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“It is essentially about controlling women’s sexuality”

A critical study on the communication of ‘honour-based violence’ in Swedish online courses

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Abstract

Since the early 2000s, the issue of 'honour-based violence' has sparked significant discussions in Sweden, leading to governmental and civil efforts to combat this form of violence. An essential intervention highlighted in these efforts is improving knowledge among professionals in sectors such as social and healthcare, schools, and the judicial system. Recently, a new platform has emerged, offering easily accessible information and knowledge through web-based courses.

However, postcolonial researchers have long criticised how Sweden and Western countries construct 'honour-based violence' in their sources of information and knowledge. Therefore, this thesis investigates how 'honour-based violence' is communicated specifically through Swedish web-based courses. To accomplish this, the thesis utilises two sources of data: web-based courses and interviews. The interviews have been conducted to gain a more comprehensive understanding of why the online courses were presented in the way they were.

The analysis of the data reveals three overarching results. Firstly, 'honour-based violence' is portrayed as an issue not culturally rooted in Sweden. This is evident through the use of binary oppositions in the online courses, where the normative standpoint, represented as 'we', is contrasted with the perceived 'Otherness' of 'them'. Secondly, the overall understanding and communication of 'honour-based violence' in the online courses exhibit ambivalence, as they oscillate between viewing it as a matter of men's violence against women and as a cultural phenomenon. Lastly, it is apparent that 'honour-based violence' is utilised as a means to create divisions between those who are deemed as being Swedish and those who are considered outsiders.

Keywords: honour-based violence, gender, postcolonialism feminism, liberal feminism, symbolic violence.

Popular Science Summary

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the emergence of ‘honour-based violence’ came to public attention following the deaths of Sara Abed, Pela Atroshi and Fadime Sahindal. These cases received extensive media coverage and sparked widespread discussion among society and the government. The unique aspect of the incidents was that the women were of foreign origin and were murdered by male relatives rather than by their (former) intimate partner. This brought forth questions on how to interpret such violence. Was it a manifestation of entrenched patriarchal structures, where men exert power over women, or was it specific to certain cultures or groups originating from particular countries?

While the question of interpretation remains unsolved, combating ‘honour-based violence’ has become a top priority. In addition to enacting laws, the government has emphasised the importance of improving knowledge among professionals who encounter victims daily, including social and healthcare workers, teachers, and individuals within the judicial system. Over the past few years, web-based courses have emerged as an effective means of disseminating information and knowledge. However, previous research on older sources of information has criticised how certain cultures and groups have been scapegoats as the cause of ‘honour-based violence’, leading to stigmatisation and the perpetuation of racism.

Since the online courses are a relatively new development, they have not been thoroughly investigated. This research examines how ‘honour-based violence’ is presented in the online courses and if the criticism of older information sources applies to these web-based courses. To achieve this, I have analysed the content of the courses and conducted interviews with individuals involved in their creation. The examination reveals that the previous criticism of older sources applies to the online courses. Firstly, ‘honour-based violence’ is depicted as unrelated to Swedish culture. Secondly, the confusion surrounding whether the violence stems from male domination or cultural factors persists. Lastly, ‘honour-based violence’ is utilised to categorise individuals as either Swedish or non-Swedish.

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1. Introduction

> "Honour violence is a rape of Swedish gender equality*"* (Sverigedemokraterna 2022). *"*Honour-based violence and abuse do not belong in Sweden […] There is no room for compromise*"* (Socialdemokraterna 2020). *"*Honour-related violence must be eliminated*"* (Regeringskansliet, 2023). *"*There are a lot of other things which are men's violence against women, but this issue [honour-based violence] deserves particular attention" (Expressen 2019). "Honour-related violence must be eradicated from the surface of the earth*"* (Centerpartiet Kalmar län 2021)

These quotes, originating from politicians representing a range of ideological positions in Sweden, convey a consistent perspective on 'honour-based violence'. They present 'honour-based violence' as a distinct and undesirable phenomenon that does not align with Swedish values. The acknowledgement of 'honour-based violence' in Sweden gained prominence in the late 1990s and early 2000s following the tragic deaths of Sara Abed, Pela Atroshi, and Fadime Sahindal. These cases deeply impacted Swedish society and may be considered national traumas. In response, civil society organisations such as GAPF (Glöm aldrig Pela och Fadime), Somarya aid organisation, and Save the Children's campaign "Love is Free" [Kärleken är Fri] emerged to support victims of 'honour-based violence'. These organisations represent only a selection of groups working towards such objectives.

The recognition and response to 'honour-based violence' have also been evident at the governmental level, leading to a transformation in discourse and policies surrounding this issue. Alania (2020b, p.333) states that, at a governmental level, "it is possible to talk about a before and after Fadimeh Sahindal". However, it is worth questioning why the names of the fifteen to twenty women yearly murdered by intimate partners, without being labelled as 'honour-related', remain relatively unknown compared to Sara, Pela and Fadime (Wilhelmsson 2009, p.7). There must be a reason why some women's names evolve into an NGO while the names of other women do not. It is not because of their names but rather what they have been exposed to. The common denominator for the three women, whose names are remembered, is that they all have been exposed to 'honour-based violence'; "Fadime was, even before her death, a symbol of the fight against honour violence and for women's right to choose their own partner" (SVT 2022).

Sweden has a political and civil consensus to combat 'honour-based violence' and provide comprehensive support to its victims. Education and enhanced knowledge among professionals, including social and healthcare workers, police officers, prosecutors, and attorneys, are emphasised as crucial measures (e.g., A2022/00389; A2021/01300; U2011/3826/UH; Skr 2007/08:39). The pursuit of improved knowledge has been central to addressing ‘honour-based violence’ since the early 2000s (Carbin 2010, p.120). This emphasis on knowledge improvement is also reflected in the official state investigation concerning the national strategy on men’s violence towards women and ‘honour-related violence and oppression’ (SOU 2015:55 pp.289-290). The document emphasises the importance of professionals basing their practice on research-derived information and scientific understanding. In essence, professionals should possess substantial knowledge about violence, enabling them to assess situations accurately and respond effectively when encountering victims of violence. While enhancing knowledge is viewed to be beneficial, there seems to be a lack of discussion on what kind of knowledge professionals are being provided with.

Critical scholars like Alania (2020a), Carbin (2010) and Wilhelmsson (2009) have examined official documents and policies related to ‘honour-based violence’, which all serve as sources of information and knowledge. These researchers have questioned the discourse and construction of ‘honour-based violence’ in the documents, highlighting how the portrayal of ‘honour-based violence’ tends to be associated with cultural and racial narratives. They also describe how the documents manage to create a division between ‘us’ (Swedes) and ‘them’ (non-Swedes, particularly Muslims or individuals of Middle Eastern origin). However, these researchers are not the sole voices highlighting the culturalising and racialising narratives on ‘honour-based violence’. A diverse array of scholars, such as Keskinen (2009), Gruber (2008), Abu-Lughood (2013), and Ålund & Alania (2011), have also drawn attention to this issue and provided similar types of criticism. Given the substantial criticism from academia, it can be presumed that the government and relevant authorities have been receptive to these concerns and have tried to refine the representation of ‘honour-based violence’ when establishing new sources of information.

During the autumn of 2020, I had the opportunity to intern at a Swedish knowledge centre [kunskapscentrum] that focuses on issues related to violence against children. Throughout the internship, my supervisor and I discussed the societal, academic, and political discourse surrounding ‘honour-based violence’. We were intrigued by the disagreements surrounding this topic and questioned why interventions in this area were allocated abundant resources. Most importantly, we pondered how a legitimate discourse could be publicly racialised in line with the abovementioned authors. Driven by curiosity, I desired to investigate how ‘honour-based violence’ was perceived, discussed, and constructed from an authorised view. However, it had already been done on policy and other official documents. One day, my supervisor casually suggested examining web-based courses that aimed to improve knowledge among professionals. The idea immediately piqued interest because they were *new* sources of information and in a *new* format. The courses were only found online and involved multimedia. They differ significantly from policy and official documents in how information is presented, and none has yet seemed to have examined them.

1.1 Aim and Research Question

While several researchers have critically examined the public sector's construction of "honour-based violence", the concerns seem to have been given minimal attention outside the academic sphere. Presently, novel platforms have emerged with the explicit purpose of enhancing professionals' understanding of 'honour-based violence'; the web-based courses. These online courses, offered by governmental bodies or reputable non-governmental organisations, can all be seen as extensions of the government. Why? Because the majority of them rely upon governmental funding. Moreover, they have a duty to serve and complete the assignments they have received from the government. Thus, this thesis aims to investigate the contemporary and authoritative perspective on 'honour-based violence' in Sweden. In this context, 'official' refers to the widely recognised representation of 'honour-based violence' sanctioned and disseminated by prominent and established organisations in Sweden. Consequently, the overarching research question of this thesis is as follows:

- How is 'honour-based violence' communicated through Swedish web-based courses?

While 'communicated' may not be a straightforward verb, this thesis views 'communicated' through three sub-questions; how is 'honour-based violence' defined? How is 'honour-based violence' conceptualised? What theories or frameworks are used to understand 'honour-based violence' from an overall point of view?

1.2 Outline

The thesis is structured into six chapters. Following the introduction, an overview of previous research is presented to address the different narratives surrounding 'honour-based violence'. Building on chapter two, chapter three serves to cover two theoretical frameworks; postcolonialism, feminism and a limited selection of whiteness studies and how they are relevant to the analysis. Chapter four provides information on methodological choices, and chapter five is constituted by the analysis. The analysis is divided into four subchapters in the following order: “Definition of ‘honour-based violence’” which explores how the violence is defined, followed by “Victims, Offenders and Areas of Protection”, and examines various representations of the phenomenon. The third subchapter is named “The Overall Understanding of ‘Honour-based Violence’” and discusses what frameworks are used to make sense of the violence. The last subchapter is named “Power, Knowledge and White Epistemic Habits,” which explores the interplay between knowledge and power in the online courses. The final chapter, chapter six, summarises the findings of the analysis and suggests avenues for future research in the field.

2. Previous research

Chapter two aims to develop an understanding of the discussions and narratives surrounding ‘honour-based violence’. The first sub-section describes the hegemonic perspective of ‘honour-based violence’ and critiques directed towards the general understanding. The subsequent sub-section outlines three theoretical frameworks commonly used to understand the violence. The last section sheds light on the extensive attention given to ‘honour-based violence’ in Sweden, offering insights into the reason behind the attention.

2.1 Hegemonic View on ‘Honour-Based Violence.’

Hegemony, as defined by Brittanica (2023), refers to the dominance of one group over another, supported by legitimising norms and ideas. The most prominent and acknowledged explanation of ‘honour-based violence’ is rooted in a hegemonic understanding that holds power over alternative perceptions. Although there is no single definition of the hegemonic understanding, it typically refers to acts of violence, oppression, and threats carried out to protect, defend, or restore cultural beliefs or the honour of the family and/or community. These actions are socially sanctioned or agreed upon by the family and/or collective (Baianstovu et al. 2019, p.24). However, Alania (2020a, p.256) argues that the hegemonic understanding of ‘honour-based violence’ is situated in a culturalist perspective and is characterised by the essentialisation of people from the Middle East and North Africa. Similarly, Gill (2022, p.2) states that the concept of ‘honour’ has been instrumentalised to label certain cultures as patriarchal, oppressive, and violent, thereby portraying them as a threat to the majority culture.

Criticism of ‘honour’ extends beyond its essentialising and racialising characteristics; it is also criticised for being a flawed analytical concept. One common point of criticism is that the meaning and understanding of ‘honour’ depend upon the historical period, context, and society in which the word is used (Walker & Gill 2019, p.3). Trasher & Handfield (2018, p.372) describe how the connotation of ‘honour’ can be positive or negative, making its meaning fundamentally reliant on the language and context the concept is found in. Moreover, they also describe how various researchers have attempted to distinguish the term from the closely related concepts of respect, esteem, and morality but that it has failed to assign ‘honour’ a coherent explanation. ‘Honour’ is also a term laden with value judgements, viewed positively when associated with honourability and negatively when linked to dishonour and shame (Walker & Gill 2019, p.3). This positive-negative ambivalence raises questions about its analytical usefulness (Gill, 2013, p.243). Furthermore, labelling acts of violence with 'honour' may perpetuate victim-blaming. Elakkary et al. (2014, p.77) argue that if a woman is subjected to violence because she has "polluted" her family's honour, it implies that her actions have caused her harm, rendering *her* actions dishonourable. A similar argument is made by Gill & Brah (2014, p.73), who contend that using the term 'honour' may suggest to offenders that the abuse is somehow morally justifiable, which is not, as there is nothing honourable about perpetrating violence (Asquith, p.2015, p.75)

Rather than addressing the concerns surrounding the use of 'honour' as a primary term, researchers have attempted to substitute it with self-made alternatives: honour ideology (Pomerantz 2020, p.521; Brown et al. 2018, p.538), honour society vs human rights society (Linder 2002, p.145), collectivistic honour cultures (Begum 2020, p.2), honour norms (Trasher & Handfield 2018, p.372), honour-related violence and oppression (Rexvid 2012, p.22), honour crime(s) (Hayes 2016), femicide in defence of honour (Coymak 2020, p.284), shame-related violence (Mucina & Jamal 2018, p.1), family and community-based violence (Idriss 2017, p.14) honour-based abuse (Bates 2021) honour culture/culture of honour, honour-based VAW, and honour concerns and shame killings. The proliferation of these labels for 'honour-based violence' is impractical and creates incoherence within the research field, making it susceptible to misunderstanding and misinterpretations.

2.2 Three Theoretical Perspectives

The concept 'honour-based violence' lacks a common definition, and some researchers have abandoned the use of the concept altogether. However, the field utilises three theoretical approaches to describe what analytic stance researchers have when investigating the violence. The cultural approach views 'honour-based violence' as a non-Western phenomenon rooted in patriarchal values (NCK 2010, p.18). Chesler (2010) insists on differentiating 'honour killings' from other types of femicides claiming that it is "extremely rare" that middle-aged men who kill their wives receive support from their own or the wife's family. It is argued that the difference lies within some cultures which collectively sanction violence whilst others do not. For example, Ne'Eman-Haviv (2021, p.19) states that family 'honour' and the perception of women as property are deeply ingrained in Arab societies, where men and women often support murder in the name of 'honour'. Two other alternative wordings which are used to underline its cultural association are 'honour culture' and 'culture of honour'. Lowe et al. (2018, pp.283-284) describe the 'honour culture' as a cultural system which is collectivistic and patriarchal, where the community apply pressure on women to submit to male superiority. Views of ‘honour’ as a cultural phenomenon often highlight the collective as a vital characteristic of the violence. It is argued that the collective appearance and sanctioning of the violence is one ultimate cause of why ‘honour-based violence’ must be differentiated from other types of interpersonal violence.

The gender-based approach, rooted in feminism, views ‘honour-based violence’ as a form of violence against women and girls (VAWG). It opposes the cultural perspective, which feminist researchers argue promotes cultural essentialism, stigmatisation, and marginalisation of ethnic minorities (Idriss 2017, p.7). Consequently, cultures of the ‘Other’ is portrayed as uncivilised and backwards-striving communities (Mucina 2021). Through this perspective, ‘honour-based violence’ serves as another mechanism through which men exert dominance over women, and by doing so limits women’s autonomy. Through the lens of this approach, ‘honour-based violence’ becomes another system of gender inequality through which female oppression is upheld (Idriss 2017, p.4). The perspective is concerned with universal and patriarchal violence against women and girls and less interested in the specific characteristics of ‘honour-based violence’.

The cultural- and gender-based approach explain ‘honour-based violence’ through a single factor but fails to consider other power relations. The intersectional approach, though, aims to challenge simplicity. Instead, it aims to integrate various inequalities and develop a comprehensive understanding of experiences of violence and abuse. Crenshaw’s (1991, p.1252) article, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour*, is a crucial inspiration for this understanding. Although Crenshaw discusses the situation of black women in the United States rather than ‘honour-based violence’, she demonstrates why considering multipole power relations is vital. Because black women do not experience racism in the same way as black men do, nor do they experience sexism in the same way as white women. Therefore, analysing black women’s experiences solely from antiracist or feminist perspectives would only offer a limited understanding of their marginalisation. In the context of ‘honour-based violence’, the intersectional researchers criticise the cultural and gender-based view for neglecting factors such as ethnicity, migration, class and gender relations (Yurdakul & Korteweg 2013, p.204)

2.3 Swedish Exceptionalism

Previous research has observed that the Nordic countries have shown significant attention to addressing ‘honour-based violence’ compared to other Western countries. Within the Nordic countries, Sweden seems to have given the issue the most attention, at least in terms of policy material and money spent on interventions (Carbin 2014, p.107). In the Nordic countries, there are variations in what aspects of ‘honour-based violence’ that has been focused upon. In Denmark, for example, there has been an overarching focus on forced marriage, whilst Sweden has predominantly focused on violence (Carbin 2010, p.55). Sweden also differed in interpreting ‘honour-based violence’ as an immigration *and* gender-equality issue (Carbin 2014, p. 107). This view differs from how it was understood in, for example, Denmark, where the focus remains primarily on the immigrant aspect (Keskinen 2009, p.259).

The understanding of ‘honour-based violence’ as an issue of gender equality is important and must be viewed along the national identity of being the most gender-equal country in the world. During the 1990s, Sweden started to focus on gender equality and addressing violence against women and girls, resulting in a reputation as a feminist country (Carbin 2010, p.87). The branding has deeply influenced Sweden’s self-identity, with gender equality becoming a defining characteristic of Swedish values (Kallenberg & Sigvardsdotter 2019, pp.83-84; Alinia 2020, p.249-250). When immigrant girls ‘suddenly’ were murdered by male family members, it shook the view of Sweden as being a gender-equal utopia. How did Sweden, the most gender-equal country in the world, fail so brutally to protect these women? As Carbin (2010, p.79) describes, no single question has engaged, mobilised and divided feminists to the extent that the debate upon ‘honour-violence’ has done.

The national identity of being the world’s most gender-equal country, coupled with the government’s dictation in 2019 of being the first country with a feminist government (Skilbrei 2021, p.75), is part of a broader concept known as Swedish exceptionalism. This exceptionalism encompasses the notion of being a “good” and successful agent of globalisation, combining ideals of egalitarianism and support for women’s rights domestically while projecting an image of progressiveness in promoting human rights and peacebuilding in the global South (Stoltz, Mulinari & Keskinen 2020, p.7). Swedish exceptionalism also includes being a modern, secular, and tolerant state (Alm et al. 2021, p.2). It could be summarised as being best at being good. However, Swedish exceptionalism does not only encompass ideas of gender equality but also an identification with anti-racist ideology (Kallenberg & Sigvardsdotter 2019, p.87; Garner 2014, p.414-415).

The anti-racist characteristic associated with Swedish exceptionalism is linked to liberal migrant laws, such as solid principles of family unification, a high rate of citizenship among foreign-born individuals, and an embrace of multiculturalism (Schierup & Ålund 2011, p.47). The view of being an anti-racist country where racism does not exist is interconnected with the view that Sweden, and other Nordic countries, are exceptions to the European history of imperialism and colonialism. The denial of having a colonial past plays a part in how Sweden denials the presence of racial discrimination in the nation (Stoltz 2021, pp.24-26). However, it is essential to note that discussions around Swedish exceptionalism are predominately framed in negative terms by postcolonial and anti-racist feminists. For instance, Habel (2012, p.118) describes Swedish exceptionalism as being “underpinned by a narcissistic self-image of our country as a haven of neutrality and innocence in the world”, which employs “naivety management as a protection against reflection and problematisation”.

3. Theory

The theory section will present two significant theories: postcolonialism and feminism. These theories are broad and used in various academic disciplines. Therefore, they will be introduced in general terms. The focus will then shift to applied literature focusing on the Nordic countries and Nordic literature. Each theory will be given its own title, but it is important to note that they often overlap and are not easily separated in practice. Two concepts from whiteness studies will then accompany the theories.

3.1 Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism is used in various academic fields, and its definition and use vary across disciplines. It is best understood as a heterogeneous framework that extends from literary analysis to historical research, medicine and more (Loomba 2002, p.2). According to Young (2001, pp.63-64), it "would be a mistake to assume that postcolonialism involves a unitary theory espousing a single perspective or position". The variations within postcolonialism are at the core of the theory. Young (2001, pp.64-65) describes the view of postcolonialism as a coherent theory as ironic because an essential characteristic of the theory is to refuse totalising forms. Instead, it resembles feminism as a viewpoint centred on shared perceptions and objectives. The implication of using a broad framework is the need to specify how it is used in this particular setting to align with the thesis' aim and research question. McEwan (2019, p.24) has named a particular use of postcolonialism as "critical aftermath", involving the critique of colonial and imperial images, patterns of thought, and how they operate in the present. The critical aftermath also entails to examine different identities, representations of the colonised and formerly colonised as inferior, and how colonial power operates in modern culture, politics, and economy. Similarly to Carbin (2010, p.27), this thesis employs postcolonialism as an analytical tool where processes creating identities are closely related to colonial structures.

A central part of postcolonial theory is the relationship between power and knowledge, especially the hegemonic position of the colonial/Western power over knowledge production. Loomba (2002, p.42) highlights how knowledge is not innocent but intricately connected to power operations. Power operates through language, literature, culture, and institutions in our daily lives (Loomba 2002, p.45). Another important concept in postcolonial is discourse(s), which refers to social practices through which the world is understood and given meaning. They encompass taken-for-granted assumptions, produced, and reproduced images, and are deeply embedded in power dynamics (McEwan 2019, pp.150-151). Discourses also wield power and control, especially through language (Loomba 2002, p.38). A postcolonial perspective prompts questions about whose views shape our understanding of the world and who possesses the authority to produce and unquestionably reproduce knowledge and discourses. It raises inquiries about how ‘honour-based violence’ is defined and understood and who legitimises and perpetuates these perspectives. Consequently, this thesis adopts a postcolonial approach to critically examine representations, identities, and the role of language in legitimising and perpetuating power relations and representations of the ‘coloniser’ and the ‘colonised’.

Two strategies commonly employed in postcolonialism research to investigate power relationships are binary oppositions and ambivalence. Binary oppositions involve contrasting pairs such as self/Other, male/female, normal/abnormal, developed/undeveloped, and they have contributed to Western knowledge and understanding since the Enlightenment (McEwan 2019, p. 151). However, binaries are not innocent distinctions. Instead, they serve as tools for systematically dominating groups deemed the ‘Other’, including women, people of colour, nature, workers, and animals (Haraway 1991, p.177). Binary oppositions also establish the normal and good ‘self’, as opposed to the abnormal, deviant, and bad ‘Other’. Identifying with the normal and good side of the binary implies advantages and privilege, while deviating from the norm subjects individuals to domination and marginalisation (McEwan 2019, p.152).

Not all postcolonial writers agree that one can comprehensively understand the colonial relationship through rigid dichotomies. In describing Homi Bhabha’s perspective, McEwan (2019, p.79) explains how this renowned scholar employs the concept of ambivalence to identify more nuanced understandings of colonial dominance and power. For example, the coloniser desires the colonised to be similar to himself but not identical. If they were to be identical, the grounds for the coloniser’s dominance and authority would crumble. Ambivalence serves not only to detect hybridisation in identities but also to reveal incoherences in discourses. Carbin (2010, p.40) describes how discourses aim to differentiate between the inside and the outside, right and wrong, ‘us’ and ‘them’, but how they never fully succeed. Instead, colonial, and hegemonic thinking is characterised by tensions, cracks, and impossibilities. Thus, rigid binaries do not always suffice in explaining the colonial rule. To summarise the notion of ambivalence, Bhabha (2004, p.131) suggests that “The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from *mimicry* - a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to *menace* – a difference that is almost total but not quite”.

3.2 Feminism

The subchapter of feminism is split into two parts, the first one being ‘critique against hegemonic- and liberal feminism’ and the second one being ‘postcolonial and feminist literature upon ‘honour-based violence’. Presenting critique upon liberal- and hegemonic feminism is important as the hegemonic view of ‘honour-based violence’ is built upon the ideology. Understanding why and how liberal- and hegemonic feminism is critiqued by postcolonial research to render critique in the analysis. The second sub-title is written to show how the postcolonial–feminist theory is applied and will clarify how it is intended to be used as to enable a good analysis.

3.2.1 Critique of Hegemonic- and Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism represents a distinct branch of feminism primarily prevalent in Western societies. It is founded upon liberal principles such as personal autonomy, free choice, and individualism (Gill 2022, p.7). A key objective of liberal feminism is to advocate for women’s equality in formal domains such as the legal system, institutional access, and participation in the public sphere. However, critical scholars have pointed out how liberal feminists are inclined to prioritise the experiences of white, middle-class women and men pursuing gender equality (Korteweg & Yurdakul 2021, p.413). Such criticism contends that liberal feminism often operates under the assumption that women can only achieve fulfilment and self-actualisation within liberal societies that espouses liberal values. Thereby, the liberal view perpetuates a perception of non-liberal communities as “developing” and positioning their women as requiring intervention or “saving” (Choudhury 2009, pp.154-155). Moreover, liberal feminism has faced reproach for its tendency to hypocritically embrace multiculturalism while neglecting the voices and experiences of ethnic and racialised women, particularly those who do not conform to the dominant white paradigm (Gill 2022, p.7)

In this context, hegemonic refers to the power to shape narratives within feminist and women’s movements. Stoltz, Mulinari & Keskinen (2020, p.5) describe it as the dominant and normative form of feminism. In Sweden, it manifests as forms of femo-nationalism framed through a feminist agenda of gender equality as a Swedish value (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2020, pp.183-184). Similarly, Sager & Mulinari (2018, p.150) associate hegemonic feminism with a Western tradition rooted in white privilege, which has played a pivotal role in the perception of “saving” migrant women from an oppressive patriarchal system. In Sweden, hegemonic feminism broadly aligns with liberal feminism, emphasising binary gender equality between men and women but overlooking various vulnerabilities and power dynamics within the group och women. One significant reason for critically examining the discourse of liberal and hegemonic feminism is the appropriation of liberal feminist ideals by right-wing and neo-nationalist parties. These political factions have skilfully co-opted the liberal values of feminism and gender equality to advance xenophobic agendas, despite previously focusing on women's roles as mothers, male leadership, and traditional family structure (Siim 2021, pp.55-56).

Liberal values and hegemonic feminism are not inherently less valuable than subaltern feminism. The issues lie in how they often view themselves as morally superior over alternative norm systems (Lundahl Hero 2021, p.40). In the context of Nordic countries, where right-wing ideologies manipulate Swedish notions of gender equality (Siim 2021), it becomes more important to examine liberal feminist perspectives to ascertain if they are being used to perpetuate racist practices.

3.2.2 Postcolonial Feminist Literature on 'Honour-Based Violence.'

Extensive national and international criticism has emerged regarding the construction and portrayal of 'honour-based violence', including its alleged victims and offenders, in a seminal and highly influential article by Chandra Mohanty (1988) where she criticises Western feminists' relation to "Third World Women", women of the Global East. Mohanty argues that there is a colonial discourse surrounding the representation of women from the global East due to the West's dominance in theoretical and practical realms. According to Mohanty, Western feminists have simplified and homogenised the diverse lived experience of women of the global East, depicting them as sexually repressed, ignorant, impoverished, uneducated, conservative, and victimised. Lila Abu-Lughood's (2013) work *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Offers a similar perspective. In her book, Abu-Lughood highlights substantial differences between the Western hegemonic view and her experiences encountering women living with honour during her ethnographic research in the Middle East. Drawing from her ethnographic research, Abu-Lughood describes meeting women who take pride in their honour and who consider sexual virtue and modesty as crucial aspects of their social and moral codes. She argues that the Western understanding of 'honour' portrays women as unequal to men and devoid of their moral agency. Moreover, she asserts that Western thought trivialises their moral system (ibid; pp.116-117)

Cetinkaya (2023) shares a similar perspective to Abu-Lughood's but writes about coloniality within the human rights discourse instead. Cetinkaya argues that the West has conflated various forms of honour into a single discourse characterised as violent, inhumane, and detrimental. Moreover, she highlights how the human rights discourse surrounding 'honour' has systematically marginalised and repressed other cultural perspectives. In conclusion, Cetinkaya emphasises the need for a more nuanced approach to international knowledge production that takes intersubjective and personal experiences while critically analysing social structures and historical context. On a similar note, Grewal (2013, p.2) describes the West's hegemonic interpretation of 'honour' as gendered orientalism, as it selectively examines certain cultures through the lens of masculinity and patriarchy while disregarding its patriarchal structures and their impact on women living in Western societies.

Postcolonial writings on 'honour' shed light on the notable disparity between the Western understanding of 'honour' and the lived experiences of women in/from the global South and East. The tendency of the West to impose its interpretations on Eastern and Southern women without considering their voices diminishes the significance of the non-Western moral system. It often portrays these women as victims based on uncertain grounds. Peroni (2016, pp.50-52) argues that non-Western women are frequently depicted as helpless victims because of their oppressive cultures, reducing them to a state of defencelessness and reinforcing the perception that they require protection. In so-called honour killings, women from ethnic communities become symbolic representations of violence and oppression (Keskinen 2009, p.258).

In the context of oppression and freedom, Keskinen (2009, p.261) highlights how the concept of 'freedom' is rarely questioned whilst being intimately related to the construction of the nation, race, and ethnicity. The prevailing understanding of 'freedom' entails conforming to the lifestyle of the majority population, while ethnic minorities are deemed to lack freedom due to oppressive cultural traditions. Summarising Keskinen's (2009, p.258) chapter, she elucidates how women's bodies become battlegrounds in the construction of the nation, playing a role in both inclusionary and exclusionary processes. The exploration of women's bodies for political agendas is further corroborated by Stoltz, Mulinari & Keskinen (2020, p.7), who argue that gender equality becomes a criterion for determining who can be included or excluded from the nation. Collectively, this subchapter demonstrates how postcolonial and feminist theories can be employed to critique 'honour-based violence' and sheds light on the implications of such criticism.

3.3 Whiteness Studies

The term ‘white’ is not solely based on physical characteristics. According to Garner (2014, p.409), it is primarily a way of thinking and doing. It is constructed concept associated with privileged patterns of thought. ‘Whiteness’ can serve as an analytical tool to recognise and comprehend racist practices. Garner (2014, pp.409-410) further discusses the concept of ‘colour-blind racism’, which is the mistaken belief that racism belongs to the past and that considering race is unnecessary. This viewpoint relies on ignorance, assuming that by disregarding the physical attributes of individuals, racism will cease to exist. This perspective can be linked to Swedish exceptionalism, the notion that Sweden is a non-racist country. A common argument of colour-blind racism is that discussing racism only perpetuates inequality and discrimination and that acknowledging ‘race’ leads to further differentiation based on skin colour (Garner 2014, p.409).

The paper’s analysis can benefit from incorporating two concepts: whiteness as an epistemic habit and white ignorance. Dahl (2020, p.114) provides insight into whiteness as an epistemic habit, defining habit as a recurring and automatic behaviour and epistemic as relating to knowledge or the study of knowledge. The epistemic habit refers to the common and taken-for-granted aspect of knowledge and its production and reproduction. Like Garner, Dahl (2020, p.126) rejects the notion of whiteness as an “innate, essential bodily property”. Instead, she refers to Ruth Frankenberg (1993), who proposes whiteness as a standpoint involving structural advantage, race privilege, and cultural practices (Frankenberg 1993, p.1). Sharing this view, Dahl (2020, p.127) claims that whiteness is a “power structure built on ignorance, innocence, fragility, and goodness”. The white epistemic habit, therefore, refers to how whiteness remains unmarked, unnoticed, and a prevailing standpoint despite individuals reflecting on their perspectives and disregarding whiteness as an outlook that shuns white supremacy and privilege. Dahl (2020, p.122) argues that the ignorance, negligence, and overall resistance to acknowledging privilege stems from the belief that engaging with antiracist critique is not ‘useful’ as it challenges the normative and central position of whiteness in academia.

On the other hand, white ignorance refers to a deliberate form of ignorance that goes beyond coincidence. It is a systematic behaviour that emerges from social practices and is crucial in maintaining racial inequality (Martín 2020, p.865). Alinia (2020) uses this concept to analyse Swedish policy documents. Her article explores how knowledge is shaped by selectively including specific facts while ignoring others, especially regarding the ‘Other’ and racial ignorance. Alinia describes white ignorance as an active process where the deliberate choice of “not knowing” is a way to maintain power dynamics. In the policy document she examines (SOU 2015:86), Alinia argues that the investigations and writes purposefully excluded critical literature, like antiracist and intersectional research. According to Alinia, this deliberate exclusion is a form of symbolic violence.

Whiteness studies are valuable for their analytical capacity in exploring the dynamics of privilege, power, and knowledge and how they intersect. Postcolonialism has traditionally focused on power relations discourse and language. By incorporating the concepts of white epistemic habits and ignorance, the analysis gains additional perspectives to examine the power and sheds light on other forms of power dynamics. These concepts enable the investigation of how power operates through silent structures and hidden privileged, expanding our understanding beyond overt expressions of power.

4. Method

The introduction described how the idea of investigating web-based courses appeared. However, as the data from the online courses were processed, more questions arose rather than being solved. It became clear that relying solely on the courses would not yield satisfactory answers. The questions that appeared went beyond mere inquiries about the courses' content; they delved into the underlying reasons for the courses' specific structure. I sought to uncover a rationale behind the courses' descriptions and the selective inclusion and exclusion of certain aspects, similar to the justifications in this methodological chapter. It was contended that interviews with individuals involved in producing the online courses were necessary to find answers. Thus, two types of data are incorporated in this thesis: data from web-based courses and data obtained through interviews. Combining these two sources, the study aims to understand how 'honour-based violence' is communicated through the online courses and why such communication strategies are employed.

4.1 The web-based courses

The thesis does not solely rely on an intriguing idea; there is academic relevance in studying online courses. The theory section of the thesis draws from postcolonial literature that predominantly focuses on official, governmental, or leading documents (e.g., Carbin 2010; Carbin 2014; Alinia 2020; Peroni 2016). These policies and official documents are prepared and written carefully within a rigorous process, serving as sources of information and knowledge, and providing a framework for institutions and social work (Alinia 2020, p.249). For instance, the Swedish Government Official Report SOU 2020:57, translated to, *A Particular Honour Crime* involved a careful process. The investigation was led by the prosecutor general and accompanied by nine experts ranging from lawyers to senior police officers, associate professors, PhD candidates, and other individuals with significant profiles within the Swedish judicial system. This kind of rigorous process results in formal documents. In comparison, the web-based courses are produced with the resources available at each organisation, and thus differ significantly in terms of formality. The web-based courses are not structured to appeal to academics, directors, or chiefs of institutions. Their target population are professionals who encounter children, youths, and adults in their everyday work. The information must be less formal to make it available, and the courses must be easy to use (Drabkin 2021 al, p.7915). They must not be formal. This raises questions about how this less formal material will relate to issues such as stigmatisation, prejudicial images, and the process of ‘Othering’. Another notable difference lies in the type of data on which the web-based courses are built on. These courses incorporate multimedia elements such as interviews, podcasts/audiotapes, illustrations, videos, and fictional cases. The material goes beyond text and provides a more dynamic and immersive learning experience.

Sampling the web-based courses was a straightforward process. There were three criteria for a web-based course to be included. The first criterion is specific, and the other refers to accessibility:

1. The course may only focus on ‘honour-based violence′.
2. The course must be easy to access.
3. The course must not cost.

The first criterion may seem obvious, but it was established to differentiate the selected online courses from others available. For example, the national centre for preventing men’s violence against women (NCK) offers a course that combines men’s violence against women with ‘honour-based violence’. However, these courses were deemed irrelevant as they only briefly touched upon ‘honour-based violence’ and lacked descriptive data.

The second and third criteria were established to ensure accessibility. Similar to the studies on formal policy documents, the goal is to examine an official and authorised perspective on ‘honour-based violence’. However, the importance of accessibility of information used to train professionals has been highlighted by, for example, Drabkin et al (2021), Canavese & Polidoro (2022) and Paranal et al (2012). Therefore, it was important for the courses to be easily accessible and free of charge. To identify courses that represented an official view, I turned to government agencies, which are argued to be extensions of the state. It was found that Socialstyrelsen, Skolverket, MUCF, Länsstyrelserna, and even Save the Children (one of the largest NGOs in Sweden) had produced online courses. These agencies have significant influence in society, Socialstyrelsen being closely associated with social services and workers, Skolverket governing and supporting education at various levels, MUCF assisting those working with youth and civil society, and Länsstyrelserna coordinating county administration boards. The same argument could also be applied to Save the Children’s online course.

The final sample is listed down below. It includes the name, who governs the course, how the organisation describes the course and if there is a target population.

- *Web-course Honour*. Governed by: Länsstyrelserna [The County Administration Boards']. This course aims to provide basic knowledge about HBV and constitutes support to develop your work. Target population: social workers, school personnel and preschool personnel. https://webbkursheder.se/ [2023-05-02]
- *Honour-related violence and oppression – social services*. Governed by: Socialstyrelsen (the National Board of Health and Welfare). Description: An advanced education about honour-related violence, oppression, and genital mutilation. The education aims to improve knowledge amongst managers and personnel so that more cases of honour-related violence and oppression may be detected and more people to receive help, support and interventions. Target population: social workers. https://utbildning.socialstyrelsen.se/learn/signin [2023-05-02]
- *Honour-related violence and oppression* [Hedersrelaterat våld och förtryck]. Governed by: Save the Children. Description: In this course, you will learn what honour-related violence and oppression are and how it differs from other types of violence. You will also learn how to support children and youth. Target population: Does not state. https://www.raddabarnen.se/medlem-och-volontar/grundutbildningen-det-handlar-om-karlek/ [2023-05-02]
- *Work against honour-related violence and oppression*. Governed by: Skolverket [The Swedish National Agency for Education]. Description: A web-based course concerning how schools can organise and carry out systematic work towards HBV, focusing on preventative work and interventions. Target population: school management and personnel in the schools' health- and care teams. https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/kurser-och-utbildningar/arbeta-mot-hedersrelaterat-vald-och-fortryck---webbkurs [2023-05-02]
- *Right, to Know! – Honour-related violence and oppression*. Governed by: MUCF [Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society]. Description: This program is about how to talk to youth about HBV, with a focus on perspectives of HBTQ, intellectual disabilities, as well as victimisation of racism. Target population: all adults who meet youths. https://www.mucf.se/verktyg/ratt-att-veta [2023-05-02]

The web-based courses are the fundament of the thesis, but because they are only found online, I found it to be uncomfortable to fully rely on the internet and on the platforms where the courses are available. As Topuzovska Latkovikj & Borota Popovska (2019, p.46) explains, "software and hardware failures may lead to unpredicted effects which may cause problems for the running of a study”. Studying secondary sources may be unpredictable, and if the platforms were shut down, the material would not be available. As such, I had the aim to collect and transform as much data as possible into a physical format, such as into Word documents or into PDFs, which could then be printed. While the scenario might be unlikely, there was a situation where I was not able to view two pages in one of the courses. Luckily, I had printed out the information and was able to work with that data despite not being able to view it online.

When transforming the online data into physical format, the primary method involved copying and pasting the text from the courses into separate Word documents. However, as described above, the courses used various formats to provide information, such as audiotapes, interviews, and videos. That kind of data could not be copy-pasted. Luckily, many of the podcasts, audiotapes and videos were already transcribed by the organisation and could be downloaded as PDFs. For instance, Skolverket’s course included videos and podcasts ranging between 10-20 minutes, with a button below stating how the file could be downloaded in text format. Länsstyrelserna’s course included many shorter interviews lasting about 1-2 minutes and was not transcribed separately. These kinds of videos were transcribed by hand. Many courses also offered a ‘library’ with additional information. This information was downloaded, printed, and reviewed. However, much of the extra material was irrelevant to the study of how ‘honour-based violence’ is communicated. Examples of irrelevant information were word lists that did not include ‘honour-based violence’, material related to improving one’s organisation, cooperation and routines, and documents on conducting age-appropriate conversations with children and youths. None of this material involved a communicating aspect of ‘honour-based violence’ and was judged irrelevant for the study, thus excluded.

The data obtained from the web-based courses serve as the basis for the analysis. Prior to the decision to conduct interviews, the analysis of the course’s data had already begun by reading, re-reading, and contemplating the insights provided. A more detailed account of the thematic analysis will be provided below. Still, it can be stated that the analytic process of the courses’ data was initiated weeks before the interviews. While the web-based courses serve as the basis of the thesis, it must be acknowledged that there are limitations of secondary data. Questions arose regarding how ‘honour-based violence’ was described and the reason for specific choices in its portrayal. Commencing the analytical process with the courses’ data guided the identification of the themes to be included in the interview guide. The preliminary work with courses facilitated more focused and niched interviews, resulting in richer data. Using two data sources in the analysis will contribute to a more comprehensive and profound analysis than either source could offer individually.

4.2 Interviews

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the decision to include interviews was driven by the need to understand the rationale behind the design of the web-based courses. The objective was to gain insights into the course design by interviewing the project leaders or individuals well-versed in the program. The process of identifying suitable individuals proved to be challenging. Fortunately, contacts provided me with the email addresses of four out of five project leaders. It is not accurate to consider these contacts as gatekeepers, but they certainly expedited the process of finding interviewees.

When contacting the project leaders, my identity and the purpose of the thesis were explained, and additional information, such as interview questions, was offered upon request. Responses were received from all contacted individuals, although only three project leaders agreed to participate. The fourth project leader declined due to time constraints, despite their willingness to assist. The original project leader from the fifth organisation was no longer with the organisation, and the contact person I corresponded with felt unable to provide a fair share of information. As a result, three interviewees were included in the study.

The interviewees were situated in different regions of Sweden, and for practical reasons, it was decided that conducting online interviews would be more efficient and timesaving. The interviews can be classified as "synchronous interviews" (James & Busher 2012, p.5), meaning they took place in real-time and face-to-face but in a virtual setting. Zoom meetings were utilised for conducting the interviews because I experience the platform to be user-friendly, which I have not faced difficulties with (de Villiers, Farooq & Molinari 2021). Once both parties were connected in the Zoom meeting, the information previously shared by email was reiterated. Consent was requested once more, and participants were assured that they could skip questions, end the interview, or withdraw their consent if desired. Anonymity was guaranteed, and it was explained that all recordings and transcriptions would be deleted once the examination was completed.

However, dedicating more attention to the purposive sampling is warranted. The interviewees in this thesis were selected based on their knowledge and in their roles as government employees and project leaders. According to Emmel (2014, p.3), purposive sampling is a logical and effective approach when researchers seek in-depth and comprehensive information about a specific case. It was deemed the most suitable choice to align with the thesis' interest, objectives, and research question. It is important to emphasise that the interviewees are regarded as knowledgeable individuals who possess insights into the development of the online courses rather than being interviewed about their personal experiences or life situations. This distinction is crucial because the study focuses on the web-based courses, not on the interviewees.

4.3 Analysis

The current thesis draws significant inspiration from thematic analysis (TA) to structure, identify, organise, and present patterns of meaning discovered in the data (Braun & Clarke 2012, p.57). The rationale behind employing TA lies in its flexibility and adaptability to the subject under investigation. As outlined by Guest, MacQueen & Namey (2012, p.16), TA serves as a methodological framework that encompasses elements from various traditions, including grounded theory, positivism, interpretivism, and phenomenology. It selectively incorporates the most relevant aspects from each methodological tradition, tailoring the approach to the specific context of the researcher.

TA's adaptability has proven particularly valuable given the inclusion of two distinct data sources in this study: the web-based courses and the interviews. Applying the same analytical method to both sources has helped mitigate concerns related to confirmation bias. As the themes have primarily emerged through a deductive approach, guided by the postcolonial literature that highlights specific problematic areas and issues, it has raised questions about potential biases in interpretation. To address this, the other dataset was consulted to validate the presence of the same code and themes. It is important to note that this temporary uncertainty is not viewed as a drawback but a strength. Qualitative research is a subjective process "capitalising on researchers' appreciation of signification's enormity, contingency and fragility" (Attride-Stirling 2001, p.403). Failing to question interpretations would be more worrying than recognising the limitations of the human mind and its biases.

The thematic analysis in this study involves a consistent approach for both data sources. The process followed Braun & Clarke's (2012) six-step procedure for conducting thematic analysis. The process involved familiarising with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining, and naming themes, and writing the analysis. The data was examined by reading and rereading it to understand the present words, descriptions, and explanations comprehensively. Then, initial codes were generated by noting information and highlighting critical passages based on predetermined areas which were influenced by the postcolonial literature. When patterns and connections in the data emerged, they were grouped into preliminary themes. The coherence and internal consistency of these were then carefully assessed. When initial themes were established, they were revised, refined, and adjusted to reflect the underlying meaning of the data. The themes were then assigned names to capture the essence of its content. Finally, the findings were synthesised, and the analysis was written, integrating the identified themes with supporting evidence from the data. This approach allowed a comprehensive exploration of the data, ensuring meaningful pieces were identified that reflected the underlying meaning of the data.

4.4 Researcher Standpoint

The thesis may be perceived as focused and specialised, aligning with its intended scope. It has been described how the inspiration for this investigation arose during an internship at a similar organisation which is now under the loop, where first handed experiences motivated the research. It has been described how I was critical towards the discourse surrounding 'honour-based violence' in academia, governmental institutions, and society at large, even before the investigation was initiated. It is essential to emphasise this particular standpoint to demonstrate transparency. In addition to the internship, I have an active involvement in an NGO that operates a chatroom for children and youth affected by violence, abuse, and oppression. This proves extensive pre-knowledge about the field, and I acknowledge the presence of subjectivity in my work and throughout the project. The awareness has resulted in a more careful examination of biases and misinterpretations.

Throughout the different engagements, familiarity has been gained regarding the cooperation between civil organisations and government agencies in violence-related projects, including 'honour-based violence' in Sweden. Professionals in this field, including civil society, academic research, government institutions and the legal system, often have professional connections and acquaintances. It could be labelled as a community, not in terms of shared solidarity, but in terms of professional knowledge and awareness among individuals in the field.

The issue of 'honour-based violence' continues to be a sensitive topic in Sweden, with lasting implications. Anecdotes have been shared suggesting instances where researchers have declined to speak at engagements due to the presence of their ideological "opponents". Therefore, the reception of this thesis within the community remains uncertain. It aims to provide an alternative perspective on the communication of 'honour-based violence' and challenge prevailing narratives. However, there is a possibility that it may be viewed as excessively critical or insufficient in acknowledging the efforts invested in developing the courses or in the broader fight against violence. Anticipating such reactions, I am prepared to engage in discussions, recognising the importance of examining how violence is portrayed and understanding its implications.

5. Analysis

The analysis will be presented in four sub-chapters, where each section focuses on different aspects of how ‘honour-based violence’ is communicated. The first sub-chapter examines the definition of ‘honour-based violence’ is presented in the online courses and explores the implications of such definitions. The second sub-chapter analyses how different subjects are constructed as victims, respectively, offenders, and the values that are emphasised and sought to be protected within these narratives. The third section examines the theoretical models employed in the courses to make sense of ‘honour-based violence’. Finally, the analysis concludes by discussing the relationship between power and knowledge and how this relationship is important in the knowledge production of ‘honour-based violence’. The analysis aims at working with binary distinctions, such as ‘we/us’ and ‘them/the Other’, to investigate how meaning is presented in the data. Is the exclusionary process in portraying the ‘Other’ simple and evident, or are different techniques utilised to depict ‘honour-based violence’ as a non-Swedish issue?

Before commencing the analysis, it is important to provide a clarification. Based on postcolonial studies, the forthcoming analysis will view the data from a critical stance. However, the reader must understand that I do not contest the existence of violence within ethnic communities. I do not dispute the well-documented fact that men, on a structural and global scale, bear primary responsibility for the overwhelming majority of violence. Men’s violence against women is a significant and urgent issue, with girls and women worldwide enduring physical and psychological suffering due to male abuse. I do not critique the interviewees, as it is evident that they wholeheartedly strive to create a better world. Swedish society is populated by individuals of goodwill aiming to assist young people, women, and men in living their lives without being subjected to or afflicted by violence. My critique lies in the particular application of the label ‘honour’ and its hegemonic position. I question how ‘honour-based violence’ is constructed and discussed. My concerns lie with the exclusionary and racialising nature of the Swedish discourse surrounding ‘honour-based violence’. Although the online course does not explicitly link ‘honour-based violence’ to specific ethnicities, religions, or cultures, it is presented as an imported issue rather than a culturally Swedish matter.

5.1 Definition of ‘Honour-Based Violence’

Two courses use a formal definition: Save the Children and Länsstyrelserna’s programs. The definition is sourced from the policy document Skr 2007/08:39, translated to the *Action Plan to Prevent Men’s Violence against Women, Honour-related Violence and Oppression, and Violence in Same-sex Relationships.* The definition states the following:

> Honour-related violence and oppression is, like men’s violence against women in general, based on notions of gender, power, sexuality, and cultural ideas about these. […] Regarding honour-related violence and oppression, the control of girls and women’s sexuality is central and strongly connected to the collective. In honour-thinking, notions of virginity and chastity are central, and the family’s reputation and face are seen as imminently based upon girls’ and women’s actual or claimed behaviour. (Skr 2007/08:39, p.12) [my translation]

There are two conflicting ideas in the definition. Firstly, the inclusion of ‘cultural ideas’ is present. At the same time, the policy document later states that “honour-thinking can look different depending on cultural conceptions and religion but is not related to a specific cultures or religions” (Skr 2007/08:39). In other words, while the use of ‘cultural ideas’ is deemed appropriate in the definition, associating it with a specific culture(s) is considered wrong. The two instances where ‘culture’ appears suggest two different understandings of it. Does ‘cultural ideas’ refer to what sociologists would name norms? And does ‘cultures’ refer to a layman and everyday use of cultures as being associated with countries, nations, or geographical regions? The consequence of using two different understandings of ‘culture’, regardless of what the intention of doing so was, is that it is hard to understand their meaning. The contradiction also places the cognitive burden on the reader/user to reconcile the opposing ideas into a coherent understanding. Leaving the cognitive burden upon the user increases the risk of stereotyping, as stereotyping is a strategy employed to process complex information into simplified forms (Loomba 2002, p.55).

The second contradiction in the definition refers to the combination of ‘cultural ideas’ and ‘gender, power, sexuality’. The combination is odd because the two expressions stem from divergent frameworks. ‘Gender, power, sexuality’ is linked with the gender-based approach and emphasises men’s structural power over women. At the same time, ‘cultural ideas’ is tied to the cultural perspective, positing that ‘honour-based violence’ is associated with specific cultures. As Carbin (2010, p.116) highlights, the disparity between the two expressions lies in the fact that “gender carries similarities and culture means difference”. Carbin’s statement implies that the gender-based perspective seeks to comprehend ‘honour-based violence’ by drawing parallels with men’s violence against women. Conversely, the cultural approach bases its understanding of ‘honour-based violence’ on how it differs from normative violence, such as intimate partner violence. It views ‘honour-based violence’ as *different* from intimate or interpersonal violence and must be treated differently. The combination of the two views can be perceived as illogical and incoherent. An illogical and incoherent definition raises questions about its credibility. Incoherence typically signifies indecisiveness, which is not generally regarded as a marker of credibility.

The preceding discussion is also characterised by ambivalence, a concept widely explored in postcolonial theory. Ambivalence refers to a form of ambiguity wherein the coloniser seeks to make the colonised similar to himself but not identical, as an identical relationship does not legitimise the coloniser’s supremacy (McEwan 2019, p.79). Ambivalence is an analytic concept that recognises tensions and fractures within the hegemonic state, leading to a lack of coherence (Carbin 2010, p.40). The ambivalence in the definition manifests through the divergent perceptions of ‘honour-based violence’. The two opposing views, gender versus culture, indicate conflicting directions. The conflicting understanding can interpret ‘honour-based violence’ as somewhat akin to men’s violence against women, but not *entirely*. This interpretation is based on the definition’s explicit connection to men’s violence *and* to cultural differences.

The notion of almost but not *entirely* exemplifies the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. ‘Honour-based violence’ must be sufficiently similar to the conventional understanding of interpersonal violence to avoid overt racism yet distinct enough to resist assimilation in the framework of normative violence. Considering ‘honour-based violence’ as normative violence would undermine the power of the coloniser and blur the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’, as it would negate the need for separation. Moreover, Bhabha (2004, p.131) describes how ambivalence moves between a difference that is almost nothing to almost total, but not quite. This summarises how ‘honour-based violence’, on the one hand, is communicated as almost being the same as what is perceived as normative violence. On the other hand, labelling ‘honour-based violence’ as a distinct phenomenon demonstrates that it is not the same. Furthermore, McEwan (2019, p.208), albeit from a global development perspective, suggests that the North’s real power lies in its ability to “name, represent, and theorise”. The perspective lays the foundation to argue that a definition is more than a mere description; it embodies the power to label and determine how a phenomenon should be constructed, explained, and theorised. This insight holds relevance across all chapters in the analysis and will be revised as an argument periodically.

5.1.1 Avoiding Using Formal Definitions

The absence of a formal definition is intriguing. The act of defining implies the exercise to shape understanding, and it raises questions about how the courses assert their authority to define ‘honour-based violence’ if a formal definition is absent. One explanation for the omission of a definition could be related to the contentious nature of the hegemonic understanding of ‘honour’. The online courses may seek to evade potential criticism by refraining from providing a precise definition. Not using a definition may create a false sense of security, as evidenced by recent scrutiny faced by the two courses that did provide a definition. However, the absence of a formal definition does not necessarily imply that ‘honour-based violence’ remains undefined. When formal definitions are absent, defining could involve “to determine or identify the essential qualities or meaning of” (Merriam-Webster 2023). Instead of presenting a concise definition, the online courses employ titles and descriptive paragraphs to characterise the violence. At first glance, the online courses’ description could be interpreted to be vague and fails to delineate what ‘honour-based violence’ is and what it is not. Delving deeper into the data, it becomes apparent that there is much material to touch upon and discuss.

Socialstyrelsen summarises ‘honour-based violence’ in five concise points, aiming to concretise and characterise the core aspects of the violence. The two other courses take a different approach, opting not to present a summary. Instead, they incorporate chapters that address relevant areas and utilise sub-headings to indicate the nature and scope of the violence. The interviewees were asked why the courses did not include any formal definition, and the interviewees responded the following;

> We aimed to complement other courses, so we do not have that basic knowledge about honour, or what we should call it. We expect that people have gotten that basic knowledge somewhere else. […] We are a government agency and operate with the government’s definition, so we have the same definition as the others, but add stuff […] (Representative 1)

And

> It is not the purpose of the course. We share the existing definition, and there is a new definition from 2019, retrieved from a proposition we use in the supporting material. I think it is also in the supporting pages [of the course]. In the frame for this course, we did not see a reason to define it. (Representative 2)

The interviewees' responses to the questions revealed a common trend: even in the absence of a formal definition within the web-based courses, they still aligned themselves with the definitions and perspectives established by the government. Because they align with government-produced definitions, they are subjected to the same criticism raised earlier on Skr 2007/08:38.

However, while representative 2 refers to a definition that lies outside the immediate course, it was intriguing to examine whether it had undergone significant changes compared to the definitions used by Save the Children and Länsstyrelserna. The newer definition, obtained from Prop 2019/20:131 (p.24), differs in certain aspects. Notably, it includes 'honour norms', which are said to be based on 'strictly patriarchal and heteronormative ideas'. In the new definition, the emphasis on girls' and women's sexuality is less pronounced, encompassing a broader notion of control, stating, "[the] violence aims to maintain the family's control over the individual. […] are expressed in control over girls and women […] boys are also expected to, to a great extent, oversee and control their sisters" (ibid). The control is said to involve clothing, societal life, limitations on educational opportunities and marriage. Although there are differences, the newer definition does not imply a reduced likelihood of criticism. Downplaying the control of women's sexuality and placing greater emphasis on a general understanding of control should be met with questions. If control is understood from a broader perspective, what distinguishes control within an 'honour context' from 'normal' yet dysfunctional control in, for example, intimate relationships?

The interviewees' assertions regarding adherence to a governmental approach can be associated with the views of the Polish sociologist Bauman (1991/1995:7 in Carbin 2010, p.4). Bauman posits that modern politics, intellectual pursuits, and societal life aim to eradicate ambivalence and establish precise definitions. However, the reality unveils a modern state that tends to either inadequately or excessively define, giving rise to what Bauman terms "the demon of ambiguity". Bauman's argument about coherence aligns well with the interviewees' testimonies of the governmental aim to cooperate and to follow the same rationale. Bauman illustrates that the practice of either under or overly defining is not unique to the online courses under discussion. Instead, it is a common occurrence. The paradoxical nature of reality, steeped in inherent ambivalence, starkly contrasts the official's aim, thus revealing a discrepancy.

Bauman's argument summarises the overall discussion about how the courses use or omission to use formal definitions. The data shows that some courses include a definition while others do not. This ambiguity is further complicated when considering the interviewees' aim for finding common ground. There is an apparent discrepancy between the online courses, which strive to be transparent and predictable, and the reality, which is marked by more confusion than coherence.

5.1.2 Terminology

The epilogue of *Feminism in the Nordic Region* (Keskeinen, Stoltz & Mulinari 2021) is based on a conversation between the Finnish activists Sonya Lindfors and Maryan Abdulkarim. In the conversation, Lindfors states, "Words have performative power, and they change the way we think. Words make worlds." Upon 'honour-based violence', Grewal (2013, p.1) expresses how there is only limited literature on the construction of 'honour-killings' and "the ways that concept produces meanings, culture and identities.". The observations underscore the idea of words as more than mere combinations of letters; they possess meaning and power. As previously discussed, postcolonial literature strongly critiques the use of 'honour' to label violence, arguing that it perpetuates stigma, essentialises cultures and exhibits racist tendencies (Alinia 2020a, p.254; Gill 2022, p.2). Despite such criticism, 'honour' has attained a hegemonic position as it is employed by the Swedish government, in official documents and by government bodies. 'Honour' is the foundation for 'honour-based violence', and its dominant position shows no signs of changing soon. In light of this, the most logical course of action is to draw attention, stimulate discussion and analyse the adverse consequences associated with the use of 'honour' terminology.

The web-based courses use a range of terms to describe 'honour-based violence' and adjacent abuse. Out of all wordings, only 'honour-related violence and oppression' is used by all the courses. When it is translated directly into Swedish, it is the most commonly used label. Other popular terms are 'honour norms', 'honour context', 'honour culture', 'honour thinking' and 'honour motif'. Each of these terms carries its nuances and connotations.

During the interviews, the representatives were asked to reflect upon how they had selected certain words but not others. In response to whether discussions had taken place regarding the usage of words, representative 2 made the following statement:

> I would say that our expert group has been very influential in that question. We have been like, or we have had discussions upon wording with [two other organisations], and they were not always agreeing. For example, [organisation X] uses honour-related oppression and violence … but we landed in the decision to follow the governmental approach [i.e. violence and oppression]

While the interviewee does not explicitly explain the reason behind Organisation X's prioritising "oppression" before "violence" in their chosen sequence of words, it alludes to a common critique. The criticism highlights the tendency to overemphasise the most severe cases of physical violence while neglecting the more 'mundane' and everyday forms of violence. The decision to interchange the position of 'violence' and 'oppression' is symbolic and aims to draw attention to the less physical and more pervasive forms of violence. It is an attempt to acknowledge the significance of non-physical forms of abuse. However, acknowledging less physical violence and abuse is not entirely unproblematic. The problem is not acknowledging non-physical forms of violence, such as psychological-, social-, economic-, or latent violence. The problem is similar to the discussion brought up in Chapter 1.1, which questions how control in an 'honour setting' differs from 'normal' yet dysfunctional control in interpersonal violence. If there is an attempt to include all forms of violence into the framework of 'honour-based violence', what is it that actually characterises the violence? Where is the line drawn between 'honour-based violence' and 'normal' violence? The more similar 'honour-based violence' is to normative violence, the greater risk of stereotyping and stigmatising families viewed as 'Others'. However, there is still *some* difference as there is a separate label. Once again, there is ambivalence where 'honour-based violence' drives closer to normative violence whilst still being left out from the normative framework.

It was not solely Representative 3 who discussed the issue, as Representative 1 also contributed. Representative 2 mentioned that extensive deliberations had occurred regarding the terminology and how to approach it. Representatives clarified that they were bound to governmental obligations, which required them to adhere to agreed-upon wording. The organisation cannot simply deviate from the prescribed terminology, even if they may have desired to;

> We are quite tied to our commission in printing, like the commission's name. We have co-operated with some civil-society organisations and have had difficulty spreading our course to those organisations because they simply do not like the term [honour-based violence]. Some are saying that the term is racist in itself. Well, we have discussed forward and back – how should we do? Should we use violence and oppression or violence and control? […] The term honour-based violence is more or less only used concerning legislation or with something else, but otherwise, violence and control are used.

The quote suggests a lack of explicit opposition towards the term 'honour'. By noting that the term is primarily used in the context of legislation, it implies that the word is not employed more extensively than necessary. This could be seen as a tacit acknowledgement of the problematic nature of ‘honour’. But it also raises questions of why potentially critical viewpoints are not expressed explicitly. Part of the answer lies in the responsibilities and obligations of government bodies. As mentioned by all the interviewees on multiple occasions, government agencies are bound by specific rules. Despite what was learned from Bauman, there must be coherence among government agencies, which may restrict the explicit expressions of critical opinions. This highlights the complex dynamics and constraints within a governmental context. Another representative refers to this exact discussion;

> We aim to use recognised terms as often as possible. It must be available for our target audience, and plainness is thus important, as well as aiming to sync with other government agencies. So it is more like some mutual voice.

In the quote, the interviewee acknowledges the governmental aspect of using the term ‘honour’ and the intention to make it easier for the audience to understand. However, it could be questioned how it is possible to explain a complex matter through simple words. Whenever ‘honour’ is used, it reinforces and perpetuates its hegemonic position, making it more challenging to alter the discourse surrounding the concept. As the hegemonic position is strengthened, the word gains more power, enabling it to define ‘honour’ as an actual entity rather than recognising it as a socially constructed and descriptive label. Using ‘honour’ as a legitimate term contributes to its consolidation as a fixed and tangible concept, which hinders efforts to challenge and change its meaning. It highlights the potential repercussions of reinforcing the hegemonic position of the terms and emphasis the power it holds in shaping perceptions and understanding of ‘honour’.

The discussion surrounding the absence of critical opinions, or their silent treatment, becomes particularly interesting when viewed through white ignorance. As explained in the theory section, white ignorance refers to patterns of ignorance that are not coincidental but stem from systematic practices embedded in social structures (Martín 2020, p.865). The choice to use ‘ignorance’ instead of ‘unknowing’ is significant. Ignorance implies an active process of neglecting or disregarding information while unknowing refers to the lack of awareness. The concept of white ignorance helps elucidate why critical discussions on the use of ‘honour’ were absent in the interviews. Individuals like myself, who have dedicated considerable time working with ‘honour-based violence’, cannot claim to be unaware of the disagreements surrounding the concepts of ‘honour’. The information is publicly available and accessible, thus supporting the notion that the absence of critical discussion results from intentional ignorance rather than the mere lack of knowledge.

Alinia's (2020a, p.249) article further explains this reluctance to engage with points of disagreement. It highlights how the government, the representatives in this context, functions as a 'good informants' and forms the core of our knowledge. The criticism does, however, not lie with the individuals who have been interviewed. The problem lies in their positions and the power they hold as representatives of governmental bodies. In their roles, they may either align with the hegemonic understanding or oppose it. For those who have worked in the field for a significant period of time, criticism of 'honour-based violence' is not. If the criticism is not "known", it is rather unacknowledged. It is an active process of suppression driven by the dynamics of power and control.

5.2 Victims, Offenders, and Areas of Protection

A central aspect of comprehending how 'honour-based violence' is communicated, constructed, and conceptualised is examining the positioning of subjects as victims or offenders. It involves understanding who is perceived as a legitimate victim deserving protection and who is viewed as the perpetrator or offender of violence. Additionally, it is important to explore whether these positions of victimhood and offendership are binary oppositions or if there is an overlap between them. These areas will be explored and discussed in the following sub-chapter.

5.2.1 Victims

Throughout the text, there should already have been hints about who may be considered valid victims and who may not. In several instances, gendered victimhood is noticeable and straightforward, such as in the definition retrieved from Skr 2007/8:38, which states that an important element of 'honour-based violence' is the control of female sexuality. It also appears in some of the courses' checklists of 'signs and symptoms' such as "A girl who hurries to get home in time after school, a girl who changes clothes when she arrives at school, a girl who does not participate in P.E" (Save the Children Chp 3). Another example is "it could be about girls who must go home immediately after school, who may not participate in certain classes or lectures" (Länsstyrelserna Chp 2).

In addition to the fact that females are considered primary victims, it is also interesting to investigate how their victimhood is presented. Peroni (2016, p.50) observes that postcolonial researchers often highlight a tendency to depict women as inherently helpless and vulnerable, which is somewhat seen in the material. Instances can be found where the victim is described as lacking any self-agency, such as in the statements, “The person who is exposed to honour-related violence and oppression is often dependent upon their surroundings to see what is happening and understand what to do” (Länsstyrelserna Chp 2). Another example is “the particular vulnerability which the plaintiff is in” (Ibid Chp 3). The first quote describes the victim as dependent upon their surroundings. In the second quote, it can be noted how the victim is not only vulnerable but particularly vulnerable. However, these examples are not gendered and only fulfil one-half of the suggestion of overly victimising. This thesis is critical about several constructions involved in ‘honour’, and using gender-neutral language to be more inclusive and less stigmatising should reasonably be viewed favourably. However, I relate the use of gender-neutral language to Carbin’s (2021, p.102) examination and findings on the Swedish gender-neutral term ‘violence within close relationship’. In the study, one of the interviewees expressed how gender-neutral language makes people less antagonised, while what it truly means when the term is men’s violence against women. The courses’ use of gender-neutral language is interpreted in a similar manner. The interpretation is similar because while the online courses use gender-neutral language, the core of ‘honour-based violence’ is mostly communicated as men’s violence against women. When gender-neutral language is combined with conceptualising ‘honour-based violence’ as an issue where girls’ and women’s sexuality is central, where much attention is given to female genital mutilation, and when the majority of fictive victims in the courses are illustrated as girls, it becomes difficult to fully trust gender-neutral language as a representation of victimhood independent of gender. Two more examples are found in Socialstyrelsen’s (Chp 1) and Länsstyrelserna’s (Chp 1) programs. The first course states how ‘honour-based violence’ is based on a structural imbalance between men and women while at the same time acknowledging how both men and women may be victims. The second program states that “the vulnerable may be, especially if it is a girl or young woman, harshly controlled by family and relatives”. In these two quotes, males and females are described as possible victims, but females are still prioritised.

The discourse surrounding victims becomes more ambivalent as the consideration of gender expands. While girls and women are widely acknowledged as primary victims, it is worth noting that boys and men are also described as victims. In the context of postcolonial literature on males and ‘honour-based violence’, the focus predominantly centres on how they have been portrayed as barbaric, uncivilised, and patriarchal offenders. However, there seems to be limited literature addressing whether or how they are depicted as victims. Idriss (2022, p.1908) argues that male victimhood remains significantly under-theorised and contends that the political and theoretical construction of 'honour-based violence' has rendered male victims invisible and marginalised.

Although the courses recognise males as victims, their portrayal of male victimhood reflects an uncertain understanding. When males are referred to as victims, it is often done through "but:s" instead of "and:s". For instance, a statement such as "Honour-related violence and oppression is a form of violence against women and children, but bouts and men can also be exposed" (Länsstyrelserna Chp 1 video 1). Another example is "Boys and young men can also be exposed to violence if they support or protect girls or women who violate gender norms" (Socialstyrelsen Chp 1). Using "but:s" instead of "and:s" implies that boys and men are deviant victims and are seen as exceptions to the rule while reinforcing the notion of girls and women as legitimate victims.

Other instances when male subjects are illustrated as victims are when their victimhood is combined with perpetrating violence towards females. In these instances, the males appear as 'boys' or 'brothers'. In the paragraph above, there was a quote in which 'boys and young men' are described as victims if they support or protect their female relative. Two other examples of this are detected in Länsstyrelserna's (Chp 2), stating, "It can also be about boys who must guard their sisters every day in school" and Save the Children (Chp 5) "The expectations involve that he needs to control his sisters". By portraying boys' victimhood in this manner, they are never solely victims but invariably associated with another role, either as protectors or offenders. They are depicted as victims *because of* the coercion to engage in harmful behaviours.

This relational dynamic operates in the opposite direction, as boys are rarely perceived solely as perpetrators. The discussion of their status as offenders will be further addressed in a subsequent sub-chapter of the thesis titled 'offenders'. However, when boys are depicted as victims based on their support towards female siblings, it presents them as heroic figures opposing oppression. The heroic figure also perpetuates the colonial imagination of rescuing oppressed women (Abu-Lughood 2013). Finding postcolonial literature that delves explicitly into how boys are depicted as being forced to perpetrate violence, thus becoming victims, has shown to be challenging. Nevertheless, what remains central in these portrayals is the emphasis on females. Without the presence of sisters, there would be no compulsion for boys to exert control over their female relatives, thereby erasing the notion of male victimisation. Even though the quotes treat male victimisation, they are still based upon the victimisation of females, thereby placing women at the forefront while men assume a secondary position. This perspective further reinforced the earlier argument regarding the designation of females as primary victims.

However, there are two instances when boys and men may be considered equal victims to women. The first is when males identify as non-heterosexual or queer, and the second is when they have an intellectual disability. This is because both LGBTQ+ identified individuals and those with intellectual disabilities are categorised as 'particularly vulnerable groups' in all courses. The argument for their vulnerability is that "honour-thinking is built upon the heteronormative structure with obvious gender patterns" (Skolverket Chp 1) respectively "they are often dependent on the/them [e.g., parents/family] who commits violence as well as having another reference to what is acceptable behaviour" (Länsstyrelserna Chp 2). Although postcolonial researchers often promote intersectional analysis of power relationships and dynamics, such as sexuality and functionality, the portrayal of LGBTQ and people with intellectual disabilities can inadvertently create a victim hierarchy. Carbin (2010, p.109). argues that "the woman who has immigrated is young, lesbian and handicapped who, in line with the argument, becomes the most oppressed". Such portrayal can give the impression that queer individuals or those with intellectual disabilities are more oppressed than their normative counterparts. The concept of layers of vulnerabilities should describe how people experience similar situations differently without ranking victims as more or less oppressed based on the number of vulnerabilities they possess. Approaching a victim hierarchy quickly leads to the view of some victims as more oppressed than others, which is problematic and unethical when comparing experiences of violence and suffering.

5.2.2 Values in Need of Protection

It can be concluded that girls and women are primarily considered victims. At the same time, boys and young men's victimhood is only seen as legitimate when combined with a female subject or an additional layer of vulnerability. When examining Swedish exceptionalism, it is stated that Sweden views itself as morally superior and believes it has the agency to save victims from misery. However, it is essential to question what exactly they are being saved from. The values aimed at being protected are divided into two main categories: free sexuality versus limited sexuality and liberal values/democratic values versus non-liberal/barbaric values. The last division is represented through individualism versus collectivism, gender equality versus patriarchy, and human rights versus lack of respect for human rights. Working with binaries is helpful as they distinguish the perceived normal and good self from the abnormal and bad 'Other' (McEwan 2019, p.152)

Sexuality

The most outstanding element in the data is the notion of sexuality, or more precisely, the control of and limitations upon females' sexuality. It is obvious in most web-based courses how 'honour-based violence' is conceptualised and understood as an issue of limitations on females' sexuality. In other words, females suffer from violence due to broken norms relating to chastity or sexuality. In the courses, an expression such as "control of girls and women's sexuality is a central part of an honour context (Länsstyrelserna Chp 2) and "in an honour context, ideas about women's sexuality are directly linked to the family's honour" (Socialstyrelsen Chp 1) can be found. The texts in the courses are overwhelmingly focused on the fact that female sexuality is restricted or limited rather than the violence they are exposed to. Put more clearly, much of the material interprets the sole limitations upon females' sexuality as a greater violation than the physical, psychological, or other violence they may suffer after breaking norms of chastity. Thinking of this argument, the validity of the interpretation was questioned. It was questioned whether it was a case of tunnel vision and 'seeing what one is looking for', but the interpretation was supported by one of the interviewees.

> We cannot escape the fact that the people most exposed to honour-related violence and oppression in Sweden are young women. And it is fundamentally about controlling women's sexuality; it is so central. It has a function for, like, what should I say? The structure? For the structural survival (Representative 3)

Postcolonial literature offers various critical perspectives on sexuality, 'honour-based violence', and boundary-making. According to Keskinen (2009, p.1), "gender, sexuality and family relations play a central role in the symbolic form of the nation and its boundaries". She also describes how women's bodies are instrumentalised to include or exclude 'Others' from the nation. Given this viewpoint, it is unsurprising that the courses place significant emphasis on (free) sexuality. The reason behind the conceptualisation and highlighting of 'honour-based violence' as an issue of female sexuality is closely tied to Swedish exceptionalism of moral superiority. Referring to Wendy Brown, Abu-Lughood (2013, p.19) states that liberal feminists and secularism often equate "bare skin" and "flaunted sexuality" with freedom and equality.

Choudhury (2009) also argues that liberal feminists struggle to understand why some women may embrace conservative and religious norms rather than a liberal lifestyle, as liberal values are seen as the epitome of freedom and flourishing. These authors further assert that liberal women often fail to emphasise the lived experiences of women living in non-liberal societies and resort to labelling them as underdeveloped (ibid, p.155). This theoretical framework explains why the online courses and the interviewees consider sexuality a crucial aspect of ‘honour-based violence’. It sheds light on the underlying assumptions in statements emphasising restrictions on female sexuality as a core value.

The data clearly indicate the lack of acceptance of alternative interpretations of female sexuality; it must be free. The fundamentalist perspective on ‘honour-based violence’ and its connection to female sexuality needs to be understood in the context of Swedish exceptionalism and the perception of Sweden as a gender-equal utopia. Stoltz, Mulinari & Keskinen (2021, p.7) argue that the Nordic countries have constructed an identity based on the ideals of being good and successful in terms of egalitarianism and women’s rights. Since hegemonic feminism in Sweden is rooted in liberal values, any limitations imposed on female sexuality become a battleground. The fact that there are Swedish women who are not allowed to freely explore their sexuality, choose their partner based on love, or have high school sweethearts is viewed as a social and legal crime, undermining the principles of Swedish gender equality.

The focus on female sexuality becomes particularly intriguing when authors highlight how gender equality is employed to define the boundaries of national inclusion and exclusion. Alinia (2020a, p.254) emphasises that gender and sexuality are central to oppression and inequalities, but also how they have been effectively used to racialise and perpetuate racist practices. Thus, the constant emphasis on how some girls and women have limitations on their sexuality establishes a clear binary between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This magnifies how offensively oppressed ‘those’ women are. Notions of sexuality serve as a means of differentiation; *we* have sexual liberty, but *they* do not. This is evident in many of Länsstyrelserna’s videos, such as “In honour-related violence and oppression, the control of women’s and girls’ sexuality is central” and “female genital mutilation is one of the most extreme expressions of honour-related violence and oppression, as it aims to limit a woman’s sexuality”.

Using women’s bodies as battlefields become more evident when compared to the absence of the exploitation of male bodies. Limitations on male sexuality were only mentioned a few times. In an interview conducted by Länsstyrelserna, one interviewee acknowledges, “Do not forget that behind every girl who is forced to get married, there is also a boy who has been forced to get married and who has not made his own choice.”. Another example is depicted by Save the Children (Chp 5) “and he will not get to marry whomever he wants”. It is puzzling how the absence of information about limitations on heteronormative men sharply contrasts with Abu-Lughood’s (2013) writings. She asserts that men’s sexuality and respect for modesty are nearly as significant as those of women. It is challenging to comprehend why a discussion on male sexuality is virtually non-existent. However, underlining limitations on male sexuality do not serve the purpose of boundary-making or exclusion. Instead, it suggests a colonial practice where male sexuality is simply irrelevant or worthy of exploration, as the result of such investigation would not follow the narrative of dangerous patriarchies that oppresses women. The power to define and highlight certain aspects as important is the same power that silences other aspects. The act of including some information but excluding others to fit a particular narrative is described by Alinia (2020a, p.257) as an act of symbolic violence.

Forced marriage is not synonymous with sexuality, but it shares overlapping themes. In the web-based courses, forced marriage is often presented as a specific expression of ‘honour-based violence’ as seen in Länsstyrelserna’s (Chp 2) statement: “Conflicts concerning the choice of partner and forced marriage are common reasons for youths to be exposed to honour-related violence and oppression.”. Another example is seen in Socialstyrelsen (Chp 1) “Particular expression, like female genital mutilation, forced marriage”. It is important to differentiate between forced marriage and arranged marriage. Pande (2014, pp.3-4) explains that the universal perception of arranged marriage is often conflated with forced marriage, underscoring the significance of separating abuse from cultural practices. Forced marriage occurs without the consent of either party, while arranged marriage requires consent from both parties, as supported by Tahir (2021). However, it is unsurprising that the distinction between the two is not made. Separating the two concepts would blur the boundary between ‘us’, who have the freedom to choose our partner and ‘them’, who do not. Highlighting that there is an in-between normative marriage and forced marriage does not align with the current narrative and understanding of forced marriage as an expression of ‘honour-based violence’. An intersectional analysis that considers ethnic relationships, kinship and non-Western conceptions of marital systems does not support the hegemonic discourse on ‘honour-based violence’. An intersectional analysis of the concept does not encourage exclusionary practices that emphasise the difference between ‘us’ who enjoy freedom, and the ‘Other’ who is oppressed.

Forced marriage is a harmful practice due to the absence of consent, as supported by Pande (2014) and Tahir (2021). However, the problem lay in the confusion and conflation of forced and arranged marriages, treating them as inherently harmful practices when only one is. This confusion is driven by liberal and moral superiority, which imposes its knowledge to define harmful practices, disregarding opinions that acknowledge women's self-determination, power, and agency within the framework of arranged marriages (Tahir 2021; Pande 2014). However, the failure to distinguish between the two is convenient as it perpetuates the boundary between 'us' and 'them'. The Swedish marital system is exclusively based on love; any deviation from this norm is automatically deemed a non-consensual relationship.

Liberal values, rights & individuals

The attribution of other liberal values is often made through human rights, patriarchy, and collectivism. Among these three, the most prominent binary is between individualism and collectivism, which is apparent in all web-based courses except one. Whenever collectivism is mentioned as a characteristic of 'honour-based violence', it is often juxtaposed with a description of an individualistic society within the same paragraph. For instance, "In Sweden, there is often a discussion about personal development, self-actualisation, and individual needs […] In a group-oriented society, the focus is on the interests and needs of the family and its relatives" (Save the Children Chp 1). Or

> In societies where groups are more individually oriented, it is important to the independent phase […] Teenage development might look different for students who grow up in a more collectivistic-oriented environment. It is more governed by others' expectations. (Representative 2)

The division between collectivism and individualism draws a clear line between 'us' and the 'Other', establishing dichotomies such as normal versus abnormal, progress versus backwardness and the West (Occident) versus the East (Orient) (McEwan 2019, p.152). The binary between individualism and collectivism is an ultimate example where the online courses communicate 'honour-based violence' through binary oppositions and the establishment of inclusion and exclusion. Silow & Kallenberg (2019, p.88) discuss this aspect and argue that understanding 'honour-based violence' as a collective phenomenon directly attributes it to the violence of the 'Other', as Sweden is widely recognised as an individualistic country. The separation between individualistic and collectivistic family structures and societies, where 'honour-based violence' is associated with the latter, highlights how it is often perceived as the 'Other's violence. By considering 'honour-based violence' as a collective phenomenon, it becomes challenging to argue for its independence from culture, religion, or ethnic background, which are closely linked to collective experiences.

The second value of protection is closely tied to Swedish exceptionalism and gender equality and contrasted with patriarchy. References to patriarchy as a harmful system can be found in some of the web-based courses. For example, Socialstyrelsen (Chp 1) presents how “honour-related violence and oppression is built on strict patriarchal values” and Save the Children (Chp 1) states that “HRVO is built upon patriarchal values, i.e. norms which are about men’s power over women and the right to control them.”. Grewal (2009, p.2) argues that the West has outsourced patriarchy, perceiving certain cultures as patriarchal while considering the West to have moved beyond such structures. Similarly, Stoltz, Mulinari & Keskinen (2021, p.7) explain how the notion of ‘bad’ patriarchies is central to boundary-making and associated with “distant places and racialised bodies”. This aligns well with Swedish exceptionalism and the national identity of being gender equal, as some occurrences are labelled patriarchal, and others are not. The belief that Sweden is one of the most gender-equal countries would be undermined if it was seen as having a ‘strong patriarchal system’. Therefore, emphasising that ‘we’ do not live in, or conform to, a patriarchal system, the discussion of ‘honour-based violence’ becomes attributed to someone else’s violence. Describing how ‘honour-based violence’ as rooted in and legitimise by patriarchal norms and systems not only separates Swedish gender equality from the perceived non-equal ways of others, but it also becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy where ignorance of national patriarchal structures allows the exceptionalism view to perpetuate itself.

The last attribution of protecting liberal values is achieved by describing various aspects of ‘honour-based violence’ as human rights violations. According to Gill (2022, p.5), liberal feminists theorise ‘honour-based violence’ within the framework of human rights discourse. The culture of the ‘Other’ is often interpreted as incompatible with human rights, thereby justifying the need to save women living under oppressive values. Two examples from the data illustrate this: “Honour-related violence and oppression limit human rights based on strong norms of gender, gender expression, and sexuality” (MUCF Chp 3), and “I believe that lacking in these areas hinders people from enjoying their human rights” (Länsstyrelserna, video). While it may seem questionable to argue against the reference to human rights, it highlights the persuasive power of human rights as universally beneficial in all contexts.

On the contrary, Bonnet (2015, pp.1-2) describes how postcolonial writers have criticised the Eurocentric nature of the human rights framework. The Eurocentric nature is rooted in European thought and liberal-individualistic values, leading to the exclusion of cultural, ethnic, and religious traditions. Thus, a reference to human rights only implies another system of values rooted in Western liberalism and individualism. Human rights are not intrinsically bad because they are Eurocentric, and the overall human rights discourse is not inherently bad either. However, it is important to critically examine references to human rights as they suggest "that certain cultures clashes with human rights because of some essential incapability" (Choudhury 2009, p.154). Furthermore, Cetinkaya (2023, p.2) argues that the human rights discourse views 'honour' solely as a harmful and violent practice, disregarding its potential as a "meaningful way of living". Therefore, when online courses refer to 'honour-based violence' as human rights violations, it becomes an act of symbolic violence. Why? Because the Western interpretation of 'honour' is inherently flawed, at least if one listens to the arguments of Abu-Lughod and Cetinkaya. This argument brings forth the discussion about the inadequacy of the term 'honour' to describe violence and how moral superiority is used to dismiss lived experiences outside liberal societies.

One last insight in the discussion of the online courses' reference to human rights is described by Cetinkaya (2023, p.7): "knowing your rights equates to knowing your 'true' desires". This quote is surprisingly accurate, as reflected in one of the interviews in MUCF's course: "We [organisation Z] work a lot with the rights-perspective to make them [youths] aware about their rights in society." or Länsstyrelserna (Chp 3) "strengthen children's and youth's rights, and their knowledge about them can be a part of the preventative work". Knowing more about one's rights means becoming more familiar with the liberal and Eurocentric values they are based on. The pursuit of knowing one's rights aligns well with one of the premises of the thesis question: the notion that acquiring more knowledge is the solution to combat 'honour-based violence'. In response to such a statement, I am reminded of one of my high school teachers who once told the class, "The more you learn, the blurrier it gets". While the statement is philosophical, it holds substance. Learning more about 'honour-based violence' should involve questioning one's perspective on the violence and examining whom one may perceive as a victim or perpetrator. It involves evaluating the knowledge on which one's views are based and considering how to engage with information that challenges one's perception. However, according to the critical authors referenced in this thesis, Swedish feminists may not be ready, prepared, or willing to engage in such conversations.

5.2.3 Depicting Offenders

Another aspect to explore is how the courses depict and communicate the perpetrators of 'honour-based violence'. Who is portrayed as an offender? Against whom must women and values be protected from?

Postcolonial literature argues how brown and Muslim men originating from the global East are primary suspects when depicting offenders (Abu-Lughood 2013; Grwal 2013, Choudhury 2009). The literature does not define the age or kinship of male perpetrators, but the words ‘man’ and ‘men’ direct attention to fathers, husbands, and other adult men such as grandfathers or uncles. However, it cannot be said that the portrait of men as primary offenders is at the forefront of the material. The explicit descriptions of the courses indicate that anyone may be a perpetrator. For instance, Socialstyrelsen (Chp 1) states, “Women, as well as men, can be perpetrators.” Save the Children (Chp 1) makes a similar statement, “There are often many perpetrators, both family and relatives may be involved.”. According to these quotes, there is no set image of the perpetrator(s). Yet, literature on how an undefined perpetrator should be understood seems scarce. To offer some understanding, two explanations will be proposed.

The first explanation proposes the undefined offender as the result of knowing more about violence and acknowledging that various actors are capable of committing violence regardless of gender, age, or position in the family. The second explanation returns to the argument of using avoidance as a strategy to dodge the issues of defining or identifying subjects as more violent than others. By not defining who may or may not perpetrate violence, one does not have to be as worried about stigmatising specific subjects or groups of people. By not defining, one does not need to care about explaining how, for example, power relations or other relevant factors affect violence. As I will show, there is a combination of the two.

On the one hand, there has been an increasing interest in investigating the agency of non-stereotypical offenders and victims, such as female perpetrators (Aplin 2017; Bates 2018; Walker & Gill 2019 and male-on-male violence (Idriss 2022). On the other hand, it has already been presented how most of the online courses avoid using a definition of ‘honour-based violence’ to possibly evade a hard situation. However, the conceptualisation of ‘honour-based violence’ as similar to men’s violence against women is a good contestant to falsify the undefined offender. The offender is already defined by comparing ‘honour-based violence’ with men’s violence against women. The parallel tells the reader how offenders and victims are gendered despite what is suggested in the courses.

While it is generally suggested that the perpetrator of ‘honour-based violence’ could be anyone, two weak trends can be observed. Firstly, parents are somewhat more likely to be mentioned as perpetrators. Secondly, boys are portrayed as perpetrators in conjunction with a victim position. In their study on SFI (Swedish for Immigrants), Silow Kallenberg & Sigvardsdotter (2019, p.88) present an interesting perspective. They argue that being a good citizen is closely linked to being a good parent but that a white and middle-class norm defines the standards for being a good parent. Consequently, parents who deviate from the white and middle-class norm are perceived as inadequate parents. This suggests that parents outside the framework are considered bad parents, no matter if they perpetrate violence or not. One instance that particularly highlights an exclusionary process of parents is found in Skolverket (Chp 2): “If parents with foreign background and lower education levels usually do not attend parent meetings in school, this could be addressed through, for example, organising more informal meetings where parents can participate. In this quote, immigrant parents are excluded and portrayed as less knowledgeable. It is noteworthy how the non-participation of immigrant parents is associated with lower education levels rather than being potentially influenced by language barriers or a sense of not fitting in the environment.

The second trend involves the portrayal of ‘boys’ and ‘brothers’ as perpetrators in combination with a victim position. This has already been mentioned in the sub-section of depicting victims, but now the focus shifts to the other side of the coin. In the web-based courses, expressions such as “Boys may be forced to control other family members, thus becoming both victim and offender at the same time” (Socialstyrelsen Chp 1) or “It is possible to perpetrate violence and be exposed to violence at the same time. Brothers may, for example, be pressured into overseeing their sisters.” (MUCF Chp 3) can be found. Once again, there seems to be a scarcity of postcolonial literature addressing the shared victimhood and offendership of boys and brothers. It could be suggested that they are encompassed within the umbrella term ‘brown/Muslim men’. While this may be a possible scenario, ‘boys’, ‘brothers’, and ‘young men’ are rarely mentioned as individual or independent perpetrators. Furthermore, using the words ‘man/men’ indicates that the male figures are adults and not underage.

While postcolonial literature on offendership amongst underaged males seems scarce, other criminology traditions offer explanations. For instance, the field of victimology has long discussed how males may embody both offendership and victimhood simultaneously or at least switch between the positions depending on context. However, portraying boys and brothers as being forced to use violence, thus becoming victims due to being compelled to harm others, may diminish individual responsibility and agency in being abusive and using violence. The situation shares similarities with what Eldén (1998) concludes in her investigation of one of Sweden's first trials of ‘honour killings’. She argues that the perpetrator’s culture was seen as a mitigating circumstance, resulting in a less severe sentence as he was a ‘victim’ of his culture. Similarly, Wilhelmsson (2009, p.15) argues that portraying perpetrators as victims is simply another insult to the actual victims.

5.3 The Courses Understanding of ‘Honour-Based Violence’

So far, the thesis has discussed the ambivalence between defining and not defining ‘honour-based violence’. It has also problematised how subjects are constructed as victims and offenders, and what values are aimed at being protected. Until now, the thesis has focused on specific areas of the data. However, it will not delve into the overall view of how ‘honour-based violence’ is understood.

The overall approach of most courses towards ‘honour-based violence’ reflects ambivalence. Similar to the discussion on the definition of Skr 2007/08:38 in chapter one, the courses’ overall understanding switches between gender-based and cultural explanations when addressing the violence. Some courses explicitly associate ‘honour-based violence’ with men’s violence against women, highlighting the structural power imbalance between the genders. As previously described, Socialstyrelsen’s (Chp 1) course states that “honour-related violence and oppression is based on the structural power imbalance between women and men.”. Similarly, Save the Children (Chp 1) writes, “although both children and adults can be exposed to HRVO, it is often equated with men’s violence against women due to similarities in the mechanisms of the oppression.”. The first quote presents ‘honour-based violence’ as a case of men’s violence against women. In contrast, the second quote emphasises the shared mechanism of oppression, ultimately emphasising men’s structural advantage over women.

However, this gender-based framework does not align with the rest of the data. Firstly, the majority of courses acknowledge male victimhood. To suggest that ‘honour-based violence’ is a case of men’s violence towards women while acknowledging men as victims oppose the premise of the gender-based approach. This is because the concept of ‘men’s violence against women’ already states the gender of the offender and the victim. Secondly, the explicit data indicates that almost anyone could be an offender, including women and girls, which further challenges the gender-based premise. Lastly, the analysis reveals how the courses employ binary oppositions such as sexuality–limited sexuality, individualism-collectivism, and gender-equal – patriarchy to explain ‘honour-based violence. These oppositions primarily reflect a cultural understanding rather than a gender-based one. In conclusion, most courses exhibit an ambivalent understanding of honour-based violence. This ambivalence persists regardless of whether a specific definition is used, reinforcing the notion that avoiding a definition does not resolve the issue of evading the defining process.

Although the argument above applies to most of the studied courses, there is an outlier: MUCF’s program. On the one hand, it involves elements that have been criticised, such as the underlining of human rights, the labelling of LBTQ+ people and people with intellectual disabilities as extra vulnerable and sometimes vague descriptions of what ‘honour-based violence’ is or is not. On the other hand, it involves content that approaches an intersectional view. For instance, section “Power and Norms” describes how norms and power are interconnected and form different prerequisites for different people. It does not describe ‘honour-norms’, but rather how individuals who fit the societal standard, e.g. white, heterosexual, man, receive the most power. It also assigns a short description to describe what minority stress is, and how it may affect an individual. Although the examples are not discussed in immediate closeness ‘honour-based violence’, but rather described independently in separate sections, it is still evident that this course has been produced from another view than its counterparts. It is not free from criticism, but it is noticeable that it varies from the other online courses. Despite being criticised in some respects, any content which encourages nuanced views and approaches to intersectional analysis should be acknowledged and encouraged.

To gain a better understanding of how ‘honour-based violence’ is perceived, the interviewees were asked whether they had considered the three theoretical approaches (gender-based, cultural, and intersectional) when developing the online courses. All of the representatives acknowledged that they had attempted to incorporate an intersectional perspective, although they did not explicitly state it in the courses;

> It essentially is about controlling women’s sexuality, so in that sense, I could agree with the gender-based approach. However, we have attempted to get that intersectional approach as well by… Like, show that norms occur in many different ways. One has to look at the person’s background from many perspectives. So I’d say there is some gender approach as it is about controlling women’s sexuality, but at the same time as being aware of other power relations. (Representative 2)

And

> Well, I would say that we are closest to the intersectional perspective, but it has not been formally decided at all […] It has to be shown that it is a complex problem which cannot solely be viewed from a cultural perspective but not from a gender-based perspective either. One needs to keep many thoughts at the same time. (Representative 1)

There appears to be a discrepancy between the self-perceived views of the interviewees regarding the online courses and the arguments in the analysis. While the interviewees acknowledge the importance of recognising the multi-facet nature of ‘honour-based violence’, their statements do not align coherently with the empirical data. This situation mirrors Alinia’s (2020a) discussion on white ignorance in the Swedish policy document, where the documents committed to an intersectional analysis but fell short due to the absence of race/ethnicity. Likewise, none of the online courses mentions ethnicity at any instance, despite the interviewees’ assertion of incorporating an intersectional perspective. Although the interviewees view intersectionality more as an aspirational concept rather than a formal requirement, there are no evident efforts to do so if seen to the content or to the reference lists, except for MUCF’s course. This discrepancy between the perceived inclusiveness and the actual data can be viewed as white smugness, as described by Keskinen (2021, p.208). It reflects how (liberal/Western) feminists may consider themselves aware of power dynamics but struggle to acknowledge and “reflect on the ways one participates in racialising practices and benefits from unequal power structures”. The argument is more or less a re-writing of Swedish exceptionalism, where there is a belief in being immune to racism or engaging in racist practices. Interestingly, the statement of intending to embrace intersectionality without effectively doing so may serve as a self-validating practice of being seen as a good and conscientious feminist.

Discussion on ethnicity was absent in all interviews, but one interview involved substantial discussion surrounding racism and ‘honour-based violence’.

> We work for the youth who are new in Sweden, and yes, some are exposed to honour, but more or less everyone is exposed to racism. […] I have worked with honour-question for a long time, and I can see how the lawyers of vulnerabilities are rarely discussed. (Representative 3)

In a later part of the interview, the representative expressed encountering concerns about addressing the combination of racism and ‘honour-based violence’. The representative described the reactions of others apprehensive, questioning the possibility and potential consequences of discussing both topics simultaneously: “Could one really do that? What happens if one does? Yes, we can, and we must!”. The hesitation in discussing race/ethnicity aligns with arguments presented by Habel (2012), who suggests that Swedes avoid conversations about race and ethnicity out of fear of being labelled dogmatic or even racist. In response to these concerns, the representative emphasised the importance of considering the perspectives of young individuals, who clearly bring up the issue of racism: “It is the youths’ perspective, and they are obviously talking about it! […] Racism is an extra vulnerability, and we must be prepared to meet those experiences”.

Excluding the last representative’s discussion on racism, the combination of quotes from the two other representatives and the data further contributes to the ambivalent understanding of ‘honour-based violence’. The data consistently associate the violence with men’s violence against women, either explicitly or indirectly, while simultaneously presenting the violence through binary constructions that established an ‘us’ versus ‘Others’ dynamic. This overall ambivalence is captured in the initial chapter of the analysis, where the violence is described as a means of maintaining similarity between the coloniser and the colonised. However, if the colonised were to become identical to the coloniser, it would undermine the coloniser’s power and authority.

5.4 Power, knowledge, and White epistemic habits

Power is knowledge, and knowledge is power (McEwan 2019, p.81), but at what end should the discussion of the relationship begin? It is reasonable to start examining who or what possesses the power to produce knowledge. Understanding that power lies in the production and reproduction of knowledge is crucial to investigate how ‘honour-based violence’ is defined, described, and communicated. However, throughout the paper it has become evident that only certain actors and institutions hold the power to shape the definition and understanding of the violence. These entities play a significant role in influencing the narrative and discourse surrounding ‘honour-based violence’, and it is of importance to investigate how the government and its actors exercise this power. By understanding the dynamics of power and knowledge production, one can gain insight into the perspectives, biases, and interests that shape the understanding of ‘honour-based violence’. Examining the actors and institutions involved allows us to explore potential power imbalances and the effects they may have on the discourse and responses to this issue.

An interesting point of departure for the discussion can be found in one of the testimonies provided by a representative. When reflecting on how the work of the online course was initiated, the representative said;

> It has been much focus on honour-related violence and oppression, and that’s because all the money lies in the question. That’s how it is. The great attention honour-related violence and oppression receives is the reason why everyone publishes online courses. And the reason for

> everyone to publish online courses is because the [governmental] departments give different commissions to different bodies, but they are often very similar. (Representative 1)

Although the interviewees provide insight into how individualised commissions are assigned to each governmental body, they all seem to have the same essence: enhancing knowledge through interventions. This governmental perspective operates under a previously mentioned assumption that increased knowledge is determinedly positive and advantageous. However, the knowledge which is utilised, presented, and replicated in the courses appears to exist in isolation without being subjected to updates, evaluations, or justifications of criticism. The fundamental idea of improving the general knowledge as an effective intervention in combating 'honour-based violence' raises important questions: How much knowledge is enough? Can we ever reach a point where we have sufficient knowledge? Can knowledge be measured? Will acquiring more knowledge alone solve the problem of violence? It is important to recognise that knowledge is always situated, biased, and influenced by the people who create it (McEwan 2019, p.47). Fortunately, the courses include reference lists or additional reading materials, allowing one to explore the sources they base the online courses on.

It can be asserted that most of the cited publications and references in the web-based courses are derived from policy documents, other governmental agencies, civil organisations, and international sources such as the UN. These sources predominantly reflect a liberal and hegemonic viewpoint on 'honour-based violence', thereby only presenting one perspective in the courses – the hegemonic one. As this pattern of information retrieval was identified at the outset of the thesis, the interviewees were asked if they had considered the sources of information used in the courses. The interviewees' responses were largely consistent: they aimed to maintain a governmental perspective, which was translated into relying on governmental sources of information. However, one representative expressed humility regarding the overreliance on governmental publications in their citations,

> We, the governmental bodies, are not so used to using literature from other countries […] I think it is more about some unknowing. We are so used to doing it this way. We have done as well as possible to search in other places or different ways. (Representative 1)

The citational cannon to other governmental bodies perpetuates a circular process that legitimises the governmental, liberal, and hegemonic understanding of 'honour-based violence'. This cannon can be compared with a political debate where all the participants share the same political ideology. The debate would be uninteresting and calm, as the likelihood for any participants to argue against each other would be small. The citational cannon exemplifies a clear manifestation of white epistemic habit. Dahl (2021, p.114) defines the white epistemic habit as being ingrained in the everyday routine, while the aspect of whiteness refers to the unnoticed privilege and supremacy it upholds. Although analysing reference lists may seem unconventional, it holds significance in unravelling the citational cannons of the governmental bodies and to exposing epistemic habits. As governmental bodies govern the online courses, they manage to utilise their authority and power to reproduce the hegemonic view of 'honour-based violence' to countless social, school, and healthcare workers. The government's pursuit of knowledge improvement through its affiliated institutions to professionals in these domains grants them the ability to define 'honour-based violence' on their own terms. Referencing to sources which are interconnected to the government is a white epistemic habit because it is done through habits, but it is white because the cannon upholds the liberal, hegemonic and privileged view on 'honour-based violence'.

By combining Carbin's (2014) article on victim stories and Mulinari's (2021) chapter in *Feminism in the Nordic region*, a contrast emerges between the governmental, hegemonic, and power-dominant conceptualisation of 'honour-based violence and alternative perspectives. Carbin (2014) illuminates how the government aimed to empower young immigrant women to share their experiences of violence. However, this soon transformed into a requirement to speak within a specific discourse. On the other hand, one of the interviewees in Mulinari (2021) described how white feminists were disappointed at 'us' [young immigrant girls] when they lost access to young women's stories and experiences of violence, which they had had for years. A second interviewee described how she and a group of young women had been invited to the municipality to discuss various problems. The girls aimed to discuss educational opportunities, while the organisation insisted on shifting the focus to discussing the hijab. These accounts shed light on how the authority and power of the government and its bodies suppress certain forms of knowledge by exploiting (young) immigrant women. Carbin's portrayal of immigrant women being compelled to speak within a specific discourse, along with Mulinari's interviews, strengthen the argument that the Swedish liberal perspective does not seek to gather genuine testimonies of experiences but rather selectively accept those that align with its preconceived agenda and understanding of 'honour-based violence'.

I am unable to share the experiences of the girls above, but I did observe a similar situation of an individual who attempt to push their narrative upon others and, above all, affirm the hegemonic view of 'honour-based violence'. The situation occurred during an online lecture with the Dutch researcher Janine Jensen. Her research focuses on how the police work with 'honour crimes' in the Netherlands. At the end of the lecture, a participant whom I know has worked in several big and established governmental bodies with hegemonic views on ‘honour’ asked;

> You initially talked about the definition of HBV but did not talk much about the control of girls and women’s sexuality. Would you agree that the very definition of honour-based violence has to do with the control of girls and women’s sexuality?

In addition to being a leading question, it is evident that it is designed to elicit a specific answer rather than seeking the researcher’s genuine opinion or thoughts on the relationship between ‘honour-based violence’ and limitations on females’ sexuality. In response, Jensen provided a concise answer, stating, “I think it is more complicated than that”.

Examining the relationship between power, knowledge, hegemonies, and discourses is a complex matter. On the one hand, it has been contended that the online courses are affected by white ignorance. On the other hand, discourses are understood as frameworks that dictate what can or cannot be said create challenges for individuals to think beyond the established boundaries. As Loomba (2002, p.38) suggests, these discourses limit the possibilities of alternative perspectives. Although various concepts have been utilised to explain how power structures may act silently, it is still not easy to differentiate good ignorance, i.e., unknowing, from active ignorance, which involves privilege.

Regardless of what might be labelled as unknowing or as white ignorance, postcolonial literature still argues that knowledge about the ‘Other’ may never be considered innocent since it is produced within a colonial relationship. The production of Western knowledge cannot be separated from the exercise of Western power (McEwan 2019, p.90). Thus, no liberal or hegemonic view on ‘honour-based violence’ may be deemed genuine, innocent, or true. In this discussion, it is also relevant to consider authors highlighting how the white, liberal, and hegemonic discourse benefits from creating divisions between ‘us’ and the ‘Other’. As discussed before, by keeping ‘honour-based violence’ outside the normative framework of interpersonal violence, the coloniser still manages to dominate the colonised. There is no incentive to abandon potentially stigmatising, prejudicial, or racist practices, but if there was to be, liberal and hegemonic feminists would need to re-organise their practices, theories, and whole existence (Dahl 2021, p.122).

6. Discussion

The investigation of Swedish web-based courses has focused on how ‘honour-based violence’ is communicated by examining its definition, the portrayal of victims, offenders, and the theoretical perspectives employed to understand the violence. The overall approach of the courses in communicating and conceptualising ‘honour-based violence’ has been argued to be ambivalent. This ambivalence is evident in various themes, including the ambiguity surrounding the construction of victims and offenders and the attempts to combine the gender-based and cultural perspectives in the courses’ overall understanding. An examination through a postcolonial lens would naturally reveal ambivalence, given the inherent ambivalence of colonial presence (Bhabha 1985, p.150). However, it should be noted that the use of postcolonial theory has proved insufficient in understanding the representations of male victimhood and female offendership. The literature and references used in this thesis primarily discussed victimhood in the context of colonised men being dominated by colonisers while female offendership remains unaddressed. Consequently, analysing these specific constructions with robust theoretical arguments has been challenging.

The analysis began by discussing how most of the studied courses avoided providing a formal definition of ‘honour-based violence’. This was viewed as an avoidance tactic to prevent potential stigmatisation. However, it has also been argued that the absence of a formal definition does not necessarily mean that ‘honour-based violence’ is left undefined. Instead, definitions can be inferred through headlines and descriptions, highlighting the violence’s key aspects. Using dichotomies are also seen as a part of the defining process, as they help make sense of the violence. These binary oppositons stem from liberal values and encompass concepts such as free sexuality versus limited sexuality, gender equality versus patriarchy, individualism versus collectivism, and liberal values versus other values. Descriptions, headlines, and binaries thus create a framework through which ‘honour-based violence’ is understood. However, the use of binaries not only defines the understanding of the violence but also establishes a distinction between the normal and the abnormal, portraying ‘honour-based violence’ as belonging to the culture of the ‘Other’. Additionally, through the use of binaries, ‘we’ define ourselves, with the outside always being a part of the inside and contributing to its definition (Carbin 2010, p.40)

Another significant finding is the discrepancy between the interviewees' viewpoints and the analysis's arguments. The analysis highlights the absence of intersectionality in the majority of the courses, focusing solely on the gender-based and cultural approaches while neglecting power relations such as class and ethnicity. This divergence has been attributed to concepts such as white smugness, white ignorance, and white epistemic habits. These three concepts have been used to examine how privileged positions, specifically those associated with whiteness and liberalism, have dominated the process of defining and marginalising groups of people.

In the last section of the analysis, the complex relationship between knowledge, power and epistemic habits was examined. It was concluded that the government and its affiliated bodies hold the power to define and perpetuate the definition of 'honour-based violence'. Through their control over information and resources, the government and its agencies exert authority in defining 'honour-based violence' by employing binaries and implicitly labelling it as the 'Other's violence. Consequently, all the arguments presented throughout the analysis converge to one central conclusion: 'Honour-based violence' is a socially constructed phenomenon that functions as a mechanism for delineating who does and does not belong to the nation. In other words, who may and may not be viewed as Swedish.

The direction of future research in this field is uncertain and challenging to predict. On the one hand, it has been observed that critical literature and alternative perspectives often face silence and resistance, which may suggest limited implications for further engagement. On the other hand, ignorance and resistance should motivate researchers to persist with critical examinations and investigations. Challenging the status quo and going against the mainstream can yield valuable insights and contribute to nuanced and intersectional knowledge production. Furthermore, researchers should explore non-traditional sources, such as multimedia platforms, in their investigations. As technology continues to advance, it is likely that the government and other institutions will increasingly utilise online platforms to disseminate their views and shape public disclosure. In the future, it would be intriguing to compare critical examinations of formal sources, such as policy documents, with critical examinations of online arenas.

Overall, future research in this area should strive to confront existing power structures, shed light on silenced voices, and explore emerging avenues for information and disclosures to gain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of 'honour-based violence' and its socio-political implications.

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