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Culture, Masculine Honor, and Violence Toward Women

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Ryan P. Brown[1], Kiersten Baughman[2], and Mauricio Carvallo[3]

Abstract

Prior research has connected the cultural ideology of honor to intrasexual violence between men and to attitudes supporting intersexual aggression in response to perceived honor violations by female romantic partners. We extend this research to show that honor ideology is also associated with an increased likelihood of men actually engaging in violent and sexually coercive behaviors toward women. Extending previous research on honor-based schemas and scripts linked to relationship violence, comparisons between honor states and non–honor states in the United States show that official rape and domestic homicide rates by White male perpetrators (Study 1) and experiences of rape and violence in relationships anonymously reported by White female teenagers (Study 2) were higher in honor states, controlling for a variety of potential confounds. These results extend prior laboratory research on honor-based schemas and scripts into the realm of extreme, real-world behaviors.

Keywords

culture, honor, violence, rape, domestic homicide

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Violence against women appears in many forms around the world, such as arranged marriages of underaged girls, sex trafficking, selective female infanticide, and psychological abuse. Some of the most common forms of violence against women are sexual harassment, rape, and intimate partner violence. Intimate partner violence represents one of the most insidious forms of violence against women because it occurs within the context of an intimate (or formerly intimate) relationship. A psychological approach to intimate partner violence provides explanations for violence based on a variety of perspectives, from the dispositional to the situational. One such dispositional perspective views perpetrators of violence against women as suffering from one or more personality disorders (Dutton, 2006), whereas a situational perspective might point to the role that momentary reductions in self-regulatory resources can play in violence toward women (e.g., Finkel, DeWall, Slotter, Oaten, & Foshee, 2009). Likewise, an evolutionary perspective views male violence against women as the result of a species-typical competition among men for control over women's reproductive resources (Daly & Wilson, 1988). Still other psychological perspectives are based on models of aggression that focus on individual factors affecting individual perpetrators or victims of aggression, such as anger and hostility (Norlander & Eckhardt, 2005; Stith, Smith, Penn, Ward, & Tritt, 2004), excessively high self-esteem (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Cowan & Mills, 2004), poor communication skills (Berns, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1999), and substance abuse (Chase, O'Farrell, Murphy, Fals-Stewart, & Murphy, 2003; O'Farrell, Murphy, Stephen, Fals-Stewart, & Murphy, 2004).

In contrast to the psychological approach, the sociocultural perspective associated with feminist analyses of intimate partner violence and other forms of aggression views men's violence toward women as rooted in patriarchal ideologies that motivate men to seek power and to exert control over women with the use of physical violence, if necessary (DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 2007; Saunders, 1988). Proponents of this perspective view general psychological models of aggression as being not well suited to explain the violence perpetrated by men toward women. Instead, they argue that any analysis that aims to elucidate the perpetration and acceptance of violence toward women must focus on the values and belief systems that make this violence possible in the first place. From our perspective, there are merits to both these approaches, as they are able to provide individual (psychological approach) and collective (feminist approach)

[1]Rice University, Houston, TX, USA
[2]University of the Cumberlands, Williamsburg, KY, USA
[3]The University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, USA

Corresponding Author:
Ryan P. Brown, Doerr Institute for New Leaders, MS 567, Rice University, 6100 Main Street, Houston, TX 77005, USA.
Email: rpb7@rice.edu

levels of analysis to the study of the antecedents and consequences of violence against women.

Similar to a feminist sociocultural approach, in this article, we attempt to connect the victimization of women with cultural ideologies that vary around the world, that vary over time, and that even vary among people living in the same community at the same time. Our focus is on the ideology of honor cultures, and our central thesis is that in honor cultures, where men's status is derived from their adherence to honor-based social norms, women will tend to be viewed by men as confirmations of, and rewards for, the attainment of respect and social precedence (i.e., honor). Because men's honor is so tightly bound up in their proprietary sexual relationships with women (Daly & Wilson, 1988; El-Solh & Mabro, 1994; Kimmel, Hearn, & Connell, 2014; Moghadam, 1991), men in honor cultures might be more likely to engage in violence and sexual coercion—including homicide and rape—to exert their control over women's sexuality and defend their own reputations against perceived honor threats.

What Is an Honor Culture?

Around the world, cultures vary on multiple dimensions that can have profound influences on the behaviors, beliefs, and values of men and women, and on how men and women relate to one another. One such dimension of cultural variation concerns the ideology of honor (Brown, 2016; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). Honor-oriented cultures arise in lawless and economically insecure environments, where people feel the need to solve social problems themselves, rather than rely on any outside authority (Brown & Osterman, 2012; Nowak, Gelfand, Borkowski, Cohen, & Hernandez, 2016). A central feature of this self-reliance, and arguably the defining feature of honor cultures worldwide, involves the maintenance and defense of reputation (both personal and collective), which can serve to deter aggression and exploitation. In a typical honor culture, reputation is everything, and people are allowed and even expected to go to extreme lengths to maintain and defend their reputations from threats. More specifically, men in honor cultures strive to build and defend reputations for strength, bravery, and an intolerance for disrespect (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994). Women in honor cultures typically strive to build and protect reputations for loyalty and sexual purity (Vandello & Cohen, 2003). To the extent that men and women live up to these cultural expectations, they have honor. If they ever fail to do so, however, they experience the stain of dishonor, which can be difficult (if not impossible) to expunge (Osterman & Brown, 2011). One example of an honor culture can be seen in the U.S. South and West, but other, more prototypical examples occur all around the world, including societies surrounding the Mediterranean, in the Middle East, and throughout Central and South America (Fischer, 1989; Peristiany, 1966; Vandello, Cohen, Grandon, & Franiuk, 2009).

Research on honor in the United States has demonstrated the consequences of this cultural ideology, both inside and outside the laboratory. Drawing upon historical patterns of immigration and migration of honor-oriented Scottish herders to the U.S. South and West in the 18th and 19th centuries (Fischer, 1989), social psychologists have compared the behaviors of men (particularly White men) who grew up in the more honor-oriented states in the South and West with the behaviors of men who grew up in the less honor-oriented North, which was settled primarily by English, Dutch, and German farmers and merchants. For instance, early laboratory experiments with White male college students from the U.S. North or South showed that after being insulted, southern men exhibited spikes in both testosterone and cortisol and displayed compensatory behaviors designed to reassert their threatened sense of honor (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996). Later laboratory research further revealed how these responses to threatened honor can play out over time, demonstrating the tendency of southern men to feign ignorance of subtle honor threats until they can no longer ignore them, at which point they tend to overreact in violent retaliation, a pattern not observed among northern men (Cohen, Vandello, Puente, & Rantilla, 1999). This research demonstrates what Cohen and colleagues referred to as the "paradox of politeness"—the tendency for honor-oriented men to exhibit both excessive politeness in the absence of an honor-related threat and excessively aggressive responses in the presence of an honor-related threat.

Such controlled laboratory studies are complemented by the finding that argument-related (but not felony-related) homicide rates are higher in more honor-oriented southern and western states than they are in northern states, a regional difference that occurs only among White males (consistent with the historical immigration patterns noted by Fischer, 1989) and that is particularly strong among those living in nonmetropolitan areas (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996), where reputation is more readily known. Consistent with the "paradox of politeness" thesis, Cohen et al. (1999) also found that cities in more honor-oriented states that were rated as especially high in politeness simultaneously exhibited elevated rates of argument-related homicides. Similarly, Brown, Osterman, and Barnes (2009) found that school shootings were 3 times more prevalent in honor states than in non–honor states over a 20-year period, a difference that remained statistically significant even after accounting for a host of statewide covariates (e.g., demographic composition, economic deprivation, temperature). Although certain types of violence appear to be more prevalent and more socially acceptable in honor cultures, violence for its own sake or non-honor-related violence is *not* generally condoned in more honor-oriented regions of the United States (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994) or elsewhere (Peristiany, 1966). However, when a man feels his reputation, person, family, or property is being threatened, the honor code dictates that he has the right to defend his interests, even to the point of violence. Indeed, he is *expected* to do so if he wants to be known as a "real" man (Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2012), an expectation that does not seem to apply to women.

How Is Male Honor Linked With Violence Toward and Sexual Coercion of Women?

An honor threat can come from another man, such as through an insulting remark or a dismissive or aggressive gesture, but honor-related threats can also come from women, who are governed by strong cultural mandates to maintain reputations for loyalty and sexual purity (Vandello & Cohen, 2003). Especially in romantic relationships, and even when they are mistreated by their romantic partners, women are encouraged to "stand by their man," so as not to shame the family name or suggest that their partners are not worthy of respect (Vandello et al., 2009). Whereas men's quest for status and precedence can include sexual conquests (Rodriguez-Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2002), women are expected to maintain their chastity until marriage in most honor cultures, and once married, fidelity to their spouse remains a moral imperative. Importantly, men are expected to help enforce women's fidelity when necessary, and instances of female sexual impropriety must be punished to lessen any further reputational damage to the woman's social network (especially to the men in her network). Thus, in cultures of honor, men often feel justified in engaging in aggression to control their romantic partners (or female family members), and women are encouraged to endure such treatment for the sake of honor.

Consistent with this distinction between male and female honor, Vandello and Cohen (2003) have shown starkly different reactions to relationship violence between college students in the U.S. who grew up in either honor states or non–honor states. In one study, researchers staged a live altercation between an engaged couple (actually, confederates of the experimenters), in which the male engaged in aggressive behavior toward his fiancé out of apparent jealousy. When the female confederate returned to sit beside the (real) participant, she either excused her fiancé's behavior (e.g., "He really cares about me . . . I guess that's just how he shows it, you know?") or showed indignation for how he had treated her. Compared with Northern Anglo participants (who are typically less influenced by honor norms), Southern Anglos and Hispanics (who are typically more influenced by honor norms) verbally expressed more tolerance for the violence, encouraging the victim to stay in the relationship and work it out. Furthermore, Southern Anglos and Hispanics evaluated the female confederate more positively if she exhibited loyalty to her fiancé than if she exhibited indignation toward him. Northern Anglos were more likely to see the loyal woman as weak.

This pattern of support for honor-related violence in romantic relationships has been replicated in other studies comparing respondents from honor-oriented versus non–honor-oriented cultures around the world, including Spanish versus British participants (Delgado, Prieto, & Bond, 1997), and Chilean versus Canadian participants (Vandello et al., 2009). Such research underscores the role of honor-based jealousy in promoting and justifying violent coercion and control of women by their male romantic partners in honor cultures all around the world (see also Dietrich & Schuett, 2013; Douki, Nacef, Belhadj, Bouasker, & Ghachem, 2003; Haj-Yahia, 1998; Witte & Mulla, 2012). The most extreme form of this honor-based violence is the *honor killing*, in which men (especially brothers, husbands, and fathers) go so far as to murder female relatives for having sullied the family name by behavior perceived to be dishonorable. Such behavior can include not only sexual infidelity to a husband, but also not remaining a virgin before marriage, or even just being alone with a nonkin male. Honor killings occur and are sometimes sanctioned (both formally and informally) in cultures dominated by an honor code (e.g., Eisner & Ghuneim, 2013; Oberwittler & Kasselt, 2014).

In sum, prior research on honor and violence has largely used honor-based norms to explain violence between men. However, research has also demonstrated a link between honor-related norms and various schemas and scripts that can justify and promote coercive violence by men toward women, particularly in the context of romantic relationships. When a man in an honor culture feels disrespected by his romantic partner—especially if he believes she has been or might be unfaithful to him, might leave him for another man, or otherwise fails to uphold the standards of feminine behavior established by the culture—his shame is magnified by the ideology of honor, which also seems to license both his rage and his aggression toward her. Importantly, an affront to a man's honor need not originate with a romantic partner. Any woman who exhibited a high degree of disrespect toward a man might represent a threat to his honor, such as a woman who rebuffs or scoffs at a man's sexual advances. A man who feels rejected or disrespected by a woman might retaliate aggressively, even going so far as to force her to have sex with him, an extreme outcome that would be facilitated by men viewing women as rewards for and affirmations of their honor (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009).

This hypothesized aggression stands as something of a contradiction to the honor-related "chivalrous" belief that men should protect women as they would their property or their own reputations (Vandello & Cohen, 2003), but this apparent contradiction might also be seen as yet another instance of an honor-based paradox similar to the paradox of politeness (Cohen et al., 1999). Investigating a similar hypothesis, Saucier, Strain, Hockett, and McManus (2015) have shown that masculine honor beliefs predicted men's (and women's) self-reported attitudes toward rape and rape victims, although these associations were complex and somewhat inconsistent. Whereas men who strongly endorsed the ideology of honor reported more negative attitudes toward rape, they also expressed more negative attitudes toward female rape *victims* and greater acceptance of rape myths. Furthermore, their endorsement of honor was unrelated to their scores on a measure of rape proclivity (although a subscale of the honor beliefs

measure used by Saucier et al. was *positively* related to reported rape proclivity), and honor endorsement was negatively related to respondents' scores on a measure of the acceptability of sexually "pressuring" behaviors committed by men toward women. In a separate investigation, Saucier et al. (2016) demonstrated a positive association between honor-related beliefs and both benevolent and hostile sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Thus, research shows that honor-oriented men display a tendency to hold sexist attitudes toward women, and they tend to express support for rape myths and to evaluate female rape victims especially negatively. However, they do not tend to *overtly* endorse the concept of rape or even mild sexual coercion, so it is unclear whether and how such attitudes (and the cultural ideology underlying them) might relate to *actual* interpersonal behavior.

Taking these attitudinal associations a step further, Benavidez, Neria, and Jones (2016) have recently shown that honor endorsement predicted men's intention to behave aggressively toward a "misbehaving" romantic partner in hypothetical scenarios, as well as their subtle aggression in the laboratory toward a female stranger who devalued a moral ideal that was important to them. These behavioral data are important, as they represent the only evidence, to date, that honor-oriented men would, in fact, *behave* aggressively toward women under certain circumstances, in apparent violation of the "chivalrous" mandate imbedded in honor culture's directives for men. It remains to be seen, however, whether honor ideology might lead to more extreme forms of violently coercive behaviors, which can only be realistically assessed outside of the controlled environment of the lab. Perhaps the cultural code of honor would mitigate more serious forms of male aggression toward women than the mild form revealed by Benavidez et al. (2016). Then again, the sexist attitudes that honor-oriented men tend to hold might predispose some men to behave in violent and sexually coercive ways outside the controlled environment of the lab when they feel their honor has been threatened by women, whether those women are current romantic partners who have failed to uphold cultural norms, former romantic partners who have shamed men by their rejection, or "prospective partners" who have rebuffed men's sexual advances. Thus, in the present studies, we move beyond the laboratory to examine two examples of violently coercive behaviors—specifically, rape and domestic homicide—as a function of regional differences in honor orientation.

Study 1

Extending previous studies showing a link between regional or national differences in honor orientations and the schemas and scripts that undergird violence toward women in romantic relationships (e.g., Vandello & Cohen, 2003; Vandello et al., 2009), we examined the possibility in Study 1 that honor ideology might also lead men to engage in aggressive and sexually coercive behavior toward women. We examined this possibility by analyzing differences among states in the U.S. in rates of rape and domestic homicide, controlling for a number of potential confounds that might be able to account for any differences we might observe among U.S. states. As in previous studies on the geography of honor in the U.S., we only expected to find higher rates of rape and domestic homicide in honor states compared with non–honor states among *White males*, among whom *regional distributions* of honor-related norms in the U.S. have been shown (e.g., Cohen, 1996, 1998; Osterman & Brown, 2011). Although other racial/ethnic groups certainly can and do exhibit honor-related beliefs and values, honor norms are not *regionally distributed* in the U.S. among non-White demographic groups the way they are among Whites.

Data

We compiled statistics on the number of all White adult males arrested for rape in 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014 for each state in the U.S., using data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Report (or UCR; U.S. Department of Justice—Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1991-2015). Data on rape for three states (Florida, Illinois, and Minnesota) are either not reported at all to the UCR or are reported for only a few cities, so data from these states were not included in our analyses. Likewise, during the time period under consideration here, rape arrests in Alabama and Kentucky were extremely incomplete or missing altogether. As a result, we computed composite rates for these two states using only the years with complete data (2008 and 2010 for Alabama, and 2010, 2012, and 2014 for Kentucky). We obtained population data from the U.S. Census Bureau on the number of White males aged 15+ living in each state for the years 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014, and computed the average statewide rape rate by White male perpetrators per 100,000 White males aged 15+ across the targeted years. It is important to note that our computation of rape rates is a per capita computation of *perpetrator* rates, not *victimization* rates (Study 2 reverses this focus). The same perpetrator might have multiple rape victims in a given year, causing the perpetrator rate to be much lower than the victimization rate. In addition, our computed rates depend on arrests reported to the FBI, and many sexual assaults go unreported (and even those that are reported might not result in an arrest). We return to these important limitations later.

In addition to arrests for rape, we collected domestic homicide data from the supplemental homicide reports of the UCR for all available years (1979-2002; Fox & Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2005). Although three states do not report rapes to the UCR, these same states *do* report murders, so we were able to analyze domestic homicide data from all 50 states. We were interested only in the number of murders reported in each state in which the victim was identified as the wife, ex-wife,

common law wife, or girlfriend of the (male) perpetrator, which is the definition of domestic homicide used by the FBI. As with rape rates, we computed the mean domestic homicide rate across years for each state among White males (rates reported are per 100,000 White males aged 15+), among whom the ideology of honor is regionally distributed in the United States.

We were interested in assessing the role that honor norms play in rape and domestic homicide rates at the state level. However, regions of the United States differ in a variety of ways beyond their embrace of honor norms, so it is important to account for other variables that could influence regional differences in violent crime. We, thus, included the following variables in our analyses as covariates: the Gini index of income inequality (calculated by the U.S. Census Bureau across the years 2005-2007 for our analyses of rape rates, and for the year 1999 for our analyses of domestic homicide; see Henry, 2009), the percent of the population attending a religious service every week or almost every week (Newport, 2009), the percent of the population living in nonmetropolitan areas (termed "rurality" henceforth, which was calculated by the U.S. Census Bureau for the year 2010 for analyses of rape rates, and for the year 2000 for analyses of domestic homicide), and economic deprivation, which is a combination of standardized poverty rates, median income (reversed), and unemployment rates (for analyses of rape rates, we used data for the year 2008; for analyses of domestic homicide, we used data from the year 2000).

The economic covariates that we included are typical of studies of statewide differences in honor-related behaviors or studies of violence more broadly (Barnes, Brown, & Tamborski, 2012; Brown et al., 2009; Henry, 2009; Loftin & Hill, 1974). Economic pressures related to deprivation or inequality are commonly cited among criminologists as precursors to violent crime (e.g., Straus, 1994). In contrast, both religiosity and rurality might be related to rape and domestic homicide in a variety of complex ways. For instance, states in which more people live in nonmetropolitan areas might have higher rates of domestic homicide because of decreased access to law enforcement by victims of domestic abuse prior to the abuse escalating to the level of murder. But rurality might be related to rape rates in the opposite way, reducing the likelihood that victims will be able to *report* a rape to authorities (and perhaps increasing their fear of doing so because of a greater likelihood of social consequences related to living in a smaller community). Religiosity could similarly have complex associations with rape and domestic homicide, influencing both gender role expectations and social norms about sexual and violent behaviors. Thus, it seemed prudent to control for statewide differences in such variables in our analyses, as in many previous studies of honor-related social dynamics.

For state-level honor status, our focal predictor variable, we followed the dichotomous approach used by prior studies of statewide patterns of honor-based behaviors within the United States, which is predominantly based upon Census Bureau categorizations. According to this approach, states designated by the Census Bureau as being in the South and the West are labeled as honor states (except for Alaska and Hawaii, which are technically in the West), and all remaining states (including Alaska and Hawaii) are categorized as non–honor states (e.g., Cohen, 1996, 1998; Barnes, Brown, & Tamborski, 2012; Brown et al., 2009). For our analyses, we coded non–honor states as 0 and honor states as 1.[1]

Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for, and correlations among, all study variables. We analyzed rape and domestic homicide rates in separate multiple regression analyses that included all the statewide covariates listed above. In our regression model analyzing rape rates by White male perpetrators (which overall accounted for 21.7% of the interstate variance in these rape rates), the only statistically significant predictor was state honor status, $\beta = .37$, $t(41) = 2.37$, $p = .023$, mean squared error (MSE) = 13.49, $d = 0.74$ (see Table 2). Covariate-adjusted mean rape rates perpetrated by White males in honor states ($M = 12.55$ per 100,000 White males aged 15+) were substantially higher (by approximately 30%) than they were in non–honor states ($M = 9.68$ per 100,000 White males aged 15+). Likewise, in our regression model analyzing domestic homicide rates by White male perpetrators (which accounted for 47.5% of the interstate variance in domestic homicide rates), the only significant predictor was once again state honor status, $\beta = .65$, $t(44) = 4.93$, $p < .001$, $MSE = 0.09$, $d = 1.49$ (see Table 2). The covariate-adjusted mean rate of domestic homicide among White males in honor states ($M = 1.19$ per 100,000) was approximately 72% higher than it was in non–honor states ($M = 0.69$ per 100,000), an even larger difference than we observed with regard to rape.[2]

Discussion

The results of Study 1 reveal a behavioral consequence of honor in the realm of male-to-female coercive violence. Specifically, we showed that statewide rape and domestic homicide rates among White males are uniquely predicted by a state's honor status. These behavioral data—which represent the first demonstration of such extreme behavioral consequences for women living in honor states—complement prior research on the schemas and scripts that justify honor-based male jealousy and aggression. Prior research on honor-related interpersonal aggression has been restricted to argument-based violence between men, the exception being a study showing that women in honor states do *not* display the same patterns of homicidal behavior as do men (Berthelot, Blanchard, & Brown, 2008). Thus, the data in the present study show that men's honor-based schemas, scripts, and attitudes are not limited to the realm of social

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for and Zero-Order Correlations Among Study 1 Variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	*M*	*SD*
1. Rape	—	.32	.18	−.30	−.21	−.05	−.14	—	—
2. Domestic homicide	.32	—	.65	.10	.09	−.04	.34	0.96	0.39
3. State honor status	.18	.65	—	.30	.35	.01	.49	—	—
4. Gini[a]	−.30	.07	.25	—	.31	−.17	.54	44.61	2.13
5. Religiosity	−.21	.09	.35	.29	—	.23	.43	41.06	8.81
6. Rurality[b]	−.05	−.06	−.03	−.21	.18	—	.35	28.31	14.91
7. Economic deprivation[c]	−.14	.21	.38	.50	.47	.30	—	0.00	1.00
M	11.27	—	—	44.72	41.04	27.10	0.00		
SD	3.92	—	—	1.95	9.09	14.63	1.00		

Note. n = 47 for rape rates; n = 50 for domestic homicide rates. Both rape and domestic homicide are reported per 100,000 White males (age 15+). All correlations > |.28| are significant at the .05 level. Gini = Gini coefficient of income inequality; religiosity = % of adults who attended church every week (or almost every week); economic deprivation = composite of (standardized) poverty rates, unemployment rates, and median income (reversed).
[a]Gini coefficient above the diagonal was calculated for 1999 and below the diagonal was calculated across the years 2005 to 2007.
[b]Rurality above the diagonal was calculated for 2000 and below the diagonal for 2010.
[c]Economic deprivation above the diagonal was calculated for 2000 (α = .76) and below the diagonal was calculated for 2008 (α = .62).

Table 2. Rape and Domestic Homicide Rates Among White Males as a Function of State Honor Status and Statewide Covariates (Study 1).

	Rape		Domestic homicide	
	B	95% CI	*B*	95% CI
State honor status	2.87*	[0.42, 5.32]	0.50*	[0.30, 0.71]
Gini	−1.00	[–2.38, 0.39]	−0.08	[–0.19, 0.04]
Religiosity	−0.74	[–2.00, 0.51]	−0.06	[–0.16, 0.04]
Rurality	−0.05	[–1.34, 1.23]	−0.05	[–0.16, 0.06]
Economic deprivation	−0.54	[–2.07, 0.99]	0.10	[–0.04, 0.23]
	M	*SE*	*M*	*SE*
Honor states	12.55	0.76	1.19	0.063
Non–honor states	9.68	0.86	0.69	0.070

Note. All continuous predictors were standardized across states. Covariate-adjusted mean rates shown reflect the number of White male perpetrators of rape or domestic homicide per 100,000 White males aged 15 or older. Gini = Gini coefficient of income inequality; religiosity = % of adults who attended church every week (or almost every week); economic deprivation = composite of standardized poverty rates, unemployment rates, and median income (reversed).
*p < .05.

judgments or internal states but are important risk factors for the physical well-being of women living in honor-oriented communities.

Study 1 revealed that White men in honor states commit rape at significantly higher rates and kill their intimate partners (or ex-partners) nearly twice as frequently as do White men in non–honor states. These patterns dovetail with previous work that has shown an attitudinal legitimization of certain forms of violence within honor regions (Vandello et al., 2009). However, there are several important limitations to the data analyzed in this study. First, rape data in the UCR do not include an indication of the relationship between the victim and offender, unlike homicide data. Consequently, we cannot know whether the sexual assaults in Study 1 were committed by men against their romantic partners, casual acquaintances, or total strangers. Future studies that are able to specify the nature of the relationship between rape perpetrators and their victims could add important insights into the sociocultural dynamics at work in the connection between honor ideology and sexual assault. Second, the rape and domestic homicide data analyzed in Study 1 come from official reports (arrests in the case of rape). If women underreport incidences of rape to police, or if police underreport the occurrence of rape in official statistics (or simply make fewer arrests than the number of incidents that are reported), and if any such underreporting or underarresting is systematically linked to honor norms, then these official statistics will be biased. We suspect that any such bias is more likely to lead to an underestimation of rape rates in *honor* states than in non–honor states, but we cannot be certain that this is the case. Thus, the rape data (in particular) in this study must be viewed with caution.

Domestic homicide rates are much less likely to be biased than are rape rates, partly because homicide rates depend not on reports or arrests but on the discovery of a corpse, and this simple distinction might explain why state honor status was much more strongly associated with domestic homicide than with rape in Study 1. Still, police do not always know the relationship between victim and perpetrator in homicide cases, and sometimes they err in their determination of the perpetrator, which could bias the domestic homicide data in Study 1 to an unknowable extent and direction. Although behavioral data are generally considered preferable to self-report data, we must interpret the rape and domestic homicide data in this study with some caution, as they are ultimately based upon *official reports* of behaviors, rather than, strictly speaking, *actual* behaviors.

Because of reporting or response biases that might themselves be linked to the very cultural systems that, we argue, influence instances of coercive violence toward women, it would be valuable to obtain additional evidence about such violence, such as from the anonymous reports of victims, rather than relying solely on official statistics. It is to such reports that we turn in Study 2, which examines reports of physical aggression and sexual assault among teenaged girls. This study's sample provides the additional value of determining whether the types of coercive violence that we identified in Study 1 might manifest as early as adolescence.

Study 2

Data

Every other year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) surveys students in ninth through 12th grades about their health-related behaviors and experiences through the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS) survey, including the frequencies with which they have engaged in various health-linked behaviors (e.g., wearing a seat belt, driving while intoxicated) and their experiences with violence (e.g., bullying, sexual assault). State participation in the YRBS has varied dramatically over time. For example, since 1999, state participation in the YRBS has increased from just 16 states to more than 40 states more recently, depending on the particular survey question. Not every state elects to participate every single year or to include every survey question when it does participate, so we aggregated data across the years 2003 to 2015 to obtain the most reliable estimates possible without confounding mean levels computed across participating states with secular trends over time.

The two questions on the YRBS that were most relevant to our purposes were (a) "Have you ever been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when you did not want to?" (hereafter, we refer to this item as simply *rape*) and (b) "During the past 12 months, did your boyfriend ever hit, slap, or physically hurt you on purpose?" In 2013, the second question was modified to the following: "During the past 12 months, how many times did someone you were dating or going out with physically hurt you on purpose? (Count such things as being hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon.)." Because this modification was relatively minor, differing primarily in terms of its focus on a "boyfriend" versus simply "someone you were dating or going out with," we combined responses from 2013 and 2015 with responses to the similar question administered as part of the 2003-2011 surveys, but we also analyzed the modified survey question separately using the 2013-2015 data. The response to this item was recoded to indicate the percentage of all respondents who indicated that they had gone out with someone in the past 12 months and had experienced physical dating violence at least once, consistent with the response format of the original (2003-2011) survey item. Because the YRBS does not ask participants about their sexual orientation, we were not able to exclude responses from nonheterosexual females.

We included data only from non-Hispanic[3] White females across all grade levels (9-12), consistent with prior research on the regional distribution of honor values in the United States among Whites, and analyzed the percentage of eligible respondents who answered in the affirmative to these two survey questions as a function of whether they lived in an honor state or a non–honor state. In addition, we included the same statewide covariates used in Study 1 (calculated for the same years as in the analysis of contemporary rape rates). Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among all study variables are shown in Table 3.

Results

Table 4 displays the mean percentage of White (non-Hispanic) females who reported experiencing physical dating violence in the past 12 months or who reported ever having been forced to have sex, as a function of whether they lived in an honor state or a non–honor state and adjusted for the same statewide covariates used in Study 1 for the analysis of rape rates (the Gini index of income inequality, religiosity, rurality, and economic deprivation). Consistent with the official reports of rape and domestic homicide analyzed in Study 1, these anonymous survey responses revealed a statistically significant association between state honor status and teen rape rates, $\beta = .29$, $t(37) = 2.07$, $p = .046$, $MSE = 3.06$, $d = 0.68$ (see Table 4). The association between physical dating violence and state honor status was not statistically significant, however, although it was in the predicted direction, $\beta = .30$, $t(39) = 1.84$, $p = .073$, $MSE = 3.54$, $d = 0.59$ (see Table 4). When we analyzed only the survey responses for 2013-2015, which included the modified survey question that no longer limited the perpetrator of violence to a current "boyfriend," the association between physical dating violence and state honor status was stronger and *was* statistically significant, $\beta = .38$, $t(35) = 2.24$, $p = .032$, $MSE = 2.55$, $d = 0.76$,

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for and Zero-Order Correlations Among Study 2 Variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Rape	—						
2. Physical dating violence	.59	—					
3. State honor status	.42	.40	—				
4. Gini	−.14	.20	.25	—			
5. Religiosity	.32	.35	.35	.29	—		
6. Rurality	.33	.17	−.03	−.21	.18	—	
7. Economic deprivation	.44	.32	.38	.50	.47	.30	—
M	10.57	9.80	—	0.45	41.06	26.42	0.00
SD	2.19	2.02	—	0.02	8.81	14.56	0.75

Note. n = 43 for rape; n = 45 for physical dating violence. All correlations > |.28| are significant at the .05 level. Gini = Gini coefficient of income inequality; religiosity = % of adults who attended church every week (or almost every week); economic deprivation = composite of standardized poverty rates, unemployment rates, and median income (reversed).

Table 4. Percentage of White High School Females Reporting Having Ever Been Raped or Having Experienced Physical Dating Violence in the Past 12 Months (Study 2).

	Rape		Physical dating violence	
	B	95% CI	*B*	95% CI
State honor status	1.25*	[0.03, 2.48]*	1.19	[–0.12, 2.50]
Gini	−0.95*	[–1.64, –0.25]*	0.20	[–0.52, 0.92]
Religiosity	0.12	[–0.52, 0.77]	0.30	[–0.40, 1.00]
Rurality	0.12	[–0.49, 0.74]	0.31	[–0.36, 0.98]
Economic deprivation	1.07*	[0.28, 1.86]*	0.06	[–0.77, 0.88]
	M	*SE*	*M*	*SE*
Honor states	11.18	0.40	10.36	0.41
Non–honor states	9.93	0.41	9.17	0.45

Note. All continuous predictors were standardized across states. Covariate-adjusted means shown are the percentage of White female respondents who answered in the affirmative to each survey question. Gini = Gini coefficient of income inequality; religiosity = % of adults who attended church every week (or almost every week); economic deprivation = composite of standardized poverty rates, unemployment rates, and median income (reversed).
*p < .05.

despite a reduction in statistical power due to missing data from several states.

Discussion

Consistent with the results of Study 1, which relied on official statistics for rape and domestic homicide, Study 2 showed that anonymous reports of experiences with violent coercion were higher among White female teens living in honor states compared with those living in non–honor states. This difference was statistically significant for the survey question regarding rape, but it was not statistically significant for the survey question regarding experiences of physical violence perpetrated by a boyfriend. When we analyzed data from the broader question regarding physical violence committed by a romantic partner not limited to the status of "boyfriend" (from the 2013-2015 surveys), the association with state honor status *was* statistically significant, however. Differences in item wording might be responsible for the stronger association found with the 2013-2015 survey, although it is also possible that a sampling difference related to the number of participating states could instead account for the differences we observed with the variants of this survey question. Additional research in subsequent years will be needed to determine the reliability of this result.

Nonetheless, these results among teenagers are generally consistent with the results of Study 1, which are not limited to the teen years. This consistency reveals a broad pattern of coercive violence experienced by White females living in honor states, a finding that appears as early as high school and is independent of statewide differences in various economic factors, rurality, and religiosity.

General Discussion

One of the many ways that cultures vary is in the extent to which social value is granted to those who uphold the standards of the honor code. This code demands that men be

tough, strong, intolerant of disrespect, and willing and able to defend their reputations, their persons, their families, and their property against all perceived threats (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Peristiany, 1966). This same code demands that women exhibit loyalty to their spouses and other family members, part of which is that they be sexually chaste before marriage and, more important, sexually faithful to their romantic partners (Vandello & Cohen, 2003). When men derive their worth from adherence to the honor code, we have argued that they might come to view women as both rewards for and affirmations of their honor. However, if women serve this honor-confirmation function for men, then they also have power to undermine men's honor. For instance, if women in an honor culture refuse or rebuff the romantic attentions of men, their very refusal is a denial of respect, a fundamental threat to men's honor. Such a threat might result in honor-oriented men believing that they have a right to "reclaim their manhood" and assert their social precedence over women by engaging in aggressive and sexually coercive ways, including rape or even homicide. Whereas many prior studies have examined the ways in which honor ideology can promote violence among men, the present studies are the first to provide evidence that honor might also promote violence by men toward women, despite honor's simultaneous mandate for men to protect women.

We examined this possibility in two studies. In Study 1, we extended previous attitudinal findings on honor, sexism, and perceptions of rape victims to the realm of extreme interpersonal behaviors (rape and domestic homicide). To examine these extreme behaviors, we relied on an indirect geographical index as a marker of relative honor orientations among White males (among whom honor appears to be regionally distributed in the United States; see Cohen, 1996, 1998), rather than using a direct measure of honor endorsement and assessing less extreme outcomes in the controlled environment of the laboratory (Benavidez et al., 2016). Specifically, in Study 1, we compared official rates of rape and domestic homicide perpetrated by White males in the U.S. South and West with those in the U.S. North, controlling for a host of regional differences (e.g., religiosity, rurality, economic factors) that might be able to account for any observed differences in these violent crime rates. Results were consistent with the premise that coercive violence against women is more likely within a culture of honor, showing that White men in honor states committed rape and murdered their female intimate partners (or former partners) at higher rates than did White men in non–honor states. The findings of Study 2, which involved anonymous victim reports of experiences with violent coercion (specifically, rape and physical dating violence) among White female teenagers, generally corroborated the official crime statistics analyzed in Study 1.

It is important to note that as powerful as such evidence is, due to its extreme and behavioral nature, these studies do come with important limitations. First, as noted already, the official arrest data on which we relied in Study 1 must be viewed with caution, especially with regard to arrests for rape. Rape arrest rates tend to dramatically underestimate actual rape rates, in no small part because victims are often loath to report such attacks to police. The findings of Saucier and colleagues (2015) underscore one reason for such reticence, particularly for women living in honor-oriented communities. These researchers found that honor-endorsing men and women tended to hold especially negative attitudes toward rape victims. This finding suggests that official rape rates in honor states might be artificially low because of a cultural ideology that enhances the social stigma of being a rape victim. If this is true, then it makes the higher *official* rate of rape in honor states all the more compelling. In addition, our finding a higher rate of victim-reported rape among teenagers in Study 2 substantially strengthens the results of Study 1, while also adding a rather sobering additional note to Study 1's results—specifically, that the pattern of violent, sexually coercive behavior demonstrated in Study 1 appears to be elevated in honor-oriented communities as early as adolescence, with rates across states hovering around 10%.

A second limitation of these results is that it is impossible to completely rule out other sociocultural variables as true sources of the differences that we observed, despite our attempt to control for a wide range of potential confounds. Using states as the unit of analysis limits us to a maximum of 50 observations, and for some outcome measures (e.g., official rape statistics), the number of observations is additionally reduced because of reporting failures. Thus, adding too many covariates to our regression models becomes problematic rather quickly, and we cannot be certain that we selected all the "right" controls in these studies. One reviewer of this article, for instance, suggested that we control for the statewide sex ratio in our analyses, and another suggested that we control for gender inequality. Although consideration of ideal control variables is a worthy endeavor, many controls run the risk of serving as *alternative manifestations* of the cultural ideology of honor. For example, if male-on-male deadly violence is particularly elevated in honor states, this could influence the adult sex ratio (as could other sources of elevated deaths in honor states, such as suicide or excessive risk taking; Barnes, Brown, & Tamborski, 2012; Osterman & Brown, 2011). Likewise, we might expect gender inequality to be greater in honor states than in non–honor states precisely *because* the cultural ideology of honor leads to subordinating attitudes toward women, which might translate into actual inequalities between the sexes. Finding the best and most appropriate control variables is both complex and important, and we cannot claim with certainty to have done so in these studies (but see Note 2 for additional discussion).

These limitations notwithstanding, our results do complement and extend previous sociological research that has sought to connect violence toward women in the United States with regional differences in patriarchy (e.g., Baron & Straus, 1989; Straus, 1994). Such research tends to assume

that the key causal factor in such violence is simply social power and that if power differentials could be eradicated, violence toward women would disappear as well. What this perspective seems to be missing, we think, is the fundamental role of culture in creating the beliefs, values, and expectations that can lead to *both* power differentials and violence. Unless a society modifies the cultural code that leads men to view women as rewards for, and confirmation of, their having achieved the right to respect and precedence, there is little reason to expect a substantial reduction in violence toward women. Merely altering what might well be one of the *outcomes* of the cultural code (such as power differentials) might not have a large effect on rates of violent coercion.

Nonetheless, many previous studies in this domain consistently ignore the possibility that regional differences in culture might be specific to distinct racial or ethnic groups, and, thus, they combine all demographic groups or simply control for regional differences in race/ethnicity in their analyses. These shortcomings might help to explain why these studies have yielded confusing, and sometimes contradictory, findings. For instance, some studies find that *high* power differentials between men and women are associated with increased rates of abuse and assault (Straus, 1994), and others find that both very *high* and very *low* power differentials are associated with rates of abuse and assault (Yllo, 1983; Yllo & Straus, 1990). We would suggest that an important factor missing from these studies is a cultural lens, particularly one that recognizes the cultural distinctions among different demographic groups around the United States. The regional differences that are consistently observed between Whites and Blacks in the U.S. with respect to honor-related behaviors (e.g., homicide, suicide, risk taking) in previous studies support this contention (e.g., Barnes, Brown, & Tamborski, 2012; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Osterman & Brown, 2011).

Together, these studies complement and extend previous research on the connection between honor ideology and violence toward women. Research by Vandello, Cohen, and their colleagues, in particular, has demonstrated the association between honor and certain schemas and scripts that support violence toward women when men feel that their honor has been threatened in some way, such as by the possibility that their female romantic partners have been sexually unfaithful (Vandello & Cohen, 2003; Vandello et al., 2009). Furthermore, their studies have shown that respondents from honor cultures tend to view women more favorably when they remain in a relationship with a man who has physically abused them, but only if his abuse can be attributed to his honor-based jealousy. This program of research extended earlier studies on interpersonal aggression and honor, but it did not examine the behavioral manifestations of these schemas and scripts. The present studies support and extend the work by Vandello and Cohen by showing that honor orientations are associated not just with abuse-justifying schemas and scripts, but also with violent, sexually coercive behaviors (specifically, rape, physical assault, and domestic homicide). Future research could build upon the present studies by examining the relationships between rape victims and perpetrators, as well as the precipitating circumstances involved in domestic homicides (e.g., perceived or actual infidelity by one partner) as a function of honor-related beliefs and values. Such investigations could add greatly to our understanding of the role of honor ideology in intimate partner violence, and coercive aggression, more generally.

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Notes

1. Specifically, honor states were Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming; non–honor states were Alaska, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wisconsin. An anonymous reviewer suggested that Alaska, Missouri, Delaware, and Maryland might be misclassified as non–honor (Alaska and Missouri) and honor states (Delaware and Maryland). Although prior studies on honor at the state level in the United States have been consistent in their categorization scheme for states, we agree that a more nuanced approach to classifying states could prove fruitful (see, for instance, Tamborski & Brown, 2011). We are working on just such a more nuanced classification system at present.
2. Some social scientists (e.g., Loftin & Hill, 1974) have argued that the best statistical covariate in regional analyses of homicide rates is poverty, rather than a composite that "dilutes" poverty rates with other economic indicators, as we have done here. However, when we replaced our economic deprivation index with poverty rates alone, poverty was not significantly associated with domestic homicide, $p > .30$, and state honor status remained a significant predictor, $p < .001$. Likewise, an anonymous reviewer suggested that the statewide differences we observed in these studies might be due to political conservatism or gender inequality. We do not doubt that measures of gender inequality and political conservatism might be related to honor ideology, and some prior research has actually established a modest connection between honor and related constructs (e.g., Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2012). However, we believe that political attitudes and power relations between men and women are just as likely to be a *consequence* of cultural beliefs and values related to honor as they are to be a confounding *influence*. Nonetheless, substituting statewide measures of gender equality (Sugarman & Straus, 1988) and political conservatism (Jones, 2011) in place of our religiosity variable had little effect on our results, and neither of these alternative covariates proved to be a statistically significant predictor of either rape or domestic

homicide in our regression models. Indeed, both these alternative covariates were much more strongly associated across states with religiosity (rs > .60) than with honor culture designation (rs < .33). Combining all three variables via principal axis factor analysis into a single "traditionalism" variable and controlling for this variable in our analyses did not change any of our conclusions; also, this composite traditionalism variable was not a significant predictor of either rape or domestic homicide in these analyses.

3. The Uniform Crime Report (UCR) does not make a distinction between Hispanic and non-Hispanic Whites. Thus, we were unable to draw this distinction in Study 1 in our analyses of rape and domestic homicide rates. However, the data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) used in Study 2 did allow for this distinction, so we used only data from non-Hispanic White females to be more consistent with previous studies on regional differences in honor values. Because Hispanic culture, in general, tends to be rather honor-oriented, *where* in the United States people of Hispanic origin live should not make a large difference in their honor orientations. Thus, ignoring ethnicity in studies in which it is discernable is not advisable.

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