



## Short Communication

## Honor and I: Differential relationships between honor and self-esteem in three cultural groups

Sheida Novin<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Betül Tatar<sup>a</sup>, Lydia Krabbendam<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup> Research Center for Group Dynamics, Institute for Social Research, University of MI, Ann Arbor, United States<sup>b</sup> Psychology Department, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands<sup>c</sup> Department of Educational Neuroscience, Faculty of Psychology and Education, LEARN! Institute, VU University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 14 February 2015

Received in revised form 26 May 2015

Accepted 27 May 2015

Available online xxxxx

## Keywords:

Culture  
Mental health  
Turkey  
Integrity  
Family  
Reputation  
Values

## ABSTRACT

Honor is often defined as one's self-esteem through one's own eyes as through the eyes of others. This definition assumes that endorsing honor values is universally related to one's self-esteem. Yet, prior work shows that the salience of honor in individuals' lives differs across cultures, which implies that honor would be differentially related to self-esteem across cultural groups. In the present study, we examined the contribution of three honor components (integrity, reputation, family honor) to the prediction of self-esteem in three cultural groups (Dutch, European American, Turkish). Consistent with prior work that describes the Dutch and (Northern) European Americans as low-honor groups, we found that none of the honor components were associated with self-esteem in these groups. In the Turkish group, which has been described as a high-honor group, honor integrity was associated with higher levels of self-esteem and family honor was associated with lower levels of self-esteem. Taken together, the findings indicate that honor cannot be universally defined as one's self-esteem, since the salience of honor endorsement for one's self-esteem differs across cultural groups.

© 2015 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

## 1. Introduction

Honor is often defined as an individual's self-esteem, based on Pitt-Rivers' (1966) quote, "honor is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society" (p. 21). In line with the idea that one's self-esteem is related to living up to honor concerns, the most commonly used honor-scale measures endorsement of honor values by asking participants to rate the extent to which honor-relevant behavior damages one's self-esteem (Rodríguez Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2002a). However, the link between honor and self-esteem should not be universally assumed, given that cross-cultural research has shown that the salience of honor concerns differs across cultures (e.g., Cross et al., 2014; Uskul, Cross, Sunbay, Gercek-Swing, & Ataca, 2012). In the current study, our aim was to examine the contribution of three types of honor concerns (integrity, reputation, and family honor) on self-esteem in two typical low-honor groups (Northern European Americans, Dutch) and one typical high-honor group (Turkish).

When asked to define honor, people around the globe report similar components of honor (Cross et al., 2014; Guerra, Giner-Sorolla, & Vasiljevic, 2012). Specifically, they report personal aspects related to integrity (e.g., being trustworthy, doing the right thing, being loyal to

one's own principles) and social reputation (e.g., having a positive social image and status). Group-related aspects are also reported in which one's own honor is connected to that of the in-group, such as one's family. Family honor refers to the concern for, and protection of the honor of the family; one's own honor can be influenced by actions of family members and vice versa (Rodríguez Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2000, 2002b).

Even though honor was a central concern in daily life in Medieval Western Europe, today Western Europe and the Northern U.S. are referred to as the so-called low-honor cultures, in contrast to the so-called high-honor cultures, such as those in the Mediterranean, Middle East, North Africa, and the Southern U.S. (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996; Uskul et al., 2012; see the online Supplemental materials for a description of the historical decline of honor in Western Europe). Specifically, the Dutch culture can be considered as a prototypical low-honor culture in which honor values are not part of one's daily life and are rated as less important than in high-honor cultures (Rodríguez Mosquera et al., 2000, 2002b; Cihangir, 2013). Similarly, the Northern United States has been described as a low-honor culture, and is often compared with the high-honor Southern United States (Cohen et al., 1996). Research shows that Northerners are less likely to respond with intense emotions and behaviors when one's honor is threatened than Southerners (Cohen et al., 1996). In contrast, Turkey can be considered as a prototypical high-honor culture, in which honor plays a central role in one's everyday life (Uskul et al., 2012). Honor in Turkey has been described as a valued possession, a

\* Corresponding author at: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, MI 48106, United States.

E-mail address: [sheidanovin@gmail.com](mailto:sheidanovin@gmail.com) (S. Novin).

value that guides one's moral behavior and ties the relationships between oneself and other members of the in-group.

Although the majority of honor research focuses on emotional and behavioral reactions to honor-threatening situations as a function of differences in degree of endorsing honor values (e.g. van Osch, Breugelmans, Zeelenberg, & Bölük, 2013; Uskul et al., 2012), we take another approach. In the current study we examined the extent to which honor concerns contribute to a person's self-esteem in three cultural groups. Our hypothesis was that only in the Turkish group, more endorsement of honor would contribute to the prediction of higher self-esteem. Given that honor has less significance in the Dutch and North American cultures, we did not hypothesize an association between self-esteem and the endorsement of honor values in the Dutch and European American groups. We took gender into account in our analyses, as some studies have demonstrated gender effects when examining honor (e.g., Cihangir, 2013).

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

A total of 102 Dutch (43% male;  $M_{age} = 21.45$ ,  $SD = 2.76$ ), 106 European American<sup>1</sup> (46% male;  $M_{age} = 18.91$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ), and 136 Turkish (49% male;  $M_{age} = 20.66$ ,  $SD = 1.97$ ) psychology undergraduates were presented with two questionnaires in their first language (i.e. Dutch, English, Turkish, respectively). Both questionnaires were already available in Dutch and English, but were translated from English into Turkish by a bilingual speaker and back translated by the second author. The Dutch and European American participants participated for course credit and completed the questionnaires at a computer in the laboratory. The Turkish participants participated on a voluntary basis and completed paper-and-pencil questionnaires in their classroom. The study took approximately 15 min.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Self-esteem

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) consists of 10 statements (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Half of the items are negatively formulated and were therefore reversed coded. Example items are, "I feel that I am a person of worth at least on an equal basis with others" and "I certainly feel useless at times". Cronbach's alpha's were good in each cultural group,  $\alpha's > .82$  (Table 1 in Supplemental materials).

#### 2.2.2. Honor

The Honor Concern Scale (based on Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2000) consists of 15 statements (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Theoretically, the scale consists of three subscales: *honor integrity*, reflecting a person's trustworthiness, loyalty and good character ( $\alpha's > .66$ , e.g., "Not keeping my word would impair my honor"); *honor reputation*, reflecting a person's positive reputation and social image ( $\alpha's > .71$ , e.g., "My honor depends on the appreciation and respect that I get from others"); *family honor*, reflecting a person's care for the honor and image of their family ( $\alpha's > .77$ , e.g., "I am aware that I could impair the honor of my family by acting disgracefully"). Factor analyses confirmed the 3-factor structure for each of the groups (Table 2 in Supplemental materials).

<sup>1</sup> The majority (95.5%) of the European American participant was from the Northern United States, a small minority (4.5%) was from the Southern states (Cohen et al., 1996).

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Preliminary descriptive analyses

We started examining cultural group and gender differences in the key variables (see Table 1 for means and SDs in Supplemental materials).

#### 3.1.1. Self-esteem

A univariate analysis with cultural group and gender as between subjects variables revealed a main effect of cultural group,  $F(2, 338) = 3.17$ ,  $p = .043$ ,  $d = 0.27$ . European Americans ( $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) reported higher levels of self-esteem than the Dutch ( $M = 5.05$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ),  $F(1, 338) = 4.98$ ,  $p = .026$ ,  $d = 0.24$ , and the Turkish participants ( $M = 5.08$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ),  $F(1, 338) = 4.67$ ,  $p = .031$ ,  $d = 0.24$ . The two latter groups did not differ,  $p = .815$ . No main or interaction effects of gender were found,  $ps > .177$ .

#### 3.1.2. Honor

We performed an analysis of variance with cultural group and gender as between subjects variables and the honor scales (honor integrity, honor reputation, family honor) as within subjects variables. The main effects of cultural group,  $F(2, 338) = 12.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.53$ , gender  $F(1, 338) = 8.54$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $d = 0.32$ , and honor scales,  $F(2, 337) = 373.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 2.98$ , were qualified by the cultural group by honor scales,  $F(4, 676) = 10.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.49$ , and gender by honor scales  $F(2, 337) = 3.37$ ,  $p = .036$ ,  $d = 0.28$ , interactions. The three-way interaction was not revealed.

Compared with the European American ( $M = 6.03$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ) and Turkish participants ( $M = 5.83$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ), the Dutch ( $M = 5.29$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) endorsed less honor integrity,  $F(1, 338) = 30.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.60$  and  $F(1, 338) = 18.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.46$ , respectively. Likewise, compared with the European American ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) and Turkish participants ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ), the Dutch ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ) endorsed less family honor,  $F(1, 338) = 23.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.53$  and  $F(1, 338) = 28.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.58$ , respectively. The European American and Turkish participants did not differ in their endorsement of honor integrity or family honor,  $ps = .107$ . Further, the Dutch ( $M = 4.87$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ), European American ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ), and Turkish ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ) participants did not differ in their endorsement of honor reputation values,  $ps > .075$ .

Within group comparisons showed that Dutch, European American, and Turkish participants all endorsed honor integrity more than honor reputation,  $t(101) = 12.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.20$ ,  $t(105) = 16.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.63$ , and  $t(135) = 16.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.43$ , respectively, and more than family honor,  $t(101) = 14.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.40$ ,  $t(105) = 12.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.23$ , and  $t(135) = 12.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.07$ , respectively. Additionally, Dutch, European American, and Turkish participants all endorsed honor reputation more than family honor,  $t(101) = 2.54$ ,  $p = .013$ ,  $d = 0.25$ ,  $t(105) = 4.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.42$ , and  $t(135) = 6.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.55$ , respectively.

With respect to gender, males endorsed family honor ( $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ),  $F(1, 338) = 6.82$ ,  $p = .009$ ,  $d = 0.28$ , and honor reputation values ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ),  $F(1, 338) = 10.42$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $d = 0.35$ , more than females ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 1.29$  and  $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ), respectively. No gender differences were found with respect to the endorsement of honor integrity values,  $p = .427$ .

### 3.2. Relationships between honor and self-esteem

Correlation analyses (Table 3 in Supplemental materials) revealed that none of the honor scales were related to self-esteem in the Dutch ( $p's \geq .110$ ) and the European American groups ( $p's \geq .277$ ). In the Turkish group, honor integrity was modestly related to self-esteem ( $r = .16$ ,  $p = .069$ ). Next, we conducted regression analyses for each cultural group separately, controlling for gender ( $-1 = \text{male}$ ,  $1 =$

female) and centering the honor scales around the mean of each group (Table 4 in Supplemental materials). None of the honor scales significantly contributed to the prediction of self-esteem in the Dutch ( $p$ 's  $\geq .077$ ) and European American groups ( $p$ 's  $\geq .282$ ). In the Turkish group, honor integrity was positively ( $B = .28, p = .003$ ) and family honor was negatively ( $B = -.17, p = .045$ ) and honor reputation was not ( $B = -.02, p = .798$ ) associated with self-esteem. Main or interaction effects of gender were not revealed in the analyses of the three cultural groups ( $p$ 's  $\geq .097$ ).

#### 4. Discussion

Our results indicate that the definition of honor as one's self-esteem (Pitt-Rivers, 1966) is not universally applicable. We tested the relationships between self-esteem and three components of honor (integrity, reputation, and family honor) and found that the endorsement of honor values was associated with self-esteem only in our Turkish, but not in our Dutch and (Northern) European American samples.

The outcomes contribute to the literature in at least two ways. First, by testing the relationship between the endorsement of honor values and self-esteem, we provide a novel insight into the salience of honor in one's intrapersonal lives (i.e. well-being in terms of self-esteem) across cultural groups, which goes beyond simply comparing cultural groups on levels of honor endorsement or by relating honor endorsement with interpersonal behavior (e.g., aggression). For example, we found that the predominantly Northern European American group did not differ from the Turkish group in levels of honor endorsement, which at a first glance might imply that honor is equally important for these groups. However, we also found that honor endorsement was associated with self-esteem only in the Turkish, and not the European American sample. This indicates that how one feels about oneself is less likely to be dependent on honor values in Northern European Americans. Prior work supports our findings such that Americans from the Northern States are less concerned with defending their honor when insulted, as compared with their Southern counterparts (Cohen et al., 1996). Consistent with the descriptions that the Dutch are a prototypical low-honor group (Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2000, 2002a), our Dutch sample not only reported less endorsement of honor values than their European American and the Turkish counterparts, but their levels of honor endorsement were also not associated with their levels of self-esteem.

Second, by taking various components of honor into account, we provide a valuable insight into which honor components contribute to one's intrapersonal life. In the Turkish sample, endorsement of honor integrity values was associated with higher, and endorsement of family honor values was associated with lower levels of self-esteem. Placing value in being a trustworthy and loyal person is related to a higher sense of self-esteem, whereas placing value in protecting the honor and image of one's family is related to a lower sense of self-esteem. This latter negative relationship might be due to differences in focus; while family honor is external and interpersonal, with a focus on the in-group, self-esteem is internal and intrapersonal, with a focus on the self. In other words, those who are more concerned for the protection of their family have less concern for themselves. However, more research is needed to understand this relationship.

There were also similarities between the cultural groups. The degree of endorsing honor reputation values, the concern for one's social image, was equal across the three groups. Moreover, in none of the groups was honor reputation associated with self-esteem, indicating that feelings of self-esteem were related independent of what others are thinking about them. Further, all groups endorsed honor integrity values most, followed by honor reputation, and family honor. This research is an initial investigation of how honor is related to psychological

concepts across cultural groups. However, more research is needed to address the following issues. First, a limitation of the current study was that the procedures of questionnaire administration and participant reimbursement were different for the three cultural groups. Although our results show what could be expected from prior work, these differences might have been confounding variable. Although often difficult due to practical issues, future cross-cultural research should ensure equal procedures between groups. Second, future research could take into account other components of honor, such as the endorsement of masculine (i.e., authoritarian, macho behavior) and feminine (i.e. sexual shame and purity) honor as these are known to differ between cultural groups (Cihangir, 2013) and might also be differentially related to self-esteem depending on the one's cultural context. Third, future research should examine the relationships between honor components and other intrapersonal constructs, such as subjective well-being, and consider other cultural groups, such as those in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. This would provide additional insight into the salience of honor in one's daily life and well-being across cultural groups.

#### Acknowledgments

This research was supported by the Executive Research Agency for the European Union (Marie Curie IOF grant 302795 to SN) and the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (VICI grant 453-11-005 to LK). Many thanks to Dr. Recai Coştur, Yasmeen Farran, Nic Flinkenflögel, and Austin Ross for their help in collecting the data, as well as the participants for participating in the study. We greatly appreciate the comments of Eelco van der Maat on earlier drafts of the manuscript.

#### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.05.037>.

#### References

- Cihangir, S. (2013). Gender specific honor codes and cultural change. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 16, 319–333.
- Cohen, D., Nisbett, R., Bowdle, B., & Schwarz, N. (1996). Insult, aggression, and the southern culture of honor: An "experimental ethnography". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 945–960.
- Cross, S., Uskul, A., Gerçek-Swing, B., Sunbay, Z., Alözkan, C., Günsoy, C., et al. (2014). Cultural prototypes and dimensions of honor. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 40, 232–249.
- Guerra, V. M., Giner-Sorolla, R., & Vasiljevic, M. (2012). The importance of honor concerns across eight countries. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 16, 298–318.
- Pitt-Rivers, J. (1966). Honor and social status. In J. G. Peristiany (Ed.), *Honor and shame: The values of Mediterranean society* (pp. 19–78). London, England: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Rodriguez Mosquera, P., Manstead, A., & Fischer, A. (2000). The role of honor-related values in the elicitation, experience, and communication of pride, shame, and anger: Spain and the Netherlands compared. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26, 833–844.
- Rodriguez Mosquera, P., Manstead, A., & Fischer, A. (2002a). The role of honour concerns in emotional reactions to offences. *Cognition & Emotion*, 16, 143–163.
- Rodriguez Mosquera, P., Manstead, A., & Fischer, A. (2002b). Honor in the Mediterranean and Northern Europe. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 33, 16–36.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Uskul, A. K., Cross, S. E., Sunbay, Z., Gerçek-Swing, B., & Ataca, B. (2012). Honor bound: The cultural construction of honor in Turkey and the Northern United States. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 43, 1131–1151.
- van Osch, Y., Breugelmans, S. M., Zeelenberg, M., & Bölük, P. (2013). A different kind of honor culture: Family honor and aggression in Turks. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 16, 334–344.