



Conditional aggression: Perceptions of male violence in response to threat and provocation



Conor J. O'Dea*, Steven T. Chalman, Angelica M. Castro Bueno, Donald A. Saucier

Kansas State University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Masculine honor
Individual differences
Violence
Men and masculinity
Confrontation of threat

ABSTRACT

Masculine honor ideology refers to beliefs dictating men should defend against threats, often through violent responses. Research has shown masculine honor beliefs are associated with more positive perceptions of men who defend against threat and less positive perceptions of men who do not defend against threat. Across four studies, we extended these findings by examining whether, as a function of masculine honor beliefs, men are perceived more positively simply for being violent, or if their reputations are only enhanced when they respond violently to real threats. Further, we examined whether situational factors (size of the opponent, outcome of the fight, and whether their goal was achieved) affected perceptions of men as a function of masculine honor beliefs. Our results showed that as perceivers' masculine honor beliefs increase, they perceive men more positively when they confront threats, and when they win their fight, but not when they behave violently in general.

1. Introduction

Most boys are taught from a young age to be polite and interact with others in a respectful manner. However, in certain honor-based cultures, these teachings are more than mere suggestions. These *Cultures of Honor* have norms that dictate that men should adhere to a strict code of conduct in their treatment of others which corresponds to the treatment they expect to be afforded by others. If these expectations are not met, cultures of honor dictate swift reassertion of masculinity as a way for men to reclaim their reputation. One such Culture of Honor which has been extensively examined is in the American South. In the 18th century the Southern United States rapidly developed into a region which benefited economically from sheep herding. Northern states developed agricultural societies with crops being easily protected from theft, but Southern herdsmen needed to establish a tough reputation to ward off potential livestock thieves (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994).

This reputation is built by both preemptive and retaliatory responses to threats and insults (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Saucier, O'Dea, & Stratmoen, in press). We contend these motivations function as both a sword and a shield. As a sword, any threats to honor are dealt with swiftly, and often with violence as a way for men to reassert their masculinity (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994). The reputation individuals establish for themselves by this immediate and decisive response toward any threat would then act as a shield fending off future threats from others. Likewise, the cultivation of this reputation also has influence over the physical appearance individuals present toward others (e.g.,

muscularity), with an emphasis on being seen as a “hard target”, such that their appearance functions as a shield to deter future threats (Saucier, O'Dea, et al., in press). Accordingly, violence as a response and deterrent to threats is more acceptable and, at times, expected in cultures of honor. We examined whether masculine honor beliefs are associated with increased endorsement of violence generally, or only in response to insults or threats directed at a man's masculinity. Further, we examined whether situational factors (e.g., the size of an opponent) and outcome variables (e.g., whether the man successfully wins the confrontation and whether he succeeds in defending against the threat) influence perceptions of men who defend others from threat. These questions have been understudied in the literature, with existing empirical studies largely focusing on analyzing archival data such as crime statistics between Northern and Southern regions in the United States (e.g., Cohen, 1998). Existing research has not taken into account the role of individual differences in masculine honor beliefs or aspects of the situation that may impact perceptions of men who respond violently to insults and threats.

1.1. Masculine honor as an ideology

By definition, the Southern Culture of Honor is described in terms of a regional difference compared to other regions of the United States. However, there has been a recent shift in the literature, such that researchers have begun to examine masculine honor ideology as an individual difference (Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2012; Rodriguez

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: codea@ksu.edu (C.J. O'Dea).

Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2002; Saucier et al., 2016; Saucier & McManus, 2014; Saucier, O'Dea, & Strain, 2016). This research has explored the idea that while an individual may be socialized within a particular cultural context, ultimately the individual chooses whether to accept or reject the cultural values of a particular region (Leung & Cohen, 2011). As such, masculine honor ideologies transcend regional boundaries (Saucier et al., 2016; Saucier, Miller, Martens, O'Dea, & Jones, *in press*; Saucier, O'Dea, et al., 2016). From this expanding area of research, measures such as the Masculine Honor Belief Scale (MHBS; Saucier et al., 2016; Saucier, O'Dea, et al., 2016) have been created to demonstrate individualized honor belief adherence. Masculine honor beliefs have been used as predictors of individuals' reactions and responses to threats, insults, rejections, and provocation, on both emotional (e.g., anger/shame) and behavioral (e.g., physical violence) levels (see Saucier, Miller, & O'Dea, *submitted*; Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2012; O'Dea, Castro Bueno, & Saucier, 2017; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2002; Saucier et al., 2016; Saucier & McManus, 2014; Saucier, O'Dea, et al., 2016; Saucier, Till, Miller, O'Dea, & Andres, 2015; Vandello, Cohen, Grandon, & Franiuk, 2009).

Specifically, research has shown individuals higher in masculine honor beliefs express stronger negative attitudes toward rape and women who have been raped (Saucier, Strain, Hockett, & McManus, 2015), and prioritize the prevention and punishment of rape (Saucier, Martens, & Kubik, *in preparation*; Saucier, Strain, et al., 2015). Men higher in masculine honor have also been shown to take more risks (Barnes, Brown, & Tamborski, 2012), be more concerned with their masculinity (Saucier, O'Dea, et al., *in press*), and report higher incidents of depression (Osterman & Brown, 2011) while also having more negative perceptions of mental health services (Brown, Imura, & Mayeux, 2014). Osterman and Brown (2011) describe these effects as stemming largely from men failing to adhere to the norms of the Southern culture of honor in the American South due to a “hypersensitivity” to reputational failure. These measures have been shown to predict perceptions of men who respond physically to insults (e.g., O'Dea et al., 2017) and the self-reported likelihood of men themselves responding physically to insults (Saucier et al., *submitted*; Saucier, Till, et al., 2015). Further, individual differences in masculine honor beliefs explain differences in regional attitudes regarding the acceptance of aggression in response to insults, where violence is seen as more acceptable in the American South versus the American North (Saucier, Miller, et al., *in press*). Thus, it is clear masculine honor beliefs are important in predicting men's behaviors and attitudes toward a wide variety of outcomes.

1.2. Threats to masculine honor

Threats to masculine honor include intended harm or insult toward a man, his family, significant other, property, or reputation (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994, 1997). Threats may be extreme forms of violence such as the murder or rape of a significant other (Baaz & Stern, 2009) or attacks on personal property (e.g., theft and vandalism). However, threats may also be less extreme in nature such as insults targeted at an individual (e.g., Saucier et al., *submitted*; Saucier, Till, et al., 2015).

A man's reputation can be described as the way others view him based on his actions and dealings with others. The theory of precarious honor postulates the state of “being a man” is vulnerable. This masculinity can be enhanced as well as diminished by how his actions are perceived by others (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). Threats and insults require decisive and aggressive responses from men (Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2012; Harinck, Shafa, Ellemers, & Beersma, 2013) because manhood needs to be earned and continuously demonstrated to preempt future threats (Bosson & Vandello, 2011; Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford, Weaver, & Wasti, 2009; Netchaeva, Kouchaki, & Sheppard, 2015; Saucier et al., 2016; Saucier, O'Dea, et al., 2016; Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008). In this manner, violence can serve as a tool not only to build a reputation, but also to defend or

reclaim honor, and for this reason, violence is viewed as necessary and encouraged (Hayes & Lee, 2005; Hochstetler, Copes, & Forsyth, 2014; Nisbett, 1993; Vandello, Ransom, Hettlinger, & Askew, 2009; Weaver, Vandello, Bosson, & Burnaford, 2010). This violence in response to threat allows one to assert a sense of dominance over the opposing threat. Dominance is a social perception largely earned through demonstrations of power over others (see Maner, 2017). Thus, rather than being vilified for their violent reactions, men are viewed preferentially for having come to the defense of their honor, and men gain a sort of social rank for reasserting their masculinity (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994, 1997; O'Dea et al., 2017).

But are men simply rewarded for exhibitions of violence or is violence only encouraged to defend against threats to one's masculinity? Interestingly, there is speculation in cultures of honor that men are not expected to behave violently in general, but only in response to threat. Instead, aside from provocation and threats to masculine honor, men are expected to treat others with respect and dignity (e.g., norms of politeness; see Cohen, Vandello, Puente, & Rantilla, 1999). That said, men continue to demonstrate their masculinity in ways that preemptively deter threats and assert masculinity such as their posture, their musculature, their facial expressions, and their apparel (Saucier et al., *in press*). It is in this way men gain a sense of prestige (Maner, 2017), a reputation as someone not to be messed with. As discussed, previous research has examined these effects by comparing the motivations behind murders in both the Northern and Southern United States with more *honor-based* killings happening in the South, explaining the difference in overall rate of violence in the American South. However, no previous research to our knowledge has examined perceptions of men who exhibit violence instrumentally in response to threat versus exhibiting violence for the sake of being violent (i.e., when there is no threat).

2. Study 1

In Study 1, we examined whether masculine honor beliefs moderated perceptions of a protagonist who confronted versus did not confront an antagonist who, following bumping into the protagonist's shoulder, either insulted or apologized to the protagonist. Building on previous research, we hypothesized a three-way interaction between masculine honor beliefs, insult, and confrontation. Specifically, consistent with O'Dea et al. (2017), we predicted masculine honor beliefs would enhance participants' masculine perceptions of a protagonist who confronted an antagonist who insulted the protagonist, but diminish participants' masculine perceptions of a protagonist who did not confront an antagonist who insulted the protagonist. Further, extending the findings of O'Dea et al. (2017), we predicted masculine honor beliefs would be associated with diminished masculine perceptions of a protagonist who confronted an antagonist who did not insult the protagonist, but would have no impact on perceptions of a protagonist who did not confront an antagonist who did not insult the protagonist. These results provide a specific test of the long-standing assumption in research on masculine honor that men are not simply rewarded for being violent, but are rewarded for being violent in response to insult or threat as a function of masculine honor.

2.1. Study 1 method

2.1.1. Participants

Two hundred eighty participants participated in the current study. Participants were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical TURK software and paid 5 cents for their participation. One participant did not complete any of the measures and 23 additional participants did not complete the MHBS (Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale) and were removed from data analysis. Of the remaining 256 participants, 174 self-identified as female and the remaining 81 participants self-identified as male. We did not have precedent for an estimated effect size so we deferred to

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7248574>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7248574>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)