In the eyes of others : the role of honor concerns in explaining and preventing insult-elicited aggression

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Chapter 5

In the eyes of others

The role of honor-related self-concerns in explaining and preventing insult-elicited aggression

"*Honor is unstable and seldom the same;*
for she feeds upon opinion, and is as fickle as her food. "
Charles Caleb Colton

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Abstract

Previous research relating honor concerns to conflict escalation has revealed that people from an honor culture are more sensitive to confrontational or insulting remarks and can respond more aggressively to offences compared to people who are not from an honor culture. To date no substantial attempts have been made to examine whether and how it may be possible to prevent these negative outcomes. We address this gap in the current research. First, a correlational study revealed that insult-elicited confrontation is related to an essential aspect of honor — the relative importance of social approval in defining one's worth. In a second study, we examine the effectiveness of a social affirmation in reducing insult-elicited aggression in an immersive paradigm including real insults and behavioral indicators of aggression. We show that among honor-culture members, a social affirmation is effective in reducing insult-elicited aggression compared to no affirmation at all, while a traditional self-affirmation is not. By doing so, we identify a possible intervention for limiting the negative ramifications of insulting feedback among those from an honor culture.

Previous research examining honor-related differences in the way conflicts develop and escalate has mainly established that insults and provocations elicit more aggressive responses among people who are high in honor (Cohen, et al., 1996; Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2008; Van Osch, et al., 2013). At the same time little effort has been made to empirically investigate *why* people high in honor respond more forcefully, or to develop methods that might prevent these negative consequences.

In the current study we aim to identify which self-related concerns are responsible for the heightened sensitivity of people from an honor culture towards insults and how aggression can be prevented. Based on theoretical underpinnings of honor, we distinguish between personal worth — the value of a person in his own eyes — and social worth — the value of a person in the eyes of others. We connect interpersonal differences in social worth to cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to insulting feedback in a scenario study using a correlational design. We will demonstrate that reliance on social approval in defining one's worth makes people vulnerable to (negative) social evaluations such as insults. In a second experimental study, we assess the effectiveness of a social affirmation in reducing insult-elicited aggression among honor-culture participants in an immersive paradigm with real insults and behavioral indicators of aggression. This second study examines whether a social affirmation significantly reduces insult-elicited aggression compared to a control condition, while a personal self-affirmation does not. These findings are not only theoretically relevant for cross-cultural and conflict management researchers. They can also inform practitioners on ways to develop interventions that might prevent, reduce, or resolve conflicts in many day-to-day situations where cultural differences might exacerbate conflicts.

Honor, insults and aggression

Based on seminal work in anthropology (Gilmore, 1987; Peristiany, 1965; Schneider, 1969), social psychologists usually define *honor* as "…the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society" (Pitt-

Rivers, 1965, p. 21). This definition highlights an important aspect of honor, which is the relative importance of other peoples' approval in defining a person's self-worth. Honor is a person's claim to worth, but this worth can only be claimed effectively if it is conferred by others (Gilmore, 1987). Cultures in which members adhere strongly to honor are considered honor cultures (Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2002a). In these cultures, honor norms dictate behavior and people are evaluated according to the extent to which they are perceived to adhere to these norms. As such, the maintenance and protection of one's reputation and social image play an important role in social interactions in honor cultures. Self-worth in honor cultures thus entails both personal worth (a person's value in their own eyes) and social worth (a person's value in the eyes of others)[13].

Honor cultures are found in different parts of the world such as the Middle-East, the Mediterranean, and the southern parts of the United States (Leung & Cohen, 2011). According to Cohen and Nisbett (1994) honor cultures historically developed in areas with scarce resources and a weak state. In the absence of effective law-enforcement, people living in these areas were at high risk of being robbed from their livelihood and had to rely on self-protection to deter rivals. As such, it became very important to develop a reputation of being someone who is not to be taken advantage of, but also as someone who is not about to take advantage of others. As Schneider describes in his work on honor in Sicily, it was very important for an honor culture member to "(…)

[13] Recently, Leung & Cohen (2011) further developed a framework around honor and two other cultural ideals, those of *dignity* and *face*. Dignity is defined as the value of an individual, irrespective of the opinion of others. In dignity cultures, the value of a person is inherent at birth and at least equal to that of every other person. Face also concerns the value of a person in the eyes of society, but depends more on a person's position within the greater social hierarchy. Face is also not something that is contested; people have face until they lose it, but they cannot lose it at the expense of someone else's face (for a full discussion of these two ideals see Leung & Cohen, 2011).

demonstrate to others that (1) he is worthy of their trust and loyalty, and (2) that he is not a fesso, not to be taken lightly, not to be taken advantage of " (Schneider, 1969, p. 147).

Personal integrity and assertiveness — especially for males — are hence two important domains of honor. Another domain which is considered vital in such cultures is family honor (Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2012; Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2002a). Family honor pertains to the good name and reputation of one's family and reciprocally influences the way people are perceived and valued in honor cultures (Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2000). Upholding one's family honor is essential for honor culture members, particularly in the Middle-East and the Mediterranean, and these family honor concerns have been shown to cause antagonistic responses to honor threats in these cultures (Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2002b; Van Osch, et al., 2013).

The relationship between honor, insults, and aggression has been the focal point of most honor research. For example, on 18 November 2013, the key words "culture of honor" return 41 hits in Web of Science of articles related to honor of which 34 (85%) carry a title or abstract that includes violence, revenge, or some reference to aggression. A number of these studies examine insults as instigators of threat to one's honor and the interpersonal ramifications of being offended. Early work by Cohen and colleagues for example (Cohen, et al., 1996) showed that after being insulted, participants from an honor culture showed more non-verbal and physiological signs of stress and aggression, compared to non-honor culture members. More specifically, the tendency to respond more vigorously to insults has been linked to the protection of family honor and the need to protect one's social image in subsequent research (Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2008; Van Osch, et al., 2013). Additionally, prior research shows that honor-endorsement not only explains intercultural differences but also intracultural differences in responding aggressively to insults. Even in non-honor cultures, people with high honor values also perceive

more threat after an insult and respond more vigorously to it (Beersma, et al., 2003; IJzerman, et al., 2007).

In conclusion, previous research has made clear a) that honor is for an important part based on social worth, b) that the maintenance and protection of positive social evaluations are considered essential in honor cultures, c) that insults threaten this sense of social worth and d) insults are met with aggression in order to prevent or eliminate their potentially honor-threatening impact.

At the same time, less attention is usually paid to a recurring finding that in the absence of insults or in response to a good deed, people from an honor culture are in fact more friendly, forthcoming, and cooperative than non-honor culture members (Cohen & Vandello, 2004; Harinck, et al., 2013; Leung & Cohen, 2011). In fact, recent research has shown that both obliging responses before and aggressive responses after an insult result from the same underlying motivational inclination — the need to prevent loss of honor (Shafa, et al., *under review*). This means that honor-related aggression is not insurmountable and that there are conditions in which people who attach high value to honor try to avoid conflict escalation. The question what motivates this behavior has not been answered by research thus far. Additionally, research has not provided concrete strategies that might be effective in reducing honor culture members' need to become aggressive in response to an insult. In the current paper, we develop such a strategy and assess its effect in an immersive experimental paradigm.

Explaining insult-elicited aggression

Of particular interest to our studies is the notion that social worth plays an important part in defining one's honor and that insults instigate a threat to this social worth. As social worth relies on positive external evaluations, it is a commodity that is hard to gain but easy to lose (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). As such, social worth is transient and vulnerable. Empirical findings support this notion, since social disapproval has a more severe impact on people who rely on external cues for self-validation than on those who rely on internal cues for self-

validation (Barnes, et al., 1988; Williams, Schimel, Hayes, & Martens, 2010). Internal or personal worth on the other hand is believed to be more stable and less vulnerable to external judgments (Leung & Cohen, 2011).

The distinction between personal worth and social worth has not been addressed empirically in previous research examining the impact of insults on aggression. In the current paper we connect source of self-worth to affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses to insults. We argue that when self-worth depends on social approval, as it does when people have high concerns for honor, people will be more sensitive to social evaluative cues, making them more susceptible to negative consequences of insults. This sensitivity should result in more negative affect, more cognitive self-devaluation, and a stronger need to respond in a confrontational manner than when self-worth depends on internal approval.

Preventing insult-elicited aggression

Research has shown that one possible way to relieve the impact of a self-threat such as an insult is by self-affirmation (Critcher, Dunning, & Armor, 2010; Henry, 2009). Self-affirmations consist of an array of self-defensive strategies for the psyche to maintain its integrity in response to the numerous potentially threatening situations that people face (Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Steele, 1988). This strategy is also often used by psychologists in experimental procedures to decrease the implications of a threatening event for self-integrity (for a review, see Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Prior research thus suggests that self-affirmation offers a fruitful approach to diminish insult-elicited aggression. However, its effect has not been empirically tested in an honor-culture context, where self-integrity more strongly relies on external evaluations. We argue that a strategy that affirms the social self, rather than the personal self might be more effective in honor cultures (see also Hoshino-Browne, et al., 2005). This should be the case because vigilance towards insults among honor culture members is the result of the vulnerable nature of the self-worth, which for an important part relies on social worth. Our approach is novel because this is a first attempt to

distinguish different forms of affirmation that should cater for internally and socially conferred self-worth.

Role of self-esteem

In our studies, we also take into account the level of self-esteem of our participants and assess its interplay with source of self-worth. Heretofore, research assessing the connection between self-esteem and aggression has revealed mixed results (for a review, see Ostrowsky, 2010). On the one hand, some studies have shown that low self-esteem rather than high self-esteem is associated with aggression (Walker & Bright, 2009; Webster, 2006). Recently however, there is more evidence suggesting that high (or inflated) self-esteem rather than low elf-esteem is associated with aggressive responses to ego-threats (Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000; Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). It might be that the relation between high self-esteem and aggression hinges on the extent to which self-esteem is stable or vulnerable. For people with high self-esteem have more to lose from an ego-threat than people with low self-esteem, particularly if self-esteem is vulnerable. As discussed before, self-worth that is based on social evaluations, as in honor cultures, is more vulnerable than internally defined worth. Therefore, we argue that particularly high levels of self-esteem might fuel the relationship between reliance on social approval, such as honor, and aggressive responses to ego-threats or insults.

Current studies

In the current paper, we first examined the overall relations between source of self-worth, self-esteem, and insult-elicited aggression. In a correlational study, we first measured self-esteem and source of self-worth. Next, we assessed participants' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to different insult scenarios. We hypothesized that, in general, those who highly depend on social worth would be negatively affected by the insults, but mainly those who depend on social worth and have high self-esteem would respond in a confrontational manner. To examine whether source of self-worth and

sensitivity to insults covary — irrespective of cultural background — we first assessed this relation independent from honor values, that is, within a non-honor-culture context.

In a second study, we extended these findings to an honor-culture context by focusing on honor-culture participants. We assessed the efficacy of a self-affirmation and a social affirmation in reducing insult-elicited aggression among honor culture members. If socially conferred worth is indeed what makes honor-culture members more aggressive after an insult, a social affirmation should be effective in reducing insult-elicited aggression while a traditional self-affirmation should not. To test this hypothesis, we used an immersive experimental paradigm in which participants were actually insulted and behavioral indicators of aggression were measured.

Study 5.1

Participants and design

Participants were recruited at the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences of Leiden University. In total, 135 students participated. Because the aim of this study was to examine the hypothesized relation between self-esteem, source of self-worth, and aggressive responses to an insult in a homogeneous cultural sample, 22 participants with a cultural background other than Dutch were excluded from analysis. The final dataset consisted of 113 participants (84 female, 74.3%; age M = 20.93, SD = 3.47). The study had a within-subject (3 scenarios) design, with source of self-worth and self-esteem as continuous independent variables.

Instruments and procedure

Participants were recruited with the cover story that this study was about the impact of negative affect on consumer behavior. After entering the lab and signing the informed consent, participants were placed in individual cubicles in front of a desktop computer. A questionnaire was administered using Qualtrics software.

After the general instructions, we first measured self-esteem and source of self-worth, followed by demographics and some filler questions pertaining to consumer behavior. We then presented participants with three different scenarios describing an insult. The vignettes were based on freely generated insult scenarios as described by Uskul and colleagues (Uskul, et al., 2012) and adapted to a setting that would resonate with a student population. In the first scenario, a person's *morality* was called into question when he/she was falsely accused by his/her manager of stealing money from the safe and called *a thief*. In the second scenario, after not being assertive enough, a person's *sociability* was impugned by a roommate by being called *socially inadequate*. In the third scenario, a person was made to look *incompetent* in the presence of his/her partner and called *retarded* by a bank employee. We used three different scenarios to make sure that our findings were not restricted to one particular setting or type of insult. The order in which each insult was presented was randomized. Each scenario was followed by the same set of questions assessing the offensiveness of the insult and the cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses of the participants. Afterwards, participants were informed about the true nature of the study, thanked and rewarded with either € 3,- or 1 course credit for their participation.

Measures

All items were measured using seven-point scales, unless stated otherwise.

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was assessed with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979). This scale measures trait self-esteem using ten positively worded and negatively worded items (e.g., *On the whole, I am satisfied with myself* and *I feel I do not have much to be proud of*' (r); $\alpha = .88$). Items were recoded such that higher scores indicated higher self-esteem.

Source of worth. We used the Approval of Others scale of the Contingencies of Self-worth questionnaire (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003) to assess the extent to which participants relied on internal vs.

social evaluations as a source of personal worth. This scale originally consisted of three items indicating an internal source of worth (e.g., *What others think of me has no effect on what I think about myself*) and two items indicating an external source of self-worth (e.g., *I can't respect myself if others don't respect me*). For the purpose of this study, we added a sixth item closely related to concerns for honor and assessing participants' reputational concerns (*It is important for me to have a good reputation*). Reliability analyses showed that this item fit well with the original scale (α = .71, α if item deleted = .68). Items were recoded such that higher scores indicated a more socially-based sense of worth.

The following measures reappeared after each of the three insult vignettes.

Offensiveness. Participants indicated on three items to what extent they considered the scenario to be offensive (*I would feel a)offended, b)hurt, c)insulted if this would happen to me*; α = .44). Higher score in this scale indicate more offensiveness.

Cognitive devaluation. Cognitive devaluation of the self following the insult was measured with four items (*If this situation would happen to me, I would a)evaluate myself in a more negative way, b)feel rejected, c)feel inferior, d)feel insecure about myself*; α = .69). Higher scores indicate more devaluation of the self.

Negative affect. The affective response to the insult was measured with four items (*If I would be in this situation, I would be a) upset, b) frustrated, c) angry, d) irritated*; α = .60). Higher scores indicate more negative affect.

Behavioral inclinations. Eight items assessed participants' behavioral inclinations in the given scenario. Four items assessed the inclination to confront the transgressor (*I would a) assert myself, b) confront the wrongdoer, c) raise my voice, d) verbally disapprove of the wrongdoer if this would happen to me*, α = .49). Four items assessed the inclination to behave in an avoidant manner (*I would a) withdraw from the scene, b) avoid confrontation, c) ignore*

the wrongdoer, d) avoid a conflict if this would happen to me; α = .69) in response to the insult. Confrontation and withdrawal were correlated negatively in all three scenarios (r = -.38, r = -.51, and r = -.74 respectively, all ps < .001). Therefore we recoded the withdrawal items and combined them into one scale in such a way that high scores indicated more confrontation and low scores indicated more withdrawal (α = .74). We ran analyses on the separate and combined scales. Results were highly similar for both types of analyses. To be concise, we will only report the results pertaining to the combined scale.

Results

Table 5.1

Descriptive statistics per scenario

		Morality	Sociability	Competence
Offensiveness	**M**	6.24[a]	4.65[b]	6.07[a]
	SD	.92	1.57	1.11
Cognitive devaluations	**M**	3.11[a]	3.40[b]	3.71[c]
	SD	1.34	1.45	1.43
Negative Affect	**M**	5.85[a]	4.63[b]	5.01[c]
	SD	.98	1.34	1.17
Behavior	**M**	5.38[a]	4.91[b]	5.01[b]
	SD	.91	1.11	1.34

Note. Means in rows with different signs differ significantly

Descriptive statistics for each scenario and within-subject effects are presented in Table 5.1. In general, participants considered the morality insult to be most offensive, followed by the competence insult, and the sociability insult. Also, the morality insult caused more negative affect and the inclination to confront the transgressor more than the other two insults. The self-devaluation however, was lowest in this scenario, indicating that participants generally rejected this insult the most. Initial inspections revealed that analyzing the scenarios separately resulted in the same pattern of outcomes as analyzing the

collapsed data, but the latter yielded more robust effects. Therefore, we will only discuss the findings pertaining to the collapsed data.

For the purpose of the following analyses, we first centered source of self-worth and self-esteem around their mean and also calculated their centered interaction term. Then we regressed our dependent measures on both main effects, after which we included the interaction term in the second step. Correlations between measures are presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Correlations between source of self-worth, self-esteem and dependent measures collapsed over scenarios

	Self-Worth	**Self-esteem**	**Offensive-ness**	**Cognitive devaluation**	**Negative affect**
Self-esteem	-.304**				
Offensiveness	.408**	-.045			
Cognitive deval.	.517**.	-.459**	.426**		
Negative affect	329**	-.185*	.708**	.435**	
Behavior	-.117	.215*	.095	-.315**	.176^{+}

Note. n = 113, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$., $^{+}$ $p < .1$ (two sided)

Offensiveness. For offensiveness, we only found a significant main effect for source of self-worth, β = .435, $t(112) = 4.76$, $p < .001$, 95% *CI* = .244 - .533. The stronger their reliance on external approval, the more offense participants' took at the insults. The main effect of self-esteem and the interaction effect of source of self-worth and self-esteem were not significant (ts < 1).

Cognitive devaluation. We found significant but opposing main effects for source of self-worth and self-esteem on cognitive devaluation. The higher their reliance on external approvals, the more participants tended to devalue themselves in response to the insults, β = .416, $t(112) = 5.20$, $p < .001$, 95% *CI*

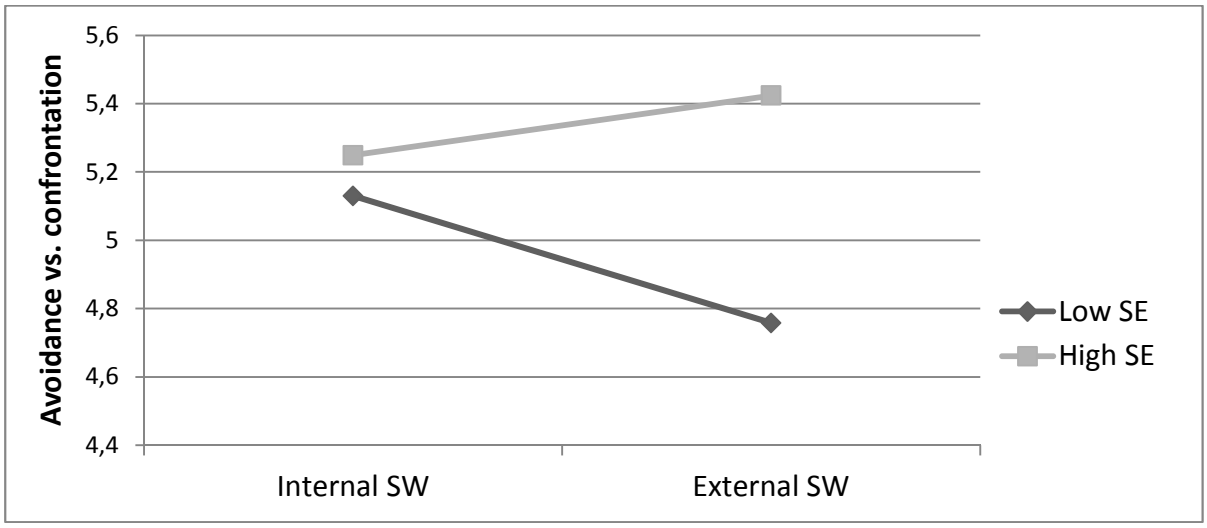
= .324 - .721. On the other hand, higher self-esteem led participants to devalue themselves to a lesser extent. The interaction effect of source of self-worth and self-esteem was not significant ($t < 1$).

Negative affect. There was only a significant main effect of source of self-worth on negative affect following insults. The higher their reliance on external approval as a source of self-worth, the more negative affect participants reported after being insulted $\beta = .300$, $t(112) = 3.19$, $p = .002$, 95% *CI* = .113 - .484. The regression analysis did not yield a significant main effect of self-esteem nor an interaction between source of self-worth and self-esteem on negative affect (*t*s < 1.13, *ns*).

Behavioral inclinations. We found a significant main effect of self-esteem on behavioral inclinations in response to the insults, indicating that the higher their self-esteem, the more inclined participants were to confront the transgressor $\beta = .233$, $t(112) = 2.39$, $p = .019$, 95% *CI* = .04 - .37. Interestingly, we also found a significant interaction of source of self-worth and self-esteem on behavior, $\beta = .194$, $t(112) = 2.08$, $p = .04$, 95% *CI* = .01 - .32; see Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1.

Source of self-worth by self-esteem interaction effect on behavioral inclinations in response to insults.



Analyses indicated that participants with a more internal source of self-worth — low on external self-worth — responded equally confrontational to the insults, irrespective of their level of self-esteem. However, among participants who relied strongly on an external source of self-worth, those with high self-esteem were more inclined to confront the transgressor while those low in self-esteem were less inclined to confront and more inclined to avoid the transgressor. Additionally, the main effect of source of self-worth was not significant.

Discussion

In this study, we examined which self-related concerns associated with honor — source of self-worth and self-esteem — influence participants' affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses to insults. The findings corroborate our predictions that, independent of cultural background, people who strongly rely on social approval as a source of self-worth are more vulnerable to the negative affective and cognitive consequences of interpersonal insults. Interestingly, we also found that among those with an internal source of self-worth, high self-esteem might inhibit the need to respond vigorously to insults. However, when self-worth relies on external evaluations, high self-esteem fuels the need to respond more forcefully to insults.

Study 5.2

The results of the previous study are conceptually interesting, because they are among the first to empirically connect source of self-worth to insult-elicited cognition, affect, and behavior. However, the study had a correlational design and was conducted among a group of participants who have generally low endorsement of honor values. Therefore, in a second study, we aimed to assess the causal relation between social worth and insult-elicited aggression by introducing an experimental manipulation that affects this specific self-related concern, i.e., a social affirmation. We assessed to what extent this manipulation would be able to prevent insult elicited-aggression in a sample of honor-culture participants. We compared its effect to a control condition without any

affirmation and to a comparable manipulation that has been forwarded in previous literature — a self-affirmation, (Henry, 2009) — but is expected to be less effective in reducing insult-elicited aggression if our predictions are valid.

We hypothesized that a traditional self-affirmation, that instructs people to think of characteristics or values that are important to them personally, might be less effective in reducing aggression among people who define their worth on the basis of external evaluations, as is the case in honor cultures. In such contexts it might be more effective to remind people of characteristics that are especially praised by important others, i.e. using a social affirmation (see also Hoshino-Browne, et al., 2005). As such we expect that the efficacy of a social affirmation is related to the extent to which people rely on social evaluations as a source of self-worth. Additionally, as self-worth may be more vulnerable when it is based on external evaluations, like in honor cultures, a traditional self-affirmation might backfire among those with high self-esteem, because it inflates the self-esteem, making it more sensitive to ego-threats (Ostrowsky, 2010). We compared the effect of both types of affirmations to a control condition with no affirmation at all.

Method

Participants and design

Participants were recruited at the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences of Leiden University. In total, 80 participants with an honor-culture background participated. We classified participants who were born in an honor culture, and/or whose both parents were born in an honor-culture as honor culture participants (Harinck, et al., 2013; Shafa, et al., 2014). All recruited participants fit this qualification. Seven participants were excluded from analysis because they communicated to us that they did not believe they were actually paired with another participant during the study. Two additional participants were excluded from the analyses because they did not comply with the intervention instructions. The final dataset consisted of 71 honor-culture participants with age (M = 22.63, SD = 4.10) and gender (55 female, 77.5%)

equally distributed among conditions. The study had a single factorial between-participants design with three conditions (Affirmation: social affirmation vs. self-affirmation vs. control).

Instruments and procedure

When participants entered the lab, they were informed that they were about to participate in a study investigating the characteristics of digital cooperation, such as via mail or online chat. They were told that they would be randomly paired with another participant in the lab, whom they did not know or meet, and would perform two tasks together. Additionally, they would answer questions related to their performance and experience. After consenting, participants were placed in individual cubicles in front of a PC and randomly assigned to one of the three conditions. All test materials were administered via a desktop computer equipped with Authorware 7 and a standard issue headphone.

First, participants answered a number of questions assessing mood, self-esteem, and source of self-worth. These questions were followed by the affirmation manipulation. In the affirmation conditions, participants were instructed to think of a situation in which they felt good about themselves because of an exceptional achievement or characteristic. In the social affirmation condition, participants were instructed to think about when they were praised by close others, while in the self-affirmation condition, they were instructed to think about a time when they praised themselves (see Appendix 5.1). They were encouraged to describe that situation in detail and report what it was that made them feel good about themselves. In the control condition, participants were asked to report which was their favorite movie and why.

Next, each participant was ostensibly linked to another participant via a network connection and performed the two cooperation tasks. These were the exact same two tasks as described in Study 3 and 4.3, in which participants solve 30 word puzzles on the first task and then engage in a reaction time game in the second task (Competitive Reaction Time task, Taylor, 1967). In this study

however, all participants received insulting feedback. The second task again gauged the level of aggression they tended to express towards that same collaborator.

After these two tasks, the supposed connection between participants was terminated, and participants continued by filling out a remaining questionnaire. This questionnaire contained an honor concerns measure, a post-measure of mood, some questions about their experience of the cooperation, and demographics. Afterwards, participants were debriefed about the true nature of the study, thanked, and rewarded with either € 3,- or 1 course credit for their participation. All measures were assessed using seven-point scales unless stated otherwise.

Measures

Mood. We used the Dutch version of the Positive and Negative Affect scale (F. P. M. L. Peeters, Ponds, & Vermeeren, 1996; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) to measure mood at the beginning and at the end of the experiment. This measure consists of 20 items assessing both positive (e.g., *excited* and *determined*) and negative mood states (e.g., *irritated* and *afraid*). Exploratory factor analyses indicated that a solution consisting of three factors fit our data best in both pre- and the post-measures. Thus we constructed three mood scales per measure indicating positive mood (10 items; pre-measure ; α = .91.; post-measure ; α = .94), dejection/fear (6 items; pre-measure ; α = .77; post-measure ; α = .84) and annoyance (4 items; pre-measure ; α = .60; post-measure ; α = .70).

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was measured with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979) as in Study 1 (α = .85).

Source of worth. Besides the Approval of Others scale we used in Study 1 (α = .86 in this sample), we used three additional scales of the Contingencies of Self-worth Questionnaire that were most relevant to the current study and cultural sample to measure source of worth. These scales were Family support (e.g., *It is important to my self-respect that I have a family that cares about me*;

α = .71), Virtue (e.g., *My self-esteem depends on whether or not I follow my moral/ethical principles*; α = .76), and Competition (e.g., *Doing better than others gives me a sense of self-respect*; α = .93). Each scale consisted of five items. We included the additional scales to rule out alternative sources of self-worth as alternative predictors of our hypothesized outcome.

Aggression. The level of noise bursts administered throughout the Competitive Reaction Time task (Taylor, 1967) was used as an indication of participants' aggression towards their supposed opponent. This measure varied between 60 dB and 105 dB. In line with previous research, we analyzed the noise level in the first trial separately from the remaining 24 trials (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Meier, et al., 2006). The first noise burst most accurately reflects the response to the previous insulting interaction, while the advanced noise bursts are highly influenced by the preceding noise levels set by the other. The levels of noise participants received was set to steadily incline, mimicking conflict escalation (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998).

Honor concerns. To measure honor concerns, we used the Family Honor Scale of the Honor Concerns questionnaire (Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2002b). This scale consisted of five items and assessed to what extent certain honor-threatening scenarios would harm a person's self-worth (e.g., *To what extent would it harm your self-worth if you were known as someone who is not able to protect your family's reputation*; α = .66). We focused on this domain because previous research has shown that concerns in this domain are the most central part of honor in our sample and the reason why they respond aggressively to insults (Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2012; Van Osch, et al., 2013). Because the Family Honor Scale measures stable individual differences, we decided to include this scale at the end of the experiment to avoid suspicion about the specific focus of the study and to avoid priming the participants with honor.

Checks. Seven questions assessed how participants had experienced the cooperation. Three questions concerned the valence of the cooperation (*The cooperation with the other participants was pleasant* (r)*, amusing* (r), and *tense*;

α = .74) and three questions assessed the extent to which participants were offended by the feedback they received (*I was offend by/angry with the other participant* and *I wanted to punish the other participant*; α = .72). Finally, participants were encouraged to evaluate the cooperation in an open-ended question. The response to this question was screened to assess whether participants were suspicious of the cover story or the absence of an actual collaborator.

Results

Checks. ANOVAs revealed no significant differences between conditions on both control measures indicating that participants in all conditions experienced the supposed cooperation as equally negative and insulting (*F*s < 1.21).

Honor concerns. An ANOVA examining self-reported honor concerns revealed that these did not differ between experimental condition ($F < 1$). As intended, all participants in this study scored well above the scale midpoint ($M = 5.39$, $SD = .85$; $t(70) = 13.75$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI = 1.19 - 1.59$), indicating that family honor was a major concern in this context.

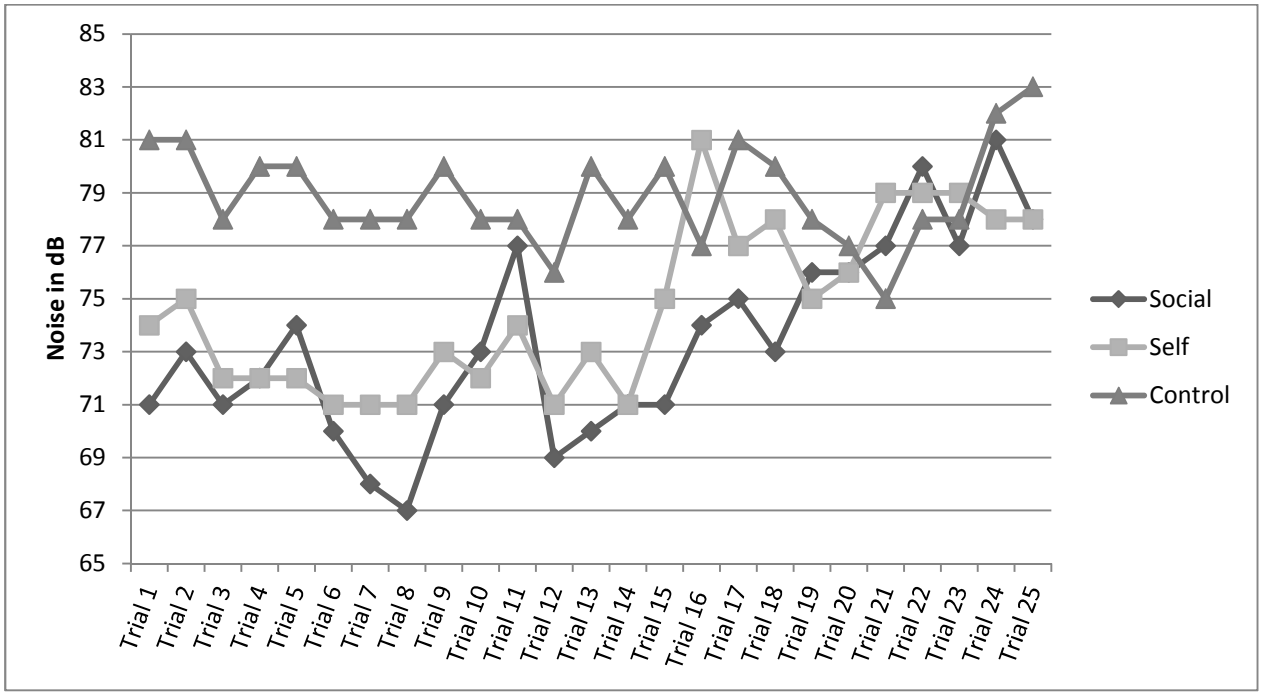
Mood. We used three Repeated Measures ANOVAs with condition as between-subject factor and pre- and post-measure as within-subject factor to analyze differences in the three mood scales separately. We found significant within-subject effects for positive mood ($F(1, 68) = 11.29$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$) and annoyance ($F(1, 68) = 17.84$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .21$). In general, participants experienced less positive mood (pre-measure: $M = 4.62$, $SD = 0.95$; post-measure: $M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.16$) and more annoyance (pre-measure: $M = 1.79$, $SD = 0.74$; post-measure: $M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.14$) after having been insulted. Participants did not experience more dejection or fear-related emotions and there were no interactions between the within- and between-subject factors (all *F*s < 1). These results indicate that being insulted indeed caused distress in all participants and to an equal extent in all conditions.

Self-esteem and source of worth. We analyzed the self-esteem and source of worth scales using separate ANOVAs with condition as between-subject factor. Neither of these scale scores depended significantly on experimental condition (all *F*s < 1). This confirms there were no pre-existing differences between conditions on the two measures relating to self-worth.

Aggression. The noise levels set in each condition during the course of the CRT are depicted in Figure 5.2. To assess the effect of condition on aggression, while taking into account individual differences in source of self-worth and level of self-esteem, we first centered source of self-worth and level of self-esteem around their mean. We also calculated their interaction term. We then regressed level of white noise on the main effects of condition, self-worth, and self-esteem in the first step and then added the interaction term of self-worth and self-esteem in the second step. We performed two separate regression analyses, one for the noise level set on the first trial and one for the averaged noise levels set on the remaining trials (2-25).

Figure 5.2

Levels of white noise set on each trial per condition



First trial. We first examined the noise levels set on the first trial (see Table 5.3), as this is most indicative of participant's response to the insulting feedback previously received. The regression analysis yielded a significant main effect of source of self-worth, $\beta = -.244$, $t(70) = -2.07$, $p = .042$, 95% *CI* = -5.23 - -.095, indicating that overall in this sample of participants from an honor culture, those whose sense of worth was more socially-defined tended to respond less aggressively after being insulted. More importantly, we observed a significant main effect of condition $\beta = .277$, $t(70) = 2.42$, $p = .018$, 95% *CI* = .86 - 8.98. To investigate this effect further, we performed ANOVA on the first noise level with condition as between-subject factor, and conducted LSD post hoc tests to examine specific contrasts. This revealed that the noise levels in the social affirmation condition ($M = 71.74$, $SD = 12.12$) were significantly lower compared to the control condition ($M = 81.30$, $SD = 14.94$; $p = .024$), as predicted. The self-affirmation condition ($M = 74.60$, $SD = 14.86$) did not differ from the other two conditions. As a result, the overall effect of condition was only marginally significant in the ANOVA, $F(2, 68) = 2.81$, $p = .067$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$).

These results indicate that the social affirmation condition was indeed effective in lowering the initial need to become aggressive in response to insulting feedback, while the self-affirmation condition did not significantly diminish the amount of aggression participants displayed compared to the control condition. The main effect of self-esteem was not significant, nor was the interaction effect of source of self-worth and level of self-esteem. To further examine how socially-defined self-worth affects noise levels under different circumstances, we examined correlations between the noise level on the first trial, source of self-worth, and self-esteem in each experimental condition.

In the social affirmation condition, initial noise levels were only significantly correlated to the source of self-worth scale, $r = -.489$, $p = .018$, indicating that in this condition, noise levels were set lower by those who defined their worth socially.

Table 5.3

Regression analysis of condition, and source of self-worth (SSW), and self-esteem (SE) on noise level in first trial

		B	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*F* change
Step 1	**Constant**	66.00	4.38	15.08	<.001	.016
	Condition	4.92	2.03	2.42	.018	
	SSW	-2.66	1.29	-2.07	.042	
	SE	.86	1.87	.46	.65	
Step 2						
	Constant	66.32	4.42	14.99	<.001	.516
	Condition	4.88	2.04	2.39	.020	
	SSW	-2.58	1.29	-1.99	.051	
	SE	1.0	1.88	.53	.59	
	SSW*SE	.778	1.19	.65	.52	

Note. Condition 1 = social affirmation, 2 = self-affirmation, 3 = control ; $n = 113$

Interestingly, in the self-affirmation condition, noise levels on the first trial were only significantly correlated with level of self-esteem, $r = .50$, $p = .011$, indicating that in this condition, higher levels of noise were set by those high in self-esteem. There were no significant correlations between noise levels and self-esteem, or self-worth in the control condition.

Trials 2-25. The noise levels set during the remainder of the CRT were combined to indicate aggression in response to further escalation of the situation, in which the other person administers increasing levels of noise to the participant. Regression analysis on the average noise levels set in the remaining 24 trials of the CRT (see Table 5.4) revealed a significant interaction of source of self-worth by self-esteem, $\beta = .277$, $t(70) = 2.42$, $p = .018$, 95% *CI* = .86 - 8.98.

Table 5.4

Regression analysis of condition, and source of self-worth (SSW), and self-esteem (SE) on average noise levels in trials 2-25

		B	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*F* change
Step 1	**Constant**	70.42	4.17	16.87	<.001	.504
	Condition	2.85	1.93	1.47	.14	
	SSW	-.56	1.23	-.45	.65	
	SE	.04	1.78	.021	.98	
Step 2						
	Constant	71.41	4.07	17.52	<.001	.028
	Condition	2.74	1.88	1.46	.15	
	SSW	-.29	1.20	-.24	.81	
	SE	.49	1.74	.28	.78	
	SSW*SE	2.47	1.09	2.52	.028	

Note. Condition 1 = social affirmation, 2 = self-affirmation, 3 = control ; n = 113

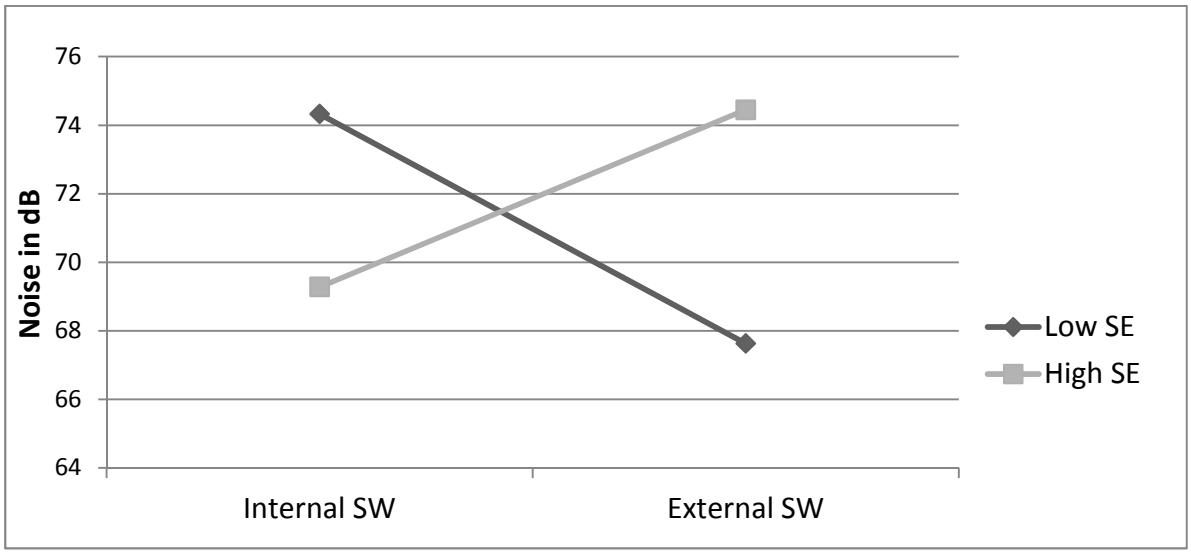
We have plotted this interaction in Figure 5.3. Results show that when self-worth is defined internally high self-esteem buffers against the need to respond more aggressively to insults. However, when self-worth is strongly based on social approval, high self-esteem actually fuels the need to react more aggressively to insults, which resonates with our observation in Study 5.1.

Discussion

The current study extends the findings of Study 5.1 to participants from an honor culture, and examines a possible way to prevent aggressive responses. In a more immersive situation in which honor-culture participants were actually insulted and exchanged white noise with their supposed insulter (indicating escalating aggression), we demonstrated that a social affirmation is effective in diminishing the initial need to respond more vigorously to insults compared to a control situation where no affirmation was made. A traditional self-affirmation, however, did not have this effect.

Figure 5.3

Source of self-worth by self-esteem interaction effect on mean white noise.



Additionally, taking into account interpersonal variations in source of self-worth and self-esteem, we found that a social affirmation reduced initial displays of aggression more when participants relied more strongly on socially conferred worth, as predicted. Notably, self-affirmation did not significantly reduce levels of aggression compared to the control condition and even increased aggression to the extent that participants had higher self-esteem.

Notably, displays of aggression during escalating noise levels set during the later trials replicated the results of Study 5.1 among an honor-culture sample. As the effect of the intervention faded during the CRT, a source of self-worth by self-esteem interaction effect on aggression emerged. This complements results of Study 5.1 which revealed that while self-esteem acts as a buffer among participants who define their self-worth internally, it fuels the need to become aggressive among those who define their worth socially.

Importantly, participants in all conditions reported to be equally affected by the insulting feedback, were equally concerned with their honor and experienced the interaction and their supposed collaborator to be equally

negative. These controls exclude a number of possible alternative explanations for the diminished levels of aggression in the social affirmation condition.

General discussion

Elaborating on previous research on honor, insults, and aggression, we hypothesized that insult-elicited aggression results from honor culture members' tendency to base their self-worth for an important part on social evaluations. Consequently, socially-conferred worth makes them more vulnerable to the negative consequence of negative social evaluations including insults. In a first correlational study, we connected socially-conferred worth to higher levels of cognitive self-devaluation and negative affect in different insulting scenarios. Additionally, we showed that socially-conferred worth interacted with level of self-esteem in predicting confrontational inclinations in these scenarios. While level of self-esteem did not affect confrontational inclinations in people who defined their worth internally, it did so among people who mainly defined their worth socially. Those high in self-esteem were more likely to confront the insulter while those low in self-esteem were more likely to withdraw.

In our second study, we extended these finding to a sample of honor-culture participants. In an immersive experiment, we compared the effectiveness of two different types of affirmations in preventing insult-elicited aggression. We discovered that a social affirmation reduced the tendency to administer white noise among honor culture members who had been insulted during a previous task relative to a control group with no affirmation, while a traditional self-affirmation did not have this effect. Moreover, results showed that this social affirmation was more effective when reliance on social approval was high, while the self-affirmation was less effective when self-esteem was high. Finally, during the course of the interaction, as the effect of the intervention started to fade, a similar interaction pattern between source of self-worth and level of self-esteem appeared, indicating that high self-esteem fuels aggression in response to insult, among those who define their worth based on social approval.

These results are both novel and fascinating. While most previous research has focused on establishing that honor culture members respond aggressively to insults, our findings are among the first to demonstrate a relationship between the social dimensions of honor and the heightened aggression following an insult — going beyond establishing covariation, to demonstrate a causal relation (see also Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2008). Such a response is a way of protecting and preventing further damage to one's social worth, an important dimension of honor. The results are also fascinating because they are the first to show that insult-elicited aggression among honor-culture members is not insurmountable. As our results revealed, affirming one's social worth is an effective way of preventing insult-elicited aggression among honor culture members. This finding complements the growing number of studies reporting honor-related antagonism, in which very few attempts have been made to examine measures that may help prevent these negative outcomes.

To our knowledge, one such attempt was made by Henry (2009) who argued that honor cultures develop among groups of people who are under the constant burden of a relatively low status. According to Henry, adherence to honor and aggressive protection of one's reputation is a form of vigilant low-status compensation, resulting from the need to protect one's stigmatized sense of social worth. Thus, a self-affirmation strategy would help compensate this low sense of worth and eliminate the need to respond aggressively to a threat to one's self-worth, such as after an insult. In an experiment, he showed that a self-affirmation diminished reported proneness to become aggressive after an insult among low-status participants (i.e. students with low parental income), compared to not-affirmed low-status participants. This difference was not found among affirmed and not-affirmed high-status participants. However, Henry did not make the important distinction between personal worth and social worth, as the self-affirmation in that study contained both aspects of worth. Additionally, this initial work examined imagined insults and self-reported indicators of aggression among high or low-status participants, instead of investigating honor

culture participants who actually suffer and respond to provocations — as was the case in our study. Therefore, our findings contribute to the prior literature on honor and insults by demonstrating the central importance of social worth as an important dimension of honor and its causal role in potentially escalatory responses to insults and offenses.

A strength of the current research is that we used different methods and measures to investigate the connection between source of worth and sensitivity to insults. Study 5.1 assessed self-reports in a correlational design to investigate the hypothesized association between source of worth and cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to different insult descriptions. We included different types of insults to be able to relate our findings to different situations. In the second study, we demonstrated the causal relation between these focal variables, in an experimental design. In this study, honor culture participants were actually insulted and demonstrated genuine behavior indicative of aggression. This approach extends the external validity of our findings, and yields important information about possible interventions that may help prevent the emergence of aggression.

A possible limitation of this study is the fact that we cannot empirically ascertain the extent to which the social affirmation prevented aggression by buttressing participants' social worth. Including a measure that gauges this process might have clarified this issue. However, we did not include such a measure in the current study in order to avoid the risk of making participants aware of the purpose of the self-affirmation procedure. Drawing further conclusions from this research, it is important to note that we only established an effect of the social affirmation on initial displays of aggression (i.e., during the first trial of the white noise task). During the course of the task, participants were confronted with increasing levels of white noise administered by their interaction partner, which arguably overruled initial tendencies based on the affirmation manipulation. This explains why during the course of the task the behavior displayed by participants is guided more by the increasing noise levels

set by their interaction partner, as well as their individual dispositions — which in this case included source of worth and self-esteem. In fact, this also reflects results of prior research with this task, in which — for similar reasons — the main focus was on participants' behavior during the first trial (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Meier, et al., 2006). In line with these earlier studies, the effects of the affirmation manipulation are most clearly visible on participants' behavior on the first trial of this task.

We highlight two interesting directions for future research. First, it is important to investigate whether the effectiveness of a social affirmation in reducing aggression is something that is particular to honor, or that a social affirmation in general is just more powerful than a self-affirmation. Our results cannot answer this question. One way to do this is by repeating the same study, including participants from honor cultures as well as dignity cultures. Such a study would not only allow for a replication of the current findings, it would also allow for an assessment of the impact of different types of affirmations in each of the two groups. Based on the theoretical underpinnings of the ideal of dignity, one would expect that a self-affirmation would be more effective in a dignity group, because their worth is defined more internally.

Additionally, these results could be of particular interest to practitioners in the field of negotiation and conflict management. As mentioned before, little has been done to develop methods that might prevent negative outcomes associated with insults. Our study offers a first step in this direction, as it informs us on what interventions should consist of in order to be effective in reducing insult-elicited aggression. The next step is to develop practical interventions, based on this knowledge, which can be tested and further improved in the field of negotiation and conflict management. As intercultural communication is now commonplace in many societies, this line of research can contribute significantly to easing intercultural relations involving honor cultures.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our results show that socially-defined worth plays an important part in explaining why people from an honor culture respond more aggressively to insults. By affirming their social worth, we were able to reduce their need to respond aggressively to insulting feedback in a sample of honor culture members while a traditional self-affirmation was not as effective. These findings have important theoretical and practical implications and inform us on why insults elicit more aggression when honor is at stake and how aggression can be prevented.

Appendix 5.1

Social affirmation

Describe a situation in which you were praised by your relatives, because of your exceptional characteristics or performance, which made you feel good about yourself. In your description, please mention what they said or did and why they made you feel good about yourself in detail.

Self-affirmation

Describe a situation in which you praised yourself because of your exceptional characteristics or performance, which made you feel good about yourself. In your description, please mention how this characteristic or performance was manifested and why it made you feel good about yourself in detail.