

Restoring Lost ‘Honor’: Retrieving Face and Identity, Removing Shame, and Controlling the Familial Cultural Environment Through ‘Honor’ Murder

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Abstract: *‘Honor’ murder or ‘honor’ killing is not identical to a man murdering a woman in a domestic violence scenario. An ‘honor’ killing involves the death of a female family member who is murdered by one or more male family members, sometimes with the active assistance of other women related to the victim. In ‘honor’ murder, a female family member is deemed by her male relatives to have transgressed the family’s honor. Unsurprisingly, ‘honor’ murders are historically underreported because of the shame the victim brought to her family. Analyses of ‘honor’ murder cases, therefore, are scarce. I examine the 2007 strangulation of Aqsa Parvez, an ‘honor’ murder victim, through the theoretical lenses of face/shame and the social bond (Scheff, 2000), identity/social identity theory (Stets & Burke, 2000), and Black’s (1983) theory of crime as social control (cited in Gauthier & Bankston, 2004). Then, I deconstruct the conflict leading to Aqsa’s murder through the conflict mapping model devised by Wehr (1979).*

1. Introduction

The December 10, 2007, murder of Aqsa Parvez, 16, strangled by her father for refusing to wear the *hijab* (Muslim head scarf) outside the home is an ‘honor’ killing, the first of its kind in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) (Warmington & Clarkson, 2009, p. 2). I begin with an overview of ‘honor’ murder, familiarizing the reader with this practice through brief descriptions of ‘honor’ murder cases reported in Canada and the United States (US). Next, I turn to the case itself, analyzed theoretically through the sociological theory

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of face/shame and the social bond (Scheff, 2000), identity/social identity theory (Stets & Burke, 2000), and Black's (1983) theory of crime as social control (cited in Gauthier & Bankston, 2004). Finally, the conflict is deconstructed through the conflict mapping model devised by Wehr (1979).

Paucity of information available from short news reports about specific instances of 'honor' murder, including the December, 2007, case is a clear limitation to my study. Chesler (2009a) emphasizes that few studies of 'honor' murder exist, as the families involved acted to expunge shame and consider the situation a private matter (p. 2). My paper adds to the available literature on 'honor' killings. Examining the Parvez case theoretically reveals a relationship between theory and behavior, possibly useful for later work to generate a theory specific to 'honor' killings. Then mapping the conflict deconstructs it systematically, allowing analysis of each of its components. Combining theory and model ensures a more robust investigation than exclusive reliance on either theory or model alone.

2. 'Honor' Killings: Overview

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (2006) declares that about 5,000 women each year lose their lives due to transgressing the family 'honor' ("United", p. 40). Jahangir (quoted in "Honor killings") stated that 'honor' murders were increasing across the globe. States reporting 'honor' killings are: "Bangladesh, Britain, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Pakistan, Morocco, Sweden, Turkey and Uganda" (2000). In the United Kingdom (UK), according to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 'honour' murders are no longer an unusual event ("Honour crimes", 2007). Whether the overall incidence of 'honor' murder is actually rising or whether this type of crime is being reported more frequently, however, is not clarified; further research is necessary. In Canada, 'honor' killings are allegedly an infrequent event (White & Mick, 2007): the Canadian government informed the UNGA that crimes of 'honour' are a rarity ("United", 2002, p. 3).

Chesler warns that a murder of 'honor' and a murder of domestic violence must be analyzed separately, as they

are not interchangeable. In a domestic violence death, usually one man is responsible, killing a woman whom he has physically abused (2009c). By contrast an 'honor' murder is the deliberate murder of a female who is felt to have behaved in a shameful or inappropriate manner. More than a single male relative, as well as female relatives of the victim, may be involved (Mojab & Hassanpour, n.d., p. 3).

Ali specifies that the female members of any Muslim family are those in whose care the 'honor' of the entire family reposes. 'Honor' is, however, reflective of *male* status. The man whom familial women shame through their inappropriate behavior must act to 'restore' his honor, by killing the offending woman (2009). "Inappropriate behavior" in this context relates usually to a woman's actions, whether such activities are actually taking place or are only suspected [by the male family member or members], of occurring. Rectifying a situation of sullied honor quickly is a priority (Smartt, 2006, p. 5).

Chesler (2009a) provides a list of honor-bound criteria. Violating any of these, apparently, can lead to that female's death: failing to cover hair, face, or body; failing to serve the family meekly in the home; choosing to don Western clothes or to put on makeup; making friends with people outside of the family's religion; dating anyone not approved of by the parents; deciding to engage in higher education; marrying a person not chosen by the family or someone of whom the family disapproves; divorcing a husband for any reason; acting with 'inappropriate' autonomy, such as automobile driving, determining to live elsewhere than the family home, or even taking time away from the home, visiting.

WNN adds that only suspicion of an honor infraction is necessary for male 'honor' to be impacted adversely and for the offending female to suffer death. An example is suspected female adultery (2007). Jaffrey emphasizes that rape, including a rape by a family member, is also considered an 'honor' 'crime' for which the woman may be murdered (S. Jaffrey, personal communication, 6 October, 2009, Toronto, Ontario).

'Honor' killings reportedly arose in nations now considered Islamic, before the advent of this religion ("Honor," n.d.). However, as stated earlier, 'honor' killings occur worldwide. Cases in Canada include an incident in

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British Columbia where in July 2003 Rajinder Atwal was convicted of murdering his 17-year old daughter Amandeep, whom he stabbed for moving in with a secretly-dated boyfriend (White & Mick, 2007). In Malton, Ontario in January, 2009, Amandeep Kaur Dhillon, 22, died of stab wounds. Her father-in-law was charged with the death. Police stated that the death may be an 'honor' killing (Warmington & Clarkson, 2009).

And in Kingston, Ontario, on June 30, 2009, four females, aged 13, 17, 19 and 52 were found in an automobile at the bottom of a lock in the Rideau Canal system. Police believe this may be an 'honor' murder. The father, brother, and mother of the three deceased young women in the car reportedly felt that the girls were becoming dangerously infused with Western ideals through the machinations of the older woman, who was the fourth victim. The three surviving family members face four murder counts each (Gatehouse, 2009).

'Honor' murders reported in the US include one in 1989: Palestina Isa, living in St. Louis, Missouri, was murdered by her father Zein, with the active collaboration of Palestina's mother. While Palestina was pinned down by her mother, her father stabbed her to death for dating an African American, attending a dance at her school, and for getting a job. Eiserer, Farwell, & Goldstein (2008) write that Lewisville, Texas cab driver Yasir Said shot both his daughters, Sarah, 17, and Amina, 18, to death in his cab. Said alleged that the influence Western society was having on his daughters' purity was pernicious. Also in 2008, Sandeela Kanwal was strangled by her father, on July 5. Sandeela's father said that his honor was sullied due to Sandeela's expressed intent to divorce her husband (2008). On October 20, 2009, in Peoria Arizona, Noor Faleh Almaleki, 20, died in the hospital after being deliberately run over by her father with a car. Faleh Hassan Almaleki, 48, insisted that Noor's rejection of customary Iraqi norms and embracing of Western norms, expressed by Noor's choice of clothing and refusal to abide by his edicts, was damaging his 'honor' ("Iraqi", 2009).

3. December 10, 2007: The Death of Aqsa Parvez

Sixteen-year old Aqsa Parvez of Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, died in a hospital, where she was brought by police. Police acted after being telephoned by a man who stated he had murdered his daughter ("Canadian", 2007). Postmortem results indicated that death was due to "neck compression" caused by strangulation. Aqsa's father Muhammed, 57, was arrested and charged with first-degree murder. Aqsa's elder brother, Waqas, 27, was also arrested and also charged with first-degree murder for his role in Aqsa's death. A court-ordered publication ban on the case means that evidence presented in the 2009 trial is unavailable (Gray, 2009).

Bayart (2005) asserts that clothing can be emblematic of power (p. 200). According to Noronha, Aqsa and her father argued about her clothing choices, which subverted what he thought she should wear: Aqsa resisted her father's requirement that she don a *hijab* while outside the house (2007). In addition, Gray stated that Aqsa rebelled against complying meekly with the rigid house-rules (2009). Noronha adds that the dispute escalated to the extent that Aqsa was reportedly telling her friends she was frightened and planned to flee her home. Aqsa's friends noted that Aqsa came to school with bruised arms, which were allegedly caused by Aqsa's father. Friends reported that Aqsa predicted her father would end her life one day (2007).

4. Theoretical Foundations for 'Honor' Murder

4.1 Face, Shame and Male Place in Society

Scheff (2000) emphasizes that both Weber and Durkheim pressed for recognition of values and emotion as *the* essential aspect of social organization (p. 84). Shame, an emotion connected to face, may be described, writes Scheff, as a complex array of emotions, including humiliation, embarrassment, and resulting feelings of failure (p. 96). Gudykunst (2003) writes that shame and pride are dyadic components of the affect regarding face (p. 142), as are dignity and honor (p. 129). According to Gudykunst, a dispute activates the emotions connected to face, because a conflict threatens the person's ability to maintain face (p. 138). Augsburger (1992) confirms the dual-relationship between 'honor'

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and shame, adding that 'honor' ascriptions are embraced to ensure continuance of the status quo (p. 103). As we shall see below, Muhammed Parvez refused to permit Aqsa to assimilate into Canadian culture, rejecting any changes in her which might result in changes for the family.

Scheff visualizes shame as arising from a disturbance in the connection between individual and society (p. 97). Makar (1996) declares that women living in patriarchal societies, such as in the Middle East, are treated as less than full citizens (p. 14). I suggest that men identify strongly with one another in a patriarchal society and are socialized to embrace visions of themselves as superior to women. Where men move freely in society and women are constrained, family 'honor' rests on the ability of the man to control the women in his family (Akpinar, 2003, p. 432). While 'honor' is deemed familial, because the man represents the entire family, any shameful act devolves directly onto him. If the man fails to act restoratively, he will be unable to comport himself socially with dignity and will be recognized by other men as weak.

Key aspects of face and shame are the need to protect one's face from shame; the ability to maintain continuity of face; and adhering to tradition (Gudykunst, p. 22). Shame occurs for the man whose women behave in a manner deemed inappropriate for the female role. The man's ability to bond socially with other men in his society and culture depends on his ability to maintain order within his house.

Kailo (2003) emphasizes the relationship between honor, face and shame, finding that the belief of being shamed and consequent loss of face when male 'honor' is deemed violated by a female's behavior, is clear and compelling. Douglas (2006) states that the shame accrued to the man whose female family member transgresses is holistic, remaining so until she is killed (p. 177). Aqsa's refusal to abide by her father's edicts apparently resulted in the belief that restoring family 'honor' meant controlling Aqsa. Seemingly unable to achieve this through intimidation and perhaps physical abuse, Aqsa's father, Muhammed and brother Waqas, responded in a manner accepted by them as traditionally customary, killing Aqsa to restore their own sense of dignity.

4.2 Identity/Social Identity Theory

Stets and Burke (2000) write that a person is able to identify the self in relation to other human beings and thus categorize the self (p. 224). Hogg and Abrams (cited in Stets & Burke, 2000) specify that a person's social identity is composed of how he or she conceptualizes of the self in

relationship to others who are of the person's social group. The social group is described by Turner et al. (cited in Stets & Burke) as those persons for whom similarities and belongingness to the same group are clear through self-identification (p. 225).

Persons who immigrate tend to expect their native-born children to behave in society as they do at home, where home cultural norms reflect that of the parents' home country, and the groups with which the parent originally identified. Feather and Wasejluk (1973), and Feather and Rudzitis (1974) (cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986) found that children of immigrants, whose values and cultural expectations are not yet ossified, evince a proclivity to assimilate the culture and values of the host society. Contrastingly, the parents of these children are less apt to change (p. 194). Yuval-Davis (cited in Akpınar, 2003) urges that the adult immigrant's original cultural group-identity is actually strengthened in a defensive maneuver, as the person rejects cultural assimilation (p. 426).

In the Parvez case, correlations may be drawn between adult rejection of cultural assimilation and the embracing of that rejected culture by younger persons in the same family. Muhammed appears to have rejected Aqsa's cultural assimilation as being dangerous to the family's values and 'honor.' Indeed, the Parvez case at least suggests that in Canada some cases of 'honor' murder confirm Chesler findings: in many probable 'honor' murders in the US, fathers kill their daughters, rather than older female relatives, such as the man's wife (2000b). However, exceptions to this generality, Chesler shows, do exist (2009c).

Muhammed Parvez was originally from Pakistan ("Man", 2007); indeed, at Parvez' trial, Gray reports, a translator was required (2009). Asma Jahangir, chairwoman of Pakistan's national human rights commission, Pakistani lawyer and activist who serves as U.N. rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, stated that approximately 300 women yearly are killed for 'honor' violations in Pakistan ("Honor Killings", 2007). I posit that a relationship between individual and social identity and face, shame and honor, existed in the Parvez case. Muhammed seems to have strongly rejected Aqsa's attempted cultural

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assimilation as contradicting his own sense of social identity and face, ultimately restoring these by killing Aqsa.

4.3. Crime as Social Control

Black (cited in Gauthier and Bankston, 2004) urges that crime is in fact a means of social control. In this interpretation, murder is a justifiable elimination of the threat created by another person. Person A feels that Person B is behaving improperly, in a manner which A finds threatening. For Person A, restoring order—regaining social control—means killing B (pp. 98-99). According to Gauthier and Bankston, men murder women to re-establish male control (pp. 99-100). While I would caution that this statement may not be applicable to all male murders of females, in the Parvez case Muhammed appears to have believed he could restore his family 'honor' only through controlling his daughter.

Ruggi (1998) observes that the family unit, in Palestine for instance, is traditionally expected to defend itself against all threats, internal and external. Killing a family member for actions perceived as constituting threat to the family is seen as rightful. Thus for a male family member to kill a female who is thought to be damaging to the family's greatest social possession, its 'honor,' is believed restorative (p. 13).

Goldstein (2002) writes that the hallmark of 'honor' killing in the cultures where the practice is normalized is the freedom of the perpetrator from all hint of guilt or responsibility (p. 30). The fault lies with the victim. An apparent universal aspect of an 'honor' killing which may be indicative of placement of fault and blame, according to the perpetrator[s], is that the deceased woman or girl will not be grieved ("Honor", n.d.).

Although the Canadian Islamic Congress' spokesperson Mohamed Elmasry claimed that Aqsa's death was "a teen issue" and not an 'honor' murder ("Canadian", 2007), Warmington writes that more than one year after her death, Aqsa Parvez' grave remains without a headstone or adornment of any kind (2009). The unmarked grave at least suggests that because Aqsa was believed to be bringing shame to her family, she will not be memorialized and should not be remembered. I conclude that, contrary to

Elmasry's simplistic ascription of "teen issue" which suggests that the 'problem' was Aqsa, offered as the reason she was strangled, apparently by her father, the complex combination of face and shame, cultural and social identify and rejection, and need to control, categorizes Aqsa's death as an 'honor' murder.

5. Conflict Map

1. *Summary Description:* Aqsa Parvez, 16, was strangled at home, apparently by her father Muhammed Parvez, 57, on December 10, 2007. Muhammed notified 911; Aqsa was taken by police to hospital where she died only a few hours later. Muhammed and his son Waqas, 27, were charged with first-degree murder.
2. *Conflict History:* the conflict between Aqsa and her father arose over her apparent rebellion against his demand she wear traditional Muslim clothing, including the *hijab*, outside the home. Aqsa's friends stated she was petrified of her father and brother, who would follow her to school to see if she were obeying. Aqsa wanted to leave her home (Noronha, 2007). The conflict involves a first-generation immigrant man from Pakistan and his Canadian-born daughter, and differences in perceived/desired cultural norms.
3. *Conflict Context:* Aqsa, as many teenagers do, resisted her father's demands. Expressing her self-identity and independence from parental control apparently meant changing her clothes and removing her *hijab* (Timson, 2007). Conflict boundaries were home and outside the home. Muhammed expected Aqsa to accede to his accustomed norms and decision-making parameters in each place; Aqsa felt differently.
4. *Conflict Parties.*
 1. *Primary:* Muhammed Parvez, 57 and Aqsa Parvez, 16.
 2. *Secondary:* Waqas, 27. Waqas shifted between a primary and a secondary-party role. Waqas, originally arrested for obstruction of justice (Noronha, 2007); the charge was later upgraded to first-degree murder over half a year after Aqsa's death (Gray, 2009), suggesting a more

active and therefore, primary, role. A second son, Sean Muhammed, stated that it was unclear to him what had happened, adding that their mother was “sick” over the occurrence. Aqsa apparently had sisters, who appear to have been recruited to observe and report back to the family on Aqsa’s behavior at school (“Man”, 2007). The roles of both Sean and Aqsa’s mother are unclear from available published sources. I stipulate that unnamed individuals who were presented in the news as having made fun of Aqsa at school for wearing her *hijab*, after which time she began to remove it (Noronha, 2007) also played an unwitting secondary-party role in the conflict.

3. *Interested third parties*: Aqsa’s friends, to whom she apparently confided.

If the Parvez’ family adhered to Pakistani authority structures, we would expect the husband Muhammed to retain highest authority and control over the women in the family, with his sons also playing more important roles than any female family member. And indeed, power relations between the parties do seem asymmetrical, with Muhammed holding highest authority followed, I posit, by Waqas. As I stated above, Sean’s role and therefore his position in the family power structure, is unclear. Aqsa’s mother appears nearly invisible, suggesting that her authority in the family was far smaller than her husband or son Waqas. The main goals of the family in the conflict appear that Aqsa comport herself as they believed she ought, while Aqsa’s main goal was the right to choose for herself. That Aqsa’s sisters and parents reportedly followed her, and that Waqas was also arrested for her murder, suggests a coalition of the family in an attempt to regain control over Aqsa’s ‘wayward’ behavior.

1. Issues.

1. *Facts-based*: a disagreement over whether or not Aqsa were wearing her *hijab* outside the home is possible, based on the alleged familial collaborative spying, which suggests that Aqsa claimed she was wearing her *hijab*. Aqsa’s

family apparently felt she was untrustworthy in her claims.

2. *Values-based*: a disagreement over Aqsa's right to wear what she chose outside the house, and over the power relationship between father/daughter and appropriate roles, is clear. The family's dispute emerged from differences in values emerging from traditional Pakistani ways of being and Canadian ways of being. I argue that the values-based aspect of the conflict is the most important, and that each of the others, facts-based, interests-based, and nonrealistic, arises from the values-based foundation.
3. *Interests-based*: a disagreement over whether or not Aqsa could gain the right to choose for herself what she wore and what she did outside the home, or whether Aqsa's family retained the right to control her, existed.
4. *Nonrealistic*: Wehr writes that the "nonrealistic" may include how the parties engage with one another, inter-party communications, and physical setting (1979). From what little is available in published reports, the parties seem to have engaged with one another directly and indirectly. The bruises Aqsa showed her friends indicated that she was subjected to direct confrontation with her father and possibly brother Waqas. Indirectly, the family kept abreast of Aqsa's behavior away from home by following her. Communications appeared to be strong among at least some family members, as sisters apparently reported to the parents about Aqsa's dress at school. My sense of the family's communications is of a group systematically ostracizing one member who differed, although my conclusion is speculative. The physical setting of the conflict centers on two locations: the home and outside the home, primarily at Aqsa's school.

1. Dynamics:

- a. *Precipitating events*: one precipitating event appears to have been the teasing Aqsa received in school for wearing her *hijab*. Consequently, the family allegedly began following her in order to ensure her behavior conformed to the family expectations and standards.
- b. *Issue emergence, transformation, proliferation*: from available information, it appears that Aqsa expressed her desire for autonomy most clearly by removing her *hijab* when away from home. However, Aqsa's overall choice in clothing also clashed with what was deemed proper by her family and Aqsa would leave home wearing one outfit, changing on the way to school ("Man", 2007). The implication is that the issues in the dispute over what Aqsa wore, were proliferating, becoming generalized into a dispute over family and Canadian values.
- c. *Polarization*: from published reports, the family appears to have polarized around duty to family as demanded by Muhammed, and Aqsa's refusal to submit to the expectations of duty. Aqsa's siblings observed their sister at school and reported back to the parents, who allegedly were also following Aqsa to monitor her.
- d. *Spiraling*: the conflict appears to have spiraled upward, as Aqsa consistently refused to accede to her father's wishes. Aqsa reportedly feared for her life and, according to a published report, had indeed already moved out of her home, returning on the day of her death only to pick up a few more of her belongings ("Man", 2007). Where Aqsa was staying was not reported and is an important piece of information, suggesting possible means by which authorities could have stepped into the conflict and prevented Aqsa's death. For instance, if Aqsa were at a safe house, her return home could have been supervised by a law officer, a case file opened, and conflict resolution or management procedures put into place. However, Avruch

(2006) warns that asymmetrical power relationships cannot automatically be restructured by recourse to trainings (p. 51). Great care would need to be taken to ensure the continued safety of the less-powerful conflict-party.

- e. *Stereotyping and mirror-imaging*: I suggest that stereotyping and mirror-imaging were in fact occurring in this conflict. Muhammed and potentially also Aqsa's family, became for Aqsa the embodiment of rigid traditionalism, while for the family, Aqsa came to represent a threat to 'honor.'

2. Alternative Routes to Solution(s) of the Problem(s):

'Honor' murder is not a humane solution to disagreements over female behavior. I suggest that education of elementary-school children is one means by which perceptions and behavior may be changed, while cautioning that the home environment of the children will also act on their perceptions of values. Sensitivity and awareness education for school staff, faculty and students could broaden understanding of cultural traditions and prevented the alleged teasing of Aqsa that was reported as precipitating her decision to begin removing her *hijab* regularly.

3. Conflict Regulation Potential:

- a. *Internal limiting factors*: Wehr stipulates that parties' similar or identical values and interests can come into play, assisting them to resolve the conflict (1979). I suggest that insufficient published information is available to answer this mapping component confidently. H. Altalhi (personal communication, September, 2009) contends that the hierarchical relationship between men and women is "nonnegotiable" in Muslim culture. Kriesberg (2003) emphasizes that identity conflicts, including those involving culture, are apt to persevere in the face of conflict resolution processes (p. 169). Similar

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values as a conflict limiting factor may thus have less potential for conflict resolution when 'honor' is formative in the dispute.

- b. *External limiting factors*: authorities such as schools; possibly Imams condemning the practice of 'honor' murder and urging alternative approaches; and police, are potential sources for external conflict controllers.
- c. *Interested or neutral third parties*: finding a trusted third party neutral acceptable to all parties, in what is considered by the family a private, honor-bound matter, may be an unworkable strategy.

4. Techniques of Conflict Management

Removing the vulnerable individual from the home or providing a safe-house where the person can flee, seems to me a first step. Providing education and training on 'honor' murder to school personnel, who could then act on behalf of the threatened person through providing resources including funds to reach the safe house, is a feasible early intervention approach to managing 'honor' conflict. As I stated earlier, sensitivity and awareness training for school personnel and students seems a feasible option to help manage this type of conflict. It is of course impossible to know whether Aqsa would still be alive had she been supported by her peers for wearing her *hijab*, rather than teased. Chesler emphasizes that families experiencing an 'honor' violation and subsequent correction through murder, prefer to refrain from communicating with researchers (2009a). I suggest that families in this situation would be apt to avoid or refuse to speak with mediators, facilitators, or conciliators. Creation of a safe house would permit a case file to be opened, activating legal and social services, including mediation and conflict resolution processes, before tragedy occurs.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I examined 'honor' murder through the case of Aqsa Parvez. I provided an overview of 'honor' murder, explaining its parameters and the difference between an 'honor' murder and a domestic violence killing. Three theories, face/shame and the social bond (Scheff, 2000), identity/social identity theory (Stets & Burke, 2000), and Black's (1983) theory of crime as social control (cited in Gauthier & Bankston, 2004), were described and correlated to Aqsa Parvez' murder. I then deconstructed the conflict through the conflict mapping model developed by Wehr (1979), concluding that creation of a safe house, along with educating school officials, staff and students raises awareness and might provide relief to potential victims and open the possibility of resolution, or at least management, of the conflict.

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