



Slurs against masculinity: masculine honor beliefs and men's reactions to slurs



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ABSTRACT

We examined the manifestation and effects of slurs against men and masculinity. In Study 1, we created a taxonomy of slurs against men and masculinity. In Study 2, we established that men may respond with physical aggression when targeted by these slurs. In Study 3, we demonstrated that slurs in different categories of our taxonomy produce varying levels of perceived offensiveness and likelihoods of aggressive responses. Finally, in Study 4, we showed that men's masculine honor beliefs are associated with their perceptions of slurs as offensive and the ratings of their likelihood of responding physically, especially for slurs that directly challenge their masculinity. These findings extend the extant literature that has examined the content of and reactions to slurs and physically aggressive responses to provocation, as well as that which has examined conceptualizations of masculine honor from both cultural and individual difference perspectives.

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“Them's fighting words.” This colloquialism indicates that the speaker has reached his (or her, but usually his) tolerance of verbal abuse from an instigator, and will now respond aggressively. This reactive aggression serves to both punish the instigator for the offense and deter future abuse. The purpose of this program of research was to examine men's perceptions of the offensiveness of slurs. We were particularly interested in slurs that target a man's masculinity, and may provoke physically aggressive responses. It was our objective first to develop a taxonomy of slurs against men and masculinity, and then to test our predictions that more extreme reactions to slurs, particularly to those that target men's masculinity, would be associated with men's greater levels of adherence to masculine honor beliefs. Our overarching research question is: does masculine honor predict aggressive responses in men who have been targeted by slurs against masculinity?

Slurs are terms used, at least initially, to disparage individuals, often on the basis of their membership in some social group (Anderson and Lepore, 2013; Camp, 2013; Croom, 2011, 2013a, 2013b). Slurs may convey stereotypes about groups and perpetuate a perspective, often negative, about the groups (Camp, 2013; Jeshion, 2013; Mullen, 2001; Vallée, 2014). This may result in the devaluation of targets of the slurs (Greenberg and Pyszczynski, 1985; Merskin, 2010) and may produce negative psychological consequences in the targets, such as feelings of exclusion (Schneider et al., 2000). Interestingly, these effects may vary as a function of the groups targeted by the slurs (Croom, 2014a; Galinsky et al., 2013; Henry et al., 2014).

Historically slur usage has been largely derogatory. However, it is also possible for slurs to be used for non-derogatory purposes (Croom, 2013a). Research on slur appropriation has shown that minority groups often “take back” slurs that

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have been historically used to degrade their social group. This slur usage may then allow group members to affiliate with each other (Rahman, 2012), and may function to dissociate the slur from its potential to offend (Bianchi, 2014).

When targeted by slurs, the perceptions and reactions to the slurs may vary (Leets, 2003). Slurs are terms that may be simultaneously descriptive and expressive in nature; that is, slurs function to not only describe the individuals against whom the slurs are targeted, but also to express a heightened emotional reaction toward the individuals (Croom, 2011, 2014b). Slurs may serve multiple social and linguistic functions for the individuals who use slurs, but given that slurs are used in social domains, the social reception of slurs may also vary. The perceived intention of the slur and the disposition of the target may moderate the reaction by the target (Garcia et al., 2006). Further, there may be consequences for individuals who use slurs in terms of how they are perceived (Uhlmann et al., 2014).

Much research has examined the linguistic uses and purposes of slurs (e.g., Bianchi, 2014; Croom, 2013a; Galinsky et al., 2013; Henry et al., 2014; Rahman, 2012; also see Hedger, 2013, for a philosophical analysis of derogatory slurs), and much of that work has focused on racial slurs (e.g., Hom, 2008; Vallée, 2014). This is not unwarranted given the history and power that racial slurs have had in the manifestation of oppression in societies across the world. Racial slurs have been categorized as “hate speech” (Hornsby, 2001, 2003) in which threats are inherent (Hom, 2008). Further, the use of racial slurs by perpetrators has been a defining feature in the identification of crimes as hate crimes (Czajkowski, 1992; Herek et al., 2002; Saucier et al., 2006; Saucier et al., 2008). While racial slurs are undeniably interesting and powerful, we sought to focus our research on slurs that focus on aspects of the targets other than their race.

In this current research we intend to extend the extant literature by focusing on the perceptions of and reactions to slurs against men in general, and against masculinity (i.e., disparaging terms that target the masculinity of men) in particular. Little research has examined the power of slurs, particularly those not related to race or ethnicity, to instigate an aggressive reaction in targets. Insults in general may be used to establish social patterns of domination and subordination (Gabriel, 1998), and we propose that slurs against men’s masculinity in particular may serve as methods by which men’s established social positions, social capital, self-concepts, and manhood may be threatened (Anderson, 1999; Croom, 2013a). It should be noted that there is more than one conception of masculinity (e.g., Plummer, 2001). What is most relevant to our purposes in this research is the heterosexual traditional conception of masculinity, and it is this conception of masculinity we reference when we make mention of “slurs against masculinity”. Consequently, we investigated how slurs against masculinity are perceived by men and whether slurs against heterosexist masculinity are provocative of aggressive responses. Further, we investigated how perceptions of and reactions to slurs against masculinity are related to men’s levels of masculine honor beliefs.

Theories of masculine honor, originating from research on male behavior in the American South, assert that cultures develop and socialize standards for appropriate male behavior. Among these standards is the belief that insults and threats against a man must not go unpunished, or the man will be at increased risk for future insult and threat (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Cohen and Nisbett, 1994, 1997; Cohen et al., 1998; Cohen et al., 1999; Nisbett, 1993). In the American South, men must create and maintain reputations that they are not easy targets for threats to minimize their risk for victimization (Nisbett, 1993). Accordingly, men are socialized, even as children, to adhere to the standards set forth for honorable men in a culture of honor, and to hold other men to those same standards (Cohen and Nisbett, 1994; Cohen et al., 1999). This includes aggressive defense in response to any insult or threat to the man’s reputation, manhood, family, or property. Allowing these insults or threats to go unpunished would be in violation of what it means to be man in the culture of honor (Cohen et al., 1998). Simply put, men in cultures of honor learn to adhere to the beliefs that even extreme forms of physical aggression are not only tolerated, but expected when they are threatened, and that slights to their masculinity are to be considered threatening (Anderson, 1999; Cohen and Nisbett, 1994, 1997).

Research has indeed shown that regional differences exist such that Southern men, who are socialized in a culture of honor, respond to insults more aggressively than do Northern men at cognitive, affective, behavioral, and physiological levels (e.g., Cohen et al., 1996). These regional differences had also been demonstrated with Southern boys and men exhibiting increased levels of school violence in response to perceived identity threats (Brown et al., 2009), and even increased rates of suicide when confronting the stigma of being dishonored (Osterman and Brown, 2011). Evidence also exists cross-culturally that being tough and standing up for themselves, and their families, are important aspects of honorable masculinity (e.g., Bandyopadhyay, 2006; Figueroa et al., 2004; Ijzerman et al., 2007; Luyt, 2005; van Osch et al., 2013; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2002a, 2002b).

More recently, researchers have begun to examine masculine honor beliefs as more than a regional difference, and to treat masculine honor beliefs as an individual difference that accounts for meaningful variance in how men perceive and respond to threats (Barnes et al., 2012; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2002b; Saucier and McManus, 2014; Vandello et al., 2009). The attempts to measure individuals’ adherence to masculine honor beliefs vary in terms of their focus. Rodriguez Mosquera et al. (2002b) assessed elements of masculine honor, feminine honor, family honor, and integrity, while Vandello et al. (2009) measured combined aspects of masculine and feminine honor. Barnes et al. (2012) focused on masculine honor particularly as it manifests in the American South, but in doing so assessed only the components of masculine honor that directly pertain to the justifiability for male defensive aggression and the qualities of masculinity related to self-sufficiency, pugnacity, and toughness.

Saucier and McManus (2014) also offered an assessment method that focused on masculine honor as it exists in the American South. By not conflating their measurement with other types of honor not related to masculinity, their measure (i.e., the Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale; Saucier and McManus, 2014) is better suited than those offered by Rodriguez Mosquera et al. (2002b) and Vandello et al. (2009) to our purposes of examining how masculine honor in particular is associated with perceptions of and reactions to slurs against men and masculinity. Further, Saucier and McManus (2014) assessed seven

components of masculine honor inspired by research on the American Southern culture of honor (Cohen, 1998; Cohen and Nisbett, 1997; Cohen et al., 1996, 1998; Nisbett, 1993) to assess a more comprehensive conceptualization of masculine honor beliefs. These components consisted of masculine courage, pride in manhood, socialization, virtue, protection, provocation, and family/community bonds. Accordingly, Saucier and McManus (2014) assert that full realization of masculine honor as defined in the American South would require that men act bravely, assert their masculinity, have been socialized about the norms dictating masculine honor, hold their masculine honor beliefs as core moral values, act to defend others from threats, act to defend themselves from insult, and be firmly connected to family and community. Thus, their assessment method is more comprehensive in its focus on masculine honor than that provided by the previous research (Barnes et al., 2012; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2002b; Vandello et al., 2009), and allows us to examine how the various components of masculine honor may instigate more negative perceptions of and more physically aggressive responses to being threatened by slurs against men and masculinity. For these reasons, we chose the measure by Saucier and McManus (2014) to operationalize the masculine honor beliefs of the men in our current research.

It is our overarching intention to identify slurs against men and masculinity that men perceive to be offensive and provocative of aggression, and to assess how individual differences in masculine honor beliefs predict men's perceptions of and reactions to slurs against masculinity. Overall, we expect that men will find slurs, particularly those targeting their masculinity, to be offensive, will report responding physically in response to being targeted by these slurs, and that these perceptions of slurs as offensive and their likelihood of responding physically to them will be related to their levels of adherence to masculine honor beliefs.

1. Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to gather a list of slurs that men would find offensive if they were targeted by them, and to use these responses to create a taxonomy of slurs that are considered offensive to men, including slurs that do and do not directly attack the men's masculinity. We provided men with the opportunity to list slurs they would be offended by if someone were to use the slurs to refer to them. We provided little structure or instruction to allow the men to respond broadly and freely. We then examined these responses for emergent themes, and assessed the frequencies at which these themes emerged. While this was an exploratory study, we tentatively expected that slurs against masculinity (slurs that directly challenged their masculinity, via references to them as non-heterosexual, feminine, or cowardly) would emerge among these themes.

1.1. Participants

Ninety-six men participated in this study. All participants were at least 18 years of age, with their ages ranging from 18 to 79 years of age ($M = 29.08$, $SD = 13.05$) and only 34% being of traditional college age (i.e., ages 18–22). The majority of participants reported being college students (53%, with 75% of the college students reporting that they were juniors or seniors), White (89%), single (75%), from suburban or rural communities (73%), and from Kansas (77%).

1.2. Procedure

Research assistants approached adult men in a college town and other communities in central Kansas. They invited the men to complete a short research survey that would take no more than 5 min in exchange for no compensation. They were informed that no identifying data would be collected and their responses were therefore completely anonymous. Men who consented to participate were given a one-page survey to complete.

Participants were asked to "please list the 10 offensive slurs or disparaging names that you would be most personally offended by if someone were to use them to refer to you." Below these instructions, the participants were given 10 lines on which they could write their free responses for offensive slurs. Participants then completed items about their demographic information, including their age, ethnicity, hometown and state, hometown description (i.e., rural, suburban, urban), college student status and year, and marital status. Upon completion of the survey, participants were thanked and their participation in the study concluded.

1.3. Results and discussion

The 96 men provided a total of 712 responses on the surveys ($M = 7.42$, $SD = 3.02$). Three of the men provided no responses, while approximately half of them ($n = 47$) provided 10 responses. We examined the 712 responses to identify themes that emerged in an effort to divide the responses into categories of slurs representing similar themes in their potential to offend. We identified seven distinct themes that appeared to emerge with adequate frequency to warrant coding. These themes were distinct in terms of the characteristics of the targeted individual on which they focused in their capacity to offend. These themes created a taxonomy of slurs deemed offensive when used against men. *Homophobic slurs* consisted of words that challenged or disparaged the targeted man's (heterosexual) sexual orientation (e.g., faggot, queer). *Feminine slurs* consisted of words that challenged or disparaged the targeted man's masculinity by implying that he is feminine (e.g., bitch, pussy). *Intelligence slurs* consisted of words that challenged or disparaged the targeted man's intelligence (e.g., dumbass, retard). *Bravery slurs* consisted of words that challenged or disparaged the targeted man's bravery or courage (e.g., coward). *Physical slurs* consisted of words that challenged or disparaged the targeted man's physical attractiveness, shape, or stature

(e.g., fat ass). *Ethnic slurs* consisted of words that challenged or disparaged the targeted man's race, ethnicity, region or nation of origin, religion, or socio-economic status (e.g., nigger, cracker). *General personality slurs* consisted of words that challenged or disparaged the targeted man's personality, general disposition, or overall worth (e.g., asshole, loser, douchebag; it should be noted that the extant literature previously has referred to terms like these as "general pejoratives", see Croom, 2014a, for a discussion). Additional responses provided by the participants that did not fit into these categories were coded as *other slurs*. Three independent coders used these operational definitions to categorize each of the participants' responses into these categories. The coding for the participants' responses into these categories were reliable ($kappas > .75$ for all pairings of coders), and discrepancies were resolved by discussion.

We examined the presence or absence of these themes being represented in the slurs provided by each male participant. We found that the majority of the men in our sample reported slurs they would find offensive that targeted their personality, intelligence, heterosexual orientation, and masculinity. Slurs that targeted ethnicity, physical features, and bravery were reported by a minority of the men.

Of the 712 slurs contained in the participants' responses, 268 were general personality slurs, 103 were intelligence slurs, 94 were homophobic slurs, 92 were feminine slurs, 59 were ethnic slurs, 49 were physical slurs, 5 were bravery slurs, and 42 were coded as "other" slurs. While few slurs were reported in the bravery slur category, we retained this in our taxonomy of slurs against men because we expect that men will be offended by and potentially inspired to take action against other men who provoke them with bravery slurs. Overall, the examination of these responses indicated that men reported slurs they would find offensive that targeted their personality, intelligence, heterosexual orientation, masculinity, ethnicity, physical features, and, to a lesser extent, bravery.

Together these results (which are summarized in Table 1) demonstrated that men would report offensive slurs that fit into a taxonomy of categories that differ according to the aspect of the man that they challenge or disparage. Specifically, slurs against men consist of words used to attack the man's personality, intelligence, heterosexual orientation, masculinity, ethnicity, physical features, and bravery. Themes did emerge that consisted of slurs that directly targeted the masculinity of men by challenging them as non-heterosexual, feminine, or cowardly (i.e., homophobic, feminine, and bravery slurs). In Study 2 we explored the potential for these slurs to instigate physically aggressive reactions in the men targeted by the slurs. We did this by examining men's past reports of fighting in response to being targeted by slurs.

2. Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to assess men's physical reactions to having been targeted by slurs in their past behavior. We asked men whether they had ever fought in response to being targeted by slurs. We asked the men to provide the slur that provoked their response to fight, and we coded these using the taxonomy of slurs against men and masculinity that we developed in Study 1. We examined, in an exploratory fashion, if men would report that they had fought as a result of being targeted by slurs, and if slurs against their masculinity would be among their responses of the slurs that instigated them to fight.

2.1. Participants

Ninety-four men participated in this study. All participants were at least 18 years of age, with their ages ranging from 18 to 79 years of age ($M = 28.31$, $SD = 10.90$) and only 36% being of traditional college age (i.e., ages 18–22). The majority of participants reported being college students (51%, with 68% of the college students reporting that they were juniors or seniors), White (85%), single (69%), and from Kansas (69%). Approximately half of the participants reported that they were from rural communities (48%).

2.2. Procedure

As in Study 1, research assistants approached adult men in a college town and other communities in central Kansas. They invited the men to complete a short research survey that would take no more than 5 min in exchange for no compensation. They were informed that no identifying data would be collected and their responses were therefore completely anonymous. Men who consented to participate were given a one-page survey to complete.

Table 1
Slurs reported to be offensive toward men.

Theme	% Of responses	% Of men reporting	Common responses
General personality	38%	83%	Asshole, loser
Intelligence	15%	53%	Retard, dumbass, idiot
Homophobic	13%	55%	Fag(got), queer
Feminine	13%	54%	Bitch, pussy
Ethnic	8%	34%	Cracker, nigger
Physical	7%	31%	Fat ass, weakling
Bravery	1%	5%	Coward
"Other"	6%	23%	n/a

Note: Percentages were calculated based on the frequencies of occurrence among 712 slurs and among 96 male participants.

The participants first responded to the question, “Have you ever gotten into a fight (physically) because someone called you a “name” (that is, the person referred to you using an offensive slur or disparaging name that personally offended you)?” by circling “Yes, I have” or “No, I have not”. Participants then indicated how many times they fought because someone had called them a “name” (0 times, 1 time, 2–5 times, 6–10 times, or More than 10 times). For the remaining questions, participants were instructed to “think of the occasion when you were most offended by the name you were called”. Using this occasion, participants used free response formats to report how old they were when they fought, the slur they were called that provoked the fight, and why they fought. Participants then indicated which of two statements that they agreed with more (*Looking back, I regret that I fought versus Looking back, I am glad that I fought*), and then reported why they chose the statement they did using a free response format.

Participants finally completed the same items about their demographic information used in Study 1. Upon completion of the survey, participants were thanked and their participation in the study concluded.

2.3. Results and discussion

Nearly half of the participants ($n = 44$, 47%) indicated that they had gotten into a fight because someone had targeted them by a slur. This demonstrates that men may be provoked by being called “names” to the point that they physically confront the individual who used the slur. Interestingly, a few participants provided responses to the other items about their experiences about fighting in reaction to being targeted by a slur despite having indicated that they had not fought in response to this initial question. Twenty of the men reported fighting because they were targeted by a slur on only one occasion, 17 reported fighting 2–5 times, 4 reported fighting 6–10 times, and 3 reported fighting more than 10 times. We were not able to average the participants’ free responses about the age at which they fought (i.e., several participants reported qualitative responses such as “teens” or age ranges such as “10–14”), but we were able to discern from their responses that only a minority of our participants ($n = 16$) reported fighting as adults (i.e., over the age of 18). The number of participants who reported that they regretted having fought ($n = 25$) was slightly higher than the number of participants who reported they did not regret having fought ($n = 23$).

Using the same taxonomy created in Study 1 to categorize slurs against men, two independent coders categorized the slurs the men provided as the instigations for their fights. These codings were perfectly reliable ($kappa = 1.00$). Of the 41 men who provided at least one specific slur that instigated their fights, 13 (32%) provided feminine slurs, 12 (29%) provided homophobic slurs, 8 (20%) provided ethnic slurs, 6 (15%) provided general personality slurs, 4 (10%) provided intelligence slurs, 2 (5%) provided physical slurs, and 2 (5%) provided “other” slurs. None of the men provided bravery slurs as instigation for their fights.

Overall, these results indicated that some men do report having fought as a result of their being targeted by slurs. Interestingly, while our Study 1 results indicated that general personality slurs were the most common in men’s free responses, with intelligence slurs among the next most common along with homophobic and feminine slurs, our Study 2 results indicated that homophobic and feminine slurs may be more powerful in instigating aggressive reactions. This suggests that slurs against masculinity, in particular, may incite physical responses. In Study 3 we more closely examined how men perceive and react to the different categories of slurs comprising our taxonomy of slurs against men and masculinity.

3. Study 3

The purpose of Study 3 was to examine how men perceive and respond to slurs representing different categories within our taxonomy of slurs against men and masculinity. In particular, we examined differences in men’s perceptions of the offensiveness of slurs representing the different categories in our taxonomy of slurs against men and masculinity, as well as their reports of how likely they would be to respond physically if they were to be targeted by the different slurs. We predicted that differences in these perceptions and reactions would emerge between the slurs representing different categories in our taxonomy such that more offense and more physical responses would be associated with slurs against masculinity (i.e., slurs in the homophobic, feminine, and bravery categories) than with slurs that did not directly challenge or disparage the men’s masculinity (i.e., slurs in the general personality, intelligence, and physical categories).

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 198 male Amazon Mechanical Turk workers. Each participant was compensated \$.10 for his participation. All participants were at least 18 years of age, with their ages ranging from 18 to 68 years of age ($M = 34.04$, $SD = 10.41$) and only 10% being of traditional college age (i.e., ages 18–22). The majority of participants reported having at least some college education (88%, with 50% of these participants reporting that they had earned a 4-year college degree or higher). All participants reported that they resided in the United States, and the majority of participants reported that they were White (84%) and single (51%). Reasonably equivalent proportions of participants reported that they were from suburban (39%), urban (36%), and rural (25%) communities.

3.2. Materials

Slur rating survey. We used the responses provided by participants in Studies 1 and 2 to identify exemplars of the categories comprising our taxonomy of slurs against men, with the exception of ethnic slurs. We did not explore reactions to ethnic slurs,

because unlike the exemplars in the other categories of our taxonomy, the ethnic slurs would need to be tailored to each participant. Further, given our research focus on slurs against masculinity, ethnic slurs are not only tangential to that focus, but also potentially ambiguous in whether or not they target masculinity. While this potential ambiguity deserves future research attention, we excluded ethnic slurs from this study to narrow our focus. We selected four exemplars for each of the six remaining categories comprising our taxonomy. Homophobic slurs consisted of *faggot*, *queer*, *homo*, and *cocksucker*. Feminine slurs consisted of *bitch*, *pussy*, *cunt*, and *woman*. Bravery slurs consisted of *coward*, *wimp*, *sissy*, and *yellow*. General personality slurs consisted of *asshole*, *loser*, *dickhead*, and *douchebag*. Intelligence slurs consisted of *retard*, *dumbass*, *idiot*, and *moron*. Physical slurs consisted of *fat ass*, *weakling*, *tiny*, and *ugly*. Our male participants responded by completing two items for each of the 24 slurs. On one of these items, participants rated how much they would take offense to being targeted by the slur using a scale from 1 (*not at all offended*) to 9 (*extremely offended*). On the other item, participants rated how likely they would be to respond physically after being targeted by the slur using a scale from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 9 (*extremely likely*).

3.3. Procedure

An online study was posted on Amazon Mechanical Turk, and advertised as a short survey on perceptions of slurs that would take approximately 10 min to complete. The title of the study indicated that the study was restricted to male participants. Participants entered the study, reported their demographic information, and completed ratings of how offensive they perceived each of the 24 slurs across the six categories to be, and how likely they would be to respond physically if they were targeted by each of the slurs. The order of the slurs was randomized within the blocks of offensiveness and physical reaction ratings, and these blocks were counterbalanced across the sample. Upon completion of the survey, participants read a written debriefing statement and were compensated for their participation.

3.4. Results and discussion

We subjected the participants' ratings of how much offense they would take if they were targeted by the slurs to confirmatory factor analyses to test one-factor (all of the slurs measure the same higher order construct), two-factor (slurs in the homophobic, feminine, and bravery categories measure one higher order construct while slurs in the general personality, intelligence, and physical categories measure a second, but correlated, higher order construct), and six-factor (slurs in the homophobic, feminine, bravery, general personality, intelligence, and physical categories measure six different, but correlated, higher order constructs). These analyses indicated that the six-factor model fit the data better (NFI = .84, CFI = .89, RMSEA = .10) than did the two-factor (NFI = .75, CFI = .80, RMSEA = .12) or one-factor (NFI = .70, CFI = .75, RMSEA = .14) models. We also subjected the participants' ratings of how likely they would be to respond physically after being targeted by these slurs to confirmatory factor analyses testing the same one-factor, two-factor, and six-factor models. These analyses also indicated that the six-factor model fit the data better (NFI = .80, CFI = .83, RMSEA = .14) than did the two-factor (NFI = .69, CFI = .72, RMSEA = .18) or one-factor (NFI = .69, CFI = .72, RMSEA = .18) models.

Accordingly, we averaged participants' ratings of how offended they would be if they were to be targeted by slurs in each of the categories to produce composites for each of the six categories of slurs (i.e., homophobic, feminine, bravery, general personality, intelligence, and physical categories). We averaged the participants' ratings of how likely they would be to respond physically after being targeted by slurs in each of these categories in the same way. The internal consistencies, means, and standard deviations, as well as the correlations between the participants' ratings of how offended they would be if they were to be targeted by slurs and their ratings of how likely they would be to respond physically after being targeted by slurs in each category are displayed in Table 2. Overall, the items comprising each composite were internally consistent, and the participants' ratings of how offensive they found the slurs in a category to be correlated with how likely they would be to respond physically to being targeted by the slurs in that category.

The participants' ratings of the slurs as offensive, and as likely to provoke physical responses, in each of the categories were intercorrelated, as shown in Table 3. This is unsurprising; participants likely to be offended by slurs of a given category are likely to be offended by slurs in other categories as well, and it would make sense that this pattern of responding would be mirrored in their reported likelihood of physical responses. We conducted a repeated measures analysis of variance on the participants' ratings of how offended they would be if they were to be targeted by slurs in each of the categories. Consistent with our predictions, significant differences emerged in the ratings of how offensive slurs in the different categories were reported to be, $F(5, 985) = 36.20, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .16$. Pairwise comparisons indicated that participants reported that they would be most offended by homophobic slurs, followed by feminine and intelligence slurs, followed by bravery and general personality slurs, followed by physical slurs (see Table 2).

We conducted a second repeated measures analysis of variance on the participants' ratings of how likely they would be to respond physically after being targeted by slurs in each of the categories. Again, consistent with our predictions, significant differences emerged in the ratings of how likely the participants reported they would be to respond physical if they had been targeted by slurs in the different categories, $F(5, 985) = 23.11, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .11$. Pairwise comparisons revealed a similar pattern to that observed above in the participants' ratings of how offended they would be, indicating that participants reported that they would be most likely to respond physically if they were targeted by homophobic slurs, followed by feminine and bravery slurs, followed by general personality, intelligence, and physical slurs (see Table 2).

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for the offensiveness and physical reaction ratings by slur category (Study 3).

Slur category	Offensiveness ratings			Physical reaction ratings			<i>r</i>
	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Homophobic	.93	4.73 _a	2.49	.94	2.75 _a	2.22	.63***
Feminine	.84	4.17 _b	2.11	.89	2.39 _b	1.83	.55***
Bravery	.86	3.63 _c	1.93	.90	2.22 _{bc}	1.72	.59***
General personality	.87	3.86 _c	2.07	.93	2.09 _{cd}	1.63	.58***
Intelligence	.90	4.17 _b	2.10	.92	2.04 _{cd}	1.54	.51***
Physical	.75	3.30 _d	1.70	.88	1.93 _d	1.45	.58***

Note: All ratings were made on 1–9 scales; higher values represented higher levels of either offensiveness or likelihood of physical reaction. Means of offensive ratings that do not share a subscript are significantly different, as are means of physical reaction ratings. The correlation coefficient provides the relationship between the offensiveness and physical reaction ratings for that slur category.

****p* < .001.

These results demonstrate that the slur categories comprising our taxonomy of slurs against men and masculinity are reasonably distinct, despite their interrelatedness, in terms of the participants' perceptions of and reactions to the slurs. Consistent with our predictions, men generally reported being more offended and being more likely to respond physically to slurs that targeted their masculinity (i.e., homophobic, feminine, and bravery slurs) than to slurs that did not directly target their masculinity (i.e., general personality, intelligence, and physical slurs). In Study 4, we assessed the hypothesis that men's levels of masculine honor beliefs would moderate their perceptions of and reactions to the slurs, and in particular those slurs that targeted their masculinity.

4. Study 4

The purpose of Study 4 was to examine how men's levels of masculine honor beliefs would correlate with their perceptions of and reactions to the slurs of the different categories of our taxonomy of slurs against men and masculinity. Men completed the Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale (MHBS; Saucier and McManus, 2014) and also rated how offended they would be, and how likely they would be to respond physically, if they were targeted by homophobic, feminine, bravery, general personality, intelligence, and physical slurs. While we predicted that men's higher levels of masculine honor beliefs will likely be associated with greater perceptions of offensiveness and greater reported likelihoods of physical responses to slurs of all categories, we predicted that the relationships would be stronger when the men were targeted by slurs that targeted their masculinity (i.e., homophobic, feminine, and bravery slurs) than when the men were targeted by slurs that did not directly target their masculinity (i.e., general personality, intelligence, and physical slurs). We made this prediction because we believed that slurs against the men's masculinity would more directly disparage or challenge the men's masculine self-concepts, and thus produce more extreme experiences of offense and consequent physical reactions to re-establish their challenged masculinity.

4.1. Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 170 male Amazon Mechanical Turk workers. Each participant was compensated \$.20 for his participation. All participants were at least 18 years of age, with their ages ranging from 18 to 68 years of age (*M* = 31.43, *SD* = 9.28) and only 17% being of traditional college age (i.e., ages 18–22). The majority of participants reported having at least some college education (86%, with 46% of these participants reporting that they had earned a 4-year college degree or higher). All participants reported that they resided in the United States, and the majority of participants reported that they were White (83%) and single (57%). Reasonably equivalent proportions of participants reported that they were from suburban (41%), urban (32%), and rural (27%) communities.

Table 3

Intercorrelations for the offensiveness and physical reaction ratings by slur category (Study 3).

Slur category	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Homophobic	–	.81***	.67***	.73***	.65***	.68***
2. Feminine	.77***	–	.77***	.87***	.81***	.81***
3. Bravery	.63***	.69***	–	.72***	.75***	.80***
4. General personality	.67***	.78***	.65***	–	.87***	.85***
5. Intelligence	.59***	.71***	.68***	.81***	–	.85***
6. Physical	.62***	.72***	.73***	.72***	.75***	–

Note: Correlation coefficients below the diagonal provide the relationships among the offensiveness ratings for the slur categories, and correlation coefficients above the diagonal provide the relationships among the physical reaction ratings for the slur categories.

****p* < .001.

4.2. Materials

Slur rating survey. We administered a survey consisting of rating the same slurs used to create our taxonomy of slurs again men in the Study 3. As in Study 3, we used four exemplars for each of the six categories comprising our taxonomy (i.e., homophobic, feminine, bravery, general personality, intelligence, and physical slurs). Participants responded by completing the same two items used in Study 3 for each of the 24 slurs (i.e., how much they would take offense to being targeted by the slur from 1 (*not at all offended*) to 9 (*extremely offended*), and how likely they would be to respond physically after being targeted by the slur from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 9 (*extremely likely*)). Composite scores were calculated by averaging the responses for each slur category with higher values indicating higher ratings of being offended or being likely to respond physically if they had been targeted by the slurs in that category. The items comprising each of these composites were internally consistent (see Table 4) as in Study 3.

Masculine honor beliefs scale. We administered the Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale (Saucier and McManus, 2014; Saucier et al., in preparation) to assess the participants' adherence to masculine honor beliefs. This scale was created based on the conceptualization of masculine honor within the culture of honor of the American South (Cohen, 1998; Cohen and Nisbett, 1997; Cohen et al., 1996, 1998; Nisbett, 1993). Participants completed 35 items in total, with 5 items representing statements related to each of 7 components of masculine honor: masculine courage (MCO; e.g., *A man should not be afraid to fight*), pride in manhood (PRI; e.g., *It is important for a man to be more masculine than other men*), socialization (SOC; e.g., *As a child you were taught that boys should always defend themselves*), virtue (VIR; e.g., *You would praise a man who reacted aggressively to an insult*), protection (PRO; e.g., *It is a male's responsibility to protect his family*), provocation (PRV; e.g., *If a man is insulted, his manhood is insulted*), and family/community bonds (FAC; e.g., *A man's family should be his number one priority*). Participants used scales from 1 (*disagree very strongly*) to 9 (*agree very strongly*) to report their agreement with each statement. Items were averaged for each participant so that higher scores represented more adherence to masculine honor beliefs comprehensively as an overall composite score ($\alpha = .94$), as well as for each of the subscales (α s > .71). Previous research has demonstrated the MHBS's internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and validity in predicting aggressive responses to provocation (Saucier and McManus, 2014; Saucier et al., in preparation).

4.3. Procedure

The same procedure used in Study 3 was used in Study 4, with minor modifications to accommodate the inclusion of the MHBS in the materials. An online study was posted on Amazon Mechanical Turk, and advertised as a short survey on social attitudes and perceptions of slurs that would take approximately 15 min to complete. The title of the study again indicated that the study was restricted to male participants. As in Study 3, participants entered the study, reported their demographic information, and completed ratings of how offensive they perceived each of the 24 slurs across the six categories to be, and how likely they would be to respond physically if they were targeted by each of the slurs. As in Study 3, the order of the slurs was randomized within the blocks of offensiveness and physical reaction ratings. The items on the MHBS were also randomized. The order in which participants completed the MHBS and the blocks of slur ratings were counterbalanced across the sample. After completing the survey, participants read a written debriefing statement and were compensated for their participation.

4.4. Results and discussion

Replicating our findings in Study 3, we found that the participants' ratings of the slurs as offensive, and their ratings of how likely they would be to respond physically to the slurs, in the different categories to be intercorrelated. These correlations are provided in Table 5. This is again unsurprising; men who are more likely to perceive slurs in any of the categories to be offensive are more likely to perceive slurs in the other categories to be offensive, and their ratings of their likelihood of responding physically to being targeted by the slurs showed the same pattern of effects.

Also replicating our findings in Study 3, repeated measures analyses of variance indicated that our male participants' ratings of the slurs varied by the category of the slurs for both their ratings of how offensive they found the slurs to be, $F(5,$

Table 4

Descriptive statistics for the offensiveness and physical reaction ratings by slur category (Study 4).

Slur category	Offensiveness ratings			Physical reaction ratings			<i>r</i>
	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Homophobic	.95	4.20 _a	2.52	.94	2.70 _a	1.99	.53***
Feminine	.84	3.88 _b	2.09	.84	2.62 _a	1.73	.50***
Bravery	.86	3.36 _{cd}	1.95	.86	2.25 _b	1.51	.55***
General personality	.88	3.56 _{bc}	1.97	.92	2.23 _{bc}	1.61	.52***
Intelligence	.91	3.64 _{bc}	2.08	.90	2.16 _{bc}	1.51	.49***
Physical	.77	3.20 _d	1.73	.80	2.00 _c	1.34	.47***

Note: All ratings were made on 1 to 9 scales; higher values represented higher levels of either offensiveness or likelihood of physical reaction. Means of offensive ratings that do not share a subscript are significantly different, as are means of physical reaction ratings. The correlation coefficient provides the relationship between the offensiveness and physical reaction ratings for that slur category.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Relationships between Masculine Honor Belief Scale Scores and the offensiveness and physical reaction ratings by slur category.

Measure		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. MHBS		–	.29***	.31***	.33***	.21*	.26**	.20*
2. Homophobic		.30***	–	.86***	.74***	.75***	.77***	.73***
3. Feminine		.31***	.84***	–	.81***	.78***	.80***	.80***
4. Bravery		.36***	.69***	.75***	–	.79***	.79***	.82***
5. General personality		.21*	.75***	.78***	.74***	–	.86***	.80***
6. Intelligence		.21*	.67***	.74***	.74***	.81***	–	.82***
7. Physical		.17*	.61**	.64***	.74***	.75***	.74***	–

Note: Correlation coefficients below the diagonal provide the relationships between the Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale (MHBS) and the offensiveness ratings for the slur categories, and correlation coefficients above the diagonal provide the relationships between the MHBS and the physical reaction ratings for the slur categories.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

700) = 15.43, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$, and how likely they would be to respond physically if they were targeted by the slurs, $F(5, 685) = 18.21$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .12$. Pairwise comparisons indicated that participants reported they would be most offended by homophobic slurs; followed by feminine, intelligence, general personality, and bravery slurs; followed by physical slurs. Similarly, pairwise comparisons indicated that participants reported they would be most likely to respond physically if they were targeted by homophobic and feminine slurs; followed by bravery, general personality, and intelligence slurs; followed by physical slurs. These patterns are consistent with our findings in Study 3 (see Table 4).

Of most interest in this study was our examination of the correlations of the participants' MHBS scores with their ratings of the slurs as offensive and their ratings of how likely they would be to respond to the slurs physically. We predicted that higher levels of adherence to masculine honor beliefs would be associated with greater perceptions of the slurs as offensive, and with reports of greater likelihoods of responding physically to the slurs. We also predicted that these relationships would be stronger for slurs in the homophobic, feminine, and bravery categories because those slurs may most directly challenge or disparage the target man's masculinity and self-concept as a man. The correlations between the participants' MHBS scores and their ratings of the slurs of the different categories as offensive, and their reported likelihoods of responding physically to the slurs, are given in Table 5.

These results supported our hypotheses. Participants' MHBS scores were significantly positively correlated with their ratings of how offended they would be by the slurs in each of the categories. This confirms our prediction that men's levels of adherence to masculine honor beliefs would be positively associated with their taking offense to being targeted by slurs generally. Examination of the size of the correlation coefficients, however, indicates that the relationships are descriptively larger for homophobic, feminine, and bravery slurs, with the largest correlation in that latter category.

The pattern of correlations for the participants' ratings of how likely they would be to respond physically if they were to be targeted by the slurs directly mirrors those findings, supporting our hypotheses. Participants' MHBS scores were positively correlated with their reported likelihoods of physically responding to the slurs in each category, but these relationships were descriptively higher for the slurs that most directly challenge or disparage a man's masculinity (i.e., homophobic, feminine, and bravery slurs), with the largest relationship emerging when the participants were targeted by bravery slurs.

To further examine the relationships between men's adherence to masculine honor beliefs and their perceptions and reactions to being targeted by slurs, we calculated correlations between the participants' scores on the subscales of the MHBS with their ratings of how offensive they found the slurs in each category to be, and with their reported likelihoods of responding physically if they were to be targeted by the slurs in each category. These correlations are provided in Table 6. There are two striking patterns that emerge from these correlations. First, the Pride in Manhood, Virtue, and Provocation subscales appear to be driving the relationships between men's adherence to masculine honor and their ratings of slurs as being more offensive and as being more likely to instigate a physical response. Each of these subscale scores was positively associated with both greater perceptions of offensiveness and greater reported likelihoods of responding physically for slurs

Table 6

Relationships between MHBS subscale scores and the offensiveness and physical reaction ratings by slur category.

Slur category	Homophobic	Feminine	Bravery	General personality	Intelligence	Physical
Masculine courage	.14/.12	.13/.15	.24**/.20*	.08/.14	.11/.14	.05/.05
Pride in manhood	.33***/.35***	.38***/.38***	.38***/.39***	.25**/.30***	.28**/.33***	.21*/.30***
Socialization	.12/.10	.16/.09	.21*/.08	.10/.06	.07/.08	.12/.04
Virtue	.23**/.41***	.23**/.44***	.27**/.43***	.16*/.32***	.22**/.41***	.18*/.39***
Protection	.17*/.06	.15/.08	.19*/.11	.07/.01	.07/.04	.02/-.01
Provocation	.38***/.38***	.35***/.36***	.40***/.42***	.27**/.25**	.23**/.30***	.23**/.30***
Family/community bonds	.07/-.06	.07/-.06	.07/-.08	.05/-.12	.01/-.07	-.01/-.15

Note: Correlation coefficients to the left of the backslash provide the relationships between the participants' relevant MHBS subscale scores and their ratings of the offensiveness of slurs in that category, while those to the right provide the relationships between the participants' relevant MHBS subscale scores and their ratings of their physical reactions ratings to slurs in that category.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

in each category. Second, the correlations were descriptively stronger for the slurs that directly challenge or disparage a man's masculinity (i.e., homophobic, feminine, and bravery slurs).

Following our correlational analyses, we tested for significant differences between the observed correlations to more directly test our prediction that the degree to which men are offended by, or respond physically to, slurs that target their masculinity (versus slurs that do not directly target their masculinity) is related to the degree to which men's self-concepts include aspects of masculine honor. More specifically we tested whether the correlation between a composite variable representing the perceived offensiveness of slurs targeting men's masculinity (the average of the offensiveness ratings of slurs in the homophobic, feminine, and bravery categories, $\alpha = .95$) and the MHBS was significantly stronger than the correlation between the MHBS and a composite variable representing the perceived offensiveness of slurs that do not directly target men's masculinity (the average of the offensiveness ratings of slurs in the general personality, intelligence, and physical categories, $\alpha = .94$). Similarly, we tested whether the correlation between a composite variable representing the likelihood of responding physically to the slurs targeting men's masculinity (the average of the physical reaction ratings of slurs in the homophobic, feminine, and bravery categories, $\alpha = .95$) and the MHBS was significantly stronger than the correlation between the MHBS and a composite variable representing the likelihood of responding physically to slurs that do not directly target men's masculinity (the average of the physical reaction ratings of slurs in the general personality, intelligence, and physical categories, $\alpha = .95$).

We chose to use the composite variables to reduce the number of pairwise comparisons to control for inflated Type-I error rates. Significance testing of the difference between correlation coefficients was conducted using Zou's (2007) method for testing the difference between two dependent overlapping correlation coefficients. Using this technique, we calculated a 95% confidence interval of the difference between correlation coefficients to test whether the point estimate of the difference was significantly different from zero (i.e., the 95% confidence interval did not contain 0).

Results indicated that the MHBS was more strongly related to the perceived offensiveness of the slurs that targeted masculinity ($r = .35, p < .001$) compared to the perceived offensiveness of the slurs that did not directly target masculinity ($r = .21, p = .01; r_{diff} = .14, 95\%$ confidence interval lower limit = .05, upper limit = .23). Similarly, the MHBS was more strongly related to how likely participants would respond physically to the slurs that targeted masculinity ($r = .33, p < .001$) compared to the slurs that did not directly target masculinity ($r = .24, p = .004; r_{diff} = .10, 95\%$ confidence interval lower limit = .01, upper limit = .17). Furthermore, these differential relationships between masculine honor beliefs and reactions to slurs that did and did not target men's masculinity were significant for the Pride in Manhood, Protection, and Provocation dimensions of masculine honor relating to ratings of offensiveness, and for the Provocation dimension relating to the likelihood of physical response (although all seven dimensions trended in the same direction, see Table 7). These findings indicate that, while men with higher levels of masculine honor beliefs take greater offense to all slurs, their levels of masculine honor are most associated with the levels of offense they take to slurs that challenge or disparage their masculinity directly.

These findings replicated and extended our findings in Study 3. We again found that, while men's perceptions of and reactions to the slurs in the various categories of our taxonomy against men and masculinity were intercorrelated, they generally reported more negative perceptions and more physical reactions to the slurs that directly targeted their masculinity. Further, consistent with our hypotheses, we found that men's higher levels of adherence to masculine honor beliefs were associated with greater perceptions of slurs as offensive and greater likelihoods of responding physically. While these relationships held for slurs in each category of our taxonomy of slurs against men and masculinity, we did find that the relationships were stronger for slurs that directly targeted the men's masculinity (i.e., bravery, homophobic, and feminine slurs) than for slurs that did not directly target their masculinity (i.e., general personality, intelligence, and physical slurs). Further, extending the research on the components that underlie masculine honor beliefs, we found that the components of masculine honor that related to believing in the virtue of manhood, taking pride in one's own masculinity, and perceiving insults as threats to one's manhood were the components of masculine honor that drove the relationships between masculine honor beliefs and taking offense and reacting physically to being targeted by slurs against men and masculinity.

Table 7

Differential relationships between Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale Scores across the composite slur categories.

	Offensiveness Diff	LL	UL	Physical Response Diff	LL	UL
MHBS	.14*	.05	.23	.10*	.01	.17
Masculine courage	.09	-.001	.18	.05	-.03	.13
Pride in manhood	.12*	.04	.21	.07	-.004	.15
Socialization	.07	-.02	.16	.03	-.05	.11
Virtue	.06	-.03	.15	.07	-.007	.15
Protection	.12*	.03	.21	.07	-.01	.15
Provocation	.15*	.06	.24	.11*	.04	.19
Family/Community bonds	.06	-.03	.15	.05	-.03	.13

Note: Offensiveness Diff = the difference between the correlations between MHBS scores and slurs that do versus do not threaten masculinity for ratings of offensiveness; Physical Response Diff = the difference between the correlations between MHBS scores and slurs that do versus do not threaten masculinity for ratings of physical response; LL = 95% confidence interval lower limit of the difference; UL = 95% confidence interval upper limit of the difference. Positive differences indicate stronger relationships between the scores on the MHBS and reactions to slurs that directly target masculinity than to slurs that do not directly target masculinity.

*Indicates that the confidence interval does not contain zero.

5. General discussion

Our purpose was to examine the manifestation and effects of slurs against men and masculinity. In Study 1, we created a taxonomy of slurs against men and masculinity that men report to be offensive. In Study 2, we established that men may respond with physical aggression when targeted by slurs against men and masculinity. In Study 3, we demonstrated that slurs in different categories of our taxonomy were associated with varying levels of perceived offensiveness and likelihoods of aggressive responses. Finally, in Study 4, we showed that men's levels of adherence to masculine honor beliefs are associated with their perceptions of slurs as offensive and the ratings of their likelihood of responding physically, especially for slurs that directly challenge or disparage their masculinity. These findings extend the extant literature that has examined the content of and reactions to slurs and physically aggressive responses to provocation, as well as that which has examined conceptualizations of masculine honor from both cultural and individual difference perspectives.

In their essence, the slurs we identified against men, and most specifically those against masculinity, challenge or disparage the men as something less than "real men," depicting them as men who are in violation of traditional male gender norms (Slaatten and Gabrys, 2014). Homophobic slurs challenge or disparage their sexual identities as heterosexual men, classifying them within a homosexual social group (see also Brown and Alderson, 2010; Oransky and Fisher, 2009). Feminine slurs challenge or disparage their identities as male, classifying them as members of a female social group. Inherent in both of these characterizations is the statement the gay men and women are devalued, and the negative characteristics implied by the slur are thus transferred to the targeted man (Oransky and Marecek, 2009; Pascoe, 2005). The slurs, then, are successful in both their expressive and descriptive functions. Interestingly, our results indicated that, while both homophobic and feminine slurs target the heterosexual traditional conception of masculinity, these slurs were not perceived equivalently; the mean ratings for the perceived offensiveness and likelihood of responding physically in reaction to homophobic slurs were significantly higher than for feminine slurs in our studies, suggesting these slurs are not synonymous. Also targeting traditional conceptions of masculinity, bravery slurs challenge or disparage the men's courage, a characteristic necessary for honorable men to possess, and classifies the targeted man within a social group of stigmatized men who are lower in power and status. That these slurs would be seen as more offensive and more provocative of physical responses, and that men's levels of masculine honor beliefs would relate to these responses, is both theoretically consistent and compelling.

Slurs that classify men as members of lower status groups in terms of their personality, intelligence, or physical features undoubtedly create negative reactions, as our findings showed, but that these reactions were a bit less extreme is also unsurprising. While these slurs do descriptively and expressively categorize men into groups with negative implications, they do so without directly challenging or disparaging the core aspects that men, especially those higher in masculine honor beliefs, see as self-defining. These slurs may be less likely to incite the need in these men to stand up for and reassert their challenged masculinity, to reestablish their lost "gender capital" (Bridges, 2009), and to fulfill their responsibilities in defending themselves and their reputations as honorable men. This is a notion consistent with research that has shown that men may use fighting, and their accounts of fighting, as methods of establishing and repairing their social status as men (Benson and Archer, 2002; Messerschmidt, 2000).

At its core, the conceptualization of masculine honor beliefs derived from the culture of honor in the American South asserts that men must not let insults go unpunished, lest they become chronically vulnerable to future victimization. Our findings suggest that slurs against men in general, and particularly those that directly target masculinity, may be incendiary when men higher in their adherence to these masculine honor beliefs are targeted by them. Specifically it appears to be the components of masculine honor that assert that their masculinity is virtuous, is an important source of personal pride, and must be protected from provocation that compel the negative reactions to being targeted by slurs against men and masculinity. These findings contribute to the understanding of the specific components that comprise the system of beliefs underlying masculine honor, and how these specific components relate to manifestations of physical aggression.

Our results are consistent with previous research that has examined how men respond to challenges to their heterosexuality. Previous research has shown that men report that homophobic slurs are among the "worst things" that men may call other men (Preston and Stanley, 1987), and that heterosexual men seek to actively maintain gender identities that serve to distance themselves from gay men (Falomir-Pichastor and Mugny, 2009). Men perceive homophobic slurs negatively, and may take measures to highlight their heterosexuality even upon exposure to these slurs – even when not directly targeted by them (Carnaghi et al., 2011). Men similarly may respond negatively toward gay men to assert their heterosexuality in an attempt to compensate for feedback that their levels of masculinity were lower than the average of men nationally (Talley and Bettencourt, 2008). Our findings confirm these conclusions from the literature by showing that homophobic slurs, as well as other slurs that threaten masculinity, are perceived as particularly offensive by men. But our studies extend this extant research by innovatively demonstrating how men's reactions to challenged masculinity are related to their masculine honor beliefs.

These studies are not without limitations. Most notably, the measures in these studies consisted of self-reports of reactions to imagined behaviors. The men in our studies were not actually targeted by slurs against men and masculinity, and therefore had no actual opportunity to respond aggressively or otherwise. Future research should attempt to test our hypotheses using more realistic lab and field studies in which men are targeted by the slurs comprising our taxonomy of slurs against men and masculinity and have the opportunity to respond aggressively at cognitive, affective, behavioral, and physiological levels. Future research should also examine how other individual differences influence the perceptions of and reactions to slurs against men and masculinity, including demographic variables (e.g., sexual orientation) and measures of relevant attitudes,

beliefs, and dispositions (e.g., sexism, prejudice against gay men, trait aggression, agreeableness), and the perceptions third party observers have of men who do and do not respond aggressively after being targeted by slurs against men and masculinity. Finally, our research was conducted with samples of American men using a conceptualization of masculine honor inspired by research conducted in the American South. Future research should examine how our results may or may not generalize to other cultures.

Across four studies, we gathered and reported compelling data that contribute to the understanding of how men perceive and respond to being targeted by slurs, especially those that challenge or disparage their masculinity. We identified a taxonomy of slurs against men and masculinity that men report to be offensive that may be used to aid the design and communication of future research on slurs, insults, and provocation. We found that men report having fought when targeted by slurs against men and masculinity, and that they perceive slurs against their masculinity to be particularly offensive and report greater likelihoods of responding to these slurs physically. Finally, we found that men's perceptions of and reactions to being targeted by slurs are associated with their adherence to masculine honor beliefs, with those relationships being stronger for the components of masculine honor related to pride in manhood, virtue in masculinity, and perceptions of provocation as threatening with slurs that directly challenge or disparage men's masculinity. In summary, our research has demonstrated that slurs against men and masculinity may incite physically aggressive responses in men bound by the standards of masculine honor, highlighting the theoretical, practical, and societal importance of investigating and understanding "fighting words."

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