Published in final edited form as:

J Fam Issues. 2006 December 1; 55(5): 588–600. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2006.00428.x.

Like Her Own: Ideals and Experiences of the Mother-in-law/ Daughter-in-law Relationship

Keera Allendorf, PhD [Assistant Professor of Sociology and International Studies]

Indiana University, 1020 E. Kirkwood Ave., Bloomington, IN 47405, Phone: (812) 855-1540, Fax: (812) 855-0781, kallendo@indiana.edu

Abstract

This article explores ideals and experiences of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship using semi-structured interviews with 46 members of 22 families living in one Indian village. Ideally, the relationship is characterized by love and understanding, where one's mother-in-law or daughter-in-law is like one's own daughter or mother. In practice, the relationship varies in quality. Some women experienced affectionate, high quality relationships, while others' relationships were characterized by hurtful exchanges and not speaking. Previous literature portrays the relationship as negative, but these results point to the relevance of positive aspects as well. I also suggest that these ideals and experiences are shaped by the joint family system. The joint family system contributes to the strongly positive ideal, while the tensions that women experience arise from the contradictory family locations that they occupy within that system. Daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law are simultaneously strangers and close family members.

Keywords

Family; mother-in-law; daughter-in-law; relationship quality; India; Asia

Research on the family often focuses on relationships nestled in the heart of the nuclear family. There are large literatures devoted to both the marital (or cohabiting) relationship and the parent-child relationship. Research on the marital relationship has examined the nature and determinants of marital quality and its consequences for health and well-being (e.g. Glenn, 1990; Umberson, Williams, Powers, Liu, & Needham, 2006; Waite, Luo, & Lewin 2009). Similarly, research focused on the parent-child relationship explores the nature of the relationship and its consequences for children's life trajectories, intergenerational transfers, and caretaking of parents in old age (e.g. Pearce & Axinn, 1998; Sobolewski & Amato, 2007; Ward & Spitze, 1998).

In comparison, relationships outside the nuclear family have received less attention. One such relationship that has been neglected is that between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Only a handful of studies explicitly set out to examine the nature of this relationship (Cotterill, 1994; Fischer, 1983; Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987; Merrill, 2007; Shih & Pyke, 2010). This neglect is unfortunate since the relationship is a common and important component of family life. Many women embark on a relationship with a mother-in-law near the beginning of their adult lives and then a relationship with a daughter-in-law later on.

While the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is important in its own right, some studies suggest that the quality of this relationship affects women's well-being and the quality of other relationships. In South Asia, daughters-in-law with poor relationships with their mothers-in-law are more likely to experience depression (Chandran, Tharyan, Muliylil, & Abraham, 2002; Gausia, Fisher, Ali, & Oosthuizen, 2009). Further, young women who get along better with their in-laws, including their mother-in-law, are more likely to use antenatal health care (Allendorf, 2010). At the other end of the life course, Soeda and Araki (1998) find that the most common reason older women in Japan experience abuse and neglect is poor relationships with their daughters-in-law. The quality of this relationship may also impact the quality of a daughter-in-law's marriage. The quality of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is associated with marital quality in the United States and Taiwan (Bryant, Conger, & Meehan, 2001; Goodwin, 2003; Wu, Yeh, Cross, Larson, Wang, & Tsai, 2010).

To the extent that the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law does appear in the literature, it is often portrayed in a negative light with an emphasis on conflict between the women that is rooted in family systems (Cotterill, 1994; Shih & Pyke, 2010; Vatuk, 1995). However, there are also indications in the literature that positive mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships do exist. Further, as described more below, family systems may not only facilitate conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, but also affectionate, positive relationships.

This article sets out to explore this possibility and contribute to understanding the nature of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship by exploring the ideals and experiences of the relationship in one setting, namely one Indian village. A focus on ideals provides a reflection of local notions about what the relationship *should* be like, or, as Fricke (1997) describes them, "cultural models for reality." By contrast, the inclusion of experiences reflects on how the relationship is actually experienced in practice and how these experiences do or do not follow the ideals. Thus, together, an exploration of ideals and experiences provides a more comprehensive view of the nature of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. It should also be noted that this article does not describe how the quality of the relationship varies among women of different characteristics or identify the factors that influence the quality of the relationship. This is an important area of further study, but is outside the scope of this article.

Background

The literature often characterizes the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship as negative in nature. Ethnographic accounts of South Asian families portray the relationship as one of conflict and domination (e.g. Bennett, 1983; Jeffery, Jeffery, & Lyon, 1989; Minturn, 1993). Daughters-in-law are generally characterized as relatively powerless women who suffer domination, criticism, and abuse at the hands of their mothers-in-law. As Vatuk (1995:290) states when characterizing the literature on South Asian women:

"If older women figure at all in these discussions, it is usually in their role as villain of the piece for the young women upon whom the writers' concern is concentrated. Older women – as mothers and, especially, as mothers-in-law – are described as

key agents for the enforcement of 'patriarchal' social norms, ... oppressing their sons' wives by forcing them to accept a subordinate status and denying them adequate nutrition, insisting upon adherence to stringent standards of modesty and confinement to the home ... and, in extreme cases of dowry abuse, even contributing to their deaths."

More recent literature does not always portray the mother-in-law as the "villain," but often continues the tradition of a negative portrayal. For example, Vera-Sanso (1999) contends that recent social and economic changes in urban India, which make daughters-in-law more independent, have led to mothers-in-law now having to submit to the dictates of selfish daughters-in-law. More recently, Rabindranathan (2004) portrays neither the mother-in-law nor daughter-in-law as the villain, but does assume that the relationship is characterized by conflict and sets out to look for the sources of conflict.

This negative characterization of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is rooted in the joint family system, which is both patrilineal and patrilocal (Das Gupta, 1999; Deshmukh-Randive, 2005). It should be stressed that family practices vary by ethnicity and location, yet much of India and the rest of South Asia, is characterized by the joint family system (Patel, 2005; Rahman & Rao, 2004). It is also important to emphasize though that the joint family system includes both joint and nuclear structures. Over time, as members join and exit the family through birth, death, and marriage, families cycle between joint and nuclear structures.

This cycling between joint and nuclear structures within the broader joint family system can be seen by following a woman's life course. When a young woman marries she becomes a member of her husband's family. Usually, she begins her married life by living with her husband, his parents, and his siblings in a joint family. As a daughter-in-law, she is at the bottom of both the generational and gender hierarchies in the joint family (Deshmukh-Randive, 2005). Later in her life course, however, her parents-in-law die or her joint family partitions, and she lives in a nuclear family. Joint families may partition because they become too large to fit within the home, members aren't getting along, or for other reasons (Parry, 1979; Caldwell, Reddy, & Caldwell, 1984). Then, even later in her life course, a woman's nuclear family transitions back into a joint family when her own son(s) marry and bring daughter(s)-in-law into the household. She becomes a mother-in-law and moves to the top of the generational hierarchy.

Daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law are closely tied together in a joint family system. Customarily, it is the mother-in-law who directs a daughter-in-law's labor and integration into the family after marriage (e.g. Minturn, 1993; Jeffery, 1989). Further, the two women are both dependent on the attention and support of their respective husband and son and, thus, are often seen as competitors.

Other studies extend the negative portrayal of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship to places outside South Asia as well. A similarly negative portrayal of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship and its roots in the joint family system are found in literature on East Asian families (Kim, 1996; Sandel, 2004; Shih & Pyke, 2010). For example, Shih and Pyke (2010:334) note that the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship

in Chinese families is portrayed as “inherently conflictual” with the two women “pitt[ed] again one another as they vie for more individual power.” Kandiyoti (1988) further includes the domination of the daughter-in-law by the mother-in-law as part of the patriarchal bargain. Conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and negative portrayals in popular culture are also described in studies on the United States and Great Britain (Cotterill, 1994; Fisher, 1983; Merrill, 2007).

Like Asian studies, Western studies emphasize the role of family systems in producing conflict, although it is within a nuclear family system. They suggest that much of the tension in the relationship stems from the mismatch or ambiguity of family bonds between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law (Fisher, 1983; Cotterill, 1997; Merrill, 2007). Fischer (1983) describes the conflicts experienced by daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law as a struggle to be close to a stranger. She contrasts this struggle between in-laws to the naturally strong, blood bond – often accompanied by unconditional love – that ties daughters and mothers together. Similarly, Cotterill (1994) describes the ambiguous position of the mother-in-law vis-à-vis her daughter-in-law due to her position both inside and outside the family. Merrill (2007) too suggests that the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is difficult because, on the one hand, women are expected to treat each other like family members, and yet, on the other hand, they do not have blood ties and shared histories to bond them together.

While the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is often characterized as negative, the literature also points to the relevance of positive aspects. Jeffery and Jeffery (1996:156-57) describe how widespread beliefs about the common experience of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship focused on competition and disunity in Uttar Pradesh, but they also note that “there were, of course, households... where the mother-in-law gratefully acknowledged the ‘shade’ provided by a devoted daughter-in-law, and where the younger woman had nothing but praise for her kindly mother-in-law.” Similarly, Bennett (1983) states that most mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships were characterized by tension and rivalry in her study of high caste households in Nepal, but also notes that a few were characterized by harmony and cooperation. She also describes a young woman who loved her mother-in-law as a second mother.

Studies from the United States and Great Britain provide more than a suggestion of positive experiences. Cotterill (1994: 81) concluded that the majority of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law “developed a remarkable degree of tolerance and sometimes genuine affection for each other.” Similarly, Merrill (2007: 40) concluded that while there is a broad range in the quality of the relationship, many are good with “high affection and little or no conflict.”

The indications of positive relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in South Asia may be more than just rare exceptions. As described above, the joint family system does facilitate conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. However, the joint family system may simultaneously provide pressure for these women to get along well. Positive, affectionate ties between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law would reinforce the joint family system. Specifically, the inability of family members, especially women family

members, to get along is one common reason for joint families to partition (Parry, 1979; Caldwell et al., 1984). Thus, if mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law get along and even love each other, their families would be more harmonious and more likely to stay intact. Thus, it is possible that the joint family system would facilitate the development of ideals of positive, loving ties between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law that would help keep families together.

The potential of family systems to shape ideals about the nature of relationships between family members is consistent with literature that describes how culture shapes love. Jankowiak (1995) contends that romantic love is a human universal, but the meaning and experience of such love is shaped by culture. In this tradition, for example, De Munck (1996) suggests that the many opportunities for cross cousins to meet during their youth encourage the development of love among preferred marriage partners in Sri Lanka. Similarly, in her ethnography of a Tamil family in India, Trawick (1990) found that some mothers deliberately mistreated their married daughters in order to direct their love away from them and towards their husbands. The mothers did this because they wanted to ease their daughters' transition from their natal to marital families. Thus, Trawick's results point to the broader application of Jankowiak's (1995) findings – it is not just romantic love, but also non-romantic love that is shaped by culture or, more specifically in this case, cultural ideals about who constitutes a family.

Methods

This study is part of a larger project that addressed family relationship quality and its connections to women's agency and maternal and child health. Fieldwork was completed by the author in the village of Pariwarbasti in Darjeeling District, West Bengal from September, 2007 through May, 2008. (Pariwarbasti, as well as the names of respondents used below, are all pseudonyms.) The bulk of the data presented here are drawn from semi-structured interviews with 46 members of a sample of 22 village households. The data on ideals of the relationship are drawn from interviews with all respondents, while data on experiences are taken only from women with experience as a mother-in-law and/or daughter-in-law.

Site

Pariwarbasti is located in the Himalayan foothills. The primary economic activity is agriculture, with rice, corn, and gladiolas comprising the main crops. Some people from the village also work in other parts of India, either temporarily migrating to cities in search of jobs or working as Gurkha soldiers in the Indian army. The village contains a mix of castes and ethnic groups that are common in the rest of Darjeeling District, Sikkim and Eastern Nepal. These groups comprise high caste Chetri-Bahun, Dalits, and several Tibeto-Burman groups – including Lepcha, Limbu, Gurung, Tamang, and Rai. The village is primarily Hindu, but also includes Buddhists and Christians.

In Pariwarbasti, family life follows the joint family system. Young women join their husband's family when they marry and they usually begin their married lives residing with their husband and in-laws in a joint household. There are also many nuclear households that arise when the older generation dies, leaving a nuclear family behind, or when a joint family

partitions. In Pariwarbasti, many partitions happen when a married couple has two or more children and the family becomes too large for the small sized homes. Usually, a new home for the couple is built nearby the original home. Thus, while many young women do not live in the same house as their mother-in-law, the two are neighbors and there is still a substantial amount of regular interaction between them. A handful of married women also live with their natal families because they are separated from their husbands or the couple wants to live in Pariwarbasti, rather than the husband's village, to take advantage of schooling opportunities.

Data collection and analysis

Sample selection began with visits to every household in the study area (n=232) and identifying all available households that had a birth in the past year (n=31). The 22 sample households were then selected based on variation in family structure. Half of the households were joint households where the woman who had the birth (referred to as the focus woman) was residing with her in-laws, while the other half were non-joint households where the focus woman resided in a nuclear household or with her natal family. The sample was stratified by household structure to help ensure that a range of family relationship quality was sampled. As referenced above, the inability of family members to get along, including mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, is one reason that joint households partition. Further, the main reason that women return to natal families is because their marriage has broken down and they are separated from their husbands (Bennett, 1983; Jeffery et al., 1989). It should also be noted that household structure changed for two of the focus women during the course of the study.

The interviews were collected and recorded by the author in Nepali, the local language, with focus women (n=22) and, when available, their co-resident husbands (n=14), co-resident mothers-in-law (n=8), and co-resident mothers (n=2). Nineteen of the focus women had experience as daughters-in-law, while the remaining three focus women had never met their mothers-in-law. Two of the focus women were married to brothers and shared the same mother-in-law. So the respondents include nine matched pairs of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. I also observed and had informal interactions with another three mothers-in-law of focus women whom I was not able to interview. I interviewed multiple family members in order to provide a more thorough understanding of family dynamics within each household. Focus women were interviewed formally three times and their mothers-in-law, mothers, and husbands were formally interviewed once. The fieldwork also included many informal conversations with respondents and other family members, as well as observation of family interactions in their homes. A listing of the focus women and their mother-in-law appear in Table 1, while additional characteristics of the respondents and sample households appear in Tables 2 and 3.

The interviews began with open-ended questions about the ideal nature of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. These questions included, for example, what a good relationship with a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is like, how the two women should feel towards each other, and how they should interact with each other. Focus women, husbands, mothers, and mothers-in-law all answered these questions. After elements of the

quality of the relationship emerged, follow up questions about personal experience of the elements that emerged earlier were asked of women in later interviews. For example, I asked how they feel about their mother-in-law/daughter-in-law, how they think the other feels about them, how often they talk, and how much they fight and what about. The broader questions on all family relationships included questions that focused on the family situation at the time of interview, including who they like to make decisions with, who they talk to when their feelings are hurt, and whether there is tension in their family and why. Another set of questions also focused on family relationships in the past.

All interviews were transcribed in Nepali and translated into English by native Nepali speakers. The transcripts were analyzed to identify common aspects of a good (and bad) mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship by using a combination of open and focused coding schemes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I began by reading over the transcripts and creating codes for each new aspect of the relationship that I encountered. The codes were simply brief descriptions of that aspect, such as love or fighting, that were assigned to relevant text. After a few interviews had been coded in this manner, I then reduced the list of codes by merging some codes that appeared to tap into the same dimensions. With this refined list of codes, I then coded the remaining transcripts. In the larger project, these data were analyzed to explore the meaning and experience of relationship quality for two other family dyads: husbands/wives and daughters/parents. This article focuses on the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship, but draws on the analysis of the daughter/parent dyad as well.

It is also important to note a limitation of this analysis. Understanding the quality of people's relationships is a difficult endeavor. For the most part, I had to rely on what people told me about their relationships. It is possible that people exaggerated or underplayed interpersonal dynamics or simply lied about the quality of their relationships. However, I believe people were largely honest for several reasons. First, I spent a large amount of time with these families in their homes where I observed them interacting. What people said matched my observations. Second, the time I spent with these families served to build rapport. The interviews took place over a period of nine months while I was living in the community. I believe this rapport made people feel comfortable in telling me what was actually happening in their families. Third, the content of the interviews themselves leads me to believe people were largely honest. If they had not been honest, I suspect the results about experiences would have been more uniform. The common response would have been to say their relationship was fine and stop there. However, some women told me about loving, close relationships, while others told me about abuse and tension. Perhaps even more importantly, within mother-in-law/daughter-in-law dyads the women's descriptions were consistent. In no case, did a mother-in-law say she had a good, loving relationship while her daughter-in-law reported the opposite.

Results

Ideals

There is one overarching ideal which characterizes the way the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship should be as a whole. This ideal is that the daughter-in-law should be like

the mother-in-law's own daughter and, conversely, the mother-in-law should be like the daughter-in-law's own mother. Parvati's words summed up this ideal from the perspective of a daughter-in-law. When I asked her what kind of relationship she would like to have with her mother-in-law, she replied "to love her and treat her as my own mother." Snehi similarly summed up the ideal from the perspective of a mother-in-law, "A mother-in-law should also be good to her daughter-in-law. She should love her like her own daughter." The obligations for both the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law inherent in this ideal were more fully described by Ranjita:

"The in-laws should not think that the daughter-in-law has come from a different family – that she was not born in our family, so she has to do everything, everything that we ask her to. Instead, they should think that she is a part of our family since she has been married to my son and that she is very much a part of our family and she should be loved as much as any other member of the family. If all these could be followed everything would be fine. The daughter-in-law should be treated like their own daughter. Secondly, the daughter-in-law should also accept her husband's family as her own. She should not treat them as just her husband's people, but as her own. She should be able to accept her husband's family and the entire house as her own and love them as her own. She should accept everything and try and build a world for herself along with her husband and the entire family. This is how a relation between a mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law should be."

This ideal of being like one's own mother or daughter suggests that the relationship is ideally a very positive one. People in *Pariwarbasti* view the relationship with one's own mother or daughter as inherently loving and close. Their assumption that a parent/child relationship is naturally strong and loving is seen in respondents' responses to questions about their relationships with their own parents. The tone and at times their explicit words indicated that 'of course!' a relationship with a parent is good. Vandita, for example, noted that "Of course [parents] love us! They have to. After all, they are our parents." Similarly, Megna noted that "While I was at my parents' house I was very happy. After all, your parents are your parents, isn't it?" (It should be noted, however, that while people believed relationships with parents are inherently good, the experiences of the respondents demonstrated that this is not always the case. Many respondents had poor quality relationships with their mothers or fathers.) Thus, believing that a mother-in-law or daughter-in-law should be like one's own mother or daughter is a strong normative statement that a mother-in-law or daughter-in-law should share a strong and loving relationship. This overarching, positive ideal was consistently upheld and invoked in the ideals that were expressed for the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. These ideals essentially fell onto two broad ideals for a mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship – living with love and understanding each other.

Love and affection was the most commonly invoked aspect of a good mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. Loving one's daughter-in-law or mother-in-law is integral to the ideal of treating them like your own. As Maneesh, one of the husbands, described, "The mother-in-law has to love the daughter-in-law and she too must love her back. The best will be if they get along with each other. That itself will be the best." As seen in Maneesh's

words, as well as the quotes above, this imperative to love each other is reciprocal – they both need to love the other like a mother or daughter.

Respondents also spoke of the importance of understanding between mothers and daughters-in-law, which was invoked as amicable relations, sympathetic tolerance, and having an agreement of expectations. For example, as Laxman, another young husband, described:

“The daughter-in-law and mother-in-law must understand each other in everything. If they get along, then the world can function. In order to make their own world function their feelings must agree. If one has a different feeling than the other, then nothing can work, nothing can be achieved. If they have the same kind of feelings than everything will be well, for that reason everything will go well.”

Laxman stressed explicitly that mothers and daughters-in-law need to get along, but he also noted that that such compatibility comes through agreement in their feelings – pointing to the multi-faceted nature of understanding.

The sympathetic tolerance aspect of understanding is crucial. Daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law come from different families, which often have different ways of carrying out daily tasks, including child rearing and cooking. These differences can also include daughters-in-law accommodating themselves to different religious and cultural practices. Despite these potential barriers to their relationship, however, the two women are expected to live and work together in close proximity. Thus, many people stressed that mothers and daughters-in-law should strive to be sympathetic and accommodating towards one another. For example, as Salokh described:

“The mother-in-law has to like the daughter-in-law and support her because she has come from a different background and she will take some time to adjust in the new family. So, if the mother-in-law is cooperative and teaches her things that she is not aware of then that would be good. On the other hand, the daughter-in-law should also try and adapt to the new customs and traditions and also try and understand them. Only after the two try and get along with each other can a good and healthy relation be established.”

For many, understanding between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is centered on agreement about how the household work will be done and, in particular, what the daughter-in-law is responsible for. In many households, this agreement took the form of the mother-in-law taking the lead on child care, while the daughter-in-law took care of cooking, collecting water and fodder, cleaning, and other household and agriculture tasks.

The importance of the dimension of understanding is also seen in the closely related ability to live in peace. Living in peace is essentially another aspect of understanding – the ability to get along without conflict or fighting. As Kamalnath stated, “Harmony has to be there. The mother-in-law should not say anything to the daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law cannot say anything to the mother-in-law. There will be peace in the house if they live well together without quarrelling. It is good if they live without conflict.”

The nature of the ideal mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is made even clearer when further compared to people's ideal of the mother/daughter relationship. As described above, the mother/daughter relationship is assumed to be an inherently strong and positive one. Daughters are viewed as naturally a part of the family they are born into – they are their parent's *own* daughters – and thus close, loving relationships are expected and assumed. However, a daughter becomes a member of her husband's family when she marries. Thus, from the perspective of her parents she is not, in the end, theirs. As Dipesh noted, "Well... the daughter is meant to be someone else's. She is only there until she grows up. Then she goes to someone else's house. After [marriage] she belongs to someone else. She has another house and family."

Given that a married woman is primarily a member of her husband's family, the close relationship of a mother and daughter should ideally become secondary and more distant after a daughter marries. The importance of this distance is seen in the commonly held belief that a woman should not visit her natal home too frequently or for too long for fear of giving the appearance that she is incorrectly giving primacy to her natal family. As Ranjita noted: "If we go to our natal homes, then people will ridicule us. They say perhaps her husband is not a good man and beats her, or her in-laws are not good, or they do not like her, or she fights with them so she has come to her parent's home." Thus, the ideal of a mother/daughter relationship is the inverse of the ideal mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. Daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law should ideally strive to achieve close and loving relations despite obstacles, while married daughters and their parents should work to temper what are viewed as inherently close and loving relationships. A daughter-in-law should be like your own daughter and yet your own daughter is not, in the end, yours.

Experiences

Below, I describe the range of experiences of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship by describing more positive cases and then more negative cases. This approach was taken to provide a clear description of the range of experiences. It is important to note, however, that women's relationships cannot be characterized as entirely or simplistically good or bad. Some women felt both positive and negative feelings toward their mother-in-law or daughter-in-law at the same time and also experienced changes in their feelings over time. Ranjita, for example, explicitly spoke of how happy she was that she had a good mother-in-law and that she loved her, yet she also noted that she could not confide her deepest feelings to her mother-in-law and felt that her mother-in-law maintained a distance at times. Further, the occasional harsh word or hurt feelings are seen as a natural part of even the best relationships.

Several of the daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law shared high quality, positive relationships in practice. Five of the focus women had extremely close and affectionate relationships with their mothers-in-law. These women and their mothers-in-law often spoke about the strength of their relationships and their closeness could also be clearly observed during family visits. A further five focus women had good relationships with their mothers-in-law – the two women got along, but did not share the strong affection and closeness of the other pairs.

These mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law who had very strong relationships sometimes explicitly said that they had achieved the ideal of their mother-in-law or daughter-in-law being like their own mother or daughter. Medini, for example, drew on this overarching ideal in expressing her love for her daughter-in-law: "I have the same amount of love for my daughter and my daughter-in-law. I love my daughter-in-law. My son brought her. We have a son and we love his love also. It's good. Daughter and daughter-in-law are the same." Similarly, in expressing her love for her mother-in-law (and her father-in-law) Vandita also evoked this ideal: "I feel love. I love them [my mother and father-in-law]. They are like my own parents!"

One way that such strong and positive relationships are visibly expressed and experienced is by taking care of each other. For example, it is the daughter-in-law's duty to cook for the family, yet providing this duty with extra love and care is highly valued and seen as an expression of love. While speaking about her daughter-in-law, Lavani noted, "She loves me and says 'mother have your food.' That means a lot to me." Similarly, after expressing that she loves her in-laws like her own parents, Vandita went on to say that such love made her want to take care of them: "Whatever they [my mother-in-law and father-in-law] want to eat and whatever clothes they want to wear, I will get for them. Since they treat me well, I too must treat them well. My in-laws are good. I also am good to them. I love them."

Good communication between mothers and daughters-in-law emerged as another way that positive relationships are experienced in practice. Good communication consisted of speaking nicely and listening to each other. For example, Laxmi noted: "[My mother-in-law] never scolds me and she gently instructs me. She is good to me like a daughter." The importance of listening is further demonstrated by Manisha when she described how she and her sister-in-law both have a good relationship with their mother-in-law: "Mother-in-law loves us too. We too love her. She does listen to what we say and we too listen to her. Our relationship is good. We like it just the way it is at the moment. It is good."

While some mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law did achieve close and affectionate relationships in practice, others did not. Nine of the focus women consistently did not get along with their mothers-in-law. Some women expressed these tensions as an inherent difficulty in realizing the ideal of an in-law being just like one's own mother or daughter. For example, one mother-in-law who had a particularly poor relationship noted, "No matter how hard you try you will never be able to make her [a daughter-in-law] your own. She will always be an outsider no matter how hard we try. She will never be your own child." Similarly, from the perspective of a daughter-in-law, Ranjita said, "No matter what you cannot get close with your in-laws like we are with our own parents. No matter what you do, they sort of maintain a distance and at times I feel really bad."

Poor quality relationships were largely experienced through poor communication and conflict. Poor communication, including scolding and saying mean, abusive, or hurtful things emerged as a common pattern among the worst relationships. Salila, for example, had a difficult relationship with her daughter-in-law, Saloni. Salila made several complaints about Salila's behavior, but the one that seemed to stick with her the most was the fact that Saloni used "bad language" towards her: "I have felt very bad. My tears come out, I cry

sometimes. ... I didn't like [my son's] wife using bad language. I didn't like it at all. Suddenly she called me a prostitute. She said that my face is like her butt." On the other side, Saloni too said that Salila said mean things to her and made her cry and feel badly.

Poor relationship quality is also experienced through the absence of communication. Four of the focus women and their mothers-in-law avoided speaking to each other on a regular basis. As Purvi put it plainly, "We don't have a good relationship. We don't talk to each other." Given that these women reside in small houses and live in close proximity to each other, not speaking is a testament to tense relationships. Some women also avoided speaking to each other only occasionally. For example, Salila regretfully described how her daughter-in-law once took the baby from her without speaking to her:

"I was holding the baby and sitting here. [My daughter-in-law] should have said that she is taking the baby inside to massage it. Instead, she came and took the baby without telling me anything. I stayed there quietly. I don't know if she got angry because I was holding the baby."

Hurtful exchanges and not speaking also spilled into fighting and conflict, which can be described as lacking the ideal of understanding. For example, Shakti, who generally doesn't speak to her mother-in-law, describes how she occasionally fights with her mother-in-law when they do speak about household chores:

"I do not like the way she does things. I ask her to wash the utensils, she does not wash them very well and they are dirty. I ask her to do this and she does the opposite. So I scold her. If get angry than I shout. That is in my nature. She gets angry. Then she does not speak to me."

Similarly, Purvi noted that she and her mother-in-law fight over money and the children: "Sometimes [my mother-in-law and I fight] about money and the children. She says I do not earn money! I cannot earn with the baby." Conflict can also be physically violent. Three of the focus women had been beaten by their mothers-in-law and one mother-in-law said that her daughter-in-law threatened to hit her once.

Discussion

Drawing on these findings in comparison with the literature, I make two main points, which I discuss in turn below. First, I challenge the view that the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is primarily a negative relationship, characterized by conflict. In this village, the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is ideally a strong and positive relationship. Further, this loving ideal may be strong because of the joint family system itself. The relevance of positive aspects of the relationship is also demonstrated by the women that did experience strong, loving relationships in practice. Second, in keeping with Western studies, I conclude that a characterizing feature of this relationship is the mismatch of family ties, which simultaneously encourage affection and conflict. I refer to this mismatch as contradictory family locations.

The Relevance of Love and Other Positive Aspects

Above, I described how the nature of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship has been characterized as negative, with conflict being the most salient aspect of the relationship. In contrast to this negative portrayal, however, the ideal relationship in Pariwarbasti is strongly positive. Ideally, a daughter-in-law or mother-in-law should be like one's own daughter or mother. Daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law should love and understand each other – they should share loving emotional ties and get along well with each other on a daily basis. This ideal for the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is not only positive, but even more positive than the ideal for a mother and married daughter who are supposed to temper their love.

As suggested above, the ideal may be especially positive because of the pressure of the joint family system itself. The potential role of the joint family system can be seen most clearly when comparing the results from Pariwarbasti with studies on the US and Great Britain, which have nuclear family systems. Western studies that compare the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship to the mother/daughter relationship consistently find that the mother/daughter relationship is more positive, in terms of ideals *and* experience (Fischer, 1983; Lee, Spitze, & Logan, 2003; Timmer & Veroff, 2000; Willson, Shuey, & Elder, 2003). In terms of ideals, people commonly express that it is not only acceptable, but appropriate for a woman to be closer to her mother than her mother-in-law. In terms of experience, Western women also report having closer, more loving relationships with their mothers than their mothers-in-law. Fischer (1983), suggests that women's relationship with their mothers are stronger than those with their mothers-in-law because biological bonds build stronger ties than affinal bonds.

However, the comparison with Pariwarbasti suggests that the role of biological versus affinal ties does not provide a complete explanation. Differences in ideals and experiences of a woman's relationship with her mother versus her mother-in-law map onto the differences between biological and affinal ties in Western contexts, but not in Pariwarbasti. In Pariwarbasti, the ideal of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship is that of a close, loving relationship, but with the acknowledgement that such a loving relationship is not easy to achieve in practice. As noted above, the ideal for the daughter/mother relationship poses an inverse conception to that of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. A woman should temper love for her mother, but she should work hard to love her mother-in-law. Since a married woman is primarily a member of her husband's family, what is viewed as a naturally close relationship with her mother should ideally become secondary and more distant after a woman marries.

This comparison suggests that it is the interaction of the natal and affinal ties with the family system that shapes the ideal for the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. In both the Western studies and in Pariwarbasti, there is a common belief that a natal, biological tie is naturally more loving and close than an affinal tie. However, whether the supremacy of that biological tie should ideally be strengthened or tempered varies by family system. In Great Britain and the US, which have nuclear family systems, it is accepted and appropriate for a woman to maintain closer, more loving ties to her own natal family compared to her in-laws. By contrast, in Pariwarbasti, which has a joint family system, a married woman is primarily

a member of her husband's family and, thus, she should ideally love her in-laws more than her natal family.

This comparison suggests that ideals of love are consistently shaped in ways that support bonds among people defined as members of the primary family. In the nuclear family system, the central ties of love are between nuclear family members. Thus, it is acceptable for a woman to love her mother much more than her mother-in-law because it does not interfere with strong nuclear family ties. By contrast, in a joint family system, a woman is primarily a member of her husband's family, in which case, strengthening her love for her mother-in-law and tempering her love for her mother is consistent with that family membership.

My argument that the joint family system itself contributes to a positive ideal appears at odds with previous research. If the joint family system itself shapes positive ideals for this relationship, then why do previous studies from India and other places with joint family systems characterize this relationship as negative? This disconnect may be due to a difference in research questions. As described above, this study's focus on ideals about what a relationship should be like places an emphasis on Fricke's (1997) models *for* reality. However, as Fricke (1997) describes, there are also models *of* reality – cultural notions of what something *is* like, rather what it should be like. Previous research on India has focused on these models of reality. Ethnographers asked people what the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is like – they uncovered beliefs about the common experience of the relationship. If researchers had instead asked what the relationship *should be* like they too may have found these positive ideals.

The discussion above focuses on the positive ideals for the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. It is important to further note, however, that some mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law do experience close, loving relationships in practice. As noted above, roughly one quarter of the focus women had close, loving relationships with their mothers-in-law and another quarter got along with their mothers-in-law. (While the other half of the focus women did not get along with their mothers-in-law.) Further, women described their positive feelings for their daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law through the emotion of love. Those with good relationships explicitly declared that they loved each other and even those with the worst relationships consistently voiced that they wished they had a loving relationship. As a small scale study with a purposive sample, these results cannot be drawn on to show the frequency of high or low quality mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships in a larger population. The existence, however, of loving relationships and, more importantly, people's belief in the relevance of love demonstrates its importance.

It should be emphasized, however, that I do not intend to suggest that all mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law get along well, or even that a majority do. Instead, I suggest that love and affection, as well as other positive aspects of the relationship, are relevant in addition to negative aspects. It should also be noted though that strong, loving relationships are difficult to achieve in practice for nearly every family dyad. Some respondents also had difficulties achieving strong and loving relationships with their parents. The many studies that document abuse, neglect, and conflict between parents and children, as well as husbands and wives,

further demonstrate the difficulty in achieving positive relationships across family dyads and contexts (e.g. Fischer, 1983; Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2006; Hawkins & Booth, 2005; Hawkins, Amato, & King, 2007).

Contradictory Family Locations

The results described above also suggest that the contradictory location of the mother-in-law vis-à-vis the daughter-in-law in the family structure is the fundamental force shaping the experience of the relationship in practice. As pointed out by Pariwarbasti respondents, a mother-in-law or daughter-in-law should be like your own mother or daughter, yet she isn't really your own. The two women are family members and yet, at the same time, they are strangers – they are simultaneously their own and not their own. This contradiction stems from a mismatch of family ties between the two women. On the one hand, they are members of the same family, yet, on the other hand, they do not share the same ties that natal family members do.

This categorization of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship as a contradictory family location draws on Wright's (1980) concept of a contradictory class location. Wright's contradictory class location arises when the dimensions of social relations of production are mismatched. Thus, for example, managers occupy a contradictory class location because, like the working class, they do not have control over capital, yet, unlike the working class, they do control the physical means of labor. In a similar manner, a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law do share one dimension of being family, yet do not share another.

It is this contradictory family location that leads to tensions in developing another tie that defines what it means to be family – that of a loving relationship. Respondents believe that family members should be tied together by love. In this way, a loving relationship comprises a dimension of being family. Thus, as discussed above, as family members, a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law should love and understand each other. However, it is precisely their lack of another family tie – the lack of shared history and background as Merrill (2007) describes it – that makes developing a loving bond difficult.

The struggle for mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law to overcome a lack of common history and background is the same struggle described in the Western studies (Merrill, 2007; Fischer, 1983; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987). However, this struggle may well be more central to women's lives in India, where daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law are tied closer together in the joint family system. As described above, American and British studies find the same mismatch in family ties, which leads to the same tensions between conflict and affection (Fischer, 1983; Cotterill, 1994; Merrill, 2007). There is one important distinction however. In the Western studies, the concept of ambiguity, rather than contradiction, is used to describe it (Cotterill, 1994; Lopata, 1999; Merrill, 2007). The concept of ambiguity is used to suggest that the tension between love and conflict among mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law is due confusion about whether they really are family members.

The focus on ambiguity in the Western studies, rather than contradiction, may also be due to differences in family systems. Cotterill (1994) suggests that there is ambiguity because it is unclear if a mother-in-law is inside or outside the daughter-in-law's family. Thus, she

contends the tension is due to the relationship falling outside the parameters of the nuclear family. In Pariwarbasti, there is no ambiguity in whether a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are in the same family, yet there is still the same tension of being simultaneously family and stranger. Thus, in this joint family system context, I suggest that contradiction is a more accurate concept than ambiguity. It is not that it is unclear whether a mother-in-law is in her daughter-in-law's family, it is that she is both inside and outside of it at the same time.

Conclusion

I motivated this article by noting the importance of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship to family life and women's well-being and, thus, the need to better understand the nature of the relationship. A small study from one village in India cannot provide a definitive characterization of this family relationship for India as a whole, let alone Asian or non-Western contexts as a whole. Further research is needed to explore whether the ideals and experiences I encountered in one Indian village are relevant in other contexts, both inside and outside of India. I believe, however, given the resonance with prior research that many of these aspects will prove relevant in other contexts. In particular, I believe the two main points of the discussion – the relevance of love and other positive aspects and the constraints of contradictory family locations – will have broad relevance.

The strong theme of love in the findings presented here also warrants a final note on the importance of including love in future research on the family in India and other non-Western contexts. In non-Western contexts, researchers often ignore how love and other emotions influence behavior and well-being (Basu, 2006). It is only relatively recently that romantic love has begun to be recognized as an important part of people's lives in non-Western contexts (Jankowiak, 1995). This examination of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship similarly points to the relevance of love beyond romantic love. Love and other emotions are an important part of people's family lives in non-Western context. Thus, love and other emotions should be better incorporated into sociological inquiry on the family in non-Western contexts.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Arland Thornton, Michel Guillot, Cindy Buckley, Brian Powell, Elizabeth Thomson, Myra Marx Ferree, and M. Giovanna Merli for their helpful comments and advice. This research was supported by a Fulbright Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship and a Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant from the National Science Foundation.

References

- Allendorf K. The quality of family relationships and use of maternal health-care services in India. *Studies in Family Planning*. 2010; 41:263–276. [PubMed: 21465727]
- Basu AM. The emotions and reproductive health. *Population and Development Review*. 2006; 32:107–121.
- Bennett, L. *Dangerous wives and sacred sisters: Social and symbolic roles of high-caste women in Nepal*. Columbia University Press; New York: 1983.
- Bryant CM, Conger RD, Meehan JM. The influence of in-laws on change in marital success. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 2001; 63:614–626.

- Caldwell JC, Reddy PH, Caldwell P. The determinants of family-structure in rural south India. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 1984; 46:215–229.
- Chandran M, Tharyan P, Muliylil P, Abraham S. Post-partum depression in a cohort of women from a rural area of Tamil Nadu, India - Incidence and risk factors. *British Journal of Psychiatry*. 2002; 181:499–504. [PubMed: 12456520]
- Cotterill, P. *Friendly relations? Mothers and their daughters-in-law*. Taylor & Francis; London: 1994.
- Das Gupta M. Lifeboat versus corporate ethic: Social and demographic implications of stem and joint families. *Social Science & Medicine*. 1999; 49:173–184. [PubMed: 10414827]
- De Munck VC. Love and marriage in a Sri Lankan Muslim community: Toward a reevaluation of Dravidian marriage practices. *American Ethnologist*. 1996; 23:698–716.
- Deshmukh-Ranadive, J. Gender, power, and empowerment: An analysis of household and family dynamics. In: Narayan, D., editor. *Measuring empowerment: Cross-disciplinary perspectives*. The World Bank; Washington, DC: 2005. p. 103–122.
- Fischer LR. Mothers and mothers-in-law. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 1983; 45:187–192.
- Fricke, T. Culture theory and demographic process: Toward a thicker demography. In: Kertzer, DI.; Fricke, T., editors. *Anthropological Demography: Toward a New Synthesis*. The University of Chicago Press; Chicago: 1997. p. 248–278.
- Garcia-Moreno C, Jansen HAFM, Ellsberg M, Heise L, Watts CH. Prevalence of intimate partner violence: Findings from the WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence. *Lancet*. 2006; 368:1260–1269. [PubMed: 17027732]
- Gausia K, Fisher C, Ali M, Oosthuizen J. Antenatal depression and suicidal ideation among rural Bangladeshi women: A community-based study. *Archives of Womens Mental Health*. 2009; 12:351–358.
- Glenn ND. Quantitative research on marital quality in the 1980s - a critical-review. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 1990; 52:818–831.
- Goodwin PY. African American and European American women's marital well-being. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 2003; 65:550–560.
- Hawkins DN, Amato PR, King V. Nonresident father involvement and adolescent well-being: Father effects or child effects? *American Sociological Review*. 2007; 72:990–1010.
- Hawkins DN, Booth A. Unhappily ever after: Effects of long-term, low-quality marriages on well-being. *Social Forces*. 2005; 84:451–471.
- Jackson J, Berg-Cross L. Extending the extended family: The mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship of black women. *Family Relations*. 1988; 37:293–297.
- Jankowiak, W. *Romantic passion: A universal experience?*. Columbia University Press; New York: 1995.
- Jeffery, P.; Jeffery, R. *Don't marry me to a plowman!: Women's everyday lives in rural north India*. Westview Press Inc; Boulder, CO: 1996.
- Jeffery, P.; Jeffery, R.; Lyon, A. *Labour pains and labour power: Women and childbearing in India*. Zed Books Ltd; London: 1989.
- Kandiyoti D. Bargaining with patriarchy. *Gender & Society*. 1988; 2:274–290.
- Kim MH. Changing relationships between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law in urban South Korea. *Anthropological Quarterly*. 1996; 69:179–192.
- Lee EJ, Spitze G, Logan JR. Social support to parents-in-law: The interplay of gender and kin Hierarchies. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 2003; 65:396–403.
- Lopata HZ. In-laws and the concept of family. *Marriage and Family Review*. 1999; 28:161–172.
- Marotz-Baden R, Cowan D. Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law - the effects of proximity on conflict and stress. *Family Relations*. 1987; 36:385–390.
- Merrill, DM. *Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law: Understanding the relationship and what makes them friends or foe*. Praeger; Westport, CT: 2007.
- Miles, MB.; Huberman, AM. *Qualitative data analysis*. Sage Publications; Thousand Oaks, CA: 1994.
- Minturn, L. *Sita's daughters: Coming out of purdah*. Oxford University Press; New York: 1993.
- Parry, JP. *Caste and kinship in Kangra*. Routledge and Paul; London: 1979.

- Patel, T. The family in India: Structure and practice. Sage Publications; New Delhi: 2005.
- Pearce LD, Axinn WG. The impact of family religious life on the quality of mother-child relations. *American Sociological Review*. 1998; 63:810–828.
- Rabindranathan S. Intergenerational co-residence: Conflict and resolution in familial contexts in India. *Asian Journal of Womens Studies*. 2004; 10:58–78.
- Rahman L, Rao V. The determinants of gender equity in India: Examining Dyson and Moore's thesis with new data. *Population and Development Review*. 2004; 30:239–268.
- Sandel TL. Narrated relationships: Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law justifying conflicts in Taiwan's Chhan-Chng. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*. 2004; 37:365–398.
- Shih KY, Pyke K. Power, resistance, and emotional economies in women's relationships with mothers-in-law in Chinese immigrant families. *Journal of Family Issues*. 2010; 31:333–357.
- Sobolewski JM, Amato PR. Parents' discord and divorce, parent-child relationships and subjective well-being in early adulthood: Is feeling close to two parents always better than feeling close to one? *Social Forces*. 2007; 85:1105–1124.
- Soeda A, Araki C. Elder abuse by daughters-in-law in Japan. *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*. 1999; 11:47–58.
- Timmer SG, Veroff J. Family ties and the discontinuity of divorce in black and white newlywed couples. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 2000; 62:349–361.
- Trawick, M. Notes on love in a Tamil family. University of California Press; Berkeley: 1990.
- Umberson D, Williams K, Powers DA, Liu H, Needham B. You make me sick: Marital quality and health over the life course. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 2006; 47:1–16. [PubMed: 16583772]
- Vatuk, S. The Indian woman in later life: Some social and cultural considerations. In: Gupta, M. Das; L.C, editors. *Women's health in India: Risk and vulnerability*. 1995. p. 259–306.
- Vera-Sanso P. Dominant daughters-in-law and submissive mothers-in-law? Cooperation and conflict in south India. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. 1999; 5:577–593.
- Waite LJ, Luo Y, Lewin AC. Marital happiness and marital stability: Consequences for psychological well-being. *Social Science Research*. 2009; 38:201–212.
- Ward RA, Spitze G. Sandwiched marriages: The implications of child and parent relations for marital quality in midlife. *Social Forces*. 1998; 77:647–666.
- Willson AE, Shuey KM, Elder GH. Ambivalence in the relationship of adult children to aging parents and in-laws. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 2003; 65:1055–1072.
- Wright EO. Varieties of marxist conceptions of class-structure. *Politics & Society*. 1980; 9:323–370.
- Wu TF, Yeh KH, Cross SE, Larson LM, Wang YC, Tsai YL. Conflict with mothers-in-law and Taiwanese women's marital satisfaction: The moderating role of husband support. *Counseling Psychologist*. 2010; 38:497–522.

Table 1

Pseudonyms and co-resident family members of the selected households (n=22).

	Focus woman (Daughter-in-law)	Mother-in-law	Husband	Co-resident family members (in relation to the focus woman/daughter-in-law)
1	Laxmi	Lavani	Laxman	Husband, one child, mother-in-law, father-in-law
2	Manisha	Manavi	Maneesh	Husband, three children (mother-in-law, father-in-law and Vandita, her sister-in-law, live next door)
3	Vandita	Manavi	Not interviewed	Two children (mother-in-law, father-in-law and Manisha, her sister-in-law, live next door)
4	Pratika	Not interviewed	Not interviewed	Husband, one child, mother-in-law, father-in-law, husband's sister
5	Ranjita	Not interviewed	Ranjay	Husband, one child, mother-in-law, and father-in-law
6	Bina	Bhakti *	Not interviewed	One child, mother, father, brother, sister-in-law (who is Kamala), niece (later moved to own home)
7	Smita	Not interviewed	Smritiman	Husband, two children, mother, father, two brothers, and sister
8	Lalima	Not interviewed (Never met)	Not interviewed	One child, husband's sisters and brother, nieces
9	Divya	Not interviewed (Never met)	Dipesh	Husband, one child
10	Sarisha	Not interviewed	Sarit	Husband, two children
11	Parvati	Not interviewed	Not interviewed	Husband, one child (during fieldwork moved back in with parents-in-law temporarily)
12	Megna	Medini	Not interviewed	Two children, mother-in-law, father-in-law, sisters-in-law
13	Shakti	Not interviewed	Shakunt	Husband, two children, mother-in-law
14	Unnati	Unma *	Umesh	Husband, two children, mother, sisters, brother
15	Sahila	Not interviewed	Sahaj	Husband, three children
16	Mohini	Monal	Mohit	Husband, one child, mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, nieces
17	Mayuri	Maya	Not interviewed	Husband, one child, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, nieces
18	Saloni	Salila	Salokh	Husband, one child, mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law
19	Indu	Deceased	Not interviewed	Six children (husband lived at home half the year)
20	Premila	Not interviewed (Never met)	Prem	Husband, three children (the two older children often lived with relatives)
21	Purvi	Purnima	Purnendu	Husband, two children, mother-in-law, husband's sister
22	Kamala	Bhakti	Kamalnath	Husband, daughter, mother-in-law, father-in-law, husband's sister (who is Bina), and nephew

* Indicates cases where the focus woman resided in her natal household and her mother (not her mother-in-law) was interviewed. "Never met" indicates that the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law never met.

Table 2

Individual level characteristics for all respondents (n=46).

	Number
Respondent type	
Focus woman	22
Husband	14
Mother-in-law	8
Mother	2
Age	
<25	18
25-34	15
35+	13
Education	
None	9
Primary	24
Secondary	13

Table 3

Characteristics of sample households and focus women (n=22).

	Number
Caste/Ethnic Group	
Chhetri-Bahun	3
Tibeto-Burman	17
Dalit	2
Religion	
Hindu	13
Buddhist	5
Christian	4
Household Type	
Joint with husband's family	13
Nuclear	6
Living with wife's family	3
Focus women's residence with mother-in-law	
Living together	11
Previously lived together	7
Never lived together	1
Never met	3
Marriage type among focus women	
Arranged	6
Elopement	16