BRIDE ABDUCTION THROUGH A FEMINIST LENS

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ABSTRACT


The research focuses on the phenomenon of bride abduction. The researcher delves into a wide array of societies in which the practice takes place and presents them along with the paradoxical implications that further distinguish the practice. There has not been a wide array of collective literature on this topic and the researcher worked on condensing relevant studies in order to provide a more conclusive look at the field of study. The activist approach allows the paper to be lead with a heavy theoretical approach and for the presented concepts to be explained further by notable theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir, bell hooks, and Sandra Bartky and to connect them to the themes of power, dominance, and shame that take precedence throughout. She highlights the unequal power ideologies that enable the practice to continue and draws specific attention to the pervasive sexual, physical, and emotional violence that is pervasive in all bride abductions. The data collected was obtained using a series of mixed methods. The researcher used in-depth analysis to condense the narrative of bride abduction into a cohesive stream of events. She used media, literature, and interviews to fully articulate the social function of bride abductions and seeks to bring awareness to the subject at hand.

Keywords: Bride Abduction, Bride Kidnapping, Bride Theft, Forced Marriage, Feminism, Shame, Dominance, Power
The Social Framework of Bride Abduction Through a Feminist Lens

Go and hide in the vineyards 21 and watch. When the young women of Shiloh come out to join in the dancing, rush from the vineyards and each of you seize one of them to be your wife. Then return to the land of Benjamin


Tradition or a crime? It is the question at the forefront of the conversation when addressing bride abduction. It is a practice that occurs throughout the world in many countries and is a violent assault on a woman's personhood. Unlike other forms of violence, this type is only directed at women. The woman is therefore reduced to an object status and merely as a thing to be possessed and through this reasoning man is able to justify his actions towards women. While the practice has lived on throughout the centuries, it is the time to start an open and critical discourse as we scholars continue researching the social context of the phenomenon in order to recognize the enormous and monumental impact of the issue. Traditions become outdated and it’s time for this practice to follow suit and become one of the past. We must work with vigor to give a voice to those who are silenced.

Bride abduction is starting to become recognized as an international issue. It is critical that people step up and begin to challenge the old, tired traditions that dominate worldwide. Many of these traditions involve the marginalization of half of the population, women. Women in many traditional and non-Western societies have not had the same access to education, healthcare, and basic human rights as the men their same age and status have. Many patrilocal customs are still practiced today that subjugate that marginalize women.
Bride abduction or forced marriages occur throughout the world. Largely ignored in common media and literature, this practice is not a central focus of Western aid. The whys of this may be speculated upon in a different setting, but for now this research will focus on the woman and her experiences, as she becomes part of this traditional and culturally accepted practice. In Kyrgyzstan it is difficult to even identify which marriages are consensual or not (Nick and Dariece 2014). In the countries in which bride abduction exists, there is no separate law that identifies consensual kidnapping versus non-consensual kidnapping. The fine line that exists between delineating these two forms is a common problem that scholars and writers alike encounter when they set out to explore the practice of bride abduction. Also, this line often inhibits the abductors in non-consensual marriages from being persecuted (Nick and Dariece 2014).

Women’s lives are being diminished to little or no importance and only valued for furthering the status or quality of life for a man. If the existing attitudes that permeate through the traditional societies that practice bride abduction continue, women will continue to be subjugated and marginalized for no reason other than their gender. The abducted women are more likely to be submitted to domestic abuse, lower quality and levels of education, unhappy marriages, and a plethora of other detrimental factors.

Equality laws should be prevalent in all of today’s modern societies. The absence of these critical laws leads to the further subjugation of women worldwide and leads to men over-dominating a significant portion and forcing outdated traditions upon them, such as bride abduction. It is important to give a voice to the
voiceless and continue to advocate for these women as they hide behind their veils of shame, laid upon them from the moment of birth. Parents should not have to be disappointed to have daughters instead of sons. All people should be treated with reverence and kindness from the moment of their birth, regardless of gender.

Sadly enough, in various societies, not only is the practice being ignored, but it is becoming increasingly common as well (Gayle 2014). In an online news article, there are posted pictures and a video of a woman screaming and crying as her abductor drags her out of his car in which wedding music plays from the speakers (Gayle 2014). The video is unsettling to watch and it is just one minor look into one experience of an individual woman. The phenomenon is occurring trans-nationally and cannot be prevented with a few disturbing news articles and videos. The women who are suffering in their marriages or who will someday suffer in these types of marriages need advocates who will come to their aid and fight to stop this violent practice. Young women deserve to be in relationships where they are cherished and loved, not in ones in which they are humiliated, abused, and degraded from the onset.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Terms

Bride abduction is a cultural phenomenon that occurs throughout the world, including regions in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and the Americas. Ayres’ pan-cultural study gives us a concise definition of bride abduction, which she characterizes as the “forceable abduction of a woman for the purpose of marriage, without her foreknowledge or consent and without the knowledge or consent of her
parents or guardian” (Ayres 1974:238). The U.N. describes it as a “marriage that takes place without the free or valid consent of one or both of the partners and involves either physical or emotional duress” (Thomas 2009). Scholars and past studies that have been done have use various terms to articulate the practice, including (but not limited to): bride theft, bride abduction, bride capture, bride kidnapping, forced marriage, and forced abduction (Bates 1974:234; Doubt 2012:91; Thomas 2009:2; Werner 2009:316). All encapsulate the same practice. In more recent texts it is typically referred to as bride theft or bride abduction. For the research presented in this paper, I will fluctuate between the terms aforementioned. I will use bride abduction most frequently because unlike bride theft, bride abduction recognizes the violence in the act in question. Bride theft further dehumanizes the woman, who the act is perpetuated against, reducing her to an object status that can be stolen.

Vuk Karadzič’s definition (in Lockwood 1974:253) gives a more general description of the practice and how it is customarily performed. Bride abduction originates when a man selects a woman he wishes to be his wife. He and group of friends then proceed to develop a plan to abduct the woman from her home without her or her family’s consent. Occasionally this practice takes place after a woman has rejected a man’s hand in marriage, but it is more commonplace for the man to go forward without asking for her hand initially. Routinely this is accomplished by use of sheer brute physical force. If she struggles the men will typically not hesitate to hit or harm her physically. It is considered shameful for an entire village when a woman becomes a victim of bride theft. Oftentimes the woman’s family will pursue
the captors, but typically once a girl is taken it is too late and she must consent to the marriage or bear heavy consequences (Lockwood 1974:253).

It becomes a difficult task when one endeavors to define bride abduction for a pan-cultural study. There is not solely one form. It exists in many different spheres and may serve a different function in the specific culture in which it takes place. Ayres (1974:272) identifies the four different forms of bride abduction that are known to occur. The first is “wife raiding” which transpires when the man and the woman do not know each other, but the man steals her for the purpose of marriage. This type is most likely to be concurrent with violence. One community also commits this type against another community, not within one (as community members are more likely to know each other) (Ayres 1974:238). Repeatedly, we see this in times of war or battle in which it is perceived as an act of violence against the community to which the woman belongs. The next is “genuine bride theft.” The research at hand will address this type in greater detail and it will become the groundwork for the data collection and analysis. Members within a community commit this type. Ordinarily after the abduction, the groom’s family offers some sort of apology or compensation for the wife and they then establish familial relations (Ayres 1974:238).

Another form of the practice is “mock bride theft.” It can be also described as a type of elopement. The man and the woman secretly agree to become married and the man goes through the process of abducting her from her home (Ayres 1974:238). She pretends to resist the men capturing her, often screaming and crying, exactly like real bride abduction. The bride’s family does not know or agree
upon the marriage beforehand; this is why the theatrics are necessary. Sometimes this type of marriage is performed because the couple knows her family may not consent to the marriage. Lastly, there is “ceremonial capture.” Both families agree upon the marriage and the capture is merely part of the traditions that are prevalent in the culture in which they take place. Violence does not occur in these two forms of the practice, because the parties are both consenting.

It is also necessary to differentiate between the terms patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal to further understand the context and social environments in which bride abduction takes place. Patriarchal refers to the systematic controls that exist in society that encourages the active subordination of women, and create the dominant paradigm of the masculine ideal. There are innumerable ideologies that permeate culture that recreate and promote this ideal. Patrilineal and patrilocal societies can only exist within a patriarchal society. Patrilineal refers to the lineage of a family being directly tied to the father rather than the mother. Patrilocal societies are ones in which the bride moves into the groom’s home after their marriage and helps provide for his family, rather than her birth family. All three of these are in place in the vast majority of societies in which bride abduction occurs.

The most common form of marriage in Bosnia is elopement or “mock bride theft” (Doubt 2012:91). Bride abduction and elopement are linguistically different in Bosnia. (Doubt 2012:91). However, both forms are often collapsed in studies of this phenomenon into the bride abduction, otmica, rather than mock bride theft, because families regard both similarly. The collapse does not take into account the significant differences in the practices of each form. Both of these traditions exist in
Bosnia because they have been long performed by the people in the country and in the Yugoslavian countries surrounding it as well. This combination of elopement and bride theft is problematic for those who wish to study solely one or the other. While attempting to focus on the violent aspect and not the functional part of this act, the lack of distinction in the word is quite inhibiting. In Bates’ study of the Yörük people of Turkey, he notes that there is no linguistic difference between elopement and bride theft (1974:272). Apparently, this lack of distinction is prevalent in cultures in which bride abduction takes place because both forms of marriage are considered to be an assault on the family’s honor (Bates 1974:272). The woman’s consent or non-consent to the marriage does not factor in how these marriages are labeled or perceived in society.

Geographical Regions, Frequency, Legality Measures

Bride abduction spans over many societies and different cultures. The laws and the condemnation of the practice vary greatly between each as well. According to the United Nations study, it is estimated that more than 38% of Afghanistan women are victims are bride abduction (Thomas 2009:4). There have also been numerous cases in “Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Tajikistan, and Albania” (Thomas 2009:7). As one can see, the practice is prevalent in those on the borders of Eurasia, around the Caucasus region and extending beyond it. There are many countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union that exhibit these patterns of behavior (Thomas 2009:2). In fact, it has estimated that 40% of the women in the cities of Kyrgyzstan
have been victims of bride abduction, and anywhere from 60-80% of the women living in villages have been as well (Thomas 2009:7-8).

There have been a number of legal measures that have been taken in order to counteract the frequency of this practice. In November of 1962, the Convention on Consent to Marriage met in order to make an overarching set of limitations and measures in order to control and staunch the bride abductions that were occurring at the time (United Nations). The resulting agreement left a series of limitations and standards for marriages, including, but not limited to: abidance by the legal age of marrying within each country, registration all marriages with the state, and consent of both husband and wife in order to carry out a marriage (Thomas 2009:5). Though the agreement may seem rather straightforward to some, it is pivotal for these nations to have an official set of guidelines and regulations in place. One of the main issues these nations still face is enforcing the guidelines within each society.

Scholars and national authorities alike are becoming increasingly aware that while the practice of bride abduction remains technically illegal in the majority of countries in which it is practiced, it is still becoming increasingly common in select regions throughout the world, most notably in Africa and East Asia (Thomas 2009:3). Further studies demonstrate that in the former Soviet Union territories, bride abduction has been somewhat reinstated since the end of the days of communism (Thomas 2009:7). It is speculated the increase stems from the fact that during communism there was greater equality between women and men, and as the communist ideology has unraveled and has been replaced by other forms of government and measures of control, the inequalities that now exist between
women and men have been and still are increasing (Werner 2009:326). Bride abduction is detrimental for the women who experience it because not only does it restrict their choice in partner, but it typically also restricts their “freedom of movement, the right to education, the right to be free from forced or compulsory labor, as well as a woman’s right to liberty and security of person, and right to life and physical integrity, especially if it involves battery or rape” (Thomas 2009:8). The rights aforementioned should be natural human rights and it is completely unjust for a woman to be stripped of these rights by anyone especially a person that she may not even know or care for.

_Bride Abduction: Social Function_

In her 1974 study, Ayre’s researched 53 societies and attempted to discover the reasons for bride theft and in which type of society it was most likely to be present. In the past scholars hypothesized that the function of bride abduction is for men to “obtain resources” (i.e. the brides) which are scarce, the woman being the resource in this sense. Though recent scholars have made new assumptions on the motivations for bride abduction, in older studies there is often a lack of empathy for the women whom are studied and at times even referred to as objects to be obtained. It does not help that males who failed to include feminist thought or theory into their findings performed many of the studies done on the topic, but merely regard the act as a social practice to be studied and recorded. For example, in Kiefer’s essay analyzing the Tausag of Jolo in the Philippines, he refers to the “colorful and gamelike aspect of the Tausag culture” (1974:123). When trying to develop a study on dominance and shame, the older research is often limiting
because the emotions of the women were not typically measured or even deemed as worthy of recording. Most recent studies have learned from feminist insights to show much more compassion and apply a more critically theoretical approach towards advocacy in their research, which provides a more conclusive view of the practice.

Ayre’s also outlines several other factors that are frequently attributed to be motivational for the practice to take place, such as “polygyny, bride price parental control of marriages, wealth differentials within the society, and high valuation of virginity” (1974:241). Her results articulate the disparity between popular reasoning of factors that lead to the practice and the actual statistical data. The research looks into each of these factors individually. For one, it shows that while bride abduction occurs more often within societies that practice polygyny rather than monogamy, however only 37% of the societies that practiced bride theft had general polygyny (Ayres 1974:241). The bride price is the amount of money that the groom’s family agrees to pay to the bride’s family in order for the marriage to take place. The bride price fluctuates depending on location, social class of the families, and a multitude of other factors. Testing parental controls over marriages and high valuation of virginity did not result in significant findings. Surprisingly, the highest occurrence of bride theft took place in those societies in which class and wealth distinctions did not exist (Ayres 1974:243).

Werner, however, notes that bride theft is much more prevalent in areas in which the parents put regulatory control on their daughter’s marriage and where arranged marriages are commonplace (Werner 2009:326). Her studies mainly
focused on bride abduction in Asia, whereas Ayres was cross-cultural, focusing on 53 different societies throughout many countries, including Africa, Circum-Mediterranean, East Eurasia, the Insular Pacific, North America, and South America (Ayres 1974:240). Werner’s research is much more recent than Ayres, though it does not cover as many different societies. There is a gap in the literature that spans societies and the prevalence of bride abduction in today’s more recent literature. Usually articles focus on individual societies. It is difficult to find true statistics on bride abduction, especially when we take into account the multitude of definitions that exist to describe it.

Kiefer’s study of the Tausag of Jolo demonstrates the role that the practice takes within this specific society. He describes the practice as a quick and easy way to secure a bride, especially one that is desirable or not readily available (Kiefer 1974:123). The men use the act of bride abduction to assert their masculinity in society; the women relinquish their power over to the men who will in turn control and dominate them (Kiefer 1974:123). In the Tausag culture there are a number of ways in which marriages are limited including “lack of institutionalized courtship, preferential patterns of marriage, wealth differentials, bridewealth payments, a high value placed on virginity, and strong parental controls of marriages” (Kiefer 1974:123). These factors lead men to possess the sense that the only way they will be able to secure a marriage with the woman they want is to abduct her. It’s unfortunate that so many controls on marriage exist in this society. However, for the most part they are effective in regulating the marriage procedures, except according to Kiefer’s research 20% of marriages were performed by abductions (1974: 124).
The patrilocal values that permeate this society may contribute to the practice of bride abduction (Kiefer 1974: 127).

Bates’ research is also culturally specific. In his research of the Yörük people of Southeastern Turkey, he claims that 20% of the marriages occur through bride abduction or by elopement (Bates 1974:278). There is also a 55.7% instance of bride theft in marriages that are performed out of kinship marriages (Bates 1974:278). This number is significant because this society practices marriages within kin groups frequently. The elopement allows for men and women to marry whom they want without the constraints of parental judgment or control. The kidnapping allows for the male to make his sole choice on female without his or her family's consent (Bates 1974:278). Bates explains that bride price plays a factor in the function of bride theft as well. The typical bride price is much higher for an arranged marriage. After a bride theft, there is no compensation that is given or there is a price that is lower than typical bride prices in the society (Bates 1974:276). Another function that Bates recognizes is the fact that in Yörük culture males do not become recognized as adults until they are married. If a man does not have a woman or cannot afford to pay for a wife, bride abduction serves as a way for them to obtain a bride and increase their social status.

Another society in which bride abduction occurs is in the Tzeltal people of Mexico. The customs vary a bit here from the Asian and European nations, however the concept is the same. There are many restrictions placed on the young people in this society, which leads to non-traditional marriage customs. Though there are 5 different types of marriages that occur in this society, we will focus on the bride
abduction. Men are not considered adults in society until they are married, so almost every man is in want of a wife (Stross 1974:330). However, contact between opposite gender is strictly prohibited and looked down upon by the community at large (Stross 1974:331). Marriage is not typically desired by the females, and in a poll done by the researcher with the question: “Do you want to get married?” to 40 women eligible for marriage, 22 said no, 15 refused to answer, and the remained 3 said maybe (Stross 1974:333). Drinking is a large aspect of the culture and taking care of the drunken husband is a job reserved for the wife. This frequent behavior is also in conjunction with beatings and wild accusations about the wife (Stross 1974:333).

In bride abduction in this culture, the woman is taken from her home and taken into the mountains where she is raped by her abductor (Stross 1974:339). They will stay in the mountains for several days or in the home of one of the husband’s relatives until the bride’s father’s anger has subsided (Stross 1974:339). While in the mountains, she is expected to struggle against her abductor initially and then later concede and allow herself to feel ashamed (Stross 1974:339). The woman stays with her abductor after the kidnapping because it is culturally accepted and her value will be seen as diminished if she leaves him and tries to find another suitor (Stross 1974:349). When women are raped in this society the act goes frequently unreported because if the community finds out they blame it on one of two factors. Firstly, she had been alone or careless which is why she was raped or secondly, she had been willing to commit the act (Stross 1974:341). With the attitudes that prevail
over rape and women, it is no wonder that bride abduction is a culturally accepted practice in the Tzeltal tribe.

On the other side of the coin, we may view the Hmong culture of China. Abducted women are treated with more reverence than in the Tzeltal tribe. Typically the women are abducted in the society only as a last resort of sorts; for example it will be done if the potential husband’s family is impoverished, stricken with leprosy, or has a criminal background (Moua 2003:31). The practice is quite rare in the Hmong culture but is sometimes viewed as a necessary means to obtain a wife (Moua 2003:31).

*Patrilocal Customs: Masculinity and Dominance*

Bride abduction is much more frequent in those societies which are male-dominant. When the women have less power, the men are more apt to take control. For example, in almost every society where bride abduction occurs, it is an illegal practice. This does not stop the practicing from occurring. If a case is ever called to trial (which is a very rare occasion), the men are found to be not guilty, and as the woman is typically already submissive to her husband, she remarks that it was a planned bride abduction or elopement (Mojica and Morton 2011).

In recent years, the practice has become recognized as an act of violence against women. In the past, it was typically regarded only as an assault on the household from which the girl was taken and not on the woman herself. Many times the women are taken into households in which they are physically abused. The majority of literature that exists on the subject of bride abduction comes from patrilocal societies. The women in the households help bolster systems of male
dominance. Werner notes that the mother and other kinswomen of the groom are often the ones who convince the bride to marry the groom (Werner 2009:234). After the woman is abducted, she is typically taken back to the groom’s home where she is put into a room with his women kin and they attempt to secure a white veil to her head (Werner 2009:234). Another form this violence may display itself is in the act of rape. Though heavily ignored in literature, presumably because of the sensitive nature, this horrific act of violence is quite frequently perpetrated against the abducted women.

The U. N. report recognizes that this sometimes occurs after the woman is abducted and before she is married in order to shame her and prevent her from going home (Thomas 2009:7). Other times, the assault occurs after the marriage ceremony has taken place on the couple’s wedding night (Thomas 2009:7). Not only does this degrading, emotionally distressing, and physically distressing, but it completely subordinates the woman to the man. Committing this abominable aggression aligns the hierarchy of control at the very beginning of the couples union.

As aforementioned, bride abduction in Bosnia has played a major role in forming social relations. During the Bosnian War in the early 1990s, horrific crimes against humanity occurred, including placing women of Bosnian descent into rape camps (Filice, Vincent, Adams, and Bajramovic 1994: 210). The emotional impact that these crimes against the women had is too extensive to gauge. Rape is defined in their research as thus “any sexual act with which the woman does not consent... anything that will put him in a coercive position of power” (Filice et al. 1994: 212). This definition is problematic for obvious reasons, because rape is described very
generally. In the research context of bride abduction it must be defined as vaginal rape and the taking of the woman's virginity. By making the woman submissive sexually, the man takes on the dominant role in the relationship. With bride abduction, rape is also used as a tool in order to increase power for the male (Thomas 2009:7). In Scully and Marolla's extensive research collected on those who committed rape, it is pivotal to note some of the key phrases that rapists used. It was often remarked in the interviews that they raped in order "to put women in their place" and a way to of displaying their "manhood" (Scully and Marolla 1985:256). In analyzing the functionality of bride abduction in Bosnia and multiple societies around the world, it is notable that these two acts, while different, are effective at "devaluing" women and maintaining dominance and control in each society.

The men who participate in bride theft usually take on a higher social status within their community after they've performed the act. The men are typically perceived to have more bravery and daringness (Bates 1974:277). This gives them more respect from members in their community. Since harm is usually inflicted on the victim of this crime, scholars are able to understand this practice as an act of aggression against women. Against the women, it is suggested that this is equivalent to the act of rape (Ayres 1974:245). However, comparing acts such as rape and bride abduction is nearly impossible because though both are life altering, they differ greatly in their constitution. Though as aforementioned, it is easy to see that while rape does not always occur in conjunction with bride abduction, it is definitely not unseen or uncommon. Against the father and the family of the woman, the act may be perceived of the loss of a valuable asset and diminishing to the father's
authority (Ayres 1974:245). The literature fails to take an empathetic view of the women and the emotional damage that may have been inflicted on account of the act of aggression. Much of it takes a functionalist approach to the issue of bride abduction. The men often use some sort of deception in order to steal their bride (Werner 2009:321).

Paradoxical Implications

There is significant paradox that exists in nearly every form of bride abduction across all cultures in which this practice exists. It lies in the shared belief that is wrong for a man to abduct a woman to become his bride and it is wrong for a woman to return home after she has become a victim of bride abduction (Werner 2009:322). If a woman returns home after she has been abducted, she takes on a new social status as “a girl who returned home” (Werner 2009:322). This is often very damaging to her respectability and her ability to find another spouse. The “girl who returned home” is looked upon as stubborn, which makes for a poor quality in a mate. Another negative factor is that her sexual purity will be questioned. Sometimes after the woman is abducted, she is raped soon after her capture (Thomas 2009:7). The woman takes on much shame after this violence and feels unable to return home and is forced to marry her captor/rapist. Sexual modesty is a highly favored trait for spouses in these male-dominated societies, and when this quality is questioned in a female, she is looked down upon. If a woman does manage to escape from her kidnapper, she will not be considered virginal in her society, whether the rape actually took place or not. (Thomas 2009:9). With the social stigmas, expectations, and normative traditions that exist with a woman’s
community she may find no choice but to stay with her abductor (Thomas 2009:8). It is often seen that the women in these situations experience physical, emotional, and psychological trauma (Thomas 2009:8). As a way to cope with their situation, it is frequently found that women begin to identify with and care for their abductor (Thomas 2009:8).

Werner performs several interviews with women and men in her field study of bride theft. The only people who actually spoke in favor of the practice were those men who had participated in bride abductions previously (Werner 2009:327). The men humored themselves in the recollections of their stories of the captured brides. They didn’t believe it was necessary for the woman to give her consent to marry, because no matter what she would eventually become happy with the marriage (Werner 2009:327). The women did not share this view with the men at all. They disdained the practice and questioned why it was still in use. Many activists question the traditional aspects of bride abduction.

Societies in which men can threaten their dominance over women is unsettling for activists. The potential violence threatened towards the women day in and day out is disempowering and makes it easier for men to dominate and control women (Werner 2009:328). The bride abduction itself weakens social bonds between families and communities (Bates 1974:284). The shame that results from this practice is disheartening for the involved parties.

THEORETICAL EXPLANATION

The framework of this research can be viewed through the lens of a multitude of several prominent feminist theorists throughout the history of the
movement. While the early feminists are typically viewed as the early female suffragists, the writing at that time was scattered and focused on certain topics that don’t carry the same relevance today.

Simone de Beauvoir, a French feminist, published a remarkable book entitled *Le deuxième sexe* in 1949, essentially based on the oppression of women in France, and in the larger spectrum, Western cultures, it is entirely applicable to non-Western cultures, as they exist in today’s globalized world. An initial and dominant position she maintains throughout her writing is that “what happened in the patriarchal regime is that man became master of woman” (de Beauvoir 1949:162). In many cultures, this has been seen to be true. The traditional male role has been “natural” above women and he in turn has subjugated her throughout history. Bride abduction is a purposeful and obvious demonstration of this traditionally held belief. De Beauvoir remarks that “in thus accepting her passive role, the girl also agrees to submit unresistingly to a destiny that is going to be imposed on her from without, and this calamity frightens her” (1949:314). Somewhat in passivity, the women who live in cultures in which bride abduction occurs live in a constant state of uneasiness. The woman does not know where and when she is safe. There have been instances in which men have broken into young girls homes in order to abduct her. In Ethiopia, it is not infrequent to have young girls 10 or 11 years old abducted without consent or a trace (Gena 2007). A woman is never safe from the oppressive nature of this practice she is already married. The mere matter of the fact is that the men who perpetuate this practice in societies do not respect the woman’s right to say no as much as they respect another man’s “possession” of her.
Virginity and chastity are prized in countries where bride abduction takes place. De Beauvoir offers a tantalizing remark in regards to these prevalent ideals of women in that:

“Virginity is demanded for more immediate reasons when a man regards his wife as his personal property. In the first place, it is always impossible to realize positively the idea of possession; in truth, one never has any thing or any person; one tries then to establish ownership in negative fashion. The surest way of asserting something is mine is to prevent others from using it. And nothing seems to a man to be more desirable than what has never belonged to any human being: then the conquest seems like a unique and absolute event” (de Beauvoir 1949:162-163).

The passage is extremely relevant in analyzing the subject at hand. The reinforcement of the belief that women are to be regarded as property and that man may possess her is at the forefront of her argument in the passage. A man taking a woman by force to be his bride and then taking her virginity is a practice of a primal nature. There is no inane right a male possesses that provides him with the rights to the female body in this fashion, or in actuality, any fashion at all. We may even argue that this is why rape is used as a tool during bride abduction. The man asserts his will over her and in taking from her what is so highly valued by society without consent; he takes what she perceives to be a valuable part of herself. Including the heavy shame that is directed at women after the loss of their virginity, we may reason this is the reason why so many women feel compelled to stay with their abductor. The passage suggests that once the man has indeed committed a sexual act with his new wife, she is then bound to him and his family for the rest of her life.

Another insight we may gain from this passage is the point de Beauvoir begins to articulate in the section regarding the idea of possession (of a female
body). Her remark about the male’s idea that possessing her is the way to prevent others from using it is designed to invoke an outward response for most of her readers. She is referring to the woman as the it in this sense. The labeling of a woman as such is debilitating and reduces her worth to that of an object. The pervasive belief of wife as a possession in society is what gives this statement its enormous strength. It is easy to take an object rather than a person because there is less an emotional component attached with this idea. A person supposedly has more worth than that of an object. However, we see that in some societies that treatment of women and objects seem to go hand in hand. An object may be regarded as having a monetary gain as well. People, however, are invaluable. Therefore, reducing a woman to a mere object there in fact makes her only a commodity to be obtained for her net worth rather than appreciating her for her in and of herself.

Woman’s condition is one that has survived and arisen out of ancient values and traditions that are somehow still prevailing over new and more-forward ways of thinking and progressing (de Beauvoir 1949:143). The old traditions that continue to control and rule half the global population are outdated and oppressive. There can be no actual forward momentum with the ideals that are perpetuated through the various facets that control all social life. Men continue to dominate the vast majority of the public spectrum. There is a horizontal space that women dominate and there is a horizontal arena above this space that men occupy. In the past years, especially the twentieth century, we have slightly closed the gap and called it progress. There are women who have been fooled by this closure and believe they are no longer oppressed. Though a few new “equality” laws have
assuaged them, alas there is still a monumental divide between the two groups at hand.

bell hooks also argues about the current state of “equality” that women have been afforded in the past years. She is a notable, prominent theorist in the scholarly field as well. Though being American theorist that makes her points differ a bit from de Beauvoir, she still provides critical insight into injustices against women that can be applied to bride abduction. Unlike many earlier original feminist thinkers, she openly criticizes other feminist theorists and remarks that there have not been enough feminist theorists who have focused on race or class distinctions. Her work aligns with conflict theory much more closely than other feminist theorists, and she describes the various social structures in which many are suppressed, oppressed, and manipulated. By siding with the conflict theorists, she is openly critical of the various social structures that uphold dominant, masculine ideologies and denounces them.

She argues that marginalized women have been traditionally perceived to be unable to change the circumstances of their lives and that women accept what they are presented with and do not become organized or angered by any of the conditions (hooks 1984:1). It is almost as though women are expected to be passive in this sense. In the patriarchal system women ought to submit to their lot in life without actively taking a voice and speaking out against the injustices that she and her fellow women face on a daily basis. Hooks labels women the silent majority (1984:1). The majority lies in the sense that women constitute half the population; however possess strikingly low numbers of positions of power, especially when
Another argument she reiterates is that “being oppressed means the absence of choices” (hooks 1984:5). Women in all of today’s global societies experience this phenomenon. Men have been permitted and free to live with fewer restrictions upon them than women. Sometimes, the gendered regulations are strictly written and mandated, where at other times they are verbally or culturally sanctioned, taught, and followed. In Kyrgyzstan bride abduction is illegal by law and in 2002 there were 12 reported cases (Lom 2004). Low numbers such as this encourage people to believe that the problem is not widespread and does not even exist. By speaking with local villagers and residents of Kyrgyzstan it is strikingly evident just how incorrect this number is. It is speculated that up to a third of Kyrgyz marriages take the form of bride abduction (Lom 2004). In countries where the practice exists, the women are extremely limited in regards on deciding whom they want as a spouse. Men can and may traditionally “take” any woman he pleases by physically using brute strength to snatch her from her home. Women do not have the equal say in the matter. Once she is taken, she all but loses her choice to return home. If she does, she is forced to live with the stigma of being a “girl who returned home” (Werner 2009:317).

As stated above, many women do not feel as if they are oppressed because they have *some* say in the choices they make. We may not have the same intense restrictions that women used to have in place, but this does not mean that the restrictions do not still exist (hooks 1984:5). Many women focus on the areas in
which they do not feel they are being oppressed and have aspects of freedom, and ignore the areas in which they are manipulated and exploited (hooks 1984:5). For this reason, many women feel as though they are not oppressed and have the same freedom and social mobility as men, when in reality, this is not the case.

In its most basic and concise form, feminism is the endeavor to end oppression of others based on sex and gender (hooks 1984: 24). There are many side goals to feminism as well, but once we have eradicated all gender-based oppression, the plethora of side goals will become accomplished with much more ease. One of the goals that the research at hand focuses on is the reduction of bride abduction by creating greater social awareness and understanding. It’s pivotal to analyze bride abduction from a conflict perspective and to argue that the practice can only exist in societies that treat women as inferior. As aforementioned, though the practice is technically illegal in many countries there is little if anything that people do to deter or prevent the abduction. The ideologies that exist help the power systems stay in place and do not leave any room to alter them. The argument “this is the way it’s always been done” needs to be taken off the table. The societies in which this practice exists need to commit “to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires” (hooks 1984:24). The systems that dominate societies globally are controlled by those few in power and as a result, many become marginalized. It’s imperative to wake up from this inertness and take new strides to recognize the inconsistencies that continue to dominate the systems that are running our nations.
For instance, if we delve deeper into this topic of feminism we have fervent outbursts from men and women alike who start campaigns such as #notallmen. The #notallmen campaign began as a movement against feminists and made claims that feminists make generalized statements about all men (Ryan 2014). Not only is this unfair and false, but defenses as such take precedence over the actual problems that feminists seek to address. Feminists do not label men as the enemy. The social constructs we are born into seek to elevate the status of men and reduce that of women. Feminists seek to create equality for all genders, not “When we cease to focus on the simplistic stance ‘men are the enemy,’ we are compelled to examine systems of domination and our role in their maintenance and perpetuation” (Hooks 1984:25-26).

In Westerner’s perceptions of bride abduction, usually the abductor is perceived to have relentless qualities who takes the women and forces her to marry him. Though this may be partially true, we cannot fail to recognize the role that women play in perpetuating the trend. When the man takes the bride-to-be back to his home following a bride abduction, typically she is lead to a room or area where his female relatives have congregated (Morton and Mojica 2011). Once there the female kin try to convince her to marry the male, sometimes by coercing her to put a white cloth upon her head, which symbolizes her agreement to the marriage. Through a series of manipulative and condemning arguments, the bride-to-be is usually convinced to proceed with the marriage (Lom 2004). This can take hours or even days at times, but in the vast majority of cases the female eventually agrees to wear the white ceremonial scarf. This demonstrates hooks’ argument that not only
is it the men who are perpetrating the gender notions and roles across society, but there are females who are actively involved in subjugating and maintaining the practices that demean their own gender as well. To change the system we need to first recognize the ideologies that are supporting. Instead of actively upholding the outdated traditional practices of the system, we need to speak up and recognize the divide that these practices create for us within our society.

With these remarks on the perpetuation of the dominant ideologies that manage to uphold practice with negatives outcomes for a significant portion of the population, we may turn to a more recent theorist, Sandra Bartky. Her work focuses on woman’s role in society in regards to structures of domination, control, and shame. The themes she speculates on can be applied to a diverse array of social relations between woman and man. Whether in the Western hemisphere or globally, the methods of subjugation for women that she outlines can span and permeate within almost any given culture in which patriarchal rule exists.

Bartky’s claim that “women are not just situated differently than men within the social ensemble, but are actively subordinated to them within it” highlights the main spectrum of her work (1990:84); she often reiterates this initial point through much of her work. In the case of bride abduction, it is clear that this module is fitting. Women are the non-dominant gender on almost every spectrum that isn’t directly related to domesticity. Their perceived importance in society lies in the fact that they provide men with an adult status, bear and care for children, and take care of the household. The man decides who, where, when, and how the marriage will take
place. The woman has the choice to either consent to the marriage or forever live her life in shame.

The common consensus is society today is that men are inherently different than women. The point is not even contested nor speculated, it is held as social fact. Often, people (including scholars) tend to categorize men and women, using umbrella terms that describe an entire gender’s typical moods, feelings or modes of behavior. Bartky highlights several of these applications for women including, but not limited to “shame; guilt... pervasive apprehension consequent upon physical vulnerability, especially the fear of rape or assault” (1990:84). She then goes further to emphasize that these feelings and moods are not so much gender-specific, as they are gender-based (Bartky 1990:84). Women are more prone to internalize and experience these characteristics because society encourages this mode of behavior. Shame is a daily aspect of life for many women, whereas for men, it typically isn’t. Guilt and fear of assault are both relevant as well. Women are more likely to experience and exhibit these traits than a man. When men do in fact display these traits, they are usually due to a form of emasculation, whereas when women experience these feelings, they are usually met with a type of powerlessness (Bartky 1990:84).

Focusing on the theme of shame, which plays a pivotal role in bride abduction, we may stress and explain why it is such a significant and contributing factor. Women engage in rituals of self-shaming (Bartky 1990:89). The feelings can be attributed to the high standards that are put onto women, especially in regards of modesty and sexual purity. In the case of bride abduction we are aware that this
atrocious act is committed against only women. Therefore these acts of “violations against women occur for the sole reason that they are women” (Sharratt and Kaschak 1999). The stigmatized notions and ideals that women lead their lives by are ingrained by a method that has been employed by men and women alike to subjugate the weaker class. In order to rupture these conceptions, we must, as a global society, wake up from our disenchanted state and focus on the fundamental issues that have created these notions.

**METHODOLOGY**

For my methodology I analyzed 3 different narratives on bride abduction and worked them into a cohesive flow that attempts to further develop the topic. I also interviewed a scholar who has worked firsthand with victims of bride abduction. The methods enable the highlight of the prevalence of the act. Using these three different narratives and the interview, we can compare and understand how the practice exists in different societies. It also attempts to widen the scope in which people view the practice. The methodology attempts to brings insight into the daily lives of the victims of bride abduction, people’s perceptions and acceptance of the trend, and the preventative measures that scholars are using in order to reduce the number of bride abductions.

I chose the different methodologies in order to gain a more comprehensive and exhausting view of the question at hand. The research is limited in a multitude of ways and it’s important to recognize this fact. I aimed to overcome this obstacle within my own personal research. It would be very difficult to find a way to gain statistics on this phenomenon on a global scale. Initially, I focused on Bosnia as my
undercurrent throughout the paper, because bride abduction has been largely ignored in this Yugoslavian country since the early seventies. However as I furthered my research, it became increasingly imperative to bring in other scholarly sources that focused on the traditions and beliefs that exist within the cultures that currently practice and perpetuate this tradition.

The topic of bride abduction is critical to note for my research context. The subject is extremely prevalent in many societies throughout the world, but today's Western scholars do not typically research it. This will be a potential disadvantage to the research, because it is difficult to find relevant material that can strongly correlate with the topic. There are many people who are aware of the practice, but know little of the pervasiveness throughout societies and even less have an idea on the methods we may use in order to deter the continuance of bride abduction. It is critical that we put this issue in the forefront of scholarly journals in order for the issue to reach more public awareness. Women are subjugated during the practice of bride abduction and it's important to raise public concern.

Research can be limiting and inhibiting on the subject, because there has been so little resolute or relevant scholarly data that has addressed it recently. It has also been difficult to remain objective in this research, especially when becoming increasingly unaware of the un-sympathetic views that scholars have used when researching this practice. Writing from an activist and feminist approach helped further my research into a more theoretical setting with an emphasis on historical treatment and perception of the practice. The documentary film that is focused on
bride abduction will be used to further illustrate the themes of shame, power, and dominance that pervade through the practice.

It will be difficult to obtain a causal relationship between data points, so I will seek a simple association at best. Through research, I believe I will find the shame women feel projected onto her by her family and community members throughout the whole experience of bride abduction (including the physical and sexual violence) is a leading component in determining the reasons why she decides to stay with her abductor. Shame is often overlooked in research as well as the pervasiveness of sexual assault that seems to occur in the majority of bride abductions. The research question spans across several different variables that affect the prevalence of the practice throughout modern societies.

The data presented here was collected using mixed methods. There has been a lack of recent published scholarly journals on the subject of bride abduction. Therefore, because of the deficit, I decided to interview notable scholars in the field who specialize in bride abduction and forced marriages. The scholar I was able to interview has worked with and researched the field of study more exhaustively and have firsthand experience working with the victims of bride abduction. To find multiple scholars who specialized in the topic, I initially began by contacting those whose research I used for my literature review. After the interviews, I transcribed the interviews fully before coding them and piecing together relevant information and themes. I interviewed two people in my research, however only one interview turned out to carry relevance and to fit in with the research.
The interview questions provided a more comprehensive view into the practice of bride abduction. They also provided insight into the gender constructs that are present in the societies in which each scholar has worked. The questions addressed the legality of the practice and why if it is outlawed (which it is in the vast majority of countries where it exists), it is still widely prevalent in traditionally valued societies of today’s modern world. Another focus of the questions was on the violence that is perpetrated during the act of bride abduction and what occurs within the first few days following the initial bride abduction.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted no longer than one and a half hours. I prepared with a list of questions and themes to focus on, altering the questions slightly for both scholars in order to make them more specific to their research or field of study. If relevant issues or topics came up, I kept the conversation flowing when necessary in order to establish rapport and to introduce ideas that I may have not thought of before collecting interviews. Each interviewee signed a consent form, which enabled me to record the interview, and guaranteed their anonymity (if desired).

My IRB was submitted and approved in early November. The initial goals of the research were to aim to provide a better understanding of the lives of the women who have been abducted brides. The feminist lens allowed me to introduce conflict theory and look at this cultural phenomenon focusing on themes of dominance and shame. It seeks to give a voice to the silent majority of women who have been victimized through this experience. Hopefully, it will bring greater public
and social awareness to the practice and will produce more advocates against the practice.

**DISCUSSION**

*Analysis of Film*

The powerful documentary entitled “Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan” presented by *Vice* in 2011 is a stunning and legitimate glimpse into bride abduction. Giving a comprehensive view of bride abduction we hear narratives from an array of people including: three different couples, Russell Kleinbach, a scholar who focuses on bride kidnapping, a movie director who made a film of bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan, and a woman who works at a women’s shelter. Using a semiotic analysis, it is possible to analyze this documentary in depth and to further comprehend the realm of bride abduction, as it exists in one of today’s modern societies. *Vice* uses an immersionist method of journalism in which the journalist engages himself or herself in the field or topic to be studied. In “Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan” we watch as journalist Thomas Morton witnesses and provides insight to bride kidnapping inside and outside the capital city of Bishkek.

We are lead into the documentary with a glimpse of the violence that is procured as a source of amusement. There is a game that the narrator describes as “polo with a dead goat.” After watching men run around on horseback with dead goats for a minute or so he remarks “one of the traditions [in Kyrgyzstan] a little less fun is kidnapping women and making them your bride” (Mojica and Morton 2011). The title sequence then starts to play and we see the goat dropped off into the goal behind the lettering. It is obvious that *Vice* is choosing to portray the Kyrgyz people
as a bit uncivilized and brutal at this point. Throughout the film, there are several features that lead to this representation as well. Men’s dominance over animals and women is a recurring element throughout. The first woman that appears in the film is in the middle of being taken in a bride abduction. She is screaming, crying, and struggling while the several men who have taken her are using all their muscle power to restrain and transport her, all the while laughing and making jokes about her impending fate.

There is one bride abduction in the documentary that is played out from the beginning until the end, including the planning stages, the actual kidnapping, the convincing of the bride to stay, and then the marriage and celebration itself. In this particular case the power dynamic between the male and female are made drastically clear. After being snatched violently from the watering hole by three of the groomsmen, Nurgul is dragged into the car screaming, resisting, and calling out for her mother (Mojica and Morton 2011). Though the audience learns earlier that the groom and bride-to-be were acquainted before this, it does not in any way excuse the violent attack on her personhood. After the initial abduction, she is driven to the groom’s home, where she is physically dragged from the car, all the while resisting, into a yurt, a common type of home in Kyrgyzstan. Almost immediately after entering, the men leave her and the women kin of the groom, Kubanti, began to enter and started to try to tie the white ceremonial marriage scarf onto her head. All the women in the yurt at this point were wearing their own scarves, although theirs were vibrant colors. The married women in Kyrgyzstan all
wear them (Brinkley 2011); Most of them had dressed exuberantly for the “happy” wedding celebration.

The men’s versus the women’s’ job in the practice differ greatly. Whereas the men perform the physical abduction, the women, in a way, perform the emotional abduction. Hooks tells us “it is the practice of domination most people are socialized to accept before they even know that other forms of group oppression exist” (1984:35). In the documentary, this can be viewed as strikingly cohesive. Since the women convincing the bride-to-be that this is right and is tradition. They are playing into the oppression of the brides, not understanding that this is an oppressive practice. For them, it is just the way things have always been done. Taking women’s role into consideration while analyzing bride abduction it becomes clearer why the practice is so fundamentally ingrained into the culture. Statistics demonstrate that around ½ of Kyrgyzstan marriages are completed by bride kidnapping (Mojica and Morton 2011). By this estimate, we can then speculate ½ the children born into society are raised by parents, one of whom has been kidnapped into marriage and the other as the abductor. Children born into this type of family will likely normalize these practices, and this form of marriage become symbolized as the right and accepted form of marriage among the Kyrgyz people. Their parents and elders teach them that this is the traditional form of marriage and performing it keeps customs alive. Gender equality does not seem to be a relevant factor or component for the families.

Another component that must be taken into account is the law enforcement. Throughout the video there are several references to police officers. Typically when
they are mentioned, a Kyrgyz says that they will not get into trouble after speaking with the policemen. The society is less constricted than typical Western cultures because of different normative practices. Bride kidnapping does not seem to be a concern for the law enforcement in Kyrgyzstan; In fact many are unaware that this is an illegal practice, and if they know of its illegality they do not persecute the perpetrators because of the traditional value it has attached to it (Mojica and Morton 2011). The average annual income in Kyrgyzstan comes out to equal roughly $870 (Brinkley 2011). The low income is one of the inhibitors to reducing the frequency of bride abduction. There are simply not adequate resources to address many of the social concerns of the society. The lawmakers are more concerned with addressing basic human needs before enforcing equality laws and educating the people on the subject at hand.

While watching and analyzing the film, it is evident to see why the practice continues. The controls that exist for the Kyrgyz citizens aren’t nearly as restrictive as the ones on Western societies. Morton does a poor job at hiding his contempt for the practice within the film and rightly so. Nurgul is a 16-year-old girl, who lies before giving consent to the marriage and says she is 18 (Mojica and Morton 2011). Though she vocalizes to our narrator that she was not ready to get married and wanted to finish school, she believes that one day she will be happy. Our narrator wonders aloud which is worse: one family losing a daughter or one family gaining a scullery maid? (Mojica and Morton 2011).

Though this system of marriage would not be acceptable in the Western world, instead of pointing fingers and throwing senseless blame onto the men in the
society it is pivotal to take a step back and focus on the fundamental issue at hand. The problem isn’t that men are dominating the women; it is that the physical stealing of women is an institutionalized practice that is accepted by nearly everyone in this society. Women are literally being treated as bartering goods. It is not unusual to see young brides traded for a small dowry and a farm animal. Since the end of the Soviet Union control in Kyrgyzstan the rate of bride kidnapping has been on the rise and will continue to do so until there are preventative measures put in place, repercussions for kidnappers, and available education on bride kidnapping.

*Otmica: Reading Between the Lines*

In a quest to truly understand the statutes of bride abduction we may also refer to the literature of scholars. As aforementioned the Bosnian word “otmica” encompasses both elopement and bride abduction, making the distinction between the two extremely difficult. While Doubt provides a brilliant collection of narratives of elopements of Bosnian women, we again see the ambiguity of elopement versus abduction. In chapter three, “An Extraordinary Elopement,” we read an account of a woman who was married at 14 years old. She was viewed in her village as a beautiful young woman, and even had a young suitor, a poor orphan boy (Doubt 2014:26). Though her parents probably wouldn’t have approved of their union, she spent many hours speaking with him outside her bedroom window into the late hours of the night. One day she begged her mother to allow her to go to a village festival, though hesitant initially her mother eventually acceded to her daughter’s request (Doubt 2014:23).
At the festival, a throng of boys surrounded her, one 12 years her senior seemed quite taken with her, but she paid him no mind since there were many boys of her own age in the vicinity. Later she felt a bit ill and went to her cousin’s home to rest for a bit when the man who was taken with her appeared and made her come to the window to speak for a moment (Doubt 2014:24). He left after a few short sentences. Feeling better, she returned to the festival and began to dance in a circle with her peers. Her cousin warned her that the man was planning to abduct her and stayed close to her. Suddenly a group of men attempted to pull her from the group into a cornfield. She managed to hold strong to a few of her friends instead of being pulled alone (Doubt 2014: 24).

The cornfield became ablaze with chaos and it wasn’t long before a policeman entered the scene and asked the girl if she intended to marry the man. She truthfully answered no. They could hear the man’s mother in the background shouting that she did not want the girl. Instead of breaking the scene apart, the policeman then took the girl aside and vouched for the man’s good character and said her father would approve. She then decided to acquiesce to the marriage because she was afraid her parents would found out that she’d been pulled from the circle and they would shame her (Doubt 2014:24-25).

As it turns out she ended up having a happy and fruitful marriage with the man, but we still must return to the original question. Was this or was this not bride abduction? There are three pivotal points that may allow us to demonstrate it was. Firstly, the girl had another suitor that she was involved with. She was not looking for a husband at the festival; she was merely a young girl celebrating with her peers.
Secondly, the elopements done in Bosnian society are typically done in secret, without approval from one or both sets of parents. The man’s mother was aware of the man’s desire to marry the girl. Though she adamantly disapproved, she was still aware and ultimately allowed the girl to come live in her house with them. Lastly and most importantly was the shame that persuaded the girl to go on with the marriage. She feared the shame she would experience if she denied the marriage. In a way, she was limited by her lack of knowledge. She knew that some shame would be assigned to the situation by she was not sure how much. This is what ultimately fueled her decision to consent to the marriage.

Though fundamentally different than some of the other abductions in past literature, it is almost certain the girl would not have agreed to the marriage if shame had not played a pivotal role. Without shame, the girl would not have felt obliged to marry the man. It is possibly because of her naiveté that she was unaware of the exact repercussions of her actions if she had refused. As de Beauvoir tell us the “the truth is that her situation is out of equilibrium, and for that reason it is very difficult for her to adapt herself to it” (de Beauvoir 1953:143). Since it was beyond the girl’s previous normalness in her childhood, this was most definitely her first decision that had a critical impact on the rest of her life. It certainly must have been a difficult time for the girl while making the decision.

_Bride Abduction in Scripture_

Though Christianity is the dominant religion for the Western world, there are many practices in the Christian bible that Westerners have deemed outdated and barbaric. Though it is no question that the Bible’s pages are lined with misogyny, we
can accentuate one specific example that pertains to the subject at hand, bride abduction. In my analysis of the passage I will argue that what transpires is a clear and purposeful depiction of bride abduction. It is seen distinctly in Judges 21:20-23. Before this passage, the Benjamites were angry that the Jabesh Gilead tribes did not present themselves to the Lord, which in turn meant their tribe would be obliterated. The Lord gave this advice to the Benjamites to order to aid them:

20 So they instructed the Benjamites, saying, “Go and hide in the vineyards and watch. When the young women of Shiloh come out to join in the dancing, rush from the vineyards and each of you seize one of them to be your wife. Then return to the land of Benjamin. 22 When their fathers or brothers complain to us, we will say to them, ‘Do us the favor of helping them, because we did not get wives for them during the war. You will not be guilty of breaking your oath because you did not give your daughters to them. 23 So that is what the Benjamites did. While the young women were dancing, each man caught one and carried her off to be his wife. Then they returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the towns and settled in them” (21 Judges 20-23: New International Version).

The Lord literally commands the Benjamites to commit bride abduction. Not once in this passage does it take into account the social impact this will have on the tribes nor the emotional impact it will have on the women. As de Beauvoir articulates “Man enjoys the great advantage of having a God endorse the codes he writes; and since man exercises a sovereign authority over women, it is especially fortunate this authority has been vested in him by the Supreme Being” (1952: 653-654). Man quite literally has the power to dominate women in anyway he deems necessary, as appropriated by his God. If the vast majority of Western philosophy and thought is based on a book that recommends these philosophies, it is quite
interesting at the way they choose to shame other cultures that abide by these practices.

Though to be fair, Christianity has never laid equal groundwork for men and women. From the beginning women are made inferior to men, because of Eve’s actions in the garden of Eden. The religion is based on hypocrisy. How can Western society or any Christian society achieve equality when its principles are so deeply rooted in misogyny? De Beauvoir maintains “all Christian literature strives to enhance the disgust that man can feel for woman.” (1952: 176). The passage above demonstrates this quite clearly, by not having any female representation whatsoever, besides their role as objects to be obtained by and to be used by men. The passage not only allowing, but encouraging men to steal their brides highlights that not only is this practice traditional in societies perceived as uncivilized, but civilized as well.

It is strikingly clear that the practices become normalized and accepted in the societies in which they exist. They are deemed to be natural and traditional practices. The same mental framework is applicable when basing assumptions for the natural world order based on the Bible. Passages like the one mentioned further affirm the stereotype that women are naturally inferior to men and are to be deemed as objects. Blind following of these rules and traditions symbolizes that people are unwilling to form their own opinions and moral obligations that are different.
Methods of Positive Deviance

Ashley Lackovich-Van Gorp’s piercing eyes blaze into mine as she describes her research. “It embodies everything that I’m working against, right? The control of women, the control of their bodies, the control of choices, physical harm, emotional harm, psychological harm, it gets them in a cycle of poverty and inequality and powerlessness.” She is a bright young scholar who specializes in forced marriage by abduction, focusing on child brides in Ethiopia. While many choose to go study the field, take their field notes, and go home, Lackovich-Van Gorp specialized in a type of participatory action research. Her methods included travelling back and forth to Ethiopia every other month, staying for a week or so, and meeting with a group of 43 women, half of whom had been abducted into marriage.

Bride abduction in the village is a very taboo affair. When a girl became married, no one was quite sure if it had been an arranged marriage or an abduction. The abductions were horrific. The victim was typically a child aged 10-14 years old; She would be coerced by men then abducted. After the abduction they would take her into the forest where they would circumcise and rape her. After this act, she is tied to him forever. The group worked together to form preventative measures to reduce the number of abductions in the village. They focused on using a form of positive deviance (PD), which were basically the out-of-the-norm techniques that girls employed that prevented them from being abducted. One of the major factors they came across was simply warning the children that this was a common practice and to not go off into the woods with men. In this particular village, the practice was so taboo (yet so common) that no one talked about it. The young, abducted girls
would be completely defenseless against her abductors. By the time the girls realized the practice occurred, it had already happened to them. Using PD, the women found by warning their daughters that such a practice exists, they could reduce the number of abductions.

The most fundamental deterrent from solving this problem in Ethiopia is the vast inequality between men and women. Men marry at 30, by abduction or an arranged marriage to a child bride arranged by her father. Then they essentially break her spirit with the circumcision and rape, and mold her into the wife/caretaker they need. The system itself is in dire need of renovation. It has become a vicious cycle and one that will never be ended unless it is confronted from all sides of the spectrum.

CONCLUSION

Bride abduction, bride kidnapping, bride theft, forced marriage. The practice takes so many forms, yet it is somehow so prevalent and arching over so many modern and past societies. There are many components that feed into the social practice at different outlets: bride price, parental controls of marriage, power systems, roles of dominance, economic units. However, it still can be boiled down to one overarching idea: Patrilineal society and misogynistic approaches of control. The practice does not exist outside of patrilineal society, that is a fact.

The victims of every way, shape, and form of bride abduction are leading lives of oppression. They experience loss of control and are manipulated into continuing the institutionalized patterns. One recurring theme is the emphasis on the traditional aspects of the practice. Women and men alike continue to play their
parts as pawns because the practice is deemed as culturally important and something that has always been done. In this manner “the girl seems absolutely passive; she is married, given in marriage by her parents. Boys get married, they take a wife” (de Beauvoir 1952:451). Women have no say in the manner. Their opinion does not merit any weight or significance, unless it is used to further the agenda of the men.

For instance, the women in Kyrgyzstan are the ones who ultimately convince the abducted brides to marry. The women do not realize they are subjugating their own gender. When a bride refuses in these situations the women spit and curse at her, assigning evil omens upon her, wishing her unhappy marriages and deformed children. Is this because she had the strength to resist what they could not? Is it because they have broken an important cultural tradition? The women are unable to articulate their reasoning for their malcontent, using certain hypothetical situations to prove their points.

Furthermore, we see a vast gap in the research when we encounter the major role that shame and rape both play within the practice. Both of these elements are pervasive in bride abduction and both lead to the perpetuation of this trend. Some of the literature fails to even mention either of these pivotal elements. It’s important to encourage future researchers to recognize the importance of these items and to note them in the broader understanding of bride abduction. Neglecting to draw attention to rape and shame inhibits us from further understanding the major components of the phenomenon.
It is evident that this is not just a crime of man versus women. The problem is that in the societies in which the practice exists it has become so institutionalized and so normalized that when a woman is dragged screaming and kicking into a vehicle, no one tries to stop it. No one calls for help. They laugh. They shrug their shoulders and give each other knowing looks. The practice will never be eliminated completely until gender equality is established. We cannot burden one race, one gender, and one society to take the blame for this practice.
REFERENCES


Survey of Bosnian Residents in 2014. 2014. Dataset obtained by Dr. Keith Doubt.
