

# Psychology of Men & Masculinities

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Online First Publication, February 14, 2022. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/men0000389>

### CITATION

O’Dea, C. J., Rapp, S., Brand, O. R., & Greco-Henderson, D. (2022, February 14). “Act Like a Real Man!” A Novel Examination of How Socializing Others to Masculine Honor-Based Norms Bolsters Men’s Reputations. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/men0000389>

# “Act Like a Real Man!” A Novel Examination of How Socializing Others to Masculine Honor-Based Norms Bolsters Men’s Reputations

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Masculine honor beliefs describe an ideology whereby people have the expectation that men should be protectors of their family and partner. Previous research has shown that men who adhere to these expectations have their social reputations bolstered while men who do not adhere have their social reputations diminished. We examined how United States-based English-speaking participants ( $n = 247$ ; 114 men, 126 women, 2 gender nonbinary, 5 did not report) would perceive a man who was confronted (or not) by a bystander for behaving in honor-consistent versus honor-inconsistent ways. We predicted (although our findings did not support) that participants’ own perceptions of the man as honorable would be exacerbated when the man was confronted. Instead, consistent with previous research, participants’ perceptions of the man were bolstered when he behaved in honor-consistent and diminished when he behaved in honor-inconsistent ways, but this was not affected by how a bystander responded (confronting him or not). Most notably, we also examined how participants perceived the bystander and showed that if a bystander fails to enforce and socialize traditional honor expectations (i.e., confronting a man behaving in honor-inconsistent ways), his own honor can be minimized similarly to if he, himself, had failed to act in honor-consistent ways.

## Public Significance Statement


Masculine honor beliefs describe expectations for men’s behavior in society as well as how people should respond when men do not adhere to these expectations. People who do not reinforce these behaviors are perceived more negatively by people who hold masculine honor beliefs. These expectations have important implications for understanding men’s aggression in society.

*Keywords:* masculine honor beliefs, aggression, confrontation, social norms, masculinity

Masculine honor beliefs describe a strict code of standards for people (particularly men; although see Chalman et al., 2021; Martens & Saucier, In preparation) to respond when they experience threats to themselves or their property (Cohen, 1998; Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Cohen et al., 1996, 1999; Nisbett, 1993). These highly socialized expectations are instilled early for young boys and are reinforced throughout their life in cultures of honor (Cohen et al., 1999; Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Mathis, 2020; Nisbett, 1993; Saucier, O’Dea, & Stratmoen, 2018; O’Dea et al., 2022). Indeed, previous researchers have described this

attainment of honor as being highly precarious (Vandello & Bosson, 2013), such that failure to consistently adhere to these norms and expectations will be associated with diminished reputation in the eyes of others (e.g., Bosson et al., 2009; O’Connor et al., 2017; Vandello & Bosson, 2013). We examined perceptions of men who chose to respond aggressively or nonaggressively to threat and were then confronted (or not confronted) on their decision by another man. Replicating previous research, we predicted that men who aggressively responded to a threat would be perceived more positively by those higher in masculine honor beliefs while those who responded nonaggressively would be perceived more negatively by participants higher in masculine honor beliefs. Additionally, we predicted that the confrontation of the man’s decision by a bystander would prime participants with the masculine honor ideology norms which we predicted would exaggerate participants’ perceptions of the male protagonist. Specifically, if the male protagonist aggresses against an insulting stranger (honor-consistent response), he would be perceived even more positively by those higher in masculine honor beliefs when he is confronted (because participants would disagree with the confrontation; see Gideon Conway et al., 2017 showing revolt by people who disagree with a political prime), while a nonaggressive man (honor-inconsistent response) would be perceived even more negatively by those higher in masculine honor beliefs

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These data were preregistered using the Open-Science Framework website (<https://osf.io/48xyn>). Data are available upon request from the corresponding author. These data have not been published elsewhere. These data were presented at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology. We have no declarations of conflicts of interest to report. These data were funded by a Skidmore College Student Opportunity Fund.

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(because the prime is making the norms shown by O'Dea et al., 2017, 2018 more salient).

### Masculine Honor Beliefs

Masculine honor beliefs (MHB) constitute an ideology that men should defend (often violently) against threats (i.e., physical or verbal intimidation) and insults (see Preston & Stanley, 1987) toward themselves, their possessions, and families (e.g., Brown, 2016; Cohen, 1998; Cohen et al., 1996, 1999; Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Nisbett, 1993; Saucier & McManus, 2014). Originating from herding cultures of the American South (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994), MHB helped protect herds from thieves through the development of an intimidating reputation for violently defending possessions and family (Figueredo et al., 2004; Nisbett, 1993).

Masculine honor ideology now extends beyond herding culture due to the rapid exchanging of ideas online, travel, and globalization (Saucier et al., 2016). MHB is commonly conceptualized as an individual difference variable (Imura et al., 2014; Saucier et al., 2016) and is correlated to numerous effects to bolster one's reputation such as fighting unfairly for the sake of winning (O'Dea et al., 2019), support of extreme counter-terrorism measures (Barnes et al., 2012a), greater risk-taking behavior (Barnes et al., 2012b), and use of muscularity as threat prevention (Saucier, Miller, et al., 2018). Men who view this reputation as precarious often hold the ideology that their masculinity may be threatened at any moment, even if already proven (Bosson & Vandello, 2011; Vandello & Bosson, 2013; Vandello et al., 2008). Recent work has begun examining how men are perceived when they fail to behave in honor-consistent ways (Chu, 2014; Cross et al., 2012; O'Dea et al., 2017). This work has shown that if men do not defend their masculinity, they are at risk of being victimized and portrayed as weak and less masculine (O'Dea et al., 2017, 2018). To avoid being labeled as weak, men higher in masculine honor beliefs often try to enforce their masculinity by participating in rough play sports, bragging about sexual encounters with women, and insulting and distancing themselves from gay and effeminate men (Brown et al., 2018; Foote et al., 2017; Kroeper et al., 2014; Vandello et al., 2008).

All these effects come together to describe one important facet of honor: norms. These norms are socialized into men and young boys from an early age (Rodríguez Mosquera, 2011, 2013, 2016; Rodríguez Mosquera et al., 2002). Further, these norms are socialized into men and young boys by their fathers, their mothers, their community, and their friends (see Lopez-Zafra et al., 2020; Saucier et al., 2016; see also Eccles, 1994). For these reasons, in the present study, we did not limit our recruitment of participants to only men, but included men, women, and gender nonbinary participants as all are involved in the socialization of these ideological expectations. This methodological choice is consistent with many recently published studies examining expectations for men from a third-party perspective (see Brand & O'Dea, 2021, Chalman et al., 2021; O'Dea et al., 2017, 2018, 2019; Saucier et al., 2016). This research broadly shows that, while men typically have higher masculine honor belief endorsement than women, typically gender does not interact with masculine honor in predicting expectations for men's behavior (e.g., Brand & O'Dea, 2021; O'Dea et al., 2019).

Indeed, men's engagement in these behaviors is a self-presentational motivation to appear positive to others and to prove their masculinity to others (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Saucier et al., 2016). Starting as an

infant, mothers talk less to their sons than their daughters, using less supportive language overall (Leaper et al., 1998). At a young age, boys show preferences for same-sex playmates, male-stereotyped toys (i.e., cars, action figures, etc.), and masculine pretend games (i.e., playing soldiers, etc., Vandello et al., 2009; Davis & Hines, 2020; Spinner et al., 2018) and suppress "nonmasculine" emotions (Chaplin et al., 2005). Young boys are instructed to respond violently to their bullies and are socialized to believe that they will lose their honor and masculinity if they do not respond aggressively (O'Dea et al., 2022, in press).

### Present Study Overview

Because masculine honor is a socialized construct, we examined whether individuals use the responses of others when understanding how to react to a man's demonstration of honor-consistent versus honor-inconsistent behavior. Specifically, using an experimental vignette paradigm, we manipulated whether a man in our vignettes aggressed against or ignored an insult toward his female partner. We then manipulated the response of a third-party bystander by either having him criticize the man for how he responded to the threat or not. Next, we examined how participants perceived the man (and the bystander who did or did not confront) for the honor-consistent versus honor-inconsistent behavior. Extending previous research, we predicted that confrontation of the man by a third-party individual would exacerbate these perceptions due to the social nature of masculine honor ideologies. Specifically, we predicted that men who behaved in honor-inconsistent ways (ignoring the insulting stranger) and were confronted for ignoring these threats would be perceived most negatively because the confrontation would enhance the salience of the norms associated with confrontation. Further, we predicted that those who were confronted for honor-consistent ways (aggressing against the insulting stranger) would be perceived most positively as a function of masculine honor beliefs because participants would disagree with the confrontation and affirm the opinions about the male protagonist in the vignette.

### Method

#### Participants

This study was preregistered using the Open-Science Framework website (<https://osf.io/m29e7/>), approved by the Skidmore College Institutional Review Board, and these data were presented at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology. We specified that we would seek to recruit at least 237 participants based on the necessary sample size requirements for a  $2 \times 2 \times$  continuous between-groups study with a small-medium effect size of  $f^2 = .0625$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ , power = .80. United States-based, English-speaking participants with greater than 50% hit approval rate were all recruited via the CloudResearch software (Litman et al., 2016). Two hundred sixty-two participants accessed our study on Qualtrics. Fifteen participants were removed for not completing the full study (10 of whom did not advance beyond the informed consent page). This left 247 participants for data analysis. The average age of participants was 37.39 ( $SD = 11.43$ ). The sample included 159 White participants, 51 Black participants, 10 Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx, 17 Asian, 1 Native American, 1 Pacific Islander, 4 multiracial, 2 who self-reported race as

“Other” and 2 who did not report race. Our sample consisted of 114 men, 126 women, 2 gender nonbinary, and 5 participants who did not respond to gender (2 of whom did not respond to age or race).

**Materials**

**Masculine Honor Ideologies**

To measure participants’ endorsement of masculine honor ideologies, we used the Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale (Saucier et al., 2016). This scale has been shown to be both reliable across several studies and a valid predictor of expectations for men and women’s behavior in society. This scale consists of 35 items on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*) scale (e.g., “A man should be expected to fight for himself”). Items were averaged to create a composite score with higher scores indicating greater endorsement of masculine honor beliefs.

**Vignette**

Participants were shown a vignette in which a man was walking with his female partner when a stranger insulted her. The vignette was then manipulated such that in one condition the protagonist responded aggressively to the stranger (honor-consistent response) and in the other condition the protagonist responded by ignoring the stranger (honor-inconsistent response). The full vignette as it was presented in the aggress condition is presented below (brackets denote the alternative condition):

Danny and his girlfriend are walking down the sidewalk of a busy street. A stranger walking the other direction whistles at Danny’s girlfriend. When she ignores him, the stranger mutters, “bitch” under his breath. Danny responds by turning and punching the stranger in the face. [Danny responds by ignoring the man and walking away with his girlfriend.]

The vignette then went on to describe that a male bystander witnessed the encounter. We manipulated whether the male bystander responded by affirming the male protagonist’s choice or confronted the male protagonist for how he responded to the insulting stranger. The full vignette is presented below as it was shown in the confrontation condition (brackets denote the alternative condition):

Not liking how Danny responded to the stranger, Brian, a bystander, runs over and confronts Danny for his behavior. [Viewing how Danny

responded to the stranger, Brian, a bystander continues to walk down the street.]

**Honorable and Appropriate Perceptions**

After viewing the vignette, participants reported their perceptions of the male protagonist and bystander separately as honorable and appropriate using the items from O’Dea et al. (2018). These included five items measuring honorable perceptions (e.g., “What Danny [Brian] did was the honorable thing to do”) and five items measuring appropriate perceptions (e.g., “Danny [Brian] did the right thing”). Antithetical items were reverse-scored, and items were averaged to create composites with higher scores indicating more honorable and appropriate perceptions of the man.

**Procedure**

Participants were recruited via CloudResearch and completed the study on Qualtrics. Recruitment for the study used the title, “Perceptions of a social interaction on a sidewalk \*\*\*10 min survey\*\*\*\*” which was intended to be vague to not bias participants in their assessments of how the individuals responded in the vignette. After providing informed consent, participants either completed the masculine honor beliefs scale or read the randomly assigned vignette and reported their perceptions of the protagonist and bystander as honorable and appropriate (whether participants completed the predictor or vignette and outcomes first was counterbalanced). Participants then completed the demographics and were debriefed, thanked, and compensated for their participation (Table 1).

**Results**

We conducted a series of 2 (protagonist response to insulter: aggress, ignore) × 2 (bystander response: confronting protagonist, not confronting protagonist) × continuous (masculine honor beliefs) between-groups linear regressions predicting participants’ perceptions of the protagonist as honorable and appropriate (which were tested in separate regressions) using JAMOVl, an open-source statistics program (The Jamovi Project, 2021). The full statistical reportings of the regression analyses are presented in Tables 2 and 3 and these results are plotted in Figures 1 and 2. As can be seen, consistent with our hypotheses, there was a significant MHBS × Protagonist Response interaction predicting participants’ perceptions of the protagonist as honorable and appropriate. We probed this interaction using simple slopes analyses and found that,

**Table 1**

*Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations Among Each of the Continuous Variables in Our Study*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. MHBS	5.71	1.62	(.96)	—	—	—	—
2. Protagonist honor	5.35	2.24	.23***	(.92)	—	—	—
3. Protagonist appropriate	5.35	2.41	.05	.82***	(.90)	—	—
4. Bystander honor	4.98	2.17	.08	.01	-.12	(.90)	—
5. Bystander appropriate	5.29	2.31	-.16*	-.13*	-.11	.79***	(.88)

*Note.* MHBS = Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale. McDonalds ω are provided in parentheses along the diagonal.

\* *p* < .05. \*\*\* *p* < .001.

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**Table 2**

*Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Participants' Perceptions of the Protagonist as Honorable*

Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Model	20.75	<.001	.38
MHBS	25.61	<.001	.10
Protagonist response	52.93	<.001	.18
Bystander response	1.96	.163	.01
MHBS × Protagonist response	63.30	<.001	.21
MHBS × Bystander response	0.16	.691	.00
Protagonist response × Bystander response	0.11	.744	.00
MHBS × Protagonist response × Bystander response	0.21	.648	.00

*Note.* MHBS = Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale. MHBS was centered. Analysis was conducted using the JAMOVI GAMLJ module in which MHBS was centered and Protagonist Response (aggress =  $-.5$ , ignore =  $.5$ ) and Bystander Response (confrontation =  $-.5$ , no confrontation =  $.5$ ) were simple coded.

consistent with findings by O'Dea et al. (2017, 2018), higher levels of MHBS were associated with more honorable,  $B = 0.94$ ,  $se = .10$ , 95% CI [0.73, 1.14],  $t(239) = 8.95$ ,  $p < .001$ , and appropriate,  $B = 0.73$ ,  $se = .10$ , 95% CI [0.53, 0.93],  $t(239) = 7.12$ ,  $p < .001$ , perceptions of a male protagonist who responded aggressively; and less honorable,  $B = -0.21$ ,  $se = .10$ , 95% CI  $[-0.40, -0.01]$ ,  $t(239) = -2.11$ ,  $p = .036$ , and appropriate,  $B = -0.52$ ,  $se = .10$ , 95% CI  $[-0.71, -0.33]$ ,  $t(239) = -5.42$ ,  $p < .001$ , perceptions of a male protagonist who ignored, an insult against his female partner. Interestingly, Bystander Response did not interact with Protagonist Response or MHBS suggesting that opinions of honor-consistent versus honor-deviant behavior are more dependent on their own endorsement of these ideologies rather than how others perceive men.

We also examined perceptions of the male bystander who either confronted or did not confront the male protagonist. We ran separate 2 (protagonist response to insulter: aggressive, ignore) × 2 (bystander response: confronting protagonist, not confronting protagonist) × continuous (masculine honor beliefs) between-groups linear regressions predicting participants' perceptions of the bystander as honorable and appropriate

**Table 3**

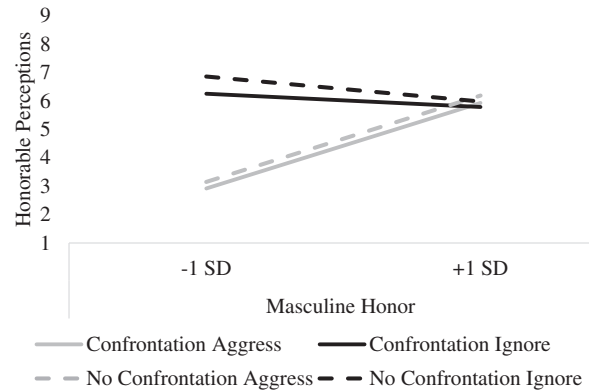
*Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Participants' Perceptions of the Protagonist as Appropriate*

Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Model	31.88	<.001	.48
MHBS	2.12	.146	.01
Protagonist response	134.02	<.001	.36
Bystander response	4.83	.029	.02
MHBS × Protagonist response	79.20	<.001	.25
MHBS × Bystander response	0.34	.559	.00
Protagonist response × Bystander response	0.07	.793	.00
MHBS × Protagonist response × Bystander response	0.01	.909	.00

*Note.* MHBS = Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale. MHBS was centered. Analysis was conducted using the JAMOVI GAMLJ module in which MHBS was centered and Protagonist Response (aggress =  $-.5$ , ignore =  $.5$ ) and Bystander Response (confrontation =  $-.5$ , no confrontation =  $.5$ ) were simple coded.

**Figure 1**

*Perceptions of the Protagonist as Honorable*



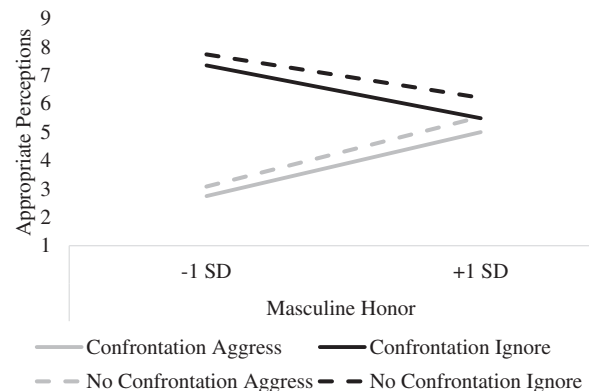
(see Tables 4, 5 and Figures 3, 4). Interestingly, there was a significant three-way interaction predicting both outcome variables that we probed using simple slopes analyses. These showed that, when the protagonist aggressed (i.e., behaved in an honor-consistent way), MHBS did not significantly affect perceptions of the bystander as honorable and appropriate. However, if the protagonist did not aggress, it seemed as though participants higher in MHBS expected the bystander to voice disapproval. Specifically, when the bystander confronted the male protagonist for honor-inconsistent behavior, MHBS was positively related to honorable and appropriate perceptions of the bystander. However, when the bystander did not confront the protagonist for honor-inconsistent behavior, MHBS was related to marginally lower honorable and significantly lower appropriate perceptions suggesting that if a man does not behave in honor-consistent ways, bystanders are expected to confront him.

### Exploratory Gender Effects

Extending the above, we explored if Gender interacted with MHBS, Protagonist Response, or Bystander Response to predict perceptions of the protagonist and bystander as honorable and/or appropriate. These analyses are presented in Tables 6–9. Here, we focus on the interactions involving gender and masculine honor

**Figure 2**

*Perceptions of the Protagonist's Behavior as Appropriate*



**Table 4**  
*Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Participants' Perceptions of the Bystander as Honorable*

Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Model	3.84	<.001	.10
MHBS	4.11	.044	.02
Protagonist response	0.26	.610	.00
Bystander response	4.64	.032	.02
MHBS × Protagonist response	0.05	.822	.00
MHBS × Bystander response	5.55	.019	.02
Protagonist response × Bystander response	5.13	.024	.02
MHBS × Protagonist response × Bystander response	9.70	.002	.04

MHBS × Protagonist response × Bystander response simple slopes				
Protagonist response	Bystander response	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i> (238)	<i>p</i>
Aggress	Confrontation	0.09	0.53	.595
	No confrontation	0.22	1.18	.241
Ignore	Confrontation	0.65	3.73	<.001
	No confrontation	-0.27	-1.83	.069

*Note.* MHBS = Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale. MHBS was centered. Analysis was conducted using the JAMOVI GAMLJ module in which MHBS was centered and Protagonist Response (aggress = -.5, ignore = .5) and Bystander Response (confrontation = -.5, no confrontation = .5) were simple coded.

beliefs as these are most central to understanding our hypotheses. There was a three-way interaction between MHBS, protagonist response, and gender,  $F(1, 224) = 5.01, p = .026, \eta_p^2 = .02$ ; which showed that higher levels of masculine honor beliefs were associated with significantly greater perceptions of honor when the protagonist aggressed for both men ( $B = 0.91, p < .001$ ) and women ( $B = 0.98, p < .001$ ), were unrelated to men's perceptions of the protagonist as honorable who ignored the insulter ( $B = 0.11, p = .450$ ), and were negatively associated with women's perceptions of the protagonist who ignored the insulter ( $B = -0.50, p = .001$ ). Gender did not interact with masculine honor beliefs, Protagonist

Response, or Bystander Response in predicting perceptions of the protagonist as appropriate. There was also a three-way interaction between MHBS, confrontation condition, and gender predicting participants' perceptions of the bystander as honorable,  $F(1, 223) = 4.07, p = .045, \eta_p^2 = .02$ . These results showed that higher levels of masculine honor beliefs were associated with significantly more honorable perceptions of the bystander by female participants when he confronted the protagonist ( $B = 0.44, p = .026$ ), but not when he did not confront the protagonist ( $B = -0.26, p = .117$ ), and MHBS were unrelated to men's perceptions in the confrontation ( $B = 0.26, p = .136$ ) and no confrontation conditions ( $B = 0.29, p = .118$ ).

**Table 5**  
*Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Participants' Perceptions of the Bystander as Appropriate*

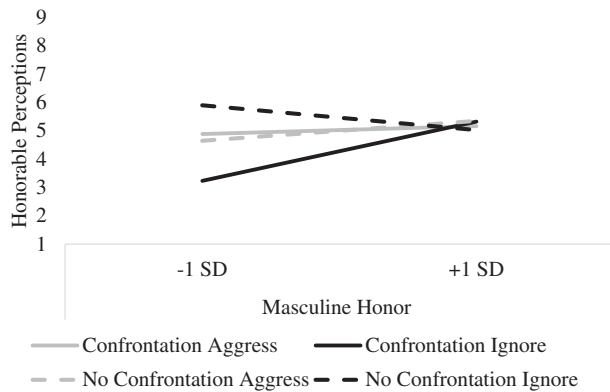
Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Model	7.22	<.001	.17
MHBS	3.31	.070	.01
Protagonist response	0.69	.408	.00
Bystander response	18.97	<.001	.07
MHBS × Protagonist response	1.01	.317	.00
MHBS × Bystander response	11.01	.001	.04
Protagonist response × Bystander response	7.85	.006	.03
MHBS × Protagonist response × Bystander response	6.31	.013	.03

MHBS × Protagonist response × Bystander response simple slopes				
Protagonist response	Bystander response	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i> (238)	<i>p</i>
Aggress	Confrontation	-0.17	-1.02	.310
	No confrontation	-0.31	-1.70	.090
Ignore	Confrontation	0.43	2.40	.017
	No confrontation	-0.57	-3.74	<.001

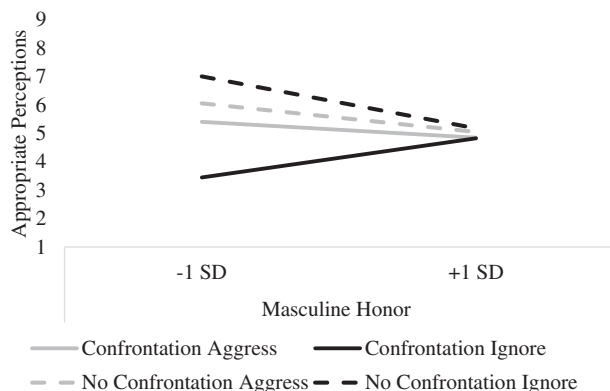
*Note.* MHBS = Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale. MHBS was centered. Analysis was conducted using the JAMOVI GAMLJ module in which MHBS was centered and Protagonist Response (aggress = -.5, ignore = .5) and Bystander Response (confrontation = -.5, no confrontation = .5) were simple coded.

**Figure 3**  
Perceptions of the Bystander's Behavior as Honorable



There was also a three-way interaction between MHBS, confrontation condition, and gender predicting participants' perceptions of the bystander as appropriate,  $F(1, 224) = 4.30, p = .039, \eta_p^2 = .02$ . Specifically, MHBS was, again, unrelated to perceptions of the bystander as appropriate by men in the confrontation ( $B = -0.00, p = .997$ ) and no confrontation conditions ( $B = -0.17, p = .373$ ). MHBS was unrelated to women's perceptions of the bystander as appropriate in the confrontation condition ( $B = 0.30, p = .136$ ) but were associated with significantly lower perceptions of the bystander's behavior as appropriate in the no confrontation condition ( $B = -0.63, p < .001$ ). Taken together, these findings generally support our inclusion of women due MBHS in women often being more strongly related than MHBS in women with perceptions of the protagonist and bystander, but these results are generally fairly uninterpretable with regard to theory they seemed fairly spurious (e.g., the interactions predicting perceptions of the bystander did not depend on how the protagonist had initially responded leaving questions regarding why women and men were concerned or not concerned with the bystander's actions). Indeed, regarding our hypotheses and the interactions most relevant to our hypotheses, there seemed to be little impact of gender.

**Figure 4**  
Perceptions of the Protagonist's Behavior as Appropriate



**Table 6**  
Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Participants' Perceptions of the Protagonist as Honorable

Variable	$F(1, 228)$	$p$	$\eta_p^2$
Model	14.82	<.001	.42
MHBS	26.95	<.001	.11
Participant gender	3.51	.062	.02
Protagonist response	43.90	<.001	.16
Bystander response	1.05	.305	.00
MHBS $\times$ Participant gender	2.86	.092	.01
MHBS $\times$ Protagonist response	57.77	<.001	.20
Gender $\times$ Protagonist response	4.63	.033	.02
MHBS $\times$ Bystander response	0.03	.852	.00
Participant gender $\times$ Bystander response	0.06	.811	.00
Protagonist response $\times$ Bystander response	0.06	.800	.00
MHBS $\times$ Participant gender $\times$ Protagonist response	4.80	.030	.02

*Note.* MHBS = Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale. MHBS was centered. Analysis was conducted using the JAMOVI GAMLJ module in which MHBS was centered and Protagonist Response (aggress =  $-.5$ , ignore =  $.5$ ), Bystander Response (confrontation =  $-.5$ , no confrontation =  $.5$ ), and participant gender (male =  $-.5$ , female =  $.5$ ) were simple coded. Insignificant ( $p > .05$ ) interactions that did not have a significant higher-level interaction were removed from the model but are available upon request from the corresponding author.

## General Discussion

Previous research on masculine honor ideologies suggests that masculine honor is a highly social variable (Cohen et al., 1996; Henry, 2009). Specifically, men and boys from a young age are socialized to respect and engage positively with their community but are taught to respond aggressively if others ever threaten or insult them or their family (Cohen, 1998; Cohen et al., 1996; Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Cross et al., 2012; O'Dea et al., 2017, 2018) or they risk negative perceptions from others or having their own masculinity questioned (Vandello & Bosson, 2013; Vandello et al., 2008, 2009). Consistent with this work, we showed that higher levels of

**Table 7**  
Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Participants' Perceptions of the Protagonist as Appropriate

Variable	$F(1, 232)$	$p$	$\eta_p^2$
Model	33.68	<.001	.50
MHBS	3.74	.054	.02
Participant gender	2.25	.135	.01
Protagonist response	132.50	<.001	.36
Bystander response	4.20	.041	.02
MHBS $\times$ Participant gender	0.03	.862	.00
MHBS $\times$ Protagonist response	68.65	<.001	.23
Gender $\times$ Protagonist response	7.60	.006	.03

*Note.* MHBS = Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale. MHBS was centered. Analysis was conducted using the JAMOVI GAMLJ module in which MHBS was centered and Protagonist Response (aggress =  $-.5$ , ignore =  $.5$ ), Bystander Response (confrontation =  $-.5$ , no confrontation =  $.5$ ), and participant gender (male =  $-.5$ , female =  $.5$ ) were simple coded. Insignificant ( $p > .05$ ) interactions that did not have a significant higher-level interaction were removed from the model but are available upon request from the corresponding author.

**Table 8**  
*Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Participants' Perceptions of the Bystander as Honorable*

Variable	F(1, 225)	p	$\eta_p^2$
Model	2.69	.002	.13
MHBS	3.97	.048	.02
Participant gender	1.00	.318	.00
Protagonist response	0.69	.409	.00
Bystander response	2.28	.132	.01
MHBS × Participant gender	1.23	.269	.01
MHBS × Protagonist response	0.58	.447	.00
Gender × Protagonist response	0.50	.480	.00
MHBS × Bystander response	3.43	.066	.01
Participant gender × Bystander response	0.34	.562	.00
Protagonist response × Bystander response	5.94	.016	.03
MHBS × Participant gender × Protagonist response	0.18	.674	.00
MHBS × Participant gender × Bystander response	4.18	.042	.02
MHBS × Protagonist response × Bystander response	9.39	.002	.04

*Note.* MHBS = Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale. MHBS was centered. Analysis was conducted using the JAMOVI GAMLJ module in which MHBS was centered and Protagonist Response (aggress = -.5, ignore = .5), Bystander Response (confrontation = -.5, no confrontation = .5), and participant gender (male = -.5, female = .5) were simple coded. Insignificant ( $p > .05$ ) interactions that did not have a significant higher-level interaction were removed from the model but are available upon request from the corresponding author.

masculine honor beliefs are associated with significantly more honorable and appropriate perceptions of a man who defends his female significant other against an insulting male stranger and significantly less honorable and appropriate perceptions of the man if he ignores the insulting stranger.

Extending previous research, we added a bystander to this encounter who either confronted or did not confront the male protagonist for how he responded to the threatening stranger. Interestingly, despite masculine honor beliefs being a highly socially based variable, participants' perceptions of the male protagonist were unchanged by how the bystander reacted. Thus, our results support existing research (e.g., Chalman et al., 2021; O'Dea et al., 2017, 2018) showing that participants higher in masculine honor beliefs report more negative perceptions of men who behave in honor-consistent ways and more negative perceptions of men who behave in honor-inconsistent ways. These effects seem to be independent of how others respond to the behavior of the man suggesting that, while masculine honor beliefs are highly socially based and socialized, participants may form their own opinions about behavior based on their own ideological endorsement rather than relying on the ideological perceptions of others. That said, participants' expectations for how others should socialize masculine honor expectation did seem to be shaped by their own masculine honor beliefs. Specifically, we explored whether perceptions of the bystander were affected by how he responded to the situation. When the bystander reinforced honor expectations by confronting a male protagonist who behaved in honor-inconsistent ways, he was perceived as more honorable and appropriate while a bystander who did not confront a male protagonist who behaved in honor-inconsistent ways was perceived as marginally less honorable and significantly less appropriate.

**Table 9**  
*Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Participants' Perceptions of the Bystander as Appropriate*

Variable	F(1, 225)	p	$\eta_p^2$
Model	4.34	<.001	.20
MHBS	1.78	.184	.01
Participant gender	0.35	.556	.00
Protagonist response	0.63	.429	.00
Bystander response	13.76	<.001	.06
MHBS × Participant gender	0.14	.705	.00
MHBS × Protagonist response	1.76	.186	.01
Gender × Protagonist response	0.01	.922	.00
MHBS × Bystander response	9.24	.003	.04
Participant gender × Bystander response	0.27	.603	.00
Protagonist response × Bystander response	9.02	.003	.04
MHBS × Participant gender × Protagonist response	0.56	.455	.00
MHBS × Participant gender × Bystander response	4.33	.039	.02
MHBS × Protagonist response × Bystander response	7.89	.005	.03

*Note.* MHBS = Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale. MHBS was centered. Analysis was conducted using the JAMOVI GAMLJ module in which MHBS was centered and Protagonist Response (aggress = -.5, ignore = .5), Bystander Response (confrontation = -.5, no confrontation = .5), and participant gender (male = -.5, female = .5) were simple coded. Insignificant ( $p > .05$ ) interactions that did not have a significant higher-level interaction were removed from the model but are available upon request from the corresponding author.

Taken together, socialization is key in the fostering and development of masculine honor ideologies as much of the extant literature on masculine honor ideologies discusses the importance of socialization (Cohen, 1998; Cohen et al., 1996; Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Lopez-Zafra et al., 2020; Rodriguez Mosquera, 2011, 2013, 2016; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2002; Saucier et al., 2016). Important, too, in socialization is the impact of both men and women in socializing boys and young men as described by previous research. Indeed, while most previous research does not consider women's perceptions, the effects most central to our hypotheses seemed to be largely unaffected by participant gender. Indeed, it seemed as though women might hold even stronger expectations than men do, though this is fairly speculative at this point. Taken together, our findings suggest that once individuals form these ideologies and their opinions of appropriate and honorable behavior, their opinions are less shaped by the opinions of others. Future research could further examine whether this strong opinion is more of a narcissistic viewpoint or simply a confident assertion of one's own perceptions, examining how this viewpoint is affected by attitudinal challenges.

**Limitations**

Our study is not without limitations. It was a cross-sectional study conducted online using vignettes. This is much less realistic than if participants were able to witness this scene happening in person or even if they were able to watch a video of these events transpiring. Indeed, participants may have been more able to gauge their real perceptions of the protagonist and the bystander using more realistic procedures. Further, our studies were limited by the vague nature of how the bystander responded to the protagonist. Because we aimed



to have equivalent wording across the different conditions, we were unable to be specific about what, specifically, the bystander was confronting the protagonist about. Instead, to be more consistent across the vignettes, our wording simply said, "Not liking how Danny responded to the stranger . . ." Thus, it could be that participants interpreted this language differently than we had intended. We believe that the consistency in language across the vignettes was more important to achieving a valid manipulation. The vignette that we used, although based on previous research (see Chalman et al., 2021; O'Dea et al., 2017, 2018), could have presented participants with too strong of a reaction. Indeed, in modern society, punching a stranger, even one who is insulting, is a quite extreme reaction. We do not believe it is out of the realm of possibility that this is how an individual could respond in this situation. Indeed, across many different studies previous researchers have shown that violence of this level is generally not acceptable, especially when men are responding to insults directed at themselves (although people higher do view it more positively than those lower in masculine honor beliefs; see Chalman et al., 2021; O'Dea et al., 2017, 2018). That being said, O'Dea et al. (2017) showed that the violent response was actually perceived more positively than no response by participants regardless of masculine honor beliefs (but even more so by those higher in masculine honor beliefs) when the insult was directed at the male protagonist's female partner. Thus, to enhance the realism in our study, we specifically chose a vignette in which a man's female partner was insulted because participants in previous research have indicated this to be an appropriate response.

Our studies are further limited by our sample consisting of only United States-based, English-speaking participants. This choice in methodology was due to the origins of our specific conceptualization of masculine honor beliefs originating from the American South. The American South is not the only culture associated with hegemonic masculine honor belief expectations. For example, recent researchers noted that there are honor cultures around the world (e.g., Spain; Cohen, 1998; Cohen et al., 1996; Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2000). Future research should examine if our effects generalize to men from other cultures holding masculine honor expectations. Our studies also are limited by the lack of acknowledgment of the protagonist's and the bystander's race, sexual orientation, etc. It is quite possible that the expectations for White, cisgender, straight men are quite different for the expectations of men from other identities. While we did not specifically say that the man was White, cisgender, and straight, it is likely that this is what our participants assumed, and future research should examine the expectations that people have for men with other intersecting identities.

### Implications and Future Directions

Although existing research has consistently demonstrated the importance of socialization of masculine honor beliefs, no previous research has examined the expectation that people have for how people should engage and socialize boys and young men and if they are punished for not enforcing strict honor adherence in men. This was largely an exploratory test in the present study, but it highlights the importance of future research assessing how bystanders, parents, and other members of one's community are perceived when they successfully reinforce or unsuccessfully do not reinforce the expectations of masculine honor ideologies.

This finding is quite provocative as our vignette simply said that the bystander "viewed" what happened and continued walking. By showing that his reputation was diminished in this short exchange that he had almost no role in, our results highlight the importance of social norms and the socialization of these norms. Recent research has begun examining the socialization of young boys and has shown that parents who backlash their children for gender deviant behavior are perceived quite negatively (see Brenner et al., 2022). It would be interesting to test whether these negative perceptions are reduced if participants are higher in masculine honor ideologies. Indeed, Sullivan et al. (2018) showed that higher levels of sexism (a variable related to masculine honor beliefs) were associated with significantly more negative perceptions of gender deviant children suggesting that ideological variables may be important in understanding expectations for children and their socialization. Still other research has examined the expectations that people have for how children should respond to bullies. Higher masculine honor ideologies are associated with significantly greater endorsement of children verbally and physically confronting their bullies (see O'Dea et al., 2022). It would be interesting to test perceptions of parents whose children are struggling with bullying to examine whether participants have negative views toward or perceive the parents as uninvolved bystanders allowing their children to be victimized.

Also, important to study in the future is whether these effects apply to a female bystander. Existing honor research has generally done a poor job at applying these ideologies to the expectations they set for women (O'Dea et al., 2022; Martens & Saucier, In preparation). Recent researchers have challenged this by showing that many of the expectations that men are held to, women are also celebrated for engaging in (see Chalman et al., 2021). Because women are also expected to socialize these ideologies into boys and young men (if not believed to be the predominant socializer), we wonder if participants would have the same negative perceptions of a woman who chooses not to confront a man for honor-inconsistent behavior. Further, would the man's reputation be more reduced if his female partner confronted him for not coming to her defense? Finally, it would be interesting to examine the type of confrontation that men exhibit, both in terms of the protagonist and the bystander—examining whether they are doing it to bolster their own reputations or to provide allyship and support to the woman, and if they even care about the effects of the sexism and insult on the woman versus their own self-image. These questions are important because women internalize the reasons and ways that men confront and the motivations of men higher in masculine honor beliefs may simultaneously reinforce his reputation while diminishing his female partner's own self-worth, image, and even motivations to confront sexism (see, e.g., Estevan-Reina et al., 2021; Saucier et al., 2021).

### Conclusion

Our study is the first to examine the expectations that people have for the socialization of masculine honor ideologies. Previous research has shown that men who do not adhere to masculine honor expectations are perceived more negatively by those higher in the ideology. Extending this work, our participants viewed a situation in which a man was challenged (or not) by a bystander for how he

responded to a stranger who insulted his female significant other. If the man did not defend his female partner, we showed that participants seemed to expect the bystander to confront him for not adhering to the masculine honor expectations. Indeed, our results suggest that if men do not instill and reinforce cultural expectations in others, their reputations are in jeopardy in ways like if they, themselves, do not behave in honor-consistent ways.

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Received August 6, 2021

Revision received December 20, 2021

Accepted December 21, 2021 ■