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Punches or punchlines? Honor, face, and dignity cultures encourage different reactions to provocation

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Abstract: Research on culture-related violence has typically focused on honor cultures and their justification of certain forms of aggression as reactions to provocation. In contrast, amusement and humor as the preferred reactions to provocation remain understudied phenomena, especially in a cross-cultural context. In an attempt to remedy this, participants from an honor culture (Poland), dignity culture (Canada), and face culture (China) were asked how they would react and how they would like to react to a series of provocative scenarios. Results confirmed that aggression may be the preferred reaction to provocation in honor cultures, while the preferred reaction to provocation in dignity cultures may be based on humor and amusement. The third kind of provocation reaction, withdrawal, turned out to be more complex but was most popular in dignity and face cultures. Furthermore, results confirmed that the way individuals think they would behave is more culturally diversified than the way individuals would like to behave.

Keywords: culture, honor, face, dignity, aggression, violence, provocation, humor, amusement

The relieving effect of humor on anger and the ability of amusement to alleviate negative emotions have been known for quite some time (Dworkin and Efran 1967; Martin 2007). Being provoked is one example of a negative interpersonal experience that can escalate into violence in certain contexts, but humor and

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amusement is another possible reaction. Amusement-based reactions to provocation, however, have received little attention, apart from being tangentially mentioned in studies on aggression in cultures of honor (e.g., Cohen et al. 1996). Preferences for amusement and humor in response to provocation remain especially understudied from a cross-cultural perspective, where these types of reactions may be preferred and more likely to occur in some cultures (i.e., dignity cultures) than others (i.e., honor or face cultures; Leung and Cohen 2011). The current paper attempts to address this dearth in research by investigating the cultural variety in preferred reactions to provocation, and the role that amusement and humor might play.

1 Background

In an effort to understand the causes of violence, many social scientists have examined the cultural origins of aggression. Up to this point, the vast majority of research linking violence and culture has focused on cultures of honor (Leung and Cohen 2011). Within cultures of honor, it is of the utmost importance, particularly for men, to maintain honor at any expense. Men are obliged to respond vigorously to threats to their reputation, and their culture justifies violent reactions to provocation (Osterman and Brown 2011). For instance, individuals within honor societies express more acceptance toward honor-related murders than poverty-related theft (Szmajke 2008). Although a lot of research is aimed at understanding violence in cultures of honor, it is only one of the three cultural logics described by Leung and Cohen (2011). The other two are dignity and face cultures, and how they encourage reactions to provocation is less established.

Researchers of honor cultures routinely contrast them with dignity cultures (Cohen 1998; Osterman and Brown 2011), but attention is typically restricted to honor-related aggression and violence. Only a few researchers describe withdrawal as an alternative to aggression in honor-dignity culture comparisons. Cross et al. (2013) concluded that withdrawal from confrontation might be the alternative to provocation-related violence even in cultures of honor, and Rodriguez Mosquera et al. (2008) indicated that the emotion of shame may lead to withdrawal from confrontation among non-honor oriented individuals.

We argue that amusement is another alternative to violent logics that is prevalent in dignity cultures. Cohen et al. (1996) provide initial support for this idea in their ‘chicken game’ experiment. The common emotional reaction for insulted US Northerners was to express more amusement than anger. The

comparison to US Southerners was dramatic: 65% of US Northerners reacted with amusement, compared to only 15% of US Southerners. Freud (1905/1957) claimed that focusing on the funny aspects of a stressful situation may be a mature defensive mechanism, but amusement and humor remain understudied (also see Krys 2010). Mindess (1971) noted that our social roles require us to suppress many impulses and humor may be an appropriate way to deal with suppression-related tensions. Moreover, Martin (2007) indicated that some forms of humor (i.e., sarcasm, teasing, ridicule, and derision) have an aggressive function. Taking all this into account, we make the claim that amusement and humor may substitute physical aggression and that cultural logics of dignity may favor this kind of reaction instead of aggression or withdrawal (the latter response seems to be prevalent in face cultures).

Thus, in the current study, using samples from Poland, China, and Canada, we analyze how three cultural logics – honor, face, and dignity, respectively – encourage preferred reactions to provocation. We document that whereas honor cultures promote physically aggressive reactions, dignity cultures encourage reactions embedded in amusement and humor. Face cultures, which we expected to promote withdrawal reactions, turned out to be more complex in their reactions to provocation: they encourage active reactions (i.e., amusement and aggression), though their support for withdrawal is also considerably high.

1.1 Defending the self in honor, face, and dignity cultures

People are motivated to perceive themselves as good and skillful, and value integrity of the self (Sherman and Cohen 2006). Although an integrity motive seems to be universal, the ways that individuals protect the self are not the same across cultures (Sasaki et al. 2014). Different cultures came up with different ideas about the inalienable versus socially conferred worth of the individual. According to Leung and Cohen (2011), valuation of the self may be internal, external, or both, and culture may be one of the factors shaping the scripts of valuing internal worth. On the basis of this distinction, they describe how three cultural logics – honor, face, and dignity – form different approaches to the sustainment and protection of internal worth.

Cultures in which the self has both external and internal qualities, belongs only to some individuals, and can be lost and regained are called honor cultures. “Honor must be claimed, and honor must be paid by others. A person who claims honor but is not paid honor does not in fact have honor” (Leung and Cohen 2011, p. 509). Honor cultures are a form of collectivistic cultures

based on reputation (Rodríguez Mosquera et al. 2002). A sense of honor depends on the ability to defend one's reputation and family's reputation against threat (Osterman and Brown 2011). In honor cultures, insults may be tests of who can do what to whom. In the logic of honor cultures, it is understood that a person who does not tolerate small insults cannot be provoked on big issues either. Therefore, violence, or the threat of it, is 'necessary' for self-protection.

In comparison to men in other cultures, those in honor cultures are highly sensitive to interpersonal threats. They respond to interpersonal threats actively, and, if needed, violently. In honor cultures, withdrawal as a response to insult leads to dishonor (Rodríguez Mosquera et al. 2008). Therefore, as numerous studies indicate, honor cultures facilitate violence (e.g. Nisbett and Cohen 1996; Vandello et al. 2008), including even suicides, which can be considered as violence against the self (Osterman and Brown 2011).

Honor cultures exist throughout the world, including South America, regions of the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe, and the southern US (Barnes et al. 2012). Although the first researchers identified honor cultures' roots in the herding lifestyle (Nisbett and Cohen 1996), recent studies suggest that honor-related violence originates from social inequalities (Henry 2009). Being low on the social ladder can threaten an individual's sense of worth, while simultaneously leaving them with relatively fewer options to compensate for this threat. Therefore, high justifications toward violence in response to worth threats emerged in hierarchical societies guided by honor as it was the only means of defending the self. Leung and Cohen (2011) add that honor cultures originate in societies with weak formal structures. If a state is unable to protect individuals, ineffectively punishes guilt, and does not enforce laws, then low status individuals need to take care of their worth on their own.

The logic of the second type of culture – face cultures – is based on 'what other people see'. In face cultures, the self is external, belongs to some people, and they have it unless they lose it. The importance of others' judgments is common in both face and honor cultures, but these two types of cultures differ in settings and role expectations. "Whereas honor is contested in a competitive environment of rough equals, face exists in settled hierarchies that are essentially cooperative" (Leung and Cohen 2011, p. 510). Unlike honor cultures, it is bad to cause or sustain conflict in face cultures because it could lead other people to lose their face; face culture obliges individuals to preserve each other's face (Gelfand et al. 2006).

Face cultures exist mainly in East Asia – in China, the Koreas, and Japan. Face cultures, like honor cultures, emphasize 'others' in valuing the self, but

they avoid direct conflicts. Victims of insults in face cultures are not supposed to react directly to the provocation – the group or a superior are in charge of punishing the wrongdoer. Direct reaction is not only unnecessary, it is undesirable because it would further undermine the harmony of the social system (Leung and Cohen 2011). A face logic is based on 3H: hierarchy, humility, and harmony. Individuals need to show appropriate respect to hierarchy, displays of humility are expected behaviors, and sustaining the harmony of the social system is crucial (Kim and Cohen 2010). Direct aggressive defense of the self would undermine each the three roots of the face logic's social system.

In the third logics, which can be found in dignity cultures, the self is internal, belongs to everyone, and cannot be lost. Each individual's worth is permanent and essential, and does not rely on the admiration of others. Dignity cannot be given nor taken away by others. In dignity cultures, worth is inalienable. As Leung and Cohen (2011) note, 'sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me' would be an appropriate motto for dignity cultures. Dignity, in comparison to honor or face, is immune to insults and external threats to the self.

Found in Canada, northern and western European countries, and the northern US, dignity cultures emphasize autonomy and independence. Exchange between equal individuals is the core idea underlying the social relations of dignity societies. Because the worth of every individual is inherent and does not depend on the judgments of others, dignity is thought to be relatively impervious to insults and threats from others (Leung and Cohen 2011). Internal standards are the main motive and being driven by impulse or situational factors is a signal of untrustworthiness. In cultures of dignity, other people cannot corrupt the self. According to Cohen and Vandello (2001), people from dignity cultures are supposed to do nothing or withdraw in response to insults – a violent reaction would be an indicator of someone's selfishness, immaturity, or egotism. Cross and collaborators (2013) suggest that in dignity cultures individuals are socialized to ignore taunts and those who refrain from retaliation after being provoked are viewed as mature. Here we argue that there is another type of reaction to provocation that is typical for dignity cultures: amusement.

1.2 Amusement as a reaction to insult

Across cultures, insults stimulate strong emotional reactions (Rodriguez Mosquera et al. 2008). Insults tend to elicit intensive anger and shame

regardless of whether someone endorses individualistic or collectivistic values. Moreover, people from both honor and dignity cultures feel more anger than shame when provoked (Rodríguez Mosquera et al. 2002). This suggests that the emotional urge to react to provocation may be similar across cultures.

Anger promotes the urge to punish, reprimand, or antagonize the wrongdoer (Averill 1983; Fischer et al. 2004). Averill (1983) claims that anger and the desire for punishment can lead to (a) various forms of aggression (i.e., direct, indirect, or displaced); (b) withdrawal (e.g., talking to a neutral party about the anger eliciting event or engaging in a calming activity); or (c) non-hostile confrontation. Whereas researchers of culture-related violence routinely recognize the first two options, less attention has been given to the third option – non-hostile confrontation.

Here we argue that amusement and humor may be a way for physically non-violent confrontation, and that preference for this kind of reaction in the face of provocation is shaped by dignity cultures. Cohen et al. (1996) noted that amusement may be the ‘right answer’ to insult in dignity cultures. In their ‘chicken game’ experiment, they examined the effect of insults on emotional reactions and expressed hostility. Whereas the dominant reaction for honor culture participants was to show more anger than amusement, the most common emotional reaction for those coming from a dignity culture was to show more amusement than anger. They leave the amusement reaction largely undiscussed though, and focus solely on the aggressive reaction instead.

Vaillant (2000) carried out a systematic comparison of seventeen defense mechanisms and concluded that humor is one of the five most adaptive. Vaillant claims that humor allows for the expression of difficult emotions in a way that is safe and relieves tension. In humor, people may convey very difficult content, while their behavior remains nonviolent. Because the meaning of humor is inherently ambiguous, people can get away with saying things in a humorous way that they could not express using more serious communication.

Dworkin and Efran (1967) delivered direct support for the claim that humor relieves anger. Participants were made to feel angry by experimenters treating them rudely and were then shown (a) hostile humorous stimuli, (b) non-hostile humorous stimuli, or (c) non-humorous stimuli. Exposure to both types of humor significantly reduced self-reported hostility and anxiety in angered participants. No change in mood was recorded among participants exposed to non-humorous stimuli. Amusement may alleviate negative emotions, psychological arousal, and behavioral impairments that occur as a result of a stressful experience (Martin 2007) and it reduces cardiovascular arousal in the context of anxiety (Fredrickson et al. 2000).

Martin et al. (2003) describe four different kinds of humor (i.e., affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating) and indicate that some forms of humor (e.g., sarcasm, teasing, ridicule, and derision) may act as a substitute for direct physical aggression. Even the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 2000) identifies humor as an adaptive and mature defense mechanism. All the above suggest that humor may relieve anger-related tension and amusement may function as a substitute for aggression. Therefore, we claim that amusement and humor can and sometimes do substitute physical aggression, and are the dominant reaction to provocation in dignity cultures.

1.3 Behaviors vs. urges

Berry (2013) notices that over the years cross-cultural psychology has gradually shifted from what is different between cultural groups and their members to what is similar among them. According to Berry, “universals are cultural and psychological features of human life, that are found in all cultural populations, even though they may be expressed in a very different way” (p. 56). He argues that the search for human universals requires the examination of behavioral diversity. In our study, we followed this theorizing and decided to examine cultural universals, and behavioral diversity across cultures as well, in the reactions to provocation.

In the search for culturally specific aspects of reactions to provocation, we followed Berry’s (2013) suggestions and theorized that the most culturally diversified should be the basic outcome of all psychological processes: the actual behavior. In contrast, in pursuit of universal processes in reactions to provocation, we followed Rodriguez Mosquera et al. (2002) who documented that insults elicit similar, highly intensive anger in various types of cultures. Thus, we theorized that urges – the way people would like to react – should be closer to universal processes postulated by Berry, and less culturally diversified than actual behaviors. Therefore, we predict that the urges aroused by provocations (i.e., the way people would like to behave) are more universal across cultures than behaviors (i.e., the way people actually react). That is, although culture is expected to regulate behaviors, the anger-based urges are expected to remain relatively universal (or at least less diversified) across cultures.

How individuals think they would behave not always matches how they actually behave. This is especially salient in high-stress situations (Ajzen et al. 2004). Although it would be ideal to study actual behaviors in response to

provocative situations, due to ethical considerations, this initial cross-cultural investigation had to be limited to hypothetical provocation scenarios and self-report ratings of how people would and want to act. Therefore, because declarations about behaviors when provoked may differ from actual behaviors, we subsequently use the term 'behavioral intentions' instead of 'behaviors.'

2 Hypotheses

To summarize, our main argument is that different cultures encourage different reactions to provocation. Following previous research, we hypothesize that aggression is a more popular reaction to provocation than amusement or withdrawal in cultures of honor. In cultures of dignity, however, we predict that amusement is a more popular reaction to provocation than aggression or withdrawal. Furthermore, as the group or superiors are expected to provide justice in face cultures, we hypothesize that the withdrawal reaction is relatively more popular in cultures of face than in other cultures. Nevertheless, like Cohen and Vandello (2001), we predict that withdrawal may also be relatively popular in dignity cultures. Furthermore, following studies revealing that insults elicit similar, highly intensive anger in various types of cultures (Rodriguez Mosquera et al. 2002), we predict that the urges aroused by provocations (i.e., the way people would like to behave) are less diversified across cultures than behavioral intentions (i.e., the way people report how they would actually react). That is, although culture is expected to regulate behavioral intentions, the anger-based urges are expected to remain relatively universal across cultures.

3 Method

The present research was carried out in Poland, China, and Canada. These cultures, respectively, are model examples of an honor culture (Szmajke 2008), face culture (Leung and Cohen 2011), and dignity culture (Vandello et al. 2009).

3.1 Participants

A total of 774 students participated in this study; after excluding individuals with missing values on dependent variables, statistical analyses were based on the data of 726 students from the University of Lodz in Poland ($N = 242$; 52%

female; age: $M = 21.7$, $SD = 1.9$), Renmin University of China ($N = 185$; 49 % female; age: $M = 21.3$, $SD = 2.7$), and Carleton University in Canada ($N = 299$; 60 % female; age: $M = 20.9$, $SD = 5.2$).

3.2 Materials and procedure

Participants were asked to rate their reactions to seven different provocative situations (for questionnaires see Appendix). These situations were selected from previous studies on aggression in cultures of honor (Cohen et al. 1996; Szmajke 2008), as well as a pilot study we ran asking 20 individuals from each culture to indicate five highly provocative behaviors. On the basis of previous studies and collected materials, we selected seven situations that were judged as highly provocative in each type of culture (e.g., *During an informal meeting with co-workers your colleague unfavourably spoke of your spouse by questioning his/her morality and intellectual skills. As a reaction to this insult you would:*). For every provocative situation, we presented three different reactions: (a) based on withdrawal (e.g., *do nothing and expect the boss of your team to intervene*), (b) based on aggression (e.g., *return the insult to that person using swear-words*), and (c) based on amusement (e.g., *humorously comment on that person's behaviour*).

Individuals judged each reaction in two ways: (a) whether they would behave in a given way (a measure of behavioral intentions of reactions to provocation), and (b) whether they would like to behave in a given way (a measure of urges aroused by provocation). All ratings of behavioral intentions were made before instructions to rate urges. Participants rated their reactions on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*I would never behave this way* for behavioral intentions and *I would not like to behave this way* for urges) to 7 (*for sure I would do it* for behavioral intentions and *of course I would like to do it* for urges). Materials were written in English, and were translated into Mandarin and Polish. Paper questionnaires were used and distributed individually to all participants in Poland and China, while Canadian participants completed the study online. All measures had high reliability in each analyzed sample (see diagonals of Table 1). Correlations between dependent measures are presented in Table 1 as well.

4 Results

To test our hypotheses regarding cultural differences in reactions to provocation, we conducted a 3 (culture: honor, dignity, face) \times 2 (gender: male, female) \times 3 (reaction type: aggression, withdrawal, amusement) \times 2 (response frame:

Table 1: Reliabilities (on Diagonals) and Correlations Between Reactions to Provocation Split by Behavioral Intentions (the Way Participants Predicted They Would Behave) and Urges (the Way Participants Would Like to Behave).

			1	2	3	4	5	6
Honor culture								
1	BI	Withdrawal	.83					
2	BI	Aggression	-.24***	.85				
3	BI	Amusement	.22**	-.15*	.88			
4	U	Withdrawal	.46***	.03	.10	.92		
5	U	Aggression	-.08	.57***	-.03	-.33***	.92	
6	U	Amusement	.22***	-.18**	.68***	-.17**	-.27***	.93
Face culture								
1	BI	Withdrawal	.73					
2	BI	Aggression	-.08	.80				
3	BI	Amusement	.02	-.30***	.84			
4	U	Withdrawal	.54***	.14 ⁺	-.03	.84		
5	U	Aggression	.04	.43***	-.04	-.11	.88	
6	U	Amusement	.05	-.26***	.66***	.00	-.30***	.91
Dignity culture								
1	BI	Withdrawal	.80					
2	BI	Aggression	-.22***	.87				
3	BI	Amusement	.06	.29***	.89			
4	U	Withdrawal	.60***	-.19**	.04	.92		
5	U	Aggression	-.12*	.59***	.24***	-.37***	.93	
6	U	Amusement	.09	.17**	.66***	.01	.39***	.94

Note: BI means behavioral intentions (the way participants predicted they would behave) and U means urges (the way participants would like to behave). ⁺ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

behavioral intention, urge) mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA). Although gender was not the focus of the current study, we decided to statistically control for it because men and women have been shown to differ in their behaviors when provoked (Bettencourt and Miller 1996). Culture and gender were between-subjects factors and reaction type and response frame were within-subjects factors. As predicted, we found a significant three-way culture by response frame by reaction type interaction ($F = 23.9$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$). No other significant three-way interaction ($ps > .64$) or four-way interaction ($p = .35$) was found. In order to facilitate the interpretation of the significant three-way interaction,

we report a 3 (culture: honor, dignity, face) \times 2 (gender: male, female) \times 3 (reaction type: aggression, withdrawal, amusement) mixed ANOVA separately for behavioral intentions (the way participants predicted they would behave) and urges (the way participants would like to behave).

4.1 Behavioral intentions (the way participants predicted they would behave)

A significant main effect was found for reaction type, $F(2, 707) = 152.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$, indicating that there were differences among the popularity of reactions to provocation ($M_{\text{Aggress}} = 4.06$, $SD = 1.51$; $M_{\text{Withdraw}} = 2.81$, $SD = 1.33$; $M_{\text{Amuse}} = 3.97$, $SD = 1.60$). Follow-up t -tests revealed that withdrawal was the least popular reaction compared to the other two types of reactions (both $ps < .001$), whereas overall aggression and amusement did not differ significantly from each other ($p = .70$). There was also a main effect of culture, $F(2, 707) = 15.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, indicating that the average intensity across reactions to provocation was not the same in all cultures. Furthermore, a main effect of gender, $F(1, 707) = 8.45$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, showed that male participants reacted more intensely than female participants ($M_{\text{Male}} = 3.70$, $SD = .85$; $M_{\text{Female}} = 3.52$, $SD = .80$). We did not observe a two-way gender by reaction type interaction, $F(2, 707) = 2.30$, $p = .10$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$, but we did find a two-way gender by culture interaction, $F(2, 707) = 5.24$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, indicating that the intensity of reactions for males and females vary between cultures.

Most importantly, and as predicted, we observed a two-way culture by reaction type interaction, $F(2, 707) = 27.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, indicating that reactions to provocation differ between cultures (we present the results of simple effects analyses in Table 2). As seen in Figure 1, and as predicted, aggression was a more popular behavioral response to provocation than amusement in the honor culture, whereas the opposite pattern was observed in the culture of dignity.

Furthermore, as predicted, the withdrawal reaction was the most popular in the face and dignity cultures, although this reaction was not rated the highest out of all three reactions in the face culture. The three-way interaction was not significant ($p = .69$).

Finally, a positive and moderate correlation between amusement and aggression in the dignity culture ($r = .29$, $p < .001$), in comparison to the negative correlations for these two reactions in the face and honor cultures ($r = -.30$, $p < .001$ and $r = -.15$, $p = .02$ respectively; compared with the dignity culture $zs > 5.1$ and $ps < .001$), is consistent with our prediction that in dignity cultures amusement may be a substitute for aggression.

Table 2: Preferred Reactions to Provocation in Honor, Face and Dignity Cultures Split by the Behavioral Intentions (the Way Participants Predicted They Would Behave) and Urges (the Way Participants Would Like to Behave).

Culture of:	Honor (Poland)	Face (China)	Dignity (Canada)	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS (the way participants predicted they would behave)						
Withdrawal	2.35 _{a/a}	2.98 _{a/b}	3.11 _{a/b}	24.71	2,723	< .001
<i>SD</i>	(1.36)	(1.20)	(1.30)			
Aggression	4.45 _{b/a}	3.90 _{b/b}	3.71 _{b/b}	17.27	2,723	< .001
<i>SD</i>	(1.56)	(1.36)	(1.48)			
Amusement	3.39 _{c/a}	4.08 _{b/b}	4.38 _{c/c}	28.13	2,723	< .001
<i>SD</i>	(1.67)	(1.46)	(1.49)			
URGES (the way participants would like to behave)						
Withdrawal	3.22 _{a/a}	3.27 _{a/ab}	3.58 _{a/b}	3.11	2,723	.045
<i>SD</i>	(1.92)	(1.63)	(1.88)			
Aggression	3.78 _{b/a}	4.32 _{b/b}	4.18 _{b/b}	5.10	2,723	.006
<i>SD</i>	(1.93)	(1.72)	(1.91)			
Amusement	4.10 _{b/a}	4.44 _{b/ab}	4.60 _{c/b}	4.86	2,723	.008
<i>SD</i>	(1.93)	(1.90)	(1.80)			

Note: First a,b,c indices regard comparisons within culture (in columns) and the second indices (after slash) regard comparisons within reaction (in rows).

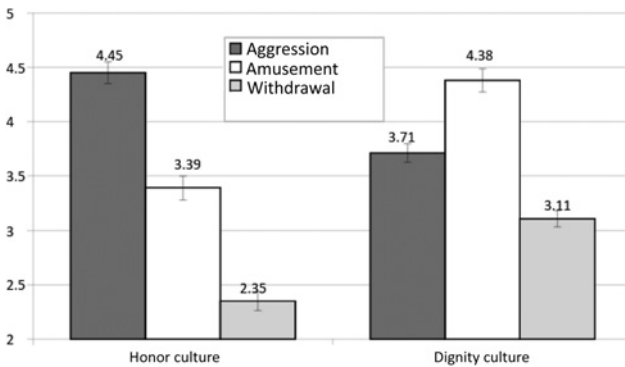


Figure 1: Support for three different reactions to provocation (the way participants would behave) in honor and dignity cultures. Higher scores indicate greater support.

4.2 Urges (the way participants would like to behave)

A significant main effect for reaction type, $F(2, 707) = 50.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, indicated that there were overall differences in the popularity of how

participants wanted to react to provocations ($M_{\text{Aggress}} = 4.10$, $SD = 1.88$; $M_{\text{Withdraw}} = 3.36$, $SD = 1.84$; $M_{\text{Amuse}} = 4.40$, $SD = 1.88$). Follow-up t -tests revealed that withdrawal was the least popular reaction compared to the two other reactions (both $ps < .001$) and amusement was valued the highest (comparison of amusement with aggression: $t[725] = 3.18$, $p = .002$). There was also a significant main effect of culture, $F(2, 707) = 14.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, indicating that the intensity of reactions to provocation was not the same in all cultures (see Table 2). We did not observe a main effect of gender, $F(1, 707) = .01$, $p = .94$.

Moreover, the two-way gender by reaction type, $F(2, 707) = 2.34$, $p = .10$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$, and gender by culture, $F(2, 707) = 2.80$, $p = .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, interactions did not reach traditional levels of statistical significance. The remaining two-way and three-way interactions were also not significant. In particular, the lack of the two-way culture by reaction type interaction for urges (the way participants would like to behave), $F(2, 707) = .49$, $p = .62$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$, in comparison with the significant two-way culture by reaction type interaction for behavioral intentions (the way participants predicted they would behave), supports our hypothesis that cultures vary on behavioral intentions, but not on the urges aroused by provocations.

Finally, similar patterns of correlations were found for urges as behavioral intentions. A positive and strong correlation was found between amusement and aggression in the dignity culture ($r = .39$, $p < .001$), and moderate and negative correlations for these two reactions were found in the face and honor cultures ($r = -.30$, $p < .001$ and $r = -.27$, $p < .001$ respectively; when compared with the dignity culture $zs > 7.9$ and $ps < .001$). Again, we believe that this is consistent with our prediction that in dignity cultures amusement may be a substitute for aggression.

5 Discussion

In this study, we tried to examine the preferred reaction to provocation in cultures that are not ruled by the logics of honor. Based on hints from previous work (Cohen et al. 1996; Dworkin and Efran 1967), we reasoned that the preferred reaction to provocation in dignity cultures may be based on amusement and humor. Other studies (Leung and Cohen 2011; Cohen and Vandello 2001) predict that withdrawal would be highly supported in face and dignity cultures, but not in honor cultures. Furthermore, the finding that anger is homogeneously the strongest emotional reaction to provocation across cultures (Rodriguez Mosquera et al. 2002) allows for the prediction that urges aroused by provocation (i.e., the way people would like to behave) are less diversified than

behavioral intentions (i.e., the way people declare they would behave) because the latter are regulated by cultural scripts of behavior.

The results of our experiment support the above hypotheses. Like in most other studies on honor cultures (e.g. Cohen 1998; Osterman and Brown 2011), we confirmed that violence and aggression are the most common reactions to provocation in this kind of culture. Expanding to other cultural logics, we showed that amusement is the most popular reaction to provocation in dignity cultures. And, as predicted, withdrawal turned out to be more popular in face and dignity cultures than in honor cultures. Furthermore, the differences in directions of correlations may support the reasoning that amusement is a substitute to aggression in dignity cultures, but not in face or honor cultures.

The fact that withdrawal was less popular than aggression and amusement in face cultures requires further research. One possible explanation may relate to whether it is an in-group or out-group member who is doing the provoking (it was the latter in our study). For instance, individuals living in face cultures may strongly support withdrawal from confrontation if the provocation is done by an in-group member. In contrast, withdrawal does not have to be the main reaction to provocations from out-group members because active (i.e., either aggressive or amusement-based) reactions may not upset the harmony of the community – an out-group member is not a part of the closest community. Moreover, the provoked person may not expect that a group or a superior would punish the wrongdoer because the chance that an out-group member is under the power of one's superior or the victim's own group is relatively small. Future studies should test these explanations.

Results of the study also support our second main hypothesis that cultures are more similar in urges. We did not find a culture by reaction interaction for urges (the way participants would like to behave); this contrasts with the significant culture by reaction interaction for behavioral intentions (the way participants predicted they would behave). It appears that emotional reactions were similar across cultures (i.e., provocation induces anger), but cultural scripts encourage different behavioral intentions of reactions in different cultures. Furthermore, the main effect for reaction for urges indicates that across cultures participants would most preferably react to provocation with amusement. This seems to be worth further investigation – the tension-relief function of humor and the predicted preference by our participants for reactions based on amusement may deliver new insight into aggression and violence prevention.

Although this study examined novel research questions and provided support for our hypotheses, there are limitations that future research should address. Despite these cultures being model examples of honor, dignity, and face cultures, it would be beneficial to verify the results with a larger sample of cultures. Further research may also help verify potential explanations based on, for example, the

distinction between internal and external self (see Leung and Cohen 2011). Three further distinctions that seem worthy of consideration are (1) provocations from in-group versus out-group members (here we tested the provocations done by out-group members); (2) strong versus mild provocations (here we tested the strongest provocations that were described in the literature and identified in a pilot study); and (3) different kinds of humor as a response to provocation (i.e., affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating, and aggressive). Furthermore, generalizations of our self-reported ratings to real behaviors should be done with caution. Due to ethical considerations, our analysis was limited to descriptions of behaviors and participants were not really provoked. Declarations of what individuals say they would do may differ from actual behaviors when provoked.

Although the hypothesis that amusement and humor may have tension-relief functions is not new, it remains an understudied area of research. Our findings are consistent with arguments from positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000) and highlight the need for further explorations of amusement-aggression substitution. The research on amusement may initially seem unimportant, but we argue that it may result in a better understanding of behaviors that can serve as an effective alternative to aggression. The development of this research may be important both for science and for societies.

Although we all are human beings and we share many similarities (Berry 2013), culture can encourage our worldview and the behaviors we engage in. The present study suggests that we have similar urges across cultures when provoked, but how we actually react to provocation is influenced by the culture we find ourselves in. Although a lot of effort has been put into understanding the dynamics of aggression and violence in cultures of honor, determining alternatives to aggression in other cultures still needs industrious research. Here we make a first attempt with hopes that others will follow our lead.

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Appendix A – The Questionnaire (English version)

1 The way things are

Below you can find a description of seven insulting situations. Each situation has three different endings. Would you behave this way in a real situation?

Please assess each of the below described behaviours – would you defend your worth by behaving this way? Please use the scale from 1 (I would never behave this way) to 7 (for sure I would do it).

-
1. During a party in the presence of many of your friends your acquaintance severely insulted your mother by abusively calling her a prostitute. As a reaction to this insult you would:
 - do nothing and expect the host of the party to intervene 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - return the insult to that person using swear-words 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - humorously comment on that person’s behaviour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 2. During an informal meeting with co-workers your colleague unfavourably spoke of your spouse by questioning his/her morality and intellectual skills. As a reaction to this insult you would:
 - do nothing and expect the boss of your team to intervene 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - return the insult to that person using swear-words 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - humorously comment on that person’s behaviour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 3. While walking with friends in the park your former neighbour coming from the opposite direction hit you with an arm, and on top of that called you ‘bitch’/‘asshole’. As a reaction to this insult you would:
 - do nothing but consider reporting this behaviour to the police 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - return the insult to that person using words similar to what she/he used 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - turn to your friends and humorously comment on that person’s behaviour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 4. One of your former classmates spread insulting information about you (you’re a thief, a cheat and your moral conduct is poor). You met that person on the former class gathering. You would:
 - do nothing and expect others not to believe in those rumours 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - call that person a dirty liar in the presence of others 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - humorously comment on that person’s behaviour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 5. A friend of one of your far relatives violently cut in line for a concert right in front of you with the words ‘move away you prick’. As a reaction to this insult you would:

- do nothing and expect the nearby security guard to intervene 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - return the insult to that person and try to defend your place in the line 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - humorously comment on that person's behaviour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. During a family trip to another country someone on the railway station heard you use your language and called you 'stupid Canadian/Pole/Chinese'. As a reaction to this insult you would:
- do nothing and expect the station security guard to intervene 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - publicly return the insult 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - turn to your family and humorously comment on that person's behaviour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. During a night out in a pub/restaurant with friends your outfit was ridiculed aloud by someone living in your neighbourhood sitting nearby. As a reaction to this insult you would:
- do nothing and expect the pub/restaurant staff to intervene 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - publicly return the insult 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - humorously comment on that person's behaviour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
-

2 The way things generally should be

Below you can find a description of the same seven insulting situations. Again each situation has three different endings. Would you like to be able to behave this way? Do you see reactions displayed as justified? Imagine you will not be punished for your reaction – what would you ideally like to do?

Please assess each of the below described behaviours – would you like to behave this way to defend your worth? Please use the scale from 1 (I would not like to behave this way) to 7 (of course I would like to do it).

-
1. During a party in the presence of many of your friends your acquaintance severely insulted your mother by abusively calling her a prostitute. As a reaction to this insult you would ideally like to:
- do nothing and expect the host of the party to intervene 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - return the insult to that person using swear-words 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - humorously comment on that person's behaviour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. During an informal meeting with co-workers your colleague unfavourably spoke of your spouse by questioning his/her morality and intellectual skills. As a reaction to this insult you would ideally like to:

- do nothing and expect the boss of your team to intervene 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - return the insult to that person using swear-words 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - humorously comment on that person’s behaviour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. While walking with friends in the park your former neighbour coming from the opposite direction hit you with an arm, and on top of that called you ‘bitch’/‘asshole’. You would ideally like to:
- do nothing but consider reporting this behaviour to the police 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - return the insult to that person using words similar to what she/he used 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - turn to your friends and humorously comment on that person’s behaviour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. One of your former classmates spread insulting information about you (you’re a thief, a cheat and your moral conduct is poor). You met that person on the former class gathering. You would ideally like to:
- do nothing and expect others not to believe in those rumours 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - call that person a dirty liar in the presence of others 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - humorously comment on that person’s behaviour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. A friend of one of your far relatives violently cut in line for a concert right in front of you with the words ‘move away you prick’. As a reaction to this insult you would ideally like to:
- do nothing and expect the nearby security guard to intervene 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - return the insult to that person and try to defend your place in the line 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - humorously comment on that person’s behaviour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. During a family trip to another country someone on the railway station heard you use your language and called you ‘stupid Canadian/Pole/Chinese’. As a reaction to this insult you would ideally like to:
- do nothing and expect the station security guard to intervene 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - publicly return the insult 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - turn to your family and humorously comment on that person’s behaviour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. During a night out in a pub/restaurant with friends your outfit was ridiculed aloud by someone living in your neighbourhood sitting nearby. As a reaction to this insult you would ideally like to:
- do nothing and expect the pub/restaurant staff to intervene 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - publicly return the insult 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - humorously comment on that person’s behaviour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
-