A Review of the Literature on Honor-based Violence

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Abstract

Honor-based violence (HBV) is a serious concern for women and girls from particular ethnic backgrounds. Unfortunately, while the sociology discipline pays significant attention to gender-based violence in western contexts, HBV is a topic under-studied in the field. This article reviews the literature on HBV, typically coming from social work, cultural studies, and feminist studies, and focuses on the phenomena’s link to notions of masculinity and femininity, its collective nature, and the ways an Orientalist discourse has developed in western regions that address HBV. The article closes by identifying gaps in the existing literature, and offers suggestions for future directions.

Introduction

Men’s violence against women and other forms of gender-based violence receive substantial attention in sociology and related academic disciplines. Academicians have explored best-practice approaches to teaching gender-based violence in university sociology courses (Gardner 1993; Latshaw 2015; Murphy-Geiss 2008) and professional workplace settings (Connell 1996; Huisman Martinez, and Wilson 2005; Leach and Humphreys 2007). At major conferences in the social sciences, it is not uncommon for proceedings to include papers on gender-based violence. And a number of important scholarly journals cover the issue (e.g. Violence Against Women, Journal of Family Violence, and Violence and Gender). Although gender-based violence is no longer an atypical topic in sociology, some topics within the field remain under-studied. Honor-based violence (HBV) is one of these marginalized fields, perhaps not considered central because of the complex ways that gender, culture, race, migration, and nationality intersect in shaping the phenomena. On the other hand, this intricate intersectionality presents sociologists with a valuable opportunity to unpack the ways that gender-based violence operates in communities across diverse international contexts.

At a basic level, HBV can be understood as a form of gender-based violence involving restoration of a family’s honor through punishment of a family member, or a family member’s romantic partner, that has brought shame to the family by violating sexual boundaries. HBV, in particular honor killings, began receiving significant international media interest in the late 1990s with numerous reports stating uncritically that roughly 5,000 honor killings transpire annually across the globe (Abu-Lughod 2011). Popular literature, media, and governmental bodies typically associate HBV with cultural groups from Middle Eastern and South Asian societies, occurring in their countries of origin and migrant contexts; during the post-9/11 era, perhaps unsurprisingly, popular connections between HBV and Muslim communities have strengthened considerably (Carbin 2013). However, HBV is shaped by a broad range of traditions, attitudes, behaviors, and parties that despite being frequently misunderstood, still impact public sentiment and policy.
Like many forms of gender-based violence, HBV is also a form of family violence, and when a family follows traditional practices aligned with an honor system, all family members are affected. Scholars in the field often note that while young men and boys can be victims of HBV, young women and girls are the much more common victims (Alizadeh et al. 2011). This essay will review the academic literature on HBV, first by detailing how HBV has been explained as a collective practice perpetuating gender inequality; from there, the essay will connect HBV to notions of hegemonic masculinity and what Coles (2009) refers to as multiple dominant masculinities. Following this, the essay will review the body of literature that analyzes HBV through an Orientalist perspective, overviewing how racist, Orientalist discourses have emerged in western contexts since western institutions began recognizing HBV as an external social problem that infiltrated national borders. The essay will close with a discussion on gaps in the literature.

Defining honor-based violence

Most scholarship focused on HBV examines cultural groups and countries surrounding the western region of the Mediterranean Sea and South Asia. Though not an exhaustive list, some of these countries include Greece (Lazaridis 1995), Turkey (Kogacioglu 2004; Sev’er and Yurdakul 2001), Jordan (Nanes 2003), Pakistan, and India (Baxi, Rai, and Ali 2006; Chowdhry 1997; Vishwanath and Palakonda 2011), while other scholarship has examined HBV in broader regions, such as the Middle East and North Africa (Kulczycki and Windle 2011) or among diasporic groups from these regions now residing in western countries (Siddiqui 2005).

As mentioned previously, HBV is connected to a system of patriarchal values and behaviors that reestablish a family’s honor after it has been shamed, almost invariably because a woman or girl has transgressed prescribed sexual boundaries. Schneider (1971) argues that historically in many Mediterranean communities, control over women’s sexuality helped to maximize family resources during a time when state protection was non-existent. Regulating women’s behaviors functioned to expand male family members’ jurisdiction in fragile pastoral societies. In short, if women could not have sexual liaisons with men outside of the family, males from outside the family could not infiltrate family businesses. Furthermore, control over women’s sexuality fostered male solidarity; “the sanctity of virgins play[ed] a critical role in holding together the few corporate groups of males which occur[red] in many Mediterranean societies” (p. 21, 22). Consequently, an honor-based family system rests upon socially constructed understandings of rigid femininity and masculinity, and under such systems, women’s and girls’ purported sexual purity is central to the family’s reputation. As girls reach adolescence and young adulthood, their virginity prior to marriage and fidelity to their husband during marriage play extreme importance in upholding family honor; violations of these patriarchal norms can lead to harsh consequences (Baker, Gregware, and Cassidy 1999).

However, a number of markers are used to appraise this assigned sexual integrity where women and girls are expected to follow honor codes that minimize overstepping of sexual boundaries. For instance, women may be expected to dress modestly, not interact with male strangers, refrain from initiating separation from a male partner, and/or not leave domestic spaces without being accompanied by a male family member, particularly during evenings (Hague, Gill, and Begikhani 2013; Kulczycki and Windle 2011). In migrant contexts, women’s assimilation into western norms may also be identified as a move towards sexual promiscuity and deviation from the culture of origin (Cooney 2014). Along with these rules that govern sexuality, scholars have noted that for married women, appropriate femininity is also demonstrated through sacrifice of one’s own interests and showing unmitigated support for one’s husband, in-laws, and children. Among families who follow these honor codes, repercussions are also
wide-ranging. At the extreme end a woman or girl may be subjected to victimization of an honor killing, which receives a disproportionately large amount of attention in popular media and the academic literature (as do forced marriages and female genital mutilation). Far more common are punishments involving increased restrictions on freedom of movement, minimized contact with males, verbal violence, and non-lethal physical abuse (Sen 2005). As such, scholars often use the terms honor-based violence, honor-related violence, or honor-based oppression to reflect a wider array of patriarchal behaviors and social arrangements that while still repressive, do not rely on shock value by speaking only to the most extreme forms of HBV.

As Kandiyoti (1987) has pointed out, honor systems serve as a foundation for gender norms. Women’s and girls’ sexuality is regulated in order to maintain a family’s honor, or more precisely, male honor. In contrast to masculinity’s association with honor, women’s and girls’ femininity is associated with potential shame; should a female family member violate sexual boundaries by, for example, speaking with a male stranger, dressing inappropriately, having sex out of wedlock, or showing infidelity to her husband, she has compromised her family’s honor and shamed family members’ (masculine) reputation. Hence Kandiyoti (1987, p. 326, 327) asserts that for female family members, femininity is “an ascribed status rather than something to strive for,” whereas masculinity is “an achieved status, one that is never permanently achieved, because the danger of being unmanned is ever present.” Given these social parameters, inspections of HBV provide scholars with opportunity to advance a number of key sociological concepts tied to the social construction of gender.

**Honor-based violence and hegemonic masculinity**

Much can be gleaned, for instance, about hegemonic masculinity through analyses of HBV. Early conceptions of hegemonic masculinity offered a roadmap to identify a continuum of masculinities, ranging from those that were subordinated because of their association with femininity to those that approached an “ideal” state of hegemonic manhood based on their tighter connections to patriarchal power structures, including labor systems, media, and the state (Connell 1987). Influential scholars in the mid-1980s detailed how idealized versions of masculinity were legitimized and reproduced in society, cemented into organizational structures. These scholarly leaders were careful to delineate between different classes of masculinities, all of which relied upon patriarchy to subordinate women, but did so differently based on varying class privileges. In short, technical dominance over women was, and still is, said to be more prevalent in upper-class households, whereas a physical working-class authoritarianism is more common in homes where men lack access to extensive economic resources. Thus, across all class levels, patriarchal dominance is pervasive, but males in working-class communities will more likely show “a reliance on traditional ideology (religion or ethnic culture)” (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985, p. 593).

These early discussions of hegemonic masculinity by Connell and colleagues still apply nicely to contemporary discussion on HBV, for instance, in a diasporic context. Migrant men living in western societies experiencing racism and downward occupational mobility may not enjoy financial prosperity and the typical privileges that accompany economic wealth (e.g. increased status within the family and among peers). In turn, migrant men may view HBV as a way to reassert masculine dominance. Even among men who experience economic opulence, pressures to assimilate may stimulate a return to traditional family arrangements that reflect male privilege. In other words, the fluctuating stresses of migration contribute to a loss of masculine control, and honor systems provide organizational structures and rules that restore men’s status to patriarchal positions of power, at least within the family setting. With the threat of losing masculinity fixated so heavily on family dynamics, men can minimize the complete forfeiture
of their masculinity by ensuring that women and girls in the family refrain from engaging in sexualized behaviors that are said to shame the family (Gill, Begikhani, and Hague 2012). As Akipinar (2003, p. 439) states, “What is at stake here is the men’s honour, which is inextricably tied to a woman’s sexuality,” and because women – especially young women and adolescent girls – are viewed as constant threats to shame the family through alleged sexual misconduct, male family members feel compelled to police women’s sexuality with vigilance, thereby protecting a sense of hegemonic masculinity within their familial and cultural niche.

More recent scholarship on hegemonic masculinity also applies nicely to HBV. Donaldson (1993) argues that male presentations of masculinity do not necessarily reflect an accurate portrayal of men themselves. Instead, public displays of masculinity operate strategically to sustain a wider perception that men remain in control. As some scholars have suggested, gender roles specific to HBV signal a version of hegemonic masculinity, where attempts to publicly display one’s manhood align with contextualized notions of “ideal” masculinity. Speaking of honor killings in Pakistan, Jafri (2008, p. 10) writes, “For those who view it as their sacred duty, killing for the sake of individual and collective honour is not a crime but a heroic act.” Jafri goes on to state that it is not uncommon for a man, while being arrested for committing an honor killing, to proudly display his handcuffs in the media. Because honor and shame are developed as part of a gendered and communal framework, it is vital that restoration of manhood is known among the broader community. Lazaridis (1995) adds with respect to HBV in rural Greek communities, that public opinion legitimizes the codes of conduct and broader patriarchal order which men use to control women. As will be discussed later, some women ensconced in honor-based systems internalize and reproduce rules that reinforce HBV. This can entail displays of emphasized femininity connected to so-called sexual purity, “not only the preservation of actual virginity but the production of the public effect of virginity” Abu-Odeh (2011, p. 12; emphasis in original).

Again, within a context where HBV pervades, policing women’s sexuality and following ascribed gender roles typically operate at the collective level, though aspects of this frequently shift in migrant contexts. Abraham (2000) sheds further light on this, explaining that unlike western communities where marriage signifies development of a nuclear family and independence from one’s parents, in South Asian families, marriage represents a union between families where individuals and their attendant behaviors symbolize extended familial standing: “In this context, shame and guilt attain a different meaning whereby the failures of the individual result in the ‘loss of face’ or loss of honor for the entire family” (Abraham 2000, p. 19).

Within this extended, collective family framework, HBV operates somewhat differently from intimate partner violence in societies where individualism and the nuclear family are stressed. Among families that follow strict notions of honor and shame, a woman who shames the family is not necessarily subject to punishment from her intimate partner. Instead, anyone who she shames may punish her as a means of restoring family honor – her father, brother, uncle, or a male cousin. Since the shamed identity is understood as a collective one, the process of restoring family honor (i.e. masculine hegemony) is likewise collective (Abu-Odeh 1997; Mojab 2012). But in a western, migrant context this dynamic often changes due to the loss of extended family networks and the nuclear family’s emphasis. This is not to suggest collective, community-based panopticism dissipates entirely in western countries where ethnic enclaves have developed, but “in Western societies, the male/husband in each family becomes devoid of the support of other men’s alliance and thereby becomes the sole representative to maintain control of women’s sexuality” (Akipinar 2003, p. 427). Therefore, in diasporic communities where honor and shame shape ideology, execution of honor codes more commonly falls upon a woman’s intimate partner, as opposed to extended family members (Baker, Gregware, and Cassidy 1999). Thus, in the migrant context, restoration of hegemonic masculinity operates on a more individualized level.
As the literature demonstrates, globalization has impacted analyses of HBV, how it operates similarly and differently in migrant and non-migrant contexts. Connell (2005) notes that masculinities must be understood while accounting for globalization, and that during the current period of neoliberalism where global markets and international capitalists are dominant in shaping society’s norms, a transnational business masculinity reflects a powerful version of gendered hegemony. However, most migrant men in western countries do not hold occupations that would warrant a transnational business identity. Instead, migrant men must cope with positional changes and challenges, and actively reconfigure a sense of masculinity specific to their shifting cultural circumstances (Connell 2001). To this end, in cases where migrant men reinforce honor-based systems that control female family members, they are enacting a dominant masculinity that accounts for culture, class, and migratory status. This dominant masculinity is perhaps not hegemonic on a global scale, but it remains dominant in that it actively subverts female agency and draws on global patriarchal norms. Furthermore, as Coles (2009, p. 33) argues, idealized masculinity is defined differently by diverse men, “varied in how it is understood, experienced, and lived out in daily practice.” Thus, when migrant men enact HBV, they are sustaining a particular dominant masculinity within their cultural context, while reproducing hegemonic masculinity at broader, abstract levels.

Within these diverse contexts, the mechanisms that uphold hegemonic masculinity also vary, and in the case of HBV, preservation of patriarchy is not limited to males. Scholars have illustrated how some women within these communities perpetuate honor systems by monitoring one another’s behaviors, both in their countries of origin and migrant settings. Most scholarship on this facet of HBV has focused on mothers-in-law. In a qualitative study of South Asian women in the United States, Raj and colleagues (2006, p. 943) state, “Women reported that their in-laws, particularly their mother-in-law, were often aware of and tolerated the IPV being perpetrated against them, and at times instigated the IPV or directly assaulted the women themselves.” Kandiyoti’s (1987) work on this topic has been particularly influential, explaining that within the extended family, stringent age and gender hierarchies mold HBV. Often times when a husband and wife marry, the wife will move in with the husband’s family, where the husband’s mother has earned and can wield significant power. “Within the household there is a clear hierarchy whereby the newest bride is subordinated to her mother-in-law as well as all the sisters-in-law with more seniority” (Kandiyoti 1987, p. 331). Kandiyoti goes on to explain that although the newly wedded wife may hold virtually no power at the time and be subject to highly oppressive conditions, she may make a patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti 1988) and accept the situation, hoping eventually to have her own son and a command over his future wife (see also Chaudhuri, Morash, and Yingling 2014).

The collective nature of HBV is also exemplified through broader community gossip and estrangement. A number of studies have noted that within ethnic communities (again, both in families’ countries of origin and diasporic communities), gossip among older women serves as an additional form of panopticism and social control that upholds patriarchal norms (Sen 2005). Hague, Gill, and Begikhani’s (2013) research in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region found that gossip and rumors contributed heavily to the social policing that influenced women’s behaviors. If younger Kurdish women violated sexual norms, or were thought to have done so, gossip of the purported behavior could lead to harmful repercussions. Similarly, Akipinar’s (2003) research with Turkish women living in Sweden found that rumors regarding suspected sexual promiscuity influenced women not to deviate from expected sexual modesty, and further that when young women’s sexual behaviors were in question, rumors could even spread to family members in Turkey, leading to a macro level of oppression crossing international lines. Therefore, when women are accused of sexual impropriety, the collective stigmatization thrust upon them can be so powerful, women feel ostracized from their entire community.
This makes migrant women in western environments that lack personal networks particularly vulnerable. For instance, in Sweden, girls ages 13–18 who were removed from their homes due to concerns over HBV felt extremely isolated (Schlytter and Linell 2010), a finding substantiated by Wikström and Ghazinour (2010), who also found through interviews with young women of Middle Eastern and African backgrounds staying in Swedish shelters that new feelings of isolation emerged after the women were removed from their families. In Das Dasgupta and Warrier’s (1996) research with predominantly middle-class Indian women in the United States, participants stated that feelings of isolation and possible ostracism from their ethnic community kept them from exiting abusive relationships; additionally these women feared that if they left their violent husbands, their natal families in India would be disgraced, showcasing again how shaming transpires across multiple ecological levels. Kang (2006, p. 155) adds from her research, “Shame is the most powerful element in Indian communities…. She cannot go to social gatherings, make friends or go to the temple because of the fear of people blaming her for leaving her husband…and not adjusting to her abusive family.” Clearly, the honor that men can earn and the shame that keeps women and girls in check function in tandem with one another. Studies of HBV demonstrate how hegemonic masculinities are not limited to men’s relationships with one another. Honor-based systems showcase how a particular dominant masculinity and its attendant values operate within the existing patriarchal gender order, relying on men’s dominance and women’s complicity to subvert female agency.

**Honor-based violence and Orientalist discourses**

The above section on HBV and hegemonic masculinity, if presented without broader context, arguably affirms a static and solitary non-western cultural tradition that rests upon patriarchal cultural norms. As such, a danger lies in discussing HBV because of its ongoing association with cultural groups across the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. Particularly in a post-9/11 era when Islamophobia has intensified, connecting communities where Islam is commonly practiced (or is perceived as the prevalent religion) to any type of violence can easily reify racial stereotypes and influence public policies accordingly. As Abu-Lughod (2011, p. 53) aptly points out, this makes analysis of HBV a risky endeavor for feminist scholars:

> Categories like the honor crime trap feminist scholars and activists in difficult binds: how are we to publicize and work against violence against women in the Middle East, South Asia, and Muslim Europe without being complicit in other forms of institutions of harm?

In the early 2000s, a robust body of empirical scholarship on HBV began to emerge from Scandinavia and Western Europe. Most of this scholarship stemmed from Sweden, shortly after three young Swedish women of Kurdish ancestry were murdered by male relatives in the form of honor killings; two of the murders occurred in Sweden and in the other case, the young woman was killed after being lured from Sweden to Iraq. The murders received extensive attention in the Swedish media and prompted the Swedish government to respond. Wikström and Ghazinour (2010, p. 250) write that by 2004, city councils in Malmo, Gothenburg, and Stockholm “received SEK7.5 million each to develop sheltered housing. In 2005, there were approximately 105 beds at 27 sheltered houses for adults and youngsters at risk of exposure to HRV.” While the Swedish government’s swift response to address the concern is commendable, academicians have observed that rhetoric in the mainstream media and government responded to attention over HBV in Sweden and across Europe by drawing on an Orientalist narrative. Said’s (1978) system of Orientalism provides a framework for scholars to analyze western discourse that presents colonized, “othered” societies as homogenously dangerous,
mysterious, uncivilized, simplistic, and fixed. In turn, even without mention of western society, implicit comparisons are made, denoting western superiority.

Drawing on Foucault, Hall (2006) underscores the importance of discourse, which stands as a collection of messages, deemed factual because those who construct the messages wield extensive authority and have the power to disseminate their viewpoints across multiple platforms. “Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language” (Hall 2006, p. 165) and the ways that those with authority legitimize the meanings attached to such knowledge. For Said, western discourse describing the “East,” or the “Orient,” has been so wide-ranging and supported by powerful institutions (e.g. government, academia) that western paternalism, domination, and ongoing forms of neocolonialism over the “Orient” become justified in popular public opinion. From this postcolonial perspective, disparaging representations of Orientalized “others” are key to understanding how western institutions maintain superior understandings of themselves and rationalize public policies that keep ethnic minorities subverted (McLennan 2003). In short, when key figures in western society repeatedly profile “the other” as barbaric and less civilized through legitimized outlets, it is not only “the other” that is vilified; in addition, western culture is glorified.

Returning to the three honor killings from Sweden from the early 2000s, a divisive multiculturalist discourse arose among Swedish policy makers in the aftermath, which Meetoo and Mirza (2007, p. 190) argue perpetuated an “inherent cultural reductionism.” This dominant narrative suggested that a culture’s stance as civilized or uncivilized was reduced to its perceived treatment of women (Nader 1989). Migrant, often times Muslim communities, were cast as less socially evolved and violently patriarchal without space for diversity within their cultures; in contrast, western culture was presented as an unblemished standard of gender equity where gender disparities were non-existent. Hellgren and Hobson (2008, p. 391, 392) found that mainstream media in Sweden and some prominent Swedish politicians “defined culture in terms of communities who failed to adapt to Swedish norms around gender equality,” making gender equity the measuring stick that determined which cultural groups belonged as part of the national culture.

Additional empirical work from Sweden illustrates how this dominant narrative materialized in other institutional environments. Research utilizing interviews with student welfare staff from Swedish secondary schools found that staff not only associated HBV with cultures from “Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Somalia, and Pakistan,” but also used HBV among those national groups to “draw boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘the other’, between ‘here’ and ‘there’ and between ‘gender equal’ and the ‘patriarchal’” (Gruber 2011, p. 134). In this discourse, Muslim men’s representation becomes highly problematic, profiled homogenously, and classified as the central problem, while unsurprisingly absent is any acknowledgement of existing sexism from Swedish men. However, as two other empirical studies conducted in Sweden demonstrate, the situation carries greater complexity. Sedem and Ferrer-Wreder (2014) interviewed 16 adolescent girls and young women, and 7 men from migrant backgrounds living or recently living in Sweden. Men in the study did articulate worries about their daughters’ assimilation into Swedish culture, but their anxieties were contextualized within an immigrant setting, expressing concerns of “being judged by their compatriots in Sweden and their relatives in their home countries” (p. 232). Rexvid and Schlytter’s (2012) evaluation of a Swedish program that addresses HBV with young men of Middle Eastern, African and Latin backgrounds found that although some of the men viewed women’s sexuality in their communities as a marker of family honor, participants also believed women should be able to engage in premarital sex and have love marriages, and that the men felt constricted by occupational racism. These latter studies highlight the attitudinal diversity that exists among migrant men, as well as their struggles with migration and western racism.
Scholarship taking a discursive analysis across other parts of Europe reports similar findings. Yurdakul and Korteweg’s (2013) comparative analysis of parliamentary discussions on HBV in the Netherlands, Germany, and UK found that immigrant leaders were only involved in addressing the issue in the Netherlands. Whereas in Germany and the UK, Muslim communities were treated as patriarchal problems to solve, which ultimately contributed to more restrictive immigration laws in Germany and further criminalization of Muslim culture in the UK (see also Bredal 2005; Gill 2006; Korteweg and Yurdakul 2010). Likewise, Hong’s (2014) study of Finnish policy documents on HBV argues that “culturalizing discourses” positioned Finnish women as emancipated in contrast to vulnerable, victimized migrant women in need of western protection. These reductionist representations leave little room for diversity within cultures, when in reality women of color have staunchly exercised their rights and advocated against HBV (Nanes 2003; Siddiqui 2005).

In fact, one of Said’s (1985) central arguments is that within dominant western discourses, “othered” populations are not given space to represent themselves. Said’s position becomes all the more applicable when gender is also considered, as noted by Spivak (2006) who contends that colonial presentations leave the least room for oppressed women of color to articulate their voices. As presented above, much of the empirical research in this area focuses on discourse analysis of governmental reports and mainstream media, or involves interviews with western practitioners. Though the research certainly exists (Das Dasgupta and Warrier 1996; Kang 2006; Sedem and Ferrer-Wreder 2014; Wikström and Ghazinour 2010), the body of literature involving women who cope directly with HBV is considerably smaller. Moreover, there is virtually no literature involving women from North African, Middle Eastern, or South Asian backgrounds who express not coping with HBV. This is a considerable gap since patriarchy operates differently, both between and within cultures (Ali 2007). Given the Orientalized ways that migrant women and men are profiled in government reports and mainstream media, Carbin (2013) contends that when women and girls from these populations refuse to discuss HBV, they are exercising a form of resistance, their silence acting as a barrier to racist, Orientalist lines of questioning.

Considering the diversity that exists within cultural groups among men and women, Reddy (2008) advocates that a “mature multiculturalism” be used when discussing HBV. This entails an intersectional approach accounting not only for patriarchal traditions in ethnic minority cultures but also the range of perspectives inside cultures, western imperialism, western patriarchy, racism experienced by migrants in western countries, and additional adjustments migrants experience in host countries. Of equal importance, it is critical when examining these intersectional factors that power inequalities embedded in honor systems are illuminated to emphasize the tangible effects of crosscutting inequalities (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013). Finally, a responsible scholarship will recognize that HBV is not an indicator that a culture is backwards relative to another. Instead, a responsible scholarship will view HBV as specific type of patriarchy, simultaneously acknowledging that different forms of patriarchy cut across all cultures, including western ones. Unfortunately, recent debates on HBV in western societies reflect an Orientalist discourse that erases western patriarchy and directs focus solely on the non-western cultural elements that contribute to one particular form of patriarchy.

Research gaps and future directions

Although scholarship on HBV within sociology is relatively thin, a rich literature exists. Still, there are a number of areas where the field requires further advancement. Considering that HBV disproportionately impacts younger women and adolescent girls from particular ethnic backgrounds, more empirical work should be conducted with these groups, in migrant and
non-migrant settings. Future research can approach the issue in ways that counter Orientalist framings by having participants explain how they (A) find agency in their culture to resist what they view as toxic western patterns (e.g. heavy alcohol consumption and sexual promiscuity; Werbner 2007), (B) create “free zones” where they can act independent of community surveillance (Alizadeh et al. 2011), and (C) contribute to youth programming since adult staff in western institutions typically do not know how to attend to HBV (Gruber 2011). Research may also involve interviewing older women who contribute to HBV to identify what factors influence these women to sustain patriarchal norms.

Jafri (2008, p. 142), however, argues, “Education for the awareness of human rights and equality has to be cross-gender: if women are to be empowered, men have to be alerted to adjust their roles and identities.” Thus, it would benefit communities if sociological research assisted in conceptualization of programs which counter culturally specific hegemonic masculinities connected to HBV. Work by Rexvid and Schlytter (2012) that evaluates programs for young men critiquing honor systems is critical. Emerging work should include components that incorporate contemporary forms of control, such as online shaming and surveillance (Hague, Gill, and Begikhani 2013). At the same time, neither culture nor men from the ethnic groups under study should be cast uncritically as the sole problem. It would also benefit the field if research were conducted with women and men who resist HBV to determine best-practice methods of disseminating these perspectives in community-based efforts. Perhaps as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest, it is possible to identify new forms of hegemonic masculinity within ethnic minority groups that promote gender equity.

Finally, the field would advance if understandings of HBV were analyzed in concert with concepts already addressed in the domestic violence literature. Honor killings already receive a disproportionate amount of attention, but less extreme forms of HBV are far more common. It would be useful in applying Stark’s (2007) concept of coercive control to settings where HBV transpires, tying in broader notions of extended family and expectations of acceptable sexuality. It is crucial though, that a responsible intersectional approach is used so new research in examination of HBV does not unintentionally critique culture divorced from concerns tied to migration, nationalism, racism, and western patriarchy.

Short Biographies

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362 Literature Honor-based Violence

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