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Working the Night Shift:
Women's Employment in the Transnational Call Center Industry

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Working the Night Shift:
Women's Employment in the Transnational Call Center Industry

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Uncle Charlie

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When I returned from fieldwork, it was suggested that in order to write a book I hunker down and stay in one place. A writing desk that one returns to regularly and a set environment is supposedly key to creating and maintaining the writing process. This confined work ethic did not work for me and thankfully I had the support of grants,

friends, and family to visit around the country while writing chapters in some of my favorite places. The bulk of this book was written among my dear friends, Leona and John, in upcountry Maui. To awake every morning to a view of the Pacific Ocean and Haleakala on one side and the West Maui Mountains on the other side is more than I ever imagined. To end a day of writing with two friends who shared laugher, merriment, good food, and wine was a gift. Add to that, their 85-pound lab named Kula, who made sure that my daily walk stayed daily, and I was living a writer's dream. The foundation of this book was laid in Maui, and to Leona and John I am grateful.

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Working the Night Shift:
Women's Employment in the Transnational Call Center Industry

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In the past decade, a night shift labor force has gained momentum in the global economy. The hyper-growth of the transnational call center industry in India provides a quintessential example. The night shift requirement of the transnational call industry also intersects with the spatial and temporal construction of gender. Research conducted in 2006 in Mumbai, Bangalore, and Ahmedabad indicates that the nightscape is primarily a male domain (with the exception of prostitutes, bar dancers, and call girls) and women's entry into this domain generates a range of diverse responses from call centers, their employees, the employees' families, the media, and the Indian public.

This research illustrates that there is no linear outcome to how working the night shift at a call center affects women's lives. Even though the global nature of the work combined with the relatively high salary is viewed as a liberating force in the lives of workers, in actuality women simultaneously experience opening and constriction for working in the industry. Through the collection of interviews, focus group data, and

participant observation gathered during 10 months of fieldwork in India, I examine female night shift workers' physical, temporal, social, and economic mobility to illustrate how global night shift labor is intersecting with the lives of women in ironic and unsettling ways.

Call center employment certainly changes the temporal mobility of some women because it provides them with a legitimate reason to leave the house at night, whereas before this was considered unacceptable. Concerns about promiscuity and "bad character" related to working at night are deflected by linking employment to skill acquisition, high wages, and a contribution to the household. Women's safety—a code word for their reputation—is preserved by segregating them, via private transport, from the other women of the night. Women consequently become more physically and economically mobile, but through the use of what I term mobility-morality narratives, households continue to maintain regimes of surveillance and control over when and how women come and go. Similarly their social mobility is limited by obligations to support family members and conform to gendered notions of a woman's place.

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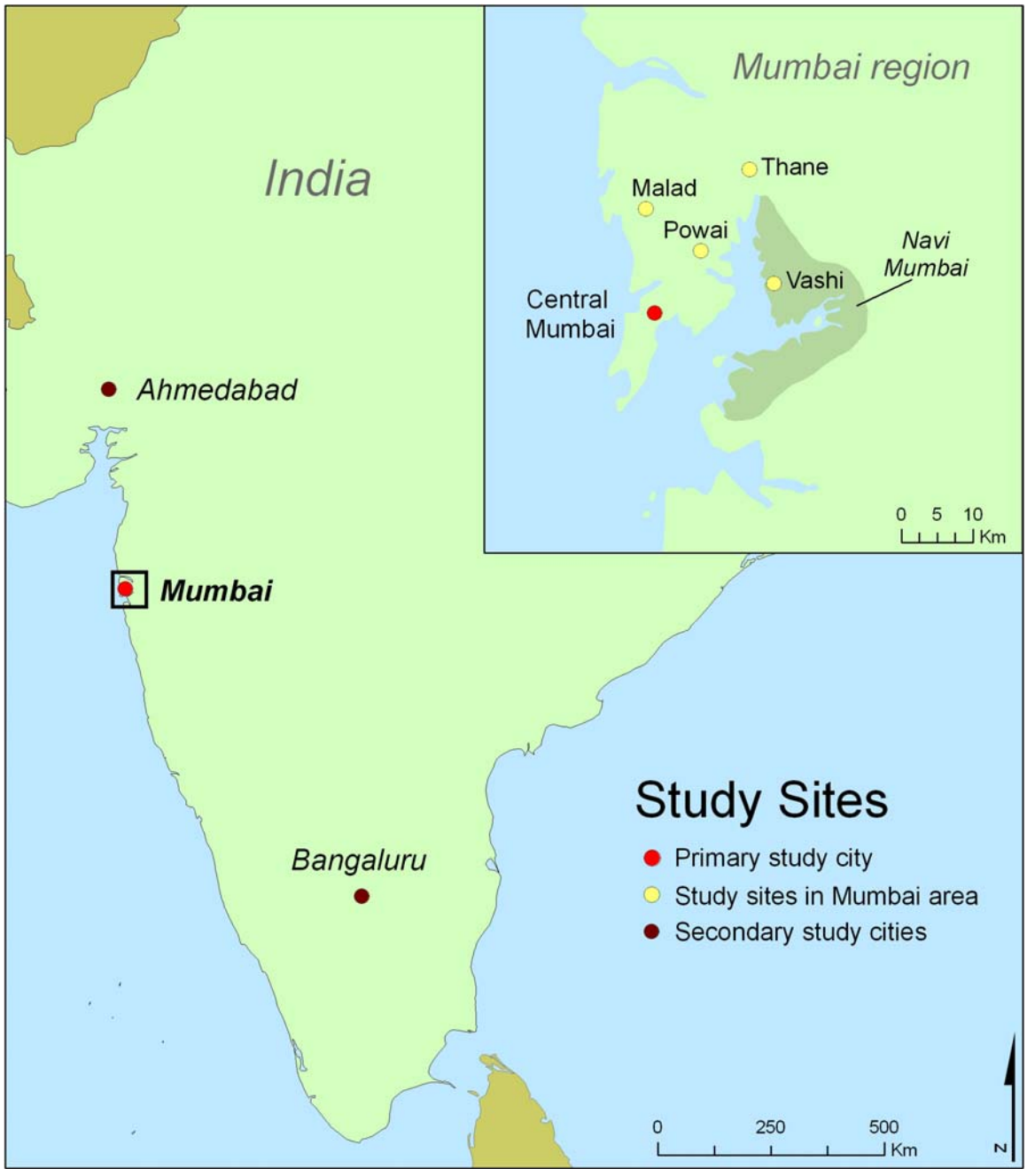


Chapter 1: Introduction

> For many young people, especially women, call-center work means money, independence and an informal environment where they can wear and say what they like. Along with training in American accents and geography, India's legions of call-center employees are absorbing new ideas about family, material possessions and romance.
>
> *– Wall Street Journal, 2004*[1]

"Housekeepers to the World." This headline of a 2002 India Today article on the call center industry was accompanied by an image of a woman wearing a headset gracing the magazine's cover.[2] Meanwhile, other reports emerging at the same time suggested these 20-something "housekeepers" were trading in salwar kameez's and arranged marriage for hip-hugger jeans, dating, and living "the good life."[3] The call center industry, with its relatively high wages and high-tech work environment, was heralded as a source of liberation for women.[4]

A closer look reveals a different aspect of the story. On December 13, 2005, Pratibha Srikanth Murthy, a 24-year-old employee of Hewlett Packard, was raped and murdered en route to her night shift call center position in Bangalore. Reported by the India Times to the BBC and CNN, the Bangalore rape case attracted worldwide attention. In December 2003, just two years prior to the Bangalore rape, a speaker at the 2003 Women in IT Conference in Chidambaram, India, described how one of her employees in Chennai called her company's New York office in a complete panic because the shuttle van used to transport employees during the night was pulled over by the police. Despite having identity cards, the women were accused of prostitution. Global night shift labor was intersecting with the lives of women in ironic and unsettling ways.

In the late 1990s, Fortune 500 companies in the United States began moving customer service jobs to India because of the availability of an English-speaking population and lower wages than those paid to United States workers. Call centers fall under the umbrella of the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry in India. Estimates suggest that approximately 470,000 people work in the industry, and it is currently the fastest growing sector in the nation.[5]

Due to the time difference between India and the United States, one of the primary requirements for employment in a transnational call center—besides fluency in English—is working the night shift.[6] Typical night shift hours range from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. or 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. Mobility is vitally important in order to work in this industry. In other words, *physical* mobility (getting to and from work) and *temporal* mobility (going out when one is expected to stay in) are job requirements. Because leaving home at night is generally considered inappropriate and off-limits to women, companies provide transportation as part of their recruitment strategy.

In this dissertation I examine how women employed in the industry experience this rapidly expanding "second shift" in the global economy. The notion of a woman's "place" in the urban nightscape, which for most women has until now been characterized as "being safe at home," is transforming as a result of the night shift requirement in the BPO industry. This project is shaped by three broad, interconnected questions related to this transformation: (1) How does the demand for night shift workers re-codify women's physical and temporal mobility?; (2) How does call center employment translate into social and economic mobility?; and (3) What spatial and temporal barriers do women

face, both in the household and urban public space as a result of BPO employment? As discovered in my in-depth qualitative analysis, the answers to these questions are by no means unified and singular because of a variety of factors such as age, economic status, and one's living situation (e.g., married, single, living alone, living with parents or within a joint family).

For the most part, educated, middle-class women working in call centers are earning an income that far exceeds what they could previously earn. Proponents of the industry believe this serves as a catalyst for empowering women. Yet no one has considered whether increased income and education means that women experience expanded physical and temporal mobility (i.e., now able to go out, day or night, as freely as their male counterparts). Thus, underlying *Working the Night Shift* is a concern about whether women continue to face strict regimes of surveillance and control on their physical and temporal mobility, despite increased income and education, and what this tells us about power and dominance in Indian society.

SPATIALIZING THE NIGHT

Social science tends to either ignore space completely, view it merely as a container of difference, or conceptualize it as "dead," absolute, or neutral.[7] According to Fincher and Jacobs, this framework is problematic because class and gender differences are "…experienced in and through place."[8] Thus, geographers are on the forefront of

illustrating the ways in which space matters, particularly in terms of the social construction of identities.[9]

For instance, Dalits, also called untouchables or the backward caste, were barred from entering Hindu temples because of the lower status assigned to them by society.[10] Likewise, in many Hindu temples, the body of a menstruating woman is considered dirty.[11] Menstruating women are forbidden to enter because it is believed they will contaminate the perceived sanctity and purity of this sacred space. In this context, a temple is far from a neutral space. It marks people as pure or impure, compatible with the sacred or essentially profane. Who belongs in a temple is determined by multiple categories such as age, gender, religion, and class.

Similarly, the nightscape is not a static geographic or temporal landscape. It is a dynamic space with a spatiality that is different from the day. Who belongs out at night and who does not is similarly determined by multiple categories such as gender, class, age, and religion. Areas perceived as safe during the day transform into spaces of danger at night, and stories about the dangers of going out at night are used to control women's mobility. As a result, women who break the rules about their place are viewed as "asking for it" if they meet with violence, or even rape, when they go out at night.

The conception of space as inter-relational is illustrated in how women are viewed as both a site and source of contamination. As global customer service workers, women must traverse the nightscape. As a result of this relocation, perceptions about their place in society also have the potential to be transformed. But as this research illustrates, generally speaking "women of the night" continue to be viewed as loose, bold, and

mysterious. In some instances, they are assumed to be prostitutes, transformed symbolically by time and space into "a dirty girl." While women bring contamination into sacred sites because they are, at certain times of the month, out of *place*, they are also, at certain *times* of the day, out of place simply by leaving the home.[12] The profane space of the street, particularly at night, contaminates women's bodies while the sacred space of the temple is contaminated by women's blood. This reflects how flows of the body (e.g., moving about) and flows from the body (e.g., menstruation) are spatialized in a variety of ways.

When women leave their homes or migrate from their villages, the act of "stepping out" can place them in positions of experiencing disdain, and possible violence, even when the act of stepping out is done for the good of their families and society. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, for instance, migrant women working at night in export-oriented garment factories experience hostility and abuse both inside the factory and when they travel to and from work.[13] The violence these workers face includes verbal harassment from male supervisors such as "Daughter of a whore, why don't you work? You can die for all I care, but you have to finish your work," rape both inside and outside the factory, and the very real threat of assault and kidnapping when they are out at night.[14] The independence of earning their own money and living away from the family unit is viewed as a threat to the urban, male order. As Siddiqi aptly points out, "Symbols of inverted moral order, women workers signify through their bodies male inadequacies and national failure."[15] In addition, female garment workers are relegated to a low class status by society, and the factories they work in are sometimes referred to as whore houses and

baby-producing centers.[16] This lower class status combined with working at night renders garment workers extremely vulnerable. They are perceived to be indecent women because they are out of place. At the same time, the local government provides little intervention or protection to garment workers. This is especially ironic given that their labor serves as the primary contributor to foreign exchange income and is a key benefit to the government in the form of economic development.

Barring women from sacred spaces because their bodily functions are viewed as dirty and attacking women workers who labor at night are just two examples of the restrictions and challenges women face when they venture outside the home. As some women gain increased access to night spaces outside the household, their experiences are further complicated as their bodies become imbued with stereotypes of sexual impropriety, questionable moral values, and "bad character."

WHY DOES PHYSICAL AND TEMPORAL MOBILITY MATTER?

The ability and freedom to drive a car, traverse the urban nightscape, and explore neighborhoods beyond the confines of one's community speak volumes in terms of gender equality. Massey's seminal work on space, place, and gender finds that "the mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people."[17] Hägerstand also points out that "one individual's use of his freedom influences what other individuals are able to do with theirs."[18] While they're often overlooked, physical and temporal

mobility or a lack thereof, provide an important perspective in terms of understanding which groups or individuals hold domain over certain spaces and which groups do not.

Studies on women's mobility are conducted in a variety of settings as scholars seek to understand how mobility shapes their lives.[19] From Worcester, Massachusetts, to Porto Novo, Benin, a lack of mobility impacts women's access to education and job opportunities.[20] Sujata, a 58-year-old woman whom I interviewed one sunny afternoon in San Antonio, Texas, described growing up in her small town in the state of Gujarat, India. She was not allowed to leave home after 6 p.m. As a child, she wanted to participate in sports that were offered to girls, but was forbidden because she would not be home by the curfew imposed on her. She recalled that restrictions on her mobility undermined her ability to compete with her fellow students as she grew older. She remarked that "the bitterness still remains" as she looks back on her childhood. Sujata made it a point to tell me that she would ensure that her daughters not experience the same confinement in their lives.

Mobility, however, reflects more than the physical act of walking or driving from point A to point B. Paromita Vohra's 2006 documentary, *Q2P*, provides an important perspective on how physical and temporal mobility, toilets, and health are intertwined.[21] By examining women's access to toilets in Mumbai, she revealed how the lack of public toilets combined with societal rules about where women are expected to relieve themselves hinders women's mobility. Vohra also linked the lack of access to toilets to ongoing health problems women face, such as urinary tract infections.

Going to the bathroom is a fundamental issue for women in Mumbai because many lack toilets in their homes, but are still expected to relieve themselves incognito. Under these conditions, women will hold off going to the bathroom until nightfall so as not to be seen. They also walk far distances to access a place to urinate away from the view of men or try to stay near areas that provide them nearby access to a toilet. Poor women, especially, bear the brunt of this situation.[22] Even women who have toilets in their homes are aware of how long they can be gone from home before the need to go to the bathroom arises and how this need can be satisfied. Often it's a choice between relieving oneself in a tucked away public space or enduring physical pain.

In comparison, men have the privilege of urinating in public spaces, such as street gutters and on the road. Women walking by are expected to turn away and pretend not to see. It is out of the question for women to behave in a similar manner. "It would be chaos!" is how one man in Vohra's film responded to the idea. This dynamic illustrates the ways in which men hold dominion over public space. It also shows one graphic way in which male behavior in public space is used to define gendered perceptions of mobility and spatial access. As a result, women modify their actions in order respect a man's need for privacy in public spaces. Women are treated as an *intrusion* in the "male domain" of public spaces and hide themselves as a means to justify their existence outside the household.

During a discussion I had with Madhusree Dutta, filmmaker of *7 Islands and a Metro*, she concurred with Vohra's film, adding, "If you want to increase women's social mobility, make more public toilets available."[23] As a means of addressing concerns about

women's safety, Dutta also pointed to the current trajectory of increasing the presence of female police stations. She believes, however, that public toilets would be more effective in addressing safety concerns because women would no longer have to go into dark, faraway spaces to relieve themselves. This would not only increase women's mobility, but also help to integrate them into mainstream spaces.

Ranade's work on gender and space in Mumbai provides an additional perspective.[24] By mapping women's mobility in four public spaces of Mumbai, she not only illustrates how gender segregation is spatialized, but also how a woman's access to public space intersects with maintaining a particular reputation. The areas she mapped were: (1) Central Avenue, Chembur, a suburban middle-class neighborhood; (2) Zaveri Bazaar and Mumbadevi, dense, commercial areas in old southern Mumbai; (3) Nariman Point, a commercial district of south Mumbai; and (4) Kalachowski, a working class neighborhood. By mapping women's mobility in these diverse settings, she found that men have almost free access to public space whereas women self-regulate their physical and temporal mobility in order to (re)produce respectability:[25]

> Women cross the road between one to four times to avoid situations in which they might find themselves uncomfortable/unsafe. This is sometimes done indirectly by producing respectability such as when a woman crosses the road to avoid a wine shop. At other times, it is direct such as when she crosses to the other side to avoid groups of men hanging out at the paan-shop, or when she chooses not to walk between trucks and a dead wall (The working class drivers in this case are regularly perceived as threatening).

If women dodge streets and avoid dead walls during the day, what happens at night?[26] In the course of this study, it became apparent that one of the ways women produced respectability in the nightscape was to be in the presence of a man and to

adhere to a strict work-to-home journey. This is not to suggest that instances of women who “bunk off” (the term used for taking a day off from work) to hang out did not occur, but it was made clear during interviews, participant observation, and personal experience that women, compared to men, are held to far stricter rules of mobility in terms of where they can move in the urban nightscape. Furthermore, some employees and their families may react with unusual sensitivity when dealing with threats to women’s safety at night.

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

This project is informed by the public versus private sphere distinction as well as literature on body politics. I draw from the public versus private sphere distinction because it provides a foundation for looking at how women experience inequality in a variety of settings, ranging from gender relations in the household to their participation in the paid labor force. Notions of public and private are generally viewed through the lens of the home as the private sphere and spaces outside the home as the public sphere or business as a private sphere and government as a public sphere. These structural conceptions, problematic as they may be, are in turn embedded on the body. In order to articulate the myriad of ways in which the public versus private sphere distinction is embodied and subsequently used to socially construct women as inherently different from men, I also draw from literature on body politics.

Public/Private

The public versus private sphere distinction gained popularity in the 1970s as a means to explain a woman's place, or lack thereof, in society.[27] As illustrated in table 1, women were relegated to private sphere traits and men were relegated to public sphere traits.

Table 1 Associated differences of the public and private sphere

Public sphere	Private sphere
Masculine	Feminine
Production of goods and services	Reproduction – childbearing
Paid labor	Unpaid labor
Leaders	Followers
Visible	Invisible

Note: Derived from Anderson[28]; Peterson and Runyan[29]

According to feminist scholar Spike Peterson, in the 1980s feminist political theorists in the West began to move away from this distinction because the notion of the public sphere shifted and was used to describe the state government while the private sphere moved into the realm of business (personal communication, March 6, 2003). Scholars from a range of disciplines have gone on to critique the use of the public versus private sphere distinction. The binary nature (e.g., dependent or independent) of this framework, for example, fails to consider difference and overlap at the individual level.[30] Although it is important to understand how the perception of a woman's place (e.g., in the home) reflects her overall status in society, this framework mirrors the belief that women and men belong in distinct categories.[31] Indeed, as demonstrated by the popularity of books such as *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*, the illusion of

separate spheres certainly remains real and relevant in men and women's lives, despite the fact that there is difference and overlap at the individual level.[32]

When a man says, "My wife will stay at home because we can afford to have her at home," certain assumptions related to the public versus private scheme are revealed. Although gender is in fact inter-relational—some men have more traits that are deemed feminine and vice versa—public versus private traits are constructed as real. The relegation of women to private spaces appears to be a privilege of the upper class and a prerogative of men.

The dichotomy perpetuated in notions of a private versus public sphere contribute to a form of gender hierarchy in which society deems the adoption of supposed masculine traits as positive and the adoption of feminine traits as negative. For example, being aggressive is better than being nurturing. Being told "you throw like a girl" or "don't be such a pussy" is an insult for men.

The public versus private sphere distinction also reflects the supposition that once women step out of the domestic hearth and into a masculine, public domain they will be allowed equal access to other aspects of the public sphere. From this perspective, getting out of the house and pursuing a career is viewed as a means of achieving liberation.[33]

This is not necessarily the case, however, because traits categorized in the public versus private sphere distinction are replicated in the paid labor force. Research on female engineers in India illustrates that gender roles, defined by the public-private distinction, are embedded in the IT Industry and have a negative impact on women's

participation in the industry.[34] An employer who participated in Parikh and Sukhatme's 2002 study on the challenges female engineers face states:[35]

> I do not have specific bias for women engineers. I do agree that they are more competent, intelligent, possess more integrity, and are more efficient than men engineers, but they are helpless. In spite of their full willingness to perform their duty perfectly they are not able to meet with the requirement of the organization in which they are employed due to family responsibilities like their responsibilities towards their children, in-laws, parents, and other social obligations towards family, illness, etc. In Indian culture men expect everything from women. (p. 248)

In general, both academia and industry fail to consider women as equal, contributing participants in the realm of technological development.[36] This occurs because more women, compared to men, continue to be viewed as "out of place" in the workforce and as such they are discriminated against.[37] The persistence of traditional gender roles deems some women's participation in the paid labor force as secondary to their reproductive role in the household and hinders women. The dichotomy embedded in the public versus private distinction—however inaccurate it may be from a theoretical stance or unjustified in an ethical sense—is a real social force in the lives of women.

Another critique of the framework is that it is couched within Western ideals of what constitutes public traits and private traits. Many argue that these kinds of definitions cannot be generalized across cultures. It would, however, appear evident that traits deemed masculine in a given society will often be linked to higher status and thus the framework does have validity across cultures.[38] For instance, the traits listed in table 1 held throughout my study. From stereotypes that helping children with their homework is a woman's job to men being a visible presence in the urban night while women were

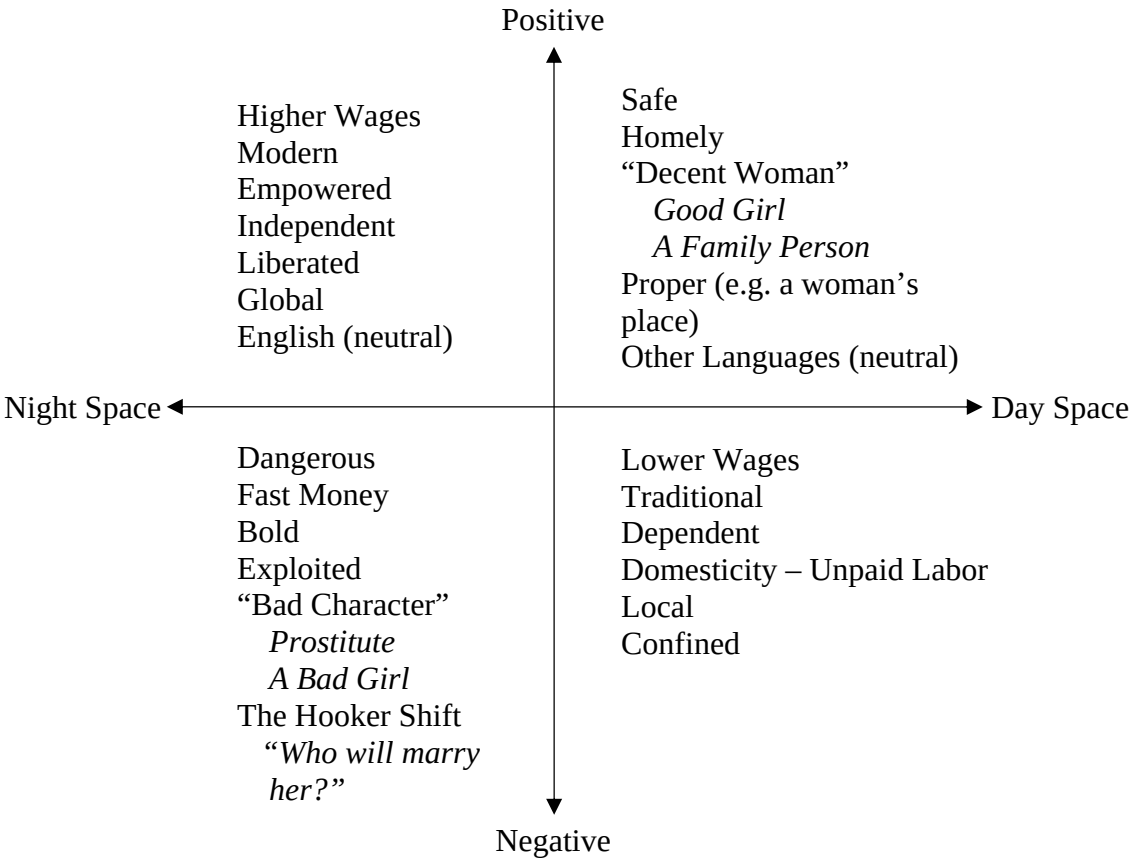
relatively out of sight, beliefs about public traits and private traits are pervasive and, in turn, spatialized in variety of settings.

The public versus private sphere distinction is now almost three decades old and is less often used in scholarly pursuit. Nevertheless, Wright demonstrates how "…the myth of public and private spaces" remains.[39] Myths in this case are essentialized ideas of difference—such as women's "natural" capacity for nurturing—which take on the status of biological destiny, thus erasing the history of their complex social construction. In the world of global capitalism, for example, this myth justifies the assignment of a disposable value to female factory workers in Mexico and China. Wright shows how this disposability narrative is used to justify inequality both inside and outside the factory setting. Her work illustrates that the conception of public and private space, however mythical it may be, continues to affect the lives of women in ways that are far beyond the imaginary.

In this study, I reposition the public versus private sphere distinction in ways that allow for an understanding of how night shift employment, gendered norms of mobility, and the global economy interact with one other. Instead of denying binary oppositions, such as women are homemakers and men are breadwinners, I acknowledge the existence of such beliefs and seek to expose how women experience them. Instead of examining the public versus private distinction from an either/or perspective (e.g., dependent vs. independent), I conceptualize categories such as "homely" (e.g., domestic) and bold as *spaces* that individuals embody and experience, often in overlapping and conflicting ways. As illustrated in figure 1, the variety of spaces women traverse do not always

follow a linear outcome (e.g., work = money = mobility) that can be mapped out and set as the standard.

Figure 1 Spaces embodied and experienced by female call center employees



Note: Quotes indicate terms used by the individuals I interviewed and italics denote common sayings or remarks that emerged during fieldwork and fall under the broader theme above.

There are several conclusions to be drawn from this matrix. For some women, call center employment represents a space of *empowerment* through going out at night and earning a higher wage. However, the global circuitry from which their employment

draws is simultaneously deemed an *exploitative* space because of stressful work conditions and wages lower than a U.S. employee in the same job.

At the same time, participation in this industry gives some women new forms of *independence* because they are able to access *night spaces* in ways that were previously deemed off-limits. Yet they are hampered by the assumption that women should embody a space of *dependency* and vulnerability. Therefore, a male escort is required for physical safety and protection of their reputation so the woman will not be viewed as too *bold*, a term used to describe defiant women, or as a "bad girl" who lacks family values. The term *homely*, in contrast, is commonly used to describe women who prefer to stay at home and is a phrase included in matrimonial ads to refer to women who are family-oriented. Although the IT infrastructure and the *global* nature of call center employment is associated with *modernization*, it also intersects with a woman's worth in ways that conflict with and degrade their bodily value in spaces deemed *traditional*, such as arranged marriage. Obviously, global night shift labor was intersecting with the lives of women in ironic and unsettling ways.

Body Politics

The literature on body politics provides an additional conceptual understanding of how individuals both embody and experience stereotypes of gender in a variety of spaces. Feminists are on the forefront of critiquing the social and biological construction of women's bodies, from being marked as a site of reproduction to a source of provocation.[40] Haraway points out that when sex is conceptualized under the guise of

biological determinism, it limits the space of emerging work in critical social theory.[41] The body, as scale of analysis, provides a powerful understanding of how space and place are conceived based on gender.[42] Furthermore, it is a key site for understanding how gender differences are maintained and spatialized.[43] Women's bodies, when read as a text, are also saturated with gendered symbols and meaning.[44]

Regarding the status of women in spaces deemed sacred, for instance, Wadley points out that Hindu mythology assigns lower ritual status to women and within this hierarchy it is believed that, "The woman's menses are polluting, but not as polluting as childbirth."[45] Ranjit's description of why women remain barred from Ayappa Temple in Kerala illustrates that gendered symbols become spatialized in ways that degrade women:[46]

> The curse on the women starts on the very first day she menstruates, a period in which the girl's body is considered to be very hot and polluting. It is also believed that the release of blood from a body orifice (opening) - in this case from the vagina - attracts spirits and demons that can devastate a family's happiness and its power of vitality. Women during this period are considered to be impure, unclean, polluted and contaminated.

Butler theorizes that gender is an act of performance.[47] By "performing" gender, notions of womanhood are inscribed on the body and marked as a biological site of difference. It is generally believed, for example, that women are the nurturing force of the family unit and in this capacity they are better equipped to take care of children and elders. Such beliefs are spatialized in ways that mark the home as their territory, and generation after generation of women are socialized to aspire to such even if they pursue a career outside the home.

Subsequently, from a young age, women are taught how to perform this nurturing role. Be it cooking and cleaning or behavioral expectations such as obedience and being deferential in the presence of men, such training does not operate only in a vacuum of home space. It is reiterated and reproduced in a variety of settings and mediums ranging from the education received in school to media images such as movies and television advertising. This social construction of what constitutes feminine behavior in turn becomes marked as a biological difference. This leads to the assumption that women are *naturally* adept in behavior that society demarcates as feminine.[48] Those who fail to perform gender in ways that adhere to this societal expectation are seen as out of place.

Utilizing Butler's framework for examining how women perform gendered norms of mobility, Secor examines how gender is presented through "regimes of veiling" in Istanbul.[49] She finds that veiling allows women to deter the male gaze when they travel, but that it also reinforces the belief that women's bodies are a source of provocation that must be controlled and concealed. Phadke too finds that wearing a burkha or hejab in Mumbai increased women's access to urban space as a means to gain permission from one's family to leave the confines of the household, but she also finds that the practice of veiling did not reduce sexual harassment.[50] This dynamic illustrates how performing gender—in ways that conform to patriarchal norms of honor—does not always protect women. Nonetheless, it does demonstrate how women perform gendered norms of mobility through their bodies.

Conceptualizing the body as a site that produces and performs gender in a variety of settings gives us a greater understanding of women's mobility. The body also provides

an understanding of how globalization and gender interact with one another.[51] Instead of contributing to universalizing discourses that present women who work at night as either victims of exploitation or exemplars of empowerment, I draw from literature on body politics to critically examine how notions of a woman's place are re-codified to meet the growing demand for 24-hour workers.

SITES OF STUDY

Research for this dissertation took place primarily in Mumbai, India. Labeled the "City of Dreams" among residents and in popular literature, it was the ideal setting for exploring the juxtaposition of day and night, traditional and modern, female and male. As the financial center of the Indian economy, Mumbai provides the largest income tax base for the country. As of 2001, an estimated 11,976,439 individuals live in this city and at 64,263 people per square mile, it is one of the densest cities in the world.[52-53]

Due to the exorbitant real estate prices in Mumbai's central business district, call centers set up shop in suburban areas such as Thane, Malad, Powai, and Navi Mumbai. Employees who participated in this project worked primarily in Navi Mumbai and Malad. Located more than 30 miles away from downtown Mumbai, Navi Mumbai measures 212.3 square miles and is India's largest urban planning project to date.[54] Development of Navi Mumbai began in 1971 with the goal of creating 14 suburbs that would hold a population of approximately two million people.[55] It was conceived as a satellite

township to slow the expansion of downtown Mumbai by serving as a counter-magnet to draw incoming migrants and also to re-settle some of its current population.[56]

Malad is home to Mindspace, the largest high-tech commercial business park in Mumbai (figure 2). At approximately 125 acres, this commercial mini-city is home to multinational corporations such as Deutsche Bank and J.P. Morgan. Mindspace has transformed this back road area, formerly a municipal dumping ground for solid waste, into a premier destination for corporations.[57] For instance, in order to service the demands of its workforce, the surrounding areas include large scale malls and retail stores such as Inorbit Mall and Hypercity, movies theaters, and restaurants. At the same time, the office park itself is home to sleek designs of steel and glass that reflect the industry's desire to showcase itself as the place to work in India.

Figure 2 Aerial shot of the Mindspace area in Malad

Source: Amiya Kumar Sahu[58]

Despite development in both Navi Mumbai and Malad, evidence of poverty and class inequality endures. Dust, pollution, dirt roads, and dilapidated housing remain in view of the sleek office buildings and upscale malls in Malad. Poster comments on this dichotomy in her research on the call center industry in Gurgoan, a suburb of Delhi:[59]

> Adjacent to Convergys (one of Gurgoan's premier call centers), and literally lined up on its side, is a migrant worker ghetto camp composed of tent cities of blue plastic tarps, held up by bamboo poles and tree branches. These workers, without homes, electricity, running water, or sanitation facilities, are the sweepers, dishwashers, and construction workers for the ICT industry, fundamental to its physical creation and daily maintenance in the night time city, but excluded from its global and virtual operations.

Call center operations have emerged throughout India. Given the variety of settings available to conduct this study, the question arose "Why Mumbai?" (especially given that Bangalore is known as the Silicon Valley of India). According to Linda, an American call center executive in Mumbai, even though Bangalore is the IT hub of India, it is not necessarily the call center hub. The presence of an educated, English-speaking population and the space available to build call centers in the outlying areas of Mumbai are the key magnets drawing companies to this area. Mumbai is also viewed as more cosmopolitan and professional, and is ahead of Delhi in terms of fiber-optic connectivity and its electricity infrastructure.[60] Seven years after this industry began in Mumbai, there is an abundance of call center advertisements, recruitment brochures, and training centers. Job fairs, such as the one I visited in Mumbai are also held (see figure 3).

Figure 3 BPO job fair held at Bhaven's College in Mumbai

Photo by author

Still, after six months of research in Mumbai, I expanded the scope of my study to include Bangalore (also known as Bengaluru) and Ahmedabad.[61] I decided to include Bangalore and Ahmedabad when it became clear that I needed a greater understanding of the context of women's mobility in Mumbai. Put another way, I wanted a comparative understanding of how women in other major cities in India experience gendered norms of mobility and spatial access. Prior to expanding the scope of this study, I was stuck in comparing women's mobility in Mumbai to that of women in major U.S. cities. From a rational standpoint, I knew such a comparison was inappropriate for the project at hand. I was also aware that it could be subject to the criticism that researchers from the U.S. are unwilling or unable to see beyond the lens of Western feminism. In order to address this

problem, I sought to understand how BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) employees in other Indian cities experience working the night shift. The two other cities are included because Bangalore is generally viewed as more conservative, and Ahmedabad is considered the most conservative, particularly in terms of gender relations. Although Mumbai was the primary site of study, my findings from Bangalore and Ahmedabad are included when they provide an appropriate context or comparative understanding.

In this research, I discovered that unlike Bangalore and Ahmedabad, Mumbai is viewed as a city of ill-repute, danger, and sin. Thus, focusing on all three cities provided a complementary understanding of how a city's reputation intersects with the demand for night shift workers. Mumbai, in particular, provided an understanding of IT intersecting with a city that was already labeled fast, progressive, and cosmopolitan. Bangalore, in contrast, was a small, quiet city that transformed to the Silicon Valley of India in a period of less than 20 years, while Ahmedabad is in the midst of ramping up its IT industry to compete with neighboring cities. These three cities, distinct in many ways, provided the opportunity to see how the demand for night shift workers plays out in a variety of settings.

Methods and Sources of Information

This study uses an inductive, mixed methods approach based on in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. Mixed methods constitute the "third wave" of academia's research movement with quantitative being the first wave and qualitative being the second wave. Broadly speaking, mixed methods integrate a variety

of data gathering techniques into the study of a single subject.[62] In this research, mixed methods were incorporated for a key reason: the weakness in one set of data is potentially compensated for by other sets of data. For instance, participant observation gave insight into when employees work, but did not provide a deep understanding of how women deal with working at night. Thus, in-depth interviews were conducted in order to elucidate the experiences of women workers. In other words, the mixed method approach served as a form of triangulation with which to double-check the validity of my findings.

This project also draws from the grounded theory approach.[63] In contrast to hypothesis testing, which compares findings to a predetermined set of outcomes, grounded theory is an inductive approach in which new findings emerge from an ongoing interplay between collecting and analyzing data.[64] Given the relative newness of the call center industry in India, the inductive approach allowed me to remain open to key findings that would have otherwise gone unnoticed had I remain attached to a strict either/or hypothesis framework.

In 2006, I conducted interviews with 72 employees over a ten-month period. In order to understand how women from varying backgrounds experience night shift employment, I sought to interview a range of women: single, married, separated, living with their families, or living on their own. Women who left the industry also participated in this study because their retrospection provided insight into how call center employment shaped the lives of some employees. Interviews were conducted in cafes, restaurants, and in three cases, family homes. I also sat on the stoop of call centers in Mindspace to interview employees who were on a break or waiting for a shuttle to

transport them home. Upon return to the United States, some employees kept in touch with me via email, text messaging, and occasional phone calls. Their willingness to maintain contact served as a forum for asking follow-up questions that emerged during the course of writing up my findings.

Of the 72 interviewees, nine were men. Taking into account that men constitute 50 percent to 70 percent of the employment pool, critics may argue that this study is incomplete because they were underrepresented. The sample was purposely skewed because it is the presence of women that disrupts gendered notions of place during the night. I also interviewed managers and executives, family members of employees, industry consultants, and film directors who have made documentaries on the call center industry. In total, 96 people were interviewed. This sample provided an understanding of how the various players inform and impact the experiences of female night shift workers.

I also conducted four focus groups, two mixed-sex and two women-only, during the course of this study. The focus groups were particularly useful because the spontaneous interaction between the participants allowed for important issues that were relevant to the research questions and not made evident during interviews to emerge.[65] Some of the findings from the focus groups, such as workers getting into car accidents due to reckless drivers, were certainly not generalizable to the experiences of all center employees. However, interviewing in a group setting provided an understanding of the varying issues and concerns workers deal with and the relative importance they placed on these matters. Additionally, the focus groups allowed for unique and interesting

perspectives to emerge because the camaraderie within the group in some cases led to more candid responses.

I also visited various locales, such as malls, cafes, and bars frequented by call center employees. In relation to mainstream media reports about call center employees spending their money on branded clothes at the latest mall, sipping coffee and hanging out in cafes, and partying all night at bars, spending time at these places provided an understanding of the lifestyle changes call center employment is associated with. Certainly, hanging out at a suburban bar in the middle of the night may strike some as a questionable research method. Specific to the goals of this project, however, it provided a firsthand glimpse of how gendered conceptions of space informed where it was acceptable for women to hang out and where it was not.

Participant observation was also conducted inside two call centers in Mumbai. Both call centers are located in Navi Mumbai and are referenced as TYJ Corporation and Company A throughout this dissertation. These are fictitious names used to protect the identity of the companies. Entry into TYJ Corp took place during preliminary fieldwork in 2005 and entry into Company A occurred during research conducted in 2006. Both companies are 100 percent Indian-owned, service U.S. and U.K. businesses, and are listed as top ten call centers by NASSCOM, the industry association for India's IT sector.[66] They are considered a "third party process," which means that overseas firms outsource their customer service requirements to them. As such, they provide customer service to credit card companies, telephone providers, major electronic stores, and airlines.

During my interactions with these companies, I was allowed to interview employees and conduct participant observation under the supervision of a company executive at TYJ Corporation and an operations manager at Company A. Employees of both companies were primarily in their early twenties, reflecting the demographics of the industry. Participant observation in this study refers to watching employees work and in some instances, listening in on phone calls. I was not allowed to answer calls or engage an employee in discussion when they were working.

TYJ Corp. is a 90,000 square foot facility (equivalent in size to a Wal-Mart SuperCenter) with a little more than 2,000 employees. On any given shift, the company had up to 1,000 employees working the phone lines. The starting salary as of January 2005, for a full-time, entry-level employee was 10,000 rupees per month (US$225).[67] I was only allowed to conduct participant observation in a department that serviced U.K. clients because TYJ Corp. was under strict contractual agreements with its U.S. clients to not allow outsiders access to their processes. Even employees who work at TYJ Corp. are restricted in their access to the departments that service U.S. clients.

Company A employs approximately 1,000 people and was one of the first call center operations to open in Mumbai. As of October 2007, the starting salary for a full-time call center employee ranged between 10,000rs to 14,000rs (US$222 to US$310) depending on their level of experience.[68] I was given limited, closely supervised access to observing the employees taking phone calls. Unlike TYJ Corporation where my interviews with women were in the cafeteria and conducted in the presence of an

executive, at Company A I was allowed to conduct interviews on a private, one-on-one basis.

Popular fiction, documentaries, and newspaper accounts on the call center industry were also collected in order to evaluate how the call center industry was portrayed popularly and to understand reaction to this relatively new industry. Popular fiction, such as *One Night @ the Call Center*, often provided a talking point when conducting interviews.[69] In addition, documentaries such as *Q2P* and *Do You Know How We Feel?* provided a visual understanding of how women's mobility and spatial access remains hindered despite the economic development and IT development taking place.[70] Meanwhile, media reports served as an excellent data source for interpreting how women who work in the call center industry are represented and perceived.

Interviews were taped when permission was granted by participants; otherwise, I recorded their responses by hand. Subsequently, I transcribed both tapes and hand-written notes. I then performed a narrative analysis based on coding and categorizing interviewee responses using NVivo 7, a qualitative data analysis software program.[71] I also integrated research notes taken during participant observation as well as newspaper accounts relating to women's participation in the call center industry into this narrative analysis. NVivo 7 not only served as a database for the variety of data sources used in this study, but was also used for coding responses, creation of thematic categories, text search and retrieval, and pattern discernment.

I then coded transcripts, interviews notes, and participant observation notes, line by line, to a variety of thematic categories I initially created, such as "family response to

going out at night," "changes in spending habits," and "issues of harassment". In some instances, a participant's response to a specific question was coded to multiple categories because their answers fit into more than one theme. Journal articles, newspaper reports, and notes on documentary films and popular fiction related to the industry were also coded. This level of coding allowed me to analyze the data across a broad spectrum of issues as well as sources (e.g., from interviews to newspaper reports). By centralizing all the data sources into NVivo 7, I was also able to uncover themes and patterns that I had failed to give consideration to at the beginning stages of this project.

Pseudonyms are used throughout this dissertation to protect the identity of the participants and the companies where they work.[72] Identity was a key source of concern for a number of participants, and on more than one occasion employees risked their jobs to contribute in this project. During a focus group interview at a mall in Malad, for example, one of the participants asked me to remove my interview notes from the table and stop the discussion because he saw the client for the account they service near the area where we were sitting. To be caught in an interview would jeopardize their jobs because they had signed contractual agreements with their employer stating that they would not to disclose information about their work.

REFLEXIVITY AND POSITIONALITY

Throughout this study, Haraway's concept of situated knowledge provided an innovative approach to thinking about my direction and goals as a researcher.[73] Rejecting

notions of detached neutrality and the quest for universal findings, Haraway encourages scholars to aim for a partial perspective that is context-specific. This is based on the premise that detached neutrality is an attempt by modern science to perform a "god-trick" by viewing itself as a disembodied Other that can produce objective findings.[74] This veil of neutrality is unrealistic because it conceals the complexities of research. In terms of gender discrimination, Haraway uses the concept of vision to explain that subjects deemed feminine are not given sight.[75] They are instead viewed primarily through a lens of being observed, described, or conquered. Essentially, they become outsiders explained away by a so-called objective, detached, scientific gaze.

In order to address this problem, feminist scholars contend that it is important to think about how one's own position, in relation to the study topic at hand, can shape the findings of a project.[76] Engaging in this exercise—termed reflexivity and positionality—is viewed as a way to address the gap between the researcher and the researched. Although much of the literature on this topic focuses on anthropological research methods such as ethnography, feminist geographers also debate the merits and concerns related to reflexivity and positionality.[77] Inspired by this ongoing discourse, an overview of my background is provided as a means for readers to be aware of the factors that may have influenced the direction and findings of this study.

Born and raised in the United States and being of Indian descent, for example, places me in the position of an "in-between entity" in terms of being identified as American and Indian at the same time. This dual identity brings forth multiple positionalities and associations. On one hand, as a U.S. citizen, I am positioned as hailing

from a country that benefits from India's low-wage labor pool, and at the individual level, I represent the customer that call center employees interact with on a daily basis. On the other hand, when in India, I am labeled a non-resident Indian (NRI) and associated with the term "American-Born Confused Desi" (ABCD). The acronym ABCD is used to characterize Indians born in the United States and notions of their "confusion" because of an underlying assumption that if Indians are raised outside of India they must have a disconnected or incoherent sense of identity and belonging.[78]

During fieldwork, I resided in Juhu-Ville Parle, a suburb of Mumbai. My inability to speak fluent Hindi as well as lack of ability to speak Gujarati had one neighborhood friend saying, "Do you have any idea how much you confuse people around here? You are the brown face that doesn't speak back." Add to this that I didn't live with a husband, parents, or uncle, and some neighbors were befuddled by the arrival of a single, child-free, "young" woman (I was 36 years old) to the building.

Despite the fact that I am of Indian origin, specifically Gujarati, and was also living in a Gujarati neighborhood while in Mumbai, there were categorical aspects of my identity that rendered me different from that community. For example, when I informed neighbors that I would be leaving to spend a weekend in Dubai, on a ticket purchased only two days prior, they were perplexed and told me that this would not be possible because there was not enough time to get my visa in order. I responded, "What visa? I'm American!" This spoke not only to my sense of identity and privilege, but also was a reminder of how citizenship played a direct role in mobilizing my lifestyle.

During the course of fieldwork, I came to realize that the questions I initially focused on during the interview process were more about patriarchal concerns about a woman's place and less about what women actually thought of their call center experiences. At the beginning stages of fieldwork, I would inadvertently hone in on the question of "What did your family think of you working at night?" As I conducted more interviews, I realized that the question itself reflected the "what will people think?" narrative women were already subjected to in many facets of their lives. By placing it foremost in the project, I was at some level taking on the belief that what other people think matters and is worthy of concern. When I moved these questions to the background and instead focused on what women thought about working the night shift and their opinions of how call center employment shaped their lives, I ended up with richer qualitative data that spoke to how women experience life beyond "family values" and marriage.

In writing this section, it was difficult to ignore the irony of reflexivity and positionality discourse in relation to feminist concerns. My basic premise is that women have struggled for years to get jobs in academia and be taken seriously. As part of gaining entry, they are compelled to work harder than men in order to prove themselves and justify their right to be scholars. After they gain entry, some feminist scholars turn around and say, "Okay, now we have to justify our position [apologize for themselves, and their status, race, gender]" in the context of our research project and also relative to those on whom we are conducting research. In my opinion, it is as if we are so used to

having to explain ourselves that we are compelled to do so even when it is not asked of us.

This is not to suggest that I disagree with reflexivity and positionality, but instead to state that I am mindful of the irony that comes from engaging in this exercise. Researchers have to maintain a fine line between not showing off or partaking in what concerned skeptics see as an act of self-absorbed navel gazing. At the same time, they deal with notions of "propriety" that prefer women researchers to present themselves as "unassuming" and "down to earth" regardless of their accomplishments. I wrestled with these thoughts throughout the project.

THE SCOPE OF THIS DISSERTATION AND GENERAL FINDINGS

During this project I have remained cognizant of how larger structural forces such as national policy and economic liberalization fuel the development of the transnational call center industry and, subsequently, inform women's participation in this industry. Although these matters are certainly important, this dissertation focuses on how individual women and their families experience being part of a global night shift labor pool. Rather than connect their stories to theories of how economic policy or unequal global relations shape the day-to-day lives of workers, I instead sought to show how the body, as a scale of analysis, provides a rich, textual understanding of how globalization and gender inequality operate "on the ground." The willingness of participants and their

family members to share intimate details of their life allowed me to gain such an understanding.

To be clear, the purpose of this dissertation is not to generalize mobility and spatial access to the entire population of call center employees. In fact, it became evident during the course of fieldwork that subgroups of women—such as divorced women and married women—merit further attention. Instead, I uncover how mobility is re-codified in a variety of settings—from the household to the urban nightscape—for those women I encountered during my time in India.

Some women are certainly able to use the emergence of this globalized, night shift labor force to expand their mobility and gain access to social spaces that were previously off-limits. At the same time, call center workers are also more intensely protected than other female laborers; this draws from class conceptions about what types of women are *worthy* of protection and what types of women are not. This protection works against increases in mobility, as keeping women safe is used as an excuse to confine them in ways their male counterparts are relatively immune from, such as relegating women to home space or controlling when they are allowed to go out. The protective attitude also plays into how some women's bodies are used as a site for promoting nationalistic attitudes. Body and nation converge around the motif of potential violation and the consequent need for boundary policing.

Furthermore, there is no linear path to how call center employment affects all workers because the diversity in women's experiences exists on a spectrum from entrapment to liberation. In contrast to presenting night shift employment as a

revolutionary turn that thoroughly reshapes women's lives, it was made evident during the course of fieldwork that women use technology and societal expectations of their "place" to *re-codify* their mobility in ways that allow them to go out at night while dealing with societal pressures. Some women, for example, used the mobile phone to both assert their autonomy and placate family members concerned about them being out at night. Although the mobile phone was certainly key to getting some women out of the house, they continued to experience disdain and social stigma for working the night shift.

This dynamic draws from how women come to embody gendered conceptions of space. Some such conceptions are protective, some are exploitative, and some are exclusionary. For example, women are seen as both contaminating (when temporally out of place in temples because it's the wrong time of the month) and as contaminated (when temporally out of place in the street because it's dark). Their bodies, in turn, become sites upon which family honor, religious piety, and national identity are performed. Key to this study is that women are held to higher levels of scrutiny, relative to their male counterparts, for when and where they go out. A woman out at night is seen as both *at risk* (in need of protection) and *risky* (in need of discipline and control). These dual anxieties are reflected in family, community, and media responses to the growing phenomenon of women working the night shift in call centers.

In closing, Tuan contends that "cultural geography remains almost wholly daylight geography" and that more attention needs to be given to the "after hours."[79] By moving into the geographies of the night, this study directly confronts how women experience spatial and temporal mobility beyond the daytime. The relatively high wages

combined with the night shift requirement of this industry provide a unique platform for thinking about how gendered norms of mobility are re-codified when the lure of high wages, an upscale office environment, and the opportunity to work in a global setting are brought together.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

To begin this exploration, chapter 2 presents a brief synopsis of the call center industry. I outline the growth of this industry in relation to gender, class, and education issues that effect who is able to gain access to these jobs and who is not. Chapter 3 introduces the concept of mobility-morality narratives, a term I created to describe how the pressure placed on women to maintain their safety and reputation (e.g., not be a "bad girl") effects their physical mobility and spatial access. Chapters 4 and 5 provide detailed accounts of how call center employment affects women's temporal mobility and economic mobility. Each chapter explores how working the night shift reshapes women's lives in a myriad of ways, from being able to get out of the house at night and having the means to purchase a home to being able to be the sole support of a family unit. Chapter 6 shifts the focus to the household and looks at how gender relations fare when women work at night and in some instances, earn more money than their husbands or parents. Chapter 7 uncovers how perceptions about call center employment as well as its relatively high wages affect the social mobility of workers. The last chapter summarizes the findings of this project and articulates the varying ways in which call center

employment has the potential to transform the lives of women workers while at the same time keep them tethered to gendered notions of a woman's place.

Chapter 2: Off-Shoring Customer Service: A New Global Order

One afternoon in the fall of 2004, when giving a guest lecture, I asked a roomful of students at The University of Texas at Austin how many of them had called a 1-800 number for customer support or technical assistance and found that the support person was in India. More than 80 percent raised their hands. I then asked these same students, "How many of you would like to use your college degree to work from midnight to 8 a.m., use an Indian accent, change your name from Sam to Shirish, and provide customer service for a product that you most likely have never owned yourself?" No hands went up. Even though call center employment is viewed by industry proponents as a vehicle to prosperity and career growth for young people in India, it was not seen the same way by this college population in the United States.

Since the U.S. call center industry workforce has gone global, it operates on a 24-hour timeframe that shifts the work space and work time of customer service employees worldwide.[1] Twenty five years ago, it would have been hard to imagine that a Texan would dial a 1-800 number at 2:30 p.m. and reach the suburb of a major Indian city at 2 a.m. India time where an employee named Jyothi would alter her accent and answer, "Good Afternoon, Delta Airlines, this is Julie speaking."[2] This transformation of time into a global resource is based on reorganizing an employee's identity, neutralizing accents, and temporally adjusting the normal nine-to-five work schedule.

The emergence of this transnational labor force represents a new level of social and spatial interaction between industrialized and developing nations. Unlike silicon chip production in Taiwan, maquiladoras in Mexico, or McDonald's in France, transnational call center employment represents a shift from exporting the *production* of material goods or culture to a full-scale *reproduction* of identity and culture. For example, McDonald's sells french fries in Paris, but does not require an American accent from its French employees. In contrast, call center operations are based on the availability of workers trained to embody an American identity and recognize cultural cues. This new local-global nexus of identity formation represents a dramatic shift in how the United States uses foreign labor to fuel its economy.[3]

In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the developments that led to the creation of transnational call centers, as well as some of the characteristics of transnational call centers in India. I also examine how the relatively high wages and night shift requirement of this industry have implications in what is often termed the feminization of labor. I then discuss how the industry is shifting from college to high-school graduates (and even some high school dropouts) and how this new recruitment strategy intersects with gender and education. Finally, I outline what happens when call center employment, traditionally viewed as "pink-collar" employment, takes on the nightscape in India. When women begin to traverse the nightscape, wide-ranging opinions and concerns related to call center employment emerge. Here, I incorporate comments and insights from interviews and participant observation that emerged during the course of fieldwork. Throughout the chapter, I argue that the emergence of the

industry is not only about economic development, but also about how gender, class, and education are linked to the English-speaking requirement that is imperative to getting a job in this industry.

BACKGROUND ON THE INDUSTRY

Call center operations moved to India because the country provided a cheap, English-speaking labor force.[4] Indeed, the global demand for 24-hour workers also emerged as transnational corporations took advantage of different time zones throughout the globe to access more and more laborers. Adam refers to this process as the *colonization of time* to describe how the Western clock is commoditized, set as the standard, and exported throughout the world.[5] *Temporal imperialism* and *temporal entrapment* have also been used to define the shifting relationship between the timescapes of the global north and global south.[6]

At the same time, the global processes that fueled the emergence of the BPO industry in the late 1990s were a direct result of national policies of both India and the United States. The restructuring of U.S. immigration policy, which reduced the number of H1-B visas, along with the economic downturn of the United States IT sector starting in 2000, led companies to off-shore both high wage engineering positions and low-wage call center jobs. Essentially, because the Indian worker could not migrate to the U.S., the work migrated to India. The protectionist policy of limiting immigration in order to bring

economic security to the American worker created the opposite effect, as more and more jobs transferred overseas.[7]

The emergence of transnational call centers in India also came about because of a national policy that welcomed the presence of multinational corporations. Historically, this was not the case. After independence, India went from being dubbed the "British Raj" to the "Permit Raj."[8] India was considered an impenetrable market because of its unending bureaucracy, notorious corruption, and protectionist policies that sought to shield India from the outside economy. This dramatically shifted in 1991 when the government, under Prime Minister Rao, removed import licensing requirements and sought to undo more than four decades' worth of bureaucracy under the Permit Raj.

In 2002, a decade after the pivotal 1991 reforms, the National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) estimated that 336 call centers had emerged throughout India. By 2006, approximately 470,000 women and men worked in this industry.[9] Amish, an industry consultant, expressed doubts about the accuracy of these numbers. When asked his opinion on approximately how many call centers there are in Mumbai, he stated that he was unable to provide an accurate estimate because there are numerous "mom and pop" call centers that emerge and shut down intermittently. Still, it is clear that the BPO industry is a significant employer of hundreds of thousands of Indian workers.[10]

Although this study primarily focuses on transnational call center employment, the BPO industry in India is far more expansive in scope. From payroll processing and legal and medical transcription to tax preparation services for individuals and financial

analysis for Wall Street firms, this rapidly expanding industry encompasses a variety of processes that are key to both U.S. industries and individuals. American Express, Microsoft, General Electric, Delta Airlines, Countrywide Mortgage (one of the largest lenders in the U.S.), and even the State of Arizona Unemployment Division are just some of the firms that have transferred a portion of their operations to India. In essence, a variety of jobs that can be done "over the wire" (i.e., internet or telecom connection) are up for grabs as India seeks to leverage its low-wage, English-speaking workforce in a competitive, global labor market.

FEMINIZATION OF LABOR

It turns out that a significant percentage of workers now employed by the BPO industry are female. But the social construction of a woman's role in society (e.g., nurturing, passive, unpaid household labor) conflicts with their participation in the paid labor force. Indeed, gendered narratives about what constitutes "a man's job" versus "ladies work," are becoming more and more common as women become employed in these transnational call centers.

From Dublin, Ireland, to the rural American West and New Zealand, call center employment especially is defined as women's work and reflects what scholars term *the feminization of labor* or more recently, *the feminization of service*.[11] Because it is associated with a part-time, flexible work schedule that allows women to manage the household and still bring home an income, call center employment is considered a "pink-

collar" field.[12] Although research on women's employment in the industry has to date focused primarily on Western countries, the demand for a qualified, low-wage labor pool to do this work is expanding the geography of this industry.

Literature on the feminization of labor focuses on women's participation in the paid labor force and uncovers how the status and value accorded to an industry transforms when women gain a foothold. Bonds, for instance, found that when women joined the call industry in the rural American West, the white-collar status associated with this job became devalued into one of a deskilled, feminized work space.[13] Her research refutes the idea that working in spaces that were traditionally male gives women higher status. Instead, the infusion of women transformed perceptions of this work from professional to entry-level. Underlying this are beliefs that women must aspire to masculine forms of labor (e.g., work outside the household) if they want to achieve equality. At the same time, there is less emphasis on holding men accountable for contributing to what Hochschild and Machung term "the second shift," namely the unpaid labor of cooking, cleaning, and child-care.[14]

When the transnational call center industry initially moved into Ireland, Breathnach stated:[15]

> Ireland has been on the forefront in acting as a host for internationally-mobile routine office work, initially involving mainly data processing and, more recently, teleservices. As elsewhere, teleservices employment in Ireland is characterized by a combination of female predominance, low pay, difficult working conditions and high turnover rates.

As illustrated by Breathnach's characterization of the transnational call center industry in Ireland, even when labor processes are exported throughout the world, gendered notions

of a woman's worth in the workforce remained in place. Unpaid labor in the household transforms into low pay when women step out. "Nurturing" becomes a code word for the belief that it is acceptable for women to tolerate difficult working conditions with less reward compared to their male counterparts. This applies not only to service jobs, but manufacturing as well. From describing women as the workers with nimble fingers and defining them as disposable and replaceable in the realm of global manufacturing, women are marked as a secondary necessity in the paid labor force and are subsequently made the target of exploitation.[16]

With this comes, in some instances, the devaluation of labor processes from white-collar to "pink-collar". This not only intersects with gender and class, but also bumps up against the limited "professional" job opportunities available in developing countries. Freeman's rich ethnographic account on the off-shoring of data processing for one of the largest insurance companies in the United States to Barbados in the 1990s reveals:[17]

> Locally, in Barbados, the pink-collar informatics operator represents a new category of feminine worker, symbolically empowered by her professional appearance and the computer technology with which she works. Her air-conditioned office appears to be a far cry from the cane fields and kitchens in which her mother and grandmother toiled….

The call center industry in India with its upscale office environment and night shift requirement is also a far cry from finishing one's education, having an arranged marriage with a dowry to seal the deal, and settling down to have children and be homebound.[18]

Freeman's study goes on to uncover the exploitative side of working in a transnational process, such as the low wages relative to the actual output demanded of

workers. In fact, what makes her research unique is that the employees in her study would have earned more money if they worked in sugar cane factories. Instead, what drew women to the industry was the sense of modernity and professionalism they associated the office environment. Women used "dressing up" to go to work (e.g., professional appearance) to create a new identity for themselves that challenged the Barbadian expectation that one's clothes must be in line with their class status. While navigating between empowerment and exploitation narratives, Freeman brings to light the sense of independence women gained from being part of the transnational data processing industry and the gendered narratives about work that made women, instead of men, the choice labor pool for this industry.

A gendered narrative about work was also apparent in the call center industry and the demand for women draws from beliefs about what constitutes "ladies work." Previous research indicates that call centers in India prefer hiring young, educated women.[19] According to Pradhan and Abraham, call centers often prefer hiring women as they are seen to be more hard-working, patient, attentive, loyal, less aggressive, and have better interpersonal and analytical skills than men.[20]

Under the rubric that call center employment requires what Hochschild terms "emotional labor," for example, empathizing with customers and soothing tempers, women are stereotyped as best suited for customer service.[21] In contrast, labor defined as aggressive and combative is considered a man's job and, in many cases, comes with a higher salary. These stereotypes are reflected in the occupational segregation interviewees described within the industry. Interviewees stated that call center work that

involved credit collections had predominantly male workers because it required aggressive employees to harass late-payers. Processes such as airline reservations had more women workers. It was also reported that a collections job came with a much higher salary potential because many companies paid a commission on the collections an employee made. This was not the case for processes such as booking airline reservations.

In closing, the integration of women into the paid labor force is at times seen as a symbol of liberation. Leaving the confines of the home to earn an income is viewed as an indicator of society moving along the path of "modernization" and thus emancipating women from traditional gender roles. Yet in most cases, the demand for women workers is less about ensuring their equal participation in the paid labor force and more about meeting the demand for a steady supply of workers who can be purchased on the cheap. Disparity in wages between women and men is certainly nothing new. Narratives related to women being loyal, compliant, deferential, nimble fingered, nurturing, and not needing to earn as much money (because they are expected to have husbands who support them) are just some of descriptions used to explain, and in many cases rationalize, the structural inequality that women continue to face in the paid labor force.

FROM COLLEGE TO HIGH SCHOOL

Research on the feminization of labor in relation to the global distribution of labor tends to focus on manufacturing. Examining the call center industry in India provides a context for comparing and contrasting how service workers versus factory workers

experience the feminization of labor. This is important because perceptions about the type of job one has overlaps with both the content of the work and the class distinctions embedded in the labor. In contrast to factory work, which is perceived as drawing from the poor or working class strata of society, call center employment in India is thought of as a job that recruits from the middle class.[22] Thus, the discussion around the feminization of labor becomes more complicated, and more enriched when class dynamics are incorporated.

It is important to note that though transnational call centers in India originally sought recent college graduates, they have recently discovered that recent college graduates didn't necessarily have the skill set they sought. As a result, some of them have begun to recruit high school graduates and high school dropouts. This shift in recruitment strategy has also lowered the age range for entry-level call center employees to include more 18- to 21-year-olds. Indeed, one interviewee, Anan, explains that depending on the process (e.g., credit card process, airline reservations) some companies prefer high school graduates or dropouts because they are less likely to quit, can be hired at a lower cost, and are able to communicate on a par with college grads.

The recruitment of high school students and dropouts is a source of concern to many both inside and outside the industry. Some suggest that the lure of fast money is causing some students to drop their education. Since call center employment is believed to be a stop-gap job instead of a viable long-term career option, foregoing school to work in this industry is considered short-sighted. Under the current educational system, students are expected to attend high school, college, and graduate school in order and,

more important, with no interruptions. When a student opts out at the college level, it is generally very difficult to reenter the system.

To provide a context for "big money" as seen though the eyes of a high school graduate, consider that interviewees reported that the average entry-level salary in other fields is 2,000rs to 3,000rs (US$44 to US$67) a month. In contrast, call centers have starting salaries in excess of 10,000rs (US$222) per month. Swati, 26 years old and a three-year veteran of the industry, contended that regardless of what one studied in college, call center employment offers the highest starting salary. Offer this income level to an individual with a high school education or to a high school dropout and the lure is even stronger. This dynamic would be the equivalent of foreign corporations setting up shop in New York City and offering local high school graduates a salary of $40,000 to $60,000 per year, provided they work the night shift and mask their identity.

Interestingly, it turns out that men are more likely to drop out of school to pursue call center employment, whereas women are more likely to stay with their education. The two companies where I conducted interviews did not disclose the education and income level of their employees. However, my participant observation and in-depth interviews indicated that the majority of women were college graduates. During discussions about why men are more likely to drop out of school to work in a call center, Anan stated, "Women are more disciplined and less rebellious."

Conversely, I argue that gender-based discipline is related to the more stringent controls placed on women's lives rather than an inherent quality based on sex. In this instance, the pressure on women to complete their education is less about providing them

the opportunity to pursue their career goals and more about increasing their worth on the arranged marriage market. Even the perceived value of what one studies runs along gender lines. Anjali, for instance, has an Arts degree and spoke in frustration about receiving comments such as "B.A. in Arts? Oh you're a girl. Arts, it's ok."

Thus, it is also important to note how gendered conceptions about education and working outside the home also inform the extent to which women participate in the paid labor force. Examining how the feminization of labor fares in work constructed as middle class, for example, is insightful from the perspective of *sanskritisation*, a process in which those of the lower-class mimic the restrictive social norms of the upper class.[23] This dynamic draws from the assertion that women from the upper echelons of society experience more stringent regimes of control over their lives because their families can afford to keep them at home as a marker of class status. Staying out all night, therefore, is in direct conflict with this regime. Although the income from call center employment is certainly a marker of upward economic mobility and subsequently class mobility in some families, the mobility is had at the price of sending women out at night to work. This disrupts the tradition of according higher status to families that keep women at home.

THE "PINK COLLAR" TRAVERSES THE NIGHTSCAPE

The night shift is generally looked down upon as a time to work, especially for women. In many instances, a night shift job is considered a last resort, the least favorable time to work. Because it's perceived as a space containing those who couldn't get a

"better" job (codeword for daytime) or for those who are paying their dues in order to move to the day shift, call center employment is viewed as a job young people take while looking for other options to move up the economic ladder.

Although disparaging views towards women who work at night were pervasive during the course of this study, the growth of the call center industry in India brought with it a dramatic shift in some women's access to night shift jobs. Previously, night shift opportunities for women in the urban domain were primarily in the following fields: prostitution, bar dancing, medicine (nurses and ob-gyn doctors), and the hotel industry. To combat resistance, some employers, including hotels and dance bars, have assumed the responsibility of transporting women workers to and from work during the night. According to Michelle, a former manager of five-star hotel properties in Mumbai:

> Ok, yes hotels typically provide night shift drops to their women employees past 10 p.m. because it's a law in India that women should not work past that hour. The legalities I am not sure of, but I know that there used to be a drop on the hour every hour till 3 to 4 a.m. for women door-to-door and any woman could avail of the drop, no grade distinction. It's just that most higher management women had their own cars so didn't take the drop, but no one would stop them if they wanted to.

Following their lead, call centers transport employees to and from the office. This is offered not only as an incentive for joining the industry, but also because companies need to ensure the safety of women workers traveling during the night in order to effectively recruit them.[24]

As call center operations traverse the globe and the day turns to night, not only does the home-to-work journey become more complicated, but also the pink-collar framework associated with the industry is destabilized. Night shift employment now

intersects with gendered notions of "skill" and mobility narratives in conflicting and often contradictory ways. According to Poster, the flexibility associated with call center employment in the West disappears and instead is replaced with a rigidification of time:[25]

> While these engineers may experience cyclical time that has breaks and down time between heavy periods of overtime, there is no hiatus or respite for Indian call center workers. Reversed work time is continuous for the full duration of the year, and industry representatives are pushing for additional work days on national and international holidays. Call center work is also hyper-managed and monitored from numerous vantage points: from the quality control department at end of the production line, to the president / CEO of the Indian call center, to the client firm in the U.S. Needless to say, self-management is far from the picture here.

The change in work time also creates a dynamic that runs counter to the gender and technology discourse. In terms of the interplay between technological development and the feminization of labor, for instance, Weinburg argues that computerization benefits women because it de-emphasizes physical skills and thus women become an important part of a labor force which demands people skills and knowledge work.[26] From this perspective, it would be expected that the gendered aspects of the call center industry would remain the same as it traverses the globe. After all, the gendered narratives used to explain why women are well suited for this job—combined with how technological development allows the U.S. to off-shore its demand for "emotional labor"—would arguably make Indian women the preferred labor pool for this position. In fact, it might even be expected that they would be on the forefront of the call center industry and, as illustrated by figures 4 and 5 this appears to be the case.

Figure 4 *India Today*, November 18, 2002

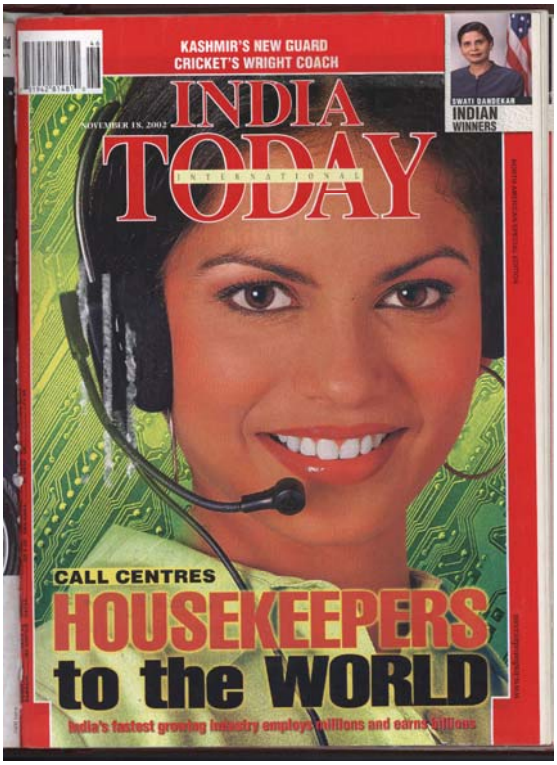


Figure 5 *Time*, June 20, 2006

In 2002, workers were depicted as "housekeepers to the world" ready to do the dirty work. Four years later, *Time* magazine depicted the Indian call center employee, wearing a bindhi and *wedding* jewels, as a sparkly, *traditional* woman ready to enter the workplace and *serve* the global economy. The underlying themes of these images are marriage, tradition, and servitude. Women are constructed as the bodily site of a marriage (codeword for merger), between the East and West. They are presented as the recipients of Western development—jobs, money, and technology—who at the same time keep to tradition and culture. Put another way, these women don't forget where they *belong*; they keep to their place.

During fieldwork, however, I learned that that was not necessarily the case. Although Indian women are depicted as the face of the industry, in contrast to their U.S. counterparts they are, in some respects, losing ground in terms of industry participation. As customer service moves from the United States to India, the 12-hour time difference that comes with it directly intersects with notions of a woman's place, namely at home. What was considered a flexible day shift job in the United States is rigid night work in India. As labor processes move from day to night, and from low wage to high wage, ideas about what constitutes "ladies work" get complicated.

Unlike garment production, which was predominantly female in the United States and remained the same upon transfer to countries such as Mexico and Bangladesh, call center employment in India, at the time of this study, *appeared* to be moving towards gender integration in the labor pool. I italicize *appeared* to point out that what lies beneath the surface is more complicated. The influx of men into positions that in the United States would be marked as "pink-collar" operates from multiple stances. While this industry provides a flexible schedule that appeals to women in the United States who are expected to put family first, the temporal landscape of this industry shifted drastically once exported. Flexible work hours transformed into a night shift requirement that disrupts the traditional day and early evening schedule of this workforce.[27]

In fact, previous research suggests that a shift in the gender aspects of the industry is occurring. Poster and Mirchandani's study of call centers in Gurgaon and Noida, near New Delhi, found that 50 to 70 percent of the employees are men.[28] This coincides with two call centers I visited in Mumbai; TYJ Corp. was approximately 60 percent men, and

Company A was approximately 50 percent men. Employees I spoke to in Bangalore also cited rates that were in line with Mumbai. In addition, Shailesh, the training manager for a top 5 call center in Mumbai, estimates that during the OTJ training phase he has 40 percent women and 60 percent men. These findings contradict the media representation of call center employment in India as being primarily female.[29]

Where I noticed an even further difference was at WebCorp and MedCorp in Ahmedabad.[30] Daksha, an HR Executive Assistant at WebCorp, stated that approximately 80 percent of their employees are men and that few women there work at night because Ahmedabad is more conservative compared to other Indian cities. At MedCorp, *no* women were working the night shift. This was also the only company in the study that did not provide transport to its employees. Although the company does have women working during the day shift, Parag, the company owner, explained that in order to integrate women into his night shift, he would have to provide transportation.

The presence of men at the entry level of this industry certainly represents a shift in the gendered aspects of the industry. Drawing from interviews with employees, managers, family members, and industry experts, two reasons emerged as to why men move into "pink-collar" employment. First, the salary earned from working in this industry is well above average. In fact, some employees are paid more money to offset the night shift requirement.[31] Second, the night shift requirement of this industry is less of a hurdle for men to address. Although women may be the preferred gender for call center employment, it is men who are able to navigate the night more freely. This is not to suggest that families give men carte blanche to go out all night, but the physical and

temporal mobility of men is a less contentious issue in comparison to the physical and temporal mobility of women.

In the upper echelons of this industry, men have always dominated. As one goes up the call center hierarchy from team leader to manager and director, women's participation dwindles. Women often plateau at mid-level positions while men progress further.[32] This disparity is linked to men's lack of responsibility to provide household labor and childcare.

The cover story in figure 4, "Housekeepers to the World," provides a glimpse of occupational segregation.[33] In the story itself, photographs of customer service workers are mostly of young women, whereas photos depicting high-level positions, such as Chairman or President, show older men. The content of the article presents only men as leaders of the industry and experts in terms of discussing future growth and challenges. In contrast, the women interviewed are primarily entry-level workers. The one exception is a female vice-president. However, she works for a company that trains women how to be effective customer service representatives. She is not in a direct position of power in terms of owning a call center or influencing policy surrounding the development of this industry. Interpreting this article, there is a sense that women are to be seen and *heard*, but not serve as active participants in corporate decision-making.

In closing, women experience temporal and spatial segregation in ways that generally limit their access to paid labor to the day shift. Although some critics present the BPO industry as one subjecting workers to toiling the night away in IT sweatshops, a similar outcry did not emerge about women not participating in the industry because they

are unable to go at night as freely as their male counterparts.[34] Advocating against exploitative labor practices was certainly a focus of attention, but advocating for a woman's right to work was not. This is significant given the relatively high wages that come with BPO employment and its rapid expansion.

OPINIONS AND CONCERNS RELATED TO CALL CENTER EMPLOYMENT

As I learned from my fieldwork, call centers in India are viewed and represented in a myriad of ways. Some accounts present them as a revolutionizing force that is re-shaping the lives of India's youth.[35] Here the argument is that call centers provide jobs and a level of income that ten years ago were beyond the reach of 18- to 25-year-olds. As a result, there are now tales of consumerism and living the good life. At the same time, call center employment is viewed as a site of exploitation (e.g., "cyber-coolies" working the night away in IT sweatshops) and moral decay (e.g., sex in the call center).[36] Coolie, for example, is a term used to describe poorly paid baggage handlers at train stations in India. Although call center employees earn a relatively high wage, it is commonly known that their American counterparts earn far more for doing the same work, hence the term cyber-coolie. At the same time, the industry is blamed for moral decay because of the social camaraderie associated with the call center environment, especially as it relates to men and women hanging out at night together.

Some argue that while call center employment provides some young people a chance to be part of a global work environment, the monotony of the job can lead to

burnout. Concerned citizens such as Father John, a 37-year-old Catholic priest who is known for speaking about the effects of call center employment on young people, believe creativity is sacrificed for high salaries. According to Father John:

> …also, see, there's no creativity. You just have a headphone, there's no creativity. And youth at this age are the most creative feeling. I have a strong feeling if this goes on for a long time, sitting with earphone, night, without lack of sleep and other things, its going to affect their minds in the long run.
>
> So, psychologically, emotionally, the whole thing of no creativity is something which I am very sad about. The youth are the best, their creative minds should be channelized.

In addition to the monotony of call center work, some interviewees felt that the job itself was not necessarily conducive to expanding their career opportunities. Although fielding phone call after phone call through the night was viewed as dulling the mind, the constrictions on a worker's career path were more specifically related to how other industries do not always consider call center employment to be "proper" work experience. Meanwhile, Nilesh, an industry consultant, deflected concerns about monotony and future career prospects by stating that call centers not only provide what he considers low-level customer service work, such as airline reservations, but also high-level customer service work, such as million-dollar collection accounts for major corporations.

Although in some instances the income from call center employment was viewed as a catalyst for economic empowerment, the flip side was stories of workers racking up debt at record levels. Parag, owner of MedCorp, a company in Ahmedabad that provides medical transcription services for U.S. firms, observed that young people with previously limited or no income—such as students—accumulate credit card debt after joining the

BPO industry. This phenomenon emerged as students began earning salaries high enough to qualify for credit schemes.

In dismay, Parag described how his own general manager did not understand the cost behind credit card debt and was paying 36 percent interest. He paid off the debt on behalf of the general manager, who is now paying him back. Concerned that the younger generation was becoming accustomed to the higher wages associated with the industry, he said, “In the USA, the economy is large and the population is low. Plus there is social security. Such does not exist in India. What will happen if these global companies leave? What will fill the void?” Although parents and critics of the industry also expressed similar concerns, this was not a theme mentioned by employees.

Despite the focus and attention given to the relatively high salaries that call centers provide, Rekha, an 18-year-old employee at Mindspace in Malad, pointed out that call center employment came with hidden costs that she did not anticipate. Once every three months, her company arranges a trip for the team. Employees bear the cost of the trip, and this can run upwards of 2,000rs (US$44). According to Rekha, not attending can affect an employee’s performance review because he or she is perceived as not being a team player. Just as companies view the money spent to entertain potential clients as the “cost of doing business,” Rekha believes that in order to get ahead, workers must take on certain company expenses as the cost of having a job. Although this was not a prevalent theme throughout the study, Rekha’s situation was not unique. Employees of a major computer firm in Bangalore also mentioned the costs they incurred, such as initiation rites

that involve buying Starbucks coffee for their group—no small expense—in order to become a "part of the team."

Despite safety concerns related to young women such as Rekha working at night in a call center, a 2006 report commissioned by the National Commission on Women (NCOW) deemed the call center industry provider of the most security for its female workforce. This study was based on a sample of 272 women working in various night shift positions in industries such as hotel, medical, and textiles. Mira, a call center manager in Bangalore, agreed with the findings of this study and argued that call centers are far safer than local industries because they are held to higher sexual harassment standards.[37] At her company, a Fortune 500 computer firm, she said both men and women received sexual harassment training. She contends that this kind of training and notices are not provided in local industries and suggested that because the call center industry—particularly captive call centers such as the one she works for—are under such scrutiny by the media, they are far more conscientious of "the rules."[38]

For individuals who are able to convince their families to let them work night shifts, opinions surrounding how hard or how easy it is to get a call center job varied.[39] During preliminary research in 2005, interviewees from Bangalore stressed the difficulty of getting a job. Hetal, a 24-year-old employee, stated that of the 500 people who applied for her position, only 12 were accepted. During fieldwork in 2006, employees in Mumbai suggested that there was a job surplus and it was considered relatively easy to get a call center job. The difficulty lay in gaining entry into top companies such as J.P. Morgan and 3 Global Services.

For those who make the cut, both managers and trainers pointed out that attrition is high, particularly during the training process. Shailesh, a trainer at a top 5 call center, stated that his company has the following training schedule:

Voice and Accent Training	2 weeks
Process training*	4 weeks
On the Job (OTJ) training	2 weeks

**This refers to training for the actual account an employee will service such as credit card, airline, etc.*

Shailesh explained that he handled employees at the OTJ training stage. His batch, at the time of this study, consisted of 36 employees. From previous experience, he found that if they survive OTJ, they will, for the most part, stay on with the company. Out of 100 employees who make it to OTJ training, he estimates that 30 to 40 drop out. Depending on the company, OTJ training is referred to as the "Nursery," and "Care and Development."

Reflecting what I heard from other interviewees, Anjali, a 27-year-old former employee, sent me an email with the following four points about how call center employment is viewed:

> 1. The entry level call centre jobs are not considered very highly. That is the actual call associate job. Other managerial and training positions are considered by other employers as credible because it does give you a lot of people experience.
>
> 2. Credibility is suspect because these jobs are still low on employee discipline, organizational experience and commitment, professional ethics and skill development and yet pay a lot in Indian standards, making young people feel it is a substitute to hard work.
>
> 3. Call centre jobs were viewed till recently as transition jobs especially for qualified youth like engineering students, IT students, MBA students etc so they

themselves preferred not to mention it on their resume. Like I didn't mention it anywhere.

4. The job of taking calls will be viewed for a long time as a low skill job unless you rise beyond it to senior positions of handling teams, HR, customer service manager etc.

Add this to the perceptions about night shift work, and call center employment appears to be a questionable job choice. One aunt labeled her niece "completely mad" while another interviewee's parents wanted their daughter to be "a normal human being." Three respondents pointed out that their parents' dismay stemmed from having higher aspirations for their daughters. Ms. Paul, a mother in her early fifties, said, "Maybe I was wrong, but I thought she could do something much better than work in a call center because she did pretty well in college. So I thought, 'you can do something better with your brains.'"

From an executive standpoint, a major concern is the shortage of *qualified* workers.[40] In contrast of other global labor pools which are viewed as "disposable," or easily replaceable—as is the case with maquila employees in Mexico and factory employees in China—call center employees are in such demand that the Wall Street Journal reported that these workers have more leverage over their employers, relative to other industries.[41]

In Ahmedabad, a city ramping up to compete with other IT cities in India, the shortage of workers intersects with class and education. Parag, the owner of MedCorp., began his company in 1999 with 60 employees and now employs 250. He pointed out that he could have easily doubled his current workforce due to the demand for services,

but was unable to because of the lack of a qualified workforce *willing* to take this sort of job. Daksha, an H.R. Executive Assistant at WebCorp, felt her company faced similar challenges. In the future, when they need to recruit "a big batch" (e.g., 50 employees), they will hold hiring sessions in distant towns such as Surat, Rajkot, and Baroda. In order to hire 50 "suitable workers," she estimates that they will need to interview at least 200 people.

This disconnect is directly related to class and education. Parag explained that it is mostly those from the middle and upper class strata of society who are sought by call centers and BPOs. These families have the money to send their children to private schools where English is the primary language. In contrast, English is traditionally taught only after the eighth standard in public schools.[42] By the time a student from public school graduates, they lack the English language skills needed to work in the industry. According to Parag, this narrows the labor pool that companies such as his can draw from to less than five percent of the population. Out of this amount, very few want to join the industry because they often: (1) go to the United States for a professional job; (2) take over their parents' business; or (3) attend a professional college. Given their higher class status, joining the BPO industry is, to some extent, considered beneath them. The lower income groups that would most benefit from employment in this industry—starting salary at MedCorp is 7,000rs per month (US$155)—are shut out because they lack English skills.

Parag also brought up the gender-based education differences at his own company. During a discussion of how 90 percent of his employees are college graduates

he commented, “Even engineers are taking this job!” Anna, the H.R. manager who also participated in the interview, said that engineers are good transcribers and that of the 30 engineers they employ, 20 are women. Parag expanded on this by saying that they are able to hire more female engineers because women are not given a chance in their own field.[43]

In addition, the fluency of English required to work in this industry is not only about reading and speaking, but also about accent acquisition and grammar.[44] During an interview with Linda, executive of TYJ Corporation in Mumbai, she stated, “If an applicant is from Ahmedabad, we don’t touch them. Their accents are untrainable. We tried before, but it just didn’t work.” According to Parag, even if a person can understand and transcribe English, this does not mean they have an understanding of proper grammar. He also found that graduates of public school are generally weak in conversational English. His concern about grammar was reflected in a company email that Irene, a training manager in Mumbai, shared with me. With the subject heading of “Pathetic English,” this email was disseminated by her coworker complaining about the quality of written communication between Indian workers and U.S. customers:

> I apologies in reference to the adjustments fiasco happened on the [Company B] side
> (I **APOLOGIES** too for the grammar fiasco)
>
> Yes sir i am too ready for this task....
> (And we are **TOO** sorry for the English here)

The disparity that Parag describes between the supply and demand of qualified workers is not an isolated concern. During fieldwork in Bangalore, a backlash towards the “English Imperialism” associated with the BPO industry—meaning its demand for an

English-speaking workforce—emerged as lawmakers grappled with an ordinance that would remove English as a language taught in the public schools and teach only in Kannada, the local language of Bangalore.[45] Proponents of the law viewed it as way to fight "English imperialism" while opponents expressed concern about how this would impact Bangalore's ability to compete with other cities seeking to gain a foothold in the BPO industry.

As illustrated in this section, the opinions and concerns related to call center employment are quite varied. From terms such as cyber-coolie and English imperialism, to anxiety about young people entering a site of moral decay that dulls the mind, to beliefs about how hard or easy it is to get a call center job, to executives worried about a shortage of qualified workers, to the disconnect between individuals who would most benefit from call center income versus those who have the qualifications to join the industry, reaction to this industry is by no means singular. Clearly, the relatively high wages associated with the industry stem from the global demand for a night shift labor force, and this intersects with gender, class, and education in ways that are complex.

WRAP-UP

The night shift requirement of the call center industry spotlights the role of geography in defining gendered conceptions of work. Feminization of labor literature tends to look at the actual content of a job and uncover how it's imbued with stereotypes, such as women are better at sewing clothes in a factory because they have nimble fingers

and men are more equipped to handle brain surgery because they have exacting minds. The transformation of day shift work into the night shift and the subsequent increased participation of men demonstrates how "ladies work" is not only about the actual content of the work, but also the space and time that it occupies.

The idea of a modern-day labor force that goes from female to male is rare in comparison to the integration of women into historically male-dominated positions such as clerical work and pharmacies.[46] As jobs deemed "pink-collar" move into developing nations and men join the ranks, their increased participation provides an opening for thinking about how women's work becomes de-feminized, or re-masculinized, when labor processes move it into the night and men gain a foothold. At the same time, the de-skilling of the job from college to high school provides another avenue through which men increasingly become involved in the industry. All of these emerging trends have significant implications in terms of women's incorporation.

Clearly, as the opinions of interviewees will indicate in the following chapters, call center employment does provide some women the opportunity to expand their social and economic mobility in ways previously unavailable to them, even as it constrains others. Instead of viewing transnational call centers either as a site of Western imperialism, a den of moral decay, or a space that liberates women from traditional gender roles, it is in the interplay between these competing beliefs that one begins to see how call center employment has the potential to reshape an individual's perception of themselves and that of the community that surrounds them.

Chapter 3: Mobility-Morality Narratives: The Effects of the Industry on the Physical Mobility of Women

Call center job equals call girl job!
What kind of work are these females doing at night?
She's too bold!

In Bangalore, I interviewed a 24-year-old man who referred to the night shift as "the hooker shift." His comment revealed how attitudes surrounding night shift employment intersect significantly with social and temporal constructions of gender. Women's physical mobility and access to urban areas are regulated by a timescape that limits their presence during the evening and late night, particularly if they are going out alone. Women who break the "rules" are marked as site of transgression and, in lay terms, considered bold.[1]

As Indian women enter the global labor pool, particularly its nightscape, they also experience the negative, gender-based reaction of "what are these females doing in the night?" regularly given to prostitutes and bar dancers. Such comments provide a context for thinking about women's access to night shift employment opportunities. As the first section of this chapter illustrates, this is not a new phenomenon; indeed, historical discourses surrounding the safety and protection of women have been frequently used in the past to legally segregate them from night shift jobs. This historical context provides insight for the second section of this chapter, which explores how *mobility-morality narratives* are today re-codified in ways that allow some women to traverse the nightscape in order to meet the U.S. demand for 24/7 workers. In the third section, I delve

into the sexual impropriety that is associated with call center employment and look at how the industry seeks to counteract this reputation. In the fourth section, I explore the anxiety both families and society in general have about women stepping out into the city, especially at night. Finally, I examine the use of the mobile phone as a form of mobility control that serves to keep track of the "mobile woman" whether day or night. Throughout the chapter, I argue that even though night shift employment has the potential to reshape women's physical mobility, they continue to experience regimes of surveillance and control in ways from which their male counterparts are relatively immune.

WORKING AT NIGHT: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In some respects, British colonial rule liberated women from traditional forms of bondage by outlawing sati (widow burning) and child marriage. However, British rule also brought legal restrictions on a woman's right to work. The cotton mills that emerged in Mumbai during the 1850s ran on a 24-hour basis and employees often worked 13- to 14-hour days. Under the guise of protecting women, The Factory and Workshop Act of 1891 allowed women to work night shifts, but had a provision that this only applied to factories "where a proper system of shifts had been adopted."[2]

Future amendments to the Factory Act, such as the Indian Factories Act of 1911, went on to restrict women from working before 5:30 a.m. or after 7:00 p.m. By 1930, the Bombay Act was enacted to provide maternity leave for women.[3] In order to avoid

tightened legal restrictions on women's employment, cotton mills in Mumbai summarily fired its female workforce and replaced them with men.[4] While the Factory and Workshop Acts and the Bombay Act were enacted under the guise of *protecting* women, in reality, these laws resulted in removing them from the workforce. Put another way, the social construct of the nightscape as a male domain and a space of exclusion for women was elevated to a legal construct.

The most recent legislation on night shift employment, Article 66(b) of the Indian 1948 Factories Act, states that no woman shall be required or allowed to work in any factory except between the hours of 6 a.m. and 7 p.m.[5] In March 2005, this act was finally amended, albeit with provisions:[6]

> Provided that where the occupier of the factory makes adequate safeguards in the factory as regards occupational safety and health, equal opportunity for woman workers, adequate protection of their dignity, honour and safety and their transportation from the factory premises to the nearest point of their residence, the State Government or any person authorised by it in this behalf may, by notification in the Official Gazette, after consulting the concerned employer or representative organisation of such employer and workers or representative organisations of such workers, *allow* [my emphasis] employment of woman workers between the hours of 7 p.m. and 6 a.m. in such factory or group or class or description of factories subject to such conditions as may be specified therein. (Bill No 104)

Instead of re-envisioning women as individuals who have an inherent right to work whenever they see fit, this law focused on the ability of industry to employ women at night, while providing provisions for their protection remain in place. Allowing women to move about in ways that are considered an inherent right for men reflects how women remain tethered to a patriarchal framework that dictates what a woman can and cannot do. The creation of the "dignity and honor rule" inadvertently marked women as

outsiders and spatialized the factory as a site where undignified and dishonorable behavior is a norm from which women must be protected.

While the amendment provided a means for women to gain entry to nightscape employment, it did not address the gendered hierarchies that shape female employment opportunities. For example, there is mention of "equal opportunity" in the amendment, but no mention for equal pay, a key issue for women. Also, the behavior of male factory employees, who are arguably responsible for creating an unwelcoming environment for female workers, is not subject to scrutiny. Instead factories are expected to accommodate women in an environment that is accepted as hostile to them.

On the surface, a law giving women access to work spaces that were formerly off-limits illustrates how women are being legally integrated into male-dominated spaces. Yet, below the surface, gendered norms of how women must be protected within male-dominated environments endure and this can have repercussions on women's employment opportunities.

MOBILITY-MORALITY NARRATIVES

Indeed, gendered norms about what women can and cannot do—as well as where it was acceptable for her to go and where it was not—continue in the contemporary era. This "mobility-morality narrative," as I call, it, continues to mark women's bodies as the site of family honor, purity, and chastity, even if legislation dictating mobility has been amended.[7] Its impact ranges from what constitutes proper attire for women (e.g., what

kind of girl would wear such a short skirt?) to the type of work they engage in (e.g., prostitute versus housewife).

From a geographical standpoint, linking morality to women's bodies generally has an immobilizing impact on their lives. Numerous historical examples point to this observation. Corseted women, for example, were unable to exert themselves without suffering shortness of breath, so the "ideal" shape acquired by upper class European and American women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a means of inhibiting movement, although it left the legs and feet unencumbered. And actions such as foot binding in China served to limit women's physical mobility by rendering their feet inoperable. Others, such as female genital mutilation, led to extreme sexual pain. This practice remains prevalent in certain parts of Africa, particularly villages, and is another means for confining a woman's physical mobility. All of these physical actions in turn encumber women's social and economic mobility as well, which results in both their physical and symbolic isolation.

The underlying message of these immobilizing regimes is that a *proper* woman's body is contained, and those who venture beyond the moral confines of household and family obligation are prostituting themselves.[8] The control of women's bodies as a means of demonstrating social status is a pervasive practice that cuts through various cultures and a range of class strata. These regimes also tell us how women who transgress gendered notions of place fare when they attract the attention of various "gatekeepers of morality," ranging from family members to state-sanctioned rules of law (e.g., police and courts).

A clear example of a mobility-morality narrative in India is the historical practice of purdah. Purdah was not a uniform institution throughout India because there were variations based on class, castes, region, and religion.[9-10] In general, however, this practice entailed the seclusion and veiling of women and was a reflection of power relations in both the public and private sphere. Purdah also indicated socioeconomic status and was a means to maintain family honor. The ability to confine a woman to specific areas of the home and forbid movement in the public sphere illustrated that the male head of the household had the financial means to support a family without female participation. It was also indicative of the control men had on women's physical mobility.

In essence, purdah was a defining force in deciding who should have a presence in public spaces and who shouldn't. It was primarily women from the lower castes who had a presence in the public sphere because their husbands or fathers could not afford to have them stay at home, whereas confinement of upper caste women was a symbol of highly prized attributes such as chastity and virginity.[11] Purdah demonstrates how caste/class attitudes and the naturalization of economic relations (e.g., man as breadwinner, woman as homemaker) operates through sexism in a covert manner. Instead of a naked economic bias in the form of blatant violence towards upper caste women who earned their own money, negative judgment of a woman's moral character and sexual prowess emerge when she does not stay at home. Thus, the practice of purdah provides a historical understanding of how mobility-morality narratives were used by society to immobilize Indian women in the past and how such narratives continue to operate today, albeit in different ways.[12]

Indeed, current mobility-morality narratives link gender to the globalization discourse in ways that are similar to how the "women's question" was linked to colonialism.[13] Purdah, for instance, became a contentious subject in the 19th century because colonists viewed the modernity of India through the status of its women. Colonial discourse constructed India as backward and primitive because of Indian customs such as child marriage, sati, and purdah.[14] Yet post-colonial research points out that the "women's question" was used by colonists to rationalize their own hegemonic behavior. British women, for example, used issues such as purdah and child marriage in order to step outside the confines of a woman's place at home in England and participate in the colonizing mission of India through public work, such as teaching and nursing.[15]

Similarly, the call center industry can be viewed as a "globalizing mission" that frees individuals, particularly women, from the immobilizing regimes and narratives of traditional society:[16]

> Women employed in call centers are no longer bound by the traditional patterns of family control over daughters. Financial independence provided by employment in call centers has empowered women to be assertive and independent in their outlook, attitude, and career choice. The gender-neutral and international working atmosphere in call centers has the potential to further female empowerment.

This modern sentiment recycles the logic used to present the "colonizing mission" as a positive force in improving the lives of women and still relies on the "women's question" to justify the inequality inherent in it. The notion that when U.S. companies provide jobs in developing nations they free women from traditional forms of bondage is problematic. Regarding American hegemony as the new global power that liberates women, Agnew states:[17]

> American hegemony can also liberate people from the hold of traditions that disempower various groups, not the least women, whose independent subjectivity (as citizens and consumers rather than solely as mothers or potential mothers) and parallel participation in society as individual persons have tended to increase with its spread.

Conceptualizing globalization as a force that liberates women from local traditions is tricky because it can inadvertently be used to disguise and rationalize the exploitative nature upon which this "liberation" is based. This is not to suggest conversely that globalization always increases exploitation.

Thus, in order to manufacture respectability, mitigate risk, and maintain one's reputation, mobility-morality narratives in India require the presence of a male counterpart to justify a woman's presence in the urban nightscape. Shilpa, a 38-year-old employee in Bangalore, was initially scared about going out at night. She linked her fear to how it felt odd to get into a cab at 9 p.m. because she was worried that her neighbors would think she was a call girl. Purvi, a 24-year-old collections agent in Mumbai, spoke of how her neighbors wondered if she was a bar dancer when she first started working at night. In Ahmedabad, Nilima described that in her neighborhood the perception of a woman working at night was "she's too bold," and neighbors assumed that such a woman "…is doing something illegal, but not prostitution like [in] Bombay."

Ashini, a 23-year-old employee, explained that when she joined Company A, her father was furious. It was her first job ever and her father's response of "call center job equals call girl job!" left her shaken. Despite his tirade, she joined the industry and currently gives her father 2,000rs (US$44) a month to support the household. During in-depth interviews and focus groups, I learned that female call center employees also dealt

with the stereotype that they were doing drugs, drinking, smoking, partying, and that they were “not a family person.” Kriti, a 21-year-old employee, described how her father has gotten into heated arguments with his friends over her job because they tell him, “The crowd is not very good. They all smoke.”

Smoking as an “immoral” practice came up frequently. Indira, a 22-year-old employee, has been in the industry for two years and contends male employees “develop bad habits” such as smoking. According to Indira, “They become chimneys.” She observed that there were far more men who smoked compared to women and explained that men smoke to relieve tension and stress. Indira said, “If a boy smokes it feels normal now because so many smoke.” In contrast, if a woman smokes she is marked as “a bad girl.”

Another theme that emerged during this study is that of the nosy neighbors. In some areas it is believed that when a woman leaves her house in the middle of the night she compromises her own reputation and that of her family. Certainly no middle-class neighborhood wanted to be seen as the one containing “those types of women.” Mina, an 18-year-old employee who resides in Juinagar, an area of Navi Mumbai, has worked in the industry for approximately 15 months. Currently working a 6:30 p.m. to 3:30 a.m. shift, she explained that when she first started this shift, her neighbors created problems for both her and her family. She explains that the society (e.g., term for neighborhood) she resides in “misunderstood my character” and she was required to produce a certificate to the authorities of her society showing proof of employment at Company A. Thereafter the police were sent to her home to question both her mother and their community

watchman. In addition, Mina had to show her employee ID to the police who proceeded to interrogate her shuttle driver. Mina contended that her night shift travel and her work would not have been the subject of scrutiny had she been a man.

Mina's experience makes it clear that patriarchal regimes of surveillance and mobility-morality narratives remain entrenched. Calling the police on the girl next door for being outside at night sends a loud and clear message that women who traverse the nightscape are "out of place." There are also subtle, yet equally compelling, messages women received about being out at night.

"People look at you," said Priya, a resident of Santa Cruz, a suburb of Mumbai. She recalled how a group of young men leered at her while she walked by, asking amongst themselves, "Where is she going?" Similarly, older men gave stares that said, "You're a girl. You're not supposed to go out." Valerie, a 27-year-old resident of Bandra, a suburb which she describes as largely Catholic, made it a point to explain that in her particular neighborhood there are a lot of non-Catholics and initially, "they [non-catholics] would look and wonder." She found this to be extremely irritating but said, "They don't say anything. They dare not and now they don't bother." In frustration, she points out that if she were a man going out at night there would be no reaction. Underlying her comments was the belief that Catholics are more open-minded compared to Hindus and Muslims.[18] In Ratna's Ahmedabad neighborhood, working at night is considered a big deal because, in her society, women are not allowed to go off the premises after 8 p.m. Her night travels surprised neighbors who decided it was their right to know, "Where are you going after 9 p.m.?"

In addition to stares, questions, and police involvement, the practice of gossiping or "keeping names" is another means of tarnishing the reputations of both the worker and her family. Ms. George, a 53-year-old mother whose daughter works for Company A, explains:

> MS. GEORGE: They [referring to Punjabis who are the majority of occupants residing in her building] keep names like, girls should not go out in the night shifts and all that. It's not good. They take it the other way. You know how these people are. They don't know what it is. And now most of them know what a call centre is, they have gone there…safety like…nothing like that.
>
> REENA: So what are reasons that you found that people would make comments that girls shouldn't work the night shift.
>
> MS. GEORGE: Haan, girls they take objection. Some, they don't want.
>
> REENA: And why would they take objection?
>
> MS. GEORGE: They will say then…they don't like, like, people keep names around and all. And then, then marriage times and then have problem.
>
> So, they think that way. So I feel this is a Punjabi way, I want Punjabis here only, na. They keep a lot of names. But most of them, they, only their daughters do all these things.
>
> REENA: Tell me more about the names
>
> MS. GEORGE: "Hamare main toh," means "[among our kind] they don't like girls working in the night shifts and all."
>
> Now, I've got one friend of mine, they also stay in BJ-7, her daughter's now in London see. She is working in London see. But that also, the old…old people, they are cousins, they used to keep names, "You know what she is doing there, that, this", that they use to keep names and all that. So…I think without seeing you should not tell, spoil anybody's name no, "what she is doing…" Gossip, they do.

"Keeping names" is a source of concern for parents because gossip about staying out all night reduces a woman's worth, a key priority in the family unit. In such instances,

a woman's bodily worth is degraded when she becomes marked down to "that kind of girl."

In all but one case, interviewees were the first women in their family to go out at night on a regular basis and working the night shift represented a dramatic change in their temporal mobility. However, in order to maintain respectability, female employees, for the most part, self-regulated their mobility in terms of when they went out, where they went, and how they dressed. According to Poonam, a 32-year-old woman, "If you are careful and don't send the wrong signals, no one is going to try anything." Working in a contained office environment till 4 a.m. was becoming acceptable, donning a mini-skirt and tank top to party at the trendiest discotheque was certainly not.

It is so important for women to conform to gendered notions of place that Phadke discusses how women will actually risk their safety in order to maintain their reputation and family honor:[19]

> …one young woman living in a predominantly Gujarati Jain building on Malabar Hill told of how her boyfriend used to drop her some distance from her building since her family did not know she had a boyfriend. She would then negotiate the distance of about 100 metres on foot, however late it was at night. The discourse of sexual safety demanded that she value her reputation over actual safety.

While attending the anniversary party of Company A in Navi Mumbai, I saw firsthand how gendered notions determined when a woman could be out and where she could go. The party, held on an expansive terrace, had approximately 300 attendees. Prizes, dinner, a fashion show, and dancing were held between 9 p.m. and midnight. Early in the party, the crowd was a mix of both men and women. By 11 p.m. the party consisted primarily of men. On the dance floor, approximately 75 to 100 men rocked out to Queen's hit "We

Will Rock You" and singing along "Fuck you! Fuck you!" Only a sprinkling of women remained and I was left wondering where the women had gone. Even my contact who got me into the party had left by 10:30 p.m. Her father's driver was not in town to pick her up, and her parents—whom she describes as very protective—did not want her out late even if she was on company property and the company was providing transport to employees. In her case, working the night shift was one thing, but partying at night was another.

A few weeks later, I was invited to attend the going-away party for a call center manager. It was held at the Orchid restaurant in Chembur, a suburb of Navi Mumbai. At night, this restaurant transforms into a bar with music. There were five women and approximately 10 to 12 men in our group and the bill came to approximately 1400rs (US$31) for food and 15000rs (US$333) for drinks. One aspect which stood out was how masculinized the space was. All the restaurant employees were men and I noticed that after 11 p.m., there were less than 10 women in a crowd of approximately 80 to 100 customers. Unlike their male counterparts who have more leeway to hang out, many women conform to societal pressures of where they belong at night and retreat to their homes, leaving the men to hang out with each other.

The self-regulation women place on their physical mobility and the surveillance they face from nosy neighbors, leering men, and "keeping names" relates to the way the city seeks to *protect* the urban nightscape from "women of the night" and the moral decay they supposedly bring. Mona, a 25-year-old employee at Company A, described how the police approached her while she was waiting for her shuttle pickup and

questioned her about why she was out alone. She was petrified because “the ones you really have to worry about are the police.” She said that if the police wanted to bring her back to the station she would have refused because it would not be safe.

In another instance, Manisha, an employee at Company A, was pulled over by police while on a company shuttle. The police ignored the driver and requested her identity card. She felt harassed because “the police would know the difference between a decent woman and a prostitute.” If they had tried to take her to the police station she would have refused because “those people are not safe.” This attitude also emerged among respondents during a focus group. In their view, police officers were potentially rapists because the police think women who go out at night have “bad character.”

The police who question a woman out at night reflect state-sanctioned conceptions of who belongs in the urban nightscape and who doesn’t. At the same time, it emerged during interviews that even when women are the victims of crimes, they do not necessarily turn to the police for help. Smita, a 26-year-old former call centeremployee, was the only person in this study to describe experiencing violence. Because she lived only a five-minute walk from her previous call center job, many nights Smita walked to and from work. At the finish of one of her 4 a.m. shifts, she was assaulted and robbed on her way home. “They took everything,” she explains. When I asked about contacting the police, she said she didn’t bother because it would be “a waste of time.” In her opinion, the police are “useless.”

SEXING THE NIGHTSCAPE

Although interviewees said that the call center industry provided relatively high wages and great office facilities, this was not enough to protect the worker or the industry from the belief that night shift employment equals bad character. This theme emerged throughout fieldwork in Mumbai, Bangalore, and Ahmedabad. As a result, employers utilize a variety of strategies to counteract misperceptions about the industry. But then again, during the course of fieldwork it became evident that call center employment provides some workers a venue for behaving in ways that previously was more difficult to access, particularly at night.

In order to counteract the perception that call centers are containers of moral decay and sexual impropriety, some companies have "family day," so that an employee's family can tour the grounds and see the work culture. Ms. Mehta, a 45-year-old mother, states that her impression changed after attending this event: "The people are normal and good … the area is good… the team leader is middle class." This came as a relief to her 23-year-old daughter, Nisha, who was thoroughly frustrated by her mother calling "a thousand and one times" to check on her. "No one else's parents call this much!" she tells her mother during a family interview.

Others, as part of the recruitment process, will have a manager or team leader visit a potential employee's home to discuss employment with a woman's family and convince them that the working conditions are safe and proper.[20] H.R. managers in companies with this practice pointed out that they do not have to do this for male recruits. Ajay, a 20-something manager of a top firm located in Mindspace, takes an innovative approach to

this matter. When someone new joins his team, he takes their picture and mails it to the employee's parents along with an introduction letter. He said that it gives parents a good impression of the company and makes team members feel special.

Although the call center industry has received media attention about being a den of sex and sin, this theme did not emerge during interviews with employees.[21] However, during preliminary fieldwork in 2005, Linda, the American executive at a top 10 call center, began our meeting by commenting that she'd never seen so many people messing around on each other. As a result, the company had to implement various forms of surveillance on missing employees. She said, "We have to keep an eye on the med unit" because they found that an employee would feign sickness, and then a "friend" would go to check on him or her and they would end up "getting busy." Similarly, security guards were dispatched to the shuttle vans parked out in the dark, to look for missing employees who were romancing the night away. Of the 64 female employees interviewed, one spoke of having a dalliance while on the job. In an email correspondence Irene, the 32-year-old training manager who also is in the midst of a divorce, wrote:

> Well, it's kinda sorta weird!! I was in the ladies loo and he was in the men's - across from each other and we were on the phone and kinda got off like that...then there was this other time where the floor was empty and we were in one corner and I was under the table.

The night represents darkness, desire, and sex. At the same time, the global nature of this industry brings new ideas about romance to India's younger generation. Vast office spaces hold upwards of a thousand 18- to 25-year-old men and women, many of whom, particularly women, were previously segregated from access to intimate relations with the opposite sex. However, call center employment is viewed as a middle-class work

environment and this intersects with class distinctions about sex and desire. It's one thing when lower class or working class women are "up to no good," but the middle-class woman is supposedly "not that kind of girl" and needs to be protected from a "polluting" environment that will tarnish her reputation.

In discussions with individuals who expressed dismay towards the industry, they inferred that call center employment contains a sexscape that women who work in supposedly proper 9-to-5 jobs do not encounter. The implication was that women who claim to work all night are up to no good. It is unknown whether sexual impropriety would be associated with the industry if it operated during the day. However, I contend that integrating hundreds of young people in a collegial work environment, away from the eyes of family and nosy neighbors, during the day or night, is bound to bring forth latent desire. And given the relative lack of access to private spaces for sexual encounters, the use of semi-public spaces—be it in a med unit, company shuttle, or under a desk—reflect how space is strategically deployed to serve individual desires.

STEPPING OUT INTO THE CITY

Nisha, the 23-year-old employee who resides in Lokhenwhala, an upper-crust suburb of Mumbai said, "This is not a culture for women to go out at night." While Mumbai is considered one of the more women-friendly cities in India, her statement reflects how gendered notions of a woman's place remain. When Kriti joined Company A, her mother was scared about "sending a girl out in the night." Sunita, age 21, said that

prior to working in a call center she was never allowed to spend a night out of the house and always had to be home by 11 p.m.

The primary concern for families regarding women working the night shift was safety. Throughout the course of study, I became interested in how women's bodies were used to define how "safe" a city really is. Time and again, employees raised in Mumbai would tell me how safe their city was, especially compared to New Delhi. Yet not all the Mumbai-based employees in this study held this view. Anita, for example, migrated to Mumbai from Jabalpur with her sister to work in the industry and during our interview she recalled that moving to Mumbai was scary at first because she was not from a big city and it was "risky for women." Although she points out that she has not encountered any problems, she also believes, "In Mumbai, you can't trust anyone."

When I asked why Mumbai was safe for women compared to other cities, the "proof" was that women in Delhi faced far greater danger in relation to violent crimes such as rape. In the eyes of Mumbaikar women, Delhi was often viewed as a lawless city where men are allowed to behave any way they like. Delhi, in fact, has even been defined as the rape capital of India by one of the nation's prominent newspapers.[22] According to Puri's research on sexual violence against women, Delhi alone accounts for 30.5 percent of the rape cases reported in the India.[23]

Although concern for women traversing the urban nightscape was generally presented in the framework of protection and concern women's safety, it became apparent that the underlying concern for women going out at night came from the "what will people think?" narrative.[24] This form of manipulation is not lost on some of the

employees I interviewed. Kavita, a 22-year-old in Navi Mumbai, stated outright that family concern for young women working the night shift is less about physical safety and more about how a woman's presence in the urban nightscape will negatively impact a family's reputation. Anxiety about a woman staying out all night is not only about risking one's physical safety in terms of bodily violence, but also about risking one's social safety in the larger community. When a woman stays out all night, she risks rupturing her own reputation and that of her family which are key concerns in communities where "keeping names" can make or break one's social and marital opportunities.

The "what will people think?" narrative inhibits women from going out as freely as their male counterparts and this narrative demarcates where a woman can and cannot go in the city. Going to a mall with friends in the early evening is okay; unwinding at a bar after a long night of work is not okay. This narrative also requires women to look proper. Before stepping out of the house, a woman must scrutinize how she is dressed in relation to the time of day and where she is going. Unlike her male counterparts, her choice of attire comes from remaining aware of how patriarchal regimes of surveillance perceive her bodily existence—whore versus homemaker—and reflects how far some men believe they have a *right* to go—from unwanted gazes to rape—when they consume a woman's body. In some instances, women are required to inhibit their bodies (i.e., not passing a group of men hanging out at a paan shop) if they wish to avoid harassment. In other cases, they are expected to exhibit their bodies (i.e., entering a trendy nightclub) if they want to fit in.

Although there appeared to be more women present in Mumbai's urban nightscape than in Ahmedabad or Bangalore, Ranade's mapping of women's mobility in four distinct public spaces of Mumbai, as outlined in chapter 1, were not inhabited by more than 28 percent women.[25] Despite the modernity associated with Mumbai and its women-friendly reputation, the mobility of Mumbaikar women continues to be marginalized compared to that of their male counterparts. As a result, women continue to face sexual harassment as illustrated in *Do You Know How We Feel?*, a documentary produced by the Girls Media Group.[26]

In Ahmedabad, Seema, a 24-year-old employee at Webco Corp. said, "People here are conservative and don't feel it's safe for a woman to be out." Prior to working the night shift she was not allowed to be outside of the house any later than 8 p.m. Now she can be out until 10:30 or 11 p.m. because her job has changed her parents' perceptions. She contended that, "Culture is changing in Gujarat [the state where Ahmedabad is located]" but also pointed out that men don't face similar restrictions: "My colleagues can turn up at 2, 3, 4 a.m.; generally, guys don't have issues." Middle-and upper-class residents I spoke to in Ahmedabad considered it "the safest city for women," but this was because women were not permitted to be out at night by themselves. Residents I spoke to emphasized that a woman could go out alone in the middle of the night and nothing would happen to her because Ahmedabad is so safe. At the same time, women explained that their families would not allow them to go out at night.

THE MOBILE PHONE AND PHYSICAL MOBILITY

The mobile phone changes how women negotiate the nightscape, while also helping to stymie some of the mobility-morality narratives that emerge as a result of working at night. Specific to call center employment, the mobile phone is the tool women use in order to *gain permission* to travel at night. In fact, not one female employee in this study was without one. The mobile phone allows women to remain connected to regimes of surveillance, such as the family unit or the employing organization, and stretch social codes that deem it unacceptable for them to go out at night. If the mobile phone were not in existence during the emergence of this night shift industry, it could be argued that women's participation would be minimized. From this perspective, the mobile phone represents a revolutionary turn in regard to expanding some women's access to night shift income (even if it also adds to a sometimes false sense of security).

At the same time, the mobile phone, in and of itself, is not an agent for change. This technology is certainly mobilizing female employees and getting them out of the house, but the demand for night shift workers also intersects with economic globalization, the feminization of labor, and national policy to name just a few. Drawing from Haraway, ". . . we are not dealing with a technological determinism, but with a historical system depending upon structured relations among people."[27]

Mobile phones play a role in re-codifying gender relations. On one hand, they keep a woman *within reach* and accessible to those who claim control over her life (e.g., family). On the other, as a tool for maintaining family connections, they provide some women the means to get out of the house and thus expand their mobility. This expansion,

however, does not come from re-envisioning women as individuals who have an inherent right to move about as they see fit. Instead, technology merely provides women the means to create an existence for themselves outside the household, while remaining within the constraints imposed by the household.

The mobile phone is also at times a private portal to intimate spaces, such as making plans for a rendezvous with a boyfriend kept secret from one's family. In cases where parents keep a watchful eye on how often their daughter is talking on the landline phone or who they are talking to, for example, the SMS feature of the mobile phone provides a means to communicate with one's friends or boyfriends incognito. Simultaneously, the mobile phone re-codifies sexual harassment. Suvarna's article in the *Times of India,* for instance, uncovers how men are using their mobile phones to photograph women without their consent—such as a picture taken up a woman's skirt or of her cleavage—and post them on the Internet.[28] According to Suvarna, "The Indian public space is today stalked by boys and men who enjoy recording inescapable exposures of just about any woman."

When going out at night, the mobile phone provides some women with a sense of security in terms of being able to call for help should a problem arise. The necessity associated with having a mobile phone, however, is also intertwined with patriarchal regimes of surveillance that are based on keeping tabs on women. Although the mobile phone is viewed as a protective measure, it is also at times a device for furthering the harassment women experience. These varying issues reflect how the mobile phone

simultaneously serves to increase some women's mobility while at the same time serving to re-enact the inequality they experience in other facets of their lives.

WRAP-UP

The varying forms of harassment and temporal segregation that some women in this study experienced illustrate how women have to justify their existence in the urban nightscape. Despite the fact that working the night shift disrupts notions of a woman's "place" and transforms individual physical mobility to a certain extent, female call center employees continue to be subjected to stricter regimes of surveillance. Family members and society use safety concerns as a way to regulate and control women's mobility.

During this process of getting out of the house and "going global," the mobile phone is technology that women use to show their families that they will remain accessible, if only hypothetically. It provides some women a means to go out at night and at the same time conform to the regimes of surveillance that govern their mobility. The mobile phone, as a portal to the home space, also reflects how technology is used to connect women back to the domestic sphere, even when they are working the night shift.

In closing, female call center employees must balance both safety and surveillance. Addressing concerns about "What kind of work are these females doing in the night?" they are armed with identity cards and mobile phones that allow them to justify their existence to the nosy neighbors, the police, and anyone else questioning their existence. This dynamic illustrates how the societal structures in place that are supposed

to protect them (e.g., family, police, neighbors) instead become a site of judgment in a variety of settings. From an angry father worried that his daughter will become *spoiled* for earning to her own money to police suspicion about a woman out at night, women experience disdain when they move about in ways deemed transgressive.

Chapter 4: Traveling at Night: The Effects of Night Shift Employment on the Temporal Mobility of Women

> This is not a culture for women to go out at night.
> *– Nisha, call center employee*
>
> I dominate my vehicle!
> *– Dipti, on dealing with company transport*

In order to address concern about women's safety during their travels, trains in Mumbai offer a ladies-only compartment. Public buses also have certain seats designated for women. Segregating women is seen as a way to keep them safe. Those who want to have the room to sit while traveling or stand without experiencing the trampling crush of desperate passengers trying to get on and off trains have the option to purchase entry into a first-class, ladies-only compartment.

Access to the city meets with class concerns about not being around "those kind of people" (e.g., dirty and lower class) and gendered conceptions of a woman's place. In turn, beliefs about who belongs out at night and where they belong are complex. Location, for example, plays a role in shaping how women who go out at night are viewed while one's class status informs the ways in which individuals experience the urban night. Reaction to women not being at home was by no means uniform and employees provided varying responses to the question of where it was considered acceptable for women to go and where it was not.

In this chapter, I begin by exploring how the mobility-morality narratives described in the previous chapter are intertwined with how companies transport their workers and concerns related to women's safety at night, with a particular focus on how

the varying transport options provided by companies became a deciding factor in where some women opted to pursue employment. I also discuss how passenger safety during the night was a source of concern for women night-shift workers, both in terms of "reckless" driving but also "reckless, harassing" drivers. Lastly, in a discussion more widely related to violence against women who are out at night, I explore why the 2005 Bangalore rape and murder case of one call center employee garnered worldwide media attention while a spate of murdered maquila employees in Mexico went ignored for years.[1] By looking at this situation from the perspective of the class difference between these two industries, I discover how beliefs about *worthy and unworthy victims* shape the concern and value placed upon working woman who traverse the urban night. Throughout the chapter, I argue that call center employment leads to new forms of temporal mobility for women workers because it provides them with a *legitimate* reason to get out of the house, particularly at night. Yet at the same time, regimes of surveillance and control continue to affect how and where women travel.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

According to Irene, the 32-year-old training manager, "Location plays a role in how those around you perceive women out at night." During a focus group interview, Michelle, a 28-year-old employee, explained that in Juhu, an upper-class suburb of Mumbai, it is not a problem for women to work at night. However, her husband

suggested that it also depends on the area of Juhu because "behind the Chandan side [a neighborhood in Juhu], it would not be OK if working at night."

During a discussion with Roshni, a 28-year-old resident of Juhu, I learned that in addition to Chandan, it would also look suspicious for a woman to be hanging around SV Road going towards Juhu junction and near Juhu Tara Road turning towards the Sea Princess Hotel because of the brothels in the area. In addition, the entire stretch from the Juhu petrol pump to the police station is a problem for women to traverse because as Roshni describes "…up to the police station has these women soliciting."

Michelle said going out at night in Andheri is acceptable in neighborhoods in and around the parish because that area is modernized, but outside that area it would not be considered appropriate. This focus group consisted of Catholic employees and from their point of view, areas surrounding Catholic churches represent a site of modernity while nearby Hindu and Muslim neighborhoods are restrictive and provide women less leeway to travel at night. In addition to linking perceptions of women out at night to religious sects, Parvati, a 25-year-old Gujarati employee who lives in Thane, a suburb of Mumbai, also linked the perception of women out at night to the type of society (i.e., neighborhood) she resides in:

> I stay in a very cosmopolitan society and there are a lot of people around my area who work in call centers. It's pretty fine, they don't care. But some of my friends have problem because they are coming from a very conservative society. And like I told you no, a lot of people don't see this as a serious job.

Meghna, a 21-year-old employee in Ahmedabad, lives in the type of conservative society described by Parvati. She explains that no one else in her society "is doing this type of work." She explained that other women who want to work in the industry, but are

forbidden to, spoke to her about how "they appreciate" that she is able to get out and, "Your parents are allowing you to go, that is good."

Devaki, also 21 years old, said that five years ago it was unacceptable for women in her suburban Navi Mumbai neighborhood of Vashi to go out at night. No women in her building worked at call centers. However, in the past six months there had been a drastic change and now five or six women in her building work in the industry. In Bangalore, Shreya contends that in the past five years there has been a significant improvement in the acceptance of women going out at night. A resident of the area for 20 years, she believes that call centers played a role in making some areas of Bangalore more accessible to women.

Working at night not only provides some women access to areas that were previously deemed off-limits, but also represents a change in *when* some women are working. In terms of *where* they go after work, women traversed the evening and late nights in ways that reflect gendered notions of place. For example, the *dhaba*, the equivalent of a truck stop, is the only recreational space to hang out in Bangalore after a work shift because city laws shut down restaurants, bars, and nightclubs at 11 p.m.[2] Mira, the call center manager for a Fortune 500 computer firm, said the men went to the dhaba after their shift, but women were excluded. She repeatedly asked to join in; her boss refused at first but finally *allowed* her to go, and some men from the team brought her there. Describing it as dirty and lower class, she said, "It was not a place for women."

Although her middle-and upper-class male counterparts had the option to "climb down" the class ladder in looking for a space to unwind after a long night of work, for the

majority of women the dhaba remained a space of exclusion and they retreated to their homes. Mira's case illustrates how an awareness of gender differences in access to night spaces is not only about counting and mapping the number of men and women out at night, but also about understanding how women experience night spaces deemed off-limits to them.

Although the presence of men in the urban nightscape is common, just the sound of women outside at night was a source of discomfort in some neighborhoods. For example, Irene was appalled to receive the following email notice in February 2007 from her call center's administration department regarding "chitchatting ladies":

> Dear All
>
> There was a police visit today at 1.45 a.m. they have instructed that no agents will stand out side the office premises because they have received the complain[t] of chitchatting of ladies from local public. All agents are requested not to go out until they get the vehicle for drop.
>
> Regards

Just as location plays a role in determining where it is acceptable or unacceptable for women to work and hang out, especially at night, mobility determines access to paid employment. Scholars have found that some women are spatially entrapped in shorter travel journeys, to which their male counterparts are immune.[3] This disparity is linked to the responsibility placed on women to maintain the household and it limits the distance a woman can travel to work. Working at night further complicates how women experience spatial entrapment because of the danger associated with going out at night along with the expectation that a *decent* woman should not be out when it is dark.

Call center employment disrupts assumptions about *when* women are supposed to work outside the home and one theme that emerged during interviews was the role of location in taking a job. It would be expected that earning a relatively high wage in an industry that is marked as "pink-collar" would be considered a boon for women and their families. Add to this the availability of free private transport allowing women to circumvent rickshaws and public transport and surely families would support a woman's desire to pursue call center employment. This was not the case.

The night shift requirement remained a source of dismay for the family members. Manisha, a 26-year-old employee in Navi Mumbai, and Hansa, a 21-year-old employee in Ahmedabad, explained that women need approval from their family or husband, if married, in order to work in the industry. Anna, an H.R. Manager in Ahmedabad, points out that working the night shift is not the norm for single women because "society doesn't allow." Thus, during in-depth interviews, employees said that one of the ways they were able to convince their families to let them out of the house at night was because the call center was close to home. Kriti, for instance, said her parents allowed her to take this job "because it was only 15 minutes away."

RIDING THE SHUTTLE

Because the call center industry falls under the governance of the Shops and Establishments Act, it was able to avoid the provisions of the 1948 Factories Act forbidding women from working the night shift. As a result, the burgeoning demand for

night shift workers helped to create a new industry as many call centers outsourced their transport demands to local providers. However, dignity, honor, and safety issues were concerns that both the employing organization and its female workers had to address.

The availability of transport was clearly a key to bringing women into the industry. Reshma, a 23-year-old employee in Bangalore, believes that it is dangerous for women to drive cars at night and said she would not have joined the industry if transportation was not provided. The availability and type of transport itself also influenced at which call centers women preferred to work. There are two basic means of transporting employees at night. First is the pick-up/drop-off between an employee's home and the office. At Company A, this consists of vehicles carrying six to eight employees and can take upwards to two hours each way, depending on where the employee resides and whether they are one of the first or last dropped off or picked up.

A second form of transport involves a mix of individual and company strategies. Going to work, employees are required to meet at a central point and from there they are transported in private buses to the employing organization. If an employee is not at the central stop on time and misses the bus, they are responsible for getting themselves to work. On the return home, the bus again transports employees to a central stop. From there they are dispatched on four- to six-passenger shuttle vehicles scheduled to go to specific residential areas. This type of transport deters some women from seeking employment in the industry because they do not feel comfortable traveling on their own to the central stop at night or their families will not allow them to. Sunita, a 32-year-old married employee who has been in the industry for six years said, "If I had to go for a

central drop, I wouldn't have gone for this industry." She explains that she lives in a remote area and if there was a problem in the night, the neighbors would not be helpful. Although nosy neighbors are a source of harassment, for women like Sunita, their lack of support is also considered a problem.

The pick-up/drop-off is considered the highest level of transport available. For those whose families were difficult to convince about taking a call center job, they specifically looked for companies that provided this type of transport. Jyothi, a 25-year-old manager, explained that her parents would not have allowed her to work in a call center if it did not provide pick-up and drop-off transportation. Despite the preference for pick-up/drop off transport, companies are moving away from this and are only providing one-way transport in order to reduce operational expenses.

In these instances, when an employee works a 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. shift, she is picked up for her 10 p.m. shift, but is responsible for her own transport in the morning. On an 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. shift, an employee is responsible for getting to work at 8 p.m., but she is provided transport for the journey home. When explaining why Company A continued to offer pick-up/drop-off, Sameer, VP of Operations, emphasized while pointing to the floor, "I want my workers here!" Picking up employees up at their home ensures that they will reach the office on time.

Interviewees spoke of both the positive aspects as well as the challenges of traveling at night and company transport. Heena, a married 33-year-old employee, stated, "Traveling at night is much more peaceful. The daytime is crowded and polluted." This was a theme that emerged throughout the study. Despite the fact that the nightscape was

often constructed as a space of danger, in many instances, it was actually viewed as quiet and calm.

Numerous employees reported that company transport was faster than public transport. However, it was also reported that various waiting times and the order in which a worker is picked up and dropped off sometimes made the journey and the workday much longer. Devaki lives about two kilometers from her office, and when she worked the 6:30 p.m. to 2:30 a.m. shift it would take approximately 15 minutes to get home. However, her shift recently changed to 5:30 p.m. to 2:30 a.m. Due to changes in the transport schedule, she often waits upwards of two hours to get a ride home and does not reach her house till 4:30 a.m. Despite being only two kilometers away from home, what used to be a nine-hour workday including transport to and from work is now upwards of 12 hours, and the long hours were affecting her sleep.

Dipti, a 25-year-old employee at Company A, said that another challenge is that some workers are slow to leave their house and the rest of the passengers end up waiting for them. In addition, the order of pick-up will affect the transport time. The last in–first out (LiFo) pickup scenario is considered the best option: during the home to work journey, the employee who is the last one picked up will be the first one dropped off. Dipti originally had this scenario and said that her travel time to work was one hour. However, it recently changed and the same journey now takes one hour and 45 minutes. Expressing frustration at employees who were running late during shuttle pick-up and creating delays, she explained that one has to be aggressive in dealing with fellow passengers and stated, “I dominate my vehicle!” More formally, Company A, in response

to such complaints, implemented a policy in which the vehicle waits for five minutes and then leaves, with or without the worker.

In another example, Nina said she is the first employee picked up from home for her call center position in Bangalore. With traffic and the waiting time of picking up coworkers, the journey takes one-and-a-half hours. In contrast, when she comes home at night, the same journey is 34 minutes. In addition to the transport time, interviewees reported that the work day is elongated beyond the set eight- to nine-hour shift because some companies require employees to be on the worksite a half-hour prior to their shift, and then they have to wait another half-hour after their shift to get a ride home because of meetings with team leaders and/or phone calls that run over their shift end time.

SAFETY ON THE SHUTTLE

Regarding passenger safety, Daksha pointed out, “We don’t stuff people in a vehicle.” During a focus group of eight participants, there was a concern about passenger safety because of accidents caused by reckless drivers. During in-depth interviews, six participants also made a point of this. Of the 42 employees interviewed in Mumbai who took shuttle transport, three had been in accidents. Denise, a 23-year-old former employee, said:

> …these drivers are reckless, like really bad at [CYC Corp]. In the car I was in an accident and I had a lot of friends who came across accidents. They drive really fast, but it’s because of pressure that is put on them also. I know of about four accidents that have taken place…at the time I was in an accident it was totally our fault. It was a rickshaw so not much damage was done. The rickshaw was totally smashed, but we didn't get that banged because we were in a car.

Drivers were purported to be reckless because they are under tight timelines for transporting employees. In another case, Michelle explained that on a company transport to her call center in Andheri, their vehicle was hit by a van. She was thrown from the back seat to the front and injured her hand. She was sent home that day, went for an x-Ray the next day, and had to be back at work that night. Despite not being well, she was only given one day off because the call center was short-staffed. She said, “Even if you are sick, you have to go and do your work.”

Purvi recalled that she was in a rickshaw accident on her way to work. She was not on a company transport because it was the start of her shift and her company only provides transport one way after 10 p.m. The accident put her out of work for one month. The company paid her medical bills, but she was not paid leave because she was a new hire. During interviews in Ahmedabad, no accidents were disclosed and during interviews in Bangalore, one out of 11 interviewees reported an accident. Nina, a 35-year-old employee in Bangalore, had been in an accident. She contends that while rash driving does not happen very often, the driver fell asleep at the wheel on this instance. Both of her legs were injured, although she is fine now. The driver now walks with a limp.

Accidents on the road are an issue worthy of concern. At the same time, the discussion surrounding reckless drivers and accidents did not appear throughout the interviews. Instead of interviewees presenting this as a problem that was rampant throughout the industry, it was limited to specific companies with inadequate practices surrounding worker safety and transport. Interestingly, the two companies whose

employees referred to them as having problems with reckless driving were the same companies that employees at other firms cited as the place to work in terms of prestige, pay, and working conditions. In fact, one of the companies is on NASSCOM's top ten third-party call center list.[4]

Safety on the shuttle is not only isolated to the "recklessness" of the driver, but also to the belief that drivers pose a threat to women's safety in the form of sexual harassment. Thus, concerns about female passenger safety were also addressed by having a security guard onboard the vehicles. At Company A, for example, if all the employees on the transport are female, then, in addition to the driver, a security guard is onboard. If one of the employees is a male, then a security guard is not required, but the male employee is the last one dropped off. Employees from other companies reported having the same policy. In companies where this was not a required policy, some men took it upon themselves to do this. For instance, at Webco Corp in Ahmedabad, Daksha, the H.R. executive assistant, explained that at her company there is no policy that requires men be the last ones dropped if a woman is in the shuttle. Instead, she explains that men do it out of courtesy.

Despite various policies on how women are to be protected when they travel at night, according to some interviewees, policy is not always practiced. Devaki, the 21-year-old employee, said, "At times there are a few females in the vehicle and no males." Kriti said that two to three times a month she is the last one dropped without a security guard.

Company A, where this occurred, was not aware of these two incidents. In Devaki's case, she did not complain because she was not uncomfortable being the only woman in the vehicle. Although Kriti also did not complain about being the last one dropped off, she recalled that one night, at 4:30 a.m., she was the only one who had to leave for her neighborhood. Refusing to go alone, she reported this predicament to her team leader and he arranged for three men in her department to accompany her and then return to the office.

The policy of having a security guard onboard the vehicles that contain only women stemmed from concerns about harassment in terms of men who are out at night seeing a car full of women and to the transport drivers themselves. One interviewee, Denise, described driver harassment in the form of him "trying to chat me up." On one hand, it was believed that drivers are more likely to be lecherous because they are of a lower class. Purvi also contended that women bring harassment onto themselves because of the way they dress, whereas, "If you hide yourself, driver will not see." On the other hand, it was also believed that drivers will not dare to harass female call center employees because they are understood to be of a higher class. From this perspective, class is a buffer that regulates sexual harassment because drivers would receive far more attention and scrutiny for bad behavior towards a so-called "decent woman" than if they treated a woman of their own class in the same fashion, particularly if she was a sex worker.

In closing, the idea of having one man (e.g., security guard or fellow employee) onboard a confined space to protect women from another man (e.g., driver), is an

example of patriarchal regimes of protection in which it is believed that adding more men—the perpetrators of the problem to begin with—will protect women's bodies and reputations from harm. Similar to rickshaws, trains, and public and private buses, there were no female drivers to service company transport. The informal policing of men by men not only attests to male power, but also to the curtailment of male power, albeit by men. The assumption in keeping more than one man on the shuttle until all women are off is that men will police each other. Yet this by no means guarantees women's safety. From groups of men who engage in eve-teasing to gang rape, expecting men to be a self-surveilling force on the behavior of other men is not always a protective force in women's lives, especially when it is believed that a woman is behaving in ways that mark her as "asking for it."

RAPE AND CAPITAL PENETRATION

When I spoke of my interest in call center employment in relation to women's safety in the urban nightscape, a few respondents brought up the Bangalore rape case. On December 13, 2005, Pratibha Srikanth Murthy, a 24-year-old employee of Hewlett Packard, was raped and murdered en-route to her call center position in Bangalore. This case garnered worldwide media attention. Scrutiny emerged in relation to Hewlett Packard's role in the crime because Murthy was murdered by a man posing as her company's transport provider.

Call centers in India offer transportation to their employees because: (1) there is no reliable transport in place during the night; and (2) providing transport is a key to recruiting employees, particularly women.[5] Nilesh, the industry consultant who helped to launch a call center in Mumbai and Gurgaon, said, "We ended up becoming our own bus company." In doing this they were also expected to secure the safety of employees during the journey. The cost of this service is far from negligible. Linda, the American executive, pointed out that transport is one of the top three expenses for call center operations, the other two being labor and IT infrastructure.

In relation to the Herman and Chomsky term *worthy and unworthy victims*, I became interested in the fervor and media attention given to the rape and murder of one woman in Bangalore versus the rape and murder of hundreds of women working in the maquilas of Mexico.[6-7] Beginning in the 1990s, a spate of brutal murders and rapes occurred in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. In fact, the homicide rate for women in Chihuahua quadrupled during the emergence of its maquila industry in the 1990s.[8] As of 2007, hundreds of women remain missing and approximately 300 women have been found murdered and mutilated.[9] According to Thompson, "…their bodies [were] tossed like garbage in the desert. All along the border, the land, the water and the air are thick with industrial and human waste."[10]

When I posed this issue to scholars who focus on labor issues related to class and globalization, they said that the Murthy case received attention because call center employment is considered middle-class while maquila employment is viewed as working-class. In essence, sewing clothes in a factory is considered working-class,

whereas speaking English and taking on an American identity is viewed as closer to middle-class, or at least represents how Indians are gaining ground in the global value chain.

Murthy's death was deemed *worthy* of outrage because she was working in a *proper* (i.e., middle-class) job where such violence is not supposed to happen. It is generally expected that middle-class jobs will be safe (codeword for dignified and honorable) for women. Wright, in contrast, finds that violence towards working class women is normalized to a certain extent.[11] Viewed as one of the hazards of working among "those kinds of people," acts of violence, harassment, and degradation become constructed as part of a maquila woman's livelihood. She also found that third world workers who refute the perception that they are disposable are labeled as being abnormal and out of place.

In addition, Murthy's murder occurred within an industry that is a catalyst of the "India Emerging" discourse.[12] Women such as Murthy are supposed to exemplify how economic globalization has the potential to propel developing nations such as India out of poverty and thus contribute to the rise of the middle class, a key market for the U.S. companies. It's certainly not supposed to lead to their rape and murder, especially considering that, in some cases, they represent the future customer base of some of the very companies for which they work.

By associating call center employment with the middle-class and wanting them to work all night—in contrast to *proper* day shifts—this industry also disrupted the timescape standard that middle-class status is supposed to bestow on individuals. In other

words, it is one thing when a poor person works all night, quite another when the middle-class person does. In order to mitigate this, companies are expected to provide a good working environment and make securing the safety of workers in the nightscape a priority. Providing transport is also a means to deflect the perception that call centers are nothing more than IT sweatshops where cyber-coolies work the night away: surely a sweatshop wouldn't be nice enough to transport its workers in private vehicles.

Rather than taking a hands-off approach to Murthy's demise, the industry responded by implementing various protective measures to prevent this from happening in the future. In Mumbai, this incident had a ripple effect on the industry and, specific to transport, a few women spoke of going to work "before and after Bangalore." Kriti explained that she was never keen on being the first woman picked up on the home-to-work journey. However, prior to the Bangalore rape case she did not express her discomfort to her employer. Afterwards, she informed her team leader that she wanted to be the second person "on the pick-up" because the usually bustling market area they pass during the night is closed. Driving through an area where no one is around, and with only her and the driver in the vehicle, was a source of anxiety for Kriti. In addition, when being dropped late at night, she requested the driver wait five minutes until she was inside her building.

Although some of the drivers at Company A were switched out for more professional drivers, little changed in its actual policy as both employees and managers pointed out that they already had secure processes in place. At other companies, there were drastic shifts. New policies were adopted, such as that a woman not be the last one

dropped home and a security guard be onboard vehicles that have no male employees. Other policies included: (1) every 20 minutes the company calls to see if a woman has reached home or where she is; (2) women are forbidden from sitting in the front seat; (3) employees have to sign in before getting in a shuttle and when getting out; (4) employees are provided with the cell number of both the driver and transport manager; and (5) if the vehicle is more than five minutes late in coming to the office, the transport manager contacts the driver.

Despite the uproar surrounding this case, only two women I interviewed in Mumbai referenced it during discussions about safety, violence, and harassment. It was not presented as the "hot topic" amongst the participants of this study. Some employees also believed the case was blown out of proportion. Amish, the industry consultant, said, "Women get raped in college. Does that mean we should not send them to school?" Ashim Ahluwalia, director of the 2005 call center documentary, *John and Jane*, thought that the Bangalore rape case was being used as an excuse to again prohibit women from going out at night. He also pointed out that if a woman was ever found to be working in a call center and working as a call girl at the same time that would be used as an excuse to further drive women out of the industry. Parents, after all, would not want their daughters associated with an industry that is linked to sex work.

There are numerous reasons why the industry responded the way it did, ranging from how worker safety might affect future IT policy in India to anxiety that down-playing this incident would give the impression that global companies do not care about India's middle-class. The industry response to this matter was swift because they did not

want to risk losing a section of the labor pool, namely women, because families would refuse to let them out at night. For instance, during a call center workshop my colleague Mathangi Krishnamurthy and I held during the November 17-18, 2006, Women Run ICT Enterprises Conference, Parul, a 40-something participant, said that after the Bangalore rape case she forced her daughter to quit her call center position in Chennai out of concern for her safety.

Given the shortage of qualified workers that some companies face, workers are in high demand.[13] Although men's participation in the industry is significant—in part due to the relatively high wages combined with a night shift requirement which is less of a contentious issue for them—the recruitment of women is vital to the continued growth of the industry. Unlike their maquila counterparts who are deemed disposable and replaceable, Gopal, an industry consultant, said that concern for women's safety was a matter of economics: companies need to be perceived as a safe place to work so that they can attract and retain employees.

Class dynamics indeed informed how the Bangalore rape case was received in society. I also contend that this case demonstrates how gender is infused in geopolitical relations and reflects the friction that emerges in the power play between nationalism and globalization. My argument is based on the premise that rape operates under the rubric of perceiving a woman's body as property to be seized. In general, rape is considered an act of violence on one's private, bodily space, or private property in the framework of a woman "belonging" to her husband or family.[14] This perception is destabilized as violence against women slowly becomes more public in nature. In terms of geo-political

relations, Hyndman contends that women's bodies are transforming into a "public site of violence on which constructions of the nation and its boundaries take place…."[15] In making this statement, she points to the June 1996 International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in which rape, for the first time, was prosecuted as a weapon of war and a "crime against humanity."[16]

Although India is not in the middle of war, the politics surrounding the worldwide media attention given to the Bangalore rape case reflect what some historians and feminists consider to be a framework in which the Indian female body is considered to be a representation of nation-state (e.g., Mother India) and "intrusions" from outside the boundary of the nation-state, such as globalization or colonialism, are represented as masculine.[17-18] From this perspective, women become the bodily sites upon which the virtues of the nation-state are to be asserted in opposition to the polluting forces of globalization.

Oza finds that by linking gender to the nation, different groups in India formulate a critique for or against globalization.[19] Drawing from the debate surrounding the Miss World Pageant held in India, she illustrates how opponents constructed the nation as a symbol of desexualized motherhood that had to be protected from the polluting forces of globalization. In this case, resistance to globalization is based on a re-inscription of control and suppression of women's sexuality.[20] Alternatively, proponents in her study argued that the pageant demonstrated to the world that India is an advanced, liberal nation. Yet even within this framework, the pageant used raising funds for children's causes as a means to detract opponents. By linking contestants to motherhood and

compassion, women's sexuality was performed within acceptable boundaries. According to Oza "women's bodies and sexualities became the material and discursive sites where nation was performed, values were contested, and border and boundaries were policed and controlled."[21]

The demand for female night shift workers disrupted notions of a woman's traditional place at home. Similar to Oza's research on the ways in which women's bodies are used as a site of proclamations for or against globalization, the Bangalore rape case provided a specter for the night shift debate. This is not to belittle the importance and outrage worthy of such a crime, but instead to consider why the global corporation received so much attention when rape occurs at all levels of society.[22]

If Murthy's Hewlett Packard call center position in India took place during 9-to-5 work hours, and she was raped and murdered on her way to work, it is quite possible that this crime would not have received worldwide media attention. Companies such as Hewlett Packard would not become intertwined with issues of rape and murder because conducting business during the daytime places the onus of public safety and security during the home to work journey on the individual and the local government, not the global corporation.

Opponents of the call center industry use Murthy's death as a platform to decry the hazards of the industry, particularly as it relates to the well-being of women. In this context, the Bangalore rape case operated under the rubric of women representing the identity and morals of a nation-state, which must be "protected." It also reflects how the stakeholders use women's bodies, when it's to their advantage, to critique what Gibson-

Graham terms the "penetration of capital" script. This script frames workers as rape victims who are powerless to the dominant forces of multinational corporations and, instead, Gibson-Graham urges us to consider ways of "making globalization lose its erection."[23]

NATIONALISM

When I presented the section on Rape and Capital Penetration to the South Asia Institute in April 2007, it was suggested that interpreting the bodies of middle-class women as a site upon which national anxieties are played out is a weak argument because unlike previous eras, such as the early and mid nineteenth century, the "women's question" was no longer front and center in the national agenda. Instead, the focus is on IT and economic development, nuclear arms, terrorism, and ongoing strife with Pakistan. The real situation, however, is more complex as gendered discourses disguise themselves in subtle and nuanced ways.

During colonial times, for example, there was a decline in the attention given to the "women's question" in Indian nationalist discourse. The assumption was that this decline occurred because other issues, such as sovereignty, became more important. Chatterjee offers an alternative understanding on why the status of women received less attention:[24]

> The reason lies in nationalism's success in situating the "women's question" in an inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state. The inner domain of national culture was constituted in light of the discovery of "tradition."

Put another way, the "woman's question" did not merely fade away. Instead it was re-situated from a public concern (e.g., politics) to a private concern (e.g., tradition) within the nationalist movement. Women became the bodily site for advocating a return to the "good ole days" of pre-colonial tradition and culture.

Fast forward to twenty-first century India, and one can witness a backlash to the "India Emerging" developments. The liberalization of the economy in combination with the rise of the Shiv Sena—a conservative Hindu right wing group founded in the 1960s by Bal Thackrey—has created a dramatic shift in Mumbai's economic and political scene. Economic liberalization has propelled the material and commercial wealth of this city. From shopping malls to upscale movie theatres, middle- and upper-class Mumbaikars are accessing new forms of recreation and entertainment on which to spend their money.

At the same time, the Shiv Sena's conservative political front has gained ground as it seeks to assert its xenophobic vision of the city, particularly as it relates to ridding the city of Muslims. By 1992 this conflict reached a boiling point that turned Mumbai into a riot zone. In 2006, concerns about another riot emerged when a statue of Thackrey's wife was desecrated. I was in Ahmedabad at the time and told not to return to Mumbai until order was restored because it was dangerous to be out. The fear of riots shut down many parts of the city because people were afraid to leave their homes. In addition to looting, a number of cars and a train were burned. In the midst of these competing events, Mumbai has become more conservative and anti-outsider.[25]

During these events, the livelihoods of middle-class women were certainly not considered important. Inspired by Chatterjee's work, I contend that it's not because the "women's question" became less important in nationalist discourse.[26] Instead, it enters through various backdoors and constitutes a backlash that is fueled in subtle, but compelling ways. Consider, for instance, how it is expected that women will continue to maintain and reproduce some of the ideals embedded in nationalism, such as family values. Under the rubric of family values, women are expected to put family first, even at the expense of their own dreams and goals. As some women gain increased access to the paid labor force, anxiety emerges about such women becoming too "bold" and not being "a family person."

One of the backdoors used to quell such anxiety is academia. In 2003, the University Grants Commission in India renamed all Women's Studies departments to Women and Family Studies. Although this may not appear as an overt move to oppress women, Raju found that this was a means to reconnect women back to the sphere of domesticity.[27] Linking women back to the household in the midst of angst about their place in society, particularly as it relates to their iconic status (e.g., Mother India) and their role in nationalist movements, is not new. Consider, for instance, the emergence of Home Science education in India during the 1920s and 1930s.[28] This type of education was a means to increase the respectability of middle-class women and their worth in areas such as arranged marriage. In the nationalist discourse, however, it also served as an apolitical channel for addressing feminist concerns such as access to education while simultaneously not disrupting the belief that a woman's primary focus must be her home.

When the highest echelons of education co-opt such a message, it reinforces an ideology that no matter how far a woman goes, her place, her existence, must remain connected to domesticity. It also reflects the underlying ways that even when women physically step outside the domestic space, whether to work, hang out, or shop, they remain tethered to it.

WRAP-UP

On one hand, India's position as a key player having a labor pool capable of providing global services addresses national concerns related to economic development. On the other, the "colonization of time" embedded in this particular type of development intersects with anxieties about women losing touch with traditional family values, particularly as they relate to going out at night and sexual impropriety.[29]

Reaction to such concern is not necessarily addressed in an overt manner, such as legally forbidding a women's right to abortion or placing curfews on how late they can be out at night. Instead, anxieties about women "getting ahead" are manufactured through narratives about how dangerous it is for them to be out at night. They are also produced through performances such as the choreographing of who gets on and off a shuttle van, where, and in what order. And when it takes women such as Devaki more than two hours to get home—despite living only two kilometers from work and despite the rickshaws available outside her building to take her home—it speaks volumes about how some women experience temporal constriction in their lives.

Under the guise of protecting them from "those types of men" lurking in the darkness, women are rendered immobile relative to their male counterparts. As illustrated by the experiences of women who contributed to this chapter, these narratives become mobilized in ways that subject women to strict regimes of surveillance, in spite of the fact that night shift employment disrupts notions of a woman's "place" and re-codifies individual temporal mobility. Although they break new ground by staying out all night, their safety—a code word for their reputation—is kept by segregating themselves, via company transport, from the other women of the night such as bar dancers and call girls. Their safety and reputation (e.g., being a good girl) is also protected through the presence of a male security guard or male employees who serve as their escorts during the night.

In this chapter, I have argued that the attention that companies pay to women's safety needs during the journey to and from work is dictated by class expectations. Middle-class women are viewed as worthy of protection whereas working class women are not. This differential is illustrated in how the murders of working-class maquila employees in Mexico went ignored for years while the rape and murder of one middle-class call center employee in Bangalore received immediate widespread attention. Call centers in Bangalore and Mumbai responded swiftly by instituting varying forms of protection. These include company rules that do not allow women to sit in the front seat of a vehicle—for fear of a lecherous driver—and monitor the whereabouts of vehicles on a regular basis. The end result is a society that monitors and protects some of its women. However, this protection is had at the price of continuing to expect these same women to mind their place.

Chapter 5: Fast Money, Family Survival, and the Consumer Class: The Effects of Call Center Employment on Economic Mobility

> You can make out they are working in call centre by their dressing style. The youth today have got style, smile, and mobile.
>
> *– Father John, 37 year old Catholic priest*

Fast money. This is the term used to describe the income from call center employment. However, during interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, a more nuanced understanding of how this "fast money" actually relates to family survival and consumerism emerged. This chapter investigates the various reasons women pursue employment in an industry that, on one hand, provides them with a relatively high level of income, while on the other hand marks them as fast, loose, not smart enough to get a *real* job, and occasionally makes them the target of remarks such as "That poor girl. Her family doesn't have enough money, so they have to send her out late at night."

Throughout this chapter, I argue that one fact is clear: the economic mobility that results from call center employment is a key driving force in why women choose to work in this industry. Time and again employees stated, "I cannot make this money in another industry." Simultaneously, call center employment is often defined as a stop-gap job or temporary employment while on the way to a better career, higher education, or marriage.[1]

Examining call center employment beyond simplistic notions of fast money and stop-gap employment provides a more complex understanding of what draws women to this industry and what can keep them there well beyond the one- to two-year time frame

that executives such as Linda label “a good run” in regard to employee retention. The experiences of the women I discuss here demonstrate how financial stability and upward economic mobility intersect with women’s lives in unexpected ways. Surely, the income call center employment represents both empowerment and exploitation.

WHY WORK FOR A CALL CENTER?

Why would someone work for a call center given the night shift requirement, job-stress, health concerns such as sleep disorders and digestive problems, and the underlying social disdain for the industry? This section examines the myriad of reasons why women join an industry despite stereotypes that call center employment requires little skill or intelligence and where the “fast money” is by no means easy.[2] I identified six key themes and will discuss them in the order of frequency in which they were brought up : (1) Family survival; (2) Because I want to!; (3) Money for spending, saving, and venture capital; (4) The great escape; and (5) The single woman’s life.[3]

Family Survival

Dependence on women to maintain the economic livelihood of their family and community represents what Sassen terms the *feminization of survival*.[4] Despite the discourse on call center income as an agent fueling the emergence of the consumer class, there is a push-pull in terms of how women experience the economic mobility it provides.

Some are certainly able to use their income to start a business or travel extensively. For many women, however, call center employment provides the means to keep their families fed and clothed and protects them from economic disaster along with the ensuing drop in class status such disaster would bring.

In particular, call center employment allowed two single women in this study to be the sole supporters of themselves and their widowed mothers. Manisha, the 26-year-old employee, was able to purchase the flat where she and her mother live.[5] Similarly, Elizabeth, a 24-year-old senior customer service representative, supports her mother, Ms. George. Elizabeth's father passed away when she was a child and Ms. George struggled for years to raise her two children on a teacher's salary.

After two interviews with Elizabeth at Company A, I was invited to interview Ms. George at their 2-bedroom flat in Navi Mumbai. During a discussion about household expenses, Ms. George explained that their monthly maintenance fee and electricity bill cost approximately 3000rs (US$67) per month. Without Elizabeth's income—approximately 24,000rs (US$532) per month after deductions—Ms. George would be destitute; teacher's pension pays only 1,200rs (US$27) per month. Before Elizabeth went to work at the call center, money had been a source of acute tension and stress for her. In addition to the basic living expenses that she was barely able to meet, Ms. George had more than 35,000rs (US$776) in outstanding property taxes that she was unable to pay. At the time of our interview, Elizabeth's income not only supported them, but it was also being used to pay down their outstanding debts.

In contrast to the spendthrift stereotype of call center employees, Elizabeth and Ms. George's livelihood was carefully budgeted. They did not eat out, Elizabeth did not purchase branded clothes or the latest fashions, and neither of them took vacations. At the same time, there were clear improvements. Instead of going to the market, Elizabeth described how they purchased vegetables and other household provisions at the CenterOne Mall in Vashi. Elizabeth pointed out that this is a step up because the mall is cleaner and the produce is a better quality. Ms. George said, "There are lots of changes. Since she's started working means, all my tension and problems, solved, like. I can bear the out-going [going out and expenses], because in pension…umm…1200 [rupees] nothing could be done."

Ms. George beamed with pride when she spoke of her daughter's ability and willingness to take financial responsibility for the household. However, she also expressed remorse that their financial situation does not provide Elizabeth the opportunity to pursue her dreams. When asked on three separate occasions what some of the positive aspects of call center employment are, her responses were negative:

> REENA: What have been the positive impacts for both you and Elizabeth of her working in a call centre, working in the night shift?
>
> MS. GEORGE: Night shifts means when she works, I feel lonely like, in the night staying back. I don't get sleep. Keep waiting when she'll be back (*laughs*)…. Just waiting. Sitting at the window….I don't get sleep. When she is there then, I feel relaxed, when she is at home.
>
> REENA: So one of the downsides is that loneliness, not having your daughter around. What're some of the good things, you think about, in terms of Elizabeth working at these night shifts. Or is there anything good?

MS. GEORGE: Good about her means she is only her job and her home and nothing else firstly. I don't like.

REENA: So what about some of the good things? Any opinions you have, do you want Elizabeth working in a call centre?

MS. GEORGE: *(sigh)* At present like, since, because of, she has to run the house, that is why…there's no one else no. Otherwise, I don't want my daughter to work actually.

REENA: And what do you rather her be doing?

MS. GEORGE: I wanted her to do whatever, means, her wishes were like she wanted to do some further education she wanted to continue. Then she says, "I want to become bigger, study abroad there and earn so much for you and make a house of my own."

Although call center employment provides the income necessary to support the household, Ms. George was clear about the ways in which it negatively affected her daughter's life. It kept her out at night, restricted her options, and forced her to forego higher education. In contrast to Elizabeth's assertion that she worked in a call center because she wanted to, her mother defined it as the choice where there is no equal or better alternative. The most Elizabeth could earn outside this industry is approximately 3,000rs to 5,000rs (US$67 to US$111) per month. Furthermore, employees know other businesses do not equate call center employment with job experience and they would have to start at entry-level again if they left the industry. In this context, call center employment is a site of both constriction (i.e., reduced entry into other industries) and opening (i.e., high wages).

Ms. George's concern about her daughter's life being only about work was not an isolated response. This theme surfaced throughout the study. Denise, the former employee, explained that her parents hated call center employment more than she did.

Her mother, Ms. Paul, a woman in her fifties, provided the following reasons why she did not want Denise working in a call center:

> Because the timings are very, very irregular. There were no fixed timings. And no proper sleep. The only thing she used to do when she was in a call center was go to work, come home, eat and sleep, get up, get dressed and go to work. That was the only thing she used to do!

As Ms. Paul watched her daughter's life transform from day to night, she was clearly unhappy with the shift. Yet her willingness to accept her daughter's decision is understandable when she recalled the constraints she endured in her lifetime:

> When I think in terms of my father, he would have a fit if I thought of working at night. He would really have a fit. He wouldn't let me, my father belonged to the old school and wouldn't let me do anything besides become a teacher, but nowadays we give them freedom to choose what they want to do and every girl works on shifts.

For single mothers such as Nivedita, a 25-year-old employee who has been in the industry for four months, working the night shift has provided a means to support her five-year-old daughter and maintain her autonomy. Nivedita is experiencing bad times financially because she is in the middle of a messy divorce from her husband, who has money but refuses to support their daughter.[6] Despite the relatively high wages, she explained that her mother's primary response to her job, particularly the night shift requirement, was, "What will people think?" Nivedita lives alone and her parents reside in Mahableshwar approximately six hours away from Mumbai. Given her twelfth standard education with only a few correspondence classes in psychology, the 10,000rs to 14,000rs (US$222 to US$310) starting salary at Company A is well above her previous job. With her call center income, Nivedita rented a small flat and hired a full-time maid, whom she described as "old and from the village," to care for her daughter.

In contrast, Mina, the 18-year-old employee who was harassed by neighbors for going out at night, lives with her younger sister and mother. Her parents are in the middle of a divorce and her father lives in Saudi Arabia. She cited three key reasons for taking this job: (1) help her mother pay bills and the housing loan; (2) provide support for her younger sister; and (3) fund her college education. She said she didn't want her parents, in particular her mother, to bear the burden of educating her.

When asked about her family's response to call center employment, she stated that her mother did not react. Her father initially objected to her working the night shift and commented that "a girl might get spoiled if earning her own money in college" but he eventually came around. Concerns about women becoming *spoiled* from earning their own income parallel attitudes towards women who defy gendered notions of place and space, be it going out at night or entering a Hindu temple during their menstrual cycle. Physical descriptions such as spoiled, devalued, and polluted are part of the backlash women face when they challenge traditional notions of their societal place. [7]

Call center employment income also intersects with pay scales formerly the domain of white-collar professions. Nisha currently works for a top three call center in Mindspace. During our initial interview in May 2006, she explained that when she started working approximately 18 months before, the starting salary at her company was 11,000rs (US$244) per month. Every six months there was an appraisal that ultimately brought her current monthly salary to 20,000rs (US$443) per month. In addition, she received a 25,000rs (US$554) bonus. She explained that the starting salary for new employees is now 15,000rs (US$333) per month. Nisha's mother, a housewife, also

participated in the interview. She commented that her brothers—one an architect and the other an engineer—earn similar salaries. Nisha has an Arts Degree from Bombay University, but she earns an income that is on par with her uncles who spent years studying. This represents a dramatic shift in the salaries available to young people who are fluent in English.

In a follow-up interview six months later, I learned that Nisha's father died unexpectedly, leaving this middle-class family in turmoil. During our initial interview, Nisha explained that her family did not rely on her income for the maintenance of the household. This changed with the passing of her father. Nisha resides in a joint family living arrangement consisting of 12 individuals living between two flats. Nisha now gives money to her mother as well as her elder cousin. In addition, she has fixed monthly expenses such as her mobile phone and transportation to work because her company only provides a one-way transport. After outlining her key expenses below, she contended that the "big money" associated with call center employment really isn't.

Money to elder cousin	6,000rs (US$133)
Money to mother	5,000rs (US$111)
Transport Charges	800rs (US$18)
Cell Phone Charges	1,000rs to1,500rs (US$22 to US$33)

Despite the perception that call center employment provides its workers enough money to hang out at the latest discotheque, drink all night, and party till dawn, Nisha argued that this is not the case for those whose families depend on their income.

Amish, the industry consultant, pointed out that "People will now pay 100 bucks [US$2] for a film, which five years ago was unheard of." Such was the case with Shivani, a 22-year-old employee, who said that she can now afford to go to movies once a week

whereas before she went once in six months. The disposable income left over for women such as Nisha, however, is minimal when the increasing cost of entertainment in the city is combined with supporting a parent over the long-term. Instead of leap-frogging into a higher income or class strata, the income from call employment simply allows Nisha's family to stay afloat.[8] However, her ability to contribute to the family unit speaks volumes in a society where there is little in the way of catching those who fall onto hard times. Instead of being viewed as a financial drain on the household, in the form of practices such as dowry, Nisha's case demonstrates how some women contribute to the economic sustenance of their families in ways that were previously unavailable to them.

Outside the family unit, provisions such as social security, welfare, unemployment, and Medicare are non-existent for the majority of the population. Given such constraints, every bit helps. The economic mobility associated with call centers does provide some women the opportunity to migrate to urban IT hubs. The income from this emerging migration trend not only reshapes the lives of the worker's family, but interviewees also spoke of the confidence and independence they gained from moving to new cities.

Born and raised in Jabalpur, capital of Madya Pradesh, Anita and her older sister made the 20-hour bus journey to Mumbai to work in the call center industry. Since migrating almost two years ago, Anita, now 21 years old, has worked at three different call centers. Both she and her 22-year-old sister were able to secure employment and a temporary place to live prior to arriving in Mumbai. As discussed in chapter 2, the

growing demand for 24/7 workers has led some companies to recruit workers from distant towns such as Jabalpur and provide dormitory housing upon arrival.

When Anita was a child, her father passed away unexpectedly and her mother was left with five young children to raise. Anita recalled that they went from being a middle-class family to a poor family. Often, her mother could not afford to buy clothes for them to wear. Anita's call center income has since improved the impoverished status of her family.

Her first job at TYJ Corporation paid 10,000rs (US$222) per month, which she termed, "a lot of money." Anita's salary steadily increased over the next two years and she provided me with the following breakdown of her income:

80% to mother
10% savings
10% living expenses

Sending 80 percent of her income to her mother is a source of pride for Anita. She views her two younger brothers as her responsibility and the money helps to support them. During the interview, she reminisced that as a child she couldn't afford the dresses her friends had and the feelings of shame and inferiority this gave her. She said that now, "It feels good because I can afford to buy for my mom, brother, and sisters."

Despite the fact that call center income improved her family's livelihood, Anita's mother was completely against the idea. Anita explained that it was her uncle who convinced the family to send them to Mumbai because he wanted them to have the opportunity "to know the world." Their move was a source of angst in the household. For two young women to move to a distant city, particularly fast-paced Mumbai, with no

male counterpart and work the night shift was unprecedented in her family. In addition, prior to joining the call center industry, Anita was never allowed to leave the house past 7 p.m. While call center employment clearly improved the life of Anita's family and she likes that she can now go out at 9 or 10 p.m. without facing family restrictions, the transition to Mumbai has not been easy. With tears in her eyes, Anita said she felt grief because she had not seen her mom in more than eight months.

The individuals who contributed to this section are clearly varied. Nisha's story illustrates how call center employment can provide a financial net to hold a family together when a breadwinner passes on. Anita's childhood, in contrast, illustrates what happens to a widowed mother and her children when there is no financial net between middle-class and poor. In between middle-class and poor, Nivedita's story shows how the breakdown of a marriage leaves some women to bear the responsibility of raising a child alone. In her situation, working the night shift allowed her to maintain a sense of personal dignity and autonomy despite perceptions of "that poor girl, her husband doesn't want her."

In India, the desire for boy children remains firmly entrenched because they are perceived as "social security" for parents while girls are expected to marry and leave the home.[9] Elizabeth and Manisha defy this expectation. Their cases illustrate the contribution women make to the support of their parents, particularly widowed mothers, who continue to be subjected to a second-class status relative to that of widowed fathers.[10]

For women such as Anita who don't have the economic means to pursue higher education or other job opportunities, call center employment is arguably the most viable alternative. However, defining Anita as "that poor girl, she had to move to Mumbai to support her family" is problematic. It places women like her who support their family as primarily a bodily site of capital accumulation.[11] It does not give enough consideration to the depth of their journeys. Nor does it provide an understanding of the sense of accomplishment women experience when they re-script gender roles—consciously or not—in the family unit. Instead of such women being viewed as pioneering spirits traversing new lands and breaking through traditional constraints governing a woman's place, they are presented as migrating because they have to.

Because I Want To!

When asked why she worked for a call center, Elizabeth, the 24-year-old who has been employed in the industry for three-and-a-half years, responded in exasperation, "Because I want to!" Elizabeth responds to being described as "that poor girl" with "I'm not poor!" and she is irritated by the judgment and disdain placed upon call center employees, including the idea that call center employment is not a proper job. The prevailing attitude is that salary and occupation should correspond to education. An individual with a college degree, for example, is expected to earn more money than a high school graduate. Call center employment disrupts this expectation.

Despite the high wages, however, call center employment is marked as an easy job that anyone can get because it does not come with an education requirement that is specific to the content of the job. As a result, “People who are educated don’t support you,” Elizabeth said. In contrast, she pointed out that her apartment building security guard was very excited, supportive, and interested when she told him about her job.

Elizabeth’s situation illustrates how the upward economic mobility associated with the call center industry does not necessarily bring with it respect or acceptance. This is particularly the case amongst the educated, middle, and upper classes, where the industry initially sought recruits. Despite earning a relatively high wage and supporting her widowed mother, Elizabeth and women like her do not receive support and praise for stepping up to earn the family bread. Instead, they are viewed with pity by the larger community. Underlying all of this is the night shift requirement. Working all day to support one’s family is one thing; working all night is another.

Armed with a B.Com degree, Elizabeth brings home a monthly income of approximately 24,000rs (US$532) after taxes, a salary that is on par with or higher than that of an entry level white-collar professional.[12] Women like Elizabeth not only disrupt the spatial and temporal limits placed on their gender by staying out all night, but they also undermine the notion that a woman’s income is secondary to that of the male head of household. Elizabeth, for example, has a brother who works in the call center industry. Although the traditional view is that sons take care of aging parents, her single brother was the one who left home and does not provide financial support to the household.

Unlike Elizabeth, who lives in a distant suburb of Navi Mumbai with her mother, Irene, the 32-year-old training manager, is in the middle of a divorce and lives alone. She rents a one-bedroom flat in Bandra, a suburb that is home to film stars and night clubs. When asked what keeps her in the call center industry, she cited both job satisfaction and money as the most important reasons. Similar to 19 other women in the study, Irene has familial bonds that allow her to pursue other career options. Although she does not view call center employment as a long-term career goal, Irene explains that she has stayed in the industry for five years because it challenges her and on two occasions allowed her to travel to the United States for business.

Diya, a 29-year-old employee at Webco Corp in Ahmedabad, has worked in the BPO industry for six years. Although she has the opportunity to pursue higher education with the support of her family, she has remained in the industry because of the relatively high wages. In addition, she prided herself on being the "only kid doing something different and weird," as her brother has a daytime job and her sister is a Ph.D. student. When asked to explain what constituted "different and weird," she cited the global nature of the work itself and the work hours that connected her to offshore customers.

She was also the only one in this study not to be the first woman in her family to stay out at night on a regular basis. Describing her family as very progressive, she spoke of how at one point her mother worked six hours away from where they lived and she would come home on the weekends while her grandmother took care of the home. This was considered unheard of in her mother's time. Diya also mentioned having an aunt who worked at a hospital and thus was used to night shifts.

Valerie, the 27-year-old, is a graduate of Xavier College, a premier institution in Mumbai. Her highly-prized education provided her the competitive edge needed to gain entry into one of the major advertising firms in Mumbai. To the shock of friends and family, she transitioned into the call center industry after three years in advertising. This was viewed as a step down.

Her reasons for joining a call center were not only because it pays more money, but also because she wanted more time for herself. Describing the advertising industry as very stressful, call center employment was easier in contrast because "you know what you are doing for a fixed amount of time and you can't take work home." Another reason was linked to her desire for an MBA, which the call center she works for would pay for. Valerie does, however, miss her advertising days, especially the parties her job gave her access to. Her long-term goal is to return to the advertising industry after she gets an MBA.

Anan, a 30-ish married Senior Quality Assurance Manager with two young children, does not need to work. She works out of a desire to be independent. Anan points out that while her mother worked outside the home for 58 years, she currently earns a yearly salary that took her mother 50 years to attain. For many women, as will be further demonstrated in the next chapter, the idea of independence and freedom as they envisioned it was paramount to their decision to pursue call center employment.

Money for Spending, Saving, and Venture Capital

Consumerism in India's major cities gained momentum in the mid-1990s, but exploded beginning in the twenty-first century.[13] When I asked employees how the income derived from call center employment impacted their spending habits, women whose income was not necessary for family survival pointed to their ability to shop for their family and themselves. The liberalization of the Indian economy has flooded the market with brand name fashions that were previously accessible only to those who traveled abroad or had connections abroad. For some of the women, there was a preference for branded clothes such as Guess and Tommy Hilfiger.

A few interviewees linked changes in their spending to the ways in which working the night shift changed not only their economic mobility, but their physical mobility as well. For Seema, the 24-year-old employee in Ahmedabad, working the night shift means that she "can roam around" starting at 6 to 7 p.m. and be at the office by 10 p.m., whereas before she was forbidden to go out past 8 p.m. She uses this newfound time to hang out at the mall and shop in the bazaar.

The increase in income also brought with it an increase in spending. Supporting one's family; paying tuition; buying junk food; traveling; and shopping for clothes, mobile phones, and household items were the primary areas where participants said their money was going. Although the increased income was often linked to gaining a sense of independence, Karen, a 24-year-old employee, had a different reaction. Stating that call center employment has "spoiled my life," she expressed concern about becoming more of

a spendthrift: “I’ll spend 1,000 bucks *[US$22]* in a day and think no worries because I have 40,000 *[US$887]* in the bank.”

At first I was confused by Karen’s conception of spoiled. Did she mean that her life had been ruined by her job? As we discussed it further, it became apparent that spoiled meant that life was easier because she no longer worried about *not* having enough money. Shilpa, a 38-year-old employee in Bangalore who does high-level outsourcing work for a Fortune 500 Company, did not express concern about becoming a spendthrift. Instead, she said she finally had the financial security to make major purchases such as a scooter for herself and a motorcycle for her husband. She commented, “What is 40,000rs *[US$887]*? I can buy that.”

Devaki, the 21-year-old employee, stated that compared to her coworkers, her parents placed little restriction on her mobility. Prior to joining the industry she went out two to three times per month and would be home by 2 a.m. This pattern remained the same, but with her increased disposable income, she now hangs out at more expensive venues such the Velvet Lounge in Powai’s Renaissance Hotel and Provogue Lounge in Bandra.

The private shuttle transport provided by call centers also reshaped how some women wanted to travel during their off-work hours, as they opted for more expensive forms of transport. Devaki explained that she is now spoiled by taking a private vehicle and doesn’t like to ride the public bus anymore. Kriti said that her mother asked her, “Why are you taking a rick?” Her mother expressed surprise that she was now taking rickshaws to get around and not the cheaper public transport she had used before.

And Mona comes from a family that does not require her income. She purchased her first home at the age of 23, bought a used car the following year, and takes yearly vacations. Among her colleagues at Company A, she was a role model of success in terms of how women use the income from call center employment to achieve economic independence.

In fact, a few participants used their income as a way to start up their own businesses. Of the 72 employees who participated in this project, three used the money they saved from call center employment to start their own businesses. In 2002, Anjali, then 23 years old, spent eight months working at night for a call center in Powai. She recalled sacrificing her sleep during the daytime in order to network and explore ideas for her future venture. Similar to Parvati, Anjali comes from an upper-middle-class family that does not require her to contribute financially to the family. Though not typical, her case is an interesting one. Earning 15,000rs (US$333) a month, she used her capital to start a nonprofit organization that provides entrepreneurial and leadership skills to young people as well as workshops on individuality and freedom, diversity, and the culture of democracy.

Since then, Anjali has partnered with the World Bank and the United Nations to hold workshops for young people as well as organize youth projects. During the time we met, for example, she was in the midst of putting together a globalization and identity workshop sponsored by the BBC and the British Consulate. Although she makes clear that other industries would not provide the pay package that the call centers does, she also stated, “The business is transported, the work ethic is not. The kind of hours and the

requirements beyond that is not something that developed countries would do. They push workers to do hours that they wouldn't do in the U.S." This comment reveals how some employees sense that they are held to a productivity standard that they perceive their U.S. counterparts are immune from.

Kriti also took the plunge to start her own venture. Our first interview was conducted at Company A in February 2006. In a follow-up interview at the CenterOne Mall in Vashi in October 2006, I learned she was laid off a few weeks after our initial meeting. Kriti had worked at Company A for one year and was able to secure employment with another company. However, her new company is not located in her hometown of Navi Mumbai and her commute is now an hour to an hour-and-a-half each way. During the interim phase between these two jobs, she made plans to open a boutique carrying her own clothing line. By November, Kriti was working full-time in a call center, enduring a nearly three-hour daily commute, and running her business during the day. Her goal is to leave the call center industry once her daytime venture becomes profitable.

In contrast to Anjali, Kriti joined the call center industry because her family needed the money. Since her middle-class family is economically stable again, the earning members of her nuclear family (i.e., father, brother, and herself; her mother is a housewife) pool a certain amount of their monthly income for household expenses and she is left with 15,000rs (US$333) to spend or save as she sees fit. Kriti emphasized that she enjoys working at a call center because of the work and the office environment, not just because of the money.

Anjali and Kriti's choices illustrate that the economic mobility associated with call center employment does not always transform into irresponsible spending or consumer debt, a concern voiced by critics of the industry. It's important to point out that both women come from families that did not require a large portion of their income to support a household. Additionally, they were not subject to stringent controls on how their income was to be spent. In Anjali's case this was due to her sheer force of will to move out of her parents' home at age 19 and seek her own independence. Kriti remained in the family unit and her decision to start her own company was supported by her family. Still, despite this support, the sections on marriage and living arrangements later in this dissertation will illustrate how social and family pressures continue to restrict how Kriti and other women use their economic mobility to assert their individuality.

Additionally, some participants reported that their spending and day-to-day living expenses actually decreased. Denise, the former employee, explained that the one-way pick-up provided by her company reduced her transportation expenses and taking a rickshaw home at 6:30 a.m. was cheaper because the roads were not congested. If she were to take her same route during the day, she would be stuck in traffic and the journey would be more expensive and arduous. In addition, such participants suggested that they spend less because when they have a day off or come home from a shift, they want to sleep. According to Maya, a 23-year-old employee, "Spending reduces because you do not have time to go out." Valerie, the 27-year-old employee, said that she is saving on average 4,000rs (US$89) a month because she does not have time to hang out.

Previously, she worked in advertising earning 8,000rs (US$177) a month and pointed out that “it was hardly nothing to make ends meet.”

As another example, Sariya, a married 34-year-old employee, resides in a joint household of seven people (husband, mother-in-law, father-in-law, uncle, and her two daughters, ages 4 and 10) in a two-bedroom, 700 square-foot flat. Because the household depends on her income to cover their day-to-day living expenses, the opportunity to save or spend for personal consumption is unavailable to her.

During exploratory fieldwork, I suspected that night shift employment may constitute a form of temporal entrapment.[14] By working through the night and inevitably sleeping through the day, employees become further excluded from social and economic opportunities within the larger community. Indeed, in the case of women such as Valerie, Maya, and Sariya, the temporal entrapment resulting from working all night prevents them from indulging in the spendthrift behavior that call center income has become associated with in the media and popular society.

None of the women I interviewed reported having credit card debt, a key concern among opponents of the industry. This does not mean, however, that some employees might not be mired in debt. Debt was perhaps not something an interviewee wanted to reveal since it could be a source of embarrassment, particularly given the negative perception workers currently face. But employees were forthright in discussing how they were able to place a portion of their income into savings. Of the 39 participants who discussed their finances in-depth, 24 were either the primary support of their household or gave a portion of their income to support their family. Although the relatively high

salary from call center employment allows some workers to increase their conspicuous consumption in ways that were previously beyond their reach, my observations and discussions with participant didn't reveal enough on the spending habits of workers or the level of debt they incur to make any conclusive statements. Suffice it to say that surely this was a problem for some female workers, but it was not a pervasive theme that emerged during the course of fieldwork.

The Great Escape

Though not always admitted outright during initial interviews, in follow-up interviews it emerged that call center employment also provided some participants with a legitimate reason to leave the house at night. Concerns about promiscuity and bad character were deflected by linking employment to skill acquisition. And in contrast to working as a prostitute or bar dancer, the night shift aspect of this industry is also tempered by its collegial work environment and its connection to the global economy.

With access to a new timescape, a few women reported that they "bunk off" without informing their family and use the time instead to go out with friends or meet with a boyfriend they were secretly dating. However, in terms of changing their access to the city—for example, hanging out at bars they previously wouldn't frequent or going to parts of town that were previously beyond their reach to due financial and familial constraint—more than half of the call center employees who discussed this topic did not

report experiencing such a change. Kriti explained that in her experience, night shift work makes it difficult to find time to hang out.

As I analyzed the varying responses women gave about not going out, three key factors emerged: (1) for single women, the strictness of their family made it difficult for them to get permission to leave the house; (2) for married women, their responsibility to the household in combination with working all night kept them home-bound; and (3) both sets of women were just plain exhausted from work all night[15].

Still, for those women who reported a change, all were single and either lived in families that were not particularly controlling or had the will to defy their parents and just sneak around. Mona said her current work schedule gives her about five to six hours of free time and her parents don't mind if she goes out to a disco. The income from call center employment allows her to go to pubs, movies, restaurants, and shopping on Linking Road, a popular spot in Bandra, all of which were previously out of her reach.

In terms of sneaking around, Ajay, the 20-something manager, described a female employee who called in sick. The company received a panicked call from her parents in the middle of the night because their daughter was not home when they expected. It was explained to the parents that the company didn't contact them about their daughter's whereabouts because they assumed she was at home sick. It was soon discovered that "she bunked to go out with her boyfriend." Lopa, a 22-year-old employee who has worked in the industry for four years, also uses her call center job as a means to sneak around and so far, she has not gotten caught. On days off, she will pretend to go to work and instead hang out with her girlfriends or fiancé. Similarly, Valerie spoke of how on

some days off she will pretend to go to work and instead spend the night at her boyfriend's place.

Although using call center employment as a means to get out of the house at night was a theme that emerged throughout the course of the study, employees for the most part were not forthright about how and if they used the night shift requirement to sneak around themselves. First-time interviewees, for instance, would speak of how "a friend" or "someone in their office" was caught with a boyfriend or bunked to go out with friends. Interviewees who maintained contact with me during the course of the study and even after I returned to the U.S. made it clear, however, that the night shift requirement of the industry was a draw for women who were looking for a legitimate reason to get out of the house at night.

The Single Woman's Life

A few months into this study, a theme of single women wanting to experience living on their own emerged. Indeed, call center income provided some women who don't support families a means to do so, and some of those I interviewed followed this strategy. At the same time, income from call center employment allowed some single women to experience life in a whole new way, from traveling beyond the confines of the typical family vacation to saving money to purchase their own flats. Parvati, the 25-year-old who resides in Thane, earns 20,000rs (US$443) per month working for a call center nearby her home. She is completing her Master's Degree in Political Science and is also

one of two women in this study in the telemarketing and collection side of the call center industry. While the work is harder, this area has a higher status and is stereotyped as a man's field because it requires aggression and a strong will.[16]

In contrast to the 22 women in this study whose income directly supported the family unit, Parvati did not connect her work to family survival, confidence building, or skill acquisition. Nor does she use her money to buy branded clothes or the latest mobile phone, a chief complaint from opponents of the industry. Instead, Parvati takes monthly vacations. From the temples of Hampi in South India to various hill stations in Maharashtra, Parvati has traveled throughout India with friends from work and college. Vacationing every month is a deviation from how society would expect a call center employee, and particularly a single woman, to live. Although Parvati was the only participant to have such a lifestyle, she was not alone in using her income to take vacations outside of Mumbai. Nine other participants also mentioned that their call center income provided them the means to travel.

According to Poster, call center employees have a rigid schedule that doesn't provide much in the way of respite or downtime.[17] Despite this, Parvati's upper-middle-class status, call center salary, and work schedule allow her to travel beyond the boundaries of Mumbai on vacations ranging from four days to one week. I was fascinated to learn how one could pursue a Master's Degree, work full time, and vacation every month. Parvati explains:

> I get two holidays in a week, so I would work at a stretch, and take four holidays the next week and I am allowed to take two scheduled leaves in a month. Of course it's based on the T.L.'s [team leaders], but if you make your sales targets, they don't care and you can take leave.

Parvati's experience illustrates how working in positions that are generally viewed as a man's job allows for increased flexibility and autonomy. From factory work to data processing, feminist scholars find that labor that is deemed feminine is subject to stricter surveillance and control over the worker's time.[18] Furthermore, positions in telemarketing and collections have the potential for higher wages because some companies provide bonuses and commissions based on performance. Purvi, for instance, has a base salary of 17,500rs (US$388) per month. However, as a collections agent, she also receives a commission that brings her monthly, after-tax salary to an average of 34,000rs ($US754) a month. An employee who is not in the management ranks, she was the highest paid person in this study. In fact, her earnings surpass many team leaders whose salaries ranges between 20,000rs to 26,000rs (US$443 to US$576) per month.

In contrast to Parvati, Purvi used her economic mobility to build a life for herself. She emphatically stated, "Call centers help women come up in life." Her case is compelling because she is an only child whose parents are deceased. She moved to Spain for one-and-a-half years to live with an aunt who offered to adopt her. However, she discovered upon her arrival that her family primarily wanted her to do their housework. This state of servitude, combined with a dislike of the Indian community in Spain, led her to return to India. Currently, she has no relatives in Mumbai, rents a 460 square-foot flat in Navi Mumbai, and is planning to buy her own flat.

Purvi is empowered by her success and said, "I have been the leader of myself." This contrasts with the exploitative perspective in Sonali Gulati's documentary film, *Nalini By Day, Nancy By Night*.[19] In the film, Avni—who goes by the alias Anne Scott—

spoke of working as a collections agent for General Electric. Despite achieving US$1,000,000 in credit collections for General Electric, she was paid the equivalent of US$7 per day for her work. Avni is aware of the unequal global labor relations that allow her to earn a salary that is relatively high by Indian standards, but does not compensate her in a manner equal to that of her American counterpart. “You’ve been giving me peanuts,” is how she describes the salaries of call center employees relative to their output. In Avni’s view, “They [companies abroad] are minting money in hand.”But Purvi, despite also being aware of the inequity of the system, still sees call center employment as a golden opportunity given the lack of options available to her.

It is important to note that of the 13 single women who lived outside a joint or nuclear family unit, six were already living on their own prior to call center employment. In these instances, call center employment did not serve as an impetus to move out. Instead it allowed those who already went through the social and family stigma of living alone to maintain and, in many instances, improve their lifestyle.

For instance, Irene, the 32-year-old training manager, pays 15,000rs (US$333) for a one-bedroom flat in Bandra, an up and coming Mumbai suburb. Compared to the living standards of the average employee, her rent was considered exorbitant. During the interviews at Company A, colleagues regarded her lifestyle as unique because she smoked, lived alone, was in the midst of a divorce, and it was known among her inner circle at work that she was dating a coworker.

For women such as Irene, who could afford to live on their own and had addressed the hurdle of it being considered inappropriate to not live with one’s family, I

discovered that access to housing itself was a challenge, particularly for single women who work the night shift. They are viewed with suspicion in that some landlords do not want to rent to single women whom they suspect to be bar dancers or prostitutes.

During the course of fieldwork I learned that the three primary housing options for single women are: (1) hostels; (2) paying guests (P.G.'s); and (3) rent or buy a flat. Anjali, the 27-year-old former employee, has lived in hostels, P.G.'s (see below), and rented flats. She found hostels to be the worst option because of the strict rules and monitoring women must endure. The documentary film *Freedom Before 11* shows how women living in hostels are subjected to stricter surveillance compared to that of men's hostels.[20] Particularly telling is how one manager refers to the women in her hostel as *inmates*, as well as discussions in the film about how women who live in hostels are perceived to have "bad character."

A P.G. rents a room in a home. This kind of housing is also difficult for single women, especially if they work at night, because some P.G.'s place restrictions on women's mobility. In her quest to find housing, Reshma, for example, was informed by one owner, "If you come back after 10 p.m., we will not let you in." Similarly, Poonam was forced to move out of the P.G. she lived in because the landlord objected to her coming and going late at night.

In general, women are expected to remain with their parents until marriage. An exception to this would be to pursue studies in a different locale. Women such as Anjali, who defy their parents by moving out of the family confines, are not the norm for the urban middle-class. In fact, with the exception of Anjali, participants who expressed a

desire to live on their own said that it was not an option for them, despite the fact that they could afford it.

Kriti's eyes lit up while she spoke on this topic and she exclaimed, "My dream is to live in a hostel and work at 3G in Mindspace. The building is beautiful and it's a great area to work." With its sleek buildings, indoor water falls, and surrounded by the latest malls and movie theaters, in the eyes of many call center employees, Mindspace is considered the premier place to work in Mumbai. Kriti's job provides her enough income to afford such a lifestyle and she could easily obtain employment in Mindspace given her current work experience. Family pressure, however, deemed it unacceptable. "What would people think?" is a common theme that emerged during interviews with single women who wanted to use their call center income to live on their own. Kriti explained that if her family lived outside of Mumbai it would make sense if she moved away. But as a resident of Mumbai, "It would appear strange to live away from home."

WRAP-UP

The relatively high income associated with call center employment is a windfall for 18- to 25-year-olds who are fluent in English. It became apparent, however, that looking at call center employment as primarily a source of fast money is problematic. This belief disguises the myriad of factors that draw women to the industry and limits our understanding of how women experience earning their own money. Women joined the industry for a variety of reasons ranging from family survival, escaping the chains of

immobility, changing their spending and saving habits and gaining capital to starting one's own business, to embracing the single life.

Without a doubt, call center income brought forth spending and saving patterns that were previously beyond the reach of employees. In addition, a sense of independence was garnered from finally being able to get out of the house at night on a regular basis, something that was previously off-limits for the women who participated in this study. This escape provided an avenue for women to sneak around at night in ways that were previously beyond their reach. Some women, however, did not report a change and this was related to factors such as strict parents, responsibility for maintaining the household, and sheer exhaustion.

Regardless of whether or not the economic mobility associated with call center employment transformed an individual's physical mobility and spatial access, the speed with which workers attain a relatively high income—and income that in many instances took their parents decades to attain—disrupts the timeline for *paying one's dues*. Thus, this shift has brought with it upheaval and confusion. Society seeks to make sense of this shift not only in terms of how it dramatically increases some women's earning potential, but also in terms of how some high school graduates now have the potential to earn an income that is on par with entry-level, white-collar professions.

As workers benefit from the cash and flash associated with call center employment, an undertone of jealousy emerges in comments such as, "She's bought a house. She doesn't deserve it." At the same time, labeling call center employment as merely fast, easy money serves to justify harsh perceptions of irresponsibility, laziness in

terms of finding a *real* job, and lack of direction. Combine the perception of fast money with staying out all night—working "the hooker shift" —and it is on the backs of women that stereotypes of "bad character" and poverty (e.g., "that poor girl, her family has to send her out at night because they don't have enough money") are engendered.

From nosy neighbors who think it looks bad on their society to have women leaving the house at night to work to parents who believe that a daughter who earns her own money in college will become spoiled, views about women who work outside the home are complex. When a "good girl" starts working the hooker shift and goes from earning a low wage to a high wage, which in turn is viewed by society as nothing more than "fast money," pity, envy, scorn, and moral condemnation are just some of the reactions that emerge as more and more women gain economic mobility as a result of working the night shift.

Although participants certainly pointed out that call center income gave them a sense of independence, for the most part the money did not buy them the right to move out of their homes because it was still considered taboo for a single woman to live away from her parents if they were in the same area as she. In the context of parental control, lower-class women who migrate to major cities for call center employment and live on their own experience less surveillance on their mobility compared to middle-class women who live with their parents.

Under the rubric of equating modernity with the freedom to move about as one sees fit, this difference disrupts the class narrative that generally demarcates middle-class Mumbaikar women as more modern compared to the city's lower class, migrant women.

This provides a framework for re-thinking how women are the bodily site upon which class narratives are constructed: a middle-class girl (e.g., a good girl) stays with her family whereas a poor girl (e.g., exploited) leaves because she has no choice.

Chapter 6: On the Home Front

> Doing something for the sake of exploring your youth is scandalous. Independence is not acceptable or preferred
>
> *– Anjali, Former employee*

According to Domosh, geographers in general do "not move past the front stoop" when it comes to looking at the household as a geographical space from which one could learn. Indeed, whether the home even constitutes a scale of analysis worthy of intellectual merit, as opposed to studies focused on a global level, is a subject of debate. On the one hand, home is viewed as a "relatively stable background structure[s]."[1] On the other, it is believed that the construction of gender relations within the household provides a powerful understanding of how both public and private space remains gendered.[2] In fact, scholars such as Chant define the household as a "geographically and historically dynamic social institution in which gender is embedded and negotiated."[3]

Instead of viewing household space as neutral or in the background, this chapter begins by examining how household relations generally fare when women become employees of call centers. To illustrate how this process plays out in intimate ways, I focus on two life histories to demonstrate how husband-wife relations in the home shift as a result of economic mobility, particularly as it relates to women who both work at night and earn an income that outstrips that of their husbands. Finally, I discuss how some parent-child relationships fare when daughters join the call center industry. Throughout the chapter, I argue that the ways in which night shift employment affects household

relations vary significantly. It is in these variations that we begin to understand why income and education alone do not always transform gender roles in household.

THE SHIFTING HOUSEHOLD DYNAMIC?

In response to women earning higher levels of income from call center employment, Amish exclaimed, “Women don’t put up with shit anymore!” Yet, during participant observation and in-depth interviews, it was apparent this is not always the case. During a breakfast visit to the home of Gita, a 43-year-old manager, her husband barked to her “Serve food!” in front of their 17-year-old son, 13-year-old daughter, and me. Although Gita’s husband earned far less than she does and her earnings allowed them to purchase the home they live in, the husband dominated their household.

Similarly, Anan explains that despite her success as a Senior Quality Assurance Manager, she is expected to awaken before her husband, a mechanical engineer, every morning to get his clothes ready, prepare his tea, and get their three-year-old son ready for preschool. Anan lives in a joint family arrangement (e.g., resides with in-laws) where her husband is the only son and has been pampered all of his life. She said that having a husband who does not contribute equally at home and expects to be served by the women in the house is a common issue for many married women working in call centers. Although Anan earns a salary that is well above average, call center employment has a lower status compared to other fields, particularly engineering. In this instance, working

outside the home does not translate into improved gender relations because notions of who has "the better job" impact the woman's status at home.[4]

Despite the apparent lack of change in gender relations, Anan worked and participated in an MBA program because of the sense of independence it gave her. Vasanti, age 23, also pointed out that for married women like her, the sense of independence derived from night shift employment meant, "we can spend on whatever we want" and "we don't have to ask someone for money."

Single women also reported that the income from call center employment gave them a sense of independence on the home front. Prior to working in a call center job, Kriti received pocket money from her family based on her expenses. She spoke of wanting a mobile phone and her father refused, citing that it was too expensive. She subsequently began working as a tutor for young children. For 20 hours of labor per month, (one hour per day, five times a week) she earned 1,000rs (US$22), which she saved to buy herself a mobile phone. She said, "It felt great to buy for myself!" Now earning 17,000rs (US$377) a month as a call center employee she said she's gained an even greater sense of independence from not having to ask her parents for any money.

During fieldwork in Ahmedabad, employees suggested that there is a difference in what independence means for married women and single women. Amrita, a 21-year-old employee, explained that for married women, independence is more about having one's own income whereas for single women like her, the sense of independence comes from getting out of the house at night. She explained that in her society "girls are not allowed to move out at night." Although she has yet to go out at night during a day off, Amrita

said that her job has given her the confidence to do this in the future. She also emphasized that money and working at nights has helped her to become more "bold."

Throughout our discussions about relations in the household, it was apparent that call center employment income did not translate into a demand for change in gender roles at home. Women did not insist their husbands, fathers, or brothers take up an active role in cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, and other forms of labor typically deemed "ladies work." As illustrated by the stories of Anan and Gita, some women are still held to the traditions of "Serve food!" and making sure the tea is ready in the morning.

And in many households, a mother or mother-in-law ended up attending to the day-shift domestic front. This dynamic is interesting from the perspective of relations between young women and elderly women. At an age when elderly women should be retiring and enjoying a matriarchal status, they continued to be treated as unpaid servants or managers of the household.

Instead of equalizing gender roles in the home, then, it is often due to the paid and unpaid work of younger women or on the backs of elderly women that men are able benefit from the double income of women in paid labor force. It is also why some women are able to gain entry to this night shift labor pool as household responsibility is passed onto other women. Elderly men and young men, in the meantime, avoid the drudgery of house work under the excuse that it is "ladies work" and that to take on such will emasculate them, another concern related to the "what will people think?" narrative.[5]

Thus, under the guise of economic development and women's liberation, it is the bodies of elderly women that are used to fuel the career aspirations of some younger

women. Put another way, in some families elderly women are used to maintain gender regimes in the household. As a result, the entry of women into a night shift labor pool does not translate into a substantive change in gender roles in the household.[6]

At the same time, there are also many servant-maintained households. Still, it falls upon the women to manage the process and schedule their time accordingly. It may appear that having servants makes the lives of middle-class working women in India easier. However, this was not always the case. The amount of labor involved in cleaning and maintaining a middle-class household in the high-density suburbs of Mumbai (i.e., dust and pollution), is far more time-consuming and arduous. Anan has four servants in her joint household and each one performs specified tasks: (1) sweep; (2) wash; (3) dust; (4) prepare chapattis. According to Anan, the housewife/working woman's schedule is based on when and if their maids show up, and she makes it a point to acknowledge that she is fortunate because she can count on her mother-in-law to manage the servants and be there to watch over them.[7] In summary, I discovered that call center employment did little to dramatically shift gender roles in the household. However, as will be demonstrated in the next section, the income garnered from night shift employment does bring forth substantive lifestyle changes for some workers and their familes.

HUSBAND-WIFE RELATIONS IN THE HOUSEHOLD: TWO LIFE HISTORIES

The women who participated in this study continued to face constrictions, in one form or another, in their lives. At the same time, it is also important to consider the

changes gained from night shift employment. In order to convey the mix of constriction and opening created by night shift employment, I draw from the life histories of two women: Shilpa and Poonam. Their lives, though divergent in many ways, reflect how economic mobility can, in one instance, transform gender roles beyond expectation, and in another, shift gender dynamics with little change to a woman's "place."

It is important to point out that although both women work at night, their positions constitute a higher rung of outsourcing that intersects with customer service, sales, and engineering. Employed in positions that have more prestige, they work directly for a top U.S.-based IT company on the Fortune 500 list. Although the actual content of their work does not fit the profile of an entry level call center employee, their cases illustrate how, even as women continue to advance in this rapidly emerging nightscape labor force, conceptions of a woman's worth can change drastically while, at the same time, remain the same.

Shilpa – Money, Marriage, and the Male Inferiority Complex

Shilpa, a 38-year-old employee with an engineering degree, doesn't hold back when talking about her career, marriage, and the ways in which she manages her husband's sense of inferiority in light of her success. In 1989, at the age of 21, her first job paid her 800rs (US$18) a month. Seventeen years later, she earns upwards of 10 lakh (US$22,171) a year. Her story follows:

> Born and raised in Bangalore, Shilpa said that she never considered a love marriage because her father is very strict and would have never allowed it. When

it came time to marry, she was also told not to be demanding in terms of finding a husband with the her level of education because there were not as many men in her community that were on par with her. Her parents arranged her marriage to a man with a diploma and after the wedding they moved to Calcutta for his job. Within a year they returned to Bangalore and she describes her time there as lonely, miserable, and one in which she cried a lot.

She moved in with her in-laws, which she termed a nightmare. The household consisted of seven people: brother-in-law, sister-in-law, father-in-law, mother-in-law, an unmarried aunt, her husband, and herself. She found the family to be highly possessive, particularly the aunt who raised her husband and his two siblings while her mother-in-law worked. After the birth of their first child, Shilpa was disturbed by how possessive the aunt was over her daughter. She points out that at times she felt that her husband and daughter were not hers, but common property over which his family held domain.

Describing her own household as one in which "my brother and I were treated the same," she quickly found that in her new home, the rules were quite different. For starters, she was not allowed to eat all the food that was served at the table. In shock and dismay, she learned that the non-vegetarian food was appropriated for her brother-in-law. Although her husband was allowed to eat non-vegetarian sometimes, the women were strictly denied. In addition to food segregation, her in-laws controlled her dowry of jewels and would gift them to other people. The aunt would pressure Shilpa to give one of her necklaces to a

relative who had taken a liking to a particular piece. Although the intention of dowry is to provide women a form of material independence when they enter their new household, in Shilpa's case as in many others, it became common property.[8]

The dire economic situation that Shilpa and her husband were experiencing upon their return to Bangalore made matters worse. Shilpa worked as a teacher from 7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., and her starting salary was 1,200rs (US$27) per month. She remained in teaching for five years in order to be home in time for their children. She was given a 50rs (US$1) salary increase on a yearly basis and by the time she left she was earning 1,400rs (US$31) per month. Her income combined with her husband's income was no more than 3,000rs (US$67) a month, of which they gave 2,000rs (US$44) to the family to cover household expenses. Her in-laws would make disparaging remarks about their income and she was unable to buy things for herself because of the family scrutiny. As a result, she would attempt to keep her purchases a secret.

Describing herself as plump when she married, Shilpa said she became thinner and thinner because of the stressful dynamics in the household. People around her saw what was going on and comments such as, "She was such a nice girl, what have you done to her?" were directed toward her in-laws. With the help of jewels from her dowry, her parents intervened by providing a property in her name. This allowed Shilpa to leave her in-laws and start a nuclear home with her husband and children.

Shilpa decided to leave her teaching job and take a night shift job because it provided her the career opportunities she was looking for and a much higher salary. Her month salary has steadily progressed from 7,000rs to 12,000rs, then to 30,000rs,(US$155, 266, and 665, respectively) to a current salary of 50,000rs (US$1,109). She receives bonuses that bring her annual income to approximately 10 lakh (US$22,171) per year. In addition, her company awarded her a four-day all-expense-paid trip to Malaysia. Her husband has worked steadily in the newspaper industry and currently earns 20,000rs (US$443) per month.

Shilpa is fully aware how she manages her husband's ego in relation to her success. She has an engineering degree but he only has a diploma; it would take him upwards of five months to earn what she does in one. She speaks of his condescending manner towards her when they first married, how he would pick on her about obscure things and put her down in front of other people with comments such as "You're an engineer. You should know this." As her salary progressed through the years, she worried what would happen to their relationship when her earnings outstripped his.

Instead of the worst, she finds that her husband is now very proud of her and, according to Shilpa, "With money, a strained relationship became good." Her income is held in a common account that he manages. In discussing how they came to this arrangement, she explains that as a child she watched her mother hand over her earnings to her father. Similarly, she gives her money to her

husband and it is not lost on her that, “It makes him feel good because he has an inferiority complex.”

In terms of managing the household, her husband is in charge of the finances and buying provisions. Of his provisions job, she tells him, “Whatever rotten vegetables you buy, I will cook.” When asked about her husband’s role in the education of their children, she said that her husband does not look after them. He believes that studying with children is ladies work. In fact, when Shilpa had her second child, her mother was against it because she knew her son-in-law “would not cooperate” and her daughter would bear the responsibility of raising the child. Her mother’s hesitancy also stemmed from the hardships she faced raising two children while working and thus felt it was better to only have one.

At the close of our interview, Shilpa recalls that she didn’t need money growing up because both of her parents worked and took care of her. Based on her experience at her in-laws, she said she now understands the importance of money and believes that it is equally important for the mother to earn an income. Although she initially took less challenging and lower paying jobs so she could be home in time for her children, she believes that as her children grow, she too must grow as an individual. In other words, some women are able to interpret unequal demands and expectations in ways that nonetheless offer them a sense of empowerment. And finally, she makes the following point about arranged marriages: if there is a problem with the marriage then it is the fault of the parents because they chose the spouse. If she had found someone on her own and problems ensued, then she would be blamed for making a bad decision.

Poonam – From Day Factory Worker to Night IT Career

Poonam is a 32-year-old employee with a degree in civil engineering. In seven years, her salary has increased almost twenty-fold as she went from earning 2000rs to 5,000rs a month (US$44 to US$111) to approximately 1 lakh a month (US$2,217). Confident and self-assured, she refused to be hampered by the idea that a woman must always follow her husband wherever his career takes him. Married for ten years, she moved to Bangalore two years ago to pursue her career goals. Her story follows:

> Born and raised in Chennai, Poonam's first office job out of college earned her 5,000rs (US$111) per month. Married at the age of 22, she relocated to Madya Pradesh with her husband, a college professor, and found work as a civil engineer in a cement factory.[9] Her salary decreased to approximately 2,000rs (US$44) a month, an income she terms negligible. Describing her experience working in a factory of more than 1,000 employees, she said, "That was really tough because it used to be totally male dominated so they couldn't really accept a female who would come in and tell them what to do…. I was the only girl in the plant basically." In time the laborers "came around" and she spoke of how she enjoyed the work because of the level of respect she gained for taking on such a job.
>
> A year-and-a-half later, she became pregnant and decided that civil engineering would not be a viable career over the long-term. She turned to the IT

sector because she considered the work to be easier. Of her time as a civil engineer she said, “It was nice when it was just my husband and I, but [then I] got pregnant and had a kid and realized it won’t work. I didn’t want to go back to it because it’s very tiresome, but it was fun while it lasted.”

She returned from to Chennai to stay with her parents and give birth. Thereafter she refused to return to Madya Pradesh because she decided—and her husband agreed—that that it would be better for her career to work in Chennai. This led to friction with her parents. After three or four months of living at home, her parents were pressured by their peers with comments of “When are you going to leave her at her husband’s place again?”

Befuddled by her decision to stay in Chennai, her parents told her, “What will people say? What will society say? You can’t stay with us!” In order to appease them, she visited Madya Pradesh to “show face,” prove that everything was fine and then immediately returned to her parents. Upon return, the tension only grew worse. She took IT classes as a means to gain employment. This was viewed as irresponsible because it did not constitute a proper job. While spending one month working on a class project from her computer at home, Poonam recalled her mother would constantly scream at her, “All the time you are sitting at computer. You don’t do anything else. You don’t take care of your kid!”

However, after her class project was written up in a national newspaper, their views changed. She spoke of how proud her parents were after that, but they remained adamant about her not living with them. Knowing that her parents

would pressure her to return to Madya Pradesh if she did not find a job, Poonam secured employment with an IT company in Chennai. Thereafter, her husband secured a position in Chennai and the family was reunited.

While her parents and in-laws assumed them to be "settled," Poonam was recruited to work at a Fortune 500 IT Company in Bangalore. She accepted the position two years ago and moved to Bangalore on her own. Meanwhile, her in-laws in Chennai took care of their child. She explains that the reason her husband did not join her is because she was unsure if she would continue with the job.

Her husband expressed full support for her decision, but both friends and family members were appalled. A mother leaving behind a five-year-old child to pursue her own career goals was unheard of. "You can't do that. You cannot leave your child and go," was the response from her parents and in-laws. Her friends in Chennai called her crazy. Her coworkers would tell her "…it's not worth leaving your family and doing this." When asked what kept her going in spite of detractors she said, "It's just that I was convinced that what I was doing was right, so that's why I kept on it."

Upon arrival in Bangalore she moved into a 3,000rs (US$67) a month P.G. Her stay was short-lived because the owners did not like her coming home late at night. Thereafter she rented a house and lived alone, an experience she describes as, "It was good. In fact, I liked living alone! (*Laughter*) I mean you know, you are not answerable, right? I've not done anything in the morning, just have my

coffee. Otherwise, if I were to live with my husband and kid I would probably have to do other things in the house."

Poonam lived away from her family for approximately 21 months. She would visit Chennai every other weekend, a journey she deemed stressful given the travel required and the demands of her new job. Three months prior to our interview, Poonam's parents and son, now seven years old, moved to Bangalore to live with her. Her husband remained in Chennai. Poonam purchased a flat with her own income, which is currently in excess of 10 lakh (US$22,171) per year. As she reflects on her lifestyle, she points out that she loves her job and garners a great deal of satisfaction in her career, but also recognized how working nights affects her family life. She said, "My kid is here and he likes to cuddle up to me, but I am not there. That is hard. He likes it when I read out to him. I miss out on a lot of things."

Throughout the course of this interview, I was intrigued by what led Poonam to pursue a life that runs counter to expectations of a married woman's place which are: (1) to be by her husband's side or at least in the same city; (2) being at home to raise children or at least in proximity of them if one is working outside the home; and (3) earning an income that supports a family, but certainly not enough for a woman to buy her own home and decide to live away from her husband. Her story is compelling because in contrast to women who migrate due to economic necessity, Poonam came from a family that did not need, or in the case of her elders, want such from her. A coworker who spoke in admiration of her remarked, "I could never do what she did." And unlike her male

counterparts who can migrate without being castigated as being bad fathers who do not care for their children, Poonam is viewed as an anomaly because her decision to be mobile does not fit the mold of where society expects a "good" mother to be.

PARENT-CHILD RELATIONS IN THE HOUSEHOLD

By working at night and earning a relatively high salary, workers were also confronted with shifting parent-child relationships. The social stigma of working at night sometimes translated into contentious family dynamics in the household. Despite earning a salary that was in many instances provided support to their families, some workers also face disdain and disregard from their households.

In addition to the women being labeled too independent and bold, working at night is viewed negatively. This dynamic illustrates how the perceptions about women in the paid labor force extend beyond the actual work space. When women work outside the home, they disrupt their place in the household. In fact, call center employment *decreased* the social status of workers in some households and a gendered narrative emerged in relation to why it was looked down upon for women to work in a call center.

Women perceived as sexually deviant, even if only by association (e.g., working in a call center), are viewed with suspicion. For parents who gave precedence to the "what will people think?" narrative, the male-female camaraderie associated with the industry was a threat to the moral order to which they subscribed. Working in a call center gave the impression that their daughters were promiscuous and this was viewed as marring the reputation of the entire family, not just the worker.

In some instances, call center employment provided some women the means to assert their autonomy in ways that previously would be considered unheard of. Karen, the 24-year-old employee who participated in a focus group, spoke of how for years she has had a rocky relationship with her father. After her mother passed away, her relationship with her father become even more tumultuous. Although she would not provide details on what lead to their temporary estrangement, she spoke of how in a fit of rage and frustration she moved out of her father's home and lived in a hostel. This was considered scandalous. She returned home after a few months and only after they had mended their relationship. While listening to her story it was made clear that the income from call center employment had provided her the financial means necessary to take stand for herself.

During interviews and focus groups, it became evident that the high salaries associated with the call center industry did not always buy women upward social mobility with their parents or in social circles who judge it as a job for the lazy and uninspired. This is not to suggest, however, that call center employment negatively impacted all parent-child relationships. In some instances, it made them closer.

Elizabeth, the 24-year-old who is the sole support of her widowed mother, pointed out that call center employment allows her to spend more money on her mom during the limited time they have together. Reflecting on the hardship her widowed mother endured as single parent struggling to raise both her and her brother on a meager teacher's salary, she stated, "I love my mom. I want to take care of her." This is significant because her brother does not help out. As Elizabeth's mother explained:

MS. GEORGE: I think she is gives me more support (*laughs*). It's just opposite now (*laughs*). She supports me. Always goin' [working], sometimes I go in depression. She says, "Why…why you're worried, I'm there, no…I'm your son, I'm your daughter, everything for you." So my son has gone, left na.

REENA: Yes, she had mentioned she had a brother and he works in a call center in that's in Mumbai.

MS. GEORGE: So since he's earning now, he has separated. He's on his own.

REENA: Does he contribute to the household?

MS. GEORGE: Nothing. That is why he has left, no. He doesn't want to contribute (*laughs*) Haan…that's why she said no, "Don't worry ma, I'm there no, I'll do everything. I'll earn so much mama, don't worry…I'll take care, "Don't worry," she says.

In this situation, the economic mobility Elizabeth gained from call center employment provided her the means to take care of herself and her mother, whom she often spoke of in admiration. Elizabeth also made it a point to tell me she doesn't buy branded clothes or spend money hanging out with friends because she is cognizant of how difficult life has been for her mother financially. Instead she stated that she enjoys her mom's company and makes it a point to spend their free time together.

Prior to call center employment they would remain in the house or go for walks because they could not afford outside entertainment such as movies and restaurants. Although their life continues to be carefully budgeted due to previous household debts, Elizabeth beams with pride about how she now earns enough money so that "I can take my mom to whichever place she wants."

During a separate interview, her mother made the following comments regarding their relationship. Interestingly, Mrs. George made it a point to connect their relationship to how she viewed Elizabeth's clothes and lifestyle in general:

REENA: How do you find that her job has impacted your relationship with her?

MS. GEORGE: No changes at all, no not at all. Just the same as simple as ever (*Laughter*) Much more simple she has become, more. Always one plait. Always tell her, "leave your hair or tie a pony tail", No! Tight plait she wants to be!

Different she is [in comparison to other young women]…I always tell her short salwar kameez is in fashion, you also stitch no. "I don't like, mama. That will become out of fashion after someday. Long is always in fashion. That doesn't go out of fashion." Long salwar kameez's. Then, like any tops also she will wear no, she will not wear short tops, pant, jeans and all. She is very much conscious about her dressing, baba. That too at the trial wear [trying on clothes in a private dressing room] nothing should be seen (*Laughs*). Even if, even if I sleep next to her, by mistake if I touch her, she'll tell immediately, "You can't sleep properly, why are you touching? (*laughs*) I'll tell her, "Then what you'll do when you get married? You will say to your husband same thing, I mean, "go!"?

Simple, *haan.* She has never worn sleeveless till now. She doesn't like sleeveless.

Even though Elizabeth was the primary breadwinner of the household and Ms. George was proud of her daughter for this, the night shift requirement of the job remained a source of contention. Ms. George wished her daughter did not have to work through the night to support them. And it was during a family interview at another employee's home that I gained an alternative understanding for why the night shift requirement is a source of angst for some mothers.

Nisha, the 25-year-old whose father passed away unexpectedly, was one of the few employees whom I had the opportunity to interview at her home amongst family. In fact, our meeting turned out to be unexpected happenstance as I had stopped her on the streets of Mindspace looking for directions, and in striking up a conversation with her I mentioned my research. Without hesitation, Nisha gave me her phone number and invited me to her family's home for lunch on one of her days off. A week later, I spent the afternoon interviewing her and her 45-year-old mother, Ms. Mehta. Her 19-year-old sister

also participated intermittently along with their 80-something-year-old neighbor whom Nisha explained was like a grandmother to them.

When I asked Nisha about her parent's initial reaction to her taking a call center job, she explained that it was not a problem. Ms. Mehta began shaking her head in disagreement. Despite attending "Family Day" at her daughter's company and being impressed with the surroundings and the people, Ms. Mehta explained that even today she remains uneasy about Nisha working in a call center because of the night shift requirement. Although she did not go into the "what will people think?" narrative that other employees complained of their parents bringing up, she did speak of receiving comments from neighbors such as, "How can you allow her?"

Instead of linking Nisha's job to concerns about her daughter being seen as promiscuous or marring the family's reputation, Ms. Mehta described how uncomfortable it felt for her to not have her daughter around her at night. She stated, "When I sleep my daughter should be around me. This is how it was when I was growing up [in Rajasthan]." One of the ways in which Ms. Mehta deals with this is to call Nisha frequently to check up on her. During our interview it was made clear that this left Nisha exasperated as she openly complained about her mother calling her 15 times in one night.

WRAP-UP

Indian women are labeled subservient and homebound in comparison to their Western counterparts. Poonam's story illustrates how some "third world" women

leapfrog into lifestyles that, for even for Western women—the supposed gold standard of progress—is unusual. Her story also vividly illustrates how the East-West distinction used to define women is problematic. Furthermore, conceptualizing "woman" as a singular category is incomplete.[10] As feminist scholars point out, when identifying similar experiences of subordination and success among women, one needs to also acknowledge how individual livelihoods intersect with race, class, education-level, and citizenship.[11]

Re-envisioning the category of "woman" in the global arena beyond the dichotomy of East and West and its subtext of exploited vs. empowered, traditional vs. modern, allows for an understanding of how women such as Poonam constitute a global network of workers who use their economic mobility to disestablish notions of a woman's place.[12] At the same time, it is important to remain cognizant of how the complex relationship between class, citizenship, and the feminization of labor is a reflection of the structural inequality embedded in global relations.[13] Poonam is certainly successful beyond the imagination of those who surround her, and she represents the upward mobility that can be gained when women take on the nightscape. At the same time, the demand for her labor comes from a desire for a "third world" worker whose skills can be purchased on the cheap since her U.S. counterparts earn a salary that is four to five times higher.

Earning a high income did not necessarily buy women respect in the home, as illustrated by Gita's husband, who continued to see it within his domain to have a wife by his side ready to "Serve food!" Instead, the sense of independence came from earning

money like men. These women no longer have to ask husbands or parents for money and often support their households financially. On the flip side, this independence is tempered by having to downplay their actual economic contribution to assuage the inferiority complex of the men in the house. And little is changed in terms of men taking on the "dirty work" of the household, as these responsibilities are merely shifted to other women.

In terms of parent-child relationships, it was clear that call center employment led to disruptions. Some parents had difficulty adjusting to their daughters not being at home with them, despite having visited the call center premises and approved of the working conditions. For others, roles changed in the household as parents felt that their children were now taking care of them in ways they assumed was their responsibility. The effect of call center employment on parent-child relations was clearly varied and as Karen's situation illustrates, it in some cases led to daughter's rebelling in ways that were considered unheard of.

In closing, rules of place remain embedded as women continue to deal with societal beliefs. Certainly exceptions apply, as illustrated in the case of Poonam, but she was not the norm of women who participated in this study. Instead, she represents the potential both scholars and policy makers associate with upward economic mobility.

Chapter 7: Social Mobility: Other Openings and Constrictions

> The call center becomes our marriage pool!
> *– Drasti, employee*
>
> You have no other life other than call center, except for your holiday.
> *– Denise, former employee*

When I moved to Mumbai, I did not anticipate that a suburban Catholic church would provide a glimpse into how the call center industry shifts the social fabric of its workers. Father John, concerned about some of the rapid social changes taking place, described the perceptible shift he witnessed over the past few years. A youth group he ran in 2001 was comprised of 25 to 30 individuals between the ages of 18 and 23. By 2003 to 2004, it had dwindled to zero. When he reached out to the community to find out why this happened, he learned that the majority of these former churchgoers joined a call center. They no longer had time to participate in church activities because they were sleeping during the day.

Parents approached Father John after sermons complaining that their children, after joining the call center industry, had no time for family and treated them with less respect. He described a conversation with one distraught dad:

> One father was telling, “Father, I got very angry with my son. I told him, what are you doing with the money? Have you put in the bank?” Then boy turns to the father and says, “Dad,” He used the word “pak,pak,pak” ‘Don’t talk too much, if you need some pocket money, tell me, I’ll give. But don’t talk too much.” This is what the boy said to the father.

That a son would not only earn more money than his parents at a young age, but also talk back to them, is considered shocking. This points to how the income from call center

employment disrupts the parent-child hierarchy in some households, as discussed in Chapter 6.

In this chapter, I examine how working the night shift re-codifies the social lives of call center workers. From forging new friendships to experiencing distress about missing family functions that were once an important part of their daily lives, I begin by exploring how employees create and experience new social connections and spaces associated with call center employment. I then focus especially on the marriage prospects of call center employees and discuss this in relation to the social stigmas women experience as a result of going out at night. Throughout the chapter, I argue that working outside the home and earning a relatively high wage does not always lead to upward social mobility.

SOCIAL CROSSINGS

Amish, the industry consultant, told me that in many industries, coworkers generally come from the same class and/or educational background. Using his own path as an example, he explained that he and his coworkers shared a standard education (e.g., MBA) required of consultants and came from the same middle-class background. Similarly, I was of the impression that call center employees were predominantly recent college graduates who came from middle-class families. The collegial work environment of the industry, combined with mainstream media stories, also gave me the impression

that call center employment was merely a transitional space for young people between college and a “real” job. This was not the case at all.

In fact, what was most striking was the range of individuals who were brought together, particularly at the entry-level stage of the industry. A theme that emerged time and again from employees was that they were meeting people they did not have access to before: an engineer worked alongside a college drop-out; a single mother who barely completed high school was in a training class with a law student. Employees described how the shared connections they previously created (such as attending the same school or college, studying the same subjects, having a comparable family background, aspiring to similar career goals, as well as having social and cultural beliefs in common) changed when they entered the call center workplace. Indeed, call centers offered alternative social networks and social connections.

Swati, a 26-year-old employee with a B.Com degree, described working beside a medical student and the friendship that developed between them. This friendship was significant to Swati because she never imagined becoming friends with a future doctor. Since joining the company A over three years ago, Swati found she “got the bestest friends…they will remain with you.” The expansion of her social network was not only linked to what her colleagues do outside the call center, but also to where they come from. She described meeting people her age who live on their own in P.G. accommodations and who come from places she considered far away, such as Pune. This was new to Swati because previously her friends came from the same neighborhood and social/economic strata. Her experience illustrates the ways in which call center

employment afforded some workers the opportunity to forge friendships and social connections with cross-sections of society previously inaccessible to them.

During an interview with Indira, a 27-year-old with a college degree in chemistry, and Manisha, the 26-year-old who is a college dropout from an English literature program, both described the other as her best friend. Both have worked at the same call center for more than six years. Indira used her money for investments and shopping because her parents do not rely on her income. Manisha, in contrast, dropped out of college to be the sole support for her widowed mother. Although she was unable to save money like Indira, Manisha's salary provided the means to purchase a home three years ago.

During a group interview at Inorbit Mall in Malad, Neil, the 27-year-old electrical engineer employed as a Team Leader for a call center introduced me to Smita, the 26-year-old former employee. She has an MBA in Human Resources and she and Neil described themselves as best friends who met through the call center. Across from Smita sat Lopa, the 22-year-old employee who has worked in the industry for four years and is now in a Quality Analyst position. She completed twelfth standard and does not have plans to attend college. Neil and Lopa met at the office and are now engaged. Halfway through the interview two more of their friends arrived. One was a 25-year-old manager engaged to a woman who is keeping him a secret from her parents, the other was a 20-something-year-old voice and accent trainer.

What made this group meeting—along with the previous discussion of Swati, Indira, and Manisha—compelling was how it reflected the variety of individuals brought

together as a result of joining the industry. Through their stories and descriptions of friendship ties, I learned that amongst these employees was a chemist who aspires to return to scientific research via Knowledge Process Outsourcing (KPO), a college drop-out who dreams of being a writer, an MBA grad who hated working in a call center, an electrical engineer whose father is ashamed of his career path, and a high school graduate looking to join the ranks of upper management. All work under one roof and, in many instances, train for the same entry-level positions. This occurs within a societal framework that generally believes a person should be employed in a position that is in line with their level of education.

The individuals described above, though divergent in many ways, reflect a melting pot of sorts in terms of the social camaraderie they formed while working in a call center. The term melting pot, however, is not to suggest that call centers are an egalitarian space void of structural inequality. Previous research and responses from employees in this study pointed to varying forms of inequality, ranging from occupational segregation to low wages relative to the actual output demanded of workers.[1] Instead, I use this term to describe how the call center, as a social space, provides some employees the means to forge social networks outside of one's familial and educational social circle.

For individuals who came from families who lacked the access or interest in mixing with those outside their community, or those whose parents maintained strict regimes of surveillance and control over their lives, the opportunity to interact with people of varying educational, social, and economic backgrounds was generally seen as a

bonus. Call center employees, despite their educational differences, were working side by side, often as part of a team. In the entry-level space of a call center, a college-drop out trains and takes calls beside an engineer. This is different from other workplace hierarchies that would, for example, place the high school graduate in a secretarial position for the engineer. This type of spatial setting is a twist on boss-worker relationships that use an individual's education and/or class status to define their place in a workplace hierarchy.

Responses to the social aspects of this industry reflect an individual's background. Kriti, the 23-year-old who opened a boutique with her call center income, attended a woman's college and had little opportunity to interact with men. The call center drastically changed that. "There are more boys than girls," said Kriti. As a result, she found herself forming more friendships with men. Describing herself as shy, she recalled that working at a call center gave her more confidence. This theme emerged throughout the study as women who described themselves as shy and introverted used terms such as confident, bold, and outgoing to illustrate the ways in which working in a call center changed them.

Valerie, the Xavier College graduate, joined the industry despite the opinion of her peers that working in a call center was a step down. She explained her social network was previously through the college and she didn't like it because it was mainly rich people whom she associated with name-dropping and snobbish behavior. In contrast, she viewed the friends she made via the call center industry to be "down to earth and simple."

Smita had quite a different opinion and did not hold back when asked what she thought about call centers, “I hate those call center people!” Smita related the industry to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, a popular psychology theory on what motivates individuals, and stated that call center employees were stuck at the bottom because there was no creativity in the job and the work was monotonous. She said, “The work is not for the brain.” In contrast to women who spoke of liking the job because they were exposed to an array of people outside their previous social network, Smita viewed her former colleagues, with the exception of her friend Neil, as “a different breed of people” who lack direction and focus in their lives because they get caught up in the money they make. This again points to the divisive class relations that sometimes emerge in the call center environment.

HANGING OUT, HANGING BACK

Just as call centers open up new social connections, they open up new social spaces as well. Indeed, some women reported using their call center income to hang out on nights off and on holidays. Yet, the vast majority reported going straight home after work. Some companies, in fact, had regulations that shuttle drivers were not to drop employees off anywhere except their homes. After finishing a Friday night shift, employees faced with this company policy but wanting to meet with friends after work, were not allowed to use company transport to be dropped off at a café en route to their homes. The inescapable delivery of women to their parents’ doorstep was not only done

out concern for women's safety, but was also a means to alleviate family anxiety about women socializing in inappropriate ways during the night.

On their nights off and on holidays, the two places most cited by participants as the place for them to hang out were movie theatres and malls such as Inorbit in Malad, CenterOne in Vashi, and Phoenix Mills in Lower Parel. Linking Road in Bandra—famous for its roadside shoe vendors and array of faux fashion—was also mentioned. After that, cafés and discos were cited.

Call center employment certainly afforded some women the opportunity to hang out and socialize in ways that were previously unavailable to them. Employees who participated in this study pointed to the positive aspects of call center employment, such as meeting new people and working in a globalized environment. At the same time, they were aware of the constriction they experienced. Although the industry is associated with workers who have money to party and hang out, 18 out of 25 women who discussed their social life in-depth experienced confinement in this aspect of their lives.

The most common response to how call center employment impacted one's social life was, "I hardly have time for family and friends." Saloni, for instance, was saddened that the friends she used to hang out with on a regular basis have now transformed into "phone friends." She believes employees sacrifice a lot to work the night shift, especially in their personal relationships. Denise, the former employee, stated, "You have no other life other than call center, except for your holiday." Elizabeth, the 25-year-old employee who supports her widowed mother, stated that working in a call center did not change her social life or night life, but pointed out that it was becoming more acceptable in Mumbai

for a woman to be out at night whereas in places such as Goa, a holiday destination, she believed it was still not as acceptable.

Despite the constriction of time caused by sleeping during the day and missing out on social venues that were part of their pre-call center lifestyle, Amish said the trade-off was that call centers provide food, entertainment, transportation, and a social environment that would otherwise not be accessible to women. He described the call center environment as one that gave women a chance to be independent. Without a doubt, the "cool" work environment described by some employees was in direct contrast to the job opportunities previously available. Furthermore, the night shift requirement provided some women the means to go out at night whereas previously their families prohibited this behavior. Surprisingly, however, Jyothi, the 25-year-old manager, revealed that the independence associated with this industry was by no means uniform and absolute.

Earning more than 30,000 rupees per month (US$800) and raised in a family that did not need or require her to contribute to household expenses, Jyothi earned enough money to purchase clothes, eat out, take rickshaws, and go on vacations. In essence, she had the money to be mobile in ways that were beyond the reach of many of her coworkers, particularly those whose families depended on call center income for their livelihood. In addition, she was one of three participants who spoke of having relatives that lived in the U.S. whom she'd be welcome to visit.

Did her money and transnational connections translate into independence outside her work environment? Would it be fair to assume that earning one's own money directly leads to increased social and temporal mobility, particularly for single women who make

a relatively high income and do not support a family? The answer in Jyothi's case was no. In fact, her social life was the most sequestered and controlled of the employees I met in Mumbai. Earning her own income did not translate into breaking free of the mobility-morality narratives that bound her to a strict work-to-home, family-centered lifestyle. She was occasionally given permission to hang out with call center friends on a day off, but this permission had to be strategically negotiated, such as going out with friends to buy clothes for a family event, and under no circumstances was she allowed to stay out all night or crash at a friend's place. In fact, at the age of 25, Jyothi had never slept away from her family. It was forbidden.

After years of working the night shift, she moved into her current management position and now works a 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. shift. Despite her previous night shift schedule, she was not allowed to go out after work and was expected to return home promptly. During an interview we had, as well as while observing her at the office, I noticed she was at times harried and nervous about not missing the transport that would have her home within the time frame her parents demanded. When asked about this, Jyothi explained that her parents are protective.

Jyothi's story illustrates that upward economic mobility and temporal mobility, in the form of earning a relatively high wage and working at night, does not necessarily translate into increased social mobility. Certainly not all women in this study experienced the level of constriction that Jyothi did. And in some cases, other women in her situation would be more apt to take chances by sneaking around. But the ways in which Jyothi self-surveilled her mobility, such as keeping an eye on the clock so as not to be home

even a few minutes later than her parents demanded, was something that I observed during the course of fieldwork. Some women, for example, were hyper-aware of keeping to their time and place so as to avoid questions about where they were and what they were up to when not at home.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

During the course of fieldwork it became apparent that gendered narratives are used to degrade both female and male call centers employees, particularly in terms of their social capital in the marriage market. In fact, one of the more surprising findings, at least to this researcher, was the disdain parents had towards the idea of their son or daughter marrying a call center employee.

Women working in call centers actually face a triple bind. First, the income itself was a source of anxiety to some families. This draws from the belief that women, who earn their own money—and a high income at that—are too bold and lack family values. This does not bode well for their marital worth.

The second bind stems from the night shift requirement. Staying out all night to earn one's own money interferes with the day shift state of servitude women are expected to embody and perform in the household. Vipin, a recently married 25-year-old employee, said that it would be not be possible for his wife to work as he does because "it would interfere with her duties in the house." Samir, the 24-year-old, called household labor "dirty work." Referring to arranged marriage, he said:

> She does not marry a guy, she does not marry the love of her life, she just marries into a family where she has to do the daily chores for in-laws. The women are coming out of this, but the guys are not comfortable with this.

Going out at night also mars a woman's sexual reputation, a concern among prospective husbands and in-laws searching for brides they believe to be chaste and "homely." The third bind indicates how working at night and making money are two sources of stigma, which combined with the *nature* of the work, mark women as low-skill workers. This in turn does little to change a woman's marital worth because her income, while perhaps vital to the economic survival of the family unit, is degraded as easy money.

In addition, women face cultural expectations related to their age. The women I interviewed in Mumbai generally stated that in their society it is expected they be *settled* by the age of 25. They also shared that their parents would much prefer them to be married by the ages of 21 to 23. At the same time, the call center industry generally recruits employees from the 18- to 25-year-old demographic. This directly intersects with a key rite of passage for women: marriage and having children.

Preeti, a 25-year-old interior decorator I met on a train ride to Churchgate, told me that despite the drastic social changes Mumbaikars have experienced over the past few years, many women her age are still compelled to ask a potential husband and in-laws, "Will I be *allowed* to work?" A similar sentiment was voiced during interviews with call center employees. Devaki, the 21-year-old, has worked in the industry for 13 months. The only child of a Sindhi family, a socio-ethnic group that originally belonged to the province of Sindh that became a part of Pakistan after Partition, she told me that her

parents want her to marry by age 22 or 23. She views this timeframe as a problem for women, particularly in the arranged marriage market, because the groom and his parents may not want her to work. She was quick to point out that she would refuse such a marriage because she wants to work. Devaki is currently dating a man who holds a day job as an architect; he doesn't stand in her way of pursuing a night shift call center career. Both belonging to different religions, they are currently making plans to marry and their parents support her decision.

The right to work outside the home is not only about taking care of one's family. As illustrated in the previous chapters, it is also about garnering access to the dignity and esteem that one gains from being self-directed. Preeti and Devaki illustrate the challenges women face in terms of pursuing a career outside the home and dealing with ideologies about a woman's marital place. Both refuse to accept a marriage that requires them to be homebound. The fact that they not only voice such a desire, but are also safe enough to assert their will, reflects how far society has come for some women. At the same time, the fact that women continue to have to ask permission (e.g., be allowed) to behave in ways that are considered the norm for men (e.g., working outside the home) reflects how divided gender roles remain. It also provides an understanding of how patriarchal regimes of *who's the boss* remain a part of this society.

However, men working in call centers also faced stigma. Even though call center employment was viewed as a way to gain upward economic mobility, the money did not increase an employee's worth in the marriage market. Among the middle-class households, the money from call center employment was negated by its lack of

professional prestige. For women, it was linked to the belief that they were promiscuous because they were out at night and mixing with men. Whereas for men, it was linked to the belief that call center employment was not a secure job.

Still, call centers were also viewed by some employees as an opening in terms of creating new avenues for young people to meet each other. Perhaps reshaping the tradition of arranged marriage, during an interview about how call center employment impacted her family and social life, Drasti exclaimed, "The call center becomes our marriage pool!"[2] She described how her parents in Delhi wanted to arrange a marriage for her, but were unable to because she was sleeping during the daytime hours she was expected to meet her prospective husband and in-laws. In this respect, call center employment provided a means for some women and men to reject the arranged marriage market, since they viewed this tradition as outdated. And according to Valerie, viewpoints about the marital worth of women who work in call centers are based on "weird logic."

With the exception of two women, both men and women who contributed to this study stated outright that their families would *not* want them marry a call center employee, even though they themselves were in the industry. Questions about marrying a coworker generally brought about hushed tones of "oh no" while others stated outright that their parents would throw them out if they did.

Diya, the 29-year-old, lives on her own and was the only woman in this study to drive her own car to and from work. Employed at Webco Corp for six years, she recalled that her mother's reaction to the possibility of her marrying a coworker was "[you] finally

found someone like you, working night shift, a nocturnal animal." The other interviewee who reported the same parental response was Vanathi, a 27-year-old employee who lived with roommates. She said, "If I meet somebody at Webco Corp, I can bring him home and they can get me married. They would be happy to give me a grand wedding."

Back in Mumbai, during an interview with Denise, the former employee, I asked her mother, Ms. Paul, what she would think if Denise married a call center employee:

> MS. PAUL: I hope not!
> REENA: Why?
> MS. PAUL: Because of the timings obviously.
> DENISE: Well, I think it's just because "where's he working?" "oh, he's working at a call center"
> MS. PAUL: Yeah, people say...

Ajay, the manager at a top firm in Mindspace, explained that his fiancé is afraid to tell her father about him for the very reason given by Ms. Paul. Ajay states that his future father-in-law, a colonel in the Indian army, will look down on him despite the fact that he has a college education, is in a management position, and earns as salary that far surpasses the salaries of managers in other industries. It is generally believed that money, in the form of financial stability, is as an indicator of a man's marital worth whereas a women's sexuality, which is expected to be non-existent prior to marriage, is the foundation of her worth.[3] Ajay's situation, however, illustrates that one's value on the marriage market is more complex. Money alone is not enough to buy him respect in his fiancé's family.

Interviewees revealed that some men don't want to marry a woman who works in a call center. Ms. George, the mother of Elizabeth, explained, "You know gents, how they are, suspicious they'd be. Some trust their wife fully, some don't. That's why they

don't like the wife to go out." The night shift requirement and social camaraderie associated with the call center environment was viewed with suspicion and this degraded the respectability of women in social spaces outside the call center.

Another reason was linked to the belief that a man is supposed to be the primary breadwinner of a household, so the money women make in a call center was a source of anxiety. According to Samir, the 24-year-old from Bangalore:

> If the guy finds out after this arranged marriage thing that, you know, the girl is not all that, the way she's supposed to be or the way he expected her to be, and she says "I want to go and work.," he would probably say yes first. Thinking about the math and all that, getting in the salary, double income, all that works, in a sense he might say yes.
>
> Then what if she starts earning more? Then this guy is done for. He is over. He cannot digest that fact because what does this fellow know? He knows that he should be the primary breadwinner and if he cannot be that, that's it, that's the route. The reasons could be many [why] he doubts his wife, that even can come up between the husband and wife. This guy could say, if she comes home late, he could accuse her of sleeping with somebody else. But all this is just, it's manifested out of basic breadwinner. The whole concept comes from that. If he is not able to be the primary contributor to family income he cannot survive. His ego will eat him up.

Come marriage time, in fact, it was reported that some parents force their daughters to quit because they don't want them to be known as a "call center girl" in the arranged marriage market. Interviewees pointed out that this is linked to a concern that a woman won't "get a *good* [my emphasis] guy" if she works in a call center. Good in this case refers to the socioeconomic status of the groom and his family, and it is also indicative of how, just like women, men who work in a call center become marked as the *bad* guy.

During a group interview, Lopa reported that a friend of theirs was forced to quit for this very reason. I was unable to interview an employee in this predicament given the secrecy surrounding the matter as well as concern that if I were to pursue women in this situation and their families were to find out, I would cause more trouble than good.[4]

Karen, the 24-year-old employee, predicted that in the future it will be vogue to marry within a call center. To date, accurate data on the number of married women who worked in the industry was unavailable, but employees did report witnessing an increase in the number of married women at their offices. It was suggested that this was because employees were marrying their coworkers. Sheila, a training manager at Company A, pointed out that a common saying used to describe such couples is "They come in a package deal." In an email conversation she wrote:

> If one quits the other soon will too...Even if one is sick the other one stays home....Hugely annoying when you have both in the same process* or in my case...In the same training batch. I even had one couple say that they would quit if we didn't put them in the same process.
>
> *process refers to working on a specific account, e.g., credit card service, airline reservations, etc…

Some companies provide special provisions for married couples as a means to address their need for family time outside the office. At Company A, for instance, I was informed that all married people are given weekends off. Previously, as a means to accommodate married women at Company A, they could request one of the few coveted day shift positions and be given preference. That option, however, is no longer available.

None of the 13 married participants in this study was wedded to a coworker. All were married prior to joining the industry to men with day jobs. Rekha, a 20-something

manager at TYJ Corp., described her relationship with her husband as “ships in the dark.” She and her coworkers joked about this being the reason why they have no children (e.g., no time for sex).

Heena, the 33-year-old married employee with a diploma in engineering/instrumentation, has worked at Company A for four years. Previously, she worked as a lab technician; then she got pregnant and stayed at home with their daughter, now 10 years old. She described her years at home as boring and said she decided to give the call center industry a try because it was something different to do. She stated that she enjoyed the work environment because she was around young, energetic people and her social circle now draws mostly from people in the call center industry. Heena was also the only married woman in this study that described her husband helping out in the household. In contrast to Anan’s husband, the mechanical engineer who expected her to prepare his tea and get his clothes ready, Heena reported that her husband—the owner of a travel agency—wakes up early to get their daughter ready and take her to school. Although the call center represented a space of social camaraderie, Heena was also saddened that the night shift work makes its impossible to spend quality time with her family during the week and that she misses out on family functions.

In contrast to Heena who wanted to try something new, Michelle and Sariya, also married, joined the industry because their families needed the money. Yet they also pointed out that they could no longer attend the family functions that used to be a regular part of their lives. This was a common complaint that emerged throughout the course of this study. In regards to developing a social life via the call center, Sariya explained that

her social life outside her family stayed the same after joining the industry. She described it as, “There is none.”

Anjali, the former employee who used her call center income to start a nonprofit organization, had an entirely different working experience. After living with roommates, she moved in with her boyfriend, whom she met at the call center, and they secretly lived together for four years. In order to avoid harassment and the risk of being thrown out, they lied to the neighbors and said they were married. She explained that she didn’t have the courage to tell her parents, who also lived in Mumbai, because her behavior was taboo. Working in a call center and moving away from home was bad enough in the eyes of her family, so for them to discover that she was also living with a boyfriend from the call center would have sent them into hysterics. Put another way, she engaged in high-risk behavior that came with dire, long-term consequences.

When her parents visited, she would hide his clothes under the bed and “wipe out all trace of man” from the flat. During our interview in October 2006 she explained that she recently moved back to her parent’s home. Her boyfriend moved to Bangalore for work and they maintained a long-distance relationship. By December 2006, however, the relationship had come to an end.

The freedom to take risks is vital to creating a dramatic shift in the experiences women can access. This assertion draws from Phadke’s research on women’s mobility in Mumbai.[5] She contends that in order to increase women’s access to public spaces, what they need is not so much provisions for their safety, but the right to take risks.[6] Although Anjali’s experience did not represent the norm for women in this study, her story

illustrates how call center employment can change the lifestyle of individuals who decide to behave in ways deemed reckless.

DISRUPTIVE WOMEN: A COMPARATIVE CONTEXT

Degrading women who disrupt societal expectations is certainly not something new. On the surface, it may appear that women primarily experience censure when they "behave like a man." Yet as will be demonstrated in my discussion of nurses in the U.S., call center workers in India, and factory workers in Bangladesh, even when women take on jobs deemed "ladies work," they continue to experience social stigma. This in turn impedes the social mobility of both themselves and in some cases their families.

George's ethnographic account of Keralite women who migrated to the U.S. as nurses offers an insightful parallel to the experiences of female call center employees, particularly in terms of how women come to embody and experience social stigma when they work outside the home.[7] The migration pattern from India to the United States is viewed as one in which men come first. It is generally assumed that they are the carriers of a skill-set that leads the way. *When Women Come First*, George's study of women who moved to the United Stated to work as nurses, reveals how gender relations fare when the opposite occurs. Despite earning a salary that was in many instances the sole support of their husband and children, and earning enough money to send remittances back to their family in India, the nurses in her study faced disdain from the Keralite community both in the United States and Kerala.

In addition to the women being labeled too independent and bold, nursing itself is viewed as dirty work. This was linked to the Hindu custom of not touching random bodies, a rule that women are held to with stricter scrutiny. Under this rubric, women who work as nurses are "polluted." This gendered symbol for *womanhood gone awry* transformed into derogatory remarks. They were labeled "dirty nurses" by the community and the husbands of these dirty nurses came to bear the label nurse-husband, an emasculating term. Nurse-husbands were viewed as taking a step back for staying at home while their wives earn a living. Even if they work outside the home, nurse-husbands were snubbed because of the assumption that their wives provide the financial base of the family.

This dynamic illustrates how the perceptions about women in the paid labor force extend beyond the actual work space. When women work outside the home, they disrupt their place in society. In turn, it is not only they, but also the men connected to them who experience censure. During the course of this study, a term describing the husband of a call center employee did not emerge, but George's account illustrates how perceptions about women in the workforce do not operate in a vacuum. Similar to the Keralite nurses, women employed in the call center industry faced disdain despite earning a relatively high salary. For the most part, the disdain was less about the actual content of the job and more about women earning high salaries while traversing the urban night, a space generally considered off-limits to them.

Working as nurses also impacted the lives of their children, particularly when marriage time came around. In the transnational marriage market, George found that

parents would reject marriage proposals from the U.S. when it was discovered that the mother of the prospective spouse was a nurse. As stated by one of George's interviewees:[8]

> When they were looking for a wife for my husband's nephew, they didn't want the daughter of a nurse. There was one proposal where the mother was a nurse and the family was outside India—very wealthy—and offered a lot of money as dowry. The girl was very well educated, but they said no because she was a nurse's daughter. And so there are still some people who don't like nurses.

This case illustrates the point that money does not always buy upward social mobility, particularly when it's the women who bring home the family bread. India's transnational call center industry is relatively new and it is unclear how the social stigma surrounding employment in this industry will play into the lives of an employee and in the future, her children. George's findings, however, gives us insight into how stepping outside the norms of convention creates long-term shifts that impact future generations. This is not to suggest that call center employment is bad for workers and their families, but instead illustrates the possible affect it may have in shaping the social fabric of future generations. On one hand, the money from call employment bolsters a family's economic mobility. On the other hand, the stigma related to working the night shift may impede social mobility within the very communities that have been part and parcel of a worker's life.

Employees, though aware of the stigma associated with working in a call center, did not report a personal sense of degradation, particularly as it related to their martial worth. Instead they focused on the possibilities that working in a call center gave them, ranging from the sense of independence they felt from earning their own money to their

pride in being the first one in their family to "do something different." Women also pointed out that they didn't care "what those people think" because they were not interested in an arranged marriage and, in some cases, any form of marriage.

Such responses to the societal backlash women face for going against convention was similar to Kibria's findings on women employed in the garment factories in Bangladesh.[9] The sexual reputation of both garment employees and call center employees was marred because of their work. This is primarily because garment labor is considered lower-class work and call center employment required women to work at night. Call center employees refuted the degraded sense of self-worth society sought to imprint on their body by pointing to the independence and money gained from working in this industry. Similarly, Kibria found that garment workers refuted notions of their martial "challenges" in terms of finding a spouse. As stated by one woman, "Because I am self-sufficient, I can go where I want and marry whom I want."[10]

Nursing also was not immune from sexual degradation. A Keralite man living in the United States refused to marry a nurse because they are regarded as proud, willful, and disobedient.[11] Another man links this disdain to the attitude held towards nurses, "It is a sexual kind of thinking. You can get them for anything. They are loose."[12] In this case, "get them" refers to the belief that nurse are more accessible, be it as a marriage prospect or a one-night stand, in comparison to other women.

Whether in customer service, garment production, or nursing, when women work in ways that go against convention, their behavior is met with anxiety even if the work they do is construed as "ladies work." Regardless of whether a job requires a college

degree such as nursing, a high school education at minimum such as call center employment, or little to no education such as factory work, when paid labor translates into women staying out at night, living on their own, or being the breadwinner of a family, they are viewed as a threat to urban, male order. This happens regardless of their education or class strata.

WRAP-UP

Social stigma is spatialized and mobilized in the lives of workers in ways that go beyond the actual work site. Furthermore, social mobility and social barriers, whether gaining entry into the latest club or no longer being considered a great catch in the marriage market, not only intersects with the amount of money one earns, but the ways in which it is earned. Anjali and her former boyfriend splurged one evening to dine at an upscale restaurant. When the owner learned they worked in a call center, Anjali said that they were snubbed as posers who lack real wealth and prestige. The owner chided them with comments such as, "Oh…So you work at the call centre, you all are always wasting money and blowing it on entertainment." Of this experience she wrote:

> We did not feel like eating after that. For a lot of people it's an important transit opportunity and people are making the best of it and previously these kinds of employment options were not available. But somehow every thing becomes a moral issue rather than livelihood issue. As a society we are still there. In one way there are checks and balances and some preservation of common values, but most of the time it's a hindrance.

In the end, then, call center employment, for the most part, did not increase the social status or mobility of employees. Furthermore, when women work in ways that

disrupt gendered notions of place, they are perceived as degrading the reputation of themselves and their family.

Nurses, for example, experience scrutiny because they are seen as entering *those dirty spaces* that pollute their womanhood, spaces where unfamiliar bodies are in contact with each other, even if it is for healing purposes. Similarly, female call center employees experience scrutiny because they are seen as entering *those sexy spaces*, as the urban night symbolizes deviance and sexual promiscuity, even if it is purely a time for working. In both cases they are marked as the *bad girl*. By entering those "dirty, sexy spaces," women bear the brunt of the mobility-morality narratives discussed in chapter 3. Put another way, nurses are contaminated symbolically by working where bodies make contact and call center workers are contaminated symbolically by working during a time that is constructed as off-limits to them.

In general, the high salaries of the industry, though considered a financial boon, did not buy women respect outside the office environment. Although interviewees reported that in the past three to four years it was slowly becoming more acceptable to work in a call center, the social stigma surrounding night shift work remained. Even as workers are introduced to a wider pool of individuals from a variety of backgrounds, they are also confronted with their own prejudices against groups that are different from themselves.

Sleeping through the day—a result of working all night—also interfered with some of the social obligations women were expected to conform to, such as meeting potential marriage prospects and once married, taking care of in-laws in the household.

This was a source of concern to parents because call centers draw from a pool of women workers who are at their prime in terms of being of a marriageable age. Instead of increasing a woman's marital value because she earns a high wage, she is degraded by working at night. This is significant in a society that views a woman's marriage prospects as a marker of her worth.

In closing, call center employment impacted the social mobility of workers in a variety of ways. Although for some it was just a paycheck to support their families, for others it provided access to a social life that was previously beyond their reach. One thing is clear: the openings and constrictions associated with how call center employment affected a worker's social life were largely dependent on the positionality of the worker themselves. And despite labels that mark employees as primarily middle-class and college educated, it was made apparent during the course of fieldwork that the individuals who fuel the growth of this industry hail from a myriad of backgrounds.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

> Geography is irrelevant.
> – *Sudip Banerjee, President of Enterprise Solutions at Wipro Spectramind* (*Time Magazine*)[1]
>
> Geography is history. Distances don't matter anymore.
> – *Raman Roy, Chairman of Infosys* (*60 Minutes*)[2]

While geography no longer matters to some company executives, the reality is that profits only exist in the realm made possible by geographical difference. And for the women who contributed to this dissertation, their experiences also illustrate how geography is alive and well. Indeed, the hyper-mobility of multinational corporations roaming the globe in search of an accessible, cost-effective labor pool certainly creates new employment opportunities for urban, English-speaking women in India. Yet when a woman is chastised by her father for wanting to work at night—call center job equals call girl job!—it is a reflection of how the hyper-mobility enjoyed by twenty-first-century capital is not necessarily shared by the twenty-first-century global workforce. The geographic mobility of daily life, whether it is the right to leave one's house at night or to travel about as one sees fit, speaks volumes in terms of how women experience gendered notions of place, particularly when in comes to working the night shift and the stigma this entails.

KEY FINDINGS

By working in transnational call centers in India, women inevitably enter "the hooker shift." As suggested by changes in the gendered aspect of this industry (e.g., men's increased participation), when day shift work moves to night, men gain a foothold in jobs traditionally viewed as women's work because going out at night is less of a contentious issue for men. In this respect, the night shift requirement of this industry is a barrier for women. Although the actual content of the work remains the same when exported, the gendered narrative on which it operates (e.g., pink collar) is disrupted. Beliefs about night shift employment—and views related to who belongs out at night and who does not—play a role in determining women's participation in this industry.

For women who join the industry, the relatively high wages and global work environment is viewed by some as a means to challenge patriarchy. Amish, the industry consultant who exclaimed, "Women don't put up with shit anymore!" echoed the sentiment of scholars such as Pradhan and Abraham who stated, "In India's patriarchal society, the emergence of call centers is nothing less than a social reform movement as far as economic, social and cultural empowerment of women is concerned."[3] As demonstrated in the lives of the women who participated in this project, call center employment does re-codify the lives of women workers. The night shift requirement of this industry in combination with a relatively high salary and the opportunity to work in a global environment provides some women a *legitimate* reason to get out of the house. This escape is garnered under the rubric of skill acquisition, working in an office environment, and/or contributing to the support of the family.

But the night shift aspect of this industry means that patriarchal regimes of surveillance are also re-codified when women move about in ways that are deemed transgressive. Instead of revolutionizing gendered norms of mobility and spatial access, women in general continue to be held to stricter regimes of surveillance. Access to the urban night—justified by being paid workers in a somewhat legitimate profession, as opposed to prostitution—certainly represents a dramatic shift in when some women work outside the home. Their entry into the urban night does not, however, draw from re-envisioning women as individuals who have an inherent right to move about in any way and at any time they see fit. This type of re-envisioning—"to travel like a man"—would be truly revolutionary as opposed to what has so far occurred with the rise of women working the night shift.

The changes in women's mobility brought about by transnational call center employment reflects a dichotomy that provides women a means to step outside the household in ways not experienced by previous generations, but at the same time, is based on maintaining gendered access to spaces outside the home. Concern for a woman's safety, for example, is used as a means to control her mobility, especially at night. Women who go out at night alone continue to be viewed as an anomaly because it is expected that they be accompanied by a man. Given that women are generally not the ones accountable for creating a violent or unsafe environment, the irony of this situation is that it's their bodies that bear censure.

As one 54-year-old woman from Ahmedabad pointed out, "If a man goes out to rape a woman at 10 o'clock at night, no one asks questions, but if a woman goes out she

is suspect!" Her comment raises the question: What if the mobility of men had to be negotiated through the use of identity cards and the presence of a female security guard or a female counterpart to ensure their safety, maintain their social reputation, and justify their presence in the urban nightscape? This dynamic might not be viewed as a protective force, but rather as an unnecessarily restrictive one. Figuratively speaking, women's bodies are under siege and those who step outside the coveted norms of a woman's place are marked as a disruptive force to the moral order of society.

From neighbors setting the police onto a woman and her family because they see her out at night, to questions such as "What are these females doing in the night?," to keeping tabs on women via mobile phones, to questioning a woman's worth on the marriage market because she works at night, to expecting that a working wife play down her contribution to household finances, to forcing a one's daughter to quit their job because of a rape that occurred in a different city, women continue to experience inequality in a variety of settings.

Without a doubt, the places some women traverse—whether a Fame Adlabs movie theatre on a Saturday afternoon or the CenterOne mall in Vashi on a Friday night—represent a shift in where women have historically spent their free time. Similar to how Hindu temples draw from gendered regimes of access (menstruating women be gone!), the social spaces young women access today also reflect gendered notions of space that will continue to change over time, but at the same time will remain tethered to beliefs about a woman's place. For the majority of the women who contributed to this

project, hanging out in malls and movie theatres was considered perfectly acceptable. Partying all night in a bar or club, especially if unescorted, was not.

Although transnational call center employment sends women workers out of the house at night and provides them with a relatively high wage that is viewed in some circles as an indicator of liberation, their work is degraded and subsequently women experience backlash. The actual content of their labor is demarcated as easy work, a job that anyone can get. The fact that this so-called easy job is done at night causes beliefs about women taking it easy, working the "hooker shift," to surface. Regardless of an upscale office environment and high wage, the snickers and stares, sympathy and subjugation, remain. As one interviewee's uncle pointed out, the chance to be independent and "know the world" did not negate women's responsibility for how staying out all night affects the family unit in terms of managing the household.

The "what will people think?" narrative came up time and again, illustrating the varying ways in which individuals are pressured to conform to ideals about their place in society and subsequently, how these ideals are embodied. When a woman works in a call center and smokes, she is marked as a bad girl, whereas a man's smoking is seen as a way to relieve stress. When it comes to concern about how call center employment will affect an individual's worth on the marriage market, a gendered narrative emerges. For women, it's more about going against the societal expectation that a woman is supposed to put family first and be chaste and homely. For men, it is more connected to not having a secure, "proper" job in order to fulfill the societal expectation that they be the family's breadwinner. The underlying tone of sex and fast money associated with the industry is

used to denigrate workers and is part of the backlash workers experience for *not paying their dues*, in terms of achieving a salary level that was previously available to an even narrower segment of the population (e.g., professional, white-collar).

Backlash is but one example of how mobility-morality narratives are experienced. A *good girl* is expected to mind her place whereas a *bad girl* transgresses and doesn't play by "the rules." Every place—from a public bus to a kitchen—comes with regimes of surveillance. These regimes are both external and self-inflicted and stem from the pressures placed on women to maintain their reputation.

The ways in which women both experience and respond to the mobility-morality narratives that shape their lives change as technology evolves. The mobile phone, for instance, can expand the physical spaces and virtual spaces women experience. Mobile phones also expand some women's social space in the form of creating a private avenue for planning travel getaways and meeting with a boyfriend kept secret from the family. So far, however, it has done little to dramatically shift the underlying tension between what constitutes a woman's place and what does not. Although women's entry into the urban night was abetted by the sense of safety and connection that carrying a mobile phone brought a woman's family, this shift was also achieved through presenting call centers as a safe place that provides a high wage and an upscale office environment. As such, the mobile phone is certainly a device that re-codifies the mobility-morality narratives that shape *when* women go out, but it does little to challenge the underlying framework that places women in a position of having to ask permission to move about in

ways deemed acceptable for their male counterparts. In this context, the mobile phone acts as a surveillance device which families depend on to keep tabs on women.

During fieldwork, threads related to the "outliers" of the working woman's story certainly emerged. Although not considered the norm of the industry, the outliers demonstrated that the affect of night shift work on women's lives is rarely a linear outcome that can be predicted and set as the standard. From Irene, the nearly-divorced training manager who lived alone and was dating a coworker, to Anjali, who secretly lived with a boyfriend for four years and used her income to start her own nonprofit, to Parvati, who used her income to take monthly vacations, to Poonam, who moved away from her family to pursue her career aspirations, to Purvi, an only child whose parents are deceased and who relies on her commissions as a collections agent to save money to buy her own home, women's lives extend beyond how they experience marital relations, household labor, and "family values." It is through the stories of these individuals that I began to realize that the tales of womanhood woven into popular culture are at times limiting because they disguise the richness and depth of women's lives.

Finally, two underlying terms, *darkness* and *blood*, emerged time and again in the course of working on this dissertation. Writing about women's access to sacred spaces in a dissertation about women's employment in the call center industry may appear to be a stretch. In terms of mobility-morality narratives, however, it provided a parallel for consideration. Darkness, for example, has an immobilizing affect on women's lives as they are generally expected to remain housebound in order to keep safe and maintain their reputation. Put another way, a moral woman doesn't wander too far, especially at

night. In conjunction, blood, specifically women's menstrual blood, also has an immobilizing effect because it is symbolized as degrading the moral order of sacred space.

Metaphorically speaking, these two beliefs speak volumes about how gendered notions of womanhood and place are both symbolized and spatialized. Women's menstrual blood—marked as feminine contamination that is released every month—is considered a polluting force on sacred spaces such as a Hindu temple. Women's bodies, keeper of a family's reputation, become contaminated when made mobile in the urban night.[4] These beliefs provide insight into how the interplay between space and time re-circulates negative depictions of women. When women enter a space during a time deemed "bad" (e.g., the urban night), they experience disdain from society. When women enter a space deemed sacred during their "bad" time of the month, they are marked as the polluting force. These forms of censure, of both bodies and the spaces traversed, hinder women's lives.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORETICAL LITERATURE

The women who participated in this study move through a variety of spaces that in some cases bring about changes in their social mobility, while in others cases lead to more dramatic shifts in spatial mobility, physical mobility, and temporal mobility. These varying forms of mobility overlap and inform one another. In the end, reaction to women's employment in the call center industry draws from the spatio-temporal

narratives that society creates in order to define an individual's place in the larger community.

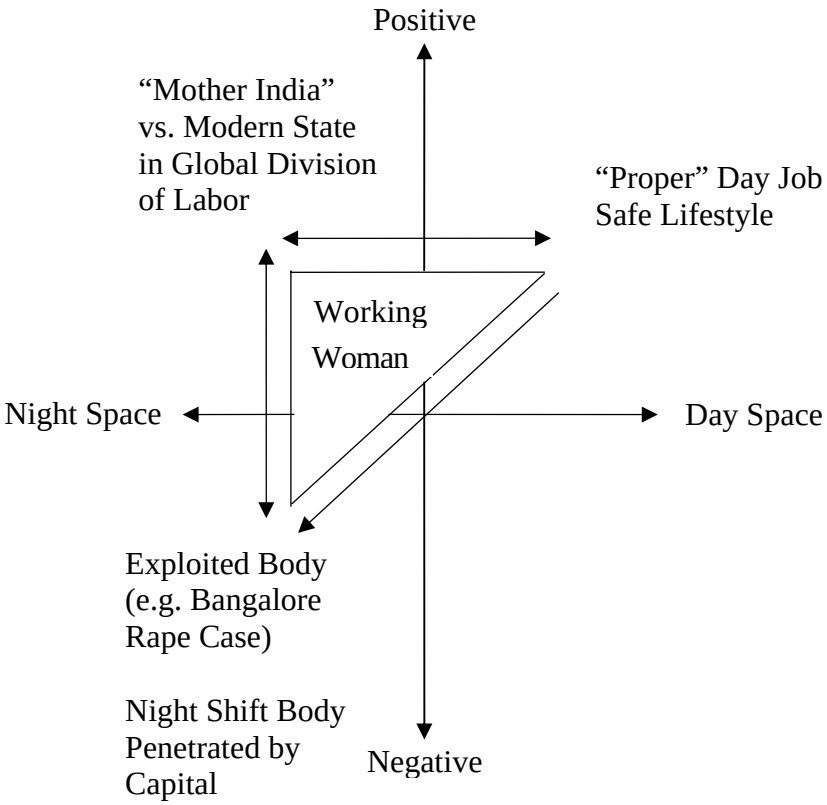
Figure 1 in chapter 1 provided a visual representation of how women come to embody and experience call center employment. Throughout the course of writing this dissertation, it was apparent that the perceptions and beliefs outlined in this diagram do continue to affect, and in many cases limit, women's mobility and spatial access. At the same time, it was also apparent that experiences of empowerment and exploitation were not distinct experiences that operate in a vacuum, void of their opposites. Instead, there is fluidity and overlap.

Many women, for instance, gained a sense of empowerment and liberation from earning their own money and going out at night. At the same time, they felt exploited and harassed because they believed that they were held to higher productivity standards relative to their U.S. counterparts, and in some cases they had to deal with police and nosy neighbors who believed it was their right to know why they were out at night.

Expanding upon the idea that there is fluidity and overlap in terms of how women experience empowerment and exploitation, at the conclusion of this research I realized that I needed to reconfigure the matrix I presented in chapter 1. Thus, I have created a new theoretical matrix (see figure 6) to expand on those ideas crafted in chapter 1. By reformulating the matrix I presented at the beginning of this dissertation, I am better able to illustrate and convey some of the findings from this project. This matrix demonstrates that the ways in which women experience working the night shift—be it backlash for

going out at night or liberation through earning their own money—is linked to larger structural forces such as global labor relations and nationalism.

Figure 6 Spaces embodied and experienced by female call center employees



Indeed, there are direct connections—albeit at times subtle and nuanced—in terms of how women who work outside the household are used as a platform for promoting and opposing issues such as globalization, nation-building, and economic development. Class also plays a role in fueling such agendas. For instance, concern related to global forces fueling the growth of India's economy invoke class narratives

about who benefits from globalization and who does not. The growth of the middle-class is certainly considered a positive result of work in the IT sector.

However, the ways in which the emergence of the IT sector disrupts the nation's understanding of women's roles and positions in society are made evident in light of reaction to changes in their mobility. When middle-class women who travel at night to service global corporations meet with rape and murder (e.g., Bangalore rape case), the idea of the nation and the image of the ideal "Mother India" female figure is disrupted by gendered conceptions of space, mobility, and violence (see figure 6).

The media frenzy surrounding the Bangalore rape case not only made apparent the disparate attention given to women's safety in relation to their class status, but also demonstrates how women's bodies are used to convey Indian nationalist anxiety related to economic development and globalization.

Literature on body politics was also key to contextualizing how women experience night shift employment. By framing the body as a geographical site that produces and performs gender in a variety of settings, the spatio-temporal narratives that dictate women's lives were given a space to emerge. These narratives are significant because beliefs surrounding night shift work affect women's participation in this rapidly-expanding labor force and also have implications for how we theorize feminization of labor discourse. More aptly, when low-wage, day shift employment moves into the realm of high-wage, night shift employment and brings with it an increase in men's participation, it suggests that "ladies work" is not only about the actual content of the job. The demand for emotional labor and the supposed preference for women as call center

workers was not enough to minimalize men's participation in the industry. The time-space geography of this industry —a night shift global environment—also has implications for how work is gendered.

PERSONAL ASPECTS RELATED TO THIS DISSERTATION

Although this dissertation is based on a scholarly interest in how gender roles fare in the midst of global technology and development, it also entails the experience of learning about a part of my identity that had remained cloistered. As an American woman returning to the country of her grandparents (my parents hail from East Africa), this project brought up issues of identity, belonging, and gender roles. It also left me deeply troubled, because the contradictory reactions I had to living in Mumbai left me with more questions than answers. I expected that returning to India would put me in touch with my roots in such a way that would forge a sense of connection and belonging. It didn't. Instead, I was anxious to leave. When I would travel out of Mumbai, the return would inevitably leave me bereft. I didn't want to go back; I found I never wanted to go back because of the disappointment of living in an area I viewed as a ghetto-like. The sense of not belonging, and not wanting to for that matter, made me want to run away.

The dilapidated building I lived in was certainly not what I envisioned when people familiar with Mumbai told me that I lived in a "posh" area. Going in and out of my flat on a daily basis, I climbed four flights of stairs—uneven stairs for that matter—and could not take my eyes off the stairwell walls covered with decades of red and brown

tobacco and betel nut spit. Never once did I even place my bare hand on the stair rail because I could not bear the dirt and grime that surrounded me. I was disgusted to live in a building where people hired maids to keep their homes spotless, but outside their front door it was absolutely filthy. To give an example of how dirty the neighborhood I resided in was, I was stunned to find that after returning from 20- to 30-minute walks brown grime would come off my hands when I washed them. The air quality, in fact, was so bad (at least compared to what I'm used to) that upon return to the U.S. after 10 months of research, I was prescribed nose and throat inhalers because I was unable breathe properly.

During pre-dissertation fieldwork in 2005, I wanted to leave by day five of a two-week visit and began counting days to my return to the United States. I spent the next year wondering how I would fare during the 10 months of fieldwork that lay ahead. At the same time, I could not imagine *not* doing the work. Beyond a sense of commitment and follow through, I was drawn to this research for other reasons. Reasons that, to date, I am unable to fully comprehend.

Defined as the "City of Dreams," a place where a person can become somebody, Mumbai was my nightmare. I felt like a caged animal, mobility ripped away, unable to speak, unable to drive. Eventually, I stopped wanting to go out. The simplest aspects of upper-middle-class life—such as figuring out where and what to eat—was an ordeal merely because I didn't want to take a 20-minute walk that would leave me grimy from the pollution, agitated from the noise, and hyper-vigilant from the aggression of drivers, beggars, and street children, as well as navigating between hawkers and other

pedestrians. Although I had the money to get on a plane and leave, within my neighborhood setting, I felt suffocated and trapped, often looking for a way out.

No one told me I would experience more than one moment of hating my research site. Frustration and anguish were to be expected, hatred was not. I came to view my surroundings as a representation of everything I did not want to become: immobilized, poor, and afraid. In addition to witnessing the abject poverty that is part and parcel of the city, the sense of having to justify my existence as a woman who did not aspire to marriage/children left me empty and uninspired. Through my lens of the world, the posh neighborhood I lived in appeared to me to be a ghetto, the first-class train was the "back of the bus," and the "safe" neighborhood my neighbors emphasized was based on it being considered unbecoming for women to go out alone late at night. "Safe for whom?" became my question.

And just when I thought I couldn't take it anymore, that I was at the end of my rope both personally and professionally, I would inevitably meet women such as Poonam and Anjali. Their bold willingness to behave in ways deemed risky, combined with their "detractors be damned" attitude, cut through the negative stereotypes I was beginning to form. On a rational level, I was aware that these stereotypes were wrong, but I drew upon them in a feeble attempt to bring order and understanding to the chaos.

In writing this, what may appear to some people as a critical, inflexible stance imbued with a sense of American superiority is in reality a sense of despair combined with a profound sense of disappointment about the inequalities that remain embedded in society today. Research in Mumbai, Bangalore, and Ahmedabad left me conflicted, and I

was concerned about the level of so-called objectivity I would bring to this project. Instead of hiding behind the detached observer stance, I decided to reveal my personal experience in order to demonstrate how conducting fieldwork is often about much more than just going out and collecting data.[5]

In fact, the decision to pursue this project was an unexpected happenstance, as I initially planned to conduct research on women working as engineers in the IT sector. This changed during a visit to India in 2003—my first since the age of three—when I participated in the Women in IT Conference held in Chidambaram, located in south India. It was here that I first learned how some call center employees were accused of prostitution when they went out at night. As a geographer-in-the-making, this situation sparked an interest in wanting to uncover how gendered norms of mobility and spatial access met with the demand for night shift workers. It was only later, however, that I also began to see a parallel between this study and my previous work experience. In 1986, for example, I earned $6.50 an hour as a call center employee of a major bank. My friend and I were the only high school students working in the department, and we considered this salary quite a step up in pay, especially compared to our friends who earned minimum wage. Fast-forward to the twenty-first century and what was for us a $6.50 per hour job 20 years ago is now done for approximately $1.30 per hour in India.

Even though we were still supported by our parents, my friend and I saw ourselves as well-off and independent, similar to some of the women who participated in this study. However, we got to keep our names and work the day shift. Workers in India struggled between opportunity and constriction, and also experienced on-the-job training

differently. Despite the fact that the content of our work was comparable, because some call center employees took on "American-sounding" names in addition to working the night shift, it became evident that our experiences were really not as similar as I had originally suspected.

POSTSCRIPT

Since returning from fieldwork, I have remained in contact with several employees. In the course of the past year, the lives of some of the women who contributed to this study changed drastically. This showed me that it's not possible to predict the outcomes for women who move about in ways deemed against "the rules." Remember Anjali, the 27-year-old who left home at the age of 18, used her call center income to start a nonprofit organization, and broke up with her boyfriend, with whom she had secretly lived with for a few years? Four months later, out of the blue I received the following email from her:

> I am coming to NY..first 2 weeks of May [2007].. the reason...i am getting engaged..with who? Picture attached. I am happy.

In a subsequent conversation, she described how she and her fiancé met while they were attending a wedding in Kolkata. Although she didn't refer to their meeting as an arranged marriage she stated "It was all very negotiated." He works as a doctor in a suburb of New York City and, at the time of this writing, Anjali was in the midst of preparing for her move to the United States in March 2008. Her goal is to continue working in the nonprofit sector, and she is also exploring graduate school opportunities.

Mona veered off in a surprising, yet telling direction considering the liberation and empowerment that is associated with call center employment. In this instance, Mona, the 25-year-old employee, was considered a success story among her friends and colleagues. As cited in chapter 4, she purchased her first home at the age of 23, which she rented out. She bought a car the following year and, during the time of our interview in February 2006, was deciding whether to trade in her older car for a new one or use her savings to take another overseas vacation. In chapter 5, she was hanging out at pubs and discos during her free time.

When I asked Mona what her parents would think if she married a call center employee she hedged on the subject, citing that they would not approve and that "caste matters" to them. I did not push further because I sensed it was a contentious topic and not one she wished to pursue with me. Months later, I learned that her life had changed drastically. Mona was in love with a man whom she met at the call center. She was Hindu; he was Catholic. Upon learning of the relationship, her father beat her, took away her mobile phone, and locked her in their home. As a result, she no longer worked in the call center. From working the night shift to taking overseas vacations, her mobility was ripped away and regimes of surveillance and control quickly took over her life.

After a few months, her family began to trust her and she was allowed to go outside. She secretly met with her boyfriend and they married, unbeknownst to her parents. His parents, fully aware of the circumstances, were supportive of the relationship. In addition to religious differences and caste concerns, disdain from her side of the family stemmed from economic issues. Her family, for instance, had more money

than his. Mona's now-husband and his parents came to her home and asked her parents permission for them to be together. They refused. As a result, Mona ran away and remained out of touch with both family and friends.

Irene, the 32-year-old training manager, is still trying to get the divorce she has spent approximately six years trying to obtain. In December 2007, she emailed to let me know that her husband is planning to visit Mumbai shortly to return her jewelry and sign the paperwork. Once signed, the divorce will take six months to be complete. In addition, Irene recently completed an exam needed to graduate from the college she left a few years ago. Upon receiving the results, she plans to move forward with her plan to find a way to migrate to the United States, either through work or with the help of a family member already in the country.

During an October 2006 interview, Kriti, the 21-year-old who used her savings from call center employment to start a boutique, spoke of how she would marry in the next few years, by age 24 if she has it her way or earlier if her parents have it their way. She described how her parents also agreed to a longer courtship—eight to nine months—to get to know the guy. Although she did once meet a man through her job, she stated, "It didn't go anywhere." Her parents want an arranged marriage and although she was initially agreeable, she now does not want this because "it's too risky." Seven months after this interview, in May 2007, Kriti emailed to let me know that she "…finally found the right guy and I'm getting married." She continues to put in long hours working the night shift at a call center while growing her business during the day.

One employee's belief that "the call center becomes our marriage pool!" seemed to have rung true for Jyothi, the 25-year-old call center manager. As discussed in chapter 7, Jyothi's life was hyper-managed by her parents. In terms of parental control, she led the most restrictive lifestyle of the participants in this study. Nine months after our initial interview, she told me that she had been secretly seeing someone at the office for years and they planned to marry. Neither had yet told their respective families. In contrast to not telling because either one's parents would disapprove of them marrying a call center employee, they have held off because both set of parents, upon finding out of the relationship, would want them to marry sooner rather than later. They preferred to wait, hence the secrecy. After the wedding, Jyothi and her husband will live with his family.

Shilpa, the 38-year-old who candidly spoke of managing her husband's inferiority complex, emailed in February 2008 to let me know that she was no longer working at nights for the Fortune 500 Company at which I initially interviewed her. Her experience with this firm provided her entry into a dayshift management position at a competing firm. She writes, "I got what I wanted now." Poonam, the 32-year-old whose first job out of college was in a cement factory and who in recent years caused waves by her decision to live away from her husband and child, described that one of her goals was to work abroad again. In January 2008 she achieved this. The company she works for sponsored her H1-B visa to migrate to the United States and she currently resides in the New England area. Her family will join her later this summer.

In closing, I want to thank the women and men who participated in this study. Their willingness to share their experiences and disclose what was, for many, sensitive

information made for the foundation of this dissertation. By taking on the night and entering a globalized work space, women certainly experienced both constriction and opening in their lives. In between tales of exploitation and tales of empowerment is a gray space which shows us that the answer is “it depends” when asking how night shift employment affects women’s mobility. From migrating women and stuck women to bold women and homely women, this industry attracts a variety of workers whose experiences and circumstances outside the industry shaped the extent to which night shift employment transformed their lives.

Endnotes

Chapter 1

[1] Joanna Slater, "Call of the West: For India's Youth, New Money Fuels a Revolution," *Wall Street Journal - Eastern Edition*, January 27, 2004.

[2] Raj Chengappa and Malini Goyal, "Housekeepers to the World," *India Today*, November 18, 2002.

[3] A salwar kameez is an outfit that consists of a long tunic-styled top worn over loose fitting pants and adorned with a scarf.

[4] J. P. Pradhan and V. Abraham, "Social and Cultural Impact of Outsourcing: Emerging Issues from Indian Call Centers," *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (2005).

[5] NASSCOM, "Nasscom's Ranking of Third Party Players" http://www.nasscom.org/artdisplay.asp?Art_id=4400 (accessed October 3, 2005).

[6] The emergence of transnational call centers is also referred to as *outsourcing*, or sometimes *offshoring*, by the mainstream media. The term outsourcing, however, does not fully account for this new phenomenon because U.S. companies have been outsourcing for decades in terms of hiring local firms to handle processes such as payroll and human resources. Transnational is used to account for the geographic scale of this industry, which is based on cartographies of cultural circulation, identification, and action beyond nation-state borders. See Philip Crang, Claire Dwyer, and Peter Jackson, "Transnationalism and the Spaces of Commodity Culture," *Progress in Human Geography* 27, no. 4 (2003). 439

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[14] Siddiqi, "The Sexual Harassment of Industrial Workers: Strategies for Intervention in the Workplace and Beyond," 34.

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[17] Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 150.

[18] Torsten Hägerstand, "Space, Time, and Human Conditions," in *Dynamic Allocation of Urban Space*, ed. Anders Karlqvist, L. Lundqvist, and Snickars (Lexington, MA: Saxon House; Lexington Books, 1975), 5.

Hagerstrand's work on individual mobility gained attention in the 1970s, and he became a leader in the field of behavioral geography. See Robin Flowerdew, "Hägerstand, Torsten," in *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, ed. Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin, and Gill Valentine (London: Sage publications, 2004).

[19] Kate Boyer, "Spaces of Change: Gender, Information Technology, and New Geographies of Mobility and Fixity in the Early Twentieth Century Information Economy," in *A Companion to Feminist Geography*, ed. Lise. Nelson and Joni Seager (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); Tim Cresswell, "Embodiment, Power and the Politics of Mobility: The Case of Female Tramps and Hobos," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24, no. 2 (1999); Paula Kantor, "Female Mobility in India - the Influence of Seclusion Norms on Economic Outcomes," *International Development Planning Review* 24, no. 2 (2002); Robin Law, "Gender and Daily Mobility in a New Zealand City, 1920-1960," *Social & Cultural Geography* 3, no. 4 (2002); Mei Po Kwan, "Gender and Individual Access to Urban Opportunities: A Study Using Space-Time Measures," *Professional Geographer* 51, no. 2 (1999); Flavia Cristaldi, "Commuting and Gender in Italy: A Methodological Issue.," *Professional Geographer* 57, no. 2 (2005).

[20] Hanson and Pratt, *Gender, Work, and Space*; Jennifer Mandel, "Mobility Matters: Women's Livelihood Strategies in Porto Novo, Benin," *Gender, Place, and Culture* 11, no. 2 (2004).

[21] Paromita Vohra, "Q2P," (India: Paromita Vohra/Devi Pictures, 2006).

[22] M. Bapat and I. Agarwal, "Our Needs, Our Priorities; Women and Men from the Slums in Mumbai and Pune Talk About Their Needs for Water and Sanitation," *Environment and Urbanization* 15, no. 2 (2003).

[23] Madhusree Dutta, "7 Islands and a Metro," (India: Majlis, 2006).

[24] Shilpa Ranade, "The Way She Moves: Mapping the Everyday Production of Gender-Space," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 17 (2007).

[25] Ibid.: 1524.

[26] In an email discussion, Ranade explained that a dead wall is a wall that does not have any openings in it and generally rises above eye level. High compound walls of industries are an example of this. These walls are not porous to the outside and in the context of their study, the critical "eyes on the street" are missing because of them.

[27] Margaret L. Andersen, *Thinking About Women: Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Gender*, 7th ed. (Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon, 2006).

[28] Ibid.

[29] V. Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan, *Global Gender Issues* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999).

[30] V. Spike Peterson, "Rereading Public and Private: The Dichotomy That Is Not One," *SAIS Review* 20, no. 11-29 (2000).

[31] Peterson and Runyan, *Global Gender Issues*.

[32] John Gray, Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus: a Practical Guide for Improving communication and getting what you want in your relationships (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

[33] For an example of this, see Somini Sengupta, "Careers Give India's Women New Independence," *New York Times* (November 23, 2007). http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/23/world/asia/23india.html?_r=1&oref=slogin (accessed November 27, 2007).

[34] Reena Patel and Mary Jane Parmentier, "The Persistence of Traditional Gender Roles in the Technology Sector: A Study of Female Engineers in India," *Information Technologies and International Development* 2, no. 3 (2005).

[35] Pravina Parikh and Suhas Sukhatme, "Women in the Engineering Profession in India: The Millennium Scenario," (Mumbai, India: Indian Institute of Technology, Department of Mechanical Engineering, 2002).

[36] Jane Fountain, "Constructing the Information Society: Women, Information Technology, and Design," *Technology in Society* 22 (2000); Nancy Hafkin and Nancy Taggart, "Gender, Information Technology, and Developing Countries: An Analytic

Study," (Washington D.C.: United States Agency for International Development, 2001); Roli Varma, "Women in Information Technology: A Case Study of Undergraduate Students in a Minority-Serving Institution," *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society* 22, no. 4 (2002).

[37] Cresswell, *In Place/out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*.

[38] See J.P. Singh, "Social and Cultural Aspects of Gender Inequality and Discrimination in India," *Asian Profile* 30, no. 2 (2002).

[39] Melissa W. Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 156.

[40] Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991); Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: A Feminist Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999).

[41] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988).

[42] Robyn Longhurst, *Bodies: Exploring Fluid Boundaries* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); ———, "The Body and Geography," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 2, no. 1 (1995); Nancy Duncan, *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1996); Rachel Silvey, "Borders, Embodiment, and Mobility: Feminist Migration Studies in Geography," in *A Companion to Feminist Geography*, ed. Lise Nelson and Joni Seager (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); Geraldine Pratt, "Geography and Body," in *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, ed. Ronald John Johnston, et al. (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

[43] Geographers from a variety of sub-specialties have demonstrated that the body is a key site for understanding how difference is maintained and spatialized. For medical geography, see Glenda Laws and John Radford, "Women with Disabilities and Everyday Geographies: Home Space and the Contested Body," in *Putting Health into Place: Landscape, Identity, and Well-Being*, ed. Robin A. Kearns and Wilbert M. Gesler, *Space, Place, and Society;* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1998). See also Kawango Agot, "HIV/Aids Interventions and the Politics of the African Woman's Body," in *A Companion to Feminist Geography*, ed. Lise Nelson and Joni Seager (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

For sports geography, see Lynda Johnston, "Crossing Boundaries : Gendered Spaces and Bodies in Golf," in *Subjectivities, Knowledges, and Feminist Geographies: The Subjects and Ethics of Social Research*, ed. Liz Bondi (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

For political geography, see Jennifer Hyndman, “Towards a Feminist Geopolitics,” *Canadian Geographer* 45, no. 2 (2001).

For social geography, see Robyn Longhurst, “Fat Bodies: Developing Geographical Research Agendas,” *Progress in Human Geography* 29, no. 3 (2005). See also Katherine McKittrick, “‘Who Do You Talk to, When a Body’s in Trouble?: M. Nourbese Philip’s (Un)Silencing of Black Bodies in the Diaspora,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 1, no. 2.

[44] Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity* (New York: Fawcett Books, 1985).

[45] Susan S. Wadley, “Women and the Hindu Tradition,” *Signs* 3, no. 1 (1977): 121.

[46] Shan Ranjit, “Sabarimalai: The Banning of Menstruating Women” http://www.tamilnation.org/forum/shanranjit/sabarimalai.htm (accessed September 29, 2007).

[47] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990).

[48] Ibid.

[49] Anna Secor, “Belaboring Gender: The Spatial Practice of Work and the Politics of ‘Making Do’ in Istanbul,” *Environment and Planning A* 35, no. 12 (2003): 5.

[50] Shilpa Phadke, “‘You Can Be Lonely in a Crowd’: The Production of Safety in Mumbai,” *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 12, no. 1 (2005): 52.

[51] Richa Nagar et al., “Locating Globalization: Feminist (Re)Readings of the Subjects and Spaces of Globalization,” *Economic Geography* 78, no. 3 (2002): 267.

[52] Wendell Cox, “Mumbai Wards & Districts: Population & Density by Sector 2001” http://www.demographia.com/db-mumbaidistr91.htm (accessed October 1, 2007).

[53] In an email discussion, Cox confirms that his numbers are derived from the Census of India data on the Municipality of Greater Mumbai. He further explains that access to this data is now limited to employees, but it can be validated on the Mumbai Helpline website: http://www.mumbaihelpline.org/YourWardList.asp.

[54] Annapurna Shaw, *The Making of Navi Mumbai* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004).

[55] Ibid., 4.

[56] Ibid., 4.

[57] Amiya Kumar Sahu, “Present Scenario of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Dumping Grounds in India” (paper presented at the International Conference on Sustainable Solid Waste Management, Chennai, September 5 - 7 2007).

[58] Ibid.

[59] Winifred Poster, "Saying 'Good Morning' in the Middle of the Night: The Reversal of Work Time in Globalized ICT Service Work," *Research in the Sociology of Work* 17 (2007): 102.

[60] Meenakshi Dhar Patel, *The Economic Times IT Enabled Services 2002* (Mumbai: Bennett Coleman & Co., 2002).

[61] Bangalore changed to Bangaluru during the course of this study. Throughout the book, however, I continue to use the name Bangalore because it reflects how interviewees referred to the city even after the official name-change.

[62] A. J. Onwuegbuzie and R. B. Johnson, "Mixed Method and Mixed Model Research," in *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches*, ed. R.B. Johnson and L.B. Christensen (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2004); A. J. Onwuegbuzie and N. L. Leech, "On Becoming a Pragmatic Researcher: The Importance of Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methodologies," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 8, no. 5 (2005).

[63] Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Ground Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990); ———, *Grounded Theory in Practice* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997).

[64] Tim Cresswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998); Bernard Russell, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002).

[65] Emily Skop, "The Methodological Potential of Focus Groups in Population Geography," *Population, Space and Place* 12, no. 2 (2006).

[66] NASSCOM, "Nasscom's Ranking of Third Party Players."

[67] Based on the April 16, 2005 currency exchange of US$1 = 43.775rs.

[68] All amounts going forward are based on an exchange rate of 45.10474rs to US$1. This rate was calculated based on a 12-month average of the 2006 Rupee to U.S. Dollar exchange, derived from Federal Reserve Bank of New York data. Amounts in USD are rounded to the nearest dollar.

[69] Chetan Bhagat, *One Night @ the Call Center* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2005).

[70] Vohra, "Q2P."

[71] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Ground Theory Procedures and Techniques*; Herbert Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995).

[72] Peppered throughout the book are names such as Sandra, Valerie, and Irene. These pseudonyms reflect the English names of Catholic Indians who participated in this study and are not American identities some employees are required to take on as part of

their job. Although accurate data on the actual number of Catholic Indians working in the industry was unavailable, interviewees noted that they are in demand because of their English skills and anglicized accent derived from speaking English in the house and attending Catholic schools.

[73] Haraway, "Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective."

[74] ———, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*.

[75] Lewis Holloway, "Donna Haraway," in *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, ed. Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin, and Gill Valentine (London; Thousand Oaks: Sage publications, 2004).

[76] Sandra G. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); M. Hickey and V. Lawson, "Beyond Science? Human Geography, Interpretation, and Critique," in *Questioning Geography: Fundamental Debates*, ed. Noel Castree and Alisdair Rogers (Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

[77] For ethnography see Suzanne R. Kirschner, ""Then What Have I to Do with Thee?": On Identity, Fieldwork, and Ethnographic Knowledge," *Cultural Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1987); Ruth Behar, "The Vulnerable Observer," in *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks the Heart*, ed. Ruth Behar (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996); Douglas E. Foley, "Critical Ethnography: The Reflexive Turn," *Qualitative Studies in Education* 15, no. 5 (2002); Radhika Parameswaran, "Feminist Media Ethnography in India: Exploring Power, Gender, and Culture in the Field," *Qualitative Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (2001).

For feminist geography see Kim England, "Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research," *The Professional Geographer* 46, no. 1 (1994); Audrey Kobayashi, "GPC Ten Years On: Is Self-Reflexivity Enough?," *Gender Place & Culture* 10, no. 4 (2003); Elizabeth Chacko, "Positionality and Praxis: Fieldwork Experiences in Rural India," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 25, no. 1 (2004); Gillian Rose, "Situating Knowledges: Positionality, Reflexivities and Other Tactics," *Progress in Human Geography* 21, no. 3 (1997); Saraswati Raju, "We Are Different, but Can We Talk?," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 9, no. 2 (2002).

[78] Emily Skop, *Saffron Suburbs: Lessons Learned from an Indian American Community* (Chicago: The Center for American Places, Forthcoming).

[79] Yi Fu Tuan, "Cultural Geography: Glances Backward and Forward," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 4 (2004): 730.

Chapter 2

[1] Although India has the highest concentration of transnational call centers thus far, the centers also have a presence in Kenya, Philippines, China, Pakistan, Ireland, Lithuania, Panama, and the Caribbean.

[2] For an insightful reading on the training and communications aspect of transnational call center employment see Aneesh Aneesh, "Specters of Global Communication," *Frakcija (forthcoming)*.

[3] For further reading on the identity aspects of this industry see Mathangi Krishnamurthy, "Outsourced Identities: The Fragmentations of the Cross-Border Economy," *Anthropology News* 46, no. 3 (2005); Winifred Poster, "Who's on the Line? Indian Call Center Agents Pose as Americans for Us-Outsourced Firms," *Industrial Relations* 46, no. 2 (2007); Kiran Mirchandani, "Practices of Global Capital: Gaps, Cracks, and Ironies in Transnational Call Centres in India," *Global Networks* 4, no. 4 (2004). The identity aspect of this industry is also the subject of a documentary filmed in Mumbai. See Ashim Ahluwalia, "John and Jane," (Mumbai: Future East Film, 2005).

[4] Labeling Indian employees as cheap labor is a source of contention as Baxi points out that some scholars believe this perpetuates a Eurocentric view of Indians. See Parul Baxi, "Globalizing Identity? Voices of Call Center Workers from Gurgaon, India" (Calif. State University, East Bay, 2006).

[5] Adam, "The Gendered Time Politics of Globalization: Of Shadowlands and Elusive Justice," 21.

[6] Barbara Adam, "The Gendered Time Politics of Globalization: Of Shadowlands and Elusive Justice," *Feminist Review* 3, no. 70 (2002); Reena Patel, "Working the Night Shift: Gender and the Global Economy," *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 5, no. 1 (2006); Tony Fitzpatrick, "Social Policy and Time," *Time & Society* 13, no. 2-3 (2004).

[7] The push for protectionist policies during times of economic insecurity is not new. The 1883 Factories Act, enacted during British Colonial rule in India, was introduced under the rubric of implementing fairer work practices. Yet Mathew argues that it was a protectionist measure brought about by textile conglomerate groups in Britain who were threatened by competition from India's textile industry. See Babu Mathew, "A Brief Note on Labour Legislation in India," *Asia Labour Update*, no. 46 (2003). http://www.amrc.org.hk/4605.htm (accessed October 28, 2007).

Although considerable media attention is given to the loss of U.S. jobs, this trend should not be exaggerated. Pandit, for example, finds that the actual number of U.S. jobs that have moved overseas thus far is not significant. In fact, "reverse outsourcing" is also slowly emerging as Indian companies such as Wipro hire hundreds of U.S. graduates to work at their offices in India. See Kavita Pandit, "Elite Migration from 'Body Shopping'

to 'Reverse Migration': The Restructuring of the Flows of Indian Technology Workers to the United States. Geography and the Environment Colloquium. University of Texas at Austin. February 4.," (2005). "U.S. Business Grads Take Jobs in India," *NPR News* (September 6, 2007). http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14204623 (accessed November 15, 2007).

Furthermore, the actual number of U.S. jobs lost, both long-term and short-term, is a highly debated subject. Critics view the BPO industry as taking jobs away from U.S. workers. Proponents view it as a means to export monotonous work, thus providing U.S. workers the means to focus on higher levels of "knowledge work." See John Nichols, "Global Fights Go Local," *Nation*, August 30, 2004; Kevin J. Delaney, "Outsourcing Jobs -- and Workers -- to India," *Wall Street Journal - Eastern Edition* 242, no. 73 (2003); Ann E. Harrison and Margaret S. McMillan, "Dispelling Some Myths About Offshoring," *The Academy of Management Perspectives (formerly The Academy of Management Executive)(AMP)* 20, no. 4 (2006); "Experts: Outsourcing Helps World Economy," *The Associated Press* (February 3, 2004). http://abcnews.go.com/wire/Business/ap20040203_1961.html (accessed July 23, 2007); Robert Reich, "Plenty of Knowledge Work to Go Around," *Harvard Business Review* 83, no. 4 (2005); "The New Jobs Migration," *Economist*, February 21, 2004; Patrick Thibodeau, "Inaction on Offshoring Will Hurt U.S. IT, Author Says," *Computerworld* 39, no. 27 (2005); Kerry Miller, "Hello, India? Er, Des Moines?," *Business Week*, 6/25/2007.

[8] Anna Greenspan, *India and the IT Revolution: Networks of Global Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[9] NASSCOM, "Indian Software and Services Exports" available from http://www.nasscom.org/artdisplay.asp?cat_id=408. (accessed June 20, 2007); ———, "Nasscom's Ranking of Third Party Players" http://www.nasscom.org/artdisplay.asp?Art_id=4400 (accessed October 3, 2005).

[10] While the BPO industry provided much-needed jobs, it inadvertently created employment competition for local industries. Jagdish, owner of a graphic design firm in Mumbai, declared that, "the call center industry is hurting my business." He attributed this to being unable to compete with the salaries of the call center industry. Indeed, entry-level wages in the call centers range between 9,000rs per month to 15,000rs per month (US$200 to US$333), depending on the company. Jagdish noted that even when he offered a salary that was on par with the starting salary of a call center, his workers still quit to work at the call center. Given that the salaries of the call center industry are far higher than the average wages paid to individuals qualified to work in this industry, call center employment is clearly an attractive choice based on salary alone.

[11] Vicki Belt, Ranald Richardson, and Juliet Webster, "Women's Work in the Information Economy: The Case of Telephone Call Centres," *Information Communication & Society* 3, no. 3 (2000); V. Hunt, "Call Centre Work for Women: Career or Stopgap," *Labour & Industry* 14, no. 3 (2004); Proinnsias Breathnach, "Information Technology, Gender Segmentation and the Relocation of Back Office

Employment," *Information, Communication & Society* 5, no. 3 (2002); Anne Bonds, "Calling on Femininity? Gender, Call Centers, and Restructuring in the Rural American West," *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 5, no. 1 (2006).

[12] "Pink collar" is a term used to denote a field that is mostly made up of women workers. For background about how some women have experienced pink-collar employment see Louise Howe, *Pink Collar Workers: Inside the World of Women's Work* (New York: Putnam, 1977).

[13] Bonds, "Calling on Femininity? Gender, Call Centers, and Restructuring in the Rural American West."

[14] Arlie Russell Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Viking, 1989).

[15] Breathnach, "Information Technology, Gender Segmentation and the Relocation of Back Office Employment," 320.

[16] Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*; Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987); Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson, "'Nimble Fingers Make Cheap Workers': An Analysis of Women's Employment in Third World Export Manufacturing," *Feminist Review*, no. 7 (1981); Diane Elson, "Nimble Fingers and Other Fables," *Of Common Cloth: Women in the Global Textile Industry* (1983); Joni K. Seager and Mona Domosh, *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* (New York: Guilford, 2001); Winifred Poster, "Dangerous Places and Nimble Fingers: Discourses of Gender Discrimination and Rights in Global Corporations," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 15, no. 1 (2001).

[17] Carla Freeman, *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy: Women, Work, and Pink-Collar Identities in the Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 5.

[18] Dowry, similar to a trousseau, involves money and material items that a woman's family provides to their daughter upon marriage to bring to her future husband's household. This practice is rife with negative social implications. The demand for large dowries on the part of the groom's family, for instance, perpetuates the preference for boys because girls are viewed as an expense. It is also the cause of dowry murder as families kill their daughters-in-law because they did not bring enough money or goods to the union. See Poonam Saxena, "The Menace of Dowry," in *From Patriarchy to Empowerment: Women's Participation, Movements, and Rights in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia*, ed. V. M. Moghadam (Syracuse University Press, 2007).

[19] Govind Kelkar and D. Nathan, "Gender Relations and Technological Change in Asia," *Current Sociology* 50, no. 3 (2002).

[20] J. P. Pradhan and V. Abraham, "Social and Cultural Impact of Outsourcing: Emerging Issues from Indian Call Centers," *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (2005): 24.

[21] Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart* (University of California Press, 1983). For a discussion on how "emotional labor" fares in customer service jobs that move abroad see John R. Bryson, "The 'Second' Global Shift: The Offshoring or Global Sourcing of Corporate Services and the Rise of Distanciated Emotional Labour," *Geografiska Annaler Series B: Human Geography* 89 (2007).

[22] The middle-class conception of the industry also stems from that fact that it initially recruited college graduates to be employees. During a 2004 interview with Nilish, the industry consultant for one of India's first call centers, he argued that by transferring call center operations to India, companies got more value for their money because unlike the United States—where he believed most workers have only a high school education—their Indian counterparts came with a college degree and could be hired at a much lower cost.

[23] Saraswati Raju and Deipica Bagchi, *Women and Work in South Asia: Regional Patterns and Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[24] In addition, companies provide transport because the Indian government does not have an adequate public transportation infrastructure in place for its citizens. Transport during the day shift in an urban area, for instance, is rife with pollution, over-crowding, and traffic that can take some employees upwards of two hours to traverse 24 kilometers (14.9 miles). The traffic is the same or worse in Bangalore. In contrast, traffic at night is relatively sparse, and for women in particular, it is not deemed safe. Despite concerns for safety voiced by family members, some women said they preferred night shift employment because they did not have to deal with the dilemmas of day shift traffic, congestion, and harassment on public transport.

[25] Poster, "Saying 'Good Morning' in the Middle of the Night: The Reversal of Work Time in Globalized ICT Service Work," 104.

[26] B. A. Weinberg, "Computer Use and the Demand for Female Workers," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 53, no. 2 (2000).

[27] This is not to infer that all customer service positions in the United States are day shift, as 24/7 customer service centers would also have night shift employees. Relatively speaking, however, they are far less in number.

[28] Poster, "Who's on the Line? Indian Call Center Agents Pose as Americans for Us-Outsourced Firms."; Kiran Mirchandani, "Gender Eclipsed? Racial Hierarchies in Transnational Call Center Work," *Social Justice* 32, no. 4 (2005).

[29] Raj Chengappa and Malini Goyal, "Housekeepers to the World," *India Today*, November 18, 2002.

[30] Although neither WebCorp and MedCorp are voice-based call centers, both companies do fall under the umbrella of the BPO industry in which working the night shift and proficiency in English is the primary requirement. WebCorp is a web-based

processing facility that addresses customer queries and MedCorp is a medical transcription firm that services U.S. clients.

[31] Parvati, a collections agent, had ten days to decide if she wanted to take a day shift position. Although it might be expected that going from a night shift position to a day shift position would be a promotion, she was undecided because of two key drawbacks: (1) a 2,500rs (US$55) reduction in her current monthly salary; and (2) no more shuttle transport. She would only be able to access a central pickup which would increase her commuting time considerably or increase her transportation expense in terms of traveling by rickshaw

[32] Preeti Singh and Anu Pandey, "Women in Call Centres," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 7 (2005).

[33] Chengappa and Goyal, "Housekeepers to the World."

[34] Ramesh, "Cyber Coolies' in BPO."

[35] "60 Minutes - Out of India," (USA: CBS News, January 11, 2004).

[36] Amrit Dhillon, "Call Centres Are Blamed for a Rise in Loose Living among India's Affluent New Elite," *Telegraph.co.uk* (August 10, 2006). http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/10/08/windia08.xml (accessed October 22, 2007); Babu P Ramesh, "Cyber Coolies' in BPO," *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 5 (2004).

[37] Similar to the way transnational call centers are viewed as safer compared to local industry, Siddiqi found that factories located within export processing zones (EPZ's) in Dhaka, Bangladesh, are safer for women in comparison to factories that operate outside the EPZ. This was ironic, given that EPZs are immune from legal provisions that require them to adhere to national labor laws. Siddiqi finds that workers experience higher levels of safety because of the lack of men in the work space and as stated by one of her interviewees, "Men in the EPZ are like sheep…They've been silenced, the ones who remain are terrified of losing their jobs." See Siddiqi, "The Sexual Harassment of Industrial Workers: Strategies for Intervention in the Workplace and Beyond," 37.

[38] Captive call centers are directly owned and operated by the offshore corporation whereas a call center that is operated an Indian-owned company or a joint venture with an Indian firm is labeled a third party process.

[39] An experiential, how-to book that focuses on gaining entry into the call center industry and advice on navigating the industry is now available. See Madhukar Yadav, *Winning @ Call Centre: Confessions of a Calling Agent* (New Delhi: Wisdom Tree, 2007).

[40] Arti Sharma, "Headcount Crisis at Call Centres," *The Times of India* (July 15, 2005). http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1173472.cms (accessed June 28, 2007); Sudhin Thanawala, "India's Call-Center Jobs Go Begging"

http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1671982,00.html?cnn=yes (accessed October 16, 2007).

[41] Melissa W. Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Jared Sandburg, "'It Says Press Any Key. Where's the Any Key?' India's Call-Center Workers Get Pounded, Pampered," *The Wall Street Journal* February 20, 2007.

[42] Eighth Standard is similar to middle school in the U.S.

[43] To illustrate Parag's point, Shivani, a 23-year-old employee at WebCorp, has an engineering degree but joined WebCorp in Ahmedabad because she could not get a job in her field. As reflected in the findings of Parikh and Sukhatme's 20 year study, Shivani recalled that during college, women were excluded from participating in the on-campus job interviews that were vital to gaining employment.

[44] For a reading on the move from an American accent to a neutral accent see Claire Cowie, "The Accents of Outsourcing: The Meanings Of" Neutral" In the Indian Call Centre Industry," *World Englishes* 26, no. 3 (2007).

[45] Jo Johnson, "Bangalore Hit by English Ban in Schools," *Financial Times* (September 26 2006). http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/5f5bfade-4cec-11db-b03c-0000779e2340.html?nclick_check=1 (accessed November 28, 2007); "Students Upset over Ban on Alternate English," *Times of India* (August 5, 2006). http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1859817.cms (accessed December 5, 2007).

As of April 2007, the government held back on closing schools that continue to teach in English and planned to fine schools instead. See "Bangalore Schools Face English Fines," *Guardian Weekly* (April 13, 2007). http://education.guardian.co.uk/tefl/story/0,,2055731,00.html (accessed November 28, 2007).

[46] Kate Boyer, "Place and the Politics of Virtue: Clerical Work, Corporate Anxiety, and Changing Meanings of Public Womanhood in Early Twentieth-Century Montreal," *Gender Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 5, no. 3 (1998); Julian Tanner and Rhonda Cockerill, "Gender, Social Change, and the Professions: The Case of Pharmacy," *Sociological Forum* 11, no. 4 (1996); Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003).

Chapter 3

[1] Cresswell, *In Place/out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*.

[2] This was an extension of the 1883 Factories Act that stipulated eight-hour work shifts, provisions for overtime wages, and made child labor illegal. See D. A. Barker, "Factory Legislation in India," *The Economic Journal* 21, no. 84 (1911). 644

[3] Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990* (London; New York: Verso, 1993).

[4] Dutta, "7 Islands and a Metro."

[5] "1948 Factories Act", Office of the Labour Commissioner http://labour.delhigovt.nic.in/act/html_ifa/fa1948_index.html (accessed April 13, 2006).

[6] K. Chandra Sekhar Rao, "The Factories (Amendment) Bill, 2005 " www.prsindia.org/docs/bills/1171264974/1171264974_The_Factories__Amendment__Bill_2005.pdf (accessed August 18, 2007).

[7] The term "mobility-morality narrative" was inspired by previous research on women's mobility and spatial access. See Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, *Daughters of Independence: Gender, Caste, and Class in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986); Liz Bondi and Mona Domosh, "On the Contours of Public Space: A Tale of Three Women," *Antipode* 30, no. 3 (1998); Liz Bondi and Damaris Rose, "Constructing Gender, Constructing the Urban: A Review of Anglo-American Feminist Urban Geography," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 10, no. 3 (2003); Richa Nagar, "Communal Discourses, Marriage, and Politics of Gendered Social Boundaries among South Asian Immigrants in Tanzania," *Gender, Place and Culture* 5, no. 2 (1998); Heidi Nast, "Unsexy Geographies," *Gender, Place, and Culture* 5 (1998).

[8] Melissa W. Wright, "From Protests to Politics: Sex Work, Women's Worth, and Ciudad Juarez Modernity," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 2 (2004); Debra A. Castillo, Maria Gudelia Rangel Gomez, and Bonnie Delgado, "Border Lives: Prostitute Women in Tijuana," *Signs* 24, no. 2 (1999).

[9] For an insightful account into life under the purdah regimes, see Antharjanam Lalithambika and Gita Krishnakutty, *Cast Me out If You Will: Stories and Memoir*, 1st ed. (New York: Feminist Press, 1998). Leigh Minturn and Swaran Kapoor, *Sita's Daughters: Coming out of Purdah: The Rajput Women of Khalapur Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[10] Joy. Deshmukh-Ranadive, *Space for Power: Social and Cultural Aspects of Gender Inequality and Discrimination in India* (Noida: Rainbow Publishers in collaboration with Centre for Women's Development Studies, 2002); Raju and Bagchi, *Women and Work in South Asia: Regional Patterns and Perspectives*; Kantor, "Female Mobility in India - the Influence of Seclusion Norms on Economic Outcomes."

In addition, Engels uncovers how purdah affected women's political activism, particularly as it related to their involvement in the nationalist movements. See Dagmar

Engels, *Beyond Purdah?: Women in Bengal 1890-1939* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[11] Deshmukh-Ranadive, *Space for Power: Social and Cultural Aspects of Gender Inequality and Discrimination in India*; Raju and Bagchi, *Women and Work in South Asia: Regional Patterns and Perspectives*; Kantor, "Female Mobility in India - the Influence of Seclusion Norms on Economic Outcomes."

[12] Some scholars contend that viewing the mobility of urban, middle-class women in the twenty-first century as a continued reflection of purdah regimes is problematic for two reasons. First, it is believed that purdah is no longer applicable to the lives of women because it is ahistorical. The stringent confinement rules that define purdah are viewed as a thing of the past. Secondly, to draw on purdah to gain a comparative context for the women in twenty-first-century India could be a form of Orientalism, a term used to describe how Westerners create discourses about Asia from an Us vs. Them perspective that positions Westerners as superior to their studied subject. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[13] The "women's question" is a term commonly used in literature that focuses on women in India.

[14] Research on sati, the practice of widow burning, is generally focused on India. Fisch, however, found that the ritualized and non-ritualized practice of widow sacrifice occurred in many parts of the world ranging from Japan to the United States. See Joerg Fisch, *Burning Women: A Global History of Widow-Sacrifice from Ancient Times to the Present* (London: Seagull Books, 2005).

[15] Antoinette M. Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

In addition, Ramusack coined the term "maternal imperialists" to describe the deferential treatment some British women demanded that Indian women give them during the colonizing mission. See Barbara N. Ramusack, "Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1865-1945," *Women's Studies International Forum* 13, no. 4 (1990).

[16] Pradhan and Abraham, "Social and Cultural Impact of Outsourcing: Emerging Issues from Indian Call Centers," 5.

[17] John Agnew, *Hegemony: The New Shape of Global Power* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 4-5.

[18] The sense of modernity Valerie associated with India's Catholic population in relation to other groups such as Hindus and Muslims was not an isolated incident. This belief was also voiced by other women and men I interviewed to during the course of fieldwork.

[19] Shilpa Phadke, "Dangerous Liaisons Men and Women: Risk and Reputation in Mumbai," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 17 (2007): 1512.

[20] Going to a woman's home to convince her family to allow her to work in a call center is not a common practice throughout the industry. Girija, an HR manager for a firm located in Mindspace stated, "It's already known the hours of the job, so it's up to the girl to sort it out."

[21] Manu Joseph, "God, Sex, and Call Centres," *The Times of India, Mumbai*, October 22, 2006; Chandna Arora, "Bad BPOs: A Case of Wrong Image?," *The Times of India, Mumbai*, November 11, 2006; Mina Joseph Tejaswi, "India Calling," *The Times of India*, August 4, 2006.

[22] "Delhi: The Rape Capital of India," *The Times of India* (July 2, 2004). http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Delhi_The_Rape_Capital_of_India/articleshow/msid-762338,curpg-2.cms (accessed September 27, 2007).

[23] Jyoti Puri, "Stakes and States: Sexual Discourses from New Delhi," *Feminist Review* 83, no. 1 (2006).

[24] Some scholars argue that marking woman as a site to protect (e.g. keep safe), is a means to reinforce patriarchal regimes of control over their bodies. See Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*.

[25] Ranade, "The Way She Moves: Mapping the Everyday Production of Gender-Space."

[26] "Do You Know How We Feel," (India: PUKAR: A Woman's Place Project, 2003).

[27] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 165.

[28] Yatish Suvarna, "Ways of the Indian Pervert," *The Times of India, Mumbai*, December 3, 2006.

Chapter 4

[1] Referring to global factory workers in Mexico.

[2] Pallavi Borkar, "Midnight Melange," *Mid Day, Mumbai*, May 26 2006.

[3] Hanson and Pratt, *Gender, Work, and Space*; Elizabeth Burns, "Women's Travel to Inner City Employment" (paper presented at the Women's Travel Issues - Proceeding from the Second National Conference, 1996); Elizabeth Burns and Patricia Gober, "Job Linkages in Inner City Phoenix," *Urban Geography* 19, no. 1 (1998).

[4] NASSCOM, "Third Party ITES-BPO Companies Rankings for Fy 05-06" http://www.nasscom.in/Nasscom/templates/NormalPage.aspx?id=43383 (accessed August 14, 2007).

[5] Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*.

[6] Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

[7] Unequal media attention given to similar crimes is linked to a political economy that deems some victims as "worthy" and others as "unworthy." See Ibid.

[8] Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*.

[9] Jessica Livingston, "Murder in Juarez: Gender, Sexual Violence, and the Global Assembly Line," *Frontiers-A Journal of Women's Studies* 25, no. 1 (2004); S. Garwood, "Working to Death: Gender, Labour, and Violence in Ciudad Juárez, México," *Peace, Conflict and Development* 2, no. 2 (2002). http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk/docs/working2.pdf (accessed November 5, 2007).

[10] Ginger Thompson, "Chasing Mexico's Dream into Squalor," *New York Times*, February 11, 2001, 2.

[11] Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*.

[12] Michael Elliot, "India, Inc.: Why the World's Biggest Democracy Is the Next Great Economic Superpower-and What it Means for America," *Time*, June 26 2006; "India's Shining Hopes: A Survey of India," *Economist*, February 21, 2004.

[13] Sharma, "Headcount Crisis at Call Centres."; Thanawala, "India's Call-Center Jobs Go Begging."

[14] Jennifer Hyndman, "Mind the Gap: Bridging Feminist and Political Geography through Geopolitics," *Political Geography* 23, no. 3 (2004).

[15] Ibid.: 318.

[16] G. Kirshenbaum, "Jadranka, Cigelj, and Nusreta Sivac: Efforts to Bring the Rapists of Bosnian Women to Justice," *Ms.* 7, no. 4 (1997). 64

[17] Rupal Oza, "Showcasing India: Gender, Geography, and Globalization," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 26, no. 4 (2001); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[18] For further reading on the gendering of nations and nationalism, see Robin Mohammed, "British Pakistani Muslim Women: Marking the Body, Marking the Nation," in *A Companion to Feminist Geography*, ed. Lise Nelson and Joni Seager (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); Lois A. West, "Nation," in *A Companion to Gender Studies*, ed. Philomena Essed, David Theo Goldberg, and Audrey Kobayashi (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005); Nira Yuval-Davis, "Gender and

Nation (1993)," in *Space, Gender, Knowledge: Feminist Readings*, ed. Linda McDowell and Joanne Sharp (London: Arnold, 1997); A. Burton, "House/Daughter/Nation: Interiority, Architecture, and Historical Imagination in Janaki Majumdar's" Family History"," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56, no. 4 (1997); Joanne Sharp, "Gendering Nationhood: A Feminist Engagement with National Identity," in *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Nancy Duncan (London: Routledge, 1996).

[19] Oza, "Showcasing India: Gender, Geography, and Globalization."

[20] This dynamic is not confined to "the woman question" within India as George's work on the transnational marriage market between Kerala and the United States uncovers how "the control of women's sexuality becomes linked to notions of nationalism and the upholding of religion, tradition, and Indian culture." See Sheba Mariam George, *When Women Come First: Gender and Class in Transnational Migration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 173.

[21] Oza, "Showcasing India: Gender, Geography, and Globalization," 1068-69.

[22] Certainly, the home itself is also a site of tyranny and violence for some women and in such instances, getting out of the house is a means of escape. See Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 1993); Shilpa Phadke, "Dangerous Liaisons Men and Women: Risk and Reputation in Mumbai," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 17 (2007); Rinki Bhattacharya, ed., *Behind Closed Doors: Domestic Violence in India* (New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London: Sage Publications, 2004).

[23] J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Cambridge, MA; Oxford [U.K.]: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 146.

[24] Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, 117.

[25] Phadke, "Dangerous Liaisons Men and Women: Risk and Reputation in Mumbai." 1510

[26] Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*.

[27] Saraswati Raju, "Contextualizing Critical Geography in India: Emerging Research and Praxis," *Geoforum* 35 (2004).

[28] Mary Elizabeth Hancock, "Gendering the Modern: Women and Home Science in British India," in *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities, Routledge Research in Gender and History* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999).

[29] The term *colonization of time* is from Adams' work on gender and global labor processes. See Adam, "The Gendered Time Politics of Globalization: Of Shadowlands and Elusive Justice."

Chapter 5

[1] Singh and Pandey, "Women in Call Centres."; Carol Upadhya and A.R. Vasavi, "Work, Culture, and Sociality in the Indian IT Industry: A Sociological Study," (Bangalore: School of Social Sciences, National Institute of Advanced Studies, 2006).

[2] Sandburg, "'It Says Press Any Key. Where's the Any Key?' India's Call-Center Workers Get Pounded, Pampered."

[3] Other themes emerged, including how call-center employment acted as a stepping stone to the airline industry. But I focus here on the themes that emerged most frequently amongst participants

[4] Saskia Sassen, "Women's Burden: Counter-Geographies of Globalization and the Feminization of Survival," *Journal of International Affairs* 53, no. 2 (2000).

[5] That a single woman such as Manisha, who also is a college dropout, has the ability to buy her own home was significant given the discrimination both urban and rural women experience in terms of land and property rights. See Kumar, "Women in India: How Free? How Equal?."; Pradeep Panda and Bina Agarwal, "Marital Violence, Human Development and Women's Property Status in India," *World Development* 33, no. 5 (2005); Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 1994); Reena Patel, *Hindu Women's Property Rights in Rural India: Law, Labour and Culture in Action* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

[6] As illustrated in Veena Grover's story in the documentary film, "A Woman's Place," the refusal of men to support of a girl-child due to the entrenched preference for boys is not uncommon. See Paromita Vohra, "A Woman's Place," (India: Paromita Vohra/Devi Pictures, 1999).

[7] This term backlash draws from Faludi's research on how U.S. women face hostility in the midst of their progress. See Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women*.

[8] The term leap-frogging draws from information technology (IT) and development discourse. It is based on the idea that by leap-frogging into new technologies (e.g., going straight to mobiles versus working on landline infrastructure), developing countries have the potential to modernize at a much faster rate. See Robin Mansell and Uta Wehn de Montalvo, *Knowledge Societies: Information Technology for Sustainable Development* (Oxford; New York: Published for and on behalf of the United Nations by Oxford University Press, 1998); Manuel Castells, *End of Millennium* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

[9] Singh, "Social and Cultural Aspects of Gender Inequality and Discrimination in India."; Roli Varma, "Technological Fix: Sex Determination in India," *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society* 22, no. 1 (2002).

[10] A.K. Shiva Kumar, & Menon-Sen, Kalyani, "Women in India: How Free? How Equal?," (New Delhi: United Nations Development Assistance Framework: Office of the Resident Coordinator in India, 2001).

[11] This term draws from Harvey who, inspired by Donna Haraway's theorizing of the body, conceptualizes the body as a site of "capitalist accumulation" vis-à-vis the political economy. Building upon this, feminist geographers such as Wright uncover how the feminization of labor on a global scale intersects with women workers being scripted as the bodily site of capital accumulation that is deemed disposable and easily replaced. See David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*.

[12] A B.Com is degree is somewhat similar to an economics degree in the U.S.

[13] For further reading on consumerism in India see Peter Jackson, "Local Consumption Cultures in a Globalizing World," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29, no. 2 (2004). See also Eric Bellman, "A Dollar Store's Rich Allure in India --- a U.S. Franchise's Success Shows 'Made in America' Sells; Lessons for Wal-Mart's Entry?," *The Wall Street Journal* January 23, 2007.

[14] Patel, "Working the Night Shift: Gender and the Global Economy."

[15] The health ramifications of night shift employment, and its effects women's mobility, were not fully taken into account during the design phase of this project. This was a mistake. During in-depth interviews, it became clear that the constriction some women faced in their lives was not only about having no time to hang out. It was also related to health problems employees linked to working at night, such as digestive problems and depression. These issues impeded their ability and desire to go out during their days off. Furthermore, the night shift requirement not only meant sleeping all day, thus losing access to the daytime, but employees also spoke of needing more sleep than before because they were exhausted. "I'm too tired to go out" was a theme that emerged.

[16] Pande's research on the call center industry in Hyderabad also reflects this finding. See Rekha Pande, "Looking at Information Technology from a Gender Perspective: A Look at Call Centers in India," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 11, no. 1 (2005).

[17] Poster, "Saying 'Good Morning' in the Middle of the Night: The Reversal of Work Time in Globalized ICT Service Work."

[18] Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline*; Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*; Freeman, *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy: Women, Work, and Pink-Collar Identities in the Caribbean*.

[19] Sonali Gulati, “Nalini by Day, Nancy by Night,” (New York, NY: Women Make Movies, 2005).

[20] Radhika Menon and Roseanne Lobo, "Freedom before 11," (Mumbai: PUKAR - Gender and Space Project, 2005).

Chapter 6

[1] Sallie Marston and Neil Smith, “States, Scales and Households: Limits to Scale Thinking? A Response to Brenner,” *Progress in Human Geography* 25, no. 4 (2001): 618.

[2] Sallie Marston, “The Social Construction of Scale,” *Progress in Human Geography* 24, no. 2 (2000).

[3] Sylvia Chant, “Households, Gender and Rural-Urban Migration: Reflections on Linkages and Considerations for Policy,” *Environment and Urbanization* 10, no. 1 (1998): 5.

[4] Govind Kelkar, Girija Shrestha, and Veena Nagarjan, “IT Industry and Women’s Agency: Explorations in Bangalore and Delhi, India,” *Gender, Technology and Development* 6, no. 1 (2002).

[5] George, *When Women Come First: Gender and Class in Transnational Migration*.

[6] This finding reflects Kelkar et al.’s argument that call center employment does not lead to a drastic shift in gender relations in the household. See Govind Kelkar, Girija Shrestha, and Veena Nagarjan, “IT Industry and Women’s Agency: Explorations in Bangalore and Delhi, India,” *Gender, Technology and Development* 6, no. 1 (2002).

[7] Two focus groups I conducted also provided another glimpse into gender relations in the household. One Sunday afternoon at a Catholic church in Mumbai, I interviewed a focus group consisting of five female employees, one of whom was married. Her husband participated in the group. Interestingly, the husband tried to speak on behalf of his wife and at times expressed what it is like to be a call center employee even though he is not one himself. In another focus group of three women and three men the same dynamic emerged. The boyfriend of a call center employee insisted on answering on behalf of his girlfriend.

[8] Control of the dowry and even the murder of young women due to the lack of dowry they are expected to bring their new households is an ongoing issue. See Kumar, “Women in India: How Free? How Equal?.”; Vohra, “A Woman’s Place.”

[9] Poonam points out that very few women are in the field of civil engineering. This finding is reflected in a ten-year study conducted by Sukatme and Parekh Pravina Parikh and Suhas Sukhatme, “Women Engineers in India,” (Bombay, India: Indian

Institute of Technology, Department of Mechanical Engineering, 1992); ———, "Women in the Engineering Profession in India: The Millennium Scenario," (Mumbai, India: Indian Institute of Technology, Department of Mechanical Engineering, 2002)..

[10] Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

[11] Alma M. García, *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 1st ed. (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981); Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2003).

[12] For a reading of how some migrant Indian women experience being part of a global network of skilled-workers via the IT sector, see Parvati Raghuram, "Migration, Gender, and the IT Sector: Intersecting Debates," *Women's Studies International Forum* 27, no. 2 (2004).

[13] Sassen, "Women's Burden: Counter-Geographies of Globalization and the Feminization of Survival."; Geraldine Pratt, *Working Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Ehrenreich and Hochschild, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*; Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang, "Negotiating Public Space: Strategies and Styles of Migrant Female Domestic Workers in Singapore," *Urban Studies* 35, no. 3 (1998); Melissa W. Wright, "Crossing the Factory Frontier: Gender, Place and Power in the Mexican Maquiladora," *Antipode* 29, no. 3 (1997).

Chapter 7

[1] Ramesh, "Cyber Coolies' in BPO."; Gulati, "Nalini by Day, Nancy by Night."; Kelkar and Nathan, "Gender Relations and Technological Change in Asia."

[2] Patel, "Working the Night Shift: Gender and the Global Economy," 20.

[3] In Indian society it is easier for a divorced man to remarry compared to a divorced woman. This is linked to the expectation that a woman be sexually chaste prior to marriage. In order to counteract this imperative, some female divorcees will label their previous marriages as "unconsummated."

[4] Concern about causing problems for the very individuals I sought to learn from stemmed from an experience in my neighborhood. The flat I resided in, in Juhu-Ville Parle Scheme, was demarcated as a conservative, Gujarati neighborhood. About six months into fieldwork, neighbors in the building told me "talk to the girl on the second floor, she works in a call center." After three families suggested this, I did as advised.

However, the young woman who answered the door responded defensively that no one in her home works at a call center. In contrast to other residents who made it a habit to chat in a social, neighborly fashion, it was clear she did not want me anything to do with me as she promptly ended our conversation and shut the door. When I told the neighbors that she did not work in a call center, they claimed she was lying. "We see her coming and going," one elderly woman stated. I never learned who was telling the truth and who wasn't, but the gossip and sense of secrecy connected with the matter reminded me of the importance of respecting boundaries, particularly of those who are the subject of "nosy neighbors."

[5] Phadke, "Dangerous Liaisons Men and Women: Risk and Reputation in Mumbai."; ———, "'You Can Be Lonely in a Crowd': The Production of Safety in Mumbai."

[6] Phadke, "Dangerous Liaisons Men and Women: Risk and Reputation in Mumbai," 1510.

[7] George, *When Women Come First: Gender and Class in Transnational Migration*.

[8] Ibid., 180.

[9] Nazli Kibria, "Culture, Social Class, and Income Control in the Lives of Women Garment Workers in Bangladesh," *Gender and Society* 9, no. 3 (1995).

[10] Kibria, "Culture, Social Class, and Income Control in the Lives of Women Garment Workers in Bangladesh." 304

[11] George, *When Women Come First: Gender and Class in Transnational Migration*, 176.

[12] Ibid.

Chapter 8

[1] Aryn Baker, "In Search of the Next Bangalore," *Time*, June 26 2006, 43.

[2] "60 Minutes - Out of India."

[3] Pradhan and Abraham, "Social and Cultural Impact of Outsourcing: Emerging Issues from Indian Call Centers," 24.

[4] For further readings on women as the bodily site of maintaining a their family's reputation see Nagar, "Communal Discourses, Marriage, and Politics of Gendered Social Boundaries among South Asian Immigrants in Tanzania."; Kanchan Mathur, "Body as Site, Body as Space," *Institute of Development Studies* (2007). http://www.idsj.org/wp-148.pdf (accessed January 5, 2008).

[5] Haraway, “Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.”

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