BRIEF REPORT

Individual Differences in Masculine Honor Beliefs Predict Attitudes Toward Aggressive Security Measures, War, and Peace

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We hypothesized that individual differences in masculine honor beliefs (MHBs) would predict participants' views of the world and the potential for evil and good among the people in it, as well as their attitudes toward war, peace, and aggressive security policies. Participants' levels of MHBs were positively associated with their support for war and aggressive security policies (Studies 1 and 2), as well as beliefs in pure evil and perceptions of the world as a competitive jungle (Study 2), and they were negatively associated with their support for peacemaking (Study 2) even after controlling for participants' levels of social desirability, conservatism, and trait aggression (Study 1); sex (Studies 1 and 2); and beliefs in pure evil and pure good (Study 2). We contend that individual differences in MHB are important for understanding how individuals perceive their worlds as places in which the potential and capacity for violence are needed to maintain safety and security.

Keywords: masculine honor, aggression, attitudes toward war, individual differences

Conflicts between nations, cultures, or other groups sometimes result in military actions. These actions may be inspired by motivations to counter threats, respond to provocation, defend or perpet- uate worldviews, maintain or enhance security, protect or gain re- sources, or defend allies. War, the formalization of military action, is a complex social behavior that derives from sophisticated collective

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decisions that may affect thousands of individuals on both sides of the conflict. We argue that individuals' core beliefs about how people, particularly men, should use interpersonal aggression to protect themselves, their families, their communities, and their reputations may impact their perceptions of war and other aggressive security policies.

A culture of honor exists in the American South that is associated with greater rates of interpersonal aggression, especially in response to threat and provocation, compared to other regions of the United States (e.g., Cohen & Nisbett, 1994, 1997). As such, Southerners are more sympathetic to men's use of violence to defend women (Cohen & Nisbett, 1997) and even encourage instrumental violence in children as protection against threat (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994). Overall, the American Southern culture of honor is founded in the belief that interpersonal aggression, by men, is both appropriate and necessary in response to insult, threat, and provocation (e.g., Cohen & Nisbett, 1994, 1997).

The components that comprise honor beliefs likely extend beyond the geographic boundaries of regions identified as cultures of honor (e.g., Brown, 2016). Researchers have created measures to capture individual variability in these beliefs and established individual differences in honor beliefs as predictors of emotional and behavioral reactions to insult, threat, provocation, and rejection (e.g., O'Dea, Castro Bueno, & Saucier, 2017; Saucier et al., 2016; Saucier, Till, Miller, O'Dea, & Andres, 2015). Notably, the research to date has largely focused on using individual differences in masculine honor beliefs (MHBs) as predictors of reactions in interpersonal situations. We contend that masculine honor may be important at a global level, in predicting support for war and aggressive policies enacted in the interest of national security, thus extending research by Barnes, Brown, and Osterman (2012), who found MHBs predicted support for violent responses to attacks by foreign terrorists.

War is an extreme aggressive response of one nation, culture, or other type of group against another. It requires the collective action of a group of individuals who agree to the aggressive endeavor. Support for war may vary as a function of situational events, such as when terrorist attacks increase the likelihood that individuals support war (Carnagey & Anderson, 2007; Pronin, Kennedy, & Butsch, 2006). However, more relevant to our current studies, individual differences may relate to attitudes and support for violence and war. Researchers have shown that attitudes in support of war are associated with individuals' core moral values and their exposure to war-related (e.g., political) rhetoric (Berinsky & Druckman, 2007). Other factors associated with attitudes toward war include one's nationhood (Covell, 1996) and levels of nationalism and patriotism (Feshbach, 1990). Thus far, only Barnes et al. (2012) have examined the relationship between MHBs and war attitudes and did so only in response to terrorist attack. The purpose of the current studies was to examine the relationships between MHBs, beliefs about the potential for human nature to be inherently good and evil, and support for war, restrictive security policies, and peacemaking more generally.

Study 1 Method

Participants

Undergraduate students ($N = 138$) at a Midwestern university participated in this study. The mean age of participants was 18.62 ($SD = 1.16$). Participants were primarily White (84.8%), female (68.1%), and in their first year of college (76.8%).

Measures

In groups of approximately 10–15 participants, they completed the measures described below. The orders of measures were counterbalanced.

Masculine honor beliefs. Participants completed the Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale (MHBS; Saucier et al., 2016). The MHBS ($\alpha = .90$) is a 35-item using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*) scale with items such as, "A man should protect his wife."

Trait aggression. Participants completed the 29-item Aggression Questionnaire ($\alpha = .90$; Buss & Perry, 1992) on a scale of 1 (*extremely uncharacteristic of me*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic of me*). This scale includes items such as, "Once in a while, I can't control the urge to strike another person."

Political conservatism. Participants completed three items that assessed their levels of political conservatism ($\alpha = .87$) in response to foreign policy issues, economic issues, and social issues using 1 (*very liberal*) to 9 (*very conservative*) scales.

Social desirability. Participants completed the 33-item Marlowe-Crown Social Desirability Scale ($\alpha = .74$; Crowne & Marlowe, 1964) by responding true-false to items such as, "I am always willing to admit it when I make a mistake."

Appropriateness of war. Participants completed several items assessing their perceptions of war as appropriate for gain/revenge ($\alpha = .81$; e.g., "Seeking to gain territory"), to protect one's own country ($\alpha = .68$; e.g., "Protecting one's country from future attacks"), protect others ($\alpha = .73$; e.g., "Protecting oppressed foreign citizens"), and spread worldviews ($\alpha = .43$; e.g., "Spreading democracy"). Participants responded using 1 (*disagree very strongly*) to 9 (*agree very strongly*) scales.

Justifiability of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Participants completed several items assessing their perceptions of the justifiability of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan ($\alpha = .89$; e.g., "I support military intervention by the United States against Iraq") and one item assessing perceptions of military action in Afghanistan (i.e., "I support military intervention in Afghanistan"). Participants responded using 1 (*disagree very strongly*) to 9 (*agree very strongly*) scale.

Support for restrictive policies in the interest of national security. Participants completed several items to assess their support for racial profiling and domestic spying ($\alpha = .89$; e.g., "Use of phone taps"); foreign spying or restrictive military action ($\alpha = .86$; e.g., "Military action in Russia"); restricted immigration ($\alpha = .91$; e.g., "More stringent immigration policies"); detaining, torturing, or assassinating threatening individuals ($\alpha = .81$; e.g., "Government sanctioned assassinations"); and increased airport security ($\alpha = .71$; e.g., "Increased security at airports"). A final item measured support for gun control (i.e., "Increased gun control legislation"). Participants responded on 1 (*do not support at all*) to 9 (*support very strongly*) scales.

Results and Discussion

We calculated correlations among our predictors.[1] We found men reported significantly higher levels of MHBs and trait aggression, as well as significantly lower levels of support for gun control, than did women ($|rs| \geq .23$). Further, MHBs were positively correlated with participants' levels of trait aggression and

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[1] Full statistical reporting of these correlations is available upon request from the corresponding author.

negatively correlated with social desirability ($|rs| \geq .21$). Most important to hypotheses, MHBs were positively correlated with their perceptions of the appropriateness of war for gain/revenge, protecting one's own country, protecting others, and spreading worldviews ($|rs| \geq .20$) and positively correlated with support for several restrictive security policies: racial profiling and domestic spying, support for immigration restrictions, and support for detaining, torturing, or assassinating perpetrators ($|rs| \geq .17$). Thus, higher MHBs were associated with greater perceptions that the use of war and other aggressive security policies are appropriate. Participants' levels of MHB were not correlated with their levels of conservatism, their specific perceptions of the justifiability of war in Iraq or in Afghanistan, their support for foreign spying or restrictive military action, their support for increased airport security, or their support for increased gun control ($|rs| \leq .15$).

We used hierarchical regression to examine whether MHBs uniquely predicted general perceptions of the appropriateness of war, specific perceptions of the justifiability of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and support for restrictive security policies above and beyond participants' sex, social desirability, conservatism, and trait aggression. We entered sex, social desirability, conservatism, and trait aggression in the first step and MHBs in the second step of the analysis (see Table 1). Supporting our hypothesis, MHBs demonstrated unique positive relationships with the perceptions of war as appropriate for the purposes of gain/revenge, protecting one's own country, protecting others, and spreading one's worldview ($\beta s \geq .19$). Further, MHBs demonstrated significant unique positive relationships with support for increased immigration restrictions and for detaining, torturing, and assassinating perpetrators ($\beta s \geq .27$). However, MHBs failed to uniquely predict the measures of support for restrictive security policies and their specific perceptions that war is justifiable in Iraq and Afghanistan ($\beta s \leq .16$).

In Study 2, we examined the relationships between MHBs and beliefs about the world as a hostile and aggressive place (e.g.,

Table 1
Masculine Honor Beliefs' Unique Prediction of Perceptions of War and Security Policies

Criterion variable	R^2 change	β
Appropriateness of war		
War for gain/revenge	.079***	.33***
War to protect one's own country	.027*	.19*
War to protect others	.025*	.18*
War to spread worldview	.039*	.23*
Justifiability of war		
Justifiability of war in Iraq	.010	.12
Justifiability of war in Afghanistan	.002	.06
National security		
Support for increased gun control	.001	.03
Support for racial profiling and domestic spying	.018+	.16+
Support for foreign spying and war	.000	.003
Support for immigration restrictions	.058**	.28**
Support for detaining, torturing, and assassinating perpetrators	.053**	.27**
Support for increased airport security	.001	−.03

Note. These regression results are for the entry of participants' Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale scores into the predictive models (at Step 2) for each criterion variable after participants' sex and levels of trait aggression, political conservatism, and social desirability were entered (at Step 1).
+ $p = .085$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

belief in pure good [BPG] and belief in pure evil [BPE]; Webster & Saucier, 2013). BPE and BPG are, respectively, beliefs that there are people in the world who are inherently motivated to do harm and there are people in the world who are inherently motivated to help others selflessly. Accordingly, we predicted MHBs would be positively associated with BPE because both constructs refer to recognition that there are people who may pose threats, and these constructs may inspire the willingness and capacity to engage in physical aggression to defend against these threats. We further predicted MHBs would be positively associated with support for extreme and preemptive militarism and torture, and they would be negatively associated with support for peacemaking and humanitarian war.

Study 2 Method

Participants

Undergraduate students ($N = 139$) at a Midwestern university participated in this study. The mean age was 18.96 ($SD = 1.79$). Participants were primarily White (75.5%), female (66.9%), and in their first year of college (73.4%).

Measures

Participants again completed the MHBS scale used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .94$) and the measures below in a counterbalanced order. Each of the additional measures below consisted of items to which participants reported their levels of agreement on response scales from 1 (*disagree very strongly*) to 9 (*agree very strongly*). We calculated composite scores for each measure by averaging the participants' responses.

Beliefs in pure evil and pure good. We assessed beliefs in pure evil and pure good using the 22-item BPE measure and 28-item BPG measure created by Webster and Saucier (2013). Sample items include the following: "Some people are just pure evil" (BPE; $\alpha = .96$), and "I do believe in "pure good" (BPG; $\alpha = .90$).

Perception of a dangerous world and competitive jungle world. We assessed perceptions of the world as a dangerous place using Duckitt (2001)'s 11-item measure (e.g., "My knowledge and experience tell me that the social world we live in is basically a dangerous and unpredictable place, in which good, decent, and moral people's values and way of life are threatened and disrupted by bad people"; $\alpha = .69$). We assessed perceptions of the world as a competitive jungle using Duckitt (2001)'s 13-item measure (e.g., "My knowledge and experience tells me that the social world we live in is basically a 'competitive jungle' in which the fittest survive and succeed; power, wealth, and winning are everything; and might is right"; $\alpha = .85$).

Support for extreme/preemptive militarism, torture, peacemaking, and humanitarian wars. We assessed participants' support for the United States' use of extreme and preemptive force using Weise and colleagues' (2008) nine-item measure (e.g., "In order to improve security within the United States, the United States must use its superior military might to destroy terrorists throughout the world"; $\alpha = .89$). We assessed support for the use of torture using Crandall, Eidelman, Skitka, and Morgan (2009)'s seven-item measure (e.g., "Torture methods are effective ways of

getting information"). We assessed support for the use of peace-making and diplomacy using Vail and Motyl (2010)'s 12-item measure (e.g., "Diplomatically addressing the reasons that terrorists attack America is more urgent than militarily fighting them"; α = .92). We assessed participants' support for the use of war for humanitarian goals using Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle (1994)'s six-item measure (e.g., "When fighting wars in foreign countries, the priority of the U.S. should be to protect unarmed civilians from battles"; α = .87).

Results

We calculated correlations[1] among our predictors (participant sex, MHBs, BPE, BPG) and dependent measures (perceptions of a dangerous world and a competitive-jungle world, as well as support for extreme/preemptive militarism, torture, peacemaking, and humanitarian wars). Men reported greater MHBs, perceptions of the world as a competitive jungle, and support for torture, as well as significantly lower levels of perceptions of the world as dangerous and support for peacemaking and humanitarian wars ($|rs| \geq .21$).

We also found BPE was generally positively correlated with pessimistic worldviews and support for the use of violence to protect their place in the world, as well as negatively correlated with support for nonviolent efforts to reduce war and conflict in the world ($|rs| \geq .23$). BPG showed relationships with these dependent measures in the opposite directions ($|rs| \geq .21$ excluding extreme/preemptive militarism) despite BPE and BPG not being significantly correlated.

Consistent with hypotheses, MHBs were positively correlated with BPE, perceptions of a competitive-jungle world, and support for extreme/preemptive militarism and torture, but they were negatively correlated with support for peacemaking ($|rs| \geq .26$). MHBs were not significantly correlated with perceptions of the world as a dangerous place or support for humanitarian wars.

To assess whether MHBs predicted our dependent measures after controlling for their sex and levels of BPE and BPG, we conducted a hierarchical regression for each of our dependent measures. We entered sex, BPE, and BPG in the first steps and MHBs in the second steps (see Table 2).

MHBs improved the regression models significantly for the prediction of participants' perceptions of the world as a competitive-jungle world and their support for extreme/preemptive militarism ($βs \geq .20$) and their support for torture, at marginally significant levels ($β = .17$). Notably, MHBs are important for understanding how and why individuals perceive their worlds in optimistic versus pessimistic ways and as places in which they perceive varying degrees of necessity for the pursuit of violence, war, and peace.

Discussion

We examined the relationships between MHBs and perceptions of war, aggressive security policies, peace, and beliefs about the potential for human nature, extending previous research by measuring MHBs as an individual rather than a cultural difference. Study 1 used MHBs to predict perceptions of war as appropriate for satisfying goals, perceptions of the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and support for various restrictive national security policies. Study 2 used MHBs to predict perceptions of the world as a dangerous and competitive place, extreme/preemptive militarism, torture, peacemaking, humanitarian war, and the potential for people to be purely evil and good. We predicted and generally showed that MHBs were positively related to individuals' positive perceptions of war, their support for aggressive security policies, their pessimistic perceptions of the world, and their perceptions that other people have the capacity for pure evil, and they were negatively related to their support for peacemaking.

Much of the extant literature has demonstrated cultural variation in interpersonal violence and aggression that may be attributed to cultural variations in the extent to which MHBs are socialized (e.g., Cohen & Nisbett, 1994). Emerging research that assesses MHBs as an individual difference has also established this link between MHBs and interpersonal aggression (e.g., Barnes et al., 2012; Saucier et al., 2016). Our studies further contribute to the literature by demonstrating the relationship between MHBs and outcomes related to perceptions of aggression and violence in the forms of war and aggressive security policies, as well as pessimistic views of the world as a competitive place in which evil people may live. We contend that MHBs are associated with not only retaliatory responses to threat but also preemptive and vigilant discouragement of threat to security. Our results may be tapping into this vigilance, as suggested by the relationship between MHBs and beliefs in pure evil, and future research should further examine this possibility.

These studies make an important contribution to the research literature examining how individual differences in MHBs are

Table 2

Masculine Honor Beliefs' Unique Prediction of Perceptions of War and Peace Related Attitudes

Criterion variable	Step 1 R^2	Sex β	BPE β	BPG β	Step 2 R^2 change	MHBS β
Dangerous world	.080*	−.25**	.16+	−.01	.016	.15
Competitive-jungle world	.421***	.21**	.36***	−.45***	.037**	.23**
Extreme/preemptive militarism	.168***	.12	.36***	−.09	.029*	.20*
Support for torture	.212***	.33***	.22**	−.19*	.022+	.17+
Support for peacemaking	.161***	−.19*	−.23**	.23**	.017	−.15
Support for humanitarian wars	.176***	−.19*	−.16+	.32***	.001	.038

Note. These regression results are for the entry of participants' MHBS scores into the predictive models (at Step 2) for each criterion variable after participants' sex and levels of beliefs in pure evil and pure good were entered (at Step 1). Participant sex was coded as female = 0 and male = 1. MHBS = Masculine Honor Beliefs Scale; BPE = belief in pure evil; BPG = belief in pure good.
+ $p = .085$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

associated with attitudes about war, aggressive security policies, peacemaking, and the potential for evil in others. These relationships should be explored and replicated with other samples and with more behavioral measures as outcomes. However, the current studies establish an important connection between MHBs and attitudes toward the use of extreme violence not only as retaliation or punishment but also as potential deterrence of threat. Such violence may be seen as consistent with the notion that men have a responsibility to defend themselves, their reputations, their families, and their communities.

Edwin Starr famously sang, "War, what is it good for?" He answered his own question with, "Absolutely nothing." We have shown that for those higher in MHBs, war may be good for something: preservation of the security of oneself, one's family, one's reputation, one's country, and one's worldview.

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