# Implications of Culture of Honor Theory and Research for Practitioners and Prevention Researchers

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Since the seminal publication of Nisbett and Cohen in 1996 linking the higher rates of violence in the Southern United States compared with the Northern United States to a "culture of honor," researchers have paid increasing attention to conceptualizing honor and identifying its underlying psychological mechanisms and its behavioral outcomes. The concern for reputation and other values embedded in culture of honor act as potential sociocultural risk factors for several major social problems in the United States. The aim of this article is to review the recent research on culture of honor and to discuss its societal implications by focusing on 3 pressing social problems: intimate partner aggression, school violence, and reluctance to seek mental health care. Relative to Whites in northern states, White populations in the southern and western states (considered to have cultures of honor) have higher levels of intimate partner violence, more school shootings, and are less likely to seek mental health care. We also briefly review the incidence of these issues among American Latinx groups, another culture of honor. We suggest ways that the scientific findings on culture of honor can enhance prevention and intervention efforts in education, health, and mental health care settings.

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**Public Significance Statement**
In this article, we review recent research on cultures of honor in the United States context summarizing evidence that suggests that reputation concerns underlying cultures of honor can act as a potential sociocultural risk factor for intimate partner violence, school shootings, and poor mental health. Additionally, we suggest tools for researchers and practitioners to become better prepared to combat and prevent violence and promote positive mental health in their communities.

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*Keywords:* culture of honor, intimate partner violence, school violence, depression, suicide

In July 2000, a 28-year old man deliberately ran over his girlfriend with his truck in rural Northeast Texas because he believed she had been unfaithful to him (McCullough, 2018). In April 1999, in Colorado, two teenage high school students, both allegedly victims of bullying, murdered 12 students, one teacher, and injured 24 additional people in a school shooting, motivated by revenge (Pankratz, 2000). In 2014, a 58-year-old White man attempted suicide in rural Wyoming after being diagnosed with a painful genetic condition that prevented him from working, triggering financial and familial stress (Barry-Jester, 2016).

What ties these three tragic incidents together is that all of them took place in parts of the United States that are characterized by a *culture of honor*.[1] Culture of honor is defined as a complex set of beliefs, attitudes, and norms

[1] Throughout the article, we use "society," "community," and "group" to refer to specific groups of people (e.g., members of Latinx communities, U.S. Southerners) and "culture" to refer to shared norms, beliefs, or practices that characterize the group (e.g., culture of honor, culture of dignity). Sometimes, we use the terms "honor-based society, group or community" briefly to refer to groups of people whose prevailing culture is based on the logic of honor.

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about the importance of personal reputation, and such a culture is active and prevalent in the southern and western regions of the United States (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). Much evidence suggests that the reputation concerns that become activated and amplified by a culture of honor can be implicated in the three major social problems described above: intimate partner violence, school violence, and poor mental health. Our aim in this article is to examine these timely social issues through the lens of culture of honor research with the goal of promoting new ways of addressing and preventing them. Several reviews have advanced theoretical understanding of the psychological foundations and behavioral outcomes of culture of honor (see Brown & Osterman, 2012; Nisbett, 1993; Rodriguez Mosquera, 2016; Shackelford, 2005; Uskul, Cross, Gunsoy, & Gul, 2019). However, an overview of the societal implications of some of the accumulated empirical findings on culture of honor that would be of interest to prevention researchers and practitioners is missing. We aim to fill this gap and provide some tools for researchers and practitioners to become better prepared scientifically, professionally, and organizationally to combat and prevent violence and promote mental health in their communities.

## The Beginnings of Social Psychological Research on the Culture of Honor: The U.S. South

The construct of "culture of honor" was introduced to the field of social psychology by Nisbett and Cohen when they attempted to understand the reasons for higher violence rates among men in the U.S. South compared with the U.S. North (see Cohen, 1996; Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Nisbett,

1993; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). According to Nisbett and Cohen (1996), culture of honor explains higher levels of violence in the South, above and beyond North-South differences in poverty, the historical practice of slavery, and temperature. In support of the culture of honor hypothesis, regional differences in rates of violence are not found for all types of violence, but only for those that result from threats to reputation, such as argument-related violence that spontaneously erupts in response to insults and affronts (Nisbett, 1993).

Why has the Southern United States developed an honor culture? According to Nisbett and Cohen (1996), honor cultures in many societies in the world, including the U.S. South, are adaptations to the threats intrinsic to ecological conditions characterized by scarce and vulnerable economic resources, and weak law enforcement. These ecological conditions historically characterized the U.S. South, which was primarily settled in the 18th century by herders from the fringes of Britain, whereas the U.S. North was settled primarily by German and Dutch farmers. Economies based on herding, compared with farming, place people at greater risk of losing their resources, because livestock is mobile and vulnerable to theft. The U.S. South was also a frontier region with low-population density, and the state had little power to command people to comply with the law well into the 19th century. These conditions encouraged White Southerners to rely on an honor code rather than on a penal code, to protect themselves, their families and resources, by maintaining a reputation for toughness and aggressive retaliation (Brown & Osterman, 2012; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996).

Although Southerners no longer rely primarily on a herding economy or live detached from law enforcement, the culture of honor in the U.S. South has persisted among its White population. Several social mechanisms have kept a culture of honor alive in this region, including interpersonal interaction patterns that lead to sudden bursts of aggression in response to insults or affronts (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996; Cohen, Vandello, Puente, & Rantilla, 1999), collective representations such as laws and media that condone honor-related violence (Cohen, 1996), institutional nonstigmatization of violence (Cohen & Nisbett, 1997), and socialization processes whereby boys and girls are taught forms of traditional masculinity and femininity that include honor-related norms and expectations (Vandello & Cohen, 2008). Although other racial or ethnic groups in the United States (e.g., Latinx Americans) do display honor values, the South-North regional differences observed for honor-related interpersonal violence (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996), suicide (Osterman & Brown, 2011), and risk-taking (Barnes, Brown, & Tamborski, 2012) are found only among European Americans, consistent with the culture-of-honor argument. Since Nisbett and Cohen's initial investigations, researchers have recognized that Euro-

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pean Americans in Mountain West states also share a history of reliance on an honor code as protection in an environment where herding was the chief form of subsistence and access to legal means of justice was limited (Cohen, 1996, 1998).

Cultural norms and beliefs that encourage a strong concern for personal reputation are prevalent in many other regions in the world including the circum-Mediterranean, Middle East, South Asia, and Central and South America (see Uskul et al., 2019 for a review). However, because most social psychological investigations into culture of honor come from the United States, our review primarily focuses on studies conducted with members of honor-based groups within the United States (European Americans from the U.S. South and Mountain West, and Latinx Americans), but we also discuss research conducted with non-U.S. samples when the findings are relevant to the U.S. population.[2,3]

## Cultural Logics of Honor, Dignity, and Face

Recently, Leung and Cohen (2011) formulated a framework that distinguishes societies as having honor, dignity, or face cultures based on the frequency with which individuals and situations promote different norms, values, practices, and ideals (or *cultural logic*) for managing social order and for defining the grounds for self-worth.

The cultural logic of honor is based on norms and beliefs that encourage individuals to view self-worth and respect as socially conferred. As the anthropologist Pitt-Rivers (1965) stated, "Honor is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgment

of that claim, his excellence recognized by his society, his right to pride" (p. 21). In this definition, honor has both an internal (self-esteem) and an external component (reputation or social image). Because self-worth depends on others' opinions, individuals in honor-based societies tend to perceive that their worth is precarious and can easily be taken away. Self-worth can be gained competitively, in that one can increase one's honor by appropriating that of someone else through competition or aggression. Furthermore, in honor-based societies, personal moral standards are deeply shaped by the expectations of the family and community, and if people violate these standards, they shame themselves and their family. Thus, people engage in a variety of behaviors to protect and maintain personal and family reputation to avoid censure and shame.

In contrast, the cultural logic of dignity-based societies of Northern and Midwestern United States and Northern and Western Europe is built on the belief that individuals have *inherent* worth; individual worth is neither conferred by others nor can it be taken away by others (Leung & Cohen, 2011). Thus, in theory, a person's sense of worth in his or her own eyes and in the eyes of others is relatively impervious to insults or affronts. A strong sense of dignity allows behavior to be self-determined and guided by the person's own values, beliefs, and moral standards. Individual behavior is constrained by guilt over failure to act in accord with one's personal standards (in contrast to the shame of public condemnation in honor societies). Dignity-based societies are typically characterized as having strong rule of law that protects individuals. Individuals do not need to take the law into their own hands and look out for themselves as in honor-based societies; thus, the importance of vigilant and aggressive defense of personal reputation has waned in dignity-based societies.

The cultural logic of face-based societies of East Asia is similar to that of honor, in the sense that self-worth is socially conferred. However, the logic of face is different than honor, because in face-based societies, self-worth depends on a person's relative position in a stable hierarchy and is not competitive. One cannot increase one's self-worth by taking another's and appropriating it as one's own;

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[2] States designated by the Census Bureau as being in the South and the West are labeled as "honor states," including 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 (except for Alaska and Hawaii), and all remaining states (including Alaska and Hawaii) are categorized as "nonhonor or dignity states" (e.g., Brown et al., 2018; Cohen, 1996, 1998).

[3] We use the term Latinx (an inclusive, gender nonspecific term replacing Latino/a) to refer to peoples of Latin American descent, regardless of race. However, because gendered assignments (whether self-imposed or assigned) have an important impact in almost every aspect of people's lives, we use the gendered forms, Latina and Latino, when referring to women and men of Latin American descent, respectively.

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claiming more self-worth than one is entitled to is seen as disrupting the much-valued societal harmony and hierarchy. Honor and dignity comprise the dominant cultures affecting the United States, with the northern states promoting a dignity culture, and the southern and western states promoting an honor culture.

It is important to note that cultural logics of honor and dignity are not clear-cut categories to define individuals or societies, but rather tendencies to behave in particular ways. For example, U.S. Northerners will at times take affront at an insult, and Southerners will at times let one pass. Individuals living in all parts of the United States can encounter social situations that promote honor or dignity concerns and values; yet, within different communities and groups the frequencies with which one encounters honor-affording or dignity-affording situations vary. As cultural logics are shaped by those situations, individuals may be more likely to organize their worldviews around the central theme that these situations present, resulting in them adhering to one cultural logic more than the other. Consequently, situations may have stronger effects among some individuals than among others.

## Components of Culture of Honor

In addition to the structural aspects of honor (vs. dignity) that were defined by Leung and Cohen (2011), there are also multiple components of honor which describe behaviors and attributes that earn an individual a good reputation, such as morality and integrity (Cross et al., 2014; Rodriguez Mosquera, 2016). Furthermore, individuals' reputations in honor-based societies depend on their adherence to gender-

specific roles and expectations (Rodriguez Mosquera, 2016). As mentioned earlier, culture of honor prescribes that men must uphold a reputation for toughness, strength, and willingness to respond ferociously to perceived threats, and they must protect and provide for their family. In contrast, women are expected to maintain their reputation for sexual purity, chastity, and loyalty to their husbands and family. Thus, members of honor-based societies express strong concern for maintaining their reputation not only for moral traits (e.g., honesty, trustworthiness), but also for traits and behavior expected based on their gender.

Even though these gender-specific honor norms are part of the traditional gender roles that exist in many societies worldwide, honor-based societies magnify the importance of complying with these gender roles (Vandello & Cohen, 2008). In honor-based societies, individual reputations are collectively shared among family members, which is referred to as family honor. Men and women in honor-based societies are highly concerned with protecting both their own and their family's reputation, because failure to do so brings shame upon the entire family and can damage community relationships (Rodriguez Mosquera, 2016).

## Latinx Community as an Honor Culture Group

In addition to European Americans in the U.S. South and Mountain West, the largest and fastest growing minority group within the United States, Latinx Americans, has also been identified as following culture of honor traditions (Rose & Ellison, 2016; Vandello & Cohen, 2004).[4] According to the latest projections, within the next 40 years, the Latinx population is expected to constitute nearly one fourth of the U.S. population (Flores, 2017).

Latinx gender-based honor norms are commonly studied in terms of *machismo* and *marianismo*. The construct of *machismo* describes a set of values, attitudes, and beliefs about masculinity and what it means to be a man. *Machismo* encompasses both positive and negative aspects of masculinity, including aggression, dominance, sexual prowess, control over women, and reserved emotions (known as *traditional machismo*), as well as protection and provision for the family, chivalry, bravery, responsibility, hard-work, and nurturance (known as *caballerismo*; Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008; Mirandé, 2018; Niemann, 2004).

Complementary to *machismo* is the construct of *marianismo*, which describes a set of values, attitudes, and beliefs concerning the female gender role and what it means to be a woman—based on the model of the Virgin Mary. *Mari-*

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[4] Minorities with Middle Eastern and South Asian origins have also been identified as having an honor culture (e.g., Mathews, 2000; Nobles & Sciarra, 2000), but we focus here on Latinx Americans as this minority group has been studied by researchers in the United States more than groups from the Middle Eastern and South Asian countries.

*anismo* encompasses aspects such as being a generous and self-sacrificial mother, maintaining familism (*familismo*), and creating friendly, harmonious relationships (*sympatia*), as well as passivity, submissiveness, and chastity (Niemann, 2004). Both men and women are socialized with these gender-based honor norms: Women are raised to expect men to be dominant and to respect male authority, protection, and provision, whereas men are raised to expect women to be nurturing, submissive to men, and to appreciate male protection and provision.

Beliefs and values about honor are associated with many positive outcomes, including strong family and community bonds, respect for family (*respeto*), self-sacrificial and altruistic behaviors, positive reciprocity, politeness, and hospitability (e.g., Katiria Perez & Cruess, 2014; Leung & Cohen, 2011; Niemann, 2004). Despite these positive outcomes, certain aspects of honor norms—particularly an emphasis on defending and upholding personal reputations—can have detrimental consequences for the health and well-being of men and women socialized with honor norms. As we discuss in more detail in the following sections, these norms can manifest in intimate partner violence, school violence, and poor mental health. Knowing about the particular social values, beliefs, and mind-sets associated with culture of honor can help practitioners working with individuals belonging to groups and communities with salient honor norms. In the following sections, we review the empirical research showing how culture of honor is implicated in these social issues.

## Culture of Honor as a Risk Factor for Intimate Partner Violence

Violence against women is a major public health, social policy, and human rights concern that traverses all nations, ethnicities, races, and social classes. The most common form of violence women experience is from an intimate partner; 30% of women worldwide (and more than 27% of women in the United States) have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017; World Health Organization, 2017). Here, we bring together empirical research showing how beliefs, values, and norms associated with culture of honor, especially gender-based honor norms, can serve as a risk factor for intimate partner violence (IPV) against women.

Gender-based honor norms can manifest as justification of aggression against women, especially when women are perceived as behaving in ways that threaten their partner's honor (e.g., disobedience, infidelity, and romantic rejection). Within the United States, Latinx individuals and White Southerners/Westerners express these attitudes and perceptions more frequently than do White Northerners. For instance, studies by Vandello and Cohen (Vandello & Co-

hen, 2004; Vandello, Cohen, Grandon, & Franiuk, 2009) showed that people from honor-based societies (U.S. Southerners, Latinx Americans, Brazilians, and Chileans) perceive a woman's infidelity to be more damaging to her husband's honor, view a husband who aggresses toward his unfaithful wife and a woman who tolerates her husband's aggression more positively, and excuse his aggressive behavior more than do people from dignity-based societies (Anglo-Saxon Canadians and U.S. Northerners). Though, these differences between honor and dignity societies in perceptions of people only applied to honor-related conflicts such as infidelity or situations involving romantic jealousy, but not to other conflicts such as disagreements over spending money. Thus, higher tolerance of honor-related aggression among U.S. Southerners/Westerners and Latinx Americans in the context of intimate relationships may not necessarily translate into tolerance of other forms of aggression. In addition to these cross-societal differences, individual differences within the United States alone were demonstrated: North American college students who strongly endorse masculine honor beliefs tend to perceive women's romantic rejection as more threatening to men's honor; consequently, they tend to perceive men's aggressive responses to rejection as more appropriate (Stratmoen, Greer, Martens, & Saucier, 2018).

Such aggressive responses to romantic rejection (and other perceived slights) are associated with many forms of interpersonal violence, including rape. Brown, Baughman, and Carvallo (2018) found that experiences of rape reported by teenage girls are higher in honor (vs. dignity) states, even after controlling for variation in economic deprivation. Furthermore, based on data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Report on rape rates, Brown et al. (2018) found that the average rape rates perpetrated by European American men aged 15 and above are 30% higher in honor (vs. dignity) states. These figures are based on arrest rates, not actual rape rates. The link between culture of honor and rape perpetration and victimization rates may be stronger in reality than that revealed by Brown et al. (2018) because of potentially lower rates of reporting rape to the police in honor (vs. dignity) states: honor norms stigmatize rape and exacerbate victims' reputation concerns, so victims may be reluctant to report rapes (Saucier, Strain, Hockett, & McManus, 2015). In fact, individual-level endorsement of gender-based honor norms both among Latinx Americans as well as the broader U.S. population relate to disapproval of the victim's efforts to seek help or to disclose their physical and sexual abuse to others, including the police (Dietrich & Schuett, 2013; McLean, Crowder, & Kemmelmeier, 2018).

Regarding actual IPV prevalence rates, Latinx Americans account for 34% of the incidence of IPV in the United States (Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014). Some comparative studies have shown that IPV rates among Latinx Americans are greater than among European

Americans (e.g., Bonomi, Anderson, Cannon, Slesnick, & Rodriguez, 2009), whereas others have found lower or similar rates of IPV among Latinx Americans as among European Americans (e.g., Denham et al., 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). These divergent findings on Latinx versus European Americans may be because of the use of different measures of IPV prevalence, different control variables, or failure to address the heterogeneity that may exist within the ethnic subgroups (e.g., Euro Americans from honor vs. dignity states). The studies that addressed a variety of control variables (e.g., economic deprivation, urbanicity, age, and family history) reveal that the differences in IPV rates between Latinx and European Americans generally disappear (e.g., Caetano, Schafer, Clark, Cunradi, & Raspberry, 2000; Straus & Smith, 1995). Controlling for drinking and impulsivity also reduced some of the cross-cultural difference, although it is unclear to what extent drinking and recklessness should be seen as part of the machismo complex. Especially important in this research is that role strain because of strict gendered honor norms and expectations—*machismo* and *marianismo*—as well as acculturation-related factors seem to uniquely contribute to vulnerability to IPV among members of Latinx communities (Cianelli et al., 2013; Mancera, Dorgo, & Provencio-Vasquez, 2017).

## Recommendations for IPV Prevention

There is growing acknowledgment that effective IPV prevention programs must address deeply rooted social norms that foster a social climate that tolerates aggression against women (Alvarez, Davidson, Fleming, & Glass, 2016). Support sessions aimed at increasing awareness about how honor-based gender dynamics may undermine women's health and safety can be an effective prevention strategy (Cihangir, 2013), especially if held at innocuous or familiar locations (e.g., schools, churches, and community centers) rather than in clinics (Davila, Bonilla, Gonzalez-Ramirez, & Villarruel, 2007). These interventions may also benefit from drawing on the positive aspects of honor, such as family and community bonds, kindness, altruism, or protection and care for women and children, which play protective roles when it comes to IPV (Mancera et al., 2017).

Alternatively, intervention programs aimed at exposing *pluralistic ignorance* (i.e., mutual misperception about the beliefs and attitudes of members of the collective) may prove effective in changing tolerant attitudes toward honor-related IPV (Vandello & Cohen, 2004). This suggestion is based on studies showing that men from U.S. South (vs. North) are more likely to mistakenly believe that others are more aggressive and endorse violence more than they do themselves (Vandello, Cohen, & Ransom, 2008). This misperception can lead men to act more aggressively than they

otherwise would as a way to conform to social expectations even when they do not privately endorse these norms. In this way, pluralistic ignorance can lead to the perpetuation of social norms about honor-related IPV. Thus, for honor-related IPV norms to change, there needs to be a shared public recognition of this change. The education sector can bring leadership and resources to develop intervention programs to reduce pluralistic ignorance among high school and college students from honor groups (e.g., students can be exposed to data showing misperceptions about honor-based IPV, see, e.g., Schroeder & Prentice, 1998 for programs to dispel pluralistic ignorance about another social issue).

It is also important to find ways to encourage victims (and family members) to seek help and utilize IPV-related services. Victims' adherence to culture of honor ideals may constitute an obstacle to disclosing experiences of abuse, seeking formal help, and identifying these acts as crimes, because of concerns about shaming the family and fears of further abuse (McLean et al., 2018). In fact, many Latinas have lower rates of disclosure about assault to professionals such as police than do non-Latinas, relying instead on informal support networks such as family members, friends, and clergy (Hazen & Soriano, 2007; Ingram, 2007). Latinas in the United States who are not documented may fear that reporting their abuser would result in their own deportation, resulting in lower levels of disclosure of domestic abuse to formal authorities (Alvarez et al., 2016). These concerns underscore the urgent need for culturally appropriate screening for physical and sexual assault in health care and other settings that serve cultural or ethnic minorities with honor traditions who may be reluctant to seek help.

## Culture of Honor and School Violence

The United States has faced a rising tide of school violence since the mid-1990s, making students, school administrators, families, and teachers increasingly worried about safety at school and turning this subject into one of the most debated societal issues in the country. School violence can come in different forms (e.g., physical fights); in this section, we focus on shootings that are initiated by a student (or students) at or near a school, leading to injuries and death. Some of the incidents that captured attention internationally include the Columbine High School (Colorado) shooting spree in 1999, and the Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School (Parkland, Florida) shooting in 2018. Similar shootings occur in other countries (e.g., the 2009 Winneden shooting in Germany); in this piece, however, we limit our attention to school violence in the United States for two reasons. First, based on media reports, since 2009 the United States has faced 57 times as many school shootings as the other G7 countries combined (Grabow & Rose,

2018). Second, given its frequent nature, social scientists have almost exclusively studied school shooting cases in the United States.[5]

School violence episodes in the United States sparked much discussion on their causes, with the public's attention directed to factors ranging from psychological reasons (e.g., traumatic events in the attacker's life history, mental illness) to societal ones (e.g., lax gun control laws, society-wide moral decline). One obvious common element across different shootings was the gender of the attacker(s): all perpetrators were male. This common denominator led researchers to focus on gender-related reasons underlying the shootings, highlighting the socially constructed culture of masculinity in the American context (e.g., Kalish & Kimmel, 2010; Newman, Fox, Roth, Mehta, & Harding, 2005; Watson, 2007), with several researchers focusing specifically on the role of masculine honor culture (e.g., Brown, Osterman, & Barnes, 2009). The core of the argument put forward by researchers across different social science disciplines was that the hegemonic culture of masculinity in which young American men are socialized encourages the use of violence to retaliate against a perceived challenge to their masculinity.

One particular type of perceived challenge or threat to masculinity is social rejection by schoolmates and other individuals in the form of acute or ongoing ostracism, bullying, malicious teasing or other humiliating experiences. For example, in an examination of 15 school shootings between 1995 and 2001, Leary, Kowalski, Smith, and Phillips (2003) observed that in most cases, the perpetrator(s) had been subjected to repeated patterns of teasing, bullying, or ostracism (and more than half of these cases included incidents of romantic rejection; also see Newman et al., 2005) or, more generally, felt aggrieved or wronged by the larger society (see Kalish & Kimmel, 2010). Social rejection and other types of humiliating experiences are likely to be taken as threats to one's honor by individuals (especially men) socialized with culture of honor norms (e.g., Brown et al., 2009; Stratmoen et al., 2018). Individuals in honor-based societies learn to respond to honor-threatening events in retaliatory ways that help them avoid negative consequences such as losing others' respect (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Uskul et al., 2019). Thus, rejected and humiliated young men raised in honor-based (vs. dignity) societies (especially those who have internalized the societal ideals and, thus, strongly endorse masculine honor beliefs) may feel more compelled to retaliate with violence to an honor threat.

In line with this reasoning, Brown et al. (2009) examined biannual survey data collected in 2003 and 2005 from secondary schools in 42 U.S. states. They found that students from honor states were more likely than students in dignity states to have reported taking a weapon to school in the previous month. They also studied the databases of

school shootings compiled over a 20-year period between 1988 and 2008 and found that school shootings were three times more likely to take place in Southern or Western U.S. states than they were to take place in Northern U.S. states. These differences between honor and dignity states in weapon possession at school and the prevalence of actual school shootings remained when a set of state-level factors and demographic variables such as average yearly temperature, indices of economic and social insecurity, rurality, poverty, religiosity, and the availability of guns were statistically controlled. An analysis of school shooting incidents since 1970 based on statistics obtained from the Centre for Homeland Defense and Security also shows that school shootings take place at higher rates in Southern (vs. Northern) U.S. states, with approximately 42 school shootings per state in the South versus approximately 22 per state in the North (Riedman & Desmond, n.d.).

These observations are in line with state-level findings in the literature on culture of honor in the United States that show higher crime rates in honor (vs. dignity) states, more permissive gun control legislation, a higher "legitimate violence" index (higher rates of executions, violent TV viewership, violent magazine subscription rates, and hunting licenses per capita), more lenient laws toward domestic violence, and representatives who vote for more hawkish foreign policies (Ayers, 1991; Baron & Straus, 1989; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). They also converge with individual-level findings which point to greater tendencies to respond aggressively to honor threats, higher tolerance for corporal punishment in schools, higher support for laws that result in mild sentences for people who use violence in defense of self or property (e.g., shooting of an intruder), and greater likelihood of carrying weapons for protection (e.g., Cohen, 1996, 1998; Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Cohen et al., 1996; Felson & Pare, 2010; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996).

## Recommendations for Violence Prevention in Schools

Culture of honor has been effectively identified as an important sociocultural factor that serves as a risk for school violence (Brown et al., 2009). Addressing culture of honor as a unique risk factor and designing evidence-based interventions that aim to change honor-related expectations for men (e.g., to be tough, manly, not weak or vulnerable, and retaliate against offenders) can be effective in reducing this risk factor and, thus, the prevalence of school violence. School-based interventions led by adults can be designed to teach young men (and women) strategies for deflecting or dismissing insults, rejection, and bullying; how to affirm one's threatened honor in emotionally healthy and peaceful

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[5] To our knowledge, this literature does not break the data by ethnic groups in the United States.

ways; or how to regulate anger, frustration, disrespect, and humiliation (see Shafii & Shafii, 2008 for a review of effective violence prevention programs). In addition, establishing and maintaining supportive school environments and fostering a sense of belonging and trust in school, instead of applying punitive penalties (e.g., expulsion, suspension, and school transfer) for any reported problem can be effective in reducing sociocultural risk factors and in turn reducing the prevalence of school violence (see Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001 for a review). Identifying effective interventions at the individual level requires input from research designed to link individual-level honor endorsement with school violence and to examine the conditions under which threats to masculine honor can lead to extremely aggressive responding resulting in others' death or injury (e.g., repeated bullying or romantic rejection incidents, unreported/undiagnosed mental health difficulties).

## Culture of Honor and Mental Health

The pressures of maintaining one's reputation as an honorable person may create substantial stress and contribute to depression or anxiety. In the sections below, we describe how culture of honor traditions, norms, and beliefs can influence mental health-related outcomes among individuals and communities.

## Experiences of Poor Mental Health

Members of culture of honor groups must diligently protect their reputation from threat and must strive to attain gender-typed (as well as gender-neutral) expectations. Individuals who fail to meet these expectations may lose self-respect and find their reputations harmed (Cohen et al., 2018). For example, the woman whose husband leaves her for another woman is likely to feel abandoned and inadequate, and others may assume that she somehow failed to nurture and protect her marriage. As a result, the person who fails to live up to the culture of honor norms and expectations encounters compound stresses: the personal loss of a sense of worth when such an honor-threatening event occurs, and the potential loss of others' respect and support, leading to poor mental health.

Indeed, residents of honor states in the United States have higher levels of depression, anxiety, and suicide than do residents of dignity states. Using national data from 2004–2005, Osterman and Brown (2011) found that depression rates were higher in honor states than in dignity states, controlling for a variety of other factors (e.g., mean temperature, economic deprivation, and access to health care). This relation was stronger for (non-Hispanic) European Americans than for African Americans. At the individual level, European Americans and Hispanics who strongly endorse masculine honor-related values are also more likely

to describe themselves as depressed than those who do not (controlling for related constructs such as self-esteem, personality traits, and gender; Osterman & Brown, 2011). Although the relation between self-reports of honor endorsement and depression was small (yet statistically significant), it may have been an underestimate of the true relation, given that members of honor cultures may be reluctant to acknowledge feelings of weakness, anxiety, or emotional trouble.

## Latinx Community and Mental Health

Identification with Latinx culture and values (e.g., *familismo*, *caballerismo*, *respeto*, and *sympatia*) can serve as a protective factor in the face of discrimination or acculturation stress (e.g., Arciniega et al., 2008; Katiria Perez & Cruess, 2014; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). Unfortunately, Latinx individuals are also more likely to meet criteria for major depression than are non-Latinx Whites in the United States (Dunlop, Song, Lyons, Manheim, & Chang, 2003; Pratt & Brody, 2008, 2014). Many factors may account for this difference (e.g., economic deprivation, access to appropriate health care, acculturation stress, or discrimination), but several cultural aspects of traditional Hispanic gender roles also appear to play a role in mental health outcomes. For example, endorsement of *machismo* is positively associated with levels of anxiety, cynical hostility, depression, and stress (Fragoso & Kashubeck, 2000; Nuñez et al., 2016). *Marianismo* beliefs are associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and anger (controlling for a variety of other factors; Nuñez et al., 2016; Piña-Watson, Castillo, Ojeda, & Rodriguez, 2013). In short, the beliefs that specify the attitudes and behaviors of a good man or good woman in Latinx culture may also contribute to experiences of stress and poor mental health.

## Help Seeking and Treatment of Poor Mental Health

Self-sufficiency and the appearance of being tough and able to care for oneself in the face of adversity are key values in cultures of honor, especially for men. Consequently, when difficulties or mental distress arises, members of honor groups may be reluctant to seek help. To do so may suggest the person is weak, inadequate, and unable to care for him/herself and family, bringing damage to the individual's reputation. To seek out help may also lead to stigmatization of one's family, leading to "courtesy stigma" or "stigma-by-association" (Muhlbauer, 2002).

Despite evidence that members of honor states have higher levels of depression than members of dignity states, the levels of prescriptions for antidepressant medications are not higher in honor states (Osterman & Brown, 2011; in fact, Crowder & Kemmelmeier, 2014, report higher rates of

antidepressant prescriptions in dignity than in honor states). This suggests that honor culture individuals are less likely to seek help or to rely on medication when depressed. Similarly, parents of children with mental health concerns are less likely to seek help for their children in honor (vs. dignity) states (Brown, Imura, & Mayeux, 2014), but they are equally likely to seek help for children experiencing physical health concerns. College students who strongly endorsed honor-related ideals were more likely to endorse statements that seeking help for a mental health concern reflected inadequacy and could harm their reputation, compared with those who did not endorse honor ideals (Brown et al., 2014). This apparent concern about the stigma of seeking mental health care is also reflected in community resources. Brown and his colleagues (2014) used nationwide data from the years 2000–2006 to show that the availability of mental health care resources was lower in honor states than in other states, even when state-wide levels of economic deprivation, rurality, religion, and collectivism were controlled. In short, culture of honor norms and values that stigmatize expression of the need for help shape not only individual level behaviors but also community and state-wide spending priorities regarding mental health care.

Suicide rates are one of the key indicators of untreated depression. High rates of suicide have complex roots in factors such as low income, social isolation, inadequate access to mental health care, and high rates of gun ownership (Brown, Imura, & Osterman, 2014; Crowder & Kemmelmeier, 2014, 2017; Van Orden et al., 2010). Some observers, however, have linked the high rates of suicide in the Mountain West to cultural factors, such as the "cowboy-up" mentality—the belief that one should be tough, self-reliant, and courageous in the face of difficulties (reflecting honor culture values; Barry-Jester, 2016). Others have argued that suicide is a response to beliefs that one is a burden to one's family because of illness, aging, unemployment, or dishonor (Brown, 2016; Van Orden et al., 2010). In fact, one observer of the suicide epidemic in honor states comments that suicide may be the "ultimate act of self-determination" (Pepper, 2017, p. 345). If suicide is construed as an act of strength and determination, it may be glorified as a "selfless and even altruistic act" that reduces the burden on one's family (Osterman & Brown, 2011, p. 1620).

Indeed, U.S. states with the highest rates of suicide tend to cluster in the Mountain West and the South, as the culture of honor theory suggests (Pepper, 2017). Moreover, archival data collected between 1999 and 2007 revealed that rates of suicide are higher among European Americans in honor states than in dignity states when mean temperature, rates of gun ownership, state-wide levels of collectivism, economic deprivation, and access to health care are controlled at the state-wide level ($d = .75$; Osterman & Brown, 2011). A follow-up study by Crowder and Kemmelmeier (2014), using archival data from 2004–2009 and additional covariates (i.e., social integration), found that when controlling for levels of depression, (lower) rates of antidepressant use partially explained the higher rates of suicide in honor states. Finally, consistent with the view that suicide may be an honorable response to feeling burdensome, the honor versus dignity regional difference in suicide rates among European American men is greatest among men aged 75–84, who are most likely to see themselves as burdens because of ill health or unemployment (Brown, 2016; Crowder & Kemmelmeier, 2017).

These findings using statewide data are informative, but researchers are beginning to investigate the individual attitudes or beliefs that may make individuals from honor states more likely to entertain the possibility of suicide. For example, a study of middle-aged and older men found that men from honor states who evaluated themselves as failing to meet the demands of the honor code tended to report that they were concerned about being a burden to their families (Bock, Brown, & Green, 2019). Furthermore, men in this study who strongly endorsed honor ideals but failed to live up to the standards for an honorable man were most likely to report feelings that they do not belong. Thwarted belongingness, like the fear of being a burden to one's family, is a significant predictor of suicidal thoughts among older adults (Chu et al., 2017). This research builds upon the interpersonal theory of suicide (Joiner, 2005; Van Orden et al., 2010) to show that membership in a culture of honor may exacerbate the degree to which these feelings (i.e., that one is a burden on one's family and that one does not belong to important social groups) create a vulnerability to suicide.

## Help Seeking Among Members of Latinx Communities

Latinx individuals in the United States are less likely to seek professional help for mental health concerns than are non-Latinx Whites (Alegria, Mulvaney-Day, Woo, et al., 2007; Cabassa, Zayas, & Hansen, 2006). Culture of honor only partly explains this effect. Economic issues, such as lack of personal resources or insurance, can reduce the likelihood of seeking help. There may also be few culturally- and linguistically proficient professionals available for Latinx clients in many places (for reviews, see Alegria & Woo, 2009; Bridges et al., 2014). We do not underestimate the significance of the availability of affordable and culturally relevant mental health services in understanding the use of mental health services among Latinx individuals. Yet, lower rates of mental health treatment remained for Latinx participants when many of these factors (e.g., levels of education, health status, and insurance coverage) were controlled (Lagomasino et al., 2005; Miller et al., 2016; Ojeda & McGuire, 2006). This difference in use of professional mental health care services may in part be

because of personal and cultural beliefs related to honor values. In community samples of Latinx individuals, endorsement of masculine gender roles (*machismo*) was associated with negative attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help (Davis & Liang, 2015; Sobralske, 2006). Furthermore, Latinx individuals may be reluctant to seek out professional mental health care or share details about family conflicts because of fears that doing so may dishonor or stigmatize family members (Cabassa, 2007; Villatoro, Morales, & Mays, 2014). These honor-related concerns—*maschimo* and fear of dishonoring one's family—may play a role in limiting Latinx individuals' willingness to seek out counseling and mental health services.

## Recommendations for Mental Health Promotion

Several scholars have addressed the ways in which important Latinx cultural values (such as *familismo* and *respeto*) can be included in outreach and treatment efforts for this population; we refer readers to these sources for recommendations and examples (Adames & Chavez-Duenos, 2017; Applewhite, Garcia Biggs, & Herrera, 2009; Grey & Hall-Clark, 2015). Researchers and practitioners working in honor states with European Americans may find many of the recommendations targeting the Latinx community helpful for their work.

For example, Latinx individuals are more likely to use mental health services when these services are integrated into teams of primary health care providers than when they are in specialty mental health clinics (Bridges et al., 2014; Comas-Díaz, 2006). This allows the individual to avoid the stigma they may fear if others see them entering a specialty mental health clinic. In addition, incorporation of mental health diagnoses and care into primary health care visits may lead to earlier identification of depression and anxiety and contribute to enhanced rates of treatment and reduced levels of suicide.

Similarly, the use of trusted local leaders, such as clergy or "promotores de salud" (promoters of health) has been helpful in facilitating the use of health services among Latinx persons with heart disease and diabetes (Medina, Balcazar, Hollen, Nkhoma, & Soto Mas, 2007; Waitzkin et al., 2011). The cultural value of *respeto* motivates community members to consider the recommendations of these senior, respected members of the community. Latinx individuals are more likely to seek help from clergy than are other Americans (Moreno & Cardemil, 2013; Nadeem, Lange, & Miranda, 2008; Villatoro et al., 2014); consequently, community mental health professionals can reach out to religious leaders to provide information about mental health resources and to encourage their congregants to seek professional help when needed (Dalencour et al., 2017). Messages that couple the values of respect and loyalty to family with the importance of getting help when needed

(e.g., "real men take care of their families and you can't take care of them if you are unwell or dead," "there's nothing honorable about being depressed or dead; treatment will make you stronger and more useful for your loved ones"), delivered by highly respected clergy, community leaders, or celebrities may prove useful in efforts to promote mental health resources for both Latinx and other members of U.S. honor-based groups.

## Conclusion

Research on the manifestation of culture of honor in negative psychological and behavioral health outcomes is relatively new, and it has been disseminated primarily among the academic community. Our goal in this article is to bring this literature to the attention of a wider array of scholars, practitioners, and policymakers who work on intimate partner violence, school violence, and mental health care. The theory of culture of honor provides new insight into these pressing social concerns, and can provoke new approaches to addressing them. Although we discussed intimate partner violence, school shootings, and mental health issues separately, they are likely to be interrelated, and studying them as such can reveal the complex processes underlying how honor operates in social interactions. For example, perpetrators of school shootings may have undiagnosed mental health issues that have resulted from repeated rejection, including partner rejection. In addition, the theory of culture of honor can help build a bridge between researchers and practitioners who work in the U.S. Southern or Mountain West states and those who focus on Latinx populations, leading to the transfer of useful approaches and interventions from one group to the other.

Finally, many of the state-level differences in aggression-related outcomes are explained by individual-level endorsement of masculine honor beliefs (Saucier, Miller, Martens, O'Dea, & Jones, 2018), yet direct, individual-level evidence linking honor norms to the issues raised here is rare. We hope to encourage researchers to include individual-level measures of honor values or ideals (e.g., Brown et al., 2014; McLean et al., 2018; Saucier et al., 2015) to investigate further the ways that personal endorsement of honor values shapes intimate relationships, aggression, and mental health. It is also important for researchers to be aware of different explicit and implicit measures of honor that have recently been developed (see Uskul et al., 2019 for an overview of measures of honor) while paying attention to which aspects of honor these measures focus on (e.g., masculine honor, family honor), which operational definition the scale items favor (e.g., self vs. social image), and at what level of analysis they target the construct (e.g., personal endorsement, perceptions of cultural norms). Needless to say, those who measure honor endorsement across cultural groups also need to take seriously differences in response

biases and other culturally variable aspects of measurement when making comparisons based on self-reports. Researchers should choose measures that are theoretically meaningful for the research question at hand and are valid and reliable from a measurement perspective so that the field gains more insight into the role of honor in societally relevant outcomes.

In recent years, there has been a growing acknowledgment among psychologists that reducing many of the health and mental health issues faced by boys and men today (e.g., violence, completed suicide) requires prevention efforts that are responsive to male-specific needs (American Psychological Association, Boys and Men Guidelines Group, 2018). The theory of cultures of honor helps scientists and practitioners understand the sources of some of these gender-specific issues. Yet, it is important to note that culture of honor shapes women's psychology as much as it does men's; women, just like men, endorse honor norms, and women socialized with these norms have strong concerns for maintaining their reputation, especially for sexual fidelity and loyalty to family (Barnes, Brown, Lenes, Bosson, & Carvallo, 2014). As we described above, these norms can manifest as women's reluctance to seek help in the face of intimate partner abuse, as well as depression and suicidal behavior when they violate feminine honor norms. Women also play a significant role in sustaining culture of honor norms through socialization of their children and influence on their husbands (Lopez-Zafra, Rodríguez-Espartal, & Ramos-Alvarez, 2019). Furthermore, evidence from a few sociological studies suggest that women in cultures of honor are not only passive victims of male aggression. These studies found that female-perpetrated violence rates against family members (including husbands) is higher in the Southern than non-Southern regions (DeWees & Parker, 2003), and the Southern subculture of honor predicts regional variation in female-perpetrated argument-initiated homicides such as lover's triangles, brawls influenced by alcohol and drugs, and arguments over money or property (Doucet, D'Antonio-Del Rio, & Chauvin, 2014). Given these negative influences of culture of honor on both men and women, promoting a healthy masculine and feminine identity among those who are most likely to be influenced by honor norms would help reduce both the perpetration and victimization of intimate partner violence, school violence, depression, and suicide among both men and women.

Recognition of honor values and expectations as risk factors for intimate partner violence, school violence, and poor mental health suggests that solutions to these social issues rest largely at the family and community level, rather than at the individual level. Our recommendations for violence prevention and mental health promotion should not be taken by readers as suggestions that members of honor-based communities and groups should give up their cultural

beliefs and traditions altogether, or as claims that all individual men and women who belong to particular cultural groups are responsible for the occurrence of these societal-level negative outcomes. Instead, we suggest that specific aspects of culture of honor—especially its emphasis on protecting personal reputations—may be directly or indirectly serving as sociocultural risk factors for these social issues. In fact, as discussed earlier, other positive aspects of culture of honor may act as antidotes to counteract some of these negative consequences. Practitioners and prevention specialists who bring an understanding of culture of honor to their work may be in a better position to make sense of behaviors that might appear irrational to some and better able to reduce the harmful consequences of honor norms by appealing to the positive, prosocial elements of culture of honor.

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