

**Honor Crimes and TV Audience Reception: An Analysis
of Meaning Production and Gender Interpretations**

By Benaz Somiry- Batrawi
Ramallah
Palestine
benazsb@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This research investigates how, based on a number of interactive factors mainly gender, audiences interpret programs dealing with honor crimes.

Introduction

Many civil society organizations in Palestine use television for the promotion of different concepts including democracy, justice, the rule of law, media, community development, and gender. This thesis aims at studying honor crimes presented in both drama and documentary film genre and the reception of television audiences: analysis of meaning construction and gender interpretations. It examines how audiences produce and interpret meanings, and whether or not interpretations are related to the audience's gender.

Honor crimes do attract media attention on a national level, but the impact of media intervention has yet to be evaluated. Existing literature in the Arab region mainly focuses on textual analysis and not the relationship between the audience and the text. Therefore, this study will introduce new knowledge to the existing literature, provide women organizations and other relevant civil society bodies with a modest resource related to the impact of two educational films, and provide audience feedback on the impact of a drama film and a documentary, and assist in audience-text research projects.

The study will examine a wide range of the audience's reactions after watching two video genres, both related to honor crimes, and make careful note of the respondents' gender.

In the first chapter, the study focuses on the historical and theoretical context of audience reception regarding honor crimes. The second chapter demonstrates the methodology of the research. While the third and fourth chapters focus on meaning construction and gender interpretation of both screened films. Chapter five analyzes the main findings in regards to general discourse about honor crimes in the eyes of a television audience based on gender.

Chapter One: Historical and Theoretical Framework: Audience Reception and Honor Crimes

1.1 Origins of Audience Reception

This research aims to produce a deep-seated cultural analysis. Audience research origins are found in three traditions; European cultural studies, American cultural studies and qualitative mass communication research. In her study Watching Dallas, Ien Ang's, 1985 relates to the three traditions (Hermes, 1995). Before Ang's study, the feminist work on popular culture consisted primarily of text-based analysis, for example, Tania Modleski's collection Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women ([1982], 1984) (Hermes, 1995). Within the European cultural studies research, the first empirical ethnographic study dealing with audiences was Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding, David Morley, 1980 used encoding/decoding model as a base for audience interpretation. He rejected the textual determinism, in which text was seen as a source of meaning rather than the interaction between texts and audiences.

Within the American cultural studies research, Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature, Janice Radway ([1984], 1987) claimed, "Romance reading is an act of valid but limited protest against the role proscribed to women by patriarchal culture. However, it leaves women's domestic role intact. It is a declaration of independence that does not lead to any material change" (Herms, 1995:P17). The classical American and European mass communication research concentrates on specific cultural phenomena, researching their social contexts from a critical Marxist, feminist or ethnic studies perspective. A key text in this tradition is Patterns of Involvement in Television Fiction: A comparative analysis, in which Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz, 1986, take *Dallas* as an example of American Television. The research consists of interviews with fifty small groups from five ethnic communities. In their study both researchers "assessed the degree of involvement of the respondents, which is seen as an indicator of influence, if there is no involvement in a text, presumably the text can not influence viewers"(Hermes, 1995:pp20)¹.

¹ To read more about new audience research please see Barrett, O. (1995) Approaches to new audience research. In Barrett, O. Newbold, C (Eds.) pp498-503, London: Verso. Reprinted in the *Approaches to*

The approach of this dissertation depends on the above three traditions engaging with the text, my own interpretations, audience-decoded messages and the focus group method.

1:1:1Feminism and Media Studies

The interest of academic feminism in studying TV and drama series in particular started in the mid seventies when feminists criticized drama content and its stereotype and emptiness. Throughout the seventies and nineties, three feminist research approaches were introduced to drama series. In the nineties, the debate addressing feminism as an ideology and patriarchy also made distinctions between black and white women and men. Feminism became fragmented (Casey & Calvert, 2002).

The three schools of feminism; liberal, radical and social agreed to consider media as the principal instrument to convey stereotypical, patriarchal and hegemonic values about women and femininity (Van Zoonen, 1996). This model is known as Feminist Transmission Model of Communication. The common strategy for the three schools was to reflect the ideal world for women through media instead of reflecting the rejected reality. Good media served the feminism agenda, while bad media reinforced the status quo (Van Zoonen, 1996). As a result, feminists suggested the elimination of magazines, novels and soap operas from bad media, and replaced them with alternatives in good media. However, women continued to read and enjoy 'unfeminist' genres. Moreover, the suggestion to remove unacceptable media meant that feminists or supporters would be denied the access to understand and explain developments. Criticism about this feminist transmission model brought about cultural feminist media studies. Feminist and cultural studies used gender concept and looked at it within Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding /decoding model. "The analysis of meaning production as cultural negotiation at the level of institutions, texts, and audiences builds on this model" (Van Zoonen, 1996:44). The concept of negotiated meaning and the stress on reception practices imply recognition for gender construction as a social process in which women and men are dynamically engaged. Furthermore, womanhood and manhood are both socially constructed where "audiences do not only take media as expressions of dominant culture, they also use

media to express something about themselves, as women or as men,” (Van Zoonen, 1996:46) and this will be further elaborated in this study.

1:1:2 Honor Crimes: What does it mean?

The issue of honor crimes or ‘femicide’ as defined by Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2004:21 “refers to any act of violence that gives girls or women the cause to for their lives under the banner of honor, being accused of conduct that implies engagement in a sexual behavior or act”. This concept as well, is derived from the voices of the victims and refers to “the status of entering a death zone that stretches on a range from the feeling by the victim -or her aid- that she is under the threat of being killed, to the loss of the victims’ life” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2004:21). Based on Kevorkian’s definition, “femicide is classified into four categories or patterns; first the victim’s fear of the loss of her life without being subject to any physical or verbal abuse; second her fear of being killed and actually threatened verbally or non-verbally; third a failed attempt to end her own life, and finally, the victim is actually killed” (Palestinian NGOs against domestic violence against women, 2007:9).

The phenomenon of honor crimes has worrying indicators in the Palestinian society. In 2007 only, approximately twenty six women in West Bank and Gaza Strip were killed under the banner of honor crimes. “While between 2004 and 2006, forty-eight women and girls were reported killed, the youngest was twelve years old and the oldest was eighty five. Police investigations documented thirty-two cases of the forty-eight as ‘honor killings’, thirty victims were Moslems and two were Christians” (Palestinian NGOs against domestic violence against women, 2007:9). On the national level, an analytical study released in 2006 showed that 61.7% of married women have experienced psychological violence, 23.3% have experienced physical violence, and 10.9% have experienced sexual violence; all experienced each type of violence more than three times (Institute of Women’s Studies/Birzeit University, 2006).

Violence against women is a universal phenomenon; on the international level, violence is a major cause of death and disability for women aged 15 to 44 years. “In 1994 a study based on World Bank data stated about ten selected risk factors facing women in this age group. Rape and domestic violence rated higher than cancer, motor vehicle accidents, war and malaria” (www.saynotoviolence.org Nov.28th, 2007). It is estimated that about 5000

women worldwide are killed annually as part of honor killings “in Pakistan, Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Iran, Yemen, Morocco and other Mediterranean and Gulf countries. It also occurs in countries such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom within immigrant communities. In Jordan and Lebanon, 70 to 75 percent of the perpetrators of these so-called honor killings are the women’s brothers” (www.saynotoviolence.org Nov.28th, 2007).

Like in any other Arab individual, a Palestinian individual does not live independently from social-cultural context. Marriage, divorce, inheritance, honor and other issues are collective matters that help to maintain or gain wealth and power. Therefore, there is a strong belief that an individual act of conduct can bring shame to the family, clan, tribe or the whole community. “Individuals have to conform to and promote the enforcement of social norms and honor codes that define what is considered to be honorable or dishonorable conduct” (Palestinian NGOs against Domestic violence against women, 2007:22). Men are expected to enforce such norms and traditions and protect family and male honor from shame. Women are expected to conduct themselves honorably. This understanding of the notion gives legitimacy to all forms of social regulation of women’s behavior and to violence committed against them. The sexual behavior of women exemplifies male honor and “codes of honor serve to construct not only what it means to be a woman, but also what it means to be a man, and thus are central to social meanings of gender. Honor is essentially linked to norms of behavior for both sexes and is predicated up on patriarchal notions of ownership and control of women’s bodies” (Palestinian NGOs against Domestic violence against women, 2007:9).

1:2 Theoretical Frame work

In Framing Abuse Media Influence and Public Understanding of Sexual Violence Against Children, Jenny Kitzinger (2004) reviews five approaches focusing on the power and activity of the audiences. **The Two-Step Model of Media Influence** in the 1940s developed out of empirical research into how politicians campaign and send messages to influence voters’ intentions. **The Uses and Gratifications** in the 1970s-1980s reflected that audiences actively use and process media materials to meet their own needs and that they consciously choose between the different media contents. **Reception Analysis and Audience Decoding** in 1970 focused on understanding text-audience relationships and

how people interpret, read or decode texts. This model emphasizes on the fact that people have a pre-existing identity, experience or resources when approaching a cultural product, like a film. “They come to with sets of opinions, views and ideas of themselves. In order to understand the role of the media it is therefore imperative to discover how different groups respond to and interpret any particular programme, to explore the resources they bring to bear on their interpretation and the discourse to which they have access” (Kitzinger, 2004:pp20-1). The fourth model is **the Domestic Consumption Process** in the 1980s-1990s that is focused on how people consume television and their consumption behavior towards other technologies at home. “Researchers examine the television set itself as a cultural object that carries symbolic meaning. For example, one’s choice of media hardware can indicate status, disposable income and taste or the lack of it” (Kitzinger, 2004:pp20-1). This approach goes even further to discuss the gendered division over who controls what technology “men take passion of the remote control or mock women’s preferred choice of programs as trivial.” It also highlights the gendered division of labor in relation to different technologies (Kitzinger, 2004:23). The fifth approach concentrated on the **Broader Field of Active Audience Studies**, which challenges the thesis of ‘cultural colonialism’ by emphasizing that audiences in diverse cultures can differ in decoding messages of the same media outputs. “Some other researchers were committed to explore social diversity and inequalities (age, gender). Others were interested in questioning the privileged status of highbrow cultural tastes. Many feminist scholars also wanted to challenge the status accorded to watching serious masculine television genre and attempted to reclaim disparaged pleasures and skills” (Kitzinger, 2004:22). Finally, the production of meaning depends heavily on what people bring to their engagement with the media that attempts to generalize the impact of media coverage or to predict how texts might influence people are misguided, or at least fated to failure (Kitzinger, 2004:24). Among the above-mentioned approaches, this study depends on the reception analysis and audience decoding approach despite its shortcomings in showing the varied decoding positions based on gender in specific.

1:2:1 Models and Main Concepts Used in this Study

This study follows the audience reception model to analyze deeply how TV audiences read, interpret, and contextualize encoded messages. The transmission model of

communication was used in the seventies by feminist movements and organizations to stress that women receive media messages as victims of the common values and have no opportunity for different readings (Casey & Calvert, 2002). The Hull's theory raised a debate between modern theory and postmodern theory. As for the dominant hegemonic position, feminism and modern theory claim that women watch drama and read romance novels as part of false consciousness. While from the oppositional position, feminism and post modern theory consider it a kind of resistance against the preferred reading or dominant structure (Hermes, 1995).

1:2:1:1 Reception Analysis Model

Dennis McQuail (2005:404) defines reception analysis as “the audience research arm of modern cultural studies, rather than an independent tradition”. According to McQuail, audiences read media texts and construct meanings and pleasure based on their own perceptions that are never fixed or predictable. They are never passive or equal since some are more experienced or more active fans than others. McQuail emphasizes that media use and context of usage are central matters of interests and audiences of specific genre constitute a separate interpretative community. Therefore, methods of audience research have to be qualitative and deep, often ethnographic, taking account of content, act of reception and context together (McQuail, 2005). Cultural research tradition and audience theory mainly aim to understand the meaning of content received and the use of context. The main data is about perceptions of meaning regarding social and cultural context, while the main methods are ethnographic and qualitative (McQuail, 2005).

1:2:1:2 Encoding and Decoding of Media Discourse: Reception Model

The origins of this model are derived from the critical theory, semiology and discourse analysis. It says that media content can have multiple meanings, because of varied interpretative communities, and the primacy of the receiver in determining meanings (McQuail, 2005). The core of the reception model is to establish the relationship between the receiver and the media meaning construction. It describes media messages as open and polysemic, and because messages can have multiple meanings, receivers have different interpretations in accordance to their cultural context. “Semiology emphasizes the power of the encoded text and sees the location of meaning as firmly embedded in it” (McQuail, 2005:73-74). Although this model has been widely accepted, Hall stressed that

messages may originate based on ideology and institutional purposes. In other words, “messages can manipulate audiences by giving them a preferred reading or ‘what might now be called spin” (McQuail, 2005:73-74). Hall also challenges that different experiences can cause receivers to resist and apply oppositional readings to what is meant to be an ideological influence. Receivers do not always follow the intended decoding, they “can read between the lines and even reverse the intended direction of the messages” (McQuail, 2005:73-74).

This dissertation is considered a cultural research in conjunction with audience theory that aims at understanding perceptions of the meaning of honor crimes in the Palestinian cultural context. The main methods used are focus group/qualitative and questionnaire/quantitative. Moreover, the study will show the message decoding and contextualizing positions of audiences who already have ideological preferred reading. The reception model and discourse decoding research in general see audience as one block-with no specifications about gender differences during the reception and message decoding process.

1:2:1:3 Text Polysemy

Polysemy is defined as the plurality of meanings. This definition is based on Hall’s explanation of message multiplicity. As an advocate of polysemy, “Fiske (1987) defines a media text as the outcome of its reading and enjoyment by the audience” (McQuail, 2005:118). Audiences tend to read popular media content differently in accordance to their subcultures, hence evading from possible social dominance.

This study will show that audiences based on gender confused or misread the text.

1:2:1:4 Identification

Some audiences identify with other characters. According to Rycroft (1986), “identification can involve - the extension of identity into some one else - the borrowing of identity from someone else-the confusion of identity with some one else” (O’Sullivan *et al*, 1994:139). The definition of ‘identifications’ goes even further, “sometimes we may emulate, or even create a type of hero/heroine that succeeds in overcoming the major frustrations encountered within everyday life. Such identification may be with some mythical entity constructed through fantasy, with media images, or with first-hand experience of others within groups” (O’Sullivan *et al*, 1994:139).

In this study, in the film analysis in particular, the audience identifies strongly with victims based on gender.

1:2:1:5 Gender and the Mass Media

Gender and mass media are very essential for this analysis. The issue of women representation has been of an interest to many scholars. Before the introduction of cultural feminist media studies, the focus was on women under-representation in media, stereotyping, and sex role socialization. Cultural feminist media studies put the relationship of gender and media in a wider context. Its emphasis is on the active construction of meanings and identities by readers of media texts; “the main questions are how are discourses of gender encoded in media texts? How does audience reception contribute to the construction of gender at the level of individual identity?” (McQuail, 2005:122). Media encoders have expectations from decoding audiences, and so they take gender considerations and gender views that are relatively different, resulting in different meaning construction and interpretation. “The different social roles between women and men, power roles in the family, and the different pleasures, meanings and psychological differences between male and female are all considerations encoders take into account when producing media texts” (McQuail, 2005:122-3). Moreover, compared to men, women face greater social and cultural restrictions, and therefore, women’s media choices can be seen as elements of resistance². “In Summary, different gendered media culture, whatever the causes and forms taken, evoke different responses. Gender differences leads to alternative modes of taking meaning from media. There are also differences in selection and context of use which have wider cultural and social implications”. (McQuail, 2005:123).

Producers of the two films, subject to research in this dissertation, encoded preferred readings in their texts in order to break the taboo of honor crimes (Khoury, 2008) and to stimulate families’ sympathy to act rationally when tackling honors issues (Odeh, 2008).

² To read more about women’s perceptions of television realism please read Press, A. (1989) Class and gender in the hegemonic process: class differences in women’s perceptions of television realism and identification with television characters. In *Media culture and society* pp229-51 London: Sage. Reprinted in the *Approaches to Media* reader of the (MA in Mass Communications by Distance Learning) Center for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester, United Kingdom

Audiences in turn, would make sense of film texts by reading, decoding, and interpreting the embedded messages based on cross cutting factors as gender identity, level of education, age, locality, and occupation in the overall Palestinian social cultural context.

Chapter Two: Methodology

2:1 Research Methods

This research is based on the following triangulation of methods:

2:1:1 Literature Review: which helps enrich the research, save time and efforts, narrow the scope, provide knowledge, and relate the study to a theoretical framework.

2:1:2 Interview: with the producers of the two genres. The interview provides “detailed and accurate responses on sensitive issues” (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997), it also explains the wider perspectives and agendas behind the production, allows human interaction. However, the interview may be subject to the interviewer /interviewee’s bias and may present problems in data analysis (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997).

2:1:3 TV Films’ Content Description: of the two selected genres produced locally and nationally; a documentary and drama film that address honor crimes as a cultural and social issue. This method offers an understanding for the politics and ideology of the encoded messages. Its main disadvantage is that it may reflect the researcher’s elitism and authority, and is frequently time consuming.

2:1:4 Focus Group and Group Discussion: to examine how audiences construct meanings and interpret messages producers encoded. The chosen TV genres were screened to the focus group participants who then filled in a questionnaire. Focus groups are quick, and more cost-efficient than individual interviews. Audiences can make sense of media through conversation and interaction with each other. It is a typical method to discuss sensitive issues, by using the discussion that makes them insensitive (Kitzinger & Farquhar, 1999). Nevertheless, in focus groups participants may not be totally honest in front of strangers. One participant may dominate the discussion; the moderator may imply his/ her opinion on the group. As well, it is hard to form a representative sample, and the researcher cannot generalize the findings. Finally, the use of tools and equipment may distract the audience notice and affect the results (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997).

2:1:5 Focus Group Questionnaire: The questionnaire was designed to collect demographical data and ask questions about several themes derived from reading and decoding messages. The use of questionnaires is of a great advantage since it narrows research areas, helps in reporting, shortens discussion time, generates quick and immediate responses, facilitates answers for sensitive and personal questions, and obtains

data before any one leaves the session. Disadvantages include the participants' unwillingness to complete it or lack of commitment to complete it accurately.

2:2 Research Design³

To answer essential questions like how people read messages and react differently, and whether gender differences come into view, it was necessary to decide what programs related to honor crimes could evoke an interactive discussion. It was also necessary to prepare a questionnaire to investigate main themes, and prepare a focus group guideline to facilitate discussion among the participants of three groups. Interviewing the producers of the two films was very essential as they gave their insight on how the message decoding was meant to be. Two TV films; the factual-documentary and the fictional-drama, both newly produced and addressing honor killing were selected. Moreover, both include a variety of types of violence against women, portrayals of different female character types as victims of violence and offer the possibility of a range of interpretations (Schlesinger, et al. 1992).

2:2:1 Description of the Documentary Film "Maria Grotto"⁴:

The 45-minute film directly addresses three stories of honor killing in the Palestinian society with a fourth story as a historical background. The historical story is about Maria, a Christian female from the West Bank village of Al-Taybeh, who was shot dead by revolutionists in 1936 because she was wrongly suspected of having an affair with a shepherd from the same village.

The second story is about Hiam, a 33-year old Moslem female, also from the Al-Taybeh village who, along with her unborn fetus, was poisoned and killed by her brothers for carrying an illegitimate child. Her family accused Mahdi, a 38-year-old married Christian, who was arrested for six months.

The third story is about an anonymous female survivor from a village, who was stabbed seven times by her brother in reaction to rumors about her sexual conduct. The woman

³ For research design flow, please see Schlesinger, P., Dobash, E., Dobash, R., Weaver, K. (1992) "Women Viewing Violence" London: British film institute

⁴ This film was produced and directed by Bothyna Khoury who is independent film maker in 2008. Because of its sensitivity and critic, the film faced a considerable resistance by the community after the first public screen in Al Qasaba Theater in Ramallah city. Therefore, it was used in this study after long negotiations and after one scene was re-edited as a result of public pressure on the director.

goes on to marry and have a son but discusses irreversible wounds to her body and soul. Her brother also explains his regrets and the pressure he was put under.

The fourth story is from Al-Lod, a Palestinian city inside Israel, where Abeer, a young female rapper in her twenties, is considered to behave inappropriately. Her extended family prohibits her from singing on stage with men, although her mom and sister support her. She abides by their demands, but does continue singing.

The last scene of the film is dark and depressing. Most characters are shown to be leaving their villages and the singer is struggling to achieve her dream.

2:2:2 Description of the Fiction-Drama Film (yet untitled)⁵

This 53-minute drama film discusses two cases in two separate families living in Ramallah city. The first case is of Suad, a 17-year old female living with her parents and two siblings. The elder, unemployed, and unattractive brother rapes Su'ad. Her paternal uncle advises the boy to throw his sister off the roof. The result is a terminally paralyzed young girl. The story ends with Su'ad in a wheelchair being spoon fed by her mother.

The second story is about Shireen-Su'ad's classmate. Shireen falls in love with man who abandons her after seducing her. Her father initially beats and curses her, but eventually her nuclear family gathers and solves the 'violation' with constructive dialogue. Shireen is forgiven and reaccepted into the family. The story ends with the father holding his daughter.

2:2:3 Findings Subsections Selection

Findings subsections have been derived and developed from several publications and the ongoing national feminist debate about honor crimes⁶. While designing this study, subsections were developed and divided between the questionnaire and focus group

⁵ This film is produced by Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling in Feb, 2008 to be used as part of a large national awareness campaign to eliminate violence against women. To the date of this dissertation, the final version of the film was still being edited. The producer has permitted the use of the film in this study exclusively.

⁶ Main publications are:

- Schlesinger, P., Dobash, E., Dobash, R., Weaver, K. (1992) *Women Viewing Violence* London: British Film Institute.
- Philo, G. and Berry, M. (2004) *Bad News from Israel* London: Pluto Press.
- Kitzinger, J. (2004) *Framing Abuse- Media Influence and Public Understanding of Sexual Violence Against Children* London: Pluto Press
- Kitzinger, J. (1999) A sociology of media power: Key issues in audience reception research. In G. Philo (Eds.), *Message received Glasgow Media Group Research 1993-1998* London: Longman

guideline as follows; sources of information, goals of the film, issue references and calls, victims depiction, sympathy and identification with victims, relation to other film characters, and portrayals of perpetrators. Further divisions include narrative closure/conflict resolution, final scene symbolism, most affecting scenes, personal experience of honor issue, used language in the film, genre effectiveness, interpretative communities, honor as a moral category, and opinions reassessment.

2:2:4 Sampling and Focus Groups

A total of twenty-three men and women, all above 18-years old, was selected and formed into groups. Each group spent half a day viewing the selected films. Three viewing groups were constituted, varying not only in gender but also in terms of age, level of education, occupation, religion and locality. The variation was important to determine how different audiences make sense of what they are watching. The three groups were divided as follows; the first constitutes only of women because depending on literature they interact more with fiction (Byerly & Ross, 2006) moreover, to let them feel free to express their opinions. The second was formed of only men since they interact more with factual (Byerly & Ross, 2006) while the third was a mixture of both to explore whether being together would affect their opinions and ways of interpretations.

Total participants were nine women for the first group; seven men for the second group and seven men and women for the third group.

2:2:5 Groups' Composition

Gender: Twelve women and eleven men participated in the groups' discussion.

Age: Three women were between 20-25, two women and three men were between 25-30, two men and two women were between 30-35, two men and one woman were between 35-40, three women and two men were between 40-45, one woman one man were between 45-50, and one man was between 60-65.

Level of education: Two women and one man have diplomas, two women are Bachelor's Degree students and two men are Master's Degree students, while five women and four men have Bachelor's Degrees. Three women and three men have Master's Degrees. Only one man, who dropped out of school at his sixth grade, needed assistance filling out the questionnaire.

Occupation: Two women and two men are students, four women and two men are self employed, two women are unemployed, one man is retired, one women and two men are working for the government, three women and two men are working for non-governmental organizations, one man is a construction worker, and another man is a unionist.

Religion: A total of four Christians (two women and two men) and nineteen Moslems (ten women and nine men).

Locality: Two women and one man live in refugee camps, nine women and eight men live in cities, one woman and two men live in villages. Three women and four men were born in villages but now live in cities.

2:2:6 Recruiting Participants

The recruiting process took a month, starting with sending out invitations by email, fax and phone. Thirty participants were recruited, however only twenty-four attended, and left directly after watching the documentary film and filling in the questionnaire (he is excluded from any data). Participants received a clear agenda and a detailed invitation.

Upon her own request, Bothyna Khoury, director of the documentary film *Maria's Grotto*, attended the men's group and the mixed group sessions and sometimes answered the participants' questions when addressed. Further, one female lawyer and one male lawyer representing the 'Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling' the producer of the drama film, also attended and fully participated in the woman's group and the mixed group. The researcher was aware of the potential impact of their existence and therefore made sure to control the interaction.

2:2:7 Screening Plans

Each session was led by an introduction about the research and informal icebreaking discussions among participants, followed by watching the film, filling the questionnaires directly, and ending with an open discussion about pre-suggested themes. Both women's and men's groups separately watched one film while the mixed group watched two films in order to explore whether they would be affected differently by the drama and the documentary, and to test if gender differences will be more obvious when men and women discuss the issue face to face.

Reactions were mostly very positive about tackling such an issue in the first place, participants were satisfied with the moderations of the discussion and the ability to be among the first to watch the films.

2:2:8 Group Discussion

The format for the two discussed films was almost consistent for easier comparison and analysis. After watching each film and filling in the questionnaire, the discussion and comments related to the film began quickly. Participants later were asked to offer interpretations for specific issues such as the main messages that the film tried to convey in general, the realism of the stories, and the emotional impact of watching the film. The discussion was especially interesting when participants identified with the two victims and when discussing the violent incest and attempted murder scenes in the drama film. The definition of 'honor', its connectedness to sexual behavior, and the wide-ranging sympathy with the three main characters in the documentary film was also intriguing. Participants brought up relevant stories from their social contexts during the discussions which continued after the allotted time.

2:2:9 Data Collection Tools and Analysis

The two film producers; who initially facilitated the understanding of the encoded messages within the general framework of the production, were interviewed in depth. The systematic analysis of these transcripts and the quantitative data gathered from participants' questionnaires were the foundation for interpreting message, decoding and gender differences.

Despite of the importance of the groups' discussions, there must be a substantial concern regarding the validity of generalizing about the individuals or the group only based on the discussion or the transcripts. Restrictions related to freedom of movement made it difficult to reach a considerable social and demographic representation among the groups. Group processing plays a significant role in the production of specific meanings and message decoding within the groups. In order to ensure equal opportunities for participants to talk and time efficiency, the researcher was the sessions' moderator.

The questionnaire data complemented the group discussions data by gathering demographical and biographical data and by obtaining participants immediate judgments, and messages readings of some characters and scenes. In the questionnaire, the data was

evidence about responses that could be used with the qualitative findings. The questionnaire was useful for the gathering of quick and immediate readings and interpretations; it shortened time of the whole session, guaranteed participants involvement and collected data about personal experiences concerning sexual violence or honor crimes. The film questionnaire was brief and contained open and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was designed systematically; the first part is about biographical data and the second part is about information resources, characters, scenes, and moral categories. It was designed for both films, but took into consideration the commonalities and the differences among fiction and factual; such as identifying with fictional and non-fictional characters. The biographical data helped in assessing the direct relationship between messages decoding and the factors of gender, locality, academic background, occupation, religion and age. While interpretations may not be direct expressions of socio-demographic categories, the interpretations made by participants in this research were affected significantly by gender, academic background, and locality thus the social cultural context. The combination of these factors determined sharply the interpretations “all together tend to provide a discourse, or variety of discourses, for the interpretation of the wider culture, of which television is a significant part. Such discourses contain quite distinctive assumptions, values, interpretations, and vocabularies, and theses can be seen in the detailed analysis of the reactions to the various programs screened” (Schlesinger, *etal.*, 1992:30).

Analysis of results proceeded on two parallel paths; analyzing the qualitative data of the transcripts and the questionnaire. Having said that, the researcher can't deny facing difficulties in avoiding selectivity such as “how certain materials are chosen over others and why quotes take precedence over those that never appear” (Schlesinger, *etal.*,1992:30). Although participants were directed to certain issues and themes, they were totally free to state their messages readings and interpretations. Therefore, their responses were grouped and analyzed under eight themes such as portrayal of victims including identification and relation to some characters, sympathy, conflict resolution, re-assessment, and honor defined as a moral category. Given the amount of data obtained, the researcher prioritized the most debatable and relevant data and excluded what lacked elaboration, therefore, the quotations were chosen and presented under the above

criterion. The groups' discussions did not bring up surprises and was not far from the general national discourse and the literature review.

Chapter Three: Drama Film, Meaning Construction and Gender Interpretation

The main criterion for analyzing both films is based on gender. Nevertheless, two other factors have made a difference in interpretations; academic background and locality. Results show that the higher the academic background, the better ability to understand the dimensions of the encoded messages and to discuss the multiplicity of problem solutions consequently taking one of the decoding positions. Moreover, participants from open communities assign several meanings to the concept of honor, while participants from villages see that honor is solely related to sexual behavior.

Sixteen participants out of twenty-three, twelve women and four men watched the drama film in both women's and mixed groups. The subsequent themes analysis is derived from the questionnaires participants completed and from the discussion sessions. The chapter will arrange the data analysis in eight subsections detailed under the research design in the previous chapter.

3:1 Opinions about victims' portrayals

In the drama film, two underage females were depicted as victims. Suad, who was raped by her brother, and Shireen, who had a sexual affair with a man who abandoned her. Each character tells a story, they "carry themes...and they are marked in moral terms as honorable or shameful" (Gillespie, 1996:12). Participants, men and women, accorded Suad as an ideal victim⁷ of incest, while most considered Shireen a victim who is unaware, irrational, emotional and of bad choices. Two women explained the reasons behind such love relationships criticizing the male dominant society, although no men found Shireen guilty of love. In the mixed group, one man with a Master's degree from a village north of the West Bank commented, "*Love is blessed but the guy understood it wrongly*". Three women stated that Shireen somehow deserved her fate because she went so far with her boyfriend and did not maintain her virginity. A Bachelor's degree student participant in the women's group from Jenin city said, "*It is her fault, and the one she loved, her problem reflects upbringing*". Some women stressed that girls should abide by

⁷ To read more about the ideal victim as a cultural construction, please see Birgitta Hoijer (2004) The discourse of global compassion: the audience and media reporting of human suffering. *Media, culture and society*, (26) 4, pp513-531. Retrieved March 14th, 2008 from personal communication: Dr. Simon Cottle.

the mainstream culture and not have premarital sex in order to avoid being blamed or even killed.

3:1:1 Identification with victims

Only 50% of the women participants could identify with one or two of the victims, while none of the men did. *“I always feel afraid and insecure, especially after hearing all these stories. Nowadays, I will not feel safe till I get married”* a participant from the women’s group residing in Ramallah city with a Master’s Degree said. Another woman from Gaza city holding a Bachelor’s Degree who participated in the mixed group blamed social perceptions, *“the social context makes any woman a target for such complications and unfairness”*. Apparently, some women could see themselves in the victims’ position and even consider themselves potential targets of such incidents, while men⁸ distanced themselves of the possibility of being raped and victims of love.

3:1:2 Relation

One man and 70% of the women could relate to one of the characters in the film, whilst 30% of the women could not relate to any character. Some women said they could relate to the understanding mother, or to some feelings such as fear, or to some images like the ideal family. A man from Azmout village said, *“I could relate to Shireen’s brother who came home from abroad just to encourage solving the problem peacefully”*. A woman from Ramallah city with a Master’s degree in mixed group saw herself in the mother’s position, *“I relate myself to the mother in the ideal family, and sometimes I think I make mistakes by trying to discipline my daughter with little space for dialogue”*. Women were more able to relate to the victims, other characters and themes to confirm their gender identity and “assure that violence is not part of feminine culture” (Hoijer, 2004:526). The majority of men did not relate to any of the above, because they tried to defend their masculine identity, especially as most male characters in the film were negatively portrayed.

⁸ To read more about males’ destination, please see Birgitta Hoijer (2004) The discourse of global compassion: the audience and media reporting of human suffering. *Media, culture and society*, (26) 4, pp513-531. Retrieved March 14th, 2008 from personal communication: Dr. Simon Cottle.

3:1:3 Sympathy

Two third of the participant women had absolute sympathy with the ideal victim Suad, while the rest sympathized with both victims. Likewise, 75% of men sympathized more with Suad - the victim of rape/incest- while 25% had sympathy for both victims. *“Of course I am more sympathetic with Suad as she was treated completely unfairly”* said a man from Azmout village holding Master’s degree in the mixed group. Almost all participants, regardless of gender, identified Su’ad’s story as an extreme case of domestic violence that included incest, rape, and a murder attempt. The context of Shireen’s case was more debatable; ‘to what extent, if any, can girls fall in love according to the Palestinian culture’.

3:2 Opinions About Portrayals of Perpetrators

All men and all women had zero tolerance for the rapist. Women mostly tried to come across the complex causes behind such violations by the two perpetrators. They saw the rapist as an animal, monster, sick, disgusting, and insensitive *“he raped his sister, and then threatened her not to tell anyone. Oh, how disgusting”* said a female from Gaza city holding her Bachelor’s degree in the mixed group. Two women and one man criticized the portrayal of the rapist, especially his ugly face and bad attitude. A woman with a Bachelor’s degree in her forties from Ramallah city in women’s group said, *“It is wrong, a rapist is not necessarily ugly in appearance, he could be also nice, handsome and distinguished, such a portrayal gives a wrong message and makes it less effective”*.

Men generally condemned the careless abandoning boyfriend and considered him an abuser, but only one male Master’s student originally from Beit Reema village in the mixed group said *“I could not understand the limit of their relationship, did they make love or not?”*. Another male Master’s student from Al-Jalazoun refugee camp in the mixed group criticized grouping the extreme case and the less extreme case in one film, *“people may get the message incorrectly, they may think that the women’s center, which produced of the film, is encouraging teenagers to have affairs as they will eventually be reaccepted by their families. Um, as if they are legitimizing it in this society”*. Women saw the careless abandoning boyfriend as a typical image of the younger generation, and described him as guilty. Despite their rejection of his act, only two women tried to understand the motivations that drove him to have an affair with a teenager, and then

abandon her. One woman could not understand the message about whether he made love to Shireen or not.

In regards to Suad's case, one man commented on her paternal uncle's attitude. He took advantage of his brother, who suffered a heart attack when he learned of his daughter's rape, and planned to 'bury the shame' by killing Suad. The man, who spoke in the mixed group, is from Al-Amari refugee camp and holds a Diploma said "*tribal power varies in this society from one area to another. In the south of the West Bank it is strong, but in the middle area it is less, and it differs between the villages and the city*". All women agreed that the uncle was portrayed to represent the mainstream culture and the power of family. "*I consider him a number one criminal, as he was the planner and supporter. As well he could not do it alone, but he used his nephew*" commented a woman from Betunia city with a Diploma in women's group. Clearly, the abusers' depictions and the violent scenes strongly affected men's and women's interpretations. Men expressed their contempt for the rapist while they were less critical of the careless boyfriend. Women criticized both, but tried to investigate causes and how to avoid such incidents, stressing on the role of better socialization and increased sexual awareness.

3:3 Personal Experience

None of the men could express any personal experience, while three women did. Two women talked about exposure to sexual harassment in the past, by either a relative or a stranger. They both were very passionate in defending the victims and searching for causes behind such attacks. One of them said "*I was with a huge man in the elevator, he tried to harass me before, but I rejected him so he took the chance of being alone and tried to attack me and kiss me. I fought back and finally the elevator was opened. Oh! Thank God. I decided not to tell anyone about this incident until today, I feel I did not get my revenge*". The other woman talked about a long-term love relationship that did not involve sex since she was thirteen years old "*I controlled myself and did not slip, as my family raised me well, I am now twenty two years and I know I will marry him one day*". According to Schlesinger (1992:166) there is little doubt that the experience of violence is a strong differentiator in women's ability to relate to depictions of violence against women on television. The interpretations of these two women were more emotional, articulate, and defensive than others in the women's group.

3:4 Most Effective Scenes

Two crucial and violent scenes were screened; rape and the failed murder attempt. All men were touched by the rape scene, while only 50% of the women were most affected by the rape scene, 33% by the failed murder attempt and 17% by a third scene of the nephew kissing his uncle and getting his blessing to kill his sister. One participant in the women's group who holds a Master's degree and lives in Jenin city said, *"The scene enforces the arrogance of the masculine society by trying to get rid of the shame, neglecting who caused the problem; the nephew expressed his loyalty to old and unfair values"*.

3:5 Narrative Closure

Both men and women showed zero tolerance for the violent solution in the film about Su'ad, which the rapist followed to solve the problem. Men focused mostly on discussing the negative solution to Suad's problem, *"I was not satisfied at all in the case of Suad, but in Shireen's case yes, I am happy about the solution"* said a man in mixed group who holds a Diploma and lives in Al-Amari refugee camp. On the other hand, women were more comprehensive in discussing the legal, social and health dimensions of the narrative closure; they denounced the violent solution and complemented the ideal family's open dialogue. Seven women mentioned a severe legal penalty for the perpetrators, two women pointed out the necessity of physical and psychological treatment for the rape victim, two talked about the necessity of less intervention from the extended family, and one could not understand the mechanism of dialogue in Shireen's family. Nevertheless, participants recognized open-dialogue and understanding as abnormal and unrealistic in the Palestinian context as the 'normally accepted' solution is to kill accused women when honor is at stake. A diploma-holder in the women's group who lives in Betunia city commented, *"I see that both solutions are over exaggerated, especially the solution based on dialogue, may be one tenth of the people will calm down when it comes to honor issues, what is happening in reality is the opposite, everyone gets mad, and loses his temper"*.

3:6 Honor as a Moral Category

Both women and men ascribed good values, decent conduct, compassion, transparency and honesty to the definition of 'honor'. One participant in the women's group who holds

a Master's degree and lives in Jenin city said, "*Honor is not a blood spot between the two legs as is well known here, it is more than that*". Men also ascribed different values as such as loyalty, self-respect, and social behavior to the term 'honor'. The man from Al-Amari camp in the mixed group said "*look around you, people are becoming more violent because of the absence of the rule of law. Look how many physical attacks we hear about every day against people or establishments, honor should be less violent*".

3:7 Genre Effectiveness

Literature reads that factuality affects men more than women and that fiction affects women more than men. The data resulting from the focus groups reflected mostly this fact. 75% of men said, they would be more affected if the topic was presented in a documentary film rather than a drama. While 25% said it would have the same effect. In the case of women, two-thirds said they would have the same effect when watching either genres. The rest said they would be more affected when watching the topic in documentary genre.

3:8 Opinions Re-Assessment

None of men reassessed his opinion after watching the drama. While three women said they did. Two of them insisted on raising sexual awareness among boys and girls in addition to improving communication within the family. While the third woman in the group, who holds a Bachelor's degree and comes from Saffa village, stressed the importance of expectations and preparations "*Now I have a vision for the future, I will consider what we have discussed and depend on it as an approach in my life, I am expecting any of such violence to happen to my sister, mother, or son and I should be ready for it and act properly*".

In the drama film discussion sessions, the wall between private and public domains is collapsed, what was considered intimate and private became a topic of public discussion as men and women went through sensitive moments while discussing sensitive issues, but surprisingly the conservative prevailing culture of men and women in both groups were very open and outspoken.

Chapter Four: Documentary Film, Meaning Construction and Gender Interpretations

Eleven men and three women watched the documentary film in both men's and mixed groups. This chapter will follow the same analysis method of the previous chapter.

4:1 Opinions About Victims' Portrayals

The documentary film⁹ depicted four victims; Maria, Hiam, the Survivor who appeared in anonymity, and Abeer. All participants felt sorry about Maria's murder, while most of them considered Hiam as an ideal victim, with the exception of two men who asserted that if she got pregnant out of marriage then she deserved to die. *"We have been raised this way; females are not like males who have the right to do anything. If she makes such a mistake, she should die"* commented a man from Tubas village with a Bachelor's degree. The same man insisted the Survivor *"should also die"* although the group agreed she was a victim. Abeer got the admiration and respect of all participants except for one participant in the men's group who saw her importing cultural perceptions by singing rap songs. The man who comes from Beit Reema village and holds a BA degree strongly rejected Abeer's choice *"she judged her society by using foreign values and tools; she should not forget who she is"*. Women participants sympathized and defended the victims while male participants investigated the causes of the violence or threats, and scaled victims in accordance to who deserves more compassion¹⁰ and why.

4:1:1 Victims Identification

Women's opinions differed in the case of this film. One woman identified with all victims, a second identified with Abeer, and the third identified with none of the victims. In the mixed group one woman from Ramallah city who holds a Master's degree said, *"I could see myself in Abeer, there are dreams and ambitions that an individual wants to achieve but the society constrains her from achieving them"*. Similarly 50% of the men identified with the victims, two men identified with all, two others with Abeer, one with the Survivor, and the remaining 50% could not identify with any. The man with an elementary school education from Beit Dajan village said *"I could see myself with the*

⁹ See above- film description

¹⁰ For gendered compassion please see Birgitta Hojjer (2004) The discourse of global compassion: the audience and media reporting of human suffering. *Media, culture and society*, (26) 4, pp513-531. Retrieved March 14th., 2008 from personal communication: Dr. Simon Cottle.

Survivor, I imagined her being my sister, a man should seek the truth before doing anything, as our society is not merciful”.

50% of the male participants could identify with the victims in the documentary film, while in the drama film none did. Literature stresses that men interact more with facts. The remaining 50% of the men still seem to find it difficult for their masculine identity to identify with any female victim and see the ‘honor victims’ as a woman’s issue.

4:1:2 Relation

Women identified with the victims but could not relate to any other characters in the film, while most men had different opinions. One man related to Mahdi, the suspected perpetrator. Two men related to the Survivor’s brother *“I related to the Survivor’s brother because he tried to kill her to clean the shame, he did the right thing, and should not regret his act”* said a resident of Tubas with a Bachelor’s degree from the men’s group. Two men related to Abeer, four related to no one. In the men’s group, a resident of Bir Zeit village with a Bachelor’s degree wrote, *“I can’t relate because situations and people become different”*, while two men wrote no answers.

Compared to the drama film about 50% of the men could relate to some characters in documentary, while in the drama almost none did. No female participants related to any character in the documentary, but 70% related to the drama. Every man in the 50% could relate to someone who is similar to his social and cultural context more deeply than to characters with similar ideological discourse and ethical conduct.

4:1:3 Sympathy

All women showed sympathy with all victims without specifying, while most men were more specific about their sympathy. A woman in the mixed group who holds a Master’s degree and lives in Ramallah said *“I felt sympathy with every victim, in addition to Mahdi and his family”*. Five men sympathized with all victims, one man specifically with Maria, another with Abeer, and a man in the mixed group from Beit Reema village said *“I sympathize with Abeer ‘the rapper’ she has a different life vision than others, whereas the society interferes and limits the freedom of people”*. While two sympathized with the Survivor, one did not feel any sympathy towards any of the victims and one man did not answer the question. It is clear that women empathized with all victims, regardless of the causes and motivations. Whereas 50% of men evaluate the victims based on a scale that

differs from one case to another. Apparently men's sympathy are conditional when comes to honor issue.

4:2 Opinions About Portrayals of Perpetrators

Mahdi, accused of adultery and fathering an illegitimate child-later proven innocent, was clearly shown on screen. The face of the Survivor's bother was, upon his request, covered on screen. All male and female participants except two, concluded that Mahdi was unfairly treated. He was assumed guilty and his house and business were burnt to the ground. Two men saw him guilty to some extent, "*I think he had to do something with Hiam, otherwise would not be a suspect*", said a participant with a Bachelor's degree in the men's group from Birzeit village. Another participant, a Master's degree student from Beit Reema village, in the same group commented, "*He deserved what he got, when tribal law proved his innocence and the paternity test showed no relation to Hima's pregnancy, he should have asked for compensation from her family*".

The Survivor's brother, who used to beat her aggressively when hearing any rumors about her sexual conduct, ended by stabbing her seven times. Women and men almost agreed that he should have sought the truth before beating her. Women condemned his behavior with no excuses. One woman in the mixed group who is from Gaza and holds a Bachelor's degree said "*After hearing his regret, I do not give him any excuse, but I can imagine all the pressure and internal emotions that he went through*". Most male participants tried to justify his angry behavior by blaming the pressure that came from his community when rumors spread about his sister. "*In the beginning when hearing about beating his sister I hated him, but when I heard his remorse, I felt sympathy with him because he was self critical*" said one man in the mixed group from Azmout village with a Master's degree. Women did not, and could not find excuses for abusers, while men were searching for reasons to "protect themselves against the myth of violence as specific male characteristics" (Hoijer, 2004:526).

4:3 Personal Experiences

Women showed no personal experience, the woman from Gaza city said "*No, thank God, I do not have any*". Three men out of eleven said they had a personal experience, the man with an elementary school education said "*my female neighbor was accused of having a relationship on the phone, but it turned to be just rumors, a man should not rush before*

doing any act". One man said that he once was asked for an advice from woman who was harassed. A man from Azmout talked about standing up for his beliefs "*The community in my village was very conservative ten years ago, and I was a communist, people did not accept me and tried to harass my father when going to pray in the mosque*".

4:4 Most Effective Scenes

Several scenes affected the participants. One woman was affected by all the scenes, another woman from Ramallah city with a Master's degree talked about "*the fetus that was dropped from the equation with no fault*". Three men spoke about the anonymity of Hiam and her fetus, two spoke of Mahdi's mother-frantically searching for her son in prisons while knowing his home was burnt down, two spoke of tribal reconciliation, one spoke of the Survivor discussing her trauma. One man was affected by all scenes, one was mostly affected when Mahdi's family left emigrated, and one was affected when the Survivor said that no one listened to her complaints. In the mixed group, a man wrote, "*I was mostly affected by the collective pain*". In regards to the effective scenes, men were more moved than women as the scenes touched multi dimensions of their lives.

4:5 Conflict Resolutions

Mahdi emigrated to avoid the negative attitude of his community. The Survivor, who went on to marry and give birth, also reallocated. Abeer decided to continue rapping despite her community's rejection and threats. Two women accepted Mahdi and the Survivor's resolution of the conflict. One of these women said "*If it happened to me, I couldn't face the community, I would take the easiest solution by leaving and not confronting the community on daily basis*". Three men did not agree with Mahdi's solution. One man said, "*when a person walks in the right direction, and does not do anything wrong from his point of view, I see here traditions and habits are not essentials*". Another man said, "*I would neither surrender by killing nor challenge the society by staying, if it happened to my sister, I would take her immediately and leave to another place where I could live anonymously*". The rest saw Mahdi and the Survivor's solutions as predictable and acceptable under the society's pressure.

All men complemented Abeer's decision to challenge her community, but two questioned her negotiating tool and said that she should have used other acceptable tools to confront

negative phenomena in her society. A man in the mixed said *“she can use another tool like a documentary film in order to convey her message, we should understand the society we are living in. There is not only one tool to reach people”*. Regardless of their gender, participants viewed solutions from within their social-cultural perspectives and their abilities to confront the society. Most men and two women referred peoples’ behaviors and attitudes to the pressure of society and the deeply-rooted traditions but not religion, taking into consideration the double burden on women rather than on the privileged men.

4:6 Honor as a Moral Category

In the Palestinian social and cultural context, “the notion of ‘honor’ is viewed as a collective rather than an individual concern, which makes preserving or cleansing it from shame a responsibility of the community as manifested in social pressure” (Palestinian NGOS against domestic violence against women, 2007: 45). Again, women define honor as a matter of high values and decent conduct. In the Palestinian society ‘honor’ is mainly linked to sexual behavior which women find it unacceptable. The participant from Gaza summarized her opinion by saying *“Looking at ‘honor’ only as a sexual behavior is a symbol of backwardness”*. The majority of men participants related ‘honor’ to values and conduct and connected it to loyalty for home. *“For me ‘honor’ means not to be a collaborator with Israel, or not to be corrupt. ‘Honor’ means a lot more than sexual connotations”* explained a male participant from Al-Bireh city with a Master’s degree. Two men, who are originally from villages in the north of the West Bank, connected honor to sexual conduct. A man with a Bachelor’s degree residing in Toubas village said, *“This is how I was raised, even though I have been living in the city for ten years now, when I go to my home village, I act like them and be one of them”*. The man from Beit Dajan with an elementary school education said, *“to be called, a collaborator with Israel, or a thief, is considered easier than being called a whore, this is honor, not a game”*.

4:7 Genre Effectiveness

One woman and two men were equally affected by both the drama and documentary film, another woman and seven men were less affected by the drama film, and the two remaining men said they felt even more when watching the drama film. A male Master’s

degree student in the mixed group from Beit Reema village said, *“The drama stimulated my feelings while the documentary stimulated my thoughts and mind”*.

This result emphasizes part of the theory that men interact more with the factual and real images while women did not feel significant difference.

4:8 Opinions Re-Assessment

None of the women had reassessed her opinion, while three men had changed their minds regarding specific points. The male Master’s degree student from Beit Reema village, studying for his Master’s degree changed his view, *“After watching the two films, I changed my mind, if the extended family one day decided to kill one of its females, I will stand against them, they cannot do so”*. The man from Al-Jalazoun camp also reconsidered his view *“ Considering all the discussion, I am now very sure that honor killing is not a solution, on the contrary the community will always remember the issue and shame will stay with children and grandchildren”*. The man from Al-Bireh said, *“I found that we still have long way to go in order to bury the honor killing phenomenon, a third party has to intervene”*. Women already have a background and formed opinions and felt they did not need to reassess their views, while some men were informed by the discussion and commented immediately on how the discussion affected their views.

It was clear that documentary film raised a heated discussion among participants creating varied and contradicting meanings, and consequently different decoding positions. Audiences expressed the reason behind it, as characters were real as well as the stories, and they felt the characters living among them.

Chapter Five: General Discourse, Honor Crimes in the Eyes of TV Audience Based on Gender

This chapter will summarize the main differences of interpretations based on gender, discuss some ideological questionings, and show few texts' polysemy and misreading.

5:1 Major Differences among Male and Female Interpretations

As stated earlier in this study, determinant factors in meaning construction and messages decoding are gender, locality, academic background and the social-cultural context. Discussions in the focus groups revealed a high degree of consensus about the main meanings of images and narratives, and showed the level of cleverness people bring to the readings of such representations. Dennis McQuail (2005:p129-130) in 'The Theory of Cultivation and the Mediation of Identity' writes "TV is responsible for a major cultivating and acculturating process, according to which people are exposed systematically to a selective view of society in almost every aspect of life, a view which tends to shape their beliefs and values accordingly". In both genres, men and women generally were introduced to a selective view of society where they saw very provocative messages. Janice Radway, 1984-1987 concluded that women practice an act of protest in the patriarchal culture when reading romance, this study shows that women practice an act of protesting when constructing meanings and interpreting honor crimes texts that are against the mainstream culture. Consequently, regardless of determinant factors, women were against femicide under any circumstances, while men were more yielding. Some women equally condemned both individuals involved in an illegitimate sexual relationship, while two men asserted that only females should be condemned.

Despite their understanding of the right for life, the majority of men, except for three, asserted loudly that they could not defend it when a woman's sexual conduct is brought to question. Because honor is a collective matter, if the clan gathers and decides to kill a female for disgracing the family's honor, no one can question their decision. "*I cannot do anything to stop it if she is an adulteress, I am from a village, the traditions and norms dominate our acts and if a female does it, she should be killed*", the man from Tubas village said. Men and women, except two men, sympathized with the victims in both genres, but the degree differed from one victim to another. Men's sympathy was related to the extent of victim's misconduct. Men were mostly affected by documentary genre,

while most women felt both had the same effectiveness. Three women revealed personal experiences after watching the drama while three men talked about personal experiences after watching the documentary. Men and women differed in their opinions on conflict resolution/narrative, but agreed that social pressure is the culprit. All participants, except two men, connected 'honor' to decent conduct, good morals, honesty and nationalism.

In conclusion, religious and civic law are not the only determinant factors when it comes to meaning construction, interpretations and message decoding of honor crimes, but audience bring other resources to bear on their interpretations and discourse such as traditions, norms, and social order that are considered the most determinant factors in this process. Not one man in the discussions stated that women should not be judged, have the absolute right to own and control their bodies, and the right to live without the fear of death as punishment.

5:1:1 Gender Difference and Body Language

Men and women used different body language in focus groups discussions, especially when challenging each other's opinions. Women in the women's session were less differed and only spoke louder and interrupted one another when intervening. When men disagreed, they spoke loudly, gestured strong facial expressions, waved hands, shouted, knocked on the table, cursed, and laughed loudly to ease tension.

5:2 Messages Decoding - Ideological Questioning and Opposition

Gathered data show a high degree of consensus about the fundamental messages of the two films; fighting violence against women (Khoury, 2008) and raising awareness about the right for life (Odeh, 2008). Most people tend to show considerable skill and a shared cultural understanding in interpreting multifaceted messages conveyed by the style of genre (Kitzinger, 2004:178). Although messages may be read in the same way, the decoding term may differ when a reader takes a position. One man expressed denial when watching the incest scene in the drama film by saying, "*the case is extreme, the director is exaggerating, incest does not happen often in the Palestinian society*". In the case of Hiam and her unborn child, two men understood the right to life on cognitive level, but opposed it ideologically (Hoijer, 1998) saying that she deserved to die for getting illegitimately pregnant. Moreover, three women opposed the encoded message of not holding teenage girls responsible for falling in love; and they condemned Shireen. One

man read the whole message behind making the drama film differently in the beginning by saying “*the whole film is focusing on females’ bodies and sexualities, reinforcing traditional norms and does not indicate self-respect*”.

5:3 Polysemy and Misreading

Scenes and narratives mostly conveyed the preferred reading to audiences. However, some participants misread Suad’s outfit. They criticized her wearing revealing night clothing in front of her brother. In the women’s group was the following exchange:

Researcher: *Do you think Suad’s outfit aroused her brother?*

One woman answered: *I would not let my daughter wear revealing clothing at home, so that her brother would have no excuse.*

One woman said: *The child must get used to seeing his mother wearing shorts for example, and then it will be normal for him to see other women wearing the same on the streets. I may wear a shorter dress than other women on the streets but I have morals may be better than religious and veiled women.*

One woman agreed: *Oh yes, one’s style of clothing does not have to do with moral conduct.*

Another woman asked: *Why did they raise the issue of clothing in the film? Why did we only comment about her? Her brother was wearing shorts too.*

One woman answered: *the director wanted to clarify that it’s not her clothes that provoked him, he is sick and abnormal.*

In another scene, the rapist - Suad’s brother – was portrayed to be aggressive and insensitive. One male participant commented, “*It is not necessary to show the rapist in this way, as if the film maker is legitimizing his behavior and giving excuses for the next rape scene*”.

When discussing the scene of Suad’s attempted murder in the drama film, audiences understood her weaknesses and fear, but one woman and one man took different decoding position by saying “*but why did they show her weak and helpless? She had all the right to resist the attempted murder.*”

All participants agreed that honor crimes are a complex issue, and solutions such as public awareness campaigns and parenting courses should be introduced to stop such crimes.

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