

Psychologist develops scale to measure masculine honor beliefs

March 1 2016, by Sarah Caldwell Hancock

A Kansas State University researcher has devised a scale to measure the degree to which men believe they must respond when provoked.

Previous research about masculine honor beliefs has explored the cultural context in which these beliefs emerge, particularly the culture of the South. Donald Saucier, associate professor of psychological sciences and 2015-2016 Coffman chair for distinguished teaching scholars, said his research team is more interested in how all people adopt such beliefs and how they might be used to understand aggressive behavior.

"There are some guys you just don't want to mess with," Saucier said. "We're trying to tap into their idea that you have to protect what's yours—your family, your property, your reputation—and if you don't, you open yourself to victimization."

Saucier's study, "Masculine honor beliefs: Measurements and correlates," co-authored by several of his graduate students and published in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*, contains four separate studies the professor and his team used to develop the masculine honors belief scale.

For the first study, the team surveyed hundreds of undergraduate students to assess factors associated with masculine honor, such as the importance of being more masculine than other [men](#), whether a man should protect his wife, and whether childhood lessons included that boys should always defend themselves. After the first large sample of

802 undergraduates, the remaining three studies tested the validity of results and whether higher masculine honor scores could be used to predict aggression when men are provoked. The scale passed its examination, and now Saucier is charting the implications in several contexts, including his 2015 study of how masculine honor beliefs affect men's views of sexual violence, which was published in *Social Psychology*.

Saucier said the culture of honor has a negative side that can include violent reactions to slurs against masculinity and somewhat complicated views of sexual violence. While men with high masculine honor beliefs believe that rape should be severely punished, they also tend to have negative views of women who have been raped, even thinking the women may have brought it on themselves. But on the plus side, men with such beliefs also believe that men should be brave, proud, and connected to community and family.

"I'm most excited about the potential pro-social side," Saucier said. "I'm interested in this guardianship element and how we can use it to create a safer society. How can we leverage masculine honor beliefs to encourage men to engage in action against sexual violence?"

An example is pressuring women for sex. To men with high masculine honor belief scores, pressuring women is not allowed. Not only are men supposed to avoid pressuring women for sex, but they are supposed to intervene if they see it occurring. This idea may cause men to take a more active role in fighting sexual violence.

"If we frame our society's need to combat sexual violence in terms of a responsibility to guard and protect each other, people high in masculine honor may take that responsibility and run with it," Saucier said.

"Organizations against [sexual violence](#) tend to be feminist organizations,

and there may be difficulties getting some men to affiliate with them," he said. "But there may be ways to pitch these organizations' messages in ways that men high in masculine honor can relate."

The graduate students who work with Saucier are applying the research to other areas. Psychological sciences doctoral student Amanda Martens is interested in the concept of feminine honor and the effects of changing gender roles.

"In the literature with masculine honor, scholars will mention feminine honor as family duties and sexual purity," Martens said. "I'm interested in whether that is changing. It might be both of those, plus being successful, hardworking and independent—the Superwoman ideal, or 'I must be good at everything.' We are also interested in questions like, what are the internal and external pressures for feminine honor?"

Stuart Miller, also a doctoral student in [psychological sciences](#), is learning methodological techniques from working with Saucier. One of his primary research interests is in individual differences in beliefs about prejudice and how people decide something is racist.

"It's interesting to see how much variability there is in things like adoption of masculine honor beliefs," Miller said. "I'm interested in individual differences in tendencies to perceive prejudice. Do educational interventions affect people's ability to tell what really is racist?"

Saucier looks forward to seeing how his students apply these ideas and continuing to chart how male gender roles affect behavior.

"The traditional masculine role hasn't changed much, even when the roles change for women," he said. "We would expect even the most nurturing loving guy, at some level, needs to push back. That aspect of

the male gender role hasn't evolved. Even today, many men feel a strong need to defend themselves, their families, their property and their reputations against threat and insult. They see their honor at stake, and people who mess with them do so at their own risk."

Saucier's previous studies, "Slurs against masculinity: Masculine honor beliefs and men's reactions to slurs" and "Stereotypic beliefs about masculine honor are associated with perceptions of rape and women who have been raped," appeared in the journals *Language Sciences* and *Social Psychology*, respectively.

More information: Donald A. Saucier et al. Slurs against masculinity: masculine honor beliefs and men's reactions to slurs, *Language Sciences* (2015). [DOI: 10.1016/j.langsci.2014.09.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2014.09.006)

Donald A. Saucier et al. Masculine honor beliefs: Measurement and correlates, *Personality and Individual Differences* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.paid.2015.12.049](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.12.049)

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