Individual differences explain regional differences in honor-related outcomes

Donald A. Saucier*, Stuart S. Miller, Amanda L. Martens, Conor J. O'Dea, Tucker L. Jones

Kansas State University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Much research has been devoted to the investigation of both the culture of honor residing in the American South and the individual difference ideologies that stem from this culture. The purpose of our study was to investigate the ability of individual differences in masculine honor beliefs (Saucier et al., 2016) to explain the regional differences that Southern and Northern men showed on the original measures of honor-related outcomes employed by the seminal scholars in culture of honor research (e.g., Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Nisbett, 1993). Consistent with hypotheses, our results replicate regional differences in honor-related responses, but also show that individual differences in masculine honor beliefs mediate these regional differences. Thus, our research extends the notion of cultures of honor beyond their regional boundaries, and highlights the value in conceptualizing honor as a psychological individual difference factor.

1. Introduction

Cultures of honor exist around the world (e.g., Figueredo, Tal, McNeil, & Guillen, 2004; Fischer, Manstead, & Rodriguez Mosquera, 1999; Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2002), with research particularly devoted to the culture of honor in the American South (e.g., Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Cohen & Nisbett, 1997; Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996; Cohen, Vandello, Puente, & Rantilla, 1999; Cohen, Vandello, & Rantilla, 1998; Nisbett, 1993). This culture of honor is characterized by men's devotion to the protection of themselves, their reputations, families, and property against threats and insults (e.g., Brown, 2016; Nisbett, 1993; Saucier & McManus, 2014). Originating from historically making their livelihoods by herding, a profession vulnerable to poaching and other threats, men in the American South strive to demonstrate they are tough, and will defend against insults and threats with physical aggression if necessary(e.g., Brown, 2016; Nisbett, 1993).

Comparatively, men (especially White men) in the American South commit more violent crimes in response to insults (e.g., Brown, Osterman, & Barnes, 2009; Cohen, 1998; Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Nisbett, 1993); demonstrate more physical aggression in response to insults (e.g., Cohen et al., 1996; Cohen et al., 1999; Cohen & Nisbett, 1997); report more aggressive thoughts, emotions, attitudes, and support for physically aggressive responses to threats and insults (e.g., Cohen et al., 1996; Vandello, Cohen, & Ransom, 2008); perpetrate more school shootings (Brown et al., 2009); and die more often in accidents

while attempting to demonstrate their honor (Barnes, Brown, & Tamborski, 2012). Thus, it appears clear cultures of honor perpetuate ideologies that drive men to aggressively demonstrate, protect, and maintain their masculine honor against potential challengers.

Recent research has operationalized the ideologies underlying these regional differences as individual differences that exist both within and beyond the traditional regional confines of cultures of honor (Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2012; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2002; Saucier et al., 2016; Vandello, Cohen, Grandon, & Franiuk, 2009). Higher levels of endorsement of masculine honor ideology are associated with more negative emotions and more aggressive responses to insult, provocation (O'Dea, Castro Bueno, & Saucier, 2017; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2002; Saucier et al., 2016; Saucier, Till, Miller, O'Dea, & Andres, 2015), terrorist threat (Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2012), and romantic rejection (Stratmoen, Greer, Martens, & Saucier, In Press). Higher levels of endorsement of masculine honor ideology are also associated with support for war and intrusive security policies (e.g., Saucier, Webster, McManus, Sonnentag, O'Dea, & Strain, In press), risk taking (Barnes, Brown, & Tamborski, 2012), depression (Osterman & Brown, 2011), perceiving it is weak to seek mental health services (Brown, Imura, & Mayeux, 2014), greater muscularity concerns (Saucier, O'Dea, & Stratmoen, In Press), and negative perceptions of rapists and women who have been raped (Saucier, Strain, Hockett, & McManus, 2015).

Despite a call for the joint examination of cultural and individual differences in understanding how honor manifests (see Leung & Cohen, 2011), only a few studies have investigated the potential for these

---

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: saucier@ksu.edu (D.A. Saucier), almartens@ksu.edu (A.L. Martens).

individual differences to explain the regional differences in honor-related outcomes documented in the seminal work on cultures of honor. For example, Barnes, Brown, & Osterman (2012) found White men from the American South, compared to White men from the American North, scored higher on their measure of masculine honor ideology and, in a separate study, found they more greatly endorsed lethal retaliation against terrorist attacks. However, Barnes, Brown, & Osterman (2012) did not test if the differences in masculine honor ideology mediated the differences on the endorsement of lethal retaliation against terrorist attacks. Similarly, Barnes, Brown, & Tamborski (2012) examined differences between honor and non-honor states in the United States in accidental death rates in one study, and examined the association between their measure of masculine honor ideology and tendencies to take risks in a second study, but did not directly test if differences in masculine honor ideology mediated the regional differences.

Our purpose was to investigate the ability of individual differences in masculine honor ideology to explain regional differences White men show on the exact measures of honor-related outcomes originally employed by seminal culture of honor researchers. These measures were used to establish the notion of "culture of honor" in the social psychological literature and thus allows our research to both replicate and extend seminal work. First, we hypothesized we would replicate the extant literature by showing White men in the American South showed greater levels of honor-related outcomes than did White men in other regions of the United States. Second, we hypothesized any regional differences on these honor-related outcomes would be mediated by the participants' scores on an individual difference measure of their masculine honor beliefs. By using an individual difference measure of their masculine honor beliefs to potentially explain the regional differences on several dependent measures of honor-related outcomes employed in the seminal research on cultures of honor, our research extends the notion of cultures of honor beyond their regional boundaries, and highlights the value in conceptualizing honor as a psychological individual difference.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants ($N = 340$) were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk and were compensated $0.15 for their participation. To stay consistent with research on the culture of honor in the United States, which used only White males to establish the construct (e.g., Cohen et al., 1996; Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Nisbett, 1993), we advertised the study as "Men's Perceptions of Aggression" and requested only male workers in the description of the study on Mechanical Turk. We removed 102 participants' data from our analyses who did not indicate they were White. We also removed 11 participants who did not indicate they were male, 9 participants who could not be coded into Northern or Southern regions, and 12 participants who had missing data on our masculine honor beliefs measure or honor-related responses. Of the remaining 206 participants the majority were single (65.6%), White male participants aged 18 to 67 ($M = 31.72$, $SD = 10.04$). Participants' modal education level was a four-year college degree (median = two-year college degree) and their modal annual household income was under $20,000 (median = $40,000–$49,000). Using a power analysis for our planned 3×2 ANOVA, we determined this sample size would give us sufficient power (> 0.90) to detect moderate effect-sizes ($f > 0.30$) at $\alpha < 0.05$.

2.2. Procedure

Participants completed an informed consent, demographic questions, and the Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale (MHBS; Saucier et al., 2016). Participants' then responded to a randomized series of honor-related scenarios and items. Upon completion of the measures (approximately 10 min), participants were thanked, debriefed, and compensated.

2.3. Variables and measures

2.3.1. Region and community type

So that we could test whether masculine honor beliefs and honor-related responses differed by where participants were from (see Vandello et al., 2008; Vandello et al., 2009), we coded participants' responses to the question: "*What state are you from (i.e., where you grew up or spent most of your life)?*" using the categorization system used in prior research (e.g., Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Nisbett, 1993; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996); participants who indicated they were from Southern states were coded as Honor Region ($n = 53$), and participants who did not indicate they were from Southern states were coded as Non-Honor Region ($n = 153$). Additionally, due to differences between honor regions and non-honor regions in rural communities reported in the literature (e.g., Nisbett, 1993; Reaves, 1992; Reaves & Nisbett, 1994), participants indicated their community types as urban ($n = 44$: North = 36, South = 8), suburban ($n = 112$: North = 83, South = 29), or rural ($n = 50$: North = 34, South = 16).

2.3.2. Masculine honor beliefs

We used the 35-item MHBS (Saucier et al., 2016) to measure individual differences in endorsement of masculine honor beliefs. Participants rated their levels of agreement with each item (e.g., "*It is very important for a man to act bravely*"; $\alpha = 0.94$) using 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 9 (*Strongly Agree*) Likert-type scales. Scores on the MHBS were calculated by averaging participants' responses across the items with higher ratings indicating higher levels of endorsement of masculine honor beliefs.

2.3.3. Honor-related responses

To test our hypotheses, we employed scenarios and dependent variables used previously to measure various aspects of honor in seminal studies that found regional differences in masculine honor-related outcomes (Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2012; Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2002; Vandello & Cohen, 2003). Participants completed the measures listed below in randomized orders:

2.3.3.1. Emotional Reactions to Insult.
Rodriguez Mosquera et al. (2002) found participants from an honor culture reported more anger-related emotions in response to insults than did those from a non-honor culture. We used the threats to masculine honor and made small changes to their wording (i.e., 'café' to 'bar'; 'partner' to 'significant other'):

> *You have a significant other and you are with this person in a bar. Another person you do not know begins to annoy your significant other. Your significant other reacts quickly and before you can do anything the other person leaves. If others were then to say to you: "You are not even capable of protecting your own significant other," to what extent would you…?*

Participants then completed five items (e.g., "*To what extent would you feel enraged/insulted/shame*") to measure their emotional reactions using 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very much*) Likert-type scales.

2.3.3.2. Endorsement of violence.
Using items and scenarios from previous research (Blumenthal, Kahn, Andrews, & Head, 1972), Cohen and Nisbett (1994) found Southern men endorsed violence serving protective or retributive functions more so than did Northern men. We used several of the Cohen and Nisbett (1994) measures in our current study:

2.3.3.2.1. Support for Violence.
Our participants rated their level of agreement with seven items measuring Support for Violence (e.g., "*It is often necessary to use violence to prevent violence*") using 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*) Likert-type scales.