrounding the H-4 visa, to better understand the hindrances these women face and how and why these barriers exist. She said:

In India, the perception is that if you are highly qualified, you should be able to get a job, just like the H1-B [visa holder] that their daughter, their sister or their friend is about to marry. That is true to the extent that if that person had a work permit already, it would be very easy for them in the sense that there would not be extra hindrances to obtain a job. There would be a level playing field for them.

Citing her extensive legal work and expertise with women H-4 visa holders, many of whom she has helped move visa statuses, Shah continued to explain that the two most common reasons, for the challenges that the women face in changing their visas into work visas are:

1. In order for an H1-B visa to be processed, one’s qualifications must match the job one is looking for; but, many of the women who come on H-4 visas unknowingly look for jobs that do not match their degrees. For instance someone with a journalism degree might apply for the position of a business manager. She may very well be qualified to be a business manager, but the H-1B visa necessary for her to be permitted to work in that capacity cannot be approved if her education does not match her intended position.” In such cases, an application for an H1-B visa will be rejected.

Besides the above two reasons enumerated for why it become hard for women with H-4 status to find jobs in the U.S there are two other reasons that are important enough to mention here. First, H-4 women are restricted by their husband’s geographical location to look for a job. Second, in many instances, even exemplary qualifications and skills become difficult to transfer in the U.S context. Shah claimed that many women found these two barrier to be more understandable and expected.
Most employers, other than the information technology firms and large financial firms, do not know or do not understand the visa process necessary to hire a foreign worker. For many employers, the visa process is too complicated to learn simply for one job candidate. This disadvantages female H-4 holders because even if they are better qualified than job candidates with permanent resident status or U.S. citizenship, employers shy away from treading uncharted paths with visas and foreign employee paperwork.

Among the migrant workers in the U.S. who can qualify as “high-skilled” workers, workers for which there is the greatest demand are in the field of Information Technology (IT). If a worker is trained in IT, it is usually easier to find a job and change visa status since most IT firms are well-versed in hiring foreign nationals; however, very few of the women H-4 holders have an IT background. Often they find their skills and qualifications being under-valued in U.S. job markets. Shah claims that if the female H-4 visa holders did not have such a restrictive visa status and could obtain a work permit more easily, that would significantly level the playing field for these highly qualified women; unfortunately, the government has so far demonstrated a resolute unwillingness to amend current policy in the interest of opportunity and fairness.

In a PBS panel discussion on the status of H-4 visa holders, a congresswoman said:

You know, I greatly sympathize with these women. The feminism in me sympathizes with these women. The congresswoman in me said, “Wait one moment!” Look who these women are. They’re almost all upper-cast, if I may say so, women. These are not your average women coming here. They have had the ability to come here and live. They made a family decision. Meanwhile, we’re accommodating many legal and illegal residents from all over the United States. We give a special visa to her husband. I don’t know. Then the feminism in me shouts, “Hey, wait a minute! Why should it be two
for one?” We’re giving a visa to him because he’s applied for it and because he has a skill others here do not have. Who knows that she has such a skill? What is to say that she isn’t competing with the 9.4 million American workers who can’t find jobs? And why should we? Why should we say – you who get every privilege in India, privileges that are denied to almost all in India – you get special treatment when you come to this country? Love you; but, not that treatment. Wait your turn.

The congresswoman’s statement reflects a common strand of thinking among the public and government officials, which is: “Why should we make it two for one?” Or, “Why should we privilege some privileged women with more privileges?” Of course, the notion of what constitutes privilege in the congresswoman’s account is dubious at best. The argument that H-4 visa holders take American jobs is fatuous, given that the entire pool of H-4 visa holders from all countries, including children below the legal age of employment (who are therefore technically not legally employable), forms only 0.1% percentage of the total employable U.S. population.29 We also see an example of the narrative of “choice” in the congresswoman’s statement. In this instance, the idea of one’s “choice” to migrate transnationally is deployed as a means to disencumber the state of responsibility for exploitative power regimes at work within its boundaries.

As I stated above, participant subjects on H-4 status often felt disenfranchised and disadvantaged, even when they were trying to accomplish simple tasks within public institutions like procuring a driving license. Jaya, who has been driving since she was 18 years old, relates her experiences trying to get a driving license in the United States:

To start with, there is only one DMV in the entire Chicagoland where you can get your license as a dependent spouse. You go there and you have to stand in separate queues meant for people with no SSN. And when you go up to the

29 2010, Department of Homeland Security statistics on visa issuance shows that the total number of H-4 visa holders including children in 2010 was 141,564. According to United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of employable U.S population in 2010 was 154.5 million.
counter and talk to the people, they constantly make you feel like a second class... They will ask why I don’t have a SSN and why I need a license, why I don’t have an utility bill on my name. The reason is because your freakin’ government will not let me not have any sort of power in this country! It has been the most harrowing experience of my life. I had to go back five times to get my license and all my friends on H-4 had the same experience. I came back from the DMV crying three times! Please, please make sure you have this in your research!

One of my participant subjects, Mili, found out, in the course of our interview, that my driving license was exclusive of my visa status and not based on visa duration. I had a five-year expiration period on my license like regular citizens. Immediately, she called her husband at work and found his driver’s license was the same as mine. Then, Mili, pursing her lips and skewing her eyebrows, visibly angry, brought out her driving license, showed it to me and said:

I don’t understand this! If my status is based on my husband’s status, why in hell do I have a license that is aligned to my visa expiration and his is not? Even in this they would have to privilege H1-Bs over us! This is completely unfair! You know I have to go and get my fucking license extended every year because my visa extensions are for one year at a time? And last time, I had to go twice in two months because I – my visa was expiring in December and the new visa was to begin in January and they gave me a one-month extension on the license. I had to go half way across town again in a month’s time in this cold weather to renew my license. Gosh, and then this stupid license is not even valid for identification. Is this a joke?

The picture below, which was given to me by one of my participants, shows the format of the driving license for H-4 holders.
Immigration lawyer Shivali Shah, who has been fighting to change H-4 laws for the past decade, commented on experiences of H-4 visa holders in the PBS television panel that I referred earlier. Shah said:

> These women are not given Social Security cards or Social Security numbers – no Social Security cards. In many states, they’re not allowed drivers licenses. In the states they are allowed drivers licenses, the process is very long and difficult. I mean, when we think about what’s in our own wallets, like the things that I carry in my wallet! Every single thing that’s in there are things that these women need to either get through their husbands or they’re not allowed to have. It’s like being perpetually without your wallet while you’re in the U.S.

This sense of being “without a wallet” amounts to marginalization. My research indicates that marginalization such as this is experienced in many forms by both women dependents and men dependents. Both dependent husbands and dependent wives expressed strong feelings about not being able to do basic things, like buying alcohol at grocery stores, without carrying their passports. Mathew, a nurse’s dependent husband said:
I felt most humiliated twice since I came here: once when I was not served wine in a restaurant because I did not have my passport and once when I went to pick up my daughter from pre-school and the substitute teacher won’t let her come with me because I had my license and not my passport. I felt like a criminal. They need to change this rule.

A similar incident became emotionally charged when Mili called me one night crying in anger about a month after our initial interview. She called to tell me that she was not let into a bar because she did not have her passport. She said:

I called you to ask you to put this in your research. I am freakin’ 29, and I was not let into our neighborhood bar because I did not have my passport and they won’t accept my driving license even when it has my DOB! And of course there were 16-year old American citizens with fake IDs in that bar! This is after all the land of freedom! How bloody hypocritical! I hate it, I hate it! I am sick of this humiliation!

Trina, also a dependent visa holder, described an incident where she was on the verge of getting arrested because she, her husband, and some friends were visiting a State Forest Park and had stayed in the park after closing time. The State Trooper who was on the rounds asked them to leave but wanted to see everyone’s ids. When Trina could not produce one because she was not carrying her passport, he expressed intentions of arresting her. After much pleading from her husband and the other friend, the State trooper left her with a warning. Trina, exclaimed:

Who would think of carrying a passport to a State Park? It is not safe to carry your passport everywhere! You lose it, you are without a visa then. And I don’t drive and can’t have a state ID, what am I to do? This is the stupid shit that goes on in our lives!

These accounts of frustration show how immigration policies can directly impact the day-to-day experiences of people who live subject to these policies. The spouses of the dependents, both the nurses and the high-tech workers, also felt affected by these policies, albeit in different ways. Akash, a manager in an IT firm, said:
The worst and the ridiculous part is that no one in your workplace, your co-workers and your bosses know nothing about dependent visas or how they work; so, when my wife goes to my office parties she is bombarded with questions about why she does not work even when she is so qualified. Explaining that she is on dependent visa is humiliating; but, even more frustrating is even after you explain people don’t get it. They merely assume that she does not work because we are Indians and I don’t let her. One of my white co-workers even joked about it. This is wrong on so many levels.

Raj, a financial consultant and a husband of a dependent spouse, cites a graver issue in terms of how being on dependent visa affect the families’ institutional exchanges: Raj pointed out to me that while H1-B holders get a two week grace period extension after their visas expire to search for jobs, their dependent spouses are required to leave the country on the day of visa expiration, which is usually on the same day as the husband’s. Raj said, “Imagine the ridiculous of this law! Does it make sense to you? It does not to me!”

An immigration lawyer from one of the leading law firms in the country, who specializes in H1-B and H-4 visa issues, confirmed this, stating that the majority of the cases they get involve H-4 spouses who loses their visa status and risk deportation because of the aforementioned mandate, or visa holders who are not aware about the renewal policies for H-4 visas.

Nurses who participated in my research had similar concerns when their husbands were on dependent visas. One of the nurses, Nancy, whose husband is on dependent visa, said:

I get it when men don’t want to come here on dependent visa. Everyone here, the neighbors and my kid’s teachers, keep asking him why he does not work. I find it insulting more than he does. The immigration officer at the airport looked at him funny. I understand if he wants to go back; but, our daughter: why should she have to live without her father or her mother?
A recurrent theme concerning the dehumanizing marginalization participants consistently report is a sense that individuals are being rendered second-class or partial citizens in their interactions with public institutions. They are deprived of agency in their interactions with institutions. Both my conversations with public officials and my archival research show how little discussion of social and political relevance was involved in creating to H-4 visa. Of the 14 public officials I talked to, except for three people, one of whom was an expert on H-4 visas, no one knew very much about the characteristics of the H-4 dependent visas or the situation such visas create for the visa holders. The reactions I received when I tried to inform some of the public officials about the situation was often one of apathy and disregard and, sometimes, even mild hostility. When so many of my participant subjects report that they feel dehumanized, alienated, and disenfranchised in their day-to-day interactions with the public at large, it is disconcerting to observe the degree to which these conditions, imposed upon their lives by their H-4 status, is invisible to the governmental officials representative of the public.

The women on dependent visas were vocal about their marginalization in he public sphere and the frustrations emanating from it; however, men, besides those quoted here, maintained that they did not experience marginalization due to their visa statuses in the public sphere. This could be representative of a mechanism employed by the men in this study to cope with the multitude of conflicting hardships in their transnational experience that collectively deprive them of the power and privilege that the Indian traditional social and cultural system had given them as a birth right, i.e. the right as men to be the patriarch and head of the household. In their lifetime, the global capitalist system has levied many, many challenges to the male privilege we speak of here (Connell 1993). Intense poverty
and lack of economic opportunity in Kerala, India, particularly for Christian minorities, has led Christian women from Kerala to take the lead in the economic sphere by fulfilling a need in the feminized nursing market in the global north (George 2005, Kurien 2002, Warner and Wittner 1998). The irrelevance of these men in the local economy, as well as in the global economy, and further disenfranchisement on account of the restrictive U.S. visa order is commonly perceived by these men as emasculating or worse. These strong economic and social forces have left the men I spoke with strained with internal contradictions that they are not often willing to fully face or come to terms with. In the very least, this internal struggle makes these men unwilling to verbalize their suffering in conversation with me.

The interviews I conducted with men on dependent visas were often difficult and tenuous because confessing emasculation was difficult for many of them; yet, my analysis, synthesizing the narratives of women and men on dependent visas and incorporating the testimony of their spouses, illustrates how the state visa structure reconfigured the lives of the visa holders, organized their everyday lives, and had lasting and consequential impact upon how these individuals understand and experience their migrant subjectivities.

**Individuals Acts of Disruption: An Indication of a Failed/Failing Policy**

In this section, I present evidence of my participants’ individual struggle as they act in resistance to and against dependent visa status. These acts of disruption show how individuals push back against the power of government and governmentality. I illustrate how participant subjects actively resist dependence and challenge the intent and the purpose of laws intended to ensure “stable families” for the migrant worker by way of
levying restrictions upon agency of the dependent visa holder. I claim that this active resistance suggests that the dependent visa policy is a failing policy.

The structural constraint of the visa regime seemed to engulf the entirety of the identities, actions, and behaviors of visa holders; yet, individual acts of disruption challenge the power of dependent visa structures as well as the validity of such policy itself. Most of my participant subjects could not perceive the breadth of their contribution to disrupting the oppressive power of the visa regime. Many of the women participants on dependent visas said that they saw their participation in research such as this project as a way of making their voices heard against the oppressive structure. They engaged with research intimately and often indicated the importance of emphasizing specific episodes of their experience. One of the women I interviewed said, “This is the only way anyone will hear what we have to say, so you need to make sure this gets out. When your book comes out, make sure to send one copy to Michelle Obama so that the issue that no one cares about and is trivialized may get some attention.” I hope to show that the disruptive and constructive accomplishments of the brave men and women that I was lucky enough to interact with throughout the course of this project go far beyond the mere research I transmit here.

Most of the women on H-4 visa status that I interviewed engaged in some form of voluntary work, either for social service agencies or business organizations. About a third of the women donated time to multiple voluntary agencies because most work organizations allow an individual only 8 hours of volunteer work per week without a work permit. Ria volunteered for four social service agencies per week and spent more than 50
hours per week volunteering, often more total time per week than her husband spent at his job. This left her very little time to do housework. Ria’s husband, Sumit, told me that he shared the housework equally and could very rarely work weekends, unlike some of his other colleagues on H1-B, since his wife was often volunteering over the weekends. The heteropatriarchal family structure that the state imposes by way of its visa regimes only intends to secure the optimum efficiency of an imported skilled labor force. Ria and Sumit, like many other couples, upend this structure by maximizing the family unit’s community impact via volunteerism without sacrificing the family’s participation in the commercial economy. Further, they disrupt dependence by enacting empowering cooperation within the family group.

While most women decided to have children so that they can use their “unproductive break in career to reproduce,” some of the women I interacted consciously decided not to have children until they were able to restart their careers. One woman said, “The social and the family (here meaning extended family) expectation is that since I am not working I will use this time to have and raise a child; but, that to me is crazy. That just takes my dream to re-start my career farther away. I am NOT getting into that trap!” Her resolve in relation to this issue should be interpreted this form of dissent against the gendered reconfiguration of the family structure that the visa regime endorses.

A follow-up interview with some of my participants, two years after the initial interview revealed that a few of the women who were trying to change their visa status had been successful in doing so. Mili had joined a full-time PhD program; Poonam had enrolled
in a computer engineering graduate program, Mia made a resourceful move, securing a job at the Indian Consulate – the only organization she could work for on U.S. soil without changing her visa. Karuna, who had a two-year-old child, joined an intensive professional graduate program in the hope that it would help her move to a work visa upon the completion of her studies. A few of women tried working despite H-4 visa regulations; but, they often quickly stopped for fear of being reported and/or being taken advantage of.

All of the life changes above required full-time commitment and required years of planning. On Karuna and Mia’s part, it took convincing their husbands since they both had young children. The women who worked informally engaged in serious arguments with their husbands, given that such actions could compromise the work and immigration statuses of their husbands; yet, some women took the leap at the cost of jeopardizing the family situation and their husband’s work status. The women who pursued higher education told me in follow-up interviews that they feared that if they did not find a job that would facilitate the conversion of their visa status after graduating, they would have to slip into their previous H-4 lifestyles. Karuna, who had a Master’s degree in hospital management from India, told me:

It would be much harder to reconcile myself the next time around. I did a MSW after I came to the U.S. while my son was a year old. It was hard as hell. I hardly slept; but, I did it just so that I did not have to be on H-4 visa. And then I did not get a job and had to go back on H-4. That was hard enough. I could not do it for much long, and now I am spending $50,000 to get this professional degree. I am killing myself to do this. I have a child. I travel two

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30 Mili and Poonm were still on H-4 (dependent visas). Dependent visa allows studying in the U.S. for a degree if one is paying for it. Dependent visa holders don’t have any access to financial aid or scholarships. The husbands of my participants had taken out loans from Indian banks to put the wives through school in hopes that they will find a job with a U.S. degree and be able to change their visa status.
hours everyday to go the university and I still do take do most of the care-
taking of my son, though Aniket (her husband) helps a ton with the
housework. It took a lot [to] convince Aniket. I hope something good comes
out of this. After all this I better get a job after this or I will be suicidal if I
have to lead a H-4 life again.

When I interviewed Karuna’s husband, Aniket, about the new situation, he said it was hard
to reconcile work-life conflict, given that now both he and Karuna had full-time
commitments; but, he emphasized the fact that he could not have been happier. It was
“physically exhausting but mentally peaceful to not to have a unhappy wife,” he said. The
other three husbands of women who had either began working or studying echoed Aniket’s
sentiments. Mia’s husband, Rex, said, “I was worried in the beginning, given we had a young
kid and I travel so much; but, believe me Mia starting to work has changed our quality of
life. We are so much happier now! I never want us as a family to go back to the old life.”
Titash’s husband, Gopal, a research scientist, set up a lab with sophisticated computer
systems in their one bed room apartment so Titash could continue the research she had
begun in India as a PhD student, research which she had terminated to join her husband in
the United States. Gopal was kind enough to show me the computer lab, and clearly
demonstrated his deep committed to his wife’s professional development. Gopal
emphasized that he did not want “hot meals everyday.” Rather, he wanted his wife to be
professionally independent. When families were not able to change the situational
conditions of their lives under visa regimes, the husbands were actively trying to relocate
to other global markets, markets where the constraints on dependent visas are not as
draconian as they are in the U.S.

In drastic acts of disruption, three highly qualified women, all in their 30s, decided
to return to India and start their lives over after being on dependent visa for five years.
Three of the women made this decision despite extreme parental and communal pressures against their choice. The women left their married lives of relative comfort in the U.S. to find jobs and re-start their lives from scratch as single women in a new city in India. The long gap in their careers disadvantaged them even in the Indian professional labor market; but, they settled for jobs that were below their qualifications. Still, when I called them for a follow-up interview, they said they were happier than they had been in the last five years. These radical decisions by women lead some of the men on H1-B to reconsider their circumstances in the U.S. Some husbands are considering returning to India to join their wives, others are considering divorce. Most of the women were still married when they went back to India but they did not intend to come back unless they were no longer on the H-4 visa. This was forcing the husbands to rethink their jobs in the U.S. and many of them are actively trying to find jobs in U.K. or Singapore, countries that don’t have dependent visa laws. Others are planning to move back to India to join their wives. Only one woman got a divorce after she went back to India because her husband was unwilling to move back for various work related reasons and his green card is still about 5 years or more away. The wife did not want to come back as dependent and so they filed for a divorce. In a follow up interview, the husband who is still here, told me they are in very good terms still and even their respective two families are still close – he told me that “her visa fucked it up for us”

He continued to say:

We had no issues as couples; but, with the visa situation and the mounting frustration, I think this is the best solution. It is sad and I am back to being single, which is hard; but, I can’t quit my job for a few years since my green card is in the works and it is unfair for her to stay on being unhappy. It is unfortunate!
The struggle of these women and their families, their fights against their H-4 identities, and their desperate attempts to change their situations can be construed as merely personal, all too personal; but, they may also be perceived as acts of dissent that disrupted the carefully crafted labor strategy of the U.S. from achieving the consequences its policies intend.

The disruptions that men with H-4 visa statuses caused in the state-imposed family structure tended to be less about upending systemic oppression and more about preserving their sense of masculinity. By working in the informal economy despite the dependent visa status, by refusing to come to the U.S. beneath a dependent label, or by maintaining a transnational conjugal/parental relationship they disrupts the work and family balance that the nurses would have if their dependent spouses conformed to the expectation of their dependent statuses. When husbands refused to come to the United States on dependent visas, the nurses would often go back to India to see their husbands and children, even at the cost of risking their jobs. While this puts additional pressure on the nurses in the work place, it also brings the crisis these families face to the attention of the hospital administrators. The realities of the nurses’ transnational lives, as they interrupt the nurses’ physical presence in the workplace, may help bring the matter of dependent visas to more prominent public debates; however, there is a relatively small number of men who come on dependent visas and the serious shortage of nurses in the U.S. These factors contribute to expedited permanent residency for nurses, which reduces the duration of the dependent visas for nurses’ spouses substantially compared to spouses of high-tech workers. Nurses can receive permanent residency in three years or less, thereby
ending the dependent visa status of their husbands, while for the high-tech workers and their wives, permanent residency can take anywhere between 6 to 15 years.

The short-term status of visas makes the issues and the consequences that emerge from them appear manageable to affected individuals. This also makes the issue of visa policy reform appear insignificant to the public officials who construct and implement the visas. In a television interview, a representative from the State Department dismisses the issue of dependent visa holders by indicating that she has too much to do to be concerned with a short-term issue. She explains, “Their husbands – predominantly husbands – get visas for six years and they can then apply for a greed card. They might have to wait it out 10 years [...] and they can work.” The participant subjects of my study who decided to come on H-4 status saw the green card as their ticket out the state-imposed dependence and considered waiting the time out; but, when faced with the reality of the circumstances, most of my women participants reacted by expressing their views with in terms of a language of oppression. They viewed the time-frame governing the transformation of visa into and green card as a carrot that tied them to their status. Tona said that “by dangling the green-card carrot, they keep us quiet; but, how long can we be silent? The carrot gets farther and farther and my life get messier and messier. Someone needs to say something []”

**Conclusion:**

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the category of dependent visa and its lasting costs on the lives and subjectivities of individuals and families involved. I show how “dependent visas” are used by the state as a technique to regulate and control labor and
family migration. I demonstrate the ways in which H-4 visas affect the self, the family configurations and public interactions of the dependent visa holders. This, I argue, reveals the mechanism of techniques of state domination (Foucault 1977), producing what I call a “visa-based governmentality” whereby visas as tools are used to exercise and maintain control over the self and subjectivities of transnationally mobile individuals. I further argue that “visa-based governmentality” is a gendered project. While largely affecting women, the issue of the dependent visas also includes men who have to negotiate their positionality as men dependents. My research shows how men are largely absent from the limited public discourse around dependent visa status holders and that this is constructed as a women’s issue.31 This construction is problematic on two levels: a) on a policy level it normalizes the dependence of Indian women through the visa policies, and; b) it tends to hide how men and women are differently affected by the category of dependent visas such that this supposedly gender neutral immigration law adopts heavily gendered meanings when translated into material realities. My research addresses both problems by deconstructing and making the mechanistic aspects of gendered structure of the dependent visas visible. I show an inherent contradiction that the visa-based-governmentality poses. It only alters the behaviors of my participants; but, not their consciousness. Each of them try to find individual ways to negotiate and survive the rules, from illegal work, to going to school, to motherhood, to alcoholism, to leaving their husbands or never joining their wives.

The analysis of dependent visas here also disrupts and critiques the U.S. state’s implied discourse of women of the global south as traditional, heteronormative wives and dependents, which appears to be basis of the dependent visas. The “immigration experts,”

31 Until I pointed out that there were also men on dependent visas most “immigration experts” seemed to be oblivious of the presence of dependent men.
particularly the lawmakers, seem to justify and defend the dependent visa policies based on an ideological framework of re-creating a 1950s model of traditional and stable families in the United States with a provider and a dependent spouse responsible for household labor, which is a family structure that is a minority in the contemporary landscape of the United States (Coontz 2011). The accounts of the lawmakers seem to reflect a conservative ideology of stable, traditional transnational families and the Western assumption that women from the global south are “universal dependents” (Mohanty 2003). At the same time, the analysis of the public discourses and archival research on the skilled-workers visas reflects a commitment towards, making it possible for corporations to import required “skilled labor” from the global south on their own terms.

Visas become tool of exploitation as they mandate multiple regulations on migrant subjects, including re-application and re-approval on an annual basis. This impacts family structures in very real ways. My participants who held dependent visas indicated how any small violation of their status codes, such as not carrying their passports, or volunteering beyond stipulated hours, or any informal work may jeopardize the renewal of their visas and the work visas of their partners. These otherwise invisible structures of dependence seem to operate as mechanisms of a governmental technology of power that is gendered and racialized and shapes and reshapes individual lives and experiences.

The analysis of the effects of employment-based visas illustrates what I call the creation of multiple invisible “structures of dependence.” My analysis shows how governmentally sanctioned “visas,” issued to large corporations to import skilled labor, create conditions of exploitation and oppression for the migrant worker at the workplace. Visas and immigration status constructs oppressive gendered and racialized conditions of
work that negatively affect the migrant worker as well as their families. As shown by Banerjee (2006) and Xiang (2011), Indian high-tech workers face racialized exploitation as foreign workers. They are often held hostage to their visa statuses. My research shows that the H-4 visas given to the wives of high-tech workers heightens the sense of constraint for the high-tech workers who perceive their wives unpaid labor as instrumental to constructing the image of an “ideal immigrant worker.” The nurses, as representatives of migrant professional labor, experienced racism at work that was also gendered, creating more oppressive structures for them than the high-tech workers. They faced more severe demands as “ideal workers” and experienced stricter glass ceilings as immigrant women than did the high-tech workers. The experiences of the nurses in my study reflects Glenn’s (2010) argument that immigrants and women of color have historically been coerced into paid and unpaid care labor, a form of labor that is feminized and demands docility, obedience, and servitude. This form of labor has historically disadvantaged and severely constrained the rights of immigrant women and women of color because it affords little or no protection from the state (Glenn 2010).

I routinely heard my participants, specifically women on H-4 visas, share acts of disruption. They often refused to be voluntarily compliant to their status of dependency and constantly pushed the boundaries of the gendered premises of global labor migration. While the policies of the state mandate visa regimes of labor migration, the individuals and the families in my study are continually pushing this regime by interrogating the contradictions and struggles of their migrant lives. Such acts of personal disruption will help form communities of dissent (Mohanty 2010) and challenge the unquestioned assumptions and invisible gendered and racialized structures behind visas regimes,
particularly dependent visas, and help to unravel the profound and lasting impact such regimes have had on the lives of the individuals and families that live through them.
Chapter 6

“I call it the Vegetable Visa:” A Gender Structure Analysis of Daily Lives of Dependent Visa Holders


“I’m not entangled in shaping my work according to other people’s views of how I should have done it” – Toni Morrison

It was dinnertime on a cold March evening in the spring of 2012. I was sitting at Naureen’s kitchen table while she reheated leftover pizza for her children. She had migrated to the U.S. on a dependent visa with her husband who was a head software engineer at a major financial institution. She was quite frustrated as she explained, “You see, I am the cook, the chauffer, the housekeeper, the teacher …what I was supposed to be was a lawyer but as an immigrant in this country, my job is defined by my visa…” As the interview continued, Naureen continued to watch over her two elementary-school aged children, while simultaneously preparing their dinner. When the dinner was ready, she asked to stop the interview so that she could feed her children and get them ready for bed before needing to pick up her husband from the commuter station. He had worked a long day outside of the home, while she worked as long inside the home. As she drove away to pick up her husband, I sat at their kitchen table making small talk to their children. However, I couldn’t help but silently reflect on the difficulties and constraints the dependent visa brought this family.

When Naureen returned with her husband, Aasman, she quickly prepared him tea, as he grabbed some snacks and ran after his children to the basement. During this time, I finished interviewing Naureen. She whispered at one point, “I never thought when I was
getting all those degrees that this is what my life was going to be and its nobody’s fault. Aasman is so tired after a grueling day, I don’t have the heart to ask him to help me…you are seeing firsthand how immigration dictates how we live.”

After Naureen’s interview, she directed me to the basement so that I could interview her husband. She hustled the kids upstairs to help them with their homework, while I sat down and started speaking with Aasman, a process that would run until about 10pm. Naureen had already put the kids to bed, and it was now time for Naureen and Aasman to eat dinner together. Naureen kindly invited me to join them, and I gratefully accepted. They also volunteered to be jointly interviewed as we ate together.

Aasman apologized over dinner for not helping prepare the meal and looked at Naureen and laughed while sharing, “I guess we both do exactly what we are supposed to do. I work my ass off at the office; she works like crazy at home. Given my job, I don’t think we could have [it any other way] –this is probably [the] reason for these visas we have.”

Naureen and Aasman, like many other couples in the high-tech families, talked about the paid and unpaid labor they performed as part of their transnational life and how it affected their lives and subjectivities.

However, I did not only study male-led migrant families and their wives who were on dependent visas. I also studied female-led migrant families and their husband who were also dependent visas. In this chapter, I rely on Risman’s\(^\text{32}\) (2004, 1998) gender structure theory to analyze the similarities and differences between these transnational migrant families. Risman (2004) in explaining gender structure theory argues:

Gender is deeply embedded as a basis for stratification not just in our personalities, our cultural rules, or institutions but in all these, and in complicated ways. The

\(^{32}\) See chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of Risman’s gender structure theory.
gender structure differentiates opportunities and constraints based on sex category and thus has consequences on three dimensions: (1) At the individual level, for the development of gendered selves; (2) during interaction as men and women face different cultural expectations even when they fill the identical structural positions; and (3) in institutional domains where explicit regulations regarding resource distribution and material goods are gender specific (2004: 433).

Therefore Risman contends that we cannot understand one dimension or the consequence of gender without placing it into a larger multidimensional framework.

In this chapter, I review the institutional constraints that a visa regime imposes on migrating individuals and families and analyze and how these constraints effects gendered selves and societal expectation expectations of marriage and family. I seek to understand the co-constitutive nature of gender at the various levels of gender structure given that the visa-laws are allegedly gender-neutral or gender-blind. I specifically focus on the organization of household labor after migration and what it says about gendered selves and societal expectations. I conceptualize household labor as reproductive labor, including childcare, and any other form of unpaid care work performed by either spouse in the families of my participants (Hochschild, 1989, Szalai, 1972). My analysis focuses on three overlapping questions: Do these visas affect migrants in gendered ways at the individual level of gender structure? At interactional level, are there different gendered expectations tied to these visas depending upon whether it is the wife or husband on the dependent visas?

To foreshadow answers to these questions, I show that in families of high-tech workers where women are on dependent visas, the wives struggle and simultaneously challenge internalized gendered meanings of marriage and housewifery. However, at the interactional level, they enact traditional gender expectations to cope with their post-migration circumstances. In families of nurses, where the husbands are the ones on
dependent visas, stereotypical gendered expectations are again enacted, despite the fact that women are the breadwinners. Yet, all of my participants, regardless of who was the lead migrant, are critical of the visa processes, and the constraints they place on families. In this critical lens they express, I see my participants wishing to gain reclaim control over their lives in the face of restrictive visa policies.

**Immigrant Families and Gendered Policies at the Institutional Level**

To recapitulate the formal definitions of the skilled workers temporary non-immigrant visa or H1-B as put forth by the United States Immigration and Citizenship Services, H1-B “applies to people who wish to perform services in a specialty occupation, services of exceptional merit.” The EB-3 or employment based immigrant visa is defined as “is immigrant visa preference category if you are a skilled worker, professional, or other worker whose job requires a minimum of 2 years training or work experience, not of a temporary or seasonal nature.” Finally the H-4 or dependent visa is defined as “spouse and unmarried children under 21 years of age of H1-B workers may seek admission in the H-4 nonimmigrant classification. Family members in the H-4 nonimmigrant classification may not engage in employment in the United States.”

These definitions or the clauses of the visa laws are not gendered and hence maybe construed as gender neutral or gender blind policy. However, my interviews and archival research shows that the ways in which immigration experts such as lawmakers, lawyers, activists and the general public understand these laws are gendered. In my discussion about the H1-B visas with immigration experts, it was often implied that that the recipients of these visas are mostly men. As one immigration activist in talking about high-skilled

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33 The definitions are taken from United States Immigration and Citizenship Services (USICS) website: www.uscis.gov.
workers put it: “we offer these men the opportunity to come develop their skills”. A recent transcript of a public hearings and debates on the Committee Reports (House Report 112-292) on “H.R. 3012—Fairness For High-Skilled Immigrants Act Of 2011” showed the public discourse on high-skilled migrants assumes that migrant skilled-workers are all men. To quote one of the public opinions statements: “If It makes little sense for American employers who seek immigrant or non-immigrant visas for foreign skilled workers from India or China to have to wait longer. These ‘men’ can easily take jobs elsewhere in the world.” Another public opinion read “given the economy here, we need to reconsider we need more imported high-skilled men in U.S. companies.” The general assumption therefore is that the migrant high-skilled workers were men and hence their spouses on dependent visas are women given the heteronormative nature of visa laws. While it is statistically true that most recipients of the H1-B visas are men (Xiang 2011), as my research and other research (Dicicco-Bloom 2004, George 2005, Khadaria 2007) has shown, nurses also arrive in the U.S. as high-skilled migrants. I reminded the immigration experts I interviewed of the nursing migration as a predominantly female.

In the discourse about dependent visas, the default assumption among the immigration experts and in the public and legal opinion forums was that the dependent visa holders were women. The rhetoric of “ensuring stable families” is a common thread of argument in support of H-4 visa categories in the public discourse. When the proposal for making changes to H-1B skilled workers visa laws was floated in Congress in 1996, one of the additions proposed was to ease the process of procuring H-4 dependent visas,

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34 The proposal was to add fixed quotas of H-1Bs for each sending country, limiting the number of years on the visa to three years and then a continuation for three years and making the process of procuring H-4 dependent visas easier.
particularly for high-tech workers. The most common argument in the five congressional hearings and the solicited public opinions on the proposed changes was “ensuring stability in the families of transnational skilled-labor” and “allowing the wife” to migrate is important for the well-being and productiveness of the transnational high-skilled employee”. One of the public opinions cited in a congressional hearing was, “having a stable family, a warm home cooked meal, ensures that we get the best work out of the immigrant employee”. The formation of stable families through state mandates allowing a traditional family structure to exist where one spouse was a “traditional wife” to garner best possible productivity from the migrant employee includes a gendered assumption about the high-skilled workers and the dependent visa laws. The dependent visa holders themselves viewed the visas as oppressive and constraining and some called it “the vegetable visa” or the “prison visa” or the “handicap visa” to describe how they viewed it. Given the contradiction between the actual law and its interpretation and that female-led migration is part of the high-skilled migration, I ask how institutional policies translate to everyday lives of the transnational families that are bound by these visas. Does the creation and enforcement of such policies create stable families as conceived in the public discourse? The analysis of gender at the individual and interactional level in the context of the family provides a convincing and problematized response to my inquiry.

Families of Male High-Tech Workers and Dependent Wives

**Internalized Notions of Gender Identities:**

Cold Chicago wintery, icy wind mercilessly swept across our faces as Tona and I walked back to her apartment after an hour-long Bengali lunch. Tona was on a dependent visa and her husband was an IT worker. One of Tona’s pre-conditions for doing an interview
with me was that I have a Bengali fish lunch with her in this new restaurant. Her husband, she told me, did not eat fish and Bengali style fish was her favorite curry cuisine. She explained while laughing, “I have not had fish in ages because my husband hates fish. I am conflicted between being a devoted wife and being my own woman.” Over lunch on that cold day, she described the different hobbies she had enjoyed growing up in India, including long-distance biking, archery, playing soccer, and building toy cars. Her only hobby now was cooking, which she said, “was the last thing I ever wanted to do.” As we walked towards her apartment, boots pounding the snowy pavement, I asked her why did she not pick up one of her many hobbies besides cooking. “I don't know,” Tona replied. She then added:

When I first came, it was cold and crazy and I was not used to the Chicago winters. All I did all day was watch T.V. I guess, I watched a lot of food network. Like most girls, growing up my idea of marriage was to have a ‘doll’s house’ – everything pretty and perfect and then somewhere while doing the PhD I forgot all about it but then when I came here as a dependent, I became this complete housewife and I fell back into the pink world of the doll’s house. I invested all my energy in building this perfect home.

Indeed, Tona’s “doll’s house” was perfect. On the 25th floor of an apartment building that overlooked downtown Chicago on one side and the frozen lake on the other, Tona’s living room was a three-dimensional portrait of an educated, middle class lifestyle. There were dark wood bookshelves with books about art, photography, travel, feminism and some fiction. The living room was decorated with paintings, vintage posters and masks, strategically placed indoor plants, comfortable vintage brown couches and bitter dark chocolates on the coffee table for munching. When I complimented her home, she proudly responded, “It’s mostly me, though I have to say Kaushik has wonderful taste, unlike most men”. Most homes of the high-tech families were tastefully decorated and the wife usually
took credit for it. Also, like Tona, many of the dependent wives talked about “learning to be houswives” upon migration while at the same time expressing deep unhappiness about their lives as dependents.

Why would well-educated women give up high-paying jobs in India to move to the U.S. on a constraining visa? This was my question for my women participants. Most of their answers involved gendered scripts around meanings of marriage and family. This allowed them to justify their decisions. Mili, who worked as a human resource manager in a multinational company in India said:

I did not know my life would stall after I come to this land of opportunities. I suddenly became this obedient, good housewife and just dedicated my life to keeping my husband happy. I have worked since I was 16 and lived by myself, supported my own education back in India. I never thought I would have to be so dependent economically and mentally. I call it the H-4 syndrome.

I: You knew you were coming on dependent visa? Why did you choose to come?
Mili: Well, once you are married you are supposed to be with your husband and take care of him and his household. My dad and Ravish’s family wanted me to join him ASAP after we got married. Not that I did not want to come but had I known I probably would rethink...and now those nuts want grandchildren...I am not falling in that trap...

What Mili calls the “the H-4 syndrome” can be interpreted as having to adapt to the role of a wife in a traditional marriage. When the women were placed in a situation of domesticity, they immediately fell back on the gendered trope of what it means to be married.

Some women even expressed bafflement at how quickly they made the shift from being career women to being “just wife.” Mili said:

It was quite amazing how quickly I learnt to be just a wife. Learning to be a dependent is a wonderful thing (in a sarcastic tone). I wake up in the morning, make tea for my husband and myself and fix his morning cereals. On the weekends he makes the morning tea if he wakes up before me, which is rare, and then if I have
not made lunch for him to take with the night before, I make that. And then he leaves. And then I think of multiple ways of filling up my day. So, then I go out for a run. Some days I would go do grocery. I come back clean the house, talk to my folks in India, or look up stuff on the internet – things I can do. Then I cook lunch because Ravish often comes home for lunch which is nice because and then I cook dinner – yeah pretty much that. I tried to explore hobbies but I don’t really have hobbies so I get bored with whatever I start pretty soon. You see my apartment with all these beautiful things – I spent hours decorating my house at one point, looking for nice stuff in reasonable prices, I learnt to cook elaborate meals and try to make Ravish happy – that was my sort of my reward. Can you imagine, I would dress up as did the other H-4 wives in our apartment building for our husbands to come home from work. Our lives had become all about pleasing our husbands. It took me a while to realize how crazy it was – when I did, I now think, I was probably moving towards insanity. I would pray – I was never religious but after I came here I suddenly became this big praying person. I bought a temple and everything and then I realized that was being stupid...

Mili’s description clearly points to gendered notions of what it means to be an ideal wife, and how role was contingent on being on dependent visa. These descriptions are uncannily similar to Coontz’s (2011) description of white, middle class, suburban “housewives” in the 1950s America. The difference is that most women on H-4 had tasted a life beyond being a housewife. While much of what Mili described was part of the normal chore for most of the dependent women, it was endorsed by the belief that if one is a married woman and not working, one must engage in a traditional gendered lifestyle. Practicing religion also became part of this trope. Many women shared how they became religiously inclined after moving to the United States, involving ritualistic worship on a daily basis. This worship rituals were unique to the women on dependent visas and did not include their husbands. An internalized notion of gender was associated with performing worshipping rituals. As Piyali shared:

I never prayed or did worshipping in India but always saw my mother and grandma do it and somehow after I came here I found myself doing it. I associated it with being married and having a family and praying for the family. And now I do it too. Also I have a lot of time. I am not sure if I could do it if I were working.
These religious practices that are not specifically gendered, became gendered acts due to internalized cultural gendered norms. Even if the women adopted these practices to fight boredom and loneliness, they relied on gendered tropes to make sense of their worlds.

Another narrative emerged as the women justified their decision to choose family over careers. They often said that they decided to move with their husband because that is the expectation of a traditional marriage. Ria, who holds an MBA degree and worked in upper management in a large financial firm in India in talking about her decision to move said:

It makes me crazy to be home all day. I feel I am wasting away my degree and my career but I am also really happy taking care of husband and enjoy having a home and family. Simply put, I had to choose one – being with my husband or having a job – I picked the first and I am not unhappy picking it but I wish I did not have to choose.

When I asked Antara, who also has an MBA and worked in an investment bank before coming to U.S on dependent visa, what made her leave her high-powered job to come on a dependent visa, she said:

I chose family over my career. Well, you marry so that you can build a family and I never thought I would have to choose between working and creating a family but that is what it has boiled down to. The weird part is, this is not my husband or his family asking me to quit the job – it is the United States of America. Our parents did want me to stay with my husband and that was part of the pressure but it was after all my choice. I wanted this life but who knew after the first blush I would be so intensely unhappy. And what is more tragic is that I only get to spend weekends with my husband since he is always traveling through the week on his consultancy job. We both are finance people and we think about optimization so I decided to have a baby while I was not working but I know with the baby my life will change as I ever knew it – not sure of for the better of worse. I hope better (smiles).  

Mili, Ria and Antara, like most of the other women, emphasized a ‘choice.’ However, they understood the choice to be a difficult one because they had to choose between “stable families” and successful careers.
The women on dependent visas that I interviewed clearly chose “stable families” at the expense of their own careers. Within this family mindset, many decided it would be a good opportunity to have children (if they didn’t already have them) because of the dependent visa restrictions that prohibit paid employment. Of the 16 high-tech families with children, 13 of the women participants told me that it was their decision to have a child because they wanted to make the best use of the time when they could not legally work. In words of Antara who had an MBA and was working as mid level manager in a large multinational company in Mumbai, India:

I was like, gosh, I can’t live a life of doing nothing. I wanted to do something productive so I decided to have a kid. Reproduce that is (laughs). Anik was so apprehensive. He did not think we made enough to have a kid right now but I was like no, no I will raise the kid in these years I am not allowed to work so that as soon as we get our green card and I can go back to working, my kid is all grown up and I don’t get behind because I might need maternity leave. Well, has it been easy? No. I had to go back to India to have the child because Anik has no time. He does not get off even when he is sick, how would he help with the pregnancy. I travelled 4000 miles by myself in my second trimester and it was hell. I came back after Suhani was 3 months, after the first set of vaccination. Anik saw his daughter when she was 3 months. He convinced his bosses to go fetch me and the baby, because I was very clear, I cannot travel alone with the baby. Even now, Anik hardly gets to spend time with Su and I often feel like a single mom. I know it was not fair on him, Su or me frankly but I am ready to endure all that. We eventually wanted a kid and I could not think of a better time to have one. This way I won’t be regretting these years of being a home because I have no choice so much.

As did most of the other women, Antara felt that she was able to exercise a choice in having a child when she had little choice in everything else in her life. Some women used a traditional gendered logic for having a child, such as “motherhood is part of being a woman” or “or my parents wanted a grandkid”. Other women made it clear they did not have the child because it was the “normal thing to do” or were “being pressured by the family,” but because they wanted to feel they did something productive with their lives. Anushree expressed that the only thing she liked about being in the U.S. was that her
parents and in-laws had less control over their lives and could not pressure her into having a kid when she did not want to. She was happy that it was her decision and not theirs. The women often went back to India to have the child or had their the mothers come from India to help them through the pregnancy because their husbands could not be involved in pre- and post natal care due to their busy schedules. Yet the women emphasized that it was important for them to have the child now.

This lends itself to an interesting paradox where women decide on motherhood to claim agency in their lives. They claim to have control over the decision to have children even though most of their responses to the question: “would you have a child now if you were working?” were” probably not.” In most cases the reproductive decision was the woman’s where she established control over her “wasted time” through reproduction almost as a protest against the restrictive visa regime.

Some women, though fewer in numbers, expressed more traditional views about household labor and reproductive labor. These women insisted that it was their job to take care of their husband, their children, and the household chores. In Jasleen’s words: “it is wrong to expect husbands to do household work and take care of the child. It is my job and I feel happy doing it. That is what my parents taught me. Just because we are educating you does not mean you forget your duties as woman they told me.” Jasleen who grew up in rural Punjab, a region infamous for discrimination against female children and women (Dasgupta 1987, Pande 2003), insisted that her parents were progressive to educate. She said she was one of the few women in her region who had an undergraduate degree and a diploma in computer programming. Piyali, who grew up in semi-urban West Bengal and had a masters in computer application, said:
...even if I was working I would make sure that I can still take care of my husband and kid the way I do now. It is my duty as a wife and a mother. I have lucky to have a wonderful husband. You know I grew up in a conservative family, I was not allowed to even wear western clothes and my husband never stops me from doing anything. He has no demands, which is why I really want to do things for him. It does not mean I don’t want to work. My parents sacrificed a lot in educating me and I would not waste it. I will work as soon as can but it would go to my discredit if I can’t take care of family well.

I do not have enough diversity in my sample to make a empirical claim about how regional differences (rural/urban, location and demography of states of origin) affected the families' understandings of unpaid/household work. However, there is an indication that regional differences, particularly urban, rural differences, lead to internalization of different gendered expectations expressed where women in raised in more rural areas verbalized more traditional gendered rhetoric than women from urban backgrounds.

Saba Mahmood (2005) argues that women in traditionally gendered societies derive agency by using traditional gendered scripts to define happiness and give meaning in their gendered lives. However, most of the women in my sample were not raised to follow traditional gender expectations. They were given the same education as their male counterparts – an education that will make them competitive in a technocratic labor market. The change in social expectation upon migration leaves the women negotiating many contradictory realities – current family situations, internalized gendered meanings of marriage and their educational credentials and desire for labor force productivity.

The male high-tech workers also held strong internalized gendered notions about women’s role in the family. Still none of them expressed a desire for their wives to stay home if they had the opportunity to work. They expressed deep unhappiness about their wives’ dependent statuses and at being forced to waste their education. But at the same time, they also believed that women should prioritize family over work. Some men,
particularly men from rural parts of Bihar and Punjab regions in India, explicitly said that they would not have chosen to come as a dependent man and suggested that “it’s a woman’s job to keep the family intact and men’s job to provide and protect the family.” I am not suggesting that these men were more sexist than others because very few high-tech workers did anything to alter the situation of the wives. They rarely contributed to household work/childcare or attempted to move to another country with better dependency laws or return to India so that their wives could get back to work. Men, particularly from upper middle class urban India, used the language of choice to describe their wives’ decision to join them on dependent visas. For instance, Rex, a high-level financial consultant, when asked about what he thought of his wife being on dependent visa said: “it was a choice for my wife, whether to stay in India and keep her job or come here on a dependent visa. She chose the latter – she chose to build a family as every woman does and probably should.”

The phrase “learning to be a dependent” came up several times in my interviews with men and women who were the legal dependents in the two types of families. The notion of “learning to be dependents” was deeply tied with internalized notions of gender and what it means to be a dependent spouse in the context of a traditional heterosexual family. However, the ways in which the men and the women understood gender was heavily shaped by their transnational social location. Most of these families were dual earner families when they were still in India. However, the institutional policies that forced a state-imposed spousal dependence reorganized how the couples understood their positions within the family. I found that they relied on different gendered cultural tropes to
make sense of their new status in the family. This differed significantly in the families of the high-tech worker and in families the nurses.

We see similar patterns of internalized gender beliefs in families of nurses among the dependent husbands and the nurse wives.

**Household Labor: Gender at the Interactional Level:**

I sat on the brown leather couch, drinking chai and munching on snacks in a spacious and well-lit living area of Jaya and Akash's apartment while I waited to interview Jaya. The apartment was tastefully decorated with various Indian decorative artifacts and painting and had many hand-embroidered pieces, which Jaya later told me she had made. I had arrived a few minutes early, but Jaya told me she was running late as she was still getting her six-year-old son ready to go to playschool and her husband for a work trip. The apartment had an open kitchen with a dining space by the kitchen, where I could see Jaya packing lunch for her husband who was leaving for a day-trip and snacks for her son. While packing lunch she was also feeding what I assume was cereal to her son from a bowl. Her husband was to drop the son at the playschool on his way. As Jaya combed her son’s hair she called out to me and told me this is how a typical weekday morning looks like for her but that Monday was particularly “crazier” because her husband was leaving for a trip and she had to help him pack before making breakfast and lunch. She said she usually made lunch later because her husband came home for lunch but that particular day she had to make lunch earlier to pack it up for him. In a few minutes her husband came out, dressed for work, said hello to me, picked up his lunch and looked into his laptop bag and waited for the son to finish his breakfast. He told Jaya to take a cab to pick up the son, as it was very cold outside. “Please don’t walk, I will feel bad since I will have the car and Aku, might
catch a cold”. He then picked up his son in one arm and hung his laptop bag on the other while pulling on his travel bag. He hugged Jaya and left. Jaya went back to the kitchen, got herself some chai and settled in for the interview. The description of Jaya’s home and the snapshot of her life that morning were typical of my observations of the lives of my women participants on dependent visas. During the interview Jaya noted with a sigh that a few years back, her mornings were as crazy except that she was not cooking but getting ready to leave for her high-pressure executive job along with her husband. In talking about their lives in the U.S., the wives of the high-tech workers often alluded to their previous lives in India to draw a contrast for me and show how different their lives were in India. They emphasized the different social expectations that they encountered as a dependent spouse than when they were a working spouse. Drawing a comparison between her present and previous lives, Mili said:

My life now is boring as hell. When I was living by myself I was living like a dude, I never cooked, cleaned sometimes and partied and traveled on free time. Cooking, cleaning and this domestic life was the last thing I did and then after I got married to Ravish and the brief time we lived together in India before coming here, even then I was not cooking and cleaning, I was still working. We had help and we’d mostly get food from outside. I never felt bound to do house work and neither did Ravish expected mainly because we had help...[ ]. But now because I am home, its like what do I do everyday – expectations build that I will be the perfect wife.

It was not a surprise that in the families of the high-tech workers, the gendered division of labor seemed to be more or less intact and the women were doing majority of the housework and reproductive work. When counting hours of household labor all the women in the high-tech families were doing a disproportionately larger share of the household chores. Tona, whose husband belonged to an upper-middle class, educated family, hailed from a urban background and expressed progressive views about gender roles said about his contribution to household chores:
I do 90% of the housework. His contribution is 15 minutes in a week when he cleans the bathroom, that is when he does that – he does not do that every week. But he wants the house to be spick and span. He would never ask me to do it but won’t do it himself but complain about it not being tidy and since I am home I feel like I should do it. Another thing he does is sometimes he cooks when entertaining guests….oh but wait a minute. I always help him out. I chop the veggies, do the defrosting, prepare *masala* (spices), and clean after he has cooked. It is usually a big mess after he has cooked. He however gets all the credit for cooking while, I have actually done the hard work. To think of it, he never helps me when I am cooking either for us or guests, Nice strategy hah!

Tona’s outrage shows her insight into gendered behaviors where even when her husband engages in household work, she still is expected to do and did most of the leg work. Tona’s husband corroborated Tona’s story of his proportion of housework. He stated with a hint of guilt in his voice and a sheepish smile that:

*Tona does, 95%, I may be do 2% and 3 % remains undone. I just don’t have the time. I manage an overseas team at work and so I am always on call. I have to work most weekend. It’s just that I have no juice left to do anything. But I have to say that maybe if I were pushed I would do more around the house but since Tona does it all, I choose not to think about it.*

*Tona’s husband, Kaushik, provides a different insight into how social expectations of gender operate. While he is aware that he falls short of his share in the family chores, he alludes to the demands of his work and confesses to employing avoidance techniques to escape houswork. While he feels guilty for not contributing to household chores, he also knows he is not held accountable for them. The guilt that Kaushik demonstrated was found among many of the other high-tech men in varied forms. I assign this guilt to the social class of the high-tech workers and their wives. Most of the high-tech workers and their spouses came from middle to upper middle class families in India where house help is affordable and common in families with economic resources. Therefore, it was nearly inconceivable that the women from upper middle class families would have to do any household chores. Both spouses and particularly the men felt a loss of status because their*
wives now had engage in household work or “dirty chores” that would be normally done by “maids” or house help if they were in India. Many of the high tech workers and their spouses stated that moving to the U.S had resulted in downward mobility because their standard of living had gone down. In India, most of these families could afford househelp, childcare, cooks and chauffers whereas, here none of that was possible. In the words of Mia, “In the U.S, you are the cook, the maid, the driver, the nanny – you are working round the clock practically”. Men shared similar sentiment as well. Rex, Mia’s husband said, “the only reason, I would ever think of going back to India would be so that we can afford help and have a better quality of life. That way Mia does not have to do all the crappy work she does here and we can have a relaxed life. Especially in a big city in India, our life would be much better at least in terms of family life.”

When the high-tech men contributed to family chores and childcare, it was explicitly out of class-guilt. Sambit said that he feels guilty about his wife doing the housework and childcare because “back in India this would never happen”. He said his way of compensating was by cooking for the family. “I love to cook and so it is not hard. Most of the women on dependent visas said when their husbands helped around the house it was because they felt that they were not good husbands for not being able to provide enough to afford household help. Karuna felt her husband did “all the hard stuff around the house”. She added, “he makes roti (Indian bread), puts Kitu (their 8 year old son) to bed, mops the floor on weekends because he knows I did not grow up doing this. I did not move a finger except to study. He feels he is not being a good husband”. Mia, said: “my husband is home during the weekends because he has a traveling job and he does the week’s laundry, cleans the house and you can say he almost does 45% of the household work.” Her husband,
however, said during his interview that he does only 20% of the household work and has been trying to find help for his wife. In my interviews, I believe women overestimate equality when it comes to equal sharing of household labor (Hochschild 1989) to feel better about the equality of their marriages.

In the realm of childcare, the men showed more pro-active support. They expressed unhappiness at the prospect of not being able to contribute towards childcare or being part of their child’s life enough. The men often volunteered to take care of the children. As one of the husband put it:

I make it a point to take care of our son for a few hours on the weekends. This gives me quality time with my son and relieves my wife of childcare duties, so that she can have some fun with her girlfriends. Childless fun (laugh).”

Sambit, one of the high-tech husbands, talked about the decision to have a child said: “I knew it would be hard but I knew this was the best time for Alka to have a kid because she can’t work. It has been hard with the money and getting help and support. I am hardly there but still it was the best decision”. He felt guilty for not being able help out with childcare enough. Like many other men, he recognized that with a child, his wife was often working more hours than him in the house and acknowledged the unfairness of the situation. The majority of the contribution high-tech men, made toward family work was childcare.

While reproductive labor was an important part of the familial social expectation from both men and women, some of the dependent women reframed the expectation by countering it. Of the four women in the high-tech families who did not have children, three told me that they did not want to have a child because of their visa status. Mili said this about about her plans for a family:
...no, I am not falling in that trap. Just because you are on H-4, you have a kid. That is the stupidest thing to do. You are already fucked and then you further screw up your life. Not me. I don’t want a kid but if I ever have a kid it will be after I am earning.

Tona, added to the oppositional rhetoric saying:

my life is so uncertain and I am so depressed all the time. I don’t want to have a kid and tie myself to this life more. Right now, if it gets too much, I can go back to India and start afresh but with a kid, I will be stuck.

Beyond the realm of the household labor and reproductive labor, gendered interactions were visible in social settings like the community events I attended. As I helped Karuna clean after a weekend get together of Indian families that she had invited me to, she told me she considered organizing get-togethers as part of her work. She said that life in the U.S., especially as a dependent spouse, was so isolating that she intentionally took it upon herself to organize weekend events with other Indian families. As I attended the weekend community parties, I noticed that the women were much more involved in organizing the events, from sending out invitations, to following up, to arranging for the food, organizing playtime for the children and finally maintaining regular connection with the community. At these social events the men hung out with other men while the women cooked together, chatted and planned other events. Most of the women were responsible for other social activities like organizing play dates for the children, organizing community religious events, buying gifts for parties and birthdays and family in India and maintaining connections with family and friends in India.

Through my observations, I found that when the men did take responsibilities for socializing it usually had to do with their colleagues at work. However the wives were still responsible for organizing parties they were hosting. I asked the women about how they felt being the main social liaison of the family. They said that while they liked to be actively
engaged in social activities because it gave them visibility, it also took an emotional toll on them. Tona said, “sometimes, I just want to hide but I am the one who is available always, so I am always the point of contact in this family.” This reflects Kanter’s (1977) observations of social roles of the wives of executives in her study. Despite all the time and energy invested by the women in socializing and organizing events, they often felt that the men took the limelight. As Pia put it: “he will usually cook something for party and earn all the kudos.”

The women on dependent visas pointed out they liked participating in social events only when it was with friends in the Indian community because their experiences attending social events at their husbands’ work felt emotionally draining to them. In the words of Poonam, who had an advanced degree in physics from Mumbai University and was an assistant professor in a four year college in Mumbai before she moved to the U.S. on dependent visa,

I hate going to Shri’s office parties. People there are so surprised that I exist. I feel completely invisible. When he introduced me to his boss, he was so surprised. He told Shri, ‘oh I did not know you were married’ and then turned away without even saying a hello to me. I was like really? You wrote that awful letter for my H-4 visa and screwed up my life and only reason he can stay at work until midnight is because I am doing other half of his work at home. Oh, how I hate talking to his office people. And then some come around and ask, you are so qualified, why don’t you work – has it to do with being a Indian wife and in my head I go, no idiots its because of your stupid and regressive policies that I don’t work.

The dependent women were also largely responsible for maintaining ties with India. Sometimes this became challenging because of their visa status. Jaya stated that it was particularly emotionally taxing to maintain ties with friends in India because of her dependent status. She complains:

I feel so ashamed talking to my friends and relatives. They ask such hurtful questions like, ‘why did you study so much if you had to sit at home. My friends who
started working with me are now in big positions. Even my parents sometimes get on my nerves. But I don’t blame them. They did not raise me to be housewife. God! It is emotionally taxing and Akash skips all the drama because he is so busy.

I coded social engagement as emotional labor because it involved time, effort and energy that the men shied away from doing on the pretext of having busy work schedules. The women took it on to themselves because they wanted to spare their husbands the time. The women often talked about the labor they put towards their families as way to claim economic resources for their personal expenses. Tona, explained,

...that even though its not my choice that I am not working, I still feel I need to be able to take care of my personal needs financially. I see the work that I put it as my part of the earning, because if I were not putting in this labor, my husband would not be doing so well and getting the promotions he has been getting so I deserve a part of those gains.

Mili added another dimension to this conversation saying:

I have always been independent, always taking care of myself so it is hard to snap out of that, which is why keep feeling guilty for spending money that is not mine and Ravish adds to that by always saying we don’t have money. So, I feel like I need to be doing a good job of maintaining the house, saving the money because that then becomes my money.

Brines (1994) found that stay-at-home wives often viewed housework as a way of economic exchange as a claim to their husband’s income. The same seems to be case with the H-4 women. The couples all agreed that men were the spenders and the women were the savers. In all the families of the high-tech workers, the men maintained a tight reign over the finances, from paying bills to investments. Only in families where the wife had expertise in finances did the husbands consult the women on financial affairs. But in terms of spending on consumer goods, the men usually out-spent the women, buying expensive items while the women almost never spent money on expensive items beyond what they absolutely needed such as winter coats or cell phones. Most of the women did not consider
their husband’s money their own. All the couples except one were in agreement on this question. For instance, Tona in the joint interview says “When I buy shoes it cost at the most $25 but when Kaushik buys shoes it can go up to $250.” Kaushik nodded in agreement with a shy smile. Likewise Mili, complained in the joint interview, “when I buy clothes it is target brand when Ravish buys clothes it is Armani. I have been conditioned not to spend money because I never think of Ravish’s money as my money.” Ravish responded by saying “no one stopped you. You are kanjoos (miser)

This restrictive visa laws create gendered social and familial expectations from men and women leading to contradictions that the men and women grapple with as transnational families. These expectations are further shaped by class and regional backgrounds and desires and aspirations of the couples. The most striking result of this analysis is that despite the construction of gendered expectation that the women are forced to meet, they are not passive actors in this play. They actively participate, make their resentments known and reclaim the most intimate choices in their lives – their reproductive labor despite the limitations exerted by the visa laws. They demonstrate reflexive agency resisting the institutional constraints that makes them active, often rebellious actors in this story.

Gendered migration set up social and cultural expectations for my participants about how men and women must behave in the context of the family and their communities. Based on gender socialization, social expectations and their migration status as a dependent or not, my participants’ performance of gender was heavily regulated and controlled. This had different consequences for the men and women and dependents and non-dependents in each of the two family forms.
Families of Nurses and Dependent Husbands

Internalized Notions of Gender Identities:

It was a hot summer Saturday afternoon in a Chicago suburb. I was in the house of Shija, a floor nurse in a suburban hospital. I sat on a bar stool across the kitchen counter, sipping on chilled coconut water, interviewing Shija while she cooked for her family for the week. Saturday was Shija’s only day off and she asked me to come at the particular time because her children had a play date with other children from the neighborhood in a local park where her husband had taken them. Shija had four stoves and an oven on. The air-conditioning was off. In the sweltering heat, the aroma from the Keralite food filled the house. As she cooked, she offered me for taste of what she was cooking and I happily accepted. During the interview, she told me that even though it was hard on her to spend her only day off cooking, she felt good doing it. She explained:

This is the only, most real way I can show my kids and my husband that I care for them. Also, I want my kids to grown up eating Malayalee food. It is big part of who we are. I grew up eating my mother’s home cooked meal and so should they.

This was a regular occurrence in their household. Only when Shija didn’t have a day off from work cook for the week, would her husband take care of meals. Shija went onto explain that her husband didn’t do much of the cleaning in their large four bedroom suburban house with a spacious living room and large kitchen. She explained: “He sometimes does, but because he does everything for the children, I try to do the other things myself.”

This was the story in nearly every family of the nurses. Although the household division of labor was among the nurses and their husbands, the wives also worked full-time while the husbands did not or had minimal part-time work. While the men refused to count
hours of household as part of their interview, I found that nurses were doing about 30 to 40 hours of housework every week. The men also cared for the children. Like Shija, all of my nurse participants said that they did majority of the cooking for the family and the cleaning on their days off. Some of the nurses (8 out of the 25 in my sample) had either their parents or their husbands’ parents living with them who often helped out, but the nurses still emphasized that cooking was primarily their responsibility. When I asked if this was something the family expected of them, most said they “felt good cooking for their families”. Rosa, one of the nurses told me, “this is the least I can do for my children and my family – give them food cooked by mom. I work so much that I am never home. This is the only way I can give them mother’s touch”. Another nurse Alma, told me that it would be hard to teach her husband to cook because “he’s never cooked or done anything in the house. It would be more work teaching him to cook so I prefer cooking myself.” Many of the nurses even opted for night shifts so that they didn’t appear to be absentee mothers for the children during the day.

Given the hours that nurses were required to put in at work, they felt they were not fulfilling their mothering duties. In talking about their children and motherhood, many of the nurses broke down in tears, saying that they were “bad mothers” or that they were “losing out on the children’s childhood”. In a heart wrenching remark, Jenny said:

I picked this life so that I have a better life than my mother but now I losing my children. I like it that they are close to their father but I my heart bleeds every time they run to their father when they need something and don’t come to me even when I am there. It is like I am the person who makes money but is never there for them. That is not what a mother is... (trails off in sobs).

The nurses’ also expressed a deep sense of guilt and shame when their husbands had to accompany them to the U.S. on dependent visas. In their guilt, the nurses often tried to
overcompensate. Alma, a nurse, shared that she has been doing night shifts for three years “so that the kids don’t think their mom brings money and dad sits at home.” Gina another nurse whose husband was on dependent visa said:

I was only able to come here because my husband decided to support me. It was more his decision to move here. It is because of his sacrifice that I am here and I am being able to work. I have two kids, five and eight. If it were not for my husband, I would not be able to do anything. We all are all in it together – we just want our family to live better. I am very lucky to have Joseph as my husband.

Like Gina, other nurses whose husbands were dependents either from their visa status or from being stay-at-home husbands and dads, tried to assert that the husbands were still the heads of the household despite their economic dependence. In all of the families with men on dependent visas, the women handed the reins of the family finances to their husbands. Many of the nurses told me that they did not even know their salaries and that the husbands “managed all money issues.” Gina explained: “I only bring in the money, the rest is up to him”. When I asked Lily what her income was, she said:

I am not quite sure; you have to ask my husband. He is the one who handles all the money things. My salary goes into our account and then he manages it – does what he thinks best. We are still a traditional Indian family. He is still the master of the house. Any major decisions about the kids or money, he takes those decisions. It is important for us as family to give him that respect. Just because he cannot work because of the visa we don’t want him to feel he is not the head of the family.

The nurses’ emphasis on the men being the “head of the family” shows desire to maintain the semblance of the patriarchal familial structure that the visa laws threatened to alter. The insistence on cooking for the family and their children shows an internalized form of cultural gendered beliefs. As an immigrant family it was important for the nurses to impart the ethnic/regional culture to their children growing up in the U.S. through food, but the nurses also construed “cooking for their children” an essential part of their motherhood. Opting for night shifts at work, engaging in second shifts (Hochschild 1989) at
home, and handing over finances to the husbands were all attempts to maintain the image of a normal traditional Indian family. This was clearly important to the nurses, revealing a deeply internalized gendered understanding of what a family should look like.

The dependent husbands told me about internalized gendered understandings of masculinity. Many of the men refused to come to the U.S. on dependent visa and preferred to live in India, visiting their wives in the U.S. once a year, rather than to compromise their masculinity by being labeled a dependent spouse. When they did come, they tried to negate their dependency by emphasizing that it was because of their “support”, “insistence” and “permission” that their wives were able to accept the jobs they had and come to the United States. George, a husband on dependent visa, said:

> When my wife got this opportunity, she was not sure if she should take it because you know for a while I won't be able to work. But I knew it was important for children and family. I gave her permission to take the job and then we moved here. It is easier because I can keep a watch on the children and while this is a bad policy, it is the way. What can we do?

Another husband on a dependent visa said:

> As a man I needed to make sure my family is okay and my wife was getting this opportunity to help our family and for that I would have to sacrifice a little and I was ready for that. I don’t think about these things. Government does what it has to – it is no point getting depressed about this. I am doing my duty of keeping my family secure. That is what a man should do.

This attempt to establish maleness in the family context by the dependent men could be interpreted as both a deep-seated gendered belief about a man’s role in the family and also a mechanism to cope with the perceived emasculation they experienced as dependent men. When they claimed to contribute in housework as the dependent spouse, they expressed resentment for having to do so. Shijo, a husband on EB-4 visa with a work permit stated:

> ...my wife works 40 to 60 hours depending on how much she is on call. She only has time to cook. I have to do the rest. No choice nah (no)? When you marry a nurse, you
know you will be servant of the house (laughs). But see I can never say this to my friends and family in Kerala because they laugh at me, say 'you became a woman or what', but what will you do. If I earned like her, we get maid but my English is not strong and my diploma is not good here. So I am stay home, I don’t want to work in gas station like others. I want to start a business later. But for now I am being houseboy.

The resentment expressed by Shijo about his changed role as the keeper of the house upon migration while his wife was working was a common sentiment among most of the husbands of nurses even when they were working. However, it was more pronounced among the few husbands who were on H-4 dependent visas. Johnny, an unemployed, separated husband of a nurse, who had been on H-4 for five years (was now a permanent resident) and was drunk at the time of the interview, shared:

I agreed to marry Maria without dowry because I thought she was my ticket to being rich and escaping from Kerala poverty but when people have power even a lamb acts like a tiger. That is what happened to Maria. It was the biggest mistake of my life, you better write that down (trailing off).

Walton-Roberts’ (2012) research with nursing students in India also revealed that being a nurse saved them from paying dowry because they were seen as potential income generators for the family. Johnny’s drunkenness largely discounts his views, but I found similar but less aggressive rhetoric in my other interviews with men on H-4 visas. When I asked George what his day looked like, he responded angrily:

...why do you even ask, to shame me? ...I am like the wife ok, I wake up in the morning, make tea, feed breakfast to my son, get him ready for school and then drop him. My wife does night shift so by the time I come back, she is home and I warm breakfast for her – you are thinking, it should be the other way round, not in this house. And then she sleeps. I warm lunch eat, clean the house and do laundry and then it is time to go pick up my son and take him for soccer and then drop my wife at the hospital and do the evening chores and go to bed. That is my life, not what a man’s life should be. But I see it as a sacrifice for my family, my son. You know if you are woman in Kerala and a nurse you can much more for the family, if you are man you have nothing. It was my decision that we come here but I should not have come like some of the people in my village did. They stayed back till the got green cards. But I did not want my son not to have a good life so I came, so it is all for him. I am
learning to be dependent but it is not easy because you can’t talk about it to anyone. Not many of the men are on this visa. Even if you don’t work, but if you are not on this visa you have prestige. And it is not Mary’s fault. She tries a lot...but what can she do. I did not ever drink or smoke – I have to now. It’s bad but what to do. Please don’t tell her anything, Please. I talked a lot with you...

George’s unhappy confession that he has taken to drinking and smoking to deal with his dependent status or as he calls it, his role of “wife”, shows the extent of internalization of gendered norms about masculinity among the men. The wives of the high-tech workers resented the closure of their life chances due to state-imposed dependency. The dependent men, on the other hand, deeply lamented their loss male privilege within the household even when their working wives strived against their own interests to maintain the patriarchal status quo.

Household Labor: Gender at the Interactional Level:

It was about 9.30 p.m. on a Saturday on a breezy fall night in a northwestern suburb in Chicago. I was leaning over on the kitchen counter at Amy’s house, chatting with Amy’s friend and colleague Rosa. Amy was a petite woman of 38, and was a nurse in an inner city hospital. That particular night all the women were clad in colorful silk saris, as were the other women. The men wore shirts and trousers. Amy owned a large five-bedroom house, which they bought new about six years ago. It had a spacious kitchen with granite countertops, aluminum finished gadgets, a large living and dining area, and a full finished basement, which served as the children’s playroom. The house was spotlessly clean and had heavy, ornate furniture typical of generic suburban stores.35 Adjoining the kitchen was a living area with a 50-inch plasma television and couches. Amy’s house was typical of most

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35 Most nurses had similarly designed suburban house and had similar wood furniture ornately designed and bought from a generic suburban furniture store.
of nurse’s houses I visited for my interviews and observations, including the layout, the furniture and the family pictures, which hung in the living room.

On this weekend night, there was a get-together of about 15 families. All the families had nurses as the lead migrant and the main bread earner. Three of the husbands in this group were on dependent visas and the rest of the husbands had a work permit or were legal permanent residents or citizens. Very few of them had full time jobs. Six were entirely stay at home fathers. I was invited by Amy to this party to conduct observations as well as interviews. Like all other community events in the Malayalee community, this event was distinctly gender segregated in its arrangement. The men gathered at one area of the house – in this party it was in the living space adjoining the kitchen where some drank beer and chatted while watching Malayalee programming on T.V. The women gathered in the kitchen or the living room. The children were often sent to the basement to play. The women usually took charge of warming and serving the food. There were usually multiple dishes (7 to 10) served, mostly cooked by the host family with a few dishes brought by the guests. Most of the food was cooked by the women (nurses) while the husbands often declared that they had cooked the meat dishes. Cooking meat was understood to be a mark of masculinity by the men. As I helped Amy lay out the food, she whispered to me with a chuckle that her husband usually helps around the kitchen, but when he is with other men in the community “it is not the done thing to help in the kitchen.” If the men helped in the kitchen at social gatherings it was seen as a sign of diminished masculinity.

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36 I usually did not address most of the nurses by their first names. I added chechi (the Malayalam term for big sister) after their first names for the women and chettan (the Malayalam term for big brother) for the men. The community viewed me as younger woman though I was not markedly younger than most of the women and men I interviewed. But I learned quickly that it was disrespectful to address my participants by their first names. This was not an issue in the families of the high-tech workers.
This scenario presents the various forms of gendered interactions that occur among couples in families of nurses and in the Malayalee communities. The gender segregated social gatherings were a common sight in most of events in the community. Dependent men and their wives were very protective of their masculinities in the presence of community members. The performance of masculinities (Martin 2003) to fit the gendered expectations of the community was common in public and social events including church at among the nurses’ families (George 2005).

Within the family, nurses did major share of the household chores. The men, however, were responsible for childcare. All the couples in families of nurses I interviewed had at least one child and given the mothers/nurses had highly demanding jobs, the fathers were required to do childcare. As one of the men put it, “someone has to feed the child and put him to bed. If the mother is not there, I have to do it. The child can’t go hungry”. The men often took care of feeding the children, putting them to bed, dropping and picking them from school and other extra-curricular activities like music and dance lessons, arranging and taking them to play dates, reading to them, drawing with them, taking them to parks or other recreational activities. The mothers or the nurses made sure to be informed about what was happening in their children's lives but would only be able to join in the activities on their off days. Nurses who taught Sunday school at the church had more time with their own children with other children in the community. Unlike for household chores, the men assumed the responsibility of childcare without much complaint. Some of the men even took pride in the fact that their children were closer to them than their mothers. John shared:
My children really love me. If they need anything or if they have to share anything, the first person they run to is me, not their mother. It makes me feel important. It is a wonderful feeling to be loved by your children.

The nurses also felt that the children were closer to the fathers than them and shared regret and pain much like the high-tech workers for being absentee mothers. However the pain and guilt were more severe for the nurses than the high-tech workers.

When it came to household work, nurses, especially when their husbands were on EB-4 visas or permanent residency where they did not have the legal dependency tag, were vocal in saying that “it was important that the men contributed equally in the household chores”.

Missy, who worked as a floor nurse in a suburban hospital, said during the joint interview with her husband, who worked as a mail sorter in the local post office, that she thought it was very important that men shared equally in the household labor. She explained:

we are not living back in days and not living in the village in Kerala. It is impossible to run a family when both people are working and in our families, we as nurses work more to say that the women will still take care of the house. I now know how much hardship my mother had to go through because of this attitude and I am happy that has changed. Arun does a lot in the house – takes of the children and that is very good if you ask me. I don’t think Arun is unhappy. (Arun nods in consent).

On the same note, Jenny shared that she decided to marry Thomas, who was less educated than her and came from a humble background, because she did not want to end up like her mother. She tearfully said:

I only wanted to become a nurse and leave my village so that I could help my mother and save her from my father. You know she was the one, worked like a donkey both for the family and at the farm and yet my father would yell at her, push her around, sometime even beat her. I did not want that for me which is why I married Thomas even if he was lower status than me. I wanted a man who would be understanding and would take care of my home and children and not be like my father. Thomas is a great husband and I am happy that he does not think it is bad to take care of children and family.
Indeed, Thomas was one of the few men who did not complain about engaging with household chores. While there was little diversity in class and region (most came from rural parts of Kerala and came from lower middle class families) among the families of the nurses, there was some indication in my research that men who came from poorer backgrounds were less shamed about having to do household work. Most of the nurse’s husbands in my study came from humbler backgrounds than the high-tech workers or their wives. Walton-Roberts (2012) found that most nurses tended to marry down economically, especially if they were working as foreign nurses or had plans to do so. The few husbands of nurses who were employed full time or had their own business unabashedly admitted to me that they did not contribute at all in household chores besides some childcare because they claimed they were not like the other husbands who were sitting at home.

In terms of social interactions and emotional work, the men in the families of nurses assumed more public responsibilities such as organizing events at the church, or organizing community picnics and games. Similar to research by George (2005), the men said the church played an important role in their lives. They were also unanimous in their complaint that the church or the community did not provide the same sort of social support they had in India. When it came to keeping in touch with family and friends in India, it was still the primary responsibility of the women. In fact the men avoided talking to family and friends in India. This was perhaps one way for the men to protect their already vulnerable masculinities from being challenged.

The social expectation that came with being a female worker with a dependent spouse was trumped by the gendered cultural beliefs and expectations from men and women based on a traditional model of family. The only area in which these gendered
cultural expectations were reversed to meet the challenges of the new reversed family form was in the area of childcare. The dependent men jumped in to take charge of the children.

**Discussion and Conclusion:**

In this chapter, I present a gender structure analysis of the consequences embedded within the rules and regulations of dependent visas. The institutional possibilities of my participants are defined by their legal visa statuses. Wives and husbands of the lead migrants are allowed into U.S. on a provisional status as dependents. They maintain their legal status as long as they do not work for pay and their spouses have a job in the U.S. The visa policies are gender neutral in language. However, the implicit assumption entrenched within dependent visas is clearly gendered. Dependent visa policies assume those migrating on dependent visas are women – wives of skilled workers from the global south in traditional families where women are full-time wives and mothers and financially dependent on the husband. The primary reason for allowing dependents or wives to accompany the skilled migrant worker was to create migrant families that were “stable” so that the lead migrant is able to meet the “ideal migrant worker” expectation with no other demands on his labor time.

The dependent spouses however actively resisted the implicit gendered presumptions about migrant families. The wives of the high-tech workers, most of who came from middle to upper middle class families, were socialized and educated to be independent. All the dependent women were highly qualified with college degrees and more and all had upwardly mobile careers before migrating on dependent visas. None of these women prior to migration wanted or conceived of a future where they would be “just
housewives”. It was therefore not surprising that most of these women responded to the visa structure by angry, verbal disavowal of their visa statuses and the invisibility and dehumanization that comes with it, exhibiting a deep mental agony. They resisted vegetating under what they called the “vegetable visa”.

The husbands of the nurses, like the women on dependent visas, resented being dependents albeit for different reasons. Most of men came from rural Kerala, with strict rules about a man’s and woman’s positions in the family. The nurses described the family structure in Kerala as strictly patriarchal with the father as the iron-fisted patriarch. The men often alluded to male honor being tied to being the provider and the head of the household. Visa imposed dependency therefore meant loss of male privilege and honor for the men causing them to be resentful and depressed with their current situation.

The effects of economic dependency differ in the families of nurses and the high-tech families. The economic realities of the visa regimes are understood primarily through the lens of gender by the dependents and the lead migrants. Class and regional backgrounds intersect with gendered understandings of familial roles to produce contradictions and complexities in the lives of the migrant subjects.

Wives of high-tech workers:

The wives of the high-tech workers dispel the monolithic image of the American mainstream of women from the global south as domestic and dependent. All of my women participants on dependent visas were highly educated and employed prior to migration and are not docile dependents. And yet their actions completely conform to the gendered expectation of their dependent positions. They invest themselves in intensive performance
of femininities, cooking, cleaning and taking care of their husbands and children. They talk about “learning to be dependents”. Dependent status pushes the women to draw on gendered tropes of marriage and their internalized gendered selves. They make do with their situation and learn to play the role of dependent spouse or an ideal wife and mother.

The underlying paradox that shaped these women’s understandings is childhood middle class socialization that encouraged them to be educated and independent simultaneously growing up in strong cultural traditions of gendered patriarchal family structures with unequal gendered relationships. The U.S state-imposed dependence forces the women to straddle these two distinct schemas, and their behaviors are informed by pre-migration social locations such class and region. Middle and upper middle class women from metropolitan regions in India perform gendered behavior as dependent wives, but they also expressed strong opinions about the oppressive consequences of visa regulations. The few wives from lower middle class backgrounds and semi-urban areas appeared happier taking on domestic responsibilities and not as resentful of their circumstances.

Some of the women attempted to claim agency by using the borrowed time away from their careers for reproduction, to avoid interrupting careers when they can finally go back to paid work. Others resisted reproduction almost as a protest against adopting an even more dependent and restrictive status.

Whatever coping mechanism the women adopt, most of them are not content as homemakers. The institutional policies, the visa regime, fail to create the intended “stable families” though it compels women to behave according to societal expectations of an ideal
migrant housewife. The women, however, are constantly in turmoil, with their self-identity as independent professionals in conflict with the obligations they face, and meet, in their everyday lives. Many of them actively disrupt the expectations by finding ways to move beyond dependent status, by getting an education, volunteering or going back to India. They persist in trying to undermine the expectations of the role they dutifully, but unhappily, perform.

**Husbands of Nurses:**

The dependent husbands of the nurses refuse to take on any purely “wifely” or househusband role but they are not resistant to adopting the role of a caregiver for the children. They adopt the role of the primary caregiver to the children because the children need care in the absence of the mother. The primary reason most of the families offered for migration was to provide a better and brighter future to the children. The men take on the reigns of childcare, claiming they are strong, able and sacrificial fathers. The paradox of the situation is embedded in the fact that childcare, including caregiving and caretaking, is typically viewed to be feminine. I therefore argue that the men are somewhat “undoing gender” by becoming caring nurturers, even if they would shy away from admitting so.

Most of the dependent men re-assert male privilege as heads of households, and thus do masculinity in that way. They, and their nurse wives, persist such that their families remain patriarchal, and they symbolically continue to be the head of household even though their wives are the main breadwinners. They carry and assert internalized notions of what it means to be a man in the context of a patriarchal family and painfully struggle with the contradictory reality of being a dependent husband. To negotiate these
contradictions these husbands often perform hyper masculinities, sometimes involving heavy drinking. This becomes particularly clear when families with men on dependent visas are contrasted with nurse lead migrants where husbands are not on dependent visas but are still not the main providers. These families are less gendered and more egalitarian with husbands performing more of the household chores as well as childcare, and the nurses applauding their husbands for being egalitarian partners.

When comparing the experiences of women on dependent visas with men’s, I find that women are expected to adopt gendered roles when they come on dependent visas and most of them do such performances well, but actively resist from re-defining their self-identity. They hold on to their identity as professional independent women temporarily playing the role of domestic wife. The men struggle much more, as their dependent position contradicts their gendered selves. They feel humiliated, shamed and attempt to cover up the pain by asserting their masculinities; they refuse to cook or clean despite being home all day. And yet, while these dependent spouses are unhappy, the visa regulations, the institutional policies influence how they live their daily lives, with women investing in traditional domestic skills and men learning to become caregivers. Expectations contribute to this changed marital behavior but neither the men nor the women alter their selves to fit the expectations of the visa structure.

**Lead Migrants:**

The male high-tech workers have the least struggle among all my participants in their visa-mandated role as the main breadwinner. They are however uncomfortable with their wives’ dependent status, not because they are invested in a gender egalitarian marriage, but because they are ashamed they cannot afford to support their wives well
enough. Most of the high-tech workers and their wives belonged to middle to upper middle class families in India and claimed to experience downward mobility upon migration. The high-tech workers expressed a loss of social status because their wives were forced into domestic labor and as breadwinners, they could not afford to outsource the labor so their wives would not have to do “dirty house work”.

The nurses and their husbands do not experience downward mobility, because they emigrate from rural, lower middle class families from a poor state in India. Their sense of dislocation was more based on the inability to live in a patriarchal family headed by, and supported by, the male head of household. Such family structures were important in the class and regional cultures from which they came. The nurses emphasized that becoming a nurse was their way to escape the life of poverty and patriarchal oppression in rural Kerala. They saw a career in nursing in a developed country as a means to improve the lives of their children and families, both here and in India. They however still carried, their traditional family beliefs. They believe that household work was women’s work. The nurses felt guilty for being the reason for their husband’s migration as dependents. They also felt intensely unhappy at being employed mothers, with long and erratic hours that made them feel as if they were “absentee” mothers. As the main breadwinner, they felt compelled to abide by any and all demands by their employers while being uncomfortable with these demands because they believe being a mother and a wife is as important as being a working woman, quite different from the high-tech male workers who feel their wives can provide appropriate child care. The gendered identity of mother remains strong among nurses, who envy the time that the fathers have with the children. They willingly do all the cooking, on their days off, to show their children that they are good and caring mothers.
While, most nurses would prefer their husbands do more household labor, they acknowledge that for them to do so is emasculating and so refrain from demanding it. Gender at the individual level leaves families of nurses uncomfortable with reversed roles, and keeps them from distributing household labor equitably.

In summary, the institutional constraints of the visa structures are based on gendered presumptions even if written in gender-neutral language. This research shows that these visa laws also have gendered consequences for the families. The nurses and their husband hold on to traditional gendered beliefs about male-providership and motherhood; yet their behavior is somewhat gender-reversed with female breadwinners, and male caretakers. The high-tech workers and their wives conform to the societal expectations that underlie the visa regulations but not happily, and the wives try their best to change the situation, rather than working towards creating a stable families.

The laws feel oppressive to both types of families in my research. The societal expectations from the state-imposed dependence change my participants’ behaviors, somewhat, more for the dependent wives then dependent husbands. The institutional constraints create economic dependency as well as legal dependency, changes behavior but not selves.

In this chapter, I show how alleged gender-neutral visa policies have oppressive gendered consequences for individuals and for the patterns of interactional expectations. The analysis of how the families understand the gendered expectations shows the unintended consequences of visa and immigration, which rather than creating stable families, creates families full of anxiety and despair. If we are truly concerned with the interests of migrant families, the visa laws as they are today must seriously be revised.
Chapter 7

Conclusion: Dismantling Dependence

In this dissertation, using extensive qualitative methods, I explored the consequences of the United States’ visa policy on transnational Indian professional labor migrants and their families. I’ve specifically argued throughout that gendered patterns of mobility, in the form of male-led migration and female-led migration, complicate and intensify the complexities of the consequences of these visa policies.

According to political scientists (Salter 2004, 2006, Hollifield 2004, Koslowski 2012) visa policies should be understood as regimes of state power that regulate internationally mobile bodies in various ways. In order to understand how state power works in the context of visas, I used Foucault’s (1984) theory of “governmentality” to disentangle the mechanisms of state power vested in the visa regimes. When coercive elements, or what Foucault calls “techniques of domination,” intersect with self-disciplining nature, or the “techniques of the self,” of the visa regime, it creates what I argue is a “visa-based governmentality.” As I discussed in chapter four, examples of coercive “techniques of domination” are: 1) the temporary and unstable nature of visa status itself, 2) the looming threat of de-legalization and deportation, and 3) the power vested in corporations to control the visa statuses of the lead migrant and her/his family. Self-disciplining or “techniques of the self” are means by which migrant families and migrant individuals negotiate their visa statuses and adjust to their new lives.

In order to contextualize gendered and racialized nature of transnational labor migration from the global south to the global north, I used Mohanty’s (2003) gender and
race regimes theory. To analyze how visa policies are shaped by gender within the context of the transnational families I use Risman’s (1998, 2004) gender structure theory. The analysis of my data is embedded in these theoretical frameworks and my findings are built on past literature on Asian Indian migration to the U.S.

In this concluding chapter, I begin with a brief summary of my findings, and proceed to provide some policy suggestions based on my research. I also offer suggestions for building communities of support to dismantle the dependence structures created by the visa regimes.

**Summary of Findings**

Based on this analysis, in this dissertation I have made two main findings: 1) the gender structure within the families intersect with the visa regimes to create unintended negative, gendered consequences for the migrants, and 2) the race and gender regimes of transnational migration intersect with “visa-based governmentality” to create contradictory experiential reality for both lead migrants and their spouses that produces situation of conflicts for them in the public spheres. Visa statuses and the experiential conditions, which migrant individuals must negotiate in order to navigate their new lives in the U.S., creates invisible structures of dependence. My dissertation is an attempt to illuminate these dependence structures so that they might be dismantled. I summarize the two major findings of my dissertation below.

**Gender Structure and Unintended Consequences of Visa Regimes:**

Dependent visa policies that regulate the migration of temporary professional workers and their families, were created to build stable migrant families, use gender-
neutral language; but, the policy at its core was framed by gendered assumptions that view work and family as two separate, binary spheres: the male provider and the female homemaker/caretaker.

I have shown in chapter five that dependent visa regimes are interpreted with gendered lenses in families of migrant workers even when the policies fostering such migration have gender-neutral language. In migrant families where women are dependent spouses, visa structure successfully builds on and enforces an internalized gendered understanding of what it means to be a dependent wife. Even when the women disavow their dependent positions and express angst at the idea of being a dependent, they still perform most of the household and childcare responsibilities. They perform femininities beyond the call of household duty and call it “learning to be dependent.” While most women are resentful of such gendered performance, some embrace it as a way to justify their dependence and to claim agency over their dependent lives.

The dependent husbands did not have a gendered script to fall back on to explain their dependence. In fact, the state-imposed dependence delegitimizes all their cultural beliefs about what it means to be a man in the context of the family. In order to cope with this loss of status, dependent men use different strategies to re-assert masculinity. Some refuse to migrate on dependent visas, which leave their nurse wives in a lurch. When they do come, they express resentment, sometimes by excessive drinking, or by not doing their full share of household work. Their way of resisting “learning to be dependents” is to protect male privilege within the household against the dependency enforced by their visa statuses. However, in the realm of childcare, these men take up caretaking roles and often project themselves as the sacrificial father to support their children’s lives.
Lead migrants also participate in gendered behaviors. Nurses bend over backwards to make their husbands feel in control of the family. High-tech workers excuse themselves from household responsibilities completely. This shows the power of gender at the individual and interactional level. Gender-neutral visas do not significantly alter gendered performances and expectations within either family form, with the exception of fathers becoming primary nurturers.

In chapter four and five, I show that despite the constraints of the visa regimes my participants exhibit strong reflexive agency as they express their dissent and resentment against the power of the state. My participants are often not in a position to act collectively on their dissent. It is important however to note that these men and women actively resist the disciplining of their selves by visa laws. They seek out different avenues to express their agency. My research challenges the self-disciplining aspect of Foucault’s theory by providing evidence that individuals resist disciplining themselves even when state power is binding as in the case of visa structures.

Nonetheless, I have shown that visa laws are oppressive for both family forms. Women in both family forms (nurses and wives of high-tech workers) seem to be more severely disadvantaged as a consequence of the visa policies: nurses are overworked as they do both paid work and most of the housework and wives of high-tech workers assume all family responsibilities feeling dehumanized in the process. Men dependents also suffer but find ways of reasserting their male privilege. My research shows that visa policies have clearly failed to implement “stable immigrant families.” Instead, they have created highly gendered families comprised of anxious, overworked, self-doubting, and unhappy
individuals. If we are truly concerned with the interests of migrant families or their stability, then today’s visa laws must be seriously reconsidered.

**Visa-based Governmentality and Gender and Race Regimes:**

I show how dependent and work visas regulate and control migrants. Visas affect the construction of self, family configurations, work place experiences, and public interactions of visa holders. The coercive nature of visa laws, along with their effect on the subjectivities of migrants, produces “visa-based governmentality.” Even when the migrant subjects display reflexive agency being critical of the visa laws, their actions are still governed by the visa structures, which have gendered and racialized consequences. Dependent visas and skilled workers visas have different consequences for the men and women in my study.

I have shown that dependent visas create continuous conflict for visa holders. The nature of these conflicts differs by gender. Women find that they are forced to reconstruct their identities upon migration: their previous identity of an independent professional woman clashes with the new identity of a dependent housewife. This recalibration of identity is complicated further because of the dissonance between a pre-migration imagination of the U.S. as a land of opportunity and the material realities encountered upon arrival. Men, on the other hand, are more reconciled to their economic dependency. Most of them are not as highly qualified as the women dependents or their wives. Yet, they struggle and suffer at the loss of social status as they reformulate their identities to be dependent.

In the sphere of public interactions, dependent visa holders feel marginalized, disenfranchised, and constricted. Both men and women feel a deep sense of humiliation.
The gendered nature of dependent visas is clearer in the public discourse as men are largely absent from public policy conversations. Most discussions presume the economic and social dependence of Indian women as normative. This public understanding is problematic because it successfully hides the struggles of both male and female visa holders.

The experiences of the high-tech workers and nurses at work support my argument about the racialized, gendered nature of labor migration (Acker 2004, Banerjee 2006, Guevarra 2010, Glenn 2010). My analysis in chapter four has shown that visas allow the exploitation of migrant workers. High-tech workers and nurses gave accounts of the ways in which coercive aspects of visa regimes were used to extract more labor time from them than other employees. The lead migrants felt, their treatment in the workplace hinged on the successful construction of an identity as “ideal migrant worker,” skilled, obedient, with no family responsibilities and unlimited labor time. The construction of this image was entirely predicated on having a dependent visa holder as a stay-at-home spouse. A grand narrative that emerged among lead migrants was that their employers also owned their spouse’s labor. Their spouses’ labor allowed employers to extract more labor time from the lead migrants. Lead migrants felt as though they were “always on call”.

While high-tech workers and nurses felt exploited at work, nurses faced gendered racial discrimination. They faced multiple disadvantages by being migrant women of color in a feminized profession. The “ideal worker” identity for the nurses carried the same meaning as described above, but also included being docile, obedient, nurturing, and caring. The nurses faced more blatant racism at work and a far lower glass ceiling than the high-tech workers.
The visa regimes constructed multiple layers of dependence in the lives of my participants. This challenges the popular perception (as some of my immigrant experts expressed) that “high-skilled” migrant workers and their families are significantly better off than other guest workers and have an nearly an equal status with their American counterparts in terms of opportunities and life chances (Ruark 2011). Even when the migrant subjects “submits to power relations [...] and hegemony of the state” (Ong 1996: 738) by making desperate efforts to project the “ideal worker” and “ideal family” image, they are far from achieving cultural or political citizenship. They continue to straddle the tenuous identities of “aliens” and “model minorities” (Lowe 1996), encumbered by their visa statuses.

Despite the tight structures of dependence, my participants, especially the dependent visa holders, resisted being made into passive victims. They challenged the dependence web by engaging in small and sometimes big acts of disruption. Many women dependents tried changing their situation by volunteering, by going back to college, or by returning to India. Men dependents often refused to come to America as long as they were to be on dependent visa. Many men dependents worked in the informal economy, even jeopardizing their wives’ jobs and the visa status of the family. Such acts of disruption challenged the notion of “stable families” put forth in defense of dependent visas by public officials. On a theoretical level, these acts of disruption also challenge the self-disciplining aspect of Foucault concept of governmentality.
Dismantling Dependence: Suggestions for Visa-Policy Change and Forming Communities of Support

I have argued in this dissertation that visa regimes, visa-based governmentality, race regimes, and gender structure of families creates invisible structures of dependence for labor migrants and their families. I do not argue that visa policies are intended to be oppressive; nevertheless, they are part of the larger gendered and racialized structural inequalities in the U.S that disenfranchise minority and immigrant workers. The work visas allow high-tech corporations to control the lives of workers and their families by relying on a racialized controlling image of the “ideal migrant workers” and the gendered and racialized image of an “ideal third world dependent wife/spouse”. Further, dependent visas control the lives of the dependent spouses and lead migrants by enforcing distinct spheres of work for each spouse.

The visa structures therefore create competing identities for migrants as they struggle to adapt, causing deep pain, suffering, and humiliation. In negotiating contradictory self-hoods and navigating the structures of inequality, migrant families find themselves ensnared in webs of dependence that have become a part of their material realities. My research has shown that while men dependents also undergo mental suffering, my women participants, the nurses and the wives of the high-tech workers, are affected by this structure in more ways than my men participants (high-tech workers and dependent husbands). Their mental agonies are compounded by the continuous physical and emotional labor they put in household work often evaded by the men. This reaffirms Mohanty’s thesis that the Euro-American state, through its heterosexist, gendered, and
racialized immigration policies, operates to disenfranchise “third world” women both in the public and the private spheres.

I therefore argue that in order to ameliorate the struggles of immigrant families in the U.S., we as social scientists must push to dismantle these webs of dependence. Below, I provide suggestions for reforming the visa laws and ways for grassroots advocacy.

**Suggestions and Reasons for Reforming Dependent Visa Laws:**

In a recent report\(^37\) released by the Department of Homeland Security (January 31, 2012) on how to attract and retain high skilled workers in the United States, especially those in the global market, one of the strategies suggested was a proposal to allow some H-4 spouses to work. Currently, the Department of Labor is considering allowing H-4 spouses whose partners' employers have filed for permanent residency to find paid employment. The U.S. government has been forced to recognize spousal dependency as a major hindrance to the recruitment and retention of high-skilled workers. The new proposal to allow employment for particular H-4 visa holders is still under debate in the congress.\(^38\)

The initiative to reform dependent visa laws after two decades, to allow some dependent spouses to work, is happening, as the U.S. faces a serious economic crisis and an employment rate of nearly 10%. Is the driving force toward the policy change, the existence of a dynamic and demanding global economy with constantly shifting labor markets and new destinations, affecting import and export of global labor (Rodriguez 2010, Ong 2006, Abella 2005)? Or, is the pattern of high-tech workers returning to India, men

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\(^{38}\) [https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/response/allowing-employment-authorization-h-4-dependent-spouses](https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/response/allowing-employment-authorization-h-4-dependent-spouses)
married to nurses refusing to come on dependent visas, Indian women leaving the U.S. to
go back home or nurses seeking jobs in other parts of world, the reasons for considering
the policy change? Whatever the reason, this is an important move in the right direction.
My research shows how unintended consequences of the visa regime constrict the selves
and life chances of my participants. I offer suggestions for changing the situation of the
dependent visa holders and work visa holders below.

The inability to seek legal employment emerges as the main issue for dependent
visa holders. Based on the accounts of my participants and given the negative
consequences of the dependent visa on the selves, family lives, and material realities of my
participants, I recommend that the U.S. government allow dependent visa holders to seek
employment after they arrive to the U.S. I do not suggest that it be a “two for one situation,”
as one Congresswoman put it. I do not suggest that the dependent spouse be automatically
provided a job upon arrival. I suggest simply that the dependent spouse should be eligible
to look for a job based on their qualifications, experience and credentials. As Shivali Shah,
the immigration lawyer, H-4 visa expert, and activist points out, if dependent spouses
received work permits from the onset, it would level the playing field and they could more
easily secure a job in accordance with their qualifications. A work permit would provide
them with the choice to look for work.

The two arguments that have been put forward against allowing H-4 visa holders to
work by public officials are: 1) allowing H-4 status holders (read as women in the public
discussions) to work would further privilege an already privileged group of women, and 2)
with high rates of unemployment, allowing H-4 visa holders to work would disadvantage
American workers in the labor markets.
I argue that both these I are logically flawed. To argue that allowing H-4 visa holders to work will further privilege women is a heterosexist argument because it assumes that if a husband has a privileged position, the wife automatically shares the same privileged position. This logic overlooks the situations of abuse and dependency encouraged by this visa status. Shah (2007) argues that many H-4 women find themselves trapped in situations of domestic violence because their visa renders them helpless. Even when the violence is not explicit, as some H-4 visa holders articulate, “the set up itself is abusive, whether it is intended or not.”

Male H-4 visa holders have been mostly absent from the public conversation about jobs. In my interviews with public officials I tried to steer the conversation towards the men; but, such attempts were largely ignored. Officials cite that very few men arrive to the U.S. on dependent visas, thereby discounting their situations of dependence. In my conversations with men dependents, they indicated that they often work part time in the “informal market,” such as Indian owned gas stations, motels, grocery stores, and other co-ethnic businesses; but, like all undocumented work, this creates exploitative circumstances for them. They struggled with low-pay, risky work, and the fear of being reported to the authorities. One of the key reasons that H-4 visa holders should be allowed the opportunity to seek employment is to prevent them from getting into situations of abuse because they are economically dependent on their spouses. As a nation championing the ideals of freedom, liberty, and equality, the U.S. Government, if it seeks to recruit “skilled workers” to benefit its economy, should assume responsibility to protect the families of these workers from situations of abuse at home or in the informal economy.
One might still argue, as the congresswoman in the PBS panel discussion does, that allowing H-4 visa holders to work poses competition to the U.S. workers, a problem given the current high rates of unemployment, especially among minorities. This argument can be easily countered. First, the number of dependent spouses seeking employment is very small: it is estimated to be less than 30,000 individuals cumulatively, which is less than 0.1% of the all-employable adults in the U.S. Moreover, economists such as Chiswick et al., (1997) and Peri (2010) have shown that immigrants do not reduce or affect native employment rates. Rather, they increase productivity especially in the long run. Peri (2010) has shown mathematically that, even in the short run and also in times of economic downturn, immigrants do not have a negative effect on the employment rates of U.S. workers, though the net gains and benefits from immigrant employment is slow in times of economic downturn.

I further argue that not allowing employment to H-4 is detrimental to the U.S. economy for various reasons.

1. The men on H-4 visas are already working in the informal economy, mainly in low-paying jobs. Because they are working under the table, they are not contributing to the economy through taxes, or via other social contributions like social security. Allowing them to work legally would help these men find employment more commensurate to their qualifications and let them contribute to the economy through taxes and social security.

2. Dependent visas do not create stable families as envisioned by lawmakers. Instead, dependency creates fragile families. In male-led families, the wives are depressed
and often return home to India to reclaim their independence. In families of nurses, the dependent husbands are resentful and often refused to arrive to the United States on dependent visas creating unstable and unhappy families.

3. Allowing dependent spouses to work is not unprecedented. Spouses on short-term dependent visas like L-2 or J-2 with their “high-skilled” spouses are allowed to work.

My participants highlighted some other issues that that they face as dependent visa holders that are not as sensitive as employment, but are also problematic and humiliating. Shah claims: “For these dependent visa women it is like they are always without their wallets.” My participants raised a number of issues and offered suggestions for change.

All my participants discussed the many disadvantages of not having a valid ID besides their passports. My participants fear carrying their passports because losing it would mean losing their visa along with it. To not have another valid ID besides the passport prevents these spouses from accessing resources available to most legal residents (immigrants and citizens) of the U.S. I recommend that dependent visa-holders be allowed to have a state ID, or that their driving licenses, which at present say “Not Valid for Identification,” be made valid for identification.

Dependents should be allowed to get a driver’s license in all states of the United States. Many states such as Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Idaho, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, South Carolina, and Mississippi do not allow dependent visa holders a driving license because they do not have a social security number. I argue that driving should be allowed for dependent visa holders across all states. I also argue that the process of procuring a license should be the same for H-4 visas holders as all other applicants. To have
a different process and a special DMV only adds to the harassment and humiliation of these visa holders.

H-4 visa holders should be able to acquire a social security number. Since they are not allowed to work they are barred from procuring a social security number. This does prevent them from seeking legal employment, but, it also restricts them from having basic benefits like an independent bank account, a credit card, an independent cell phone or an independent credit history. I argue that dependent spouses be immediately allowed to apply for a social security number or some other form of identification that will allow them to access basic rights, even if they are not allowed to work.

While there are compelling reasons to allow H-4 visa holders to work and have access to other benefits that they are currently denied, there is another important issue to be addressed. At present there is a strong market-driven explanation (posited by the congresswoman) that opposes policy change allowing dependent visa holders to work or have other benefits. As a feminist immigration sociologist, it is my responsibility to prioritize the voices of my participants who unequivocally talk about their loss of dignity and personhood that comes with the loss of employed status. My dissertation portrays the unintended negative impact dependent visas have on migrating individuals. I provide evidence for the need to reexamine the visa-policies and reform them.

**Suggestions and Reasons for Reforming Skilled-Workers Visa Laws:**

Lead migrants, i.e. the high-tech workers and nurses, are also negatively affected by their visas. Their visas too often allow exploitation of them as migrant workers. The
following are some policy recommendations to reduce use of visa regimes by employers to exploit migrant workers.

1. Visas should be tied to the employee, rather than the employer. The employee should have the opportunity to change jobs without having to leave the country. I recommend that the migrant employee be given three to six months to look for a job after leaving or losing one, before they must return to their own country. In other words, employers should not have the power to immediately delegitimize the visas and deport the lead migrant simply by firing them.

2. Corporations like the high-tech industry or the healthcare industry that heavily employ immigrants must be pushed by the government to adopt family-friendly policies that cover both American and immigrant workers alike.

3. The skilled workers should have the ability to file grievances with the labor department for discrimination and exploitation at work without fearing deportation.

**Public Sociology: Forming Communities of Support:**

Chandra Mohanty (2009) has argued for creating “communities of dissent” to counter racist, heterosexist, classist, and capitalist structures of power. Many of my women participants believed that my dissertation work their only means of activism. They felt they had had no other way to make their voices heard. Many of my participants had expressed a desire to find ways of creating awareness about their situations. I propose another way of advocacy by forming “communities of support” to help prospective and current dependent
visa holders negotiate the experience of being a migrant dependent. I suggest some ways
for creating these communities of support.

I propose organizing some my H-4 visa holder participants to develop a website
with relevant information about the lived experiences of visa holders. This will establish
lines of communication between current visa holders and prospective visa applicants. All
current “immigration help” websites list the processes for procuring a visa but there is no
systematic forum that provides information about the actual experiences of H-4 visa
holders in the U.S. I shall propose to my participants that they try to initiate the
development of a website that documents the post-migration experiences as H-4 visa
holders. The website will allow individuals to post their stories, it will allow real-time live
chats with visa holders for people who are deciding on whether to apply for H-4 visas and
among people already are on such visas. The website will also provide information on
resources available to H-4 visa holders to help cope with their situation, and help them
make their voices heard.

I also propose helping my participants initiate the development of relevant
informative publications to increase awareness. I recommend creating brochures, leaflets,
etc. with similar information as detailed above for distribution in embassies, consulates,
airport migration checkpoints, and immigrant resources centers in the U.S.

I recommend that once the website is in place, my participants connect with
immigration activist groups to link to local consulate websites, and liaison to with gender
and women’s rights organizations in India and other countries. This might help raise
awareness around these issues. With the help of transnational feminist organizations,
feminist activists can push to place H-4 brochures as described above in U.S. embassies. Interlinking resource websites to the official websites will both help emigrating individuals make an informed decision concerning their visa status, and inform them as to what resources are available.

I also suggest that people on H-4 visas form virtual support groups, as another form of grassroots support. Given the deep mental agony that many of my participants experienced as dependent visa holders, it would be very useful to start virtual support groups to help visa-holders to cope and survive the frustrations and depression of being forced into a life of dependency.

Finally, I suggest that my participants and other H-4 visa holders start a virtual and real-time petition movement to lobby for reform. I propose creating online petitions through the White House “Make Your Voices Heard” website and “Change.org” with research-based suggestions for changes such as that which I have offered here. This will act to legitimize the concerns of my participants and to present suggestions for change in the comprehensive immigration reform bill.

There is a possibility that the information on the website and the brochure information might deter spouses from coming to the U.S. on dependent visas. The U.S. government might be forced to take notice of the plight of dependent visa holders if the pool of foreign skilled workers contracts because workers refuse to come without permission to work for their spouses. If this were to happen the U.S.’s competitiveness in the global market for hiring “high-skilled workers” would be affected. Bottom-up advocacy
and communities of support might lead the U.S. government to reassess their policies concerning migrating individuals and families.

The complexities of dependent visas are personal to me as an Indian immigrant in the United States. As I described in the introduction, my cousin faced severe mental anguish, chronic depression and divorce because of her forced dependency in the U.S. She is now left with a traumatic memory of her life here as she continues to move beyond what she describes as her darkest days. My cousin’s experience is not unusual. I’ve heard similar stories from many Indian families, and shared them throughout this dissertation. For many, this will be the only place that they are heard. In a country that prides itself on freedom, liberty, equality and the pursuit of happiness, we are not living up to these ideals, if we do not wrestle with the complexities and demand change in what has, regardless of intent, negatively impacted the lives of Indian immigrants in the United States.

The recommendations I present for change are political, grounded in rigorous academic research. Through this dissertation, I advance the sociological scholarship in the area of immigrant families, gender and transnational labor migration by showing the gendered and racilaized nature of visa regimes and the lasting consequences for professional migrant families. However, the real strength of my research lies in giving voice to my participants who live their lives dependent on the visa regimes that shape their migration experiences and histories. These voices demand some real changes in the immigration policies so that they have basic rights in a country they temporarily call home. I end this dissertation with a plea to communities of social scientists, activists and American citizens to lend their voices to my participants to engender change.
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## APPENDICES

**Appendix A: Description of Data**

**All names were changed to pseudonyms picked by participants.**

### Table 4. Demographic Details of Families of High-Tech Workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family #</th>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Visa Status</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Regional Identities</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Year of Arrival to U.S</th>
<th>Highest Education</th>
<th>Current Occupation</th>
<th>Annual Range of Family Income</th>
<th>Age Of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jaya</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>H4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>81-100k</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Akash</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>H1B</td>
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*M.C.A stands for Masters in Computer Application

*B.Tech stands for Bachelors in Technology*
Appendix A: Description of Data

**All names were changed to pseudonyms picked by participants.**

Table 5. Demographic Details of Families of Nurses

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<th>Religion</th>
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<th>Highest Education</th>
<th>Current Occupation</th>
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*Index of Color Codes*

- **Families where the man is on dependent visa**: 8 Families
- **Families with initial transnational arrangement**: 9 Families
- **Families where the man came as sponsored by sister and went back and married a nurse**: 8 Families
Appendix B: Chapter 3

Brief Descriptions of the Four Main Visa Categories:

- **H1-B Visa Status:** H1-B is a non-immigrant temporary visa status held by “alien professionals who will fill a specialized knowledge position in the United States”. (Papa, Homeland Security Act of 2002). The basic eligibility for the H1-B status requires that the job being proffered is categorized as “specialty occupation”, meaning that it requires “theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge in a field of human endeavor including but not limited to but not limited to, architecture, engineering, mathematics, physical sciences, social sciences, medicine and health, education, law, accounting, business specialties, theology, and the arts...”(Congressional Research Service; Ruth Ellen Wasem 2006, p. 1). In order to qualify for any position to seek H1-B employees must meet one of the four categories to qualify for the H1-B classification: bachelor’s degree or equivalent is the minimum requirement for entry in a particular position; the nature and specific duties of the position to be held is so complex that the knowledge required to perform the job is associated with the degree attained; such degree requirement is common in parallel positions among similar organization or that the position calls for a specialized degree (Papa, Homeland Security Act of 2005). The employer must demonstrate that H1-B status holder will be paid at least 95% of the prevailing wage for a similar position in a particular metropolitan area. The H1-B is usually has a three-year term and can be extended to another three years after which the H1-B holder is required to leave the U.S. for one year before being eligible for H1-B status again. Further “an alien with an H1-B approval may not move to a new work location or different employer without first applying for a new or amended H1-B approval from the Citizenship and Immigration Services” (Papa, Homeland Security Act of 2005, p.284). Important to note is that this process requires an official release from the current employer. H1-B is a non-immigrant visa but has a pathway to immigration via the permanent residency program. The employer can petition for a legal permanent residency for a H1-B through one of the employment based categories (Congressional Research Service; Ruth Ellen Wasem
This can take anywhere between five and 10 years. The H-1 non-immigrant visa for “aliens of distinguished merit and ability” was introduced in Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952. The Congress has made several revisions to the visa since then. The H1-B category in its current form was introduced in The Immigration Act of 1990. The demand and inflow for the H-1B worker has escalated since the 1990s. Starting in 1990, the immigration law allows for a total of 85,000 new H-1B visas to be made available each government fiscal year.

• **Dependent or H-4 visa Status:** The family reunion clause of the Immigration Act of 1965 led to the facilitation of the “dependent visa status” for spouses and children of temporary skilled workers which was revised to its current form and included spouses of foreign students in the Immigration Act of 1990s (Naujoks 2009). H-4 for dependents of temporary workers of any H category, F-2 for dependents of foreign students, J-2 for exchange scholar, L-2 for dependent of intra-company transferee and P-2 for dependents of artists. Of the all the dependent visas the H-4 and F-2 have no work permit. The H-4 dependent visa – the visa status that all the dependent spouses in my study held - allows the dependent spouse and children of any principal H-class visa holders’ entry to the United States and free travel in and out of the country. The H-4 visa holder is dependent upon the principal H visa holder and will lose their status when the H visa holder loses their status, usually at the end of a period of employment. H-4 Dependent visa holders may accompany any of the following temporary workers to the United States - H1-B Specialty Occupations, H2-A temporary agricultural worker, H-2B the temporary worker semi-skilled and unskilled and H-3 workers who are trainees (Immigration Fundamentals, Rel. #31. 10/10). According to the Unites States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) descriptions of non-immigrant temporary visa dependents on H-4 visa are not permitted to be employed or receive compensation from any U.S. source. They may volunteer only if the position they are interested in has always been a volunteer position, and always will be. The Department of Labor
(DOL) does not allow a dependent to volunteer for a position, and then begin to receive payment for performing the same duties once a change of immigration status is approved. It is possible for the dependent to be offered a paid position, and apply for a change of status to an appropriate visa that allows employment. These opportunities are rare, however, and certain qualifications dictated by the visa type must be met before the visa status change is approved. In addition, employment may not commence until the USCIS approves the change, which can take up to six months. As H-4 visa holders often include dependent children under the age of 21, studying is permitted but a H-4 visa holder is strictly prohibited from working in the United States. However, studying on H-4 does not make the student eligible for any kind of scholarship, fellowship or financial aid unless they change their status to that of an international student on a student (F1) visa. It may also be possible for a H-4 visa holder to change status to another visa that will allow them to work in the United States but without that working on H-4 visa may lead to the main visa holder – that is the high-skilled spouse to lose their job and the family may even face deportation. (Immigration Fundamentals, Rel. #31. 10/10). Recent statistics released by the Department of Homeland Security in 2010 show that there were a total of 141, 575 people in the U.S on the H-4 dependent visa category in 2010 and 55,335 of those were Indian citizens. The exact gender data is not available, but the Department of Homeland Security Reports on visa issuances in the last 10 years state that the majority of dependent H-4 visas go to women, followed by children and a small percentage go to men.

- **EB-3 Visa Status for Nurses:** Like high-tech workers, nurses can also hold H1-B status because they fall under the “specialty occupation” category. However, due to the known shortage of nurses in the United States, the immigrant nurses can bypass the H1-B non-immigrant visa process and can apply for an Employment-Based Immigration visa – third preference known as EB-3. Due to the shortage of nurses, the employer is exempt from filing “labor certification”, a step in the employment-based immigration visa process that often takes a long time. The EB-3 opens up a
straight path to permanent residency for the immigrant worker. The spouses of EB-3 holder may be admitted to the United States in E34 (spouse of a “skilled worker” or “professional”) or EW4 (spouse of an “other worker”) categories. During the process when the immigrant nurse or the EB-3 holder is applying for a permanent resident status (status as a green card holder), the spouse is eligible to file for an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). Minor children (under the age of 18) of nurses or EB-3 holders may be admitted as E35 (child of a “skilled worker” or “professional”) or EW5 (child of an “other worker”) (Source: U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services Memo, 2010). The caveat here is that it is often easier to get approval for a H1-B status than a EB-3 status and when the quota for immigrant labor from a particular country is met the EB-3 category is stalled or frozen (called retrogression) for several years which is not the case for H1-B visas.

- **Employment-Based Permanent Residency or Green Card:** Every fiscal year (October 1st – September 30th), approximately 140,000 employment-based immigrant visas are made available to qualified applicants from all national origins under the provisions of U.S. immigration law. Employment based immigrant visas are divided into five preference categories – EB-1 to EB-5, that includes skilled and specialized workers of different categories. Spouses and children of certain preference categories are allowed to accompany or follow-to-join employment-based immigrants. To be considered for an immigrant visa under some of the employment-based preference categories, the applicant’s prospective employer or agent must first obtain a Labor Certification (LC) approval from the Department of Labor. Once LC (if required) is received, the employer can then file for an “Immigrant Petition for a Alien Worker with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for the appropriate preference category. After USCIS approves the petition, it is sent to the National Visa Center (NVC). There are several steps thereafter the first being a wait for processing of applications which may take from 3 months to several years depending on the preference category, once the application is processed there are other steps such as medical examination, vaccination, interview with the NVC before
the permanent residency is granted which then opens up the pathway to citizenship (Source: U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services Memo, 2010). Several of the H1-B holders in my study had petitioned for permanent residency through their employers and were waiting for the approval.
Appendix C: Institutional Review Board Approval

2009-0777 Page of 2 October 9, 2012

Approval Notice
Continuing Review

October 9, 2012

Pallavi Banerjee, MA
Sociology
1007 W. Harrison St.
411 BSB, M/C 312
Chicago, IL 60607
Phone: (847) 528-0386 / Fax: (312) 996-5104

RE: Protocol # 2009-0777
“Gendered Migration: Gender in the Families of Indian Migrant Professional (Men and Women) Workers in the U.S.”

Dear Pallavi Banerjee:

Your Continuing Review was reviewed and approved by the Expedited review process on October 8, 2012. You may now continue your research.

Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Protocol Approval Period: October 8, 2012 - October 8, 2013
Approved Subject Enrollment #: 100 (Limited to data analysis from 100 subjects)
Additional Determinations for Research Involving Minors: These determinations have not been made for this study since it has not been approved for enrollment of minors.
Performance Site: UIC
Sponsor: None
Research Protocol:
  a. Gendered Migration: Gender in the Families of Indian Migrant Professional (Men and Women) Workers in the US; Version 2; 11/03/2010
**Recruitment Material:**
   a. N/A – Data analysis only

**Informed Consent:**
   a. N/A- Data analysis only

Your research meets the criteria for expedited review as defined in 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) under the following specific categories:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes., (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including but not limited to research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

**Please note the Review History of this submission:**

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Please remember to:

→ Use your research protocol number (2009-0777) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

→ Review and comply with all requirements on the enclosure, "UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects"

Please note that the UIC IRB has the right to seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Please be aware that if the scope of work in the grant/project changes, the protocol must be amended and approved by the UIC IRB before the initiation of the change.
We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact OPRS at (312) 996-1711 or me at (312) 355-2764. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

Sincerely,

Betty Mayberry, B.S.
IRB Coordinator, IRB # 2
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

Enclosures:
1. UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects
2. Data Security Enclosure

cc: Maria Krysan, Sociology, M/C 312
    Barbara Risman, Faculty Sponsor, M/C 312
Phone: 312-996-1711 http://www.uic.edu/depts/ovcr/oprs/ FAX: 312-413-2929
Appendix D: Invitation to Participate

University of Illinois at Chicago

An Invitation to Participate in a Research Study about Families of Indian High-Tech Professionals and Indian Nurses in the U.S.

Be a part of an important nationwide research study about families of Indian professional workers in the U.S.

• Are you an Asian-Indian professional or the dependent spouse of an Asian-Indian professional working in the U.S either as a high-tech worker or as a trained nurse? Are you at least 18 years of age?

If you answered YES to both these questions, you may be eligible to participate in this research study.

The purpose of this research is to obtain an understanding of the similarities and differences in the experiences of Indian immigrant families in the U.S. who comprise of: 1) Indian men working as high-tech workers and their wives and 2) Indian women nurses and their husbands. The research will take place at any location that is convenient for both the researcher and the participant and participation will involve face-to-face interviews. The interviews will last approximately one to two hours at a location mutually convenient between the participant and the researcher. All interviews are strictly confidential.

Please call Pallavi Banerjee at 847.528.0386 or email pbaner3@uic.edu for more information.

Research Protocol # 2009-0777
This research is being conducted under the direction of:
Dr. Barbara J. Risman
Professor
Department of Sociology, University of Illinois at Chicago
1007 W. Harrison Street (MC 312)
Chicago, IL 60607-7140
Appendix D: Invitation to Participate

Email Notice A

I am a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Chicago. I am doing research on “Families of Professional Job-Holders in the U.S, specifically Indian men working in high-tech professional jobs and Indian women working as professional nurses. The purpose of this research is to obtain an understanding of the similarities and differences in the experiences of Indian immigrant families in the U.S who comprise of: 1) Indian men working as high-tech workers and their wives and 2) Indian women nurses and their husbands. The focus of the study is to explore the experiences and challenges faced by the men and women in the families where the spouses of the migrant worker is not allowed to have a job in the U.S as long as their partners are on work visa.

My research will take place in the Chicagoland and participation will involve face-to-face interviews with adult men and women in 30 families. For every family, I will be interviewing both the husband and the wife provided one of the spouses is on a work visa and the other is on a dependent visa. The interviews will be audio taped and will last approximately one to two hours at a location that is mutually convenient for the interviewee and the researcher, Pallavi Banerjee. All interviews are confidential. You may stop the audio recording at any time, or you can decline to be audio taped at all and still participate in the interview. The identity of the interviewee will not be revealed in any published material.

If you are interested in participating in this research, for more information please contact Pallavi Banerjee at pbaner3@uic.edu or via telephone at 847.528.0386. I have also attached a flyer with this email notice. I would be grateful if you forward the flyer to other people you know, who may be interested in participating in the study.

Pallavi Banerjee  
PhD. Student  
University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Sociology (MC 312)  
1007 W. Harrison St.  
Chicago, IL 60607-7140  
Contacts: Ph# 8475280386  Email id: pbaner3@uic.edu
Appendix D: Invitation to Participate

Email Notice B
For Immigration Officials and Experts

I am a graduate student at the department of Sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. I am doing a nationwide research on “Families of Professional Job-Holders in the U.S, specifically Indian men working in high-tech professional jobs and Indian women working as professional nurses. The purpose of this research is to explore how visa policies impact migrating families. I will also be exploring how different or similar are the experiences of male high-tech professionals and their wives from the experiences female nurses and their husbands as immigrating families. One of the focuses of the study is to understand the thinking behind the different kind of visa policies and where immigration experts and officials stand on issues if visa policies and any changes therein.

My research will involve telephonic or face to face interviewing 10 immigration experts that include immigration lawyers, policy makers and immigration activists who are engaged with issues of temporary professional workers in the U.S to obtain an understanding of their perspectives on work and dependent visas and changes in such visa policies. I will also conduct face-to-face interviews with 40 families from the Indian professional community that include Indian high-tech workers and Indian nurses and their spouses.

The interviews will be audio taped and will last approximately 30 minutes to an hour, and all interviews are confidential. I will not identify anyone who has participated in the research, and any published material will not identify any participant unless requested by participants in writing.

I am writing to you because you are a specialist on professional visas and have worked extensively on such visas and visa policies. Your participation will be invaluable for purposes of this research. If you are interested in participating in this research, for more information please contact Pallavi Banerjee at pbaner3@uic.edu or via telephone at 847.528.0386.

Pallavi Banerjee
PhD. Candidate
University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Sociology (MC 312)
1007 W. Harrison St.
Chicago, IL  60607-7140
Contacts: Ph# 8475280386     Email id: pbaner3@uic.edu
Appendix E: Consent Forms

Consent Form A (Initial Review)

University of Illinois at Chicago

Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research

Gendered Migration: Gender in the Families of Indian Professional Workers in the U.S

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Pallavi Banerjee, a PhD student at the Department of Sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago is doing research on "Gender in the Families of Indian Professional Workers in the U.S." Her research will involve face-to-face interviews with 40 families from the Indian professional community. She will also conduct interviews with immigration experts about their views on the visas. She will be interviewing both the spouses in families of Indian professionals who have come to the United States on work visa and their spouses on dependent visa. Specifically, she is interviewing 20 men who are high-tech workers and their dependent spouses and 20 women Indian nurses and their spouses. Pallavi will also conduct about 24 hours of participant observation through a period of six months. She will request you and her other interview participants, permission to attend some of the Indian social events like weekend get-togethers in community spaces, or public religious festivals either organized by you or
attended by you. During participant observations, Pallavi will observe interactions between you and your spouse, and who plays what kinds of parts in organizing and attending these events.

The purpose of this research is to obtain an understanding of how different or similar are the experiences of male high-tech professionals and their wives from the experiences female nurses and their husbands as immigrating families. The focus of the study is to explore the experiences and challenges faced by the men and women in the families where the spouses of the migrant worker is not allowed to have a job in the U.S as long as their partners are on the work visa.

The interviews will be audio taped and will last approximately one to two hours, and all interviews are confidential. You may stop the audio recording at any time, or you can decline to be audio taped at all and still participate in the interview. In order to protect your privacy during participant observations in social gathering unless you ask Pallavi, she will not reveal to anyone else that she is attending the event to observe you or your spouse. Pallavi will also not include any information in her research about any person in the social gathering who she does not have consent from, to conduct participant observations about.

Pallavi will not identify anyone who has participated in the research, and any published material will not identify any research subjects unless requested by research subjects in writing. All information about location of observations will also be changed in field notes and written reports of the project to maintain confidentiality. No one other than Pallavi and the faculty sponsor, Prof. Barbara J. Risman will have access to the tapes and observation field notes without the consent of the person interviewed and observed. Confidential tapes will be erased after transcription and coding.

Participation in the study may involve possible discomfort from answering questions about sensitive and personal information about family life. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may discontinue participation at any time, and for any reason, without penalty and without harming your relationship with the University.

The participants of this research may indirectly benefit from this research, as Pallavi will share the results of the research with her participants. This may help generate some awareness among migrant Indian families about gender equality within the household. Further, the information obtained from this project may divert attention to immigration policies that constrains spouses of certain visa holders from working in the US leading to inequality in society.

I have read the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.
If you have any questions regarding the research, please feel free to contact Pallavi Banerjee directly at 847.528.0386 or pbaner3@uic.edu.

This research is being conducted under the direction of:

**Dr. Barbara J. Risman, Professor**
Department of Sociology, University of Illinois at Chicago
1007 W. Harrison Street (MC 312)
Chicago, IL 60607-7140
Phone: 312-996-3005 Fax: 312-996-5104
Email: brisman@uic.edu

Pallavi Banerjee, PhD Student

Department of Sociology (MC312)

1007 West Harrison Street
Chicago, IL 60607-7140.
Email: pbaner3@uic.edu. Ph# 847528-0386

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, or complaints, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu
Appendix E: Consent Forms

Consent Form B (New)

University of Illinois at Chicago

Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research

Gendered Migration: Gender in the Families of Indian Professional Workers in the U.S

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Pallavi Banerjee, a PhD candidate at the Department of Sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago is doing research on "Gendered Migration" with a focus on how visa policies influence interactions within the families of Indian Professional Workers in the U.S. Her research will involve face-to-face interviews with 40 families from the Indian professional community that include Indian high-tech workers and Indian nurses and their spouses. She will also be interviewing 20 immigration experts and officials (that includes immigration lawyers, policy makers and immigration activists who are engaged with issues of temporary professional workers in the U.S) such as yourself to obtain an understanding of their perspectives on work and dependent visas and changes in such visa policies.

The purpose of this research is to explore how visa policies impact migrating families along with exploring how different or similar are the experiences of male high-tech professionals and their dependent spouses from the experiences female nurses and their spouses as immigrating families. One of the focuses of the study is to understand the thinking behind the different kind of visa policies and where immigration experts and officials stand on issues of temporary skilled workers’ visa policies.
The interviews will be audio taped and will last approximately 20 minutes to an hour, and all interviews are confidential. You may stop the audio recording at any time, or you can decline to be audio taped at all and still participate in the interview. Pallavi will not identify anyone who has participated in the research, and any published material will not identify any research subjects unless requested by research subjects in writing. No one other than Pallavi and the faculty sponsor, Prof. Barbara J. Risman will have access to the tapes and observation field notes without the consent of the person interviewed and observed. Confidential tapes will be erased after transcription and coding.

Participation in the study may involve possible discomfort from answering questions about visa policies and how such policy affects individuals who arrive in the U.S on those visas. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may discontinue participation at any time, and for any reason, without penalty and without harming your relationship with the University.

The participants of this research may indirectly benefit from this research, as Pallavi will share the results of the research with her participants. Further, the information obtained from this project may divert attention to immigration policies that contrains spouses of certain visa holders from working in the US.

I have read the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

Signature Date

Printed Name

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date (must be same as subject’s)

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

If you have any questions regarding the research, please feel free to contact Pallavi Banerjee directly at 847.528.0386 or pbaner3@uic.edu.

This research is being conducted under the direction of:
Dr. Barbara J. Risman, Professor
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If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, or complaints, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu
Interview Guide A

Gendered Migration: Gender in the Families of Indian Professional Workers in the U.S

Pseudonym of the Interviewee:

Date:

Start time: ___________ End time: ___________

Confidentiality Statement:
Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. If we should come to any question or topic that you do not want to discuss, let your interviewer know and she or he will go on to the next question. In addition, you may stop participating in the study at any time. You will not be identified in any reports from this study and will not be directly quoted unless you specifically authorize our use of your comments. The records will be kept confidential in accordance with federal, state, and local laws and the requirements of the University that protect your confidentiality. In addition, the researcher will not identify anyone who has participated in the research. Audiotapes of these interviews will be confidential and will be destroyed upon completion of transcripts. Transcripts will not include any identifying information.

Questions for the interviewee on dependent visa:

Eligibility Questions: Yes__________ No__________

1. Are you at least 18 years old?
   If yes, go to # 2.
   If no, ineligible.

2. Are you Indian citizen currently residing in the U.S?
   If yes, go to # 3 A or 3 B whichever applies to you.
   If no, ineligible.

3. Are you on a dependent H4 visa and your spouse either works as a IT professional or a nurse in the U.S
   If yes, go to # 4.
   If no, ineligible.

4. Does your spouse live with you here in the United States and are both of you willing to be interviewed?
   If no, ineligible.
**Demographics:**

1. I would like to begin by asking you to share some basic demographic information about yourself.

   - Name (pseudonym)
   - Age
   - Race/Ethnicity
   - Gender
   - Education
   - Relationship Status
   - Do you have children? If yes?
     i. How many? Their ages and their gender.

I am now going to ask you several questions about your experience as a spouse of a migrating professional, your family here and your life before and after coming to the US.

**I. Questions on immigration and life in India**

   - When did you come to U.S.A on the visa you have?
   - Did you come to the U.S with your spouse or did you come later?
   - Was Chicago the first city you came to?
   - Can you describe your life before you came to the U.S?
     o What part of India are you from?
     o What is the level of your education?
     o Where did you go to college?
     o Were you living with your parents or alone when doing college?
     o When did you get married? Where did you live after you got married?
     o Was your marriage arranged or did you chose your partner? Probe if necessary.
     o Were you working before you came to the US? If yes:
       - Did you start working before you got married? Did you continue working after your marriage?
       - Where were you working? Did you enjoy the work you were doing?
       - If you don’t mind me asking, how much were you earning?
• If you stayed on would you have chances of promotion?
• Did you want to make this job your career?

• What made you decide to move to US, (leaving your career behind, if working for studying towards a career)?

• Can you describe how you adjusted to your new life here? Describe the feelings, the changes? How was it different here than what it was in India? Was there anything specific that helped you adjust in the US?

• Do you have family besides your spouse in the U.S?

• How did you make friends in Chicago? How many friends do you have here? Are most of them Indians or do you have friends from other ethnic backgrounds too? What backgrounds? In terms of gender, do you mostly have male friends or female friends?

• When you say friends, how many of your friends would you count as real close friends? When you say close friends what do you mean? What sort of support can you seek from these friends?

• Who do you turn to when you face any kind of problems?

II. Household Work

• Can you describe your day as normally spend in Chicago?

• How much of the household work do you do on a regular basis? Give a list. Count hours.

• If the interviewee has children – How much time do you spend taking care of your child or children? Detail chores and count hours.

• How much does your spouse contribute in the household chores? Provide a list. Count hours. Description.

• If the interviewee has children – How much time does your spouse spend taking care of your child or children? Detail chores and count hours.

• Who decorates the house and does it up – you or your spouse?

III. Questions on children if interviewee has children (if not skip to section IV)

• When did you have your first child (if more than one child)?
• Did you conceive? While in US or on India?
• Did you have your child in the US or in India?
• How did you decide to have a child at this point in your life?
• Was it more of your decision or was it your more your spouse’s decision or was it joint?
• Who spends more time with the child, you or your spouse?
  o Are you happy with this situation? Would you like anything to change? Why of why not?

IV. Control of Finances

• When taking financial decisions, for instance if you were to buy a car, a other assets, do you take
  the decisions jointly or does one of you decide and then tell the other person that we should
  buy this item?

• Are you the one who spends more or saves more? Who is the spender in the family?

• Do you and your spouse have separate bank accounts or is it the same accounts?

• Given that you are not working at the moment and you cannot have a bank account how do you
  do your everyday spending? Do you have some cash allowance or do you have a credit card? Is
  that allowance enough for your needs?

• Who in your family takes the major decisions about investments and savings? Who decides how
  much will be saved and what the savings will be invested in?

• If your relatives or friends were in need of financial help, would you be able to help them out
  without consulting your spouse? Who would finally decide what amount to send to them?

• If you were buying gifts for your friends or relatives would your spouse do it without consulting
  your spouse? What is a gift amount that you can spend without consulting your spouse?

• When visiting India people usually buy gifts. Who in your family decides what gifts to buys, for
  whom and how much to spend? Whose family gets more gifts and better gifts– you or your
  spouse’s?

• If you have to donate money somewhere, do you consult your spouse? If has to donate money
  somewhere does he or she consult you?

• How much money do you spend in a month on personal items (things you like, your hobby)?
  How much money does your spouse spend in a month on things he/she likes? (He/shere we are
  asking about items of personal interest – not essentials)

• Tell me something that you would really like to buy for yourself? Something expensive?
  Assuming that you have enough money to buy this, would you buy it? Would you talk with your
  spouse about this before buying? If your spouse objected to buying this item, what would you
  do? If your spouse wanted to buy an expensive item, would he/she buy it without consulting
  you? Would he buy it if you objected to it?

• Who does the/she taxes in your house?
V. Work

- You said you are on______ visa? Does that allow you to work he/she? If not, would you like to work if you were allowed to? With your qualifications what kind jobs would you find he/she given that you could work? If allowed to work how confident are you that you will find a job you will like?
- How would your life change if you were working?
- Would you be able to do things that you can’t do now, if you were working?

VI. VISA Questions:

- How do you feel being on a “dependent visa”?
- Do you think this is just policy? Why or why not?

VII. Additional Questions

- How would you compare your life in the/she USA to your life in India? Would you qualify one to be better than the/she other/she? Why or why not?
- Would you like to go back to India for good? Can you tell me the/she reasons for it
- Anything else that you would like to share about your life in the/she USA.

Questions for the interviewee on work visa:

Eligibility: Yes _________  No _________

1. Are you at least 18 years old?
   If yes, go to # 2.
   If no, ineligible.

2. Are you Indian citizen currently residing in the U.S?
   If yes, go to # 3 A or 3 B whichever applies to you.
   If no, ineligible.

3. A. Are you currently working as either a nurse or an high-tech professional in the U.S?
   If yes, go to # 4.
   If no, ineligible.

4. Does your spouse live with you here in the United States and are both of you willing to be interviewed?
   If no, ineligible.

Demographics:
2. I would like to begin by asking you to share some basic demographic information about yourself.

- Name (pseudonym)
- Age
- Race/Ethnicity
- Gender
- Education
- Relationship Status
- Do you have children? If yes?
  i. How many? Their ages and their gender.

I am now going to ask you several questions about your experience as a spouse of a migrating professional, your family here and your life before and after coming to the US.

I. Questions on immigration and life in India

- When did you come to U.S.A on the visa you have?
- Did your spouse come with you or did come later?
- Was Chicago the first city you came to?
- Can you describe your life before you came to the U.S.? 
  o What part of India are you from?
  o What is the level of your education?
  o Where did you go to college/university?
  o Were you living with your parents or alone when doing college?
  o When did you get married? Where did you live after you got married?
  o Was your marriage arranged or did you choose your partner? Probe if necessary.
  o Were you working before you came to the US? If yes:

    ▪ Where were you working? Did you enjoy the work you were doing?
    ▪ If you don’t mind me asking, how much were you earning?
    ▪ If you stayed on would you have chances of promotion?
    ▪ Did you start working before you got married? Did you continue working after your marriage?
• What made you decide to move to US?

• Are you happy with the job you have in the U.S? Why or why not.

• Does you spouse work? Would you like her/him to work at this moment? Why or why not?

• If your spouse was to work, what kind of jobs would he/she find? Probe if necessary?

• Can you describe how you adjusted to your new life here? Describe the feelings, the changes? How was it different here than what it was in India? Was there anything specific that helped you adjust in the US?

• Do you have family besides your spouse in the U.S?

• How did you make friends in Chicago? How many friends do you have here? Are most of them Indians or do you have friends from other ethnic backgrounds too? What backgrounds? In terms of gender, do you mostly have male friends or female friends?

• When you say friends, how many of your friends would do you have from work?

• When you say close friends what do you mean? What sort of support can you seek from these friends?

• Who do you turn to when you face any kind of problems in the US? Friends or family?

II. Household Work

• Can you describe your day as you normally spend it?

• How much time do you spend at work in a day?

• How much of the household work can you do on a regular basis? Give a list. Count hours.

• If the interviewee has children – How much time do you spend taking care of your child or children? Detail chores and count hours.

• How much does your spouse contribute in the household chores? Provide a list. Count hours. Description.

• If the interviewee has children – How much time does your spouse spend taking care of your child or children? Detail chores and count hours.

• Who decorates the house and does it up – you or your spouse?

III. Questions on children if interviewee has children (if not skip to section IV)
• When did you have your first child (if more than one child)?
• Did you conceive? While in US or on India?
• Did you have your child in the US or in India?
• How did you decide to have a child at this point in your life?
• Was it more of your decision or was it your more your spouse’s decision or was it joint?
• Who spends more time with the child, you or your spouse?
  o Are you happy with this situation? Would you like anything to change? Why of why not?

IV. Control of Finances

• When taking financial decisions, for instance if you were to buy a car, a other assets, do you take
  the decisions jointly or does one of you decide and then tell the other person that we should
  buy this item?

• Are you the one who spends more or saves more? Who is the spender in the family?

• Do you and your spouse have separate bank accounts or do you have joint accounts or just one
  of you have an account?

• Given that you are the working member of the family? Does your spouse have a
  monthly/weekly allowance? Do you have a monthly/weekly allowance? Who decides on the
  allowances?

• Who in your family takes the major decisions about investments and savings? Who decides how
  much will be saved and what the savings will be invested in?

• If your relatives or friends were in need of financial help, would you be able to help them out
  without consulting your spouse? Who would finally decide what amount to send to them?

• If you were buying gifts for your friends or relatives would your spouse do it without consulting
  your spouse? What is a gift amount that you can spend without consulting your spouse?

• When visiting India people usually buy gifts. Who in your family decides what gifts to buys, for
  whom and how much to spend? Whose family gets more gifts and better gifts— you or your
  spouse’s?

• If you have to donate money somewhere, do you consult your spouse? If he/she has to donate
  money somewhere does he or she consult you?

• How much money do you spend in a month on personal items (things you like, your hobby)?
  How much money does your spouse spend in a month on things he/she likes? (Here we are
  asking about items of personal interest – not essentials)

• Tell me something that you would really like to buy for yourself? Something expensive?
  Assuming that you have enough money to buy this, would you buy it? Would you talk with your
spouse about this before buying? If your spouse objected to buying this item, what would you do? If your spouse wanted to buy an expensive item, would he/she buy it without consulting you?

- Who does the taxes in your house?

V. VISA Questions:

- How do you feel about your spouse being on a “dependent visa”?
- Do you think this is just policy? Why or why not?
- How do feel to be on a H1B work visa?
- Do you think this is just policy? Why or why not?

VI. Additional Questions that would provide more insight for the research.

- How would you compare your life in the USA to your life in India? Would you qualify one to be better than the other? Why or why not?
- Would you like to go back to India for good? Can you tell me the reasons for it?
- Anything else that you would like to share about your life in the USA.
Appendix F: Interview Schedules

Interview Guide B

For Interviewing Immigration Experts and Officials

Pseudonym of the Interviewee:

Date:

Start time:   End time:

Confidentiality Statement:

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. If we should come to any question or topic that you do not want to discuss, let your interviewer know and she or he will go on to the next question. In addition, you may stop participating in the study at any time.

You will not be identified in any reports from this study and will not be directly quoted unless you specifically authorize our use of your comments. The records will be kept confidential in accordance with federal, state, and local laws and the requirements of the University that protect your confidentiality. In addition, the researcher will not identify anyone who has participated in the research. Audiotapes of these interviews will be confidential and will be destroyed upon completion of transcripts. Transcripts will not include any identifying information.

Eligibility Questions: Yes_________ No_________

1. Are you either an immigration lawyer, or an immigration activist or an immigration policy maker?
   If yes, go to # 2

2. Are you familiar with clauses of work-visas given to professional skilled workers and clauses of dependent visas given to spouses of professional visas.
   If yes, start interview

Demographics:

3. I would like to begin by asking you to share some basic demographic information about yourself.
   
   • Name (pseudonym)
   
   • Age:
   
   • Race/Ethnicity:
   
   • Gender:
   
   • Education:
• Occupation:

• How long have you been working on issues of immigration?

Here are some questions about the Work Visas

For everyone:

5. I am aware of four different kinds of professional work visas (H1B, H1C, J1 and L1). Are there any other kinds of professional work visas that I am not aware of?

6. Which of these visas would you say are given out most to professional skilled workers who come to the U.S? And why so?

7. How have the categories of work visas changed in the last 20 years? What was the thinking behind these changes?

8. In your opinion how do the different categories of work visas we have for professionals, function? Is one better than the other? If so, in what ways?

9. Why do you think India was the recipient of the most numbers of H1B visas in 2008-2009?

10. How are H1B visas given out? What are the key criteria?

11. How do you feel about professional workers coming to the U.S to work?

12. Do you think any of the clauses for the H1B visa should change? If so why? Does it make sense to have these different categories of visa? Why?

13. For Policy makers:

   a. What are the latest debates on professional work visas among legislators?

   b. Which side of the debate are you on?

14. For Lawyers and Activists:

   a. What are the key issues around professional work visas you work on?

   b. How do you think these visas can be improved to help the migrating individuals (and their family members)?

Question on Dependent Visa

For everyone:

15. I am aware of two different kinds of dependent visas (H4, F2). Are there any other kinds of dependent visas that I am not aware of?
16. Why are some professional temporary workers’ spouses given visas where they are permitted to legally work and others are given a dependent visa where they can’t legally work or have an ID or an SSN?

17. When did the clause of dependent visa (family reunion) get included for non-immigrant visas? What was the thinking behind this?

18. How do you assess the clauses of the dependent visa? Do you anticipate any problems in giving someone a H4/F2 dependent visa? What do you think about the clause that some dependent visa spouses are not allowed to work or have a valid ID or an SSN?

19. Are dependent visas given to spouses of professional workers from specific countries or is it the same policy for anyone coming here to work from any country?

20. Do you think any of the clauses for the H4 or F2 visa should change? If so how?

21. For Policy makers:
   a. Are there any latest debates on dependent visas in the Congress? If not do you think there should be debate about it?

      b. Do you think anything should change around issuance of dependent visas (should the spouses of workers be allowed to work or have a valid ID and an SSN)? Why or why not?

22. For Lawyers and Activists:

   a. What are the key issues around dependent visas you work on?

   b. How do you think these visas can be improved to help the migrating individuals (and their family members)?

Last question for everyone: Is there anything else you would like me to know that is important for this project?
CURRICULUM VITAE

PALLAVI BANERJEE
November 2012

EMPLOYMENT

Post Doctoral Research Fellow (Starting January 1, 2013)
Department of Sociology
Vanderbilt University, USA

RESEARCH INTERESTS

• Immigration Policy, Globalization and Gender
• Sociology of Families with focus on Immigrant Families
• Racialization, Culture, Gender and Feminist Theory
• Qualitative and Ethnographic Methods

EDUCATION

2007 - Current  PhD, Sociology (Expected December 2012)
University of Illinois at Chicago, USA
Dissertation Title: Constructing Dependence: Visa Regimes and Gendered Migration in Indian Transnational Professional Families

Dissertation committee: Barbara Risman (Chair)

2005 – 2007  M.A, Sociology, University of Illinois at Chicago, USA
Thesis: Study of Religious Gatherings of Muslim Immigrant Bangladeshi Women in Chicago

1998 – 2000  M.A, Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, Calcutta, India

1995 – 1998  B.A (Honors), English Literature, Minors: Economics, Political Science
Lady Brabourne College, Calcutta, India

AWARDS AND HONORS

1. Dean’s Scholar Award, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2011-2012
2. UIC Liberal Arts and Sciences PhD Student Travel Award, 2012
4. Provost’s Award for Graduate Research, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2011
5. Departmental Nominee for the 2011 UIC Institute For The Humanities Dissertation Fellowship, 2011
6. Center for Research on Women and Gender, Alice Dan Dissertation Research Award (Honorable Mention), University of Illinois at Chicago, 2011
7. Rue Bucher Memorial Award (Honorable Mention) for Dissertation Proposal, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2010
8. Alice Dan Dissertation Research Award (Honorable Mention), University of Illinois at Chicago, Center for Research on Women and Gender, 2010
9. Student Travel Award, ASA Annual Meeting, Atlanta Georgia. American Sociological Association, 2010
10. Small Grant Research Support, Ford Foundation, Low-Wage, Gender and Immigration Project, 2010

PUBLICATIONS

Accepted


Under Review/Revise and Resubmit

Manuscripts Under Preparation


SELECTED PRESENTATIONS AT PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS

2012


- “Inter-ethnic and Inter-racial dating and marriage among Asian American Indian youth: Formation of Racial, Ethnic and gender Identities” with Soulit Chacko, Presented at the Midwestern Sociological Society Conference. Minneapolis, MN.

- "Visas as Neoliberal Tools: Indian Professional Families in the U.S”. Presented at the Colloquium Series at Asian American Studies Department, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL.


2011


- " I call it the Vegetable Visa’: Gendered Migration and the Politics of Dependent Visa” at the Conference on Guest Workers: Western Origins, Global Futures organized by Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, (INVITED).

- “Indian High Tech Workers in the United States and the Problem of Dependence” at the Conference on "Technologies of Migration: Asia, Media, Mobility, and Virtuality" at University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign.

2010

- “"Vegetable Visa": Gender in Families of Immigrating Indian Professionals With One Spouse on Dependent Visa.” Presented in the Regular Session on Immigration, Family and The Politics of Home and Belonging at Section on Asians and Asian Americans, at the Annual Meeting of American Sociological Association, Atlanta, GA.


- “The Role Of Religious Involvement In The Lives Of Immigrant Muslim Women: Repressive Or Liberating Force?” Invited colloquium at the Center for Social Science Research, Kolkata, India.


- “Exploring Gender in the Families of Indian Migrant Professional Workers in the U.S.” Accepted at the Midwest Sociological Conference Meeting, Chicago, IL.
2009

- With Barbara Risman. “Tween-Agers’ Race-Talk In the 21st Century.” Presented at the 12th Floor Colloquium of Gender and Women’s Studies and African-American Studies Program, UIC. Chicago IL.

2008


- “South Asian Women in Ethnic Labor Markets: Negotiating Male-Dominance at Home and at Work.” Presented at the Annual Meeting of Low-Wage Workers, Migration and Gender Conference, Chicago IL.

2007

- “The Indo-Bangladesh and Indo-China borderlands: Problematizing the global-local perspective” at a one-day Workshop on Euro-Asian Borderlands organized by the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

2006

- With Sengupta Pratim, "Social Capital As Determinant(s) of Occupation Among Multiethnic Low-Income Immigrants in Chicago" Poster Presentation at the UIC Interdisciplinary Immigration Initiative Spring Conference, UIC, Chicago IL.

RESEARCH AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Research

Spring 2009 – Summer 2010
Ford Foundation Funded Low-Wage Workers, Gender and Immigration Project, Headed by Prof. Nilda-Flores Gonzales and Prof. Anna Romina Guevarra,

- Assisted with edited volume on gender and immigrant low-wage workers and coordinated two national conferences on the same topic.

Fall 2006 – Summer 2008
Barbara J. Risman, Professor and Head,
• Data analysis of data on gender and race among middle school children; preliminary assistance on Norton Anthology on Family Research.

Summer 2006
Dr. Samuel Whalen, College of Education, University of Illinois at Chicago
• Assisted with qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis on the evaluation of the 21st Century Community School Project

Teaching

Instructor
Sociology 300: Introduction to Sociological Research Methods, Summer 2011
Sociology 490: Senior Research Experience (Making Alternative and Minority Families Visible) – Spring 2011
Sociology 100: Introduction to Sociology, Graduate Student Instructor in a Blended Learning Course - Fall 2010
Sociology 105: Social Problems - Fall 2008 and Summer 2009

Teaching Assistant
Sociology 100 - Introduction to Sociology - 2005 - 2006
Sociology 224 - Gender and Society - Summer 2007

OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES/ ACADEMIC SERVICES

• Reviewer for Gender and Society, 2012
• Reviewer for American Journal of Sociology, 2011
• Reviewer for Psychology and Society, 2011
• Reviewer for Youth and Society Journal, 2011
• Presider, Regular Session: Immigration, Family and The Politics of Home and Belonging at Section on Asians and Asian Americans, at American Sociological Association Conference, Atlanta, GA. 2010
• Session Organizer, Discussant and Presider, Migration Flows, Gender and Religion at Midwest Sociological Society Annual Meeting, Des Moines, IA 2009
• Graduate Assistant to the Council on Contemporary Families, under the direction of Barbara J. Risman, CCF Executive Officer and Professor and Head of Sociology, University of Illinois at Chicago, Aug 2006 – Aug 2008.
• Discussant, Family/Work Conflicts and Well-Being Session at Midwest Sociological Society St. Louise, MI. 2008
• Presider, Contemporary Families: Into the Future Session at Midwest Sociological Society, 2007
• Reviewer for Cities and Communities Journal, 2007
• Sociology Representative at UIC Graduate Employees Organization, 2005-2007
• Graduate Student Representative, Sociology Department, Graduate Students Recruitment Committee, 2007 – 2008

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

• American Sociological Association (2006-present)
• Society for the Study of Social Problems (2011-present)
• Midwest Sociological Society (2006-present)
• Sociologists for Women in Society (2008-present)
• Association of Asian American Studies (2010-present)

NON-ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

• Regional Youth Program Coordinator (Field Operations), Children International (U.S.A.) Field Office - SAHAY Calcutta, India. 2001 – 2004
  
  Duties Included: Designing and Implementing Community Development Program for underprivileged youth and children in India, Nepal and the Philippines. Managing and directing about 100 field staff (program managers and social workers) across India, Philippines and Nepal.

• Project Assistant – Education for the Girl Child in Eastern India, UNICEF, West Bengal, India 1999 – 2001
  
  Duties Included: Research and documentation of education programs for underprivileged girl children in collaboration with the State governments.