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U.S. SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF NORMS ABOUT AGGRESSION

Mechanisms for the Perpetuation of a Culture of Honor

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This article explores one reason why norms for male honor-related aggression persist in the U.S. South, even though they may no longer be functional. The authors suggest that, in addition to cultural differences in internalized honor-related values, southerners are more likely than northerners to perceive peer endorsement of aggression norms. Study 1 found that southern males were especially likely to overestimate the aggressiveness of their peers. Study 2 tested the hypothesis that southerners would be more likely to actively encourage aggressive behavior in others, but no support was found. However, Study 3 found that southern men were more likely than northern men to perceive others as encouraging aggression when witnessing interpersonal conflicts. Together, these studies suggest that southern males are more likely than their northern counterparts to assume their peers endorse and enforce norms of aggression that can lead to the perpetuation of norms for honorable violence above and beyond any differences in internalized values.

Keywords: culture of honor; aggression; pluralistic ignorance; cultural lag; norm perpetuation

Strict functionalist accounts of culture hold that environmental circumstances give rise to adaptive cultural norms, and individuals, as properly socialized beings, internalize those norms. There is much to be said for this view of culture. However, among other problems, two that are salient are (a) cultural norms often persist past the point when they are functional and (b) even (or perhaps *especially*) powerful norms need not correspond to individuals' internalized beliefs (Vandello & Cohen, 2004).

This article explores these issues in the context of norms about male aggression. More particularly, it contrasts perceptions of norms about aggression in a culture with a strong honor tradition (the South of the United States) versus a culture without a strong honor tradition (the North of the United States). To be clear, there are cultural differences in northerners' and southerners' internalized beliefs about aggression. However, differences in public norms may be more extreme than differences in individuals' private beliefs, and individuals' misunderstanding of this point may be one reason why the norms are so persistent over time.

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HONOR, NORMS, AND STICKINESS

Rates of violence in the southern United States have historically been, and continue to be, much higher than the rest of the United States (Baron & Straus, 1988; Gastil, 1971; Nisbett, 1993; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Nisbett, Polly, & Lang, 1995). Although the reasons for this heightened regional violence are complex and multidetermined (e.g., Anderson & Anderson, 1996; Baron & Straus, 1988; Huff-Corzine, Corzine, & Moore, 1986), a good deal of evidence suggests it can be at least partly attributed to the South's historical emphasis on cultural norms for honor (Cohen & Vandello, 2001; Gastil, 1971; McWhiney, 1988; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Vandello & Cohen, 2004; Wyatt-Brown, 1986).

As the frontier South became settled by European immigrants (primarily from the borderlands between Scotland and England), there were initially rational adaptive reasons for such a culture of honor to develop. The borderlands had long been a war-torn region, and in addition, the settlers from the borderlands had a long tradition of herding animals that was transplanted to America (see Fischer, 1989; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996, for a fuller historical account). People from herding-based cultures, in contrast to the agricultural farmers who settled the North, are constantly susceptible to having their livestock (and thus, their primary source of wealth) rustled away. This vulnerability to theft creates norms for men to have tough exteriors that make it clear they will stand up to the slightest threat, including insults to their character. In addition, much of the South, for much longer than the North, remained a frontier region with little adequate law enforcement to effectively redress grievances in a formal manner. This absence of an effective legal system able to handle disputes and enforce laws also contributed to norms where each individual felt the need to stand up for himself and his family, through violence if necessary.¹

Today, however, the original conditions (the herding-based frontier) that gave rise to the culture of honor as an adaptive response have been supplanted, yet the culture of honor remains (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994) as do continued elevated rates of violence (Nisbett, 1993; Nisbett et al., 1995). This persistence of social norms beyond the point of being functional, as when social conditions that originally give rise to norms change without corresponding changes in the norms themselves, has been referred to as *cultural lag* (Triandis, 1994) or *conservative lag* (D. T. Miller & Prentice, 1994). This article explores the "stickiness" or the persistence of southern aggression norms, despite changes to the initial circumstances that gave rise to these norms.

Certainly, southerners still endorse cultural values of honor and protection of self, family, and reputation through violence more than do people in other regions of the country (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Vandello & Cohen, 2003; Vandello, Cohen, Grandon, & Franiuk, 2007). However, these attitudes may be changing (D'Andrade, 2002), and the relatively modest regional differences in self-reported values pale in comparison to behavioral differences found in lab studies (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996; Cohen, Vandello, Puente, & Rantilla, 1999), analyses of actual serious violence (Nisbett, 1993; Vandello & Cohen, 2006), and examinations of public representations (Cohen, 1996, 1998), all of which indicate relatively high levels of honor-related violence in the South. In the absence of strong internalization of attitudes endorsing honor-related aggression, how might the norms be perpetuated and reinforced?

We propose and test three mechanisms that could lead to the perpetuation of norms beyond the point of being adaptive. First, men may misperceive *descriptive* norms (Cialdini, 2003) about aggression, believing their peers are more aggressive than they are. Second, men might misperceive *injunctive* norms (Cialdini, 2003) about aggression,

believing others approve of and encourage aggression. And third, regardless of whether people internalize norms for aggression themselves, they may encourage aggression in others as an impression management tactic.

To reiterate, we do believe cultural differences exist between the North and the South with respect to many private honor-related beliefs. It is just that southerners themselves may overestimate the extent to which honor norms are internalized among their peers.

PERCEIVING NORMS

If a southern norm exists for aggression in response to affronts, males might assume other men widely endorse this norm. Whereas most men might be uncomfortable using violence, they might assume their male peers would use aggression under similar circumstances. Therefore, southern men might be more likely to behave aggressively as a result of conformity to the perceived norm. In short, southern norms for aggression might lead to a form of pluralistic ignorance, where one's own private attitudes are believed to differ from the collective, even if one's behavior does not.

Research on pluralistic ignorance has highlighted the extent to which people can be quite ill informed about the preferences of their peers and the extent to which such misinformation can contribute to cultural perpetuation of unpopular norms (D. T. Miller & McFarland, 1987; D. T. Miller & Prentice, 1994; Prentice & Miller, 1996). Examples have included misperceptions about the acceptance of alcohol use (Prentice & Miller, 1993; Schroeder & Prentice, 1998) and short-term sexual liaisons (Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003) among college students, the disparity between public repudiation of vices (smoking, gambling, etc.) and the private acceptance of such practices (Schanck, 1932), and overestimations of public support for both racial segregation in the 1970s (O'Gorman, 1975) and affirmative action in recent years (Van Boven, 2000).

We believe norms for male aggression can also represent a particularly interesting case of pluralistic ignorance because males may perceive the costs of not endorsing aggression or not acting aggressively to be very high (Posner, 1998). The emphasis southern culture places on masculinity and male toughness may reinforce the belief that one's peers are more aggressive than oneself. A male may perceive a risk of embarrassment and the jeopardizing of his masculine status in the eyes of others if he rejects violence or fails to publicly enforce norms of aggression (Cohen et al., 1996), even when the risk is illusory. Furthermore, over and above the difficulty of directly challenging such norms, many cultural rituals require the sort of locker-room banter that supports ideas about masculine toughness. In Study 1, we test the hypothesis that men, particularly southern men, overestimate the aggressiveness of their male peers.

THIRD PARTY ENFORCEMENT AND THE MISPERCEPTION OF INJUNCTIVE NORMS

Another mechanism for the perpetuation of aggression norms may be through the active public endorsement of aggression that can occur even when private acceptance of the norm is lacking. The belief that others are in favor of the norm may be enough to create public endorsement of aggression without accompanying private support. Encouraging others to be aggressive may be one relatively cheap way to maintain one's reputation as an "honorable" individual without having to risk physical conflict oneself. Such active enforcement of the norms on others (even in the absence of private internalization) would surely contribute to the perpetuation of violence.

On the other hand, southerners may be more likely to discern the encouragement of violence even when onlookers' behavior is neutral. In addition to misperceiving their male peers' aggressiveness (a misperception of the descriptive norm), men may misperceive what is socially approved (i.e., injunctive norms). Even if southern men do not actively and enthusiastically encourage aggression themselves, they may believe other men do. Because of this, they may actually *see* aggression being encouraged in conflict situations. Intentions communicated in interpersonal conflict situations are often ambiguous, and the types of subtle signals people send may be open to multiple interpretations. Is a bystander's laughter or passive response an implicit encouragement of aggression or merely an attempt to diffuse a potentially violent confrontation? Southerners may be more prone to read approval of aggression into these sorts of ambiguous signals.

To test these hypotheses, we first had southerners and northerners "inadvertently" witness a live conflict unfold in a laboratory setting, and we measured the degree to which they seemed to be encouraging aggressive versus peaceful responses in others (Study 2). We tested the prediction that southern males who also saw these conflicts would be more likely than their northern counterparts to judge ambiguous onlooker comments as encouraging an aggressive response (Study 3). We showed northern and southern judges videotapes from Study 2 and asked them about what signals onlookers were sending as they watched a potentially violent conflict unfold. If southerners are more likely to believe there is social approval for aggression, one would expect southerners in Study 3 to see more goading and to see aggressive norms being enforced to a greater extent than northern judges. Regional cultural differences were predicted to be especially great when viewing more ambiguous signals (as rated by independent observers) compared with clearer signals.

A note on participants' gender. Our primary concern in this research is with male aggression. Males commit the vast majority of physical violence (Daly & Wilson, 1990; U.S. Department of Justice, 2004), and norms about honor and aggression are tied closely to ideas about masculinity. Women, however, do play an important role in inculcating cultural values, and males may *perceive* that women endorse cultural norms of honor and aggression (see Vandello & Ransom, 2006). For that reason, we used only male participants in Studies 1 and 3, in which the aim was to explore men's perceptions of descriptive and injunctive norms about aggression. In Study 2, we tested the encouragement of aggression in others; here we used both male and female participants.

STUDY 1: OVERESTIMATING PEER AGGRESSIVENESS

In the first study, we examined perceived support for the use of physical aggression in response to provocations. Short questionnaires about attitudes toward aggression were distributed on campuses at three large state universities in the North (University of Illinois) and South (University of Kentucky and University of Florida). The questionnaire described aggressive scenarios and asked men to imagine what they, themselves, would do, and also predict what other males would do in the situations. This was undertaken to look for self–other discrepancies that might indicate pluralistic ignorance.

Given the literature on the pervasiveness of perceived self–other asymmetries (cf. Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000; Monin & Norton, 2003; Pronin, Lin, & Ross, 2002; Savitsky, Epley, & Gilovich, 2001), it is reasonable to suspect that most males might believe their peers are more aggressive than themselves. Indeed, we have collected evidence

elsewhere supporting this proposition (Vandello & Ransom, 2006). We, therefore, hypothesized that on average, most men would believe that they were less aggressive than their peers. Importantly, though, we predicted that this self–other difference in expected aggression would be larger for southerners than northerners because of stronger perceived norms for aggression in the South.

METHOD

Participants and regional classification. Two hundred-one non-Hispanic White males were approached at various locations on the three campuses and were asked to complete a brief questionnaire. For the cleanest test of our hypotheses, only southerners' responses were used from the Kentucky and Florida campuses and only northerners' responses were used from the Illinois campus. This resulted in 36 respondents being dropped and a final sample size of 165 (82 northern, 83 southern).

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Cohen et al., 1996; Cohen et al., 1999; Vandello & Cohen, 2003), respondents were classified as "southern" if they had spent at least a third of their lives in one or more of the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. In the case of Illinois residents, respondents who resided south of Springfield were considered southern. This region was predominantly settled by people from Tennessee, Kentucky, and the Carolinas (Atack, 1989), and is considered by many historians, anthropologists, political scientists, and sociologists to be part of the South (see discussions in Cohen et al., 1999; Nardulli, 1989). Of the approximately 50 counties below Springfield, there were in fact only two counties that were *not* settled primarily by people from Tennessee, Kentucky, or the Carolinas (Atack, 1989, p. 72). Likewise, previous studies on aggression (Cohen et al., 1999; Cohen & Vandello, 2001; Vandello & Cohen, 2003) found that southern Illinoisans were much more similar to other southerners than to northerners in their aggression-related attitudes and behaviors.

Procedure. Experimenters approached males at various campus locations (e.g., dormitories, student unions) and asked for their voluntary participation in filling out a brief questionnaire about "men's attitudes toward fighting and aggression." The questionnaire consisted of five short scenarios in which a man was insulted or provoked in some way and then retaliated by punching the provoker. For example, one scenario read,

Kevin is at a bar one evening. He is sitting at a table eating chicken wings and having a beer. Another guy walks by and spills beer all over Kevin's shirt and then walks on without apologizing. Kevin gets up and punches him.

Other scenarios involved a man who repeatedly flirts with another man's girlfriend, a man getting made fun of at a college football game, a man whose girlfriend gets whistled at as they are out walking one evening, and a man who rudely cuts in front of another in a movie line. After each scenario, participants were asked what the chance was (0% to 100%) that they would have punched the provoker if they were in the same situation. Then, they were asked to imagine a random sample of 100 male students at their university and predict how many of them (0 to 100) would have punched the provoker in the same situation.

Following the scenarios, participants were asked how many fistfights they were in during high school and how many fistfights they thought the typical male at their university

was in. Finally, participants filled out a few demographic questions. The questionnaire took approximately 5 minutes to complete.

RESULTS

As expected, male students on all campuses predicted that their peers would be more violent than themselves. Collapsing across the five scenarios, participants gave themselves a 24.8% chance of punching the person, compared with a 41.2% chance for their peers, $t(163) = 12.10, p < .001$.

Also as predicted, this perceived self–other discrepancy was greatest for southerners. The self-reported likelihood of fighting made by northern (24.7% chance of fighting, $SD = 22.1$) and southern males (25.5%, $SD = 20.3$) did not differ, $t(163) = .25, ns$, but they did differ in judgments that their peers would fight, with southerners (44.5%, $SD = 17.8$) expecting their peers to fight more than northerners (38.2%, $SD = 17.0$), $t(163) = 2.31, p < .05$. A significant interaction between self–other judgment and region, $F(1, 163) = 4.15, p < .05$, was found, reflecting the greater discrepancy that southerners (vs. northerners) perceived between themselves and their peers.² Furthermore, although most people believed themselves to be less aggressive than their peers, northerners were 3 times more likely to believe that they were as aggressive or more so than their peers—18 of 82 northerners (22%) believed that they were as likely or more likely to punch a man than their fellow male students, but only 6 of 83 southerners (7%) believed this.

Respondents also reported how many fistfights they were in during high school and also how many fistfights they believed “the typical male at this university” was in. Again, all participants on average believed that they fought less than the typical male, $t(156) = 8.39, p < .001$. Southerners ($M = 1.46, SD = 2.35$) were slightly, but not significantly, more likely to have been in fights compared with northerners ($M = 1.03, SD = 1.72$), $t(159) = 1.28, ns$. Southerners, however, believed that the “typical male” had been in significantly more fights ($M = 2.96, SD = 1.93$) than did northerners ($M = 2.33, SD = 1.79$) $t(158) = 2.10, p < .05$. The interaction for region by self–other judgment, however, was not significant, $F(1, 156) = .20, ns$.

Correlation of self and other ratings. Individuals’ judgments of how often their peers would fight in the hypothetical scenarios correlated with participants’ ratings for their own likelihood of fighting ($r = .62, p < .001$). Similarly, participants’ estimates of the number of their peers’ fights correlated with their own self-reports of fights ($r = .49, p < .001$). These two effects are consistent with the notion that people might fight because they expect that others endorse aggressive norms, though they are also consistent with a self-justification effect (because people fight, they think others will too) or with a self-selection effect (aggressive people and aggressive peer groups select each other).

Demographic data. Northerners and southerners did not differ significantly in terms of age, percentage of time spent in rural locations, or parents’ marital status. Northerners tended to have been in college longer ($p < .01$), and they had a higher family income ($p = .01$). These two variables, however, were not correlated with the dependent variables of interest ($r_s < -.11, p_s > .20$).

SUMMARY

In sum, men rated other men as being more aggressive than themselves. This was particularly the case for southern men, who saw the discrepancy between themselves and their

peers as larger than northern men did. In addition, men who believed that their peers were more violent were more likely to themselves report fighting, a finding at least consistent with a pluralistic ignorance account.

Notably, southern men and northern men rated themselves as similarly likely to use aggression, but southern men estimated that their peers would be significantly more aggressive than northern men estimated. The judgment that one's peers are prone to violence might affect one's behavior by guiding actions in ambiguous situations. That is, to the extent that men believe other men are aggressive, they may be more likely to preemptively use violence themselves, despite not privately approving of such actions. Similarly (and at less personal risk), males who believe their peers are approving of violence might publicly endorse aggressive norms by goading others into aggression when witnessing interpersonal conflicts. Both of these actions would serve to perpetuate norms for aggression, even in the absence of private internalization.

STUDY 2: ENCOURAGEMENT OF AGGRESSION BY BYSTANDERS

In Study 2, participants witnessed a potential fight between two males as they were supposedly waiting for an experiment to begin. We were interested in examining whether southerners (compared with northerners) would send signals that endorsed aggression as an appropriate response to an affront. We also examined both male and female responses in this experiment, for two reasons. First, although females are much less likely to be physically violent themselves, they may nonetheless play an important role in enforcing norms about aggression by encouraging (or discouraging) aggression in others. Second, by examining gender differences in addition to cultural differences, we can get a better picture of the strength of the experimental procedure. That is, we expected males to be more encouraging of aggression than females, and by finding such a difference, we can be more confident that the experimental procedure was powerful enough to produce systematic variance in behavioral responses.

Such signals from witnesses to a conflict are essential to study, because, as the criminologist David Luckenbill (1977) suggested in his study of homicide, the audience plays an important role in influencing the resolution of such conflicts. Bystanders send signals that serve to escalate or de-escalate a conflict and that may ultimately determine whether a situation erupts in violence or is peacefully resolved (see also W. Miller, 1993; Pitt-Rivers, 1968). The question explored in the present study was whether southerners would be more likely to goad others into belligerent responses as they witnessed a conflict unfold.

METHOD

Participants. Participants were 96 White undergraduates from the University of Illinois, classified using the same procedure as in Study 1. As in Study 1, southern Illinois students were classified as southern.³ The sample included 24 northern males, 25 southern males, 22 northern females, and 25 southern females.

Procedure. Participants arrived at the laboratory and waited in a hallway with three confederates (who were blind to all experimental hypotheses). Two of the confederates were average-to-large size White males and the third was a White female.

Another male posing as a research assistant for a different study approached the group and asked if the four were waiting for an experiment. He remarked that the experimenter would be arriving any minute and invited the participants to sit and wait in the lab. Along

one wall of the room were six chairs. The confederates always entered first so that the two males sat next to each other at one end and the female sat at the other end, leaving an empty chair in the middle for the participant.

The room was filled with various puzzles and games that were meant to distract the participant from the true nature of the experiment. A table sitting in the corner of the room opposite the seats was covered with papers, boxes, and electronic equipment including a video camera that was hidden among the clutter. The video camera recorded the experiment as it took place. The research assistant gave each person an informed consent form to read and sign while they waited for the experimenter to arrive. The form explained that the participants would be working with a partner on several problem-solving tasks and logic puzzles, and it asked for the participants' permission to be videotaped. The research assistant said that he would go find the experimenter and then left the participant and three confederates in the room to wait. Approximately 1 min after participants signed the consent forms, one of the male confederates announced that he needed to use the bathroom and would return shortly. As he got up to leave, he stepped on a case holding eyeglasses sitting on the floor next to the second male confederate. This action was obvious, because the impact made a cracking noise (simulated by dry rigatoni pasta hidden in the case). Although the confederate appeared to notice that he stepped on the glasses, he continued to walk toward the door.

At this point, the conflict began. The "victim" confederate said, "Hey, wait. I think you just stepped on my glasses." The other confederate (the "perpetrator") replied, "Well, what am I supposed to do about it?" The victim pulled the glasses out of the case and noticed that a cracked lens had popped out of the frame, which was badly bent. He said, "These were brand new. I just got them 2 weeks ago." The perpetrator shrugged and replied, "Well, I guess you should have taken better care of them. What do you want me to do about it?"

The victim replied, "You could at least apologize or offer to pay for them" to which the perpetrator laughed and responded, "I'm not going to pay for those," and turned to walk away. As he was walking out the door, the victim said, "What an asshole," under his breath.

The perpetrator turned around, glared at the victim, and raising his voice said, "What did you say?" The victim replied, "You heard me," and the perpetrator quickly responded, "Do you want to start something?" After no response, he said, "That's what I thought," and left the room.

The major dependent variables involved the participants' reactions to the conflict. After the perpetrator left the room, the victim probed the participant with a series of four questions. These probes varied depending on whether the victim was playing a hostile or apologetic role. In the hostile victim condition, the four probes were as follows: (a) "Do you believe that guy?" (b) "He was being an asshole, don't you think?" (c) "I'm tempted to just go in there and kick his ass; wouldn't you be pissed?" and (d) "I'm definitely going in there and kicking his ass." In the apologetic victim condition, the four probes were as follows: (a) "Do you believe that guy?" (b) "Do you think I pissed him off when I called him an asshole?" (c) "Do you think I should go in and apologize before this gets out of hand?" and (d) "I'm going to go apologize before this gets out of hand."

Although the exchange was taking place between the confederate and the naive participant, the third (female) confederate sat reading and listening to a portable radio through headphones, apparently unaware of what had just transpired.

After each probe, the confederate waited a few seconds for a response (which was later recorded and rated for how much its tone encouraged or discouraged aggression). After the response to the fourth probe, the victim left the room, ostensibly to find the perpetrator. A short time later, the research assistant returned and said that he needed to speak to each person privately. At this point, he took the participant to another room where he began the debriefing.

Debriefing. The experimenter explained that the event that had just taken place was actually part of a study about people's reaction to conflict and that the others in the study were confederates of the experimenter. The participants were then given a postexperiment reaction questionnaire that asked about the participants' own perceptions of the messages they were sending and their impressions of the victim and the perpetrator.

After they finished this questionnaire, participants were given an extensive demographic survey. On completing this, the study was thoroughly explained.⁴ Finally, we explained Study 3 to participants and asked them for written permission to use their tapes in this follow-up study, stressing the completely optional nature of this request. All but one participant gave permission to use the videotapes.

RESULTS

Participants' responses to the conflict varied widely. On one hand, some participants gave responses encouraging aggression, including those advising our confederate to "jack him" or "kick his ass." On the other hand, there were participants who said things like, "violence doesn't solve anything" or who pleaded with the angry confederate, "don't go."

To quantify the encouragement or discouragement of aggression, we had our confederates and experimenter rate the tone of the participant's responses to their probes on 5-point scales. The male confederate (the victim) rated the participant's responses after each of the four probes on the extent to which the participant was generally encouraging the confederate to use force, apologize, forgive, or talk the matter out. Similarly, the female confederate rated the participant on these scales, and the experimenter made one rating of the extent to which the participant seemed to approve or disapprove of the victim's behavior.

Gender differences in endorsement of aggression. After reverse scoring the appropriate items so higher numbers indicated more encouragement of aggression and then aggregating the ratings of the three raters (Cronbach's alphas = .72), we found consistent gender main effects and consistent gender by victim response (apologetic or hostile) interactions. Male subjects were rated as more encouraging of aggression, male mean = 3.06, female mean = 2.71, $F(1,95) = 6.97, p = .01$. In addition, there were consistent gender by victim response interactions for encouragement ratings, male mean for hostile confederate = 3.12, male mean for apologetic confederate = 2.99, female mean for hostile confederate = 2.52, and female mean for apologetic confederate = 2.90, $F(1, 95) = 3.96; p = .05$. Raters indicated that male and female participants responded in very similar neutral ways to the apologetic confederate. However, in response to the hostile confederate, females were more discouraging of aggression and males were slightly more encouraging.

Lack of cultural differences in encouragement of aggression. We found no significant differences between northern and southern subjects' encouragement behavior. All confederates indicated that northerners and southerners were equally encouraging of aggression, and there were no region by victim persona interactions for these variables, North mean = 3.08, South mean = 2.93, $F(1, 95) = 1.04, ns$.

Self-reports. During the partial debriefing, participants rated the extent to which they believed that they themselves were encouraging aggression. Males ($M = 2.88$) and females ($M = 2.80$) did not differ in their responses, $p > .40$, nor did northerners ($M = 2.89$) and southerners ($M = 2.80, p > .30$).

Demographic data. Northern and southern participants were remarkably similar on almost all demographic dimensions we examined. Of the 20 demographic variables (including items related to academic achievement, social standing, family constellation, and personal demographic items such as age), the only differences were that southerners tended to have fathers with more military experience ($p < .05$) and northerners were more likely to participate in sports in high school ($p < .05$). Neither variable correlated with any of our major dependent variables.

SUMMARY

Southerners and northerners did not differ in their tendency to encourage aggression in this situation, presumably because both groups generally agreed that violence was inappropriate in this instance. As expected, we found consistent gender main effects, in which males generally were more encouraging of aggression, and consistent gender by victim response interactions, in which females (but not males) would explicitly discourage a hostile confederate. Although there were few behavioral differences in the actual encouragement of aggression between these groups, it may not be necessary for a norm for aggression to be enforced by even a minority for it to be perpetuated. The *expectation* that others will enforce or are enforcing a norm may be enough. In the next study, we examined whether southern men's general expectations lead them to "see" ambiguous or ambivalent actions from people as encouraging aggression or enforcing an aggressive norm during a conflict situation.

STUDY 3: PERCEIVING ENCOURAGEMENT OF AGGRESSION IN INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS

Southern White male college students are particularly likely to believe their peers are more aggressive than they are (Study 1), and they are also more likely to conclude that people will think worse of them if they react passively to an insult, in at least some circumstances (Cohen et al. 1996; Cohen & Vandello, 2001). Yet we found no evidence in Study 2 that southerners would actively encourage aggression more than northerners. Perhaps the key to norm perpetuation in at least some settings, then, is not so much actual enforcement of norms but, rather, the perceived or expected enforcement of them. If people believe that a norm is strong, they may actually perceive the norm is being enforced when it may not be. That is, southerners may see other people as encouraging aggression when reading ambiguous cues from these people. To test this possibility, we had participants watch videotapes from Study 2.

We predicted that a southern viewer would "see" the bystanders as encouraging aggression where a northerner would not. We expected that the largest differences between northerners and southerners would come as they viewed bystanders whose actions were ambivalent or unclear. If others remain silent while events unfold, does it mean they are condoning the actions or disapproving of them? Do ambiguous comments or ambivalent actions communicate disapproval or are they a "sly wink" of encouragement? The same ambiguous behavior that is seen as neutral (or even politely discouraging of aggression) in one culture may be interpreted as goading on or permissively encouraging aggression in another culture.

METHOD

Participants were 28 northern and 25 southern White males from the University of Illinois, with regional classification following the procedure from Studies 1 and 2. The

experimenter explained the details of Study 2 to participants and told them that they would be rating the naïve subjects' videotaped reactions as the tapes played.

All participants saw five tapes in the same order. For two tapes (the 1st and 4th tapes shown), the signaling of the subjects was relatively clear: Tape 1 featured a female subject who told the male confederate, "Don't go fight." Tape 4 featured a male subject, who on three separate occasions told the male confederate to "Kick his ass." On the other three tapes (the 2nd, 3rd, and 5th tapes shown), the signaling by the subjects was far more ambiguous: Tape 2 featured a male subject who, when asked by the confederate if he should apologize to the man after the confrontation, responded "No, probably not." When the confederate later said he was going to go apologize, the subject replied, "up to you." Tape 3 featured a female subject who, when asked "Do you think I pissed him off when I called him an asshole?" responded, "Yeah, probably." Then, when asked by the confederate if he should apologize, the subject responded, "He could have been a little more apologetic himself." Tape 5 featured a male subject who gave little response to the male except to nod after the probes. Before the experiment, 10 independent judges rated each tape for clarity of the message the participant on the tape was communicating, using a 1 (*very ambiguous*) to 4 (*very clear*) scale. Tapes 1 and 4 were given an average rating of 3.6, whereas Tapes 2, 3, and 5 were given an average rating of 1.9.

Each vignette was approximately 3 min long. Participants watched the staged conflict and the subject's subsequent interaction with the victim. After the victim left the room, the tape was paused to allow participants to rate what they had just seen. The process was repeated for all five vignettes.

For each vignette, participants were asked to give a global rating of the extent to which the "spectator" subject seemed to be encouraging aggression. Ratings were made on a 5-point scale, asking, "To what extent was the subject's response encouraging 5 (*an aggressive*) or 1 (*peaceful*) response to the affront?" In addition, participants were asked to rate on similar 5-point scales more specifically what the subject was communicating to the male victim in terms of encouraging the use of force, apology, and forgiveness.

RESULTS

Perceived endorsement of aggression. For each of the five videos, southerners were more likely than northerners to perceive that the subject encouraged the male victim to be aggressive. In response to the global question about encouragement of aggressive versus peaceful responses to the affront, a 2 (region) \times 5 (tape) analysis of variance revealed a main effect for region, $F(1, 200) = 4.89, p < .05$, with southerners perceiving more encouragement of aggression. When ratings were collapsed across all tapes, southerners ($M = 3.23, SD = 0.30$) were significantly more likely to perceive aggression than northerners were ($M = 3.06, SD = 0.26$), $t(51) = 2.28, p < .05$.

As expected, when ratings for ambiguous tapes (Tapes 2, 3, and 5) and clear tapes (Tapes 1 and 4) were separately collapsed into composite ratings, southern judges were found to differ from northern judges only when the videotaped subjects sent equivocal messages. Northerners ($M = 3.21$) and southerners ($M = 3.30$) did not differ in perceiving aggression when the tapes were clear, $t(51) = .66, ns$, but southerners ($M = 3.19$) were significantly more likely than northerners ($M = 2.95$) to perceive aggressive messages when the tapes were ambiguous (interaction contrast verifying a regional difference on the ambiguous tapes but not clearer tapes $t(51) = 2.95, p = .01$). Interestingly, there were no regional differences when participants were asked to pinpoint specifically the actions that were being encouraged (i.e., using force, forgiving, apologizing, and talking the matter

out; all t s < .76 and all p s > .45 for region main effect). Rather, regional differences seemed confined to how participants rated the overall global tone of the message that the target subjects communicated to the victim, with southern judges reading a more aggressive general tone into the messages.

Demographic data. Of the 20 demographic variables (including items related to academic achievement, socioeconomic status, family structure, age, and so on) northerners and southerners only differed at a $p < .05$ criterion on the amount of time spent in rural locations ($p < .01$). This variable was unrelated to dependent variables of interest. As a more conservative check, variables that differed at a $p < .10$ criterion (age, church attendance, and father's occupational status) were also examined. These variables were also uncorrelated with dependent variables of interest.

SUMMARY

Watching the same interactions unfold, southerners perceived more encouragement of aggression than did northerners when the observed interactions were relatively ambiguous, suggesting that culture may have its biggest effects on perceptions when people are required to make judgments that force them to go further beyond the information given.

Even in situations where southern college students do not appear to explicitly endorse aggression (Cohen & Vandello, 2001), they clearly believe that others would act aggressively (Study 1); and this colors their understanding and perception of everyday events, as they are actually more likely to see other people as encouraging aggressive acts.

The absolute magnitude of the difference in northerners' and southerners' ratings of aggression enforcement in Study 3, though small, was certainly not trivial when one considers that within-group variation was quite limited. The effect sizes for region ($d = .64$ collapsing over all tapes, $d = .83$ for just the ambiguous tapes) were in Cohen's (1977) medium to large size range. In terms of distributions, 68% of the southerners were above the aggregate sample median in their aggression ratings, whereas 64% of northerners were below the median (collapsing over all tapes). This sort of distributional skew could have important implications for sustaining a "critical mass" necessary for norm setting and perpetuation (see Cohen, 2001; Kuran, 1995; Schelling, 1978).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present studies suggest how perceived social norms can be important in understanding the way cultural patterns persist. The original conditions that gave rise to the culture of honor in the U.S. South, the frontier and herding-based economy, have long since vanished, but norms for honor and aggression remain (Vandello & Cohen, 2004).

Certainly, cultural norms may persist and be reinforced because people internalize them as properly socialized members of the culture, without regard for how rational the norms are (Edgerton, 2000). However, internalization of norms need not be necessary for a norm's perpetuation (D. T. Miller & Prentice, 1994). We found no evidence that southerners are more likely than northerners to actively encourage aggression in others in the situation of Study 2. However, the present studies do suggest that, in the case of southern norms for honor and aggression, men may have misperceptions about what their peers would do and would encourage. Study 1 showed that southern males, more than their

northern counterparts, perceive their peers as likely to use aggression in response to affronts. These expectations can translate into violence through one's anticipations of what others will do. Although not directly measured in this study, it has been well established that expecting another to act aggressively can lead one to be violent merely as a matter of perceived self-defense (Dill, Anderson, Anderson, & Deuser, 1997; Dodge & Coie, 1987; Kelley & Stahelski, 1970; Toch, 1969). As Daly and Wilson (1988) note, the choice to use violence often

depends in turn on one's perception of the local, contemporary prevalence of violence. . . . Violence may breed violence . . . simply by raising the perceived risks of nonviolence. A rational man in a violent milieu will be quicker on the trigger than the same man in a more pacific setting. (p. 286)

Through a self-fulfilling prophecy, expectations of violence can create violence even if neither side had any private aggressive inclinations to begin with. One may end up fighting a battle perhaps because one believes in the cause, but also perhaps because one simply believes the fight is inevitable (Cohen & Vandello, 2001).

In addition, we found evidence in Study 3 that southern men believe others encourage aggressive behavior in ambiguous conflict situations. Southerners are more likely to believe their peers are aggressive, and they, therefore, project these beliefs onto the subtle communications of others during conflicts. If southern men believe their peers endorse and encourage aggression, they may behave aggressively in a misguided attempt at impression management, when in fact such behavior is not expected or privately condoned. Several analyses of violence suggest that participants often act violently because of these types of self-presentational or face-saving concerns and often must be goaded into action, suggesting internalization of aggressive norms is often lacking (e.g., Anderson, 1994; Felson, 1982; W. Miller, 1990; Toch, 1969). Thus, even when norms are not privately believed, they may influence behavior by being collective public representations of what people (mistakenly or not) think others believe.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: CONSERVATIVE PERSISTENCE AND CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

We have suggested in this article that the South might be operating under a form of "cultural lag" (D. T. Miller & Prentice, 1994; Triandis, 1994; Vandello & Cohen, 2004) in which private attitudes about aggression may slacken without cultural norms for public behavior changing apace. However, an issue remains, if norms about aggression are not so widely generalized at the level of people's private beliefs, how can public norms be so sticky and why do men believe that others will enforce such norms? Why do not people's "true attitudes" (if such things exist) come out?

One reason for this intransigence is that there are costs to publicly renouncing aggression—namely, appearing wimpy (at least for males). Thus, even if men do not outwardly enforce aggression norms, they may be afraid to publicly denounce them; and this lack of condemnation of violence may be interpreted by others as approval. (Witness southerners' projecting more aggression onto the ambiguous signals of others in Study 3.) A second and related point is that social norms are defined by people's salient and public behavior. Acts of "honorable" violence are both public and salient, private attitudes are generally not. Thus, even if most people do not approve of violence, the salient examples that violence provides—followed by either silence or feigned approval—may lead to the misperception

that such violence is accepted by the majority. A self-reinforcing cycle can take effect: Ambiguous public reactions (or worse, public approval) following very visible acts of aggression can reinforce people's belief that there is a strong public norm in support of aggression (Vandello & Cohen, 2004). This strengthening of the public norm makes it even harder to oppose in the future, with the consequence that the norm will probably be reinforced yet again. A final practical implication here is that violence intervention work aimed at individuals' attitudes may be ineffective without proper attention being paid to public collective phenomena (see for instance, Prentice & Miller's [1993] work on changing college students' drinking behaviors by exposing pluralistic ignorance regarding drinking norms). Even if there is private apprehension about the use of violence, social norms may persist if people believe others support and enforce these norms.

NOTES

1. Although our present concerns center around the perpetuation of violence, the honor code entails much more than norms for aggression—for example, social respect, interdependence, and sacrifice (see Pitt-Rivers, 1968; Vandello & Cohen, 2003). A detailed review of the values and norms associated with the honor syndrome is beyond the scope of this study, but comprehensive reviews can be found elsewhere (Bowman, 2006; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Wyatt-Brown, 1986).

2. The self–other discrepancy in Kentucky (19.6%) was similar in size to the one in Florida (18.1%), $t(80) = .42, ns$. Separating the two southern schools and using contrast weights of 2, –1, –1 on the self–other discrepancy gives similar results to the interaction in the text, $t(162) = 2.00, p < .05$.

3. To obtain a large enough sample of southerners for our studies, Study 2 included 31 paid participants (14 southern, 17 northern) and Study 3 included 32 paid participants (19 southern, 13 northern). Results for paid and subject pool participants did not differ significantly in either Study 2 or Study 3, nor did this variable interact with region (for all effects involving the paid variable, $F_s < 1.45, p_s > .20$). Also, in this study, as in the aggression studies of Cohen et al. (1999), Vandello and Cohen (2003), and Cohen and Vandello (2001), southern Illinoisans responded similarly to participants from other southern states, and northern Illinoisans responded similarly to participants from other northern states. All region by instate/outstate interactions were nonsignificant for our major dependent variables (all interaction $p_s > .20$ in Studies 2 and 3). Across Studies 2 and 3, 30% of participants were from states outside of Illinois.

4. Twelve participants expressed some suspicion in the debriefing sessions. We reanalyzed the data excluding these participants, and cell means and significance levels changed very little.

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