BIGSSS | Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences
Research Training Group 2513 "Social Dynamics of the Self"
Description of project line 1: Cultures of Honor

SELF Project Line 1: Cultures of Honor

Many migrants who are currently entering Europe come from so-called **honor cultures**, which are often distinguished from the North Western European dignity cultures. Both concepts, honor and dignity, refer to the worth of a person, yet with quite different connotations and psychological consequences (Rodriguez Mosequera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2002). Whereas dignity is an independent concept in the sense that each individual possesses it as an internal, dispositional feature, the notion of **honor is interdependent in nature**. The current universalistic notion of dignity calls for respect of an autonomous will, rejects humiliating constraints on freedom, and refers to rights rather than duties (Misztal, 2012). Honor often refers to a whole collective, such as the family, and is dependent on each individual family member's behavior. Furthermore, honor is based on the reputation that one has in the eyes of others. Hence, honor exists only in interdependence with them. One crucial psychological consequence of these differences is that honor as compared to dignity is a much more **vulnerable basis of self-worth**. A person can lose her honor if her social reputation is threatened. This is less so the case with dignity. Therefore, potential honor threats induce very strong emotional and behavioral reactions (Uskul et al., 2014) aimed at protecting one's social image.

Research has revealed that four domains or honor codes can be distinguished: morality-based, family-based, feminine, and masculine honor (Rodriguez Mosquera, 2016). The latter two are particularly relevant in the context of migration to Europe. Men are expected to protect masculine honor, which is based on being tough, strong, and being the provider and protector of the family. Feminine honor, which is based on modesty and (sexual) restraint, is expected of women. Obviously these conceptions are at least partially incompatible with the idea of gender equality, and hence both intra as well as interpersonal conflicts are likely to occur when people migrate (Vandello & Cohen, 2003).

Accordingly, understanding such conflicts is crucial to promoting gender equality. Do such conflicts initiate **changes in honor codes** and what are the underlying dynamics? What psychological consequences do these changes have, for instance, for individuals' **subjective well-being**? To be more specific, it has been shown that one's social image contributes strongly to one's general life satisfaction in honor cultures (Rodriguez Mosquera & Imada, 2013). Is this subject to change in the process of acculturation to a dignity culture (e.g., Germany)? Do migrant women who emancipate themselves from the restraints of female honor codes gain in subjective well-being—or do they instead suffer from the conflicts that these changes bring about? Are in particular female honor codes of pudeur and decorum the harder to change, the more strongly they are justified by religious beliefs? Moreover, if the importance of honor codes decreases over time, **which concepts replace them**? Can weakening honor codes be smoothly replaced by dignity in the host country? If dignity is realized in the economic sphere through the demand for living wages and equal opportunity (Hodson, 1996), how do difficulties in the socio-economic integration of immigrants affect integration into a dignity culture? Are there educational or social class differences in the trajectories of these changes? What role does religion play in this regard? Are honor codes more resistant to change if they are justified by religious convictions? Are the emotional consequences of honor threats intensified the more strongly they are grounded in religiosity? Understanding these processes is obviously of great societal relevance.

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Possible **dissertation projects on cultures of honor:**

- Does the relationship between honor, social image, and well-being decline as a function of acculturation: Declining honor—increasing well-being?

- Honor through Islam? – Do religious justifications of honor codes intensify their psychological consequences?

Potential supervisors:

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