

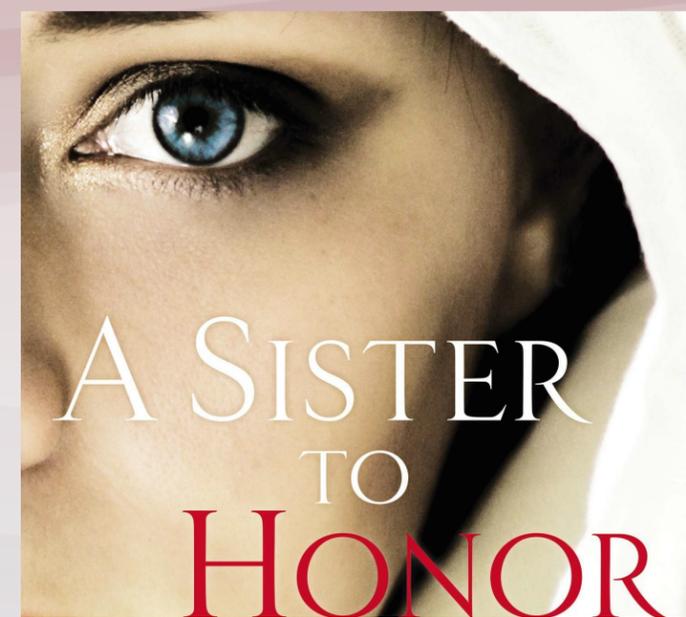


Book discussion questions

1. The book opens with the Pashtun proverb “Woman is the lamp of the family.” What do you think this means? Do you agree with the sentiment expressed?
2. Were you familiar with traditional Pakistani culture before reading *A Sister to Honor*? Did any aspects surprise you?
3. Throughout the book, Afia’s family seems conflicted about the Westernization of their children. They take pride when their children succeed in America; but they hold disdain for the host country. Do you sympathize with this contradiction or are you frustrated by it?
4. In Chapter 13, Shahid claims Afia commits a “lie of omission” by not telling him about her relationship with Gus. Do you believe that omitting information is the same as telling a lie?
5. Pakistani women are expected to maintain a strict modesty. How are American girls like Afia’s roommates, Patty and Taylor, characterized? Is this an accurate depiction?
6. Discuss how the concept of honor plays a role in the novel. What authorities define honor? Which characters do you think were honorable—or to the contrary, dishonorable?
7. In Chapter 16, Coach Lissy states, “Your people are not the only ones concerned with honor.” Cultural dissimilarities prevail more often than not in *A Sister to Honor*, but similarities also exist between characters and cultures. What are some other instances of this?
8. The American judicial system and *pashtunwali*, the code of the Pashtuns, have very different ideas about who has the right to judge an action and punish a crime. Compare these two systems. What are the flaws and benefits of each?
9. The phrase “You’re in America now” is used several times to counter Shahid and Afia’s defense of their Pashtun customs. Do you think they should have sacrificed their traditions and adapted?
10. Despite the heavy focus on honor, it is love that seems to drive some of the riskiest actions and largest sacrifices in this book. Can you think of any examples?
11. The Pakistani women in *A Sister to Honor* are expected to have an arranged marriage. What do you think of this custom? Would you marry for anything other than love?
12. Characters like Omar and Khalid seem to have a great deal of power, while others like Afia or Lema are stripped of it. Yet Afia sees her mother as possessing ultimate authority in the home. When considering all the characters in *A Sister to Honor*, who has power and who does not? What makes a character powerful or weak?



A Sister to Honor: Readers’ Guide



<http://lucyferriss.com/books/a-sister-to-honor>

Lucy Ferriss

“Vivid, compelling, as ineluctable as a Greek tragedy, *A Sister to Honor* illuminates the complexity of globalism’s cultural disjunctions.” –Claire Messud, author of *The Woman Upstairs*

Meet the characters



The Satar family

Tofan, landholder in Nasirabad, northern Pakistan

Farishta, Tofan’s wife, mother to Shahid, Afia, Sobia, and Muska

Shahid, 22, student-athlete at Enright College, Massachusetts

Afia, 19, student at Smith College, Massachusetts

Sobia, 13, in Nasirabad

Muska, 11, in Nasirabad

Khalid, 25, Tofan’s son and Farishta’s stepson, living in the mountains near Nasirabad

Saqib & Roshan, Tofan’s brothers

Azlan, Roshan’s son

Ana, Tofan’s mother

Omar, Farishta’s wealthy brother, in Peshawar

At Enright College

Lissy Hayes, Athletic Director & men’s squash coach

Ethan Springer, Lissy’s husband, a psychologist

Chloe, 3, Lissy & Ethan’s daughter

Don Shears, Enright college president

Charles Horton, chairman of the board

Afran, a Kurdish squash player

Chander, Yanik, Jamil, Tom, Johan, Carlos: other squash players on the men’s team

Gus Schneider, squash player and Afia’s boyfriend

Margot, Meaghan, Evie, Lydia: squash players on the women’s team

Ernesto, the football coach

Other characters

Lema, Afia’s best friend in Nasirabad

Sue Glasgow, biology professor at Smith

Patty & Taylor, Afia’s roommates at Smith

Sara Desfani, Iranian-American lawyer in New York

Esmerelda, Carlotta, “the aunties”: Afia’s co-workers at the Price Chopper

Woman is the lamp of the family.
–Pashtun proverb

The idea for *A Sister to Honor* came close to home. Trinity College, where I teach, has the best squash team in the country. Its players hail from wildly different cultures and religions, and yet they bond as a team in order to succeed. Through my own family, I’ve learned about competitive sports scholarships to American universities; I’ve also known many coaches who care about their players but are torn between what’s best for the player and what it takes to win. As I observed the Trinity team, I wondered: What if a talented player from a conservative culture got a scholarship here and persuaded his family to let his younger sister, a brilliant girl, come with him to the United States to study? And what if that sister were to fall in love?

At that point I realized I could not invent the answers to my questions. I had to go to the source. So I traveled to northern Pakistan, to Peshawar and the countryside. I experienced the warm, almost limitless hospitality of the Pashtun

people. I came to understand something of their history and their current struggles. And I talked to families—fathers and mothers, young men and young women—until I felt I understood something of what might happen, and why. And then I sat down, full of apprehension, and wrote *A Sister to Honor*.

This is a novel about Pakistani people in America, but it is also a novel about America. About our own sense of honor, and where and how we compromise it. About the risks we take with our ambitions, and with our hearts. I hope you enjoy it.

Lucy Ferriss is the author of seven novels, including A Sister to Honor and The Lost Daughter, a Book-of-the-Month Club pick. Learn more about her travel and her writing at <http://lucyferriss.com/blog>



“With Malala Yousafzai’s winning the Nobel Peace Prize, Ferriss’ book is breathtakingly pertinent... A heartbreaking situation, illuminating the cultural gap between the modern and traditional world.”

RT Book Reviews