

11

Aggression

As long as philosophers have contemplated the human condition, they have also wondered about the nature of aggression in humans. What is its purpose? Where does it come from? What makes people more or less aggressive? Is it innate, or is it caused by outside, situational forces? Like those early philosophers, social psychologists have sought to understand aggression, because of its social nature: It assumes at least two people, an aggressor and a target (Allport, 1924; Geen, 1995; McDougall, 1926). Before we proceed further, let us define aggression as the motive and behavior involved in harming someone else. In this introduction, we very briefly cover some of the major theories and approaches to understanding aggression that researchers in social psychology have considered. This short review is not exhaustive, and there are other places an interested reader can find a more encyclopedic coverage of aggression (e.g., Bushman & Huesmann, 2010).

INSTINCT THEORIES

One popular early view of the origin of aggression suggested that aggression is caused by an “animal instinct” we have

in our brains, stemming from the primitive group of structures in the center of our brains known as the **limbic system** (Scott et al., 1997; Yang, Raine, & Colletti, 2010). This notion was popularized by Freud following a famous correspondence with Albert Einstein, in which the physicist asked Freud about the nature of aggression, specifically, his thoughts on how humans could be so cruel to each other (in reference to World War I; Freud, 1920/1959, 1930). Prior to this, Freud had written about a “life instinct,” or *eros*, which was the driving force in preserving our lives and our positive (love) relationships with others. After considering Einstein’s query further, Freud then suggested that there is an opposite “death instinct,” or *thanatos*, which operates to bring the individual to an ultimate state of nonstress (Freud, 1932/1963). The ultimate state of stresslessness would be death. But, Freud said, most of the time the *eros* is stronger, and the death instinct energy is deflected outward toward others, in the form of aggression (and, in the extreme, war). Others, notably Lorenz (1966), also supported the instinct theory of aggression. However, it soon fell by the wayside among most researchers because of a lack of empirical evidence for such an instinctual cause of aggression.

FRUSTRATION

Another early influential theory about the causes of aggression was proposed by Dollard and colleagues (1939) in their frustration-aggression hypothesis. Dollard and his colleagues suggested that being thwarted from a goal (being frustrated) always causes a person to become aggressive. All aggression, therefore, was always caused by frustration. You may have already noticed a problem with this theory. Yes, it is the words *all* and *always*. Nothing in psychology is ever 100%, because people are messy. There will always be outliers for any explanation of any behavior. So those words doomed the theory from the outset. Later, Berkowitz (1993) reformulated the frustration-aggression hypothesis to say that frustration, or any unpleasant experience, will increase the likelihood of negative feelings, and these in turn will increase the likelihood of being aggressive. That parsimonious revision nicely accounts for most types of aggression.

EVOLUTIONARY VIEWS

Perhaps aggression is part of being human because it is adaptive to be aggressive. This is the essential argument put forth by evolutionary psychologists in explaining aggression. Recall that Darwin's theory of evolution (Darwin, 1859) and natural selection states that the main goal for all organisms is to pass on their genes (primarily via offspring). Behaviors that help the organism survive will be passed on to the next generation, whereas behaviors that make one vulnerable or weak will lead to death, and those genes will not be passed down through future generations. So, the idea is that, because aggression is still present today, it must therefore have been adaptive evolutionarily; it also means that being aggressive is hardwired into our genes as humans. But research has shown wide

variations cross-culturally in the amount of aggression and, even within a particular culture, a difference in the frequency and types of violence (Buller, 2005; Ruback & Weiner, 1995). In light of this variation, how can we say that aggression is hardwired into us through evolution? Evolutionary psychologists respond by saying that such cultural variations in aggression may be due to different evolutionary pressures requiring different adaptations (Buss, 1995; Buss & Malamuth, 1996). Although the evolutionary approach to explaining social behavior has garnered popularity in recent years in social psychology (Neuberg, Kenrick, & Schaller, 2010), it remains for some critics a speculative explanation (Rose & Rose, 2000).

HORMONES, GENDER, AND AGGRESSION

The male hormone testosterone has been associated with increased aggression in animals (Moyer, 1983; Muller, Moe, & Groothuis, 2014) and humans (Dabbs, Carr, Frady, & Riad, 1995; Montoya, Terburg, Bos, & von Honk, 2012). Animals injected with testosterone become more aggressive, and male prisoners convicted of violent crimes show higher levels of testosterone compared with those convicted of nonviolent crimes. A problem with this research in humans is the chicken and the egg conundrum: Are men more aggressive because they have higher levels of testosterone, or does being more aggressive cause an increase in testosterone levels? The research on the relationship is thus correlational and doesn't point to a solid cause-and-effect relationship.

If testosterone, a male hormone, is linked with aggression, that should mean that men are more aggressive than women, right? Research supports this assertion (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). But the issue is not as cut and

dry as it might appear. Is there another idea, besides testosterone, that can account for these gender differences in aggression? Yes, and it suggests that the differences between men and women in aggression are due to differences in the way that we socialize them, from the time they are babies through adulthood. According to social roles theory (Eagly, 1987), all else being equal, socialization differences explain gender differences in behavior better than do theories about differences in brain structures, brain chemicals, hormones, sex chromosomes, or other explanations. In other words, males are more aggressive than females because parents and society teach males to be aggressive. Females are discouraged from being aggressive. Social roles theory has been supported by subsequent research and is a parsimonious theory that makes a compelling case for the origin of sex differences in a wide variety of behaviors (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

SOCIAL LEARNING

According to social learning theory, we acquire aggressive behaviors by watching others (called “models”) perform those behaviors (Bandura, 1978). Aggression is not necessarily innate but rather is a learned behavior in a social context. Beginning with his famous “Bobo doll” experiment (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961), Bandura and his colleagues showed that children imitate aggressive behavior they see in adult models. This basic finding has been supported by hundreds of subsequent studies, and it also pointed to the strong influence that violent media has on children (Eron, 1982; Eron, Huesmann, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 1996). Interestingly, exposure to violent media has been shown to also have a significant effect on adults. Adults also demonstrate an increased likelihood toward violent behavior after they view violent media (Paik & Comstock, 1994; Phillips, 1983).

Viewing violent media has another pervasive effect on adults: It tends to numb their sensitivity to witnessing or committing violent behaviors (Krahe et al., 2011; Thomas, Horton, Lippincott, & Drabman, 1977). This is a key finding that is being tested in one of the articles you will read in this chapter. Bushman and Anderson (2009) reasoned that if watching violent movies or playing violent video games numbs our sensitivity to future incidents of violence, then it may impair our sensitivity to recognizing when others need help. The authors designed two clever studies, one in the field and one lab experiment, to test this idea. There’s a lot to discuss about the Bushman and Anderson article, but we’ll wait for a moment while we finish our overview of aggression research. Let us turn now to understanding how violence and aggression can differ even within a culture.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN AGGRESSION

Although it should be no surprise that attitudes toward aggression and what is considered aggressive behavior differ tremendously between cultures (Barber, 2006; Douglas & Strauss, 2006), very little attention has been directed at the question of regional differences in aggression within a culture. In the early 1990s, Nisbett and Cohen introduced a fascinating theory that could account for differences in attitudes toward aggression (and aggressive behavior) between those who live in the southern United States and those in the northern states (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Nisbett, 1993). Nisbett (1993) noted that there has long been a big regional difference between the North and the South in attitudes toward aggression, going back to the early colonists. Nisbett suggested this difference is due to a difference in agricultural economies, whereby Northerners were cooperative with each other, helping

each other for the common good, whereas the Southerners were independent and isolated. This isolation made Southerners (and their livestock) vulnerable to poachers and thieves. Thus, they needed to be more violent, in order to fend off the constant threat to their livelihood. A man's reputation (as fearsome) was extremely important, and any threat to that was a threat to his honor, his family, and his livelihood. Thus, aggression was seen as not only acceptable in the South but encouraged. These values and attitudes perpetuated themselves in the North and South even long past their necessity (i.e., urbanization, other ways to secure livestock) and to the present day. This brings us to our second paper in this chapter, the article by

Cohen and colleagues (1996). In it, you will read more about this "**culture of honor**" and discover the fascinating and clever ways the researchers empirically examined the differences between the North and the South in their views of aggressive behavior.

This brief introduction to the major empirical and theoretical approaches to understanding aggression in social psychology should give you a sense of how researchers have tried to identify the many causes of aggression and how the two articles you are about to read illustrate outstanding science and clever ways researchers have opened our eyes and minds to new ways of looking at aggression. Now, have fun reading the papers, and we'll talk further after each one.

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INTRODUCTION TO READING 11.1

Bushman and Anderson (2009)

One of the enduring questions in psychology has been the following: Does watching aggression or behaving aggressively make one more relaxed and therefore less likely to be aggressive? Those who say yes include Freud (1932/1963) and Dollard and colleagues (1939). This classic idea derives from Freud's version of catharsis, which says that when one performs or watches others engage in aggressive behaviors (or even fantasizes about aggression), one is relieved of aggressive energy and is therefore less likely to further aggress. Decades of research since Freud has shown just the *opposite* about his catharsis hypothesis. It turns out that watching aggression and acting aggressively don't make one less likely to be aggressive; rather, they *enhance* one's aggressive tendencies (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Patterson, 1974). Another consistent finding about the effects of watching aggression is that the viewer becomes desensitized to subsequent acts of aggression by others (Molitor & Hirsch, 1994) and against others (Mullin & Linz, 1995).

In the following paper by Brad Bushman and Craig Anderson, you will read how they demonstrate the effects of this desensitization on a person's perception of various helping situations. Bushman and Anderson theorized that if exposure to violence makes one desensitized to future violence, might that desensitization also dampen the individual's sensitivity to the plight of another person needing help? In other words, people who were just exposed to violence should be less likely to notice, or slower to notice, that someone needs help, and they should be therefore slower to offer help, compared to people who haven't just watched violence. It is a fascinating question, and the way that the researchers address it in their two studies is quite interesting and clever. More on that in a moment.

Let's take an aside here to compare this paper with the second reprinted article in this chapter, the article by Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, and Schwarz.

One thing you'll notice in the Cohen et al. paper is the leisurely pace and the detailed introduction. The authors have plenty of page space to go into great detail about the background to their study, and they have the luxury of explaining in detail all of the decisions they made all along the way throughout the paper. That paper length is fairly typical of a multistudy article in a top journal like *Personality and Social Psychology*. Other top journals have less space, and therefore require authors to be much more concise in their research report. This is the case with the Bushman and Anderson paper in *Psychological Science*. When you read the Bushman paper, you'll see the introduction is very brief, and the authors get immediately to their premise, rationale, and hypotheses. There are pros and cons to this type of article for the reader. On the pro side, it makes the article more readable, a faster read, and clear. On the con side, some of the assumptions or decisions on design are not explained and that might frustrate some readers. See for yourself which type of article (each with its own pros and cons) you prefer.

When looking at the two studies by Bushman and Anderson, put yourself in the researcher's position. If you were doing a lab study examining the influence of viewing aggression (or behaving aggressively) on one's tendency to notice someone needing help (and to offer help), how would you set up your design? Two big problems off the top: How are you going to manipulate aggression, and how will you construct a believable situation wherein someone needs help (that doesn't make subjects suspicious that it is fake or part of the study)? Now, if you were to examine the same issue (violence desensitizing one to a victim needing help) in the real world, how would you do that? You need to design a field experiment to examine people who just watched (or participated in) violence and then stage a realistic victim needing help. When you read how the researchers

addressed these challenges, ask yourself this: Does this seem to work, or are there confounds that I see that the authors don't seem to address? Do you see ways that you could improve their design? One last intriguing question for you to consider: If watching violence or behaving violently makes a person more likely to behave violently and at the same time desensitized to violence, what is the mechanism by

which the desensitization should decrease sensitivity to the plight of someone who needs help? That is, what is it about being more likely to be aggressive that cuts off our sensitivity to others? Some sort of psychological tunnel vision? Is compassion inhibited when we are in a state of aggression arousal? Without further delay, enjoy the paper, and we'll chat afterward!

Reading 11.1

Research Report

Comfortably Numb

Desensitizing Effects of Violent Media on Helping Others

Brad J. Bushman^{1,2} and Craig A. Anderson³

ABSTRACT—Two studies tested the hypothesis that exposure to violent media reduces aid offered to people in pain. In Study 1, participants played a violent or nonviolent video game for 20 min. After game play, while completing a lengthy questionnaire, they heard a loud fight, in which one person was injured, outside the lab. Participants who played violent games took longer to help the injured victim, rated the fight as less serious, and were less likely to “hear” the fight in comparison to participants who played nonviolent games. In Study 2, violent and nonviolent movie attendees witnessed a young woman with an injured ankle struggle to pick up her crutches outside the theater either before or after the movie. Participants who had just watched a violent movie took longer to help than participants in the other three conditions. The findings from both studies suggest that violent media make people numb to the pain and suffering of others.

Film is a powerful medium, film is a drug, film is a potential hallucinogen—it goes into your eye, it goes into your brain, it stimulates and it's a dangerous thing—it can be a very subversive thing.

— Oliver Stone (quoted in Dworkin, 1996)

If film is a drug, then violent film content might make people “comfortably numb” (borrowing the words of Pink Floyd). Specifically, exposure to blood and gore in the media might make people numb to the pain and suffering of others—a process called *desensitization*.

This study shows that you don't need to have a huge introduction to communicate clearly the background and rationale for a study. Here in this first paragraph, the authors have already told us the whole premise for the study.

One negative consequence of such physiological desensitization is that it may cause people to be less helpful to those in need.

The link between desensitization and helping behavior is provided by a recent model that integrates the pioneering work on helping by Latané and Darley (1968) with our work on physiological desensitization to aggression, illustrated in Figure 1. Several factors must be in place before someone decides to help a victim (Latané & Darley, 1970; see Fig. 2). Three of these factors are particularly relevant here. First, the individual must notice or attend to the violent incident. However, decreased attention to violent events is likely to be one consequence of desensitization. Second, the individual must recognize the event as an emergency. However, desensitization can reduce the perceived seriousness of injury and the perception that an emergency exists. Third, the individual must feel a personal responsibility to help. However, decreased sympathy for the victim, increased belief that violence is normative, and decreased negative attitudes toward violence all decrease feelings of personal responsibility.

Although previous research has shown that violence in the media can produce desensitization related outcomes (e.g., Linz, Donnerstein, & Adams, 1989; Molitor & Hirsch, 1994; Mullin & Linz, 1995; Thomas, Horton, Lippincott, & Drabman, 1977), this model illuminates two gaps in the desensitization literature. First, there are no published studies testing the hypothesis that violent media stimuli known to produce physiological desensitization also reduce helping behavior. Second, there are no field experiments testing the effect of violent-entertainment media on helping an injured person. We recently found that playing a violent video game for just 20 min decreased skin conductance and heart rate while watching real scenes of violence (Carnagey, Anderson, & Bushman, 2007). We conducted two studies to help fill these gaps: a lab experiment using violent video games (Study 1) and a field study using violent movies (Study 2).

STUDY 1

Participants played a violent or a nonviolent video game. Later, they overheard a staged fight leading to injury. We predicted that playing a violent video game, in comparison to playing a nonviolent game, would decrease the likelihood of help, delay helping, decrease the likelihood of noticing an emergency (the first step in the helping process), and decrease the judged severity of the emergency (the second step in the helping process).

Method

Participants

Participants were 320 college students (160 men, 160 women) who received extra course credit in exchange for voluntary participation.

Procedure

Participants were tested individually. They were told that the researchers were studying what types of people liked various types of video games. After giving consent, participants played a randomly assigned violent (*Carnageddon*, *Duke Nukem*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Future Cop*) or nonviolent (*Glider Pro*, *3D Pinball*, *Austin Powers*, *Tetra Madness*) video game.

Desensitization—the reduction of a natural sensitivity to a stimulus

All good experiments are grounded in a theory. Here Bushman and Anderson ground theirs in past helping models by Latané and Darley, and they explain how that early work connects with their current study.

Here, Bushman and Anderson lay out the rationale for their study. They explain why this study is new and necessary.

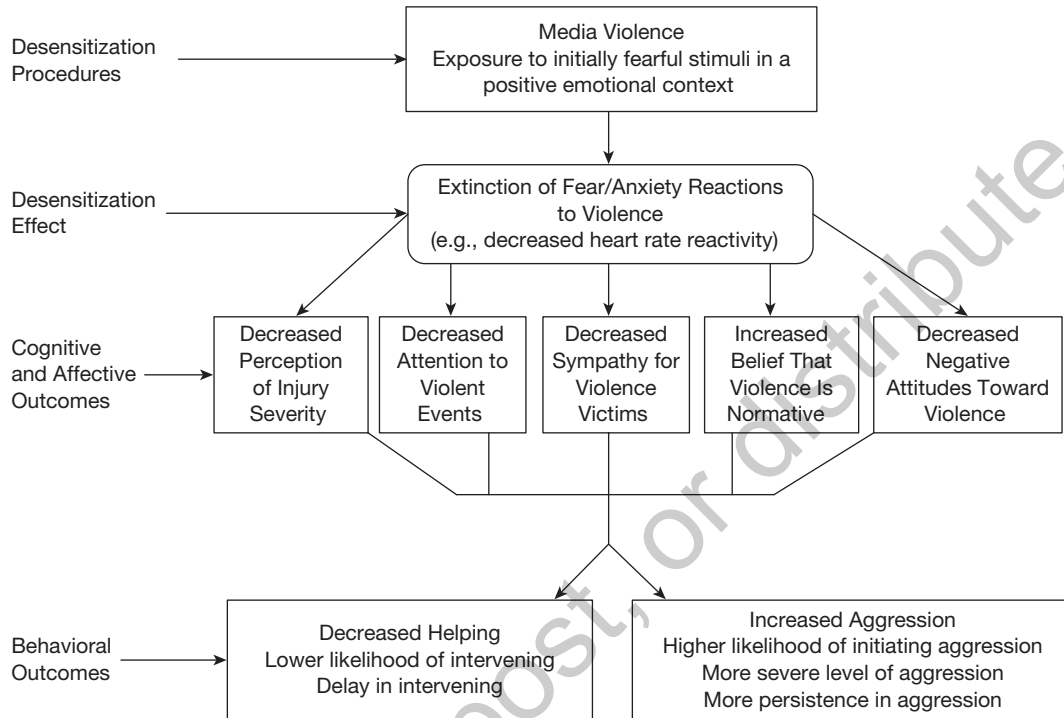
All experiment reports in psychology list the author's hypotheses at the end of the introduction, just before the description of the method.

Though they make no predictions about gender differences, it is a good idea to examine men and women in the study to determine if men and women respond differently to this desensitization.

As a critical reader, you might ask yourself how they know these games are violent (and non-violent)? How did they operationally define violent? Also, are each of the games equally violent (or equally nonviolent)?

FIG. 1.

Model of the effects of exposure to media violence. Such exposure serves as a desensitization procedure leading to increases in aggression and decreases in helping. Adapted from Carnagey, Anderson, and Bushman (2007).



We used the same violent and nonviolent video games and the same participant pool that Carnagey et al. (2007) used to demonstrate physiological desensitization to violence.

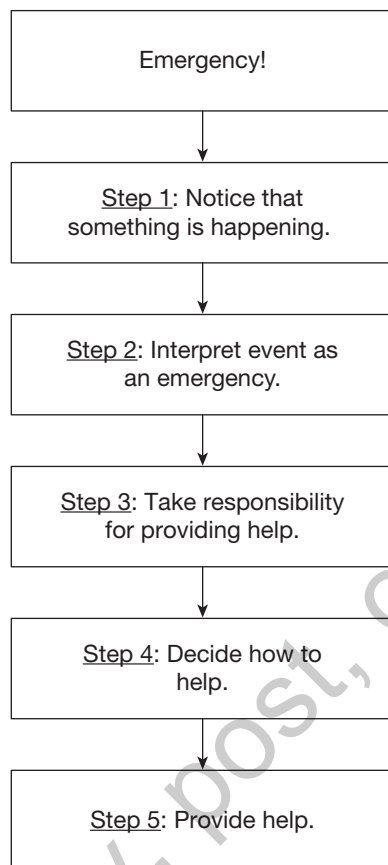
The experimenter set a timer for 20 min, handed the participant a lengthy questionnaire, and said,

After the timer goes off, please complete this questionnaire. I need to code some data for another study, but I promise to be back in about 40 min. Please don't leave the building until I get back. I have to ask you some questions about the video game before you leave. Okay?

The experimenter then departed.

After playing the video game for 20 min, participants rated on a 10-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 10 = *extremely*) how action-packed, enjoyable, fun, absorbing, arousing, boring, entertaining, exciting, involving, stimulating, addicting, and violent the video game was. The violence rating was used as a manipulation check. The other ratings were used as possible covariates in the analyses to control for differences in video games other than violent content. After reverse-scoring boring ratings, principal components factor analysis showed that the covariates loaded on a single factor (eigenvalue = 7.21), and were therefore combined (Cronbach α = .94). Because the results were virtually identical with and without the covariates, we only report the simpler analyses that excluded the covariates.

"manipulation check"—This is a common way to determine if a manipulation (the IV) was indeed effective, and if the subject perceived the IV accurately.

Fig. 2. Five steps to helping. Adapted from Latané and Darley (1970).

Next, participants indicated their favorite type of video game (i.e., education, fantasy, fighting with hands or weapons, skill, or sports). They also completed a lengthy bogus questionnaire (over 200 items), ostensibly to determine what types of people prefer various types of video games. The real purpose of the questionnaire was to keep participants busy while a recording of a staged fight was played outside the lab.

Three minutes after the participant finished playing the video game, the experimenter, who was outside of the lab, played an audio recording of a staged fight between two actors. The 6-min fight was professionally recorded using experienced actors. Two parallel versions of the fight involved male actors (used for male participants) or female actors (used for female participants). In the recording, the two actors were presumably waiting to do an experiment. They began by talking about how one stole the other's girlfriend (male version) or boyfriend (female version). The discussion quickly deteriorated into a shouting match (as indicated in the following script from the male version):

First actor: You stole her from me. I'm right, and you know it, you loser.

Second actor: Loser? If I'm a loser, why am I dating your ex-girlfriend?

First actor: Okay, that's it, I don't have to put up with this shit any longer.

Consider the design: you've just exposed the subject to the desensitizing violence. Next you want to see if it inhibits the subject's perception of a helping situation and makes him or her less likely to help another. Do you just have the subject sit there while the helping manipulation occurs? Seems too contrived, right? So let's have the subject do some task (here, a 200-item questionnaire) to make the "fight" next door seem unrelated to our study.

To keep things standardized for all participants, the "fight" is just a recording of people fighting, rather than having actors really yelling in the next room. That way, potential differences in live performances of the fight is not a confound.

How long should the fight be? This is an unknown, and one that can only be answered by testing out different durations on small samples before we start the actual study. These are called "pre-tests" or "pilot testing." It helps researchers work out the finer points like duration of the fight, or if something is making a participant unduly suspicious. Then we can make changes to the method before we start the main data collection.

When the recording reached this point, the experimenter threw a chair onto the floor, making a loud crash, and kicked the door to the participant's room twice.

Second actor: [groans in pain] First actor: Ohhhh, did I hurt you?

Second actor: It's my ankle, you bastard. It's twisted or something. First actor: Isn't that just too bad?

Second actor: I can't even stand up! First actor: Don't look to me for pity.

Second actor: You could at least help me get off the floor.

First actor: You've gotta be kidding me. Help you? I'm outta here. [slams the door and leaves]

At this point, the experimenter pressed the start button on the stopwatch to time how long it would take for participants to help the second actor—the violence victim. On the recording, the victim groaned in pain for about 1.5 min. Because the first actor had “left,” there was no perceived danger to the participant in helping the second actor.

The experimenter waited 3 min after the groans of pain stopped to give participants ample time to help. If the participant left the room to help the victim, the experimenter pressed the stop button on the stopwatch and then debriefed the participant.

If the participant did not help after 3 min, the experimenter entered the room and said, “Hi, I'm back. Is everything going all right in here? I just saw someone limping down the hallway. Did something happen here?” The experimenter recorded whether the participant mentioned hearing the fight outside the room. Those who reported hearing the fight rated how serious it was on a 10-point scale (1 = *not at all serious*, 10 = *extremely serious*). As justification for rating the severity of the fight, the experimenter explained the rating was required for a formal report that needed to be filed with the campus police. Finally, the participant was fully debriefed.

We conducted a pilot study involving 50 college students (25 men, 25 women) to test whether they thought the fight was real. Only 5 of the first 10 participants in the pilot study thought the fight was real. We therefore increased the realism of the fight (e.g., knocked over a chair and pounded on the door). After making these changes, all of the remaining 40 participants thought the fight was real.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

As expected, violence ratings were higher for the violent games ($M = 7.89$) than for the nonviolent games ($M = 1.51$), $F(1, 316) = 823.13$, $p < .0001$, $P_{\text{rep}} > .99$, $d = 3.22$. We used four violent games and four nonviolent games to improve generalizability (Wells & Windschitl, 1999). Within each type of video game, we tested whether the four games produced different effects on any of the dependent variables. No significant differences were found among the four violent or the four nonviolent games. Thus, data were collapsed across exemplars of video game types for subsequent analyses.

Main Analyses

Helping. Although in the predicted direction, there was no significant difference in helping rates between violent and nonviolent video game players, 21% and 25%, respectively,

This rating is a great indicator of the participant's view of the fight and how severe the helping situation appeared to be. Now, if most participants didn't help, and then we find that most perceived the fight to not be serious, well that may be a good reason why no one offered help to the victim.

And here is a perfect reason why it is important to pilot test one's experiments: here, only 50% of the subjects believed in the authenticity of the fight. So, the authors modified aspects of the fight, and retested it, and got 100% of the pilot test subjects to believe that the fight was real.

No difference in helping rates between nonviolent video game participants vs. nonviolent video game participants. Interesting!

$z = 0.88, p = .38, P_{\text{rep}} > .59, \Phi = -.05$. Participants who said their favorite type of video game involved “fighting with hands or weapons” were less likely to help than those who said their favorite video game was nonviolent, 11% and 26%, respectively, $z = 2.46, p < .02, P_{\text{rep}} > .92, \Phi = -.14$.

Time to Help. When people who played a violent game did decide to help, they took significantly longer ($M = 73.3$ s) to help the victim than those who played a nonviolent game ($M = 16.2$ s), $F(1, 70) = 6.70, p < .02, P_{\text{rep}} > .92, d = 0.61$.

Heard Fight. The first step to helping is to notice the emergency. As expected, people who played a violent game were less likely to report that they heard the fight than those who played a nonviolent game, 94% and 99%, respectively, $z = 2.00, p < .05, P_{\text{rep}} > .87, \Phi = -.11$.

Severity of Fight. The second step to helping is to judge the event as an emergency. As expected, people who played a violent game thought the fight was less serious ($M = 5.91$) than did those who played a nonviolent game ($M = 6.44$), $F(1, 239) = 4.44, p < .04, P_{\text{rep}} > .89, d = 0.27$. Men also thought the fight was less serious ($M = 5.92$) than did women ($M = 6.49$), $F(1, 239) = 5.43, p < .03, P_{\text{rep}} > .90, d = 0.29$.

Discussion

Violent video games known to produce physiological desensitization in a previous study (Carnagey et al., 2006) influenced helping behavior and related perceptual and cognitive variables in theoretically expected ways in Study 1. Participants who played a violent game took significantly longer to help, over 450% longer, than participants who played a nonviolent game. Furthermore, compared to participants who played a nonviolent game, those who played a violent game were less likely to notice the fight and rated it as less serious, which are two obstacles to helping.

STUDY 2

Participants in Study 2 were adult moviegoers. Our confederate, a young woman with a wrapped ankle and crutches, “accidentally” dropped her crutches outside a movie theater and struggled to retrieve them. A researcher hidden from view timed how long it took moviegoers to retrieve the crutches for the confederate. We expected that participants who had just watched a violent movie would take longer to help the confederate than would participants who had just watched a nonviolent movie or participants who had not yet seen a movie.

Method

Participants

Participants were 162 adult moviegoers.

Procedure

A minor emergency was staged just outside theaters that were showing either a violent movie (e.g., *The Ruins*, 2008) or a nonviolent movie (e.g., *Nim’s Island*, 2008). The violent movies were

Even though the data indicated no differences in helping rates between the two conditions, the researchers DID find expected significant differences between the conditions in terms of perceptions of the victim, time elapsed before offering help, and the severity of the fight, which support their overall prediction that violent media desensitizes one to subsequent helping situations.

In lab vs. field research there are pros and cons to each. Generally speaking, however, it is best to attempt to test one hypotheses with different methods. To the degree that one obtains support for one’s hypotheses using different research approaches, we can be that much more confident in the results and conclusions we make. Here, the researchers are testing their predictions experimentally (Study 1, in the lab) and out in a field setting (Study 2, at the movie theater).

It would be ideal for the researchers to explain further why they chose these two films for their “violent” and “nonviolent” conditions. The authors say that they simply chose the non-violent movie based on its PG rating, and the violent due to its R rating. But the MPAA (movie rating board) says that violence can be found even in PG and G movies. So it would be good to know that this particular nonviolent movie truly was devoid of all violence. Moreover, it would be good to know what type of violence is present in the “violent movie” in this experiment.

The researchers measured this because Latané & Darley found, in their classic research on bystander apathy, that eyewitnesses are less likely to help a victim as the number of other witnesses increases.

rated “R”; the nonviolent movies were rated “PG.” Participants had the opportunity to help a young woman with a wrapped ankle who dropped her crutches just outside the theater and was struggling to retrieve them. The confederate was told to pick up her crutches after 2 min if nobody offered help, but she always received help in less than 11 s. After receiving help, she thanked the helper and then hobbled away from the theater. A researcher hidden from view timed with a stopwatch how long it took participants to help the confederate. The researcher also recorded the gender of the person offering help and the number of potential helpers in the vicinity.

The researcher flipped a coin in advance to determine whether the emergency was staged before or after the showing of a violent or nonviolent movie. Staging the emergency before the movie allowed us to test (and control) the helpfulness of people attending violent versus nonviolent movies. Staging the emergency after the movie allowed us to test the hypothesis that viewing violence inhibits helping. The confederate dropped her crutch 36 times, 9 times in each of the four experimental conditions.

Results and Discussion

Although the helping delay increased as the number of bystanders increased, and women helped less often than men, these effects were not statistically significant and were not analyzed further. The data were analyzed using a model testing approach, in which a specific contrast representing our theoretical model and the residual between-groups variance are both tested for significance. If the theoretical model adequately accounts for differences among observed means, then the specific contrast should be significant and the residual between-groups variance should be nonsignificant. As predicted, participants who had just viewed a violent movie took over 26% longer to help ($M = 6.89$ s) than participants in the other three conditions ($M = 5.46$ s), $F(1, 32) = 6.20, p < .01, P_{rep} > .95, d = 0.88$ (see Fig. 3). Furthermore, the residual between-groups variance was not significant, $F < 1.0$, indicating that the theoretical model adequately accounted for the pattern of means. Indeed, the model accounted for 98% of the between-groups variance. The lack of a difference in helping before watching the movie rules out the possibility that less-helpful people were more likely to attend the violent movies.

The researcher's hypotheses were supported!

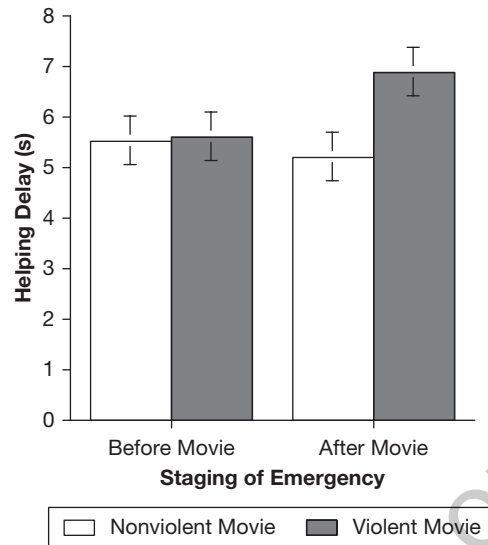
GENERAL DISCUSSION

These two studies support the desensitization hypothesis linking media violence to decreased helping behavior. In Study 1, violent video games known to desensitize people caused decreases in helping-related behavior, perceptions, and cognitions. In Study 2, violent movies delayed helping in a wholly naturalistic setting. The person in need of help had an injured ankle in both studies. In Study 1, the injury resulted from interpersonal violence, whereas in Study 2, the cause of injury was unknown. The similar results across very different studies suggest that desensitization caused by media violence generalizes beyond failure to help victims of violence. Theoretically, we expect such generalization; one factor influencing helping behavior is judged severity of injury, and that judgment is influenced by one's own emotional and physiological reaction to the injury.

In sum, the present studies clearly demonstrate that violent media exposure can reduce helping behavior in precisely the way predicted by major models of helping and desensitization theory. People exposed to media violence become “comfortably numb” to the pain and suffering of others and are consequently less helpful.

FIG. 3.

Mean time elapsed before adults helped a confederate pick up her crutches as a function of whether they watched a violent or nonviolent movie before or after the staged emergency.



You might say to yourself: why would they measure helping BEFORE the movie exposure? The reason is to assess whether there is a difference in types of people who attend each movie. Maybe people already desensitized to violence like violent movies, in which case, you would find the predicted difference even before they were exposed to violent media (the movie). As it turns out, that was not the case, and the researchers are able to say that the difference in helping was due to the different types of movies each group had seen.

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POST-ARTICLE DISCUSSION

Two of the many great characteristics of this paper are its simplicity and clarity. It is a study in wonderful scientific writing, sophisticated but understandable to the lay person. It is also an interesting and fast read. We immediately understand the basic premise in the opening paragraph. By the third paragraph (and that is the extent of the whole introduction!), we have the hypotheses for the two studies. Bushman and Anderson nicely show us the rationale for their studies in paragraph 3, and then they tie it to classic research by Latané and Darley on helping behavior and bystander apathy. They say that if viewing violence decreases sensitivity, it may make one less likely to notice that another person needs help. Specifically, in their famous five steps to helping model, Latané and Darley (1970) say that to help, one must (1) notice the event, (2) interpret it as an emergency (or that someone needs help), (3) accept responsibility to help, (4) know how to help, and (5) help. Bushman and Anderson say that viewing violence interferes with the first three steps.

How does one design a study to address this? Bushman and Anderson's first experiment is fascinating and presents an interesting design. In this lab study, they have to first come up with a way for people to behave aggressively but in such a way that they don't get hurt or hurt others. Their solution: Play violent video games. Yes, that would work. Next, what do you mean by "violent video games"? And what is considered a "nonviolent" video game?

The next big problem Bushman and Anderson had to address was how to stage an emergency or helping situation. Do you want it IN the lab (e.g., experimenter fainting) or near/outside the lab room, within hearing range? What sort of emergency is it? Is it believable? When will you start timing the participant to see if she notices or goes to help? While we are on this point, remember from the margin notes an important part of this experiment: the pilot testing. The authors found that, initially, few participants (5 out of 10) believed the helping emergency was real. After changing some things, their subsequent participants all reported that they believed the emergency was real. Pilot testing is an essential part of all experimentation.

Now, keeping yourself in the shoes of the researcher for a few more moments, how would you test your hypotheses about viewing violence and desensitization to the plight of others outside of the lab? You first need to find a place where violence is occurring (and a similar place where it isn't occurring). Then you need to stage a helping situation (with a confederate) right outside and then determine how long it takes people to notice and help the victim. Perhaps outside a boxing match? Or outside Wal-Mart on Black Friday (watch out!)? Bushman and Anderson chose violent and nonviolent movies and then had a confederate on crutches drop her crutches and struggle to pick them up. Recall an earlier point I brought up: How do the researchers define violence (in these movies)? Do you think it was random that the researchers had a female confederate for this study? Not at all. People are likely to think that a male on crutches is less in need of help than a female on crutches.

Bushman and Anderson created a theoretical model (on p. 2 of their paper) describing how they believe that viewing violence desensitizes an individual and how that desensitization manifests itself in terms of one's perception of the need of another person (for help). So according to the researchers, the mechanism by which viewing violence influences helping is via desensitization. However, recall our discussion of catharsis and how it energizes the person to be even more likely to commit subsequent acts of aggression. An unanswered question (for future research) is, Does viewing violence (or acting violently) make one more likely to be violent (as suggested by catharsis research)? If so, how does that influence the desensitization process? Does it go like this?

Viewing violence → increased likelihood to be aggressive → decreased sensitivity → decreased sensitivity to the plight of others

Or something like the following?

Viewing violence → increased likelihood to be violent → decreased sensitivity to the plight of others

Viewing violence → decreased sensitivity → decreased sensitivity to the plight of others

Or is it something else entirely? That is a question for another study. One of the main criteria by which papers were chosen for inclusion in this volume is that they had to demonstrate clever and creative, clear, sophisticated yet understandable experimental design solutions to not-so-intuitive theoretical and conceptual problems. The Bushman and Anderson studies do just that and also teach us much about good design, clever problem solving, outstanding writing, and good science.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Let's start with the rationale for the experiment: the idea that exposure to violence in the media would make one desensitized to the plight of others and therefore one would be less likely to be helpful to those in need. Although there is a lot of empirical support for the desensitizing effects of violence in reaction to viewing other violence or even committing violence oneself, does that type of desensitization translate to a complete desensitization across the board (and therefore to making one less likely to perceive others in need), or did the authors make too big of a leap in suggesting that?
2. As you may know, there are certain limitations to conducting experiments outside of the controlled setting of the lab (i.e., "in the field"). One is the lack of control over confounding variables. Can you think of possible confounds that may account for the differences between experimental conditions in the movie study?
3. When critically examining an experiment's method, one important question to ask is how are the researchers operationally defining their IVs? In the video game study, the researchers have subjects either play a nonviolent or violent video game. What data do the researchers present to show that people perceive these two groups distinctly different in terms of violence? Also, within each group, are all of the video games perceived as equally violent (for the violent group) or nonviolent?

(in the nonviolent group)? Do you think that, for example, today's violent games (e.g., Call of Duty) might be significantly more violent than the games used by the researchers in this 6-year-old study?

4. In addition to self-report measures by participants in the video game study, should the researchers also have gathered physiological measurements of arousal before and during the video game? What would the benefits and limitations of such measures be in this experiment?
5. In the video game study, do you think that it would be better for the researchers to have the participants to react to an overheard (but tape recorded) "fight" (and a victim who needs help) between two other subjects in the adjacent lab room (as they did for this study), or have participants react to a written plea for help (e.g., charity, request for time/money)? Why?
6. In the movie experiment, the researchers found that when they assessed helping among moviegoers before the movie, there were no differences in helping rates between the nonviolent and violent moviegoers. The authors used that finding to support the idea that the two groups did not differ in their sensitivity to the need of others before the movie. Now, suppose they DID find differences between groups in helping before the movie. Would the only reason be that that helping difference is due to personality (or sensitivity) differences? Can you think of any other possible confounds that could account for differences?
7. Let's revisit a point made in the margins of the article regarding the movie study. The researchers staged the helping situation outside of nonviolent movies or violent movies. They gave a sample movie and said only that the violent movies were rated R and nonviolent ones were rated PG. How did they determine violence (and how did they define violence) in the violent movies? Are all PG movies nonviolent? (Short answer: no.) So, we clearly need more information here. Suppose you are an experimenter who wants to re-create this study. What are your questions about this issue?
8. Do you think the "woman dropping her crutches" manipulation in the movie experiment represented a good helping scenario (believable, important enough to require assistance immediately)? If not, what are your ideas for alternate helping situations, and why would they be an improvement?
9. What are the unanswered questions that you have about the study and the conclusions (that exposure to violent media does indeed suppress one's perception of a victim's plight and, once one perceives that someone needs help, makes one less likely to offer help)? What are the mechanisms by which violent media make one less sensitive to the plight of others and cause one to be less likely to offer help?

INTRODUCTION TO READING 11.2

Cohen et al. (1996)

In all of my courses, I always do a review of psychological research methods at the outset to make sure we're all on the same page going forward in terms of understanding the studies we'll discuss. You may remember from your intro research methods class a discussion about external validity (also known as generalizability) of research findings from the lab. When discussing this concept, I tell students that researchers ideally want to generalize their lab findings to the whole world, to all of humanity. Unfortunately, because of cultural differences, we cannot do that, so we must restrict it to people within the borders of the United States. We assume that everyone in the U.S. population is generally the same and has the same "American" set of political, cultural, economic, and spiritual values.

However, the fascinating research in this paper by Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, and Schwarz (1996) reminds researchers that such an assumption is not necessarily accurate. Cohen and colleagues' outstanding work shows us that, in this case, there are regional differences within the United States that can have important, large influences on behavior, depending of course, on what one is studying. In the area of aggression, Cohen et al. highlight the interesting and strange fact that an old "culture of honor" that arose long ago in the early days of the country as a result of practical reasons still has a strong hold on behavior and values hundreds of years after the reasons for that culture have faded away.

This study of the culture of honor reminds psychological researchers of the importance of not assuming that one's research will generalize to an entire country. We see citizens of a country

as homogeneous, but there are important differences within a culture or country that researchers need to remember. Another reason this paper was selected for this volume is the authors' examination of the phenomenon via field research and the inventive and clever ways the researchers solved the empirical challenges in doing so. Two thirds of all research in social psychology is done in the lab, because it allows us to make clear cause-and-effect statements about behavior and because we have control over the environment, and therefore observed differences between groups on the dependent variable are likely due to the differences in the levels of the independent variables and not due to confounds.

Although Cohen and Nisbett have, in other papers, reported experiments on the culture of honor in the lab, these field studies by Cohen et al. are important because they allow us to examine the phenomenon with a better ability to say that the observed results are generalizable to the real world, either because participants are unaware they are being observed or their behavior in their natural setting is not intruded on by the experimenter in such a way as to affect it or change it. When you read the following paper, pay special attention to how the researchers explain the design of their experiment, how they operationalize their variables, and the rationale they give for the experimental choices they make. Ask yourself if there are any pitfalls in the direction the authors went and if you can think of potential confounds in their design. How would you do things differently? Or would you do anything differently? Enjoy the paper, and we'll recap afterward!

Reading 11.2

Field Experiments Examining the Culture of Honor: The Role of Institutions in Perpetuating Norms About Violence

Dov Cohen

Richard E. Nisbett

Two field experiments illustrate how institutions of the U.S. South and West can help perpetuate violence related to a culture of honor. In Study 1, employers across the United States were sent letters from job applicants who had allegedly killed someone in an honor-related conflict. Southern and western companies were more likely than their northern counterparts to respond in an understanding and cooperative way. In Study 2, newspapers were sent facts for a story concerning a stabbing in response to a family insult. Southern and western papers created stories that were more sympathetic toward the perpetrator and presented his actions as more justified than northern papers did. Control conditions in both studies showed that the greater sympathy of southern and western institutions involves honor-related violence, not all violence or crime in general. Findings highlight the importance of examining the role of institutional behavior in perpetuating culture.

A mark of a well-written paper is that the researchers present the main rationale for the experiment right away, succinctly, and clearly, as they do here.

The standard view of the Old South and West is that these regions accepted, and even glorified, certain types of violence. In these frontier areas where the law was weak, where one's wealth could be rustled away instantly, and where citizens had to depend on themselves for protection, violence—or at least the threat of it—became a powerful force in social interaction. Insults or any challenge indicating that a person could be pushed around had to be met with harsh retaliation so that a man would not be branded an “easy mark.”

Anthropologists call societies that hold such violent norms *cultures of honor*. Such cultures have been created independently many times and in many places the world over (Gilmore, 1990; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Schneider, 1971). And the conditions that can give rise to cultures of honor—weak or absent law enforcement, portable (and, therefore, stealable) wealth, economic uncertainty, and high variability of economic outcomes—are present today in pockets all over the world, from the inner cities of the United States to sparsely populated regions of Asia, Europe, and Micronesia. In such societies, in which one is vulnerable to predation, it becomes adaptive for one to adopt a tough, don't-mess-with-me stance.

Many subcultures within the United States can be characterized as possessing some version of a culture of honor, undoubtedly contributing to the high rate of violence in this country. What is striking, however, is not that cultures of honor exist where the conditions that created them are still in place but that some of these cultures continue to persist, even after there may be no functional reason for individuals to behave that way.

The regional cultures of honor in the South and West are good examples of this persistence. For the most part, the South and West are no longer frontier, herding regions where social and economic circumstances make the culture of honor a functional adaptation. Yet, the cultures in these regions remain strong. In this article, we use two field experiments to

demonstrate that the culture of honor continues to exist in the South and the West at an institutional (as well as individual) level. Institutional supports for violence may well “feed back” and help to perpetuate that culture.

Examining Culture

Psychologists are used to studying culture at the level of individual attitudes and behaviors. But as Miller and Prentice (1994) showed, collective norms exist that cannot be derived by simply aggregating individual attitudes. Understanding the collective is not just a matter of assessing the individuals in it and then summing their scores on some dimension (see also Kuran, 1995; Schelling, 1978; Sunstein, 1995). To examine culture, one needs to go beyond the level of the individual and examine public representations (Sperber, 1990). To say that one culture is more violent than another does not mean simply that there are more violent individuals in one culture; it normally means that there are more institutional, social, and collective supports for violence in that culture. Culture exists, and can be studied, at the collective, public level as well as the individual, private level.

Although behaviors are ultimately performed by individuals or groups of individuals, such behaviors can carry profound cultural consequences when they affect institutional policies or public representations. Behavior takes on the imprimatur of cultural approval as people act in their “official” roles. In this way, public representations can feed back and influence what is defined as culturally acceptable, worthy of reward or punishment. In this article, we try to demonstrate two mechanisms by which this happens: (a) the social stigma or lack of stigma for violent acts and (b) media representations of violence as heinous and unacceptable or as justified and understandable.

Persistence of a Culture of Honor in the South and West

There is evidence from a number of different methods that a culture of honor does indeed persist in the modern South and West. Such evidence comes from analyses of homicide records, attitude surveys, laboratory experiments, aggregate behavioral data, and laws and social policies.

The white homicide rates of the South and West far surpass those of the North (see discussions by Baron & Straus, 1988, 1989; Gastil, 1971; Hackney, 1969; Huff-Corzine, Corzine, & Moore, 1986, 1991; Kowalski & Peete, 1991; Land, McCall, & Cohen, 1990; Lee, 1995a; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996, chap. 2; Nisbett, Polly, & Lang, 1995; Reaves & Nisbett, 1995). The differences

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The researchers are making an important point here. Normally, psychologists study individual behavior (we leave examinations of societal-level behavior—e. g. poverty, justice—to the sociologists). However, here the researchers are proposing to examine a phenomenon—regional differences in aggression—by examining differences at the cultural level. Before you read further, think about how you might design experiments to address that challenge.

can be quite dramatic. For example, Nisbett and his colleagues (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996, chap. 2; Nisbett et al., 1995; Reaves & Nisbett, 1995) showed that homicide rates in small towns in the South are triple those of small towns in the North. Importantly, the effect is limited to differences between southern and northern Whites. Regional differences do not exist for Black homicide rates, suggesting that it is something about White southern culture (rather than just living below the Mason-Dixon Line) that elevates southern White homicide rates.

Further, in a more detailed analysis, Nisbett and colleagues (Nisbett, 1993; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Nisbett et al., 1995) showed that it is only conflict-, argument-, or brawl-related homicides—not homicides committed in the context of other felonies such as robbery—that are elevated in the South and West. This pattern was also confirmed by Rice and Goldman (1994), who found not only that southerners were more likely to kill over arguments but also that they were more likely to kill people they knew. “Both of these findings,” Rice and Goldman argued, “are consistent with common cultural explanations for southern violence” (p. 381).

In attitude surveys, White southern (and, to a lesser extent, western) respondents are more likely to endorse violence consistent with culture-of-honor norms (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). Although they are not more likely to endorse violence of all sorts, they are more likely to endorse it when used for self-protection, to answer an affront, or to socialize children. Ellison (1991) also found that “native southerners are disproportionately inclined to condone defensive or retaliatory forms of violence” (p. 1223). Thus, there seems to be a coherent ideology of violence for southern Whites revolving around culture-of-honor concerns (see also work by Baron & Straus, 1989, pp. 165–169; Ellison & Sherkat, 1993; Reed, 1981).

In laboratory experiments, southern White males respond differently to an insult than do their northern White male counterparts. After they are insulted, southern subjects become more (a) angry, (b) convinced that their masculine reputation has been damaged, (c) cognitively primed for aggression, (d) physiologically stressed and aroused, (e) physiologically prepared for aggression (as indicated by increases in testosterone level), (f) domineering in subsequent encounters with other people, and (g) physically aggressive in their behavior in subsequent challenge situations (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996).

The cultures of the South and (especially) the West are also more likely to approve of violence as shown by subscriptions to violent magazines, viewership of violent television programs, production of college football players, hunting license applications, national guard enrollments, and a number of other indicators in Baron and Straus’s (1989) Legitimate Violence Index. Lee (1995a, 1995b) came to a similar conclusion in his analysis of magazine subscription rates, arguing that the West (and, to a lesser extent, the South) was higher in its machismo interests. It was these regions where people were most likely to read magazines “in which physical strength, self-defense, weapons, combat, and sex are prominent themes” (Lee, 1995b, p. 91).

Finally, the laws of the South and West are more likely to endorse violence consistent with a strong ethic of self-protection and honor. Southern and western states are more likely than their northern counterparts to have (a) looser gun control laws, (b) laws allowing people to use violence in defense of self and property (including laws allowing people to stand their ground and kill instead of retreating), and (c) legislators who are more likely to vote hawkishly on national defense issues (Cohen, 1996). The present work supplements this body of research by adding another method—field experiments—to supply more converging, real-world evidence that the South and West possess a culture of honor and, moreover, that this culture has self-sustaining aspects.

Cohen and Nisbett make the point that southerners are not more likely to endorse any violence, but they are more likely to support violent responses to those who have offended their personal or family’s honor.

STUDY 1: SANCTIONS BY EMPLOYERS FOR AN HONOR-RELATED KILLING

If violence is less stigmatized in the South and West than in the North, then we should see this in institutional practices, such as the hiring of employees. People who have committed crimes of violence in defense of their honor should be seen less as undesirable criminals and more as decent citizens who deserve a break. Thus, if a letter inquiring about employment were sent to companies describing a person who had good credentials but who also had been convicted for honor-related violence, then the letter should receive a warmer, more promising response from companies in the South and West. To provide a tighter test of the hypothesis, organizations in the North, South, and West that were part of the same company chain were compared. Some employers were sent a letter describing an honor-related crime (the homicide condition), and others were sent a control letter describing a crime not involving personal honor (the theft condition).

Method

Materials

Letters inquiring about employment were sent to companies across the United States. The applicant described himself as a qualified, hard-working 27-year-old man who was relocating to the area. In the homicide condition, the third paragraph read as follows:

There is one thing I must explain, because I feel I must be honest and I want no misunderstandings. I have been convicted of a felony, namely manslaughter. You will probably want an explanation for this before you send me an application, so I will provide it. I got into a fight with someone who was having an affair with my fiancée. I lived in a small town, and one night this person confronted me in front of my friends at the bar. He told everyone that he and my fiancée were sleeping together. He laughed at me to my face and asked me to step outside if I was man enough. I was young and didn't want to back down from a challenge in front of everyone. As we went into the alley, he started to attack me. He knocked me down, and he picked up a bottle. I could have run away and the judge said I should have, but my pride wouldn't let me. Instead I picked up a pipe that was laying in the alley and hit him with it. I didn't mean to kill him, but he died a few hours later at the hospital. I realize that what I did was wrong.

In the theft condition, the third paragraph read as follows:

There is one thing I must explain, because I feel I must be honest and I want no misunderstandings. I have been convicted of a felony, namely motor vehicle theft. You will probably want an explanation for this before you send me an application, so I will provide it. I have no excuse for my behavior. I was young and I needed money. I had a wife and kids and by stealing a couple of expensive cars, I was able to give them what I always needed to give them and pay off the bills I owed. I never intended to cause the car owners any serious trouble. I was sentenced for grand theft auto and am very sorry for my crime. I was desperate but now I realize this is no excuse. I realize that what I did was wrong.

Immediately preceding the method is a short description of the hypotheses. Here, the researchers predict that employers from the north are going to see an employee who had murdered another person to defend his honor as not just as someone not wrong, but someone to be applauded.

All letters continued and requested an application for employment, the name and phone number of a contact person, and hours when the applicant might stop by for an interview.

Sample

Procedure for sampling. A letter (of either the honor or theft type) was mailed to 921 organizations. These organizations were businesses that were part of five national chains: a general merchandise store chain, a low-end motel chain, a high-end hotel chain, a family restaurant chain, and a motorcycle dealership chain. The chains were chosen because they represented a diverse cross section of the economy, operated nationwide, and accepted applications by mail. And importantly, we could find listings for the locations of all their outlets in the United States.

The particular businesses were selected by figuring out how many outlets would represent the state (based on its population) and then sampling every *n*th outlet within that state. Businesses from the South were over-sampled so that this region could be broken out if necessary in the analysis stage. Thus, for each chain, approximately 100 letters were sent to southern companies in that chain, and 100 letters were sent to non-southern companies in that chain. (Because not all states had enough stores to fill their quota of letters, there were somewhat less than 1,000 letters sent.)

Following census categorization, we defined the South as Census Divisions 5, 6, and 7: Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. Washington, D.C., is also defined as the South by the census but was excluded for the studies of this article because it is probably not representative of either northern or southern culture.

The West was defined as Census Divisions 8 and 9, excluding Alaska and Hawaii. (This includes New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, California, Oregon, and Washington.) Alaska and Hawaii were excluded from the West because they do not share the common historical heritage of the region. All other states not in the South or West are obviously in the third category of states. In this article, these states are referred to as *northern* merely as a shorthand way of referring to nonsouthern and nonwestern states. The definitions of these regions are consistent with other work on regional differences and violence (see Baron & Straus, 1988, 1989; Cohen, 1996; Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Nisbett, 1993; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Nisbett et al., 1995).

After the study was completed, debriefing letters were sent to all organizations, whether they responded to the original letter or not. The debriefing letter contained a brief summary of the study and its purposes. The few employers who contacted us after receiving our debriefing letter were very positive about the study and found the topic quite important.

Response rates. Of the 921 letters sent, 9 were returned as undeliverable. A total of 112 responses were received, for an overall response rate of 12%. Northern companies were more likely to respond to the letters than were southern and western companies, as indicated by logistic regression analysis, $f(9,08) = 2.93, p < .01$. The response rate for the northern-homicide condition was 16% of 149 letters; for northern-theft condition, 17.5% of 154 letters; for southern- and western-homicide condition, 11% of 308 letters; and for southern- and western-theft condition, 9% of 301 letters. One might have expected northern companies to respond more often to a theft letter than to an honor letter, whereas southern and western companies might respond more often to an honor letter than to a theft letter. This was indeed the pattern, but the interaction was far from significant. This lack of interaction, however, aids us in interpreting

the content of the letters. Differential response rates (for which there was no interaction) cannot account for the interaction effects on the compliance and tone indexes that follow.

Measures

What is crucial for our purposes is the content of the response letters. An entirely unsympathetic letter basically shuts the door on the applicant, ends communication, and may be worse than no response at all. In contrast, a letter that is cooperative, fills the person's requests, and is generally sympathetic would clearly be positive and an invitation to further communication. This was why we analyzed the responses we received for (a) compliance with requests and (b) the tone of the letter or note (if enclosed).

Compliance, tone, and job availability items. We noted whether each organization complied with the requests of the letter by sending an application, the name of a contact person, the phone number for the contact, and hours or days to stop by. Some potential employers sent back a business card and a note or a letter, and these responses were noted as well. For each of the above items, the organizations received a score of 1 if the response included the item and a 0 if it did not. The scores were then summed over the six items to compute a compliance index.

When a letter was received from an organization, its tone was evaluated by two judges who were blind to condition. The tone items were scored for how encouraging the letter was (4-point scale), how understanding it was (4-point scale), how personal it was (3-point scale), and whether it mentioned an appreciation for the applicant's candor (dichotomous scale). All scores were turned into dichotomous variables (for example, encouraging or not, understanding or not, etc.) and then summed. (Variables were dichotomized because a 0–1 scale was the simplest meaningful metric that could be common to all four items of the tone index.)

On one question, raters also coded how available the note indicated that jobs were in that organization. The codes for this question were as follows: 0 = we cannot hire felons, 1 = there are no jobs now, 2 = there are no jobs now but we will keep your materials on file or no mention about jobs, and 3 = there are jobs available.

Coding. Codes for the items of the compliance index (the presence of a note or letter, an application form, etc.) were obvious from inspection. The various measures used to create the compliance index were moderately correlated with each other. Ruder-Richardson formula 20 was used to compute an internal consistency score (analogous to Cronbach's alpha) for the compliance index ($r^* = .48$) (Carmines & Zeller, 1979, p. 48; Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991, p. 49).

For the tone index, we examined interrater agreement by computing Cohen's Kappas for the dichotomous ratings of how encouraging, understanding, and personal the letters were (Cohen, 1960). Cohen's Kappas were .58, .81, and .79, respectively (all significant at $p < .001$). Coder scores were averaged together before being combined into a scale. The reliability coefficient for the scale was .76, using Ruder-Richardson formula 20.

For the codings of job availability, nine categories were originally used, but then we collapsed this down to the four ordinal categories indicated above for greater reliability. Because of the objective nature of these categories, an interrater agreement score was not computed, and coder ratings were not averaged together. Rather, any discrepancies in coding (of which there were only five) were resolved by a third coder who was blind to condition.

When one has non-numeric information to transform into numbers (that make it easier to statistically analyze), we often will use raters to code behavior. Here, different researchers rate the same subject behavior based on pre-set criteria. The degree to which they agree is known as "inter-rater reliability."

Results

The prediction was that southern and western companies would be more accepting than northern companies of the homicide letter applicant but that the regions would not differ in their treatment of the theft applicant.¹

Compliance scores. As may be seen in Table 1, the mean compliance scores differed significantly as a function of region and condition in the way predicted.² Compliance scores were approximately equal for both regions (or even slightly higher in the North) for the theft letter. But for the homicide letter, compliance scores were higher for companies in the South and West than for companies in the North. The contrast was significant at $p < .06$, $t(WS) = 1.91$. The effect size ($r = .18$) was in the small-to-moderate-size range.³

Tone index. Letters or notes were enclosed for 78 responses. As may be seen in Table 1, the predicted pattern for the index of the tone items again held. Control letters were responded to with about the same degree of warmth and understanding in all regions. But honor letters were responded to more warmly in the South and West than in the North. The contrast was significant, $t(74) = 2.02$, $p < .05$. The effect size ($r = .23$) was in the small to moderate range.

Job availability. As predicted, there was little difference between northern versus southern and western companies for the theft letter (northern control = 2.0, southern control = 2.05). And as predicted, northern companies were less welcoming for the homicide letter than southern and western companies were (northern honor = 1.71, southern honor = 1.96). However, the standard contrast was not significant (p level = .11), $t(74) = 1.62$. The effect size ($r = .19$) was in the small to moderate range.

Interactions between region, letter type, and organization. The interactions of interest were obviously the Region x Type of Letter interactions. But one might also wonder whether these interactions would be strengthened or weakened, depending on the type of organization that was responding. They were not. The p levels for the three-way interaction between region, letter type, and organization type were all non-significant ($p > .80$ for the compliance index, $p > .65$ for the tone index, and $p > .20$ for the job availability item). There were, however, some effects for type of organization (not involving the region variable). Perhaps, these reflect the effects of organizational culture on the employment process and workplace environment (for research on organizational or small-group culture, see, for example, Levine & Moreland, 1991; Lewis, 1989; Martin, 1992; Pratt, 1994; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1996; Schein, 1990; Tichy & Cohen, 1996). Without greater ethnographic information on the organizations in our study, however, speculation about effects involving organization type would have little meaning.

Summary and discussion. In sum, for our measures of tone and compliance, control letters were treated about equally everywhere, whereas the honor letters were responded to more positively in the South and West than in the North. The only item for which the standard contrast did not achieve significance was the job availability item. Perhaps the job availability item was different because it was the response that was most constrained by reality. That is, managers are relatively free to write response letters with any tone that they feel is appropriate, but it would take an outright lie to say that there is no job when jobs are available. Still, it is probably worth noting that

TABLE 1 Compliance With Requests, Warmth of Response, and Indication of Job Availability for Honor Applicants and Control Applicants to Companies in the North, South, and West, Study 1

	Honor Letter	Control Letter
Compliance index		
North	2.83 (1.27)	3.15 (1.35)
South and West	3.52 (1.39)	2.93 (1.27)
Interaction $p < .06$		
Tone of response		
North	0.75 (0.83)	1.39 (1.30)
South and West	1.69 (1.59)	1.43 (1.47)
Interaction $p < .05$		
Job availability item		
North	1.71 (0.61)	2.00 (0.49)
South and West	1.96 (0.36)	2.05 (0.38)
Interaction $p < .11$		

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses.

the northern-homicide condition was the only condition in which a manager wrote back that he could not hire felons and in which not a single manager wrote back that jobs were available.

Consistent with this, we might note that perhaps the greatest signs of cultural difference involved the more extreme responses to the letters. In response to the homicide letter, no northern manager sent back a complete package of items, and none received the highest scores on the tone index. In contrast, southern and western employers could be quite warm toward the applicant in the homicide condition: One quarter of all southern and western employers responded to the homicide letter in a way that earned the highest score on the tone index.

A qualitative example may help make this point more vividly. In response to the applicant who had killed the man who provoked him, one southern store owner wrote back that although she had no jobs, she was sympathetic to the man's plight:

As for your problem of the past, anyone could probably be in the situation you were in. It was just an unfortunate incident that shouldn't be held against you. Your honesty shows that you are sincere. . . .

I wish you the best of luck for your future. You have a positive attitude and a willingness to work. Those are the qualities that businesses look for in an employee. Once you get settled, if you are near here, please stop in and see us.

No letter from a northern employer was anywhere near as sympathetic toward this man who killed in defense of his honor.

STUDY 2: PORTRAYALS OF HONOR-RELATED VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA

In a classic study, Bartlett (1950) showed that as stories are remembered and retold, they are distorted in ways that make sense according to the culture of the listener. We propose that the same phenomenon should occur for northern and southern listeners who are told about an incident involving honor-related violence. Specifically, in retelling a story, southern and western story tellers should be more likely than their northern counterparts to mention provocations and explain the violence in a fashion that is more sympathetic to the perpetrator.

One could examine this phenomenon at the individual level by giving a story to northerners, southerners, and westerners and seeing how they organize and retell it. But one can also examine this phenomenon in a context in which it has potential collective consequences. A reporter working for a newspaper is not just an individual but—acting in an institutional role—also creates a public representation for mass consumption.

The reporter's retelling of the story obviously reaches more people than any given individual's retelling, and by virtue of the paper's status, the story becomes a public representation of the way things are (or should be). News stories are not just objective statements of facts; they are statements of values about what a culture views as relevant, appropriate, and acceptable (see, for example, Binder, 1993; Faludi, 1991; Lee, Hallahan, & Herzog, 1996; Meyers, 1994; Morris & Peng, 1994). Thus, through the power of the reporter's role, private representations become public representations that can feed back on and influence the private representations of others (see Kuran, 1995).

One cannot just compare actual news stories about violence in defense of honor in these regions, because differences in the articles could be due to differences in "objective" facts or in "subjective" interpretations. The present study controlled for this problem by sending out a fact sheet describing a fictional honor-related stabbing to newspapers in the North, West, and South. The papers were asked to turn these events into a story (for pay) as it would appear in the paper. The prediction was that newspapers in the South and West would treat the honor-related violence more sympathetically, portray the violence as more justified, describe the assaulting person as being less blameworthy, and downplay any aggravating circumstances. For this story, we described events revolving around a central culture-of-honor concern—namely, insults or attacks against female family members (Fiske, Markus, Kitayama, & Nisbett, in press). Wyatt-Brown (1982, p. 53) described how insults against female members of the family were treated with utmost seriousness in the Old South, and Cohen and Nisbett (1994) showed that this is still true today.

A control story giving facts for a violent crime that was not honor related allowed for a tighter test of the hypothesis. We expected that stories written by southerners, westerners, and northerners would not differ in the degree of sympathy expressed for such a crime.

College newspapers were used because we assumed compliance rates would be higher for them than for professional newspapers. This probably provides for a conservative test of our hypothesis, because college newspapers (relative to rural papers, for example) are written by and produced for a more liberal segment of the population. There was also another advantage to using college newspapers, as these papers were overwhelmingly staffed by reporters who grew up in the same region where they went to school.

In this study, the authors ask: Do portrayals of violence differ in northern vs. southern (and western) states?

Again, the researchers are attempting to examine cultural differences in perceptions of honor violence by making the argument that news stories represent the voice of the culture, not just one reporter (or anchor).

Is it a problem or confound that the researchers used college newspapers for their experiment? If the intent was to say that newspapers reflect their regional culture, is that more true for mass media (major city newspapers) than for college papers?

Method

Materials

We created a set of facts to be used as the basis for two news stories and sent them to college newspapers across the country. A cover letter explained that the research concerned how newspapers turn a collection of facts into a news story. The letter said it would probably take about 1 hr to turn the facts into news stories and offered the reporter or the general fund of the paper \$25 for the help. Thus, reporters knew they were participating in a study (although they were blind to its purpose and hypotheses). The stories had to include a headline and be no longer than 250 words each. A brief questionnaire also asked how much space the paper would allot each story and for demographic information about the reporter.

The fact sheets contained many miscellaneous facts, as well as some that were highly relevant for a culture-of-honor interpretation. Some of the salient facts from the stories are summarized here:⁴

Honor story. Victor Jensen stabbed Martin Shell. Jensen is a 28-year-old Caucasian who works as a janitor at Warren High School, and Shell is a 27-year-old Caucasian who works as a mechanic at the Bradley GM car dealership. Shell is currently in stable condition at Mercy Hospital after last night's incident.

Shell dated Jensen's sister, Ann, for about a month, but they broke up a few weeks before the party. Ann was present at the party, but she was not involved in the stabbing.

Witnesses told police that Shell and Jensen talked to each other throughout the evening. Around 1:30 a.m., Shell spilled a glass of beer on Jensen's pants. The two began arguing and had to be separated by others at the party. Shell shouted that Jensen's sister, Ann, was "a slut." Jensen then started to walk toward Shell but was restrained by three other people at the party. Several men at the party were heard to make comments about what they would do if someone said that about their sister.

Around 1:45 a.m., Jensen left the party. As Jensen was leaving, Shell and his friends laughed at Jensen. Shell then shouted that both Jensen's sister and mother were "sluts." When Jensen returned to the party around 1:55 a.m., he demanded that Shell take back his comments "or else." Shell laughed at Jensen and said, "Or else what, Rambo?" Jensen then pulled a 4-in. knife out of his jacket and stabbed Shell twice. Shell was unarmed at the time of the stabbing.

Several quotes expressing opinions about the incident from both Jensen's and Shell's statements to police were also included.

Control story. Robert Hansen pistol-whipped John Seger. Seger was working at a 7-11 convenience store when Hansen robbed the store and pistol-whipped Seger. Hansen took the \$75 that was in the cash register and a carton of cigarettes. Seger is a 22-year-old Caucasian and is in stable condition at Mercy Hospital. Hansen is a 19-year-old Caucasian and is in custody at the Washtenaw County Jail. Hansen was convicted on a charge of simple assault 6 months ago and served 2 days in jail.

According to the police report about the robbery, Hansen showed the pistol and demanded that Seger open the store's safe. The pistol was not loaded, according to police. Seger told

Hansen that he did not know the combination to the safe, and he offered Hansen the \$75 in the cash register.

Seeger tried to open the safe but kept insisting he did not know the combination. Hansen then pistol-whipped Seeger, striking him five times in the head with the butt of his weapon. When Seeger fell to the ground, Hansen spit on him, swore at him, and kicked him in the stomach.

Several quotes from Hansen's and Seeger's statements to the police were given, including a few from Hansen stating that money was stolen from him earlier in the evening and he was mad about that.

Sample

Sampling was done from a list of colleges in the *1994 World Almanac* (Famighetti, 1993). Once a college was selected, its student newspaper was found through a listing in the *1994 Editor and Publisher Yearbook* (I. Anderson, 1994). To be eligible for selection, a college had to be a 4-year school and have a student enrollment of at least 5,000.

A total of 303 letters were sent out to colleges across the country. No region of the country was oversampled; 154 letters went to colleges in the North, 53 went to colleges in the West, and 96 went to colleges in the South. Responses were received from 47 schools in the North (31%), 15 schools in the West (28%), and 32 schools in the South (33%). Of the 94 responses that were received, 83 were written by White reporters. It is only the White responses that are reported below, because previous research indicates that the relevant regional differences may exist only among Whites (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Nisbett et al., 1995).

Consistent with previous research focusing on White non-Jewish populations, we excluded predominantly Jewish and historically Black schools from our sample (Cohen, Nisbett, et al., 1996; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). We also excluded schools located in Washington, D.C. (because this region is representative of neither northern nor southern culture) and University of Michigan schools (because of the remote possibility that a reporter might be familiar with our hypotheses).

Measures

Three coders rated the honor and control stories for tone and content. The coders were not blind to the experimental hypotheses or, obviously, to the type of story—honor versus control—but they were blind to what region the story came from.

We computed a justification index, examining whether writers reported or ignored nine key facts relevant to determining how justified the attack was. We constructed the index by giving papers a point for mentioning each act Shell took to provoke Jensen and a point for ignoring each act that aggravated the nature of Jensen's crime. The six actions that Shell took to provoke Jensen were spilling beer on him, insulting his sister once, insulting her again, laughing at him, insulting his mother, and laughing at him or insulting him when he asked for a retraction. The three aggravating circumstances to Jensen's crime were that Jensen returned to the party 10 min, or some time later, with a knife (suggesting premeditation); that Jensen stabbed Shell twice (or multiple times); and that Shell was unarmed at the time he was attacked. The items in the justification index were dichotomously scored, and the index had an internal consistency score of $r = .49$, using Ruder-Richardson formula 20. (Because of the

Your next problem as a researcher: How do you select which colleges you will contact? What do you think of the way the researchers approached this? Any problems in their method?

objective nature of the items—a fact was either mentioned or it was not—an interjudge reliability score was not computed.)

We also computed a blameworthiness index. Coders rated the tone of the article on several dimensions: whether the most important factor leading to the stabbing seemed to be an insult from Shell to Jensen (vs. an argument between the two), whether the incident that started the whole conflict seemed to be a provocation from Shell to Jensen (vs. an argument between the two), whether Shell or Jensen seemed to be more at fault, whether the focus of the story was on the person doing the provoking or the person who did the stabbing (thus emphasizing either the situational or the dispositional causes of the attack), whether Shell could be characterized as an innocent victim or someone who got what he deserved, whether Jensen could be characterized as a hothead or a man defending his honor, and whether the story in general could be characterized as being about a psycho or a hothead or a man defending his honor. The intraclass correlation for judges' ratings was .77, as given by Shrout and Fleiss's (1979) formula (3.1). Judges' ratings were averaged together to form the final index. The alpha coefficient for this index, reflecting how well the individual items held together, was .89. Higher numbers on the index indicated more blameworthiness.

Also, there was one question for both the honor and the control story that asked judges to rate (on a 4-point scale) how sympathetically each story portrayed the offender. We analyzed these data using a 2 x 2 ANOVA with region as one factor and type of crime as the other. (Justification and blameworthiness indexes were not analyzed using an interaction strategy because there were no justification or blameworthiness items in the control story that were directly analogous to those in the honor story. The control story was, after all, a classic felony assault.) Based on the difference scores of sympathy for the honor offender minus sympathy for the control offender, we also categorized newspapers into those that treated the honor-related offender more sympathetically than the control offender and those that did not. For the categorizations, the associated pairwise Kappas for the three judges were .56, .26, and .21, all significant at $p < .05$.

Finally, in addition to rating the actual story, judges also rated just the lead and headline of the story. Thus, they scored whether insult, argument, or honor were mentioned in the headline or first sentence. And they rated whether the headline or first sentence seemed to indicate that the story was about a psycho or a hothead or a man defending his honor. Judges also examined the use of quotes by Shell and Jensen (some of which related to an honor theme and some of which did not).

For the control story, judges rated the content and tone of the story on a number of dimensions—for example, whether the robbery or the beating seemed to be the focus of the

TABLE 2 Justification and Blameworthiness Indexes for the Honor Story for Papers in the North, South, and West, Study 2

	North	South and West	$p <$
Justification index	3.37 (1.87)	4.21 (1.43)	.02
Blameworthiness index	0.17 (0.75)	-0.10 (0.68)	.09

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses.

story, whether different circumstances of the crime were mentioned, whether different aspects of Hansen's background were mentioned, and whether different quotes from Hansen and Seger were used. The regions were not predicted to differ in their treatment of the control story.

Results and Discussion

Justification. As may be seen in the first line of Table 2, southern and western papers were likely to see the crime as more provoked and less aggravated than their northern counterparts did, $t(81) = 2.33, p < .02$. This effect was of moderate size, $d = .51$.⁵

Blameworthiness. As may be seen in the second line of Table 2, in the tone of their articles, southern and western papers were less likely to blame Jensen for stabbing Shell than northern papers were, $t(81) = 1.74, p < .09$. The effect size ($d = .38$) was in the small to moderate range.

Sympathy. Examining the raw sympathy scores for each story, there was a trend for southern and western papers to treat the honor-related offender more sympathetically and for northern papers to treat the non-honor-related offender more sympathetically, interaction, $F(1, 79) = 2.17, p < .15$ (effect size, $r = .16$, was in the small to moderate range). If papers are simply categorized according to which offender they treated most sympathetically, we found that only 19% of southern and western papers treated the nonhonor crime at least as sympathetically as the honor crime, whereas twice as many northern papers (39%) did so, $\chi^2(1, N = 83) = 4.03, p < .04$. The effect size measure for the χ^2 statistic, w , was .22, or in the small to moderate range (Cohen, 1977, chap. 7).

Leads, headlines, and quotes. There were no significant differences in the content of the lead sentence and headline or in the use of quotes by Shell and Jensen.

Control story. Although there were several differences in how papers across the country treated the honor-related story, there were virtually no differences in how they treated the control story. Only three items showed even marginally significant differences, and these three indicated that northern papers showed more sympathy than southern and western papers for the man who beat the clerk during the robbery. Thus, the differences found on the story concerning honor-related violence do not reflect an approval of all sorts of violence; rather, they reflect a sympathy among southern and western papers that is specifically focused on honor-related violence.

Demographic items. Demographic information requested at the end of the questionnaire revealed few differences among reporters from the different regions. Their newspapers did not differ in the size of their circulation, nor did the reporters differ in their age, sex, or year in school. Thus, controlling for circulation, gender, age, and year in school using multiple regression equations changed the results very little.

Controlling for demographics also made little difference because the demographic variables were themselves relatively uncorrelated with our dependent variables of justification, blameworthiness, and sympathy. Using multiple regressions, we found only a weak tendency for men to assign less blame than women to the honor-related offender. Effects of age, year in

Remember that for an effect to be considered "statistically significant," researchers use a cutoff of $p < .05$. Meaning that there is a 5% or less chance that the observed difference was due to chance.

Note here however, the "blameworthiness" effect was $p < .09$. In this case, a better wording for this difference would be to say there is a non-significant "trend in the expected direction." Or some researchers use the term "marginally significant" to refer to p values between .05 and .10.

school, and the paper's circulation on our dependent variables were very slight. Race was also not a confound in these data because we analyzed only the 83 White respondents. Results were similar, however, if the 11 non-White respondents were added to the analysis.

Demographic questions also revealed that most reporters had grown up in the region in which they were currently attending school. Indeed, there were only two cases in which southern and western reporters wrote for northern papers and only three cases in which northern reporters wrote for southern and western papers.

In summary, the papers of the South and West treated honor-related violence more sympathetically in both tone and content than did the papers of the North. The articles from the South and West portrayed the honor-related violence as more justified, less aggravated, and more the fault of the provoker. The control stories indicated that papers of the South and West were not more sympathetic toward violence in general but that sympathy was limited to honor-related violence.

DISCUSSION

The results of these two field experiments indicate that violence related to honor is less stigmatized by institutions of the South and West than by those of the North. In Study 1, southern and western employers responded in a warmer, more sympathetic, and more cooperative way to a person convicted of an honor-related killing than they did to a person convicted of a non-honor-related crime. The reverse was true of northern employers. In Study 2, southern and western newspapers treated a violent crime in defense of honor in a more sympathetic and understanding way than did northern newspapers. As predicted, no differences were found for a story concerning violence not related to honor.

A few issues and concerns should be noted here. One ethical concern is the deception used in Study 1. Although it would have been nice if organizations had known up front that they were involved in a study, one might wonder whether the results of Study 1 would be very convincing if they had been so informed. Deception was used in this field experiment because there is no reason to assume that people are aware of—or would truthfully report—the values guiding their behavior toward job applicants with various histories. Starting with LaPiere's (1934) research, it has been shown that the real behavior of workers within an organization is often poorly reflected by its professed values and that “as if” questions may provide poor guides to actual practices. In more recent times, Salancik (1979) argued that it is often necessary to use experimentation to “stimulate” an organization and discover its true orientation. Deception in this case was mild and required little effort from experimental participants—sending application forms and, in some cases, a brief note. The costs and benefits must be weighed in deciding whether to use deception, and obviously, reasonable people can and will disagree on whether a study merits its use. In this case, we felt it did.

A more theoretical concern involves the interpretation of the present two studies. Some readers might wonder about the distinction between a culture of honor and a macho culture. Such concerns should be put in context by noting that macho culture is a version of a more general culture of honor (Gilmore, 1990). That is, all cultures of honor emphasize masculinity, toughness, and the ability to protect one's own. Cultures of honor differ from each other, however, in the amount of swagger and attitude they require versus the amount of politeness and gentility they require (E. Anderson, 1994; Cohen, Vandello, Puente, & Rantilla, 1996; Pitt-Rivers, 1965, 1968). Differences between such cultures are interesting and need exploration, but they are all still rightfully considered variations of a general culture of honor.

A note about deception. Recall from our discussion about research methods that, at some level, most experiments require a bit of deception (i.e., a cover story) so that subjects don't know the purpose of the experiment and thus behave or respond differently than they would have otherwise. The general rule is “use deception sparingly, and if used, the benefits should outweigh the costs (of deceiving participants).” Here, the deception was very minor, and the scientific benefit can be argued to be larger, so ethically, the experiment doesn't present a problem.

On a more concrete level, there are some concerns having to do with specific aspects of the studies in this article. One concern involves whether the results can be generalized to real behavior. This certainly is not an issue for Study 1, in which people thought they were responding to real job applicants. It is of some concern for Study 2, in which it is possible that different results would be obtained if reporters were not aware they were participating in a study. (This is obviously the flip side of the ethical issue involving deception discussed above.)

There are plausible hypotheses for why reporters writing a real story might produce stories that muted their own personal bias. However, it is also quite possible that if reporters were writing a real story, the salience of the audience might cause them to be even more sensitive to prevailing cultural norms, and thus regional differences would become even more magnified (see Kuran, 1995). A nice follow-up study might involve examining how actual news stories (of some notoriety) are treated by correspondents from newspapers around the nation. In addition, if one were concerned with editing and presentation issues, then one could examine how wire stories— from the Associated Press, for example—were cut, restructured, and played up or played down by various papers across the country. Such studies might provide details about the process by which news is “distorted.”

Another concern has to do with the actual effects in this article. They are not large. In fact, they are almost uniformly in the small to moderate range, using Cohen’s (1977) criteria. But it is their consistency—within this package of two studies and together with the results of our lab experiments, archival studies, and attitude surveys— that give us confidence in the results (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996).

Finally, there is the issue of the representativeness of the organizations that responded in both studies. A problem with field experiments is that the response rate can be relatively low. And perhaps this was to be expected given the nature of our requests here. In Study 1, for example, it is possible that the low response rate from this study was due to the applicant in both cases having a criminal record. Although low response rates are problematic, there are two major reasons for why our concerns with this are tempered. First, concerns are allayed to some extent by the comparability of responses in the control conditions of both experiments. The non-honor-related crime was treated equivalently by employers and by newspapers in the North, West, and South, suggesting that any response bias probably affected all regions equally. And also, our concerns are tempered to a larger extent by placing the studies in their broader context. Again, the field experiments presented here give results very consistent with a line of research by Nisbett, Cohen, Reaves, and others, pointing to systematic cultural differences between the South and West versus the North. Through attitude surveys, analyses of laws and social policies, homicide records, and lab experiments, this research has established the existence of regional differences in matters having to do with violence and gender roles. The two field experiments fit well with this line of work, adding to the evidence and suggesting some institutional mechanisms through which the cultures of the South and West are perpetuated.

Study 1 tells us something about the sort of feedback given to men who have committed crimes of violence related to honor. Feedback from northern employers is more likely to convey to such men that they are undesirable, unsympathetic, and unforgiven for their crimes, whereas feedback from southern employers is more likely to convey to these men that they are normal people who got caught in unfortunate situations—situations that “anyone” could have been in—and that their behavior in those situations “shouldn’t be held against” them (as one southern letter writer indicated). Thus, Study 1 shows that institutions—as well as individuals—participate in the stigmatization, or lack of stigmatization, of violence.

Our speculation is that Study 1 underestimates regional differences regarding how men who perpetuate culture-of-honor violence are treated. At an early stage of the application process (“please send me an application and information”), most national chains probably have either (a) a policy of treating all applicants equally or (b) a policy of treating convicted felons more harshly than other applicants, regardless of what crime they committed. If so, then the opportunity for differential treatment would have been constrained in this study. Thus, one might expect to see even more differential treatment in institutional and especially in interpersonal situations in which there were not such constraints. Consider, for example, everyday social interactions, personal relationships, less formal organizational settings, or other situations in which association is more voluntary. As one Texas hotel manager called to tell us after receiving the debriefing letter, he had a lot of “empathy” as a person with the man who fought after the “dishonoring of his girlfriend.” And he “would not have a problem with this guy being my neighbor, having my kids go over and play in his yard . . . getting to know him. But as an employer, I can’t hire him” because of the legal issues involved. We suspect, then, that the feedback and stigmatization (or lack of it) evidenced in Study 1 would be greatly amplified in many less constrained interpersonal and institutional settings in the real world.

Study 2 indicates another way in which institutions can contribute to collective representations that support violence. By treating violence as sympathetic, justified, or legitimately provoked, the media can help feed cultural notions about when such behavior is appropriate. And Study 2 demonstrates that there are clear cultural differences in how papers of the North, West, and South present honor-related violence and explain it to their readers.

Newspapers are just one source of collective story telling, however. It seems remarkable that such differences were found between the stories of the South and West and stories of the North when both sets of newspapers were given the exact same facts. Newspapers are institutions that are supposed to report such stories objectively and according to journalistic formula. One can only imagine what would happen on the next iterations—as readers not bound by a journalist’s sense of objectivity and closeness to the facts retell the story to others, who then retell the story to still others, who then retell the story, and so on. As this game of “telephone” continues and stories spread throughout a community, stories would probably stray further and further from the facts and become molded into culturally prescribed myths. These communal myths could both reflect the biases of the culture and serve to perpetuate it—defining some violent actions as sympathetic or even heroic (for discussions of public narratives and communal experiences, see also Bartlett, 1950, p. 173; Faludi, 1991, chap. 1; Gates, 1995).

Researchers in cultural psychology need to examine all sorts of mechanisms by which a culture gets perpetuated—interpersonal interactions, familial socialization, and real or imagined peer enforcement of norms. We also cannot forget that we live our lives constrained by institutions—our media, our workplaces, our legal system, and our economic system. In this light, the mutually reinforcing effects of culture and social structure are extremely important to examine. Just as culture and the individual mind reinforce and strengthen each other (Fiske et al., 1997), so, too, do culture and our social structures.

Presently, we are a long way from understanding the mechanisms through which institutions (or even individuals) perpetuate a culture of honor. However, these field experiments—seen in the context of the laboratory experiments, attitude surveys, policy analyses, and homicide data—suggest that institutions, such as corporations and the media, at least reflect

As with most research reports, at the end of the discussion, the authors suggest directions for future research in this area, and point to unanswered questions. Here, the authors say that there is much we do not yet know about the mechanisms by which societal institutions perpetuate a culture.

the norms of their culture. As a consequence, they may produce public representations that perpetuate the culture and keep it strong even after the culture has outlived its original purpose.

NOTES

1. The appropriate contrast to test this prediction is +1, -1, 0, 0 (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1985). Effect size measures for the interaction contrast follow formulas given by Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991, p. 470), and interpretations of their magnitude follow Cohen's (1977) conventions.
2. All p levels are two-tailed.
3. The contrast reported in the text puts together companies from the South with those of the West. This was done because the small number of responses from the West ($n = 14$) could make estimates unreliable. Nevertheless, analyses that examine the North, West, and South separately—using a contrast of -2, 1, 1, 0, 0—give similar results. This contrast gives significance levels of $p < .02$ for the compliance index and $p < .06$ for the analysis of the tone of the letters.
4. The complete set of facts for the stories—as well as information about means and standard deviations for individual items from Studies 1 and 2—can be obtained by corresponding with the first author.
5. Data in Study 2 were analyzed with t tests between papers of the North versus papers of the South and West. Again, this was done because the small number of western responses ($n = 12$) could make estimates unreliable. However, results look very similar if the papers are separated into three regions—North, West, and South—and a contrast of -2, +1, +1 is used. The p levels for the main variables using this contrast were as follows: justification index, $p < .005$; blameworthiness index, $p < .05$; greater sympathy for the offender in the honor story versus the control story, $p < .03$. In general, responses from the West tended to be even stronger than those from the South.

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POST-ARTICLE DISCUSSION

One of the fascinating things about studying behavior is discovering the myriad factors and combinations of factors that can influence behavior in unique, often unforeseen ways. This paper by Cohen and colleagues reminds researchers of a truism in social psychology: What is important in understanding and predicting the behavior of an individual in a particular situation is not the characteristics of the situation (and how they uniformly influence people) but rather the individual's *construal* or *perception* of the situation. For example, it would be absurd to say that Auguste Renoir's painting *The Luncheon of the Boating Party* has a uniform effect on all who view it, causing the same reaction in every viewer. What instead is the case is that a viewer's reaction to the painting depends on his construal of the painting. Some may perceive the painting as a boring impressionist painting. Others, however, may view it with tremendous emotion. And there are infinite reactions in between.

So, in the present paper, we see that people's perception of an aggressive act depends not on the objective facts of the aggressive act, but rather, on their construal of the justification for such an act. Cohen and colleagues found that some people's construal depended on values and attitudes that were prevalent and adaptive long ago, but are no longer necessary, and are still deeply held by people in certain regions of the country (those regions where such attitudes about aggression were adaptive). Thus, what is influencing behavior is not some temporary aspect of the situation but rather an aspect of personality (value-driven construal of a certain type of aggression). This construal is part of who the people are, so it functions like a personality trait. Unlike a trait, however, it is not a part of one's genetic or random learning history (if so, we might find a heterogeneous mixture of people who condone and do not condone honor-related aggression in the North and South). One of the many interesting aspects of this paper is that the authors show that this personality-like characteristic (construal of honor aggression) originates

in the history of one's region of the United States, such that a like-minded construal is found concentrated in the North and also among people in the South (and West).

Doing field studies like this has both benefits and drawbacks. I pointed out some of those in the margins to the article and in the introduction to the paper. Now that you've read the paper, you have your own conclusions about things you liked about the paper and things perhaps you would have done differently pertaining to different choices the researchers made. No study is perfect, and there are always things we can change or do another way. The question you, the reader, must ask yourself is this: Did the researchers obtain data that support their predictions, and was the methodology by which they did their study sound? Cohen and colleagues have shown us an outstanding and very creative approach to understanding cultural differences in the construal of honor-related aggression.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Both of the studies in this article are done outside of the lab (field studies). If you wanted to experimentally study perceptions of aggression defending one's honor versus non-honor-related aggression, how would you do so in the lab?
2. Can you think of other regional differences that exist in the United States that would still influence behavior (e.g., different standards or values between regions that influence daily behavior, mating choice, etc.)? How about regional differences in other parts of the world that might affect perceptions of aggression?
3. In the newspaper study, do you agree with the researchers' choice to test their predictions using college newspapers versus major city newspapers? Do you suppose the major newspapers would have responded differently to the news accounts of honor-related versus non-honor-related aggression?
4. For the employer survey, the researchers mailed surveys to 921 employers. They got only 12% of their surveys returned. That's a pretty low return rate. Can you think of ways you would improve that return rate (e.g., incentives to respond)?
5. What is it about western and southern regions in the United States and their cultures that make people in those regions much more concerned with defending their honor (and that of their family) and to think that aggression toward the threat agent is not only acceptable but expected? Is there something different about the North and Midwest (or the religions, countries that immigrated to those regions) that leads to less concern with defending family honor through the use of aggression?

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6. Do you think that the reporters (asked by the researchers to write a news account of the honor-violence or control story) constructed a story that genuinely reflected how they would treat that material? Was the situation too contrived or artificial to assess how those newspapers would genuinely report those stories? If so, what are other in-the-field (i.e., non-lab) ways you (if you were the researcher) could examine regional differences in perceptions of honor aggression?

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