Emotions and the Threat to Family Honor

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Introduction

Family honor is based on a family's common social identity, and is determined by the value and status of one's family in the eyes of others. The honor of an individual and the honor of her/his family are therefore interdependent. The goal of the present study was to examine emotional responses to the threat of one's family's honor. The study examined the effect of three major variables on emotional responses: a concern with protecting one's family honor, ingroup-outgroup context of the threat, and publicity.

Participants

Two hundred and nineteen Pakistani university students completed the questionnaire. All of the participants self-identified as Pakistani. Previous research describes Pakistan as an "honor culture" that places great emphasis on family honor. Participants' average age was 22. There were similar numbers of male and female participants.

Measures

Participants were asked to report an experience in which they felt their family had been devalued. We manipulated the ingroup-outgroup context of the devaluation: Half of the participants were randomly assigned to the ingroup condition (i.e., a family member devalued the family), and half were assigned to the outgroup condition (i.e., a person who was not a family member devalued the family). We measured three different aspects of participants' emotional responses: appraisals (i.e., cognitive evaluations), feelings, and relationship tendencies toward the perpetrator. We also asked participants whether the devaluation took place in public or private (i.e., publicity). In addition, we assessed the participants' concern for family honor using Rodriguez Mosquera et al.'s honor scale (2002).

Reliabilities

All reliability alpha's paired-condition were higher than .61, and the majority of them were between .75 to .85.

Content Analysis of Narratives

Five judges trained in the analysis of qualitative data content analyzed the participants' narratives, and their codings converged to 5 main categories of family devaluation. The table below presents the frequencies for each major content analysis category with examples from the participants' narratives.

Type of Family Devaluation	Frequency & "example"
Insult family as a collective	82 "You are related of a backward family."
Prejudice (religion, race, or education)	47 "Once my brother on my education. He wanted me to stop education."
Insult family member	39 "He used very bad words about my father."
Relationship issues	30 "My cousin got married without the permission of her parents."
Quarrels	21 "My cousin killed his wife due to the doubt about her character." (honor killing)

Construct Validity

We factor analyzed all measures for each experimental condition (ingroup/outgroup), and found the following factors from convergence in both conditions.

- **Appraisals:**
  Immorality: [e.g., "what happened is immoral"];
  Devaluation of social image: [e.g., "what happened is harmful to one's name in the community"]
- **Feelings:**
  Vulnerable anger: [e.g., "irritated, vulnerable"];
  Shame: [e.g., "shamed"]
- **Relationship tendencies:**
  Maintenance: [e.g., "I still feel close with this person"];
  Distancing: [e.g., "I do not want any association with this person"]

Multivariate Analysis

We examined the role of ingroup-outgroup, publicity and participant's sex on all measures. Publicity had an effect on appraisal of devaluation of social image, $F(1, 191) = 4.88$, $p = .028$. This appraisal was higher in public ($M = 4.43$, $SE = .22$) than in private contexts ($M = 3.80$, $SE = .18$). Participants felt most intense anger when an outgroup member devalued them in public ($M = 5.29$, $SE = .24$), $F(1, 189) = 4.07$, $p = .045$. Participants wanted to distance themselves from the perpetrator more when the devaluation took place in public ($M = 4.25$, $SE = .24$) than in private ($M = 3.57$, $SE = .20$), $F(1, 191) = 19.95$, $p = .02$.

Role of Family Honor in Emotional Reponses

Regression results showed that family honor positively and significantly predicted appraisal of immorality and anger when an outgroup member devalued the family. Furthermore, as one is more concerned with family honor, one is more likely to maintain relations with a family member even after he/she had damaged the family's reputation.

	Ingroup	Outgroup
Appraisal clusters		
Immorality	.017	.405***
Devaluation of social image	-.014	.090
Feeling clusters		
Vulnerable anger	.046	.339***
Shame	.128	.042
Relationship tendencies clusters		
Maintenance	.222*	-.019
Distancing	-.024	.091

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

Conclusion

In an honor culture, devaluation of one's family leads to more intense anger and relationship strain when it takes place in public (i.e., other people witness the devaluation) than in private. Moreover, individual differences in concern for family honor is an important predictor of emotional responses to one's family devaluation.