In the eyes of others : the role of honor concerns in explaining and preventing insult-elicited aggression
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Chapter 6

General Discussion

"There is no dishonor in wisdom"

James Welch

Due to globalization, contact between people from different ethnic backgrounds has become commonplace in contemporary societies. In the Dutch society for example, 21% of the population is estimated to have a non-native ethnic background (CBS, November 2013). Ethnic diversity offers both advantages and challenges to daily life, because people from different ethnic backgrounds endorse different cultural norms, values, and convictions. Differences in core convictions may increase the risk of value conflicts (Kouzakova, et al., 2012) occurring in intercultural situations. This is especially likely when parties are unaware of each other's goals or do not recognize cues indicating increasing frustration about emerging differences. Therefore, understanding cultural differences and their impact on the way people manage conflicts is a topic of central importance in social psychological research.

In this dissertation however, I addressed differences in the way people weave together a set of shared values, norms, and beliefs into so-called cultural logics. These logics revolve around a central theme, each defined in terms of an ideal, which pertains to the way the worth of an individual is defined within that cultural context and how he/she should ideally behave (Leung & Cohen, 2011). The ideals of specific interest to this dissertation were *honor* and *dignity*. Honor reflects the value of an individual in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of others (Pitt-Rivers, 1965). Hence, honor can be lost due to negative social evaluations, such as offenses and confrontations. Dignity reflects the notion that each person possesses a value, intrinsic to him at birth, and at least equal to others (Ayers, 1984).

The cultural ideals of honor and dignity have received considerable attention in studies of conflict situations and conflict escalation, particularly with respect to antagonistic reactions after insults (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Cohen, et al., 1996; Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2008; Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2002b; Van Osch, et al., 2013). In general, it has been found that insults instigate more anger, higher levels of cortisol and testosterone, and more dominant and aggressive behavior in honor culture members compared to

dignity culture members. However, hardly any empirical research has addressed the question of *why* they respond in such a way (see also Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2008). As such, few researchers have investigated the implications of adherence to honor in relation to underlying psychological mechanisms such as judgment formation, threat management, or self-regulation and their impact on insult-elicited aggression. The studies in this dissertation contribute to existing knowledge by explicitly addressing these underlying psychological mechanisms, thus offering insight into what exactly leads to the destructive reactions of honor culture members to conflicts in general and insults in particular. Not only does this increase our understanding of the effects of honor values on conflict processes, it also enables us to discover ways in which the negative ramifications of insults can be prevented or diminished for those concerned with honor.

In this final chapter, I will discuss the findings of my own research in this area in this broader context. In a nutshell, the chapter covers honor-related differences in the perception and appraisal of insults, their impact on conflict management, as well as ways to diminish their negative impact. I will start by summarizing the most important findings of the empirical chapters of this dissertation before reflecting on overarching implications. I will also specify the limitations of this work and elaborate on recommendations that can be made on the basis of my findings.

Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, I examined how people perceive and evaluate insulting behavior, as this has been shown to be an important cause of conflict escalation when honor is at stake. Following previous conceptualizations of insults (Bond & Venus, 1991; Van Oudenhoven, et al., 2008) and research on interpersonal and group impression formation (De Bruin & Van Lange, 1999; Leach, et al., 2007; Wojciszke, 2005), I assessed to what extent insults damage people's sense of morality or competence and how this is influenced by honor.

Results of Study 2.1 revealed that individuals from an honor culture consider insulting behavior to be a stronger indication of immorality than incompetence of the transgressor compared to individuals from a dignity culture. In fact, both groups of participants were equally upset, but those high in honor reported to be more offended by the insulting behavior. Interestingly, the relationship between culture and the heightened moralization of the insulting behavior was mediated by the extent to which those high in honor were offended by the behavior. Apparently, insults are moralized more by those high in honor because they are considered more offensive. In Study 2.2, I took a different perspective, and asked participants to indicate how they would evaluate themselves after being insulted. Participants rated insults collected in Study 2.1 on the extent to which each insult would harm their own sense of morality or competence. Results of Study 2.1 were replicated, as participants who were more concerned with honor tended to moralize the insults to a larger extent. Again, the degree to which high-honor participants reported to be offended by the insults mediated this effect.

These findings are the first to connect honor to moral concerns. Morality is an important aspect of honor, as it is particularly important for honor culture members to be perceived as moral by others (Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2002b; Uskul, et al., 2012). However, it has not specifically been considered in previous attempts to understand why people high in honor respond differently to insults. In fact, it has been implied that fierce responses to insults are primarily driven by concerns about one's perceived competence. Specifically, it has been argued that honor culture members respond more fiercely to insults because they do not want to appear weak or an easy prey (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). The current findings challenge this previous perspective on honor because they show that insults threaten honor culture member's perceived morality more than their perceived competence. These findings also demonstrate that insults affect people's moral identity because they are considered more offensive.

These findings elucidate why members from an honor culture respond more aggressively to insults; insults might require a direct reprimand for those high in honor because insults more strongly violate core moral norms. Aggression may be needed to rectify such violations and to maintain group integrity. This resonates with an explanation that Cohen and colleagues offered for their results. They stated that the more aggressive reaction to insults displayed by those from the Southern, rather than Northern States in the U.S.A. could perhaps be explained by the former being "… not accustomed to such rudeness" (Cohen, et al., 1996, p. 957). When collecting the data for this thesis, I have regularly experienced this myself when insulted honor culture participants stepped out of their cubicle during the course of the experiment to complain about their rude counterpart. Apparently, the generic moral imperative of being treated with respect by others is even more essential for those high in honor.

Chapter 3

Results of Chapter 2 demonstrated that those high in honor perceive insults differently. Insults are moralized more by those high in honor. In Chapter 3 of my dissertation, I investigated how this difference influences appraisals of insults in a competitive situation. I addressed this question by including physiological indicators that would allow me to examine responses that might not be revealed in traditional self-report measures. Specifically, I investigated how insults affect reactivity in measures of heart-rate, blood pressure, and vascular impedance. According to the Biopsychosocial model of arousal regulation (Blascovich, 2000; Blascovich & Tomaka, 1996), reactivity in these cardiovascular indicators distinguishes between stress regulation associated with the psychological states of (negative) threat versus (positive) challenge. Using an experimental manipulation to activate honor or dignity concerns, I examined the general prediction that insults instigate threat when honor is made salient.

Results confirmed that when honor was activated, participants showed more cardiovascular reactivity associated with threat after receiving insulting feedback on their performance, while cardiovascular responses indicated challenge in response to neutral feedback. This response pattern characterized the activation of honor concerns, as it was reversed among participants whose dignity concerns had been experimentally activated. Behavioral displays of aggression (the extent to which participants administered white noise blasts to their supposed opponent) resonated with these physiological indicators. Interestingly, the results of this chapter also showed that – when honor concerns had been activated - participants who had been insulted (and who had exhibited the most aggression) reported being least angry by the end of the procedure. This suggests that the behavioral expression of resentment, through the administration of white noise to their opponent, helped participants to regulate their emotions after being insulted, as participants in this condition indicated being least angry after completion of the white noise task.

The notion that the behavioral expression of anger may facilitate the resolution of resentment has also been reported previously by Cohen and colleagues (Cohen, et al., 1999). In their study, honor culture participants who had acted out after being insulted were most likely to forgive their insulter compared to those who had not. The self-reported levels of anger we observed after the competitive task are in line with these earlier observations. More relevant to the central question in this thesis, Study 3 demonstrates that when the ideal of honor – rather than dignity - is made salient, insults are more likely to instigate a physiological state of threat as well as a forceful behavioral response.

Chapter 4

Results of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 demonstrated that insults are not only perceived as having more moral implications by those concerned with honor, they also instigate a sense of threat among them. The purpose of Chapter 4 was to investigate how these differences in insult perception and insult appraisal

affect the process of conflict development and conflict escalation when honor is at stake. More specifically, I set out to investigate why those concerned with honor are more obliging prior to an overt confrontation, but become more forceful once they have been offended, compared to those less concerned with honor (Beersma, et al., 2003; Cohen, et al., 1996; Cohen, et al., 1999; Harinck, et al., 2013). I argued that when honor norms are activated, people will not only be concerned with managing an emerging conflict, they will also be concerned with preventing threats to their honor. To investigate this notion, I turned to Regulatory Focus Theory (Higgins, 1997), that distinguishes between ideal goals and ought goals. When pursuing ideal goals, people employ a promotion focus, show eagerness, and are willing to take risks to achieve desired gains. When pursuing ought goals, people employ a prevention focus, are vigilant, and operate cautiously in order to avoid undesired losses. As the maintenance of one's reputation and the prevention of loss of honor is an important aspect of honor endorsement, I expected honor concerns to be associated with higher levels of prevention focus. In three studies, I investigated the link between honor and prevention focus as well as their impact on behavior during different stages of conflict.

Results of a first correlational Study (4.1) among a community sample showed that chronic prevention focus was higher among honor-culture members, compared to dignity-culture members, while promotion focus was equally high in both samples. These findings confirmed the notion that honor is associated with a pre-occupation with prevention goals rather than promotion goals.

In Study 4.2, I investigated how higher levels of prevention focus, associated with honor endorsement, affect behavior in a situation that has the potential to escalate but has not escalated yet. Results of this study revealed that the experimental activation of honor concerns resulted in more prevention strategies, more cooperative conflict intentions, and less dominant conflict intentions. Interestingly, the preference for more cooperative conflict intentions

in the high-honor group was mediated by the increased endorsement of prevention strategies. Additionally, participants indicated more agitation — an emotion that is seen as characterizing a prevention focus — when honor concerns had been activated, while no differences were found for discontent — a typical promotion focus emotion (Higgins, 1996).

In Study 4.3, I used the same experimental manipulation to assess the impact of honor activation on regulatory focus and aggression in an offensive setting, i.e. a setting in which a conflict had escalated. Results of this study supported the reasoning that insulting interactions are particularly likely to elicit more aggressive responses when honor concerns are involved. Importantly, when honor was deactivated, no reliable differences were found in aggression displays after being insulted compared to the situation where participants had received negative feedback. These findings demonstrate that derogatory or offensive feedback is particularly likely to instigate aggression among those high in honor, compared to an interaction where negative feedback is presented in an inoffensive way. Furthermore, parallel results were observed for measures of regulatory focus, indicating that aggression was associated with higher level of prevention focus when honor was activated.

Together, the results of these studies corroborate the notion that prevention concerns constitute a relevant factor in the psychology of honor. Activating honor concerns enhances the motivation to avoid undesired outcomes associated with conflict escalation. In a potentially conflictual interaction, individuals concerned with honor may not only jeopardize desired outcomes, but also run the risk of losing their honor. The increased vigilance results in a more deescalating approach at the initial stages of a possible confrontation. The purpose of this approach is to avoid that the conflict becomes overt. Importantly, however, these same concerns easily trigger aggressive responses once the interaction becomes offensive. As a pre-occupation with honor concerns implies that loss of honor is to be avoided at all cost, vigilance can quickly turn into tension and agitation when confronted with

an insulting comment, resulting in an outburst to reprimand the offender. The findings of these three studies are in line with the notion that honor is a scarce and costly commodity, which is hard to gain and easy to lose (Uskul, et al., 2012). In the face of a confrontation, people stand to lose their honor if insulted. The results also provide initial evidence for our reasoning regarding the link between honor, prevention focus, and conflict behavior. Patterns of early conflict avoidance and sudden conflict escalation are driven by the same underlying psychological mechanism, namely the prevention of loss of honor.

Chapter 5

The previous chapters of this dissertation focused on underlying psychological reasons why people concerned with honor respond more forcefully after being insulted. In Chapter 5, I addressed the question of how such responses can be diminished or prevented. Honor has been defined as the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of others (Leung & Cohen, 2011; Peristiany, 1965; Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2008). However, the specific implications of defining one's worth based on other people's evaluations has rarely been considered in understanding or preventing insult-elicited aggression. I argued that reliance on socially-defined self-worth makes people more sensitive to the negative consequences of derogatory social evaluations, such as insults.

Results of the first correlational study (5.1) showed that the more people relied on social evaluations to define their self-worth, the more they tended to self-devaluate and experience negative affect when they were insulted. Additionally, participants with socially-defined self-worth and a high level of self-esteem preferred a more confrontational response type, while those with socially-defined worth and low self-esteem preferred a more avoidant response type.

In Study 5.2, I extended these findings to a more realistic setting by investigating how honor culture participants actually respond to offensive feedback on their performance. I assessed the role of social worth by

introducing an affirmation that buffers the social worth of individuals rather than their personal worth. Results of this study indeed showed that the social affirmation was effective in reducing initial levels of aggression honor culture participants displayed towards their supposed insulter compared to no affirmation at all. The level of aggression after the traditional self-affirmation did not differ from the control group. Interestingly, the social affirmation proved to be even more effective among those honor culture members who defined their self-worth more socially, which further corroborates the hypothesized link between socially-defined worth and insult-elicited aggression. Additional analyses once more showed that participants with more socially-defined self-worth aggressed more when they had high self-esteem than when they had low self-esteem. On the other hand, for participants with internally defined self-worth, high self-esteem evoked less aggression than low self-esteem.

In sum, these two studies together highlight an important reason why those high in honor respond more vigorously to insults. They do so because an essential part of their self-worth is based on the way they are valued by others. Socially-defined self-worth makes people more vulnerable to the negative cognitive and affective consequences of destructive social evaluations, such as insults. The results also show that insult-elicited aggression among those high in honor is not inevitable. It can be prevented by making a person less vulnerable to the negative impact of the insult to one's honor, for example by affirming one's social worth. This method of affirming one's social worth instead of affirming one's personal worth proved an effective way in postponing the moment at which honor culture members felt the need to respond aggressively after being insulted.

Furthermore, these studies identify level of self-esteem as an important predictor of more vigorous responses to insults. More specifically, results of the two studies combined suggest that self-esteem moderates the relation between source of self-worth and insult-elicited aggression. When self-worth is defined

internally, high self-esteem can help prevent aggression, possibly because it operates as a buffer against the negative consequences of insults. However, when self-worth is defined socially, high self-esteem might even fuel the need to respond more vigorously to insults.

Theoretical implications

The research and findings discussed in this dissertation contribute to theory in different ways, which I will discuss more elaborately below. In general, they extend the recently developed framework of cultural logics that bind norms, values, and customs around central themes such as honor and dignity (Leung & Cohen, 2011). Thereby, these findings contribute to existing knowledge about a class of cultures prevalent in the Middle-East and the Mediterranean, the culture of honor. These cultures are systematically overlooked in traditional cross-cultural research, which mainly focusses on prototypically individualistic or prototypically collectivistic cultures such as the USA and China respectively. To the extent that prior research has addressed honor concerns, this work has primarily revealed what people from honor cultures find insulting (Cross, et al., 2013; Uskul, et al., 2012) and how they respond to confrontational situations (Cohen, et al., 1996; Cohen, et al., 1999; Hayes & Lee, 2005; Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2000). Only a very limited number of studies have addressed the psychological mechanisms that might explain *why* these patterns occur (Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2008; Van Osch, et al., 2013).

Psychological impact of insults

The current dissertation extends this knowledge by offering insights into the reasons why those concerned with honor respond differently to offenses. In general, findings indicate that offenses have a more severe psychological impact when honor is a major concern. Several findings confirm these notions. First, those concerned with honor judged other's insulting behavior to be more offensive and therefore moralized insults to a greater extent, compared to those low in honor. Additionally, insults instigated more threat on a physiological

level when honor concerns were activated, but not when dignity concerns were activated. Moreover, in the face of a —possibly— confrontational situation, activation of honor concerns was associated with prevention focus, indicating the motivation to avoid potentially undesired outcomes. Finally, results showed that among those who base their self-worth on social evaluations, as is the case with honor, insults have a more negative impact on cognitive and emotional self-concerns. These findings together highlight that insults evoke more negative appraisals among those concerned with honor, due the fact that their self-worth is based on other's approval.

Insult and the process of conflict development

Moreover, our results show that honor instigates prevention focus in the face of a confrontational situation, because people are invested in dealing with the conflict but also want to avoid potential threats to their honor. The current findings offer an exciting new perspective on conflict emergence and conflict management as well as relevant underlying mechanisms. That is, they reveal that the concern with the maintenance and protection of honor has consequences for the initial willingness to engage in a potentially conflictual situation, as well as the way the situation is managed after being offended. Hence, when honor is a major concern, the initial approach to an emerging conflict consists of de-escalatory actions. In different studies, I found that prior to being offended or in the absence of insulting feedback, those high in honor are actually less aggressive and even more obliging than individuals for whom honor concerns are less salient. The more obliging side of honor prior to conflict escalation has been observed in previous research (Beersma, et al., 2003; Cohen, et al., 1996). However, it has only recently received attention (Harinck, et al., 2013; Leung & Cohen, 2011), because most of the previous research has focused on reactions after being insulted.

The pattern of obliging behavior in the initial stages of conflict development was particularly evident in the study reported in chapter three, which focused on the process of conflict development and conflict escalation.

The findings reported here, which link obliging responses to prevention focus, clearly highlight the notion that those high in honor are more sensitive to the negative psychological ramifications of offensive behavior and operate in ways to avoid these outcomes. Apparently, the purpose of this approach is to prevent the conflict from becoming overt and escalating to a point where both parties have no option but to engage in destructive measures to defend their honor. However, initial obliging behavior might be misinterpreted by those who are unaware of its true purpose, because it does not explicitly communicate that a person is actually in a vigilant state of mind. Therefore, once the confrontation evokes a sudden forceful response, it seems like this response is radical and inexplicable. In this regard, the current findings are important, because they not only demonstrate behavior that is observable at the surface, but also reveal the underlying mechanism involved in the process prior to conflict escalation.

The reactions following insulting behavior observed throughout this dissertation were in line with previously reported findings. That is, in line with standard accounts (Beersma, et al., 2003; Cohen, et al., 1996; Cohen, et al., 1999; Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2002b; Van Osch, et al., 2013), I observed that those high in honor tend to exhibit higher levels of aggression after being insulted. These reactions pertained to honor endorsement resulting from intercultural differences, interpersonal differences, as well as after an experimental manipulation of honor. Interestingly, we found that aggressive responses are also associated with higher levels of prevention focus. The link between prevention focus and aggression qualifies the aggression, showing that this response is not offensive but defensive in nature. After being insulted, the prevention goal of not losing honor is thwarted and requires action to restore this loss.

As preventions goals are considered necessities, they can have severe psychological consequences when they are not met, resulting in agitation and anxiety (Higgins, 1996, 1997; Sassenberg, et al., 2007). Recent research has shown that people will go to great lengths to accomplish their prevention goals

and they are even prepared to use aggression if required to do so (Sassenberg & Hansen, 2007; Scholer, et al., 2010; Zaal, et al., 2011). Such is also the case with honor. Once it has been threatened, it requires and justifies aggressive responses to restore it, since maintaining one's honor is truly a necessity. In this light, I also found that after exhibiting aggression, those concerned with honor were better able to let go of their agitation. Thus people can let go of their agitation once they have defended their honor by aggression, restoring their prevention goals. Again, these findings reveal that aggressive responses serve a prevention goal, as agitation is considered an emotion specific to failing to reach prevention goals. Together, these findings allow for a better understanding of why insults evoke more aggression among those concerned with honor and which purpose this behavior serves.

Preventing insult-elicited aggression

Despite the growing body of literature connecting honor to aggression, little is known about how this aggression can be prevented. The findings discussed in this dissertation offer important insights in this respect. As I demonstrated in different chapters, avoiding confrontations and threats to their honor is an effective way of insuring cooperative responses among those concerned with honor. Nevertheless, in conflict situations it might be particularly hard to avoid confrontations, even if they are not intended as such. Therefore, in Chapter 5, I set out to investigate which factor makes people with high concerns for honor more sensitive to the negative ramifications of offensive behavior. Results of this line of research identified socially-defined self-worth as an important factor in this respect. Results demonstrated that the more people rely on social evaluations as a source of self-worth, the more they suffer from cognitive self-devaluation and negative affect after being insulted. These findings are particularly relevant to honor, since honor is for a considerable part based on socially-defined worth — i.e. the value of a person in the eyes of others. Additionally, these findings also implicate that buffering socially-conferred worth might be an effective way in limiting or postponing the

need to respond aggressively to confrontations. Indeed, by affirming their social worth prior to an offensive interaction, I was able to postpone honor-culture participants' need to become aggressive after they were insulted. A traditional self-affirmation induction did not have the same beneficial effect compared to a control group with no affirmation at all. This outcome highlights the relative importance of socially-defined worth in understanding insult-elicited aggression among those high in honor (see also Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2008). Moreover, it offers insights on what might be the focus of possible intervention aimed at preventing conflict escalation. These findings demonstrate, to my knowledge for the first time, that insult-elicited aggression is not only insurmountable for those concerned with honor, but also how it can be prevented.

Practical implications

Conflict management

The findings discussed in this dissertation also have important practical implications for cross-cultural communication and conflict management. One highly relevant discovery is that those concerned with honor use different strategies to deal with conflicts than those concerned with dignity. Although previous research on honor values has highlighted aggressive reactions displayed by those with high honor values in response to conflict situations, current findings show that people endorsing honor norms will more likely *avoid* situations that potentially threaten their honor. When possible, they will therefore try to refrain from overt conflict engagement so as to avoid confrontations that may end up in a clash over one's honor. People endorsing dignity norms are less concerned with threats to their self-worth resulting from confrontational encounters with others. Therefore, they are more likely to engage in a direct conflict management strategy, such as competing, pursuing own goals, and engaging in problem solving (for a review, see Holt & DeVore, 2005). This proactive style of conflict management might be ineffective or even counterproductive when dealing with people from honor cultures. Particularly

confrontational or overt conflict behavior may evoke the need to protect or restore one's honor by means of destructive reactions. Accordingly, an approach that takes into account honor culture members' specific relational needs, in terms of respect and honor, and reciprocates cooperative intentions may be more effective.

Furthermore, findings of the studies in this dissertation also show that even when they use the same conflict strategies as non-honor culture members, honor culture members might signal something else by it. For example, our findings pertaining to the initial de-escalation of an emerging conflict showed that early concession making does not mean that people are not concerned about their own interests and goals. In fact, results showed that activating honor made people more aware that they had something to lose, resulting in the willingness to be more cooperative and avoid conflict escalation. On the other hand, insult-elicited aggression is not competitive in nature, as it does not aim to further conflict goals or personal interests. Rather, it is defensive in nature as aggression is driven by the same underlying regulatory focus and it serves to prevent loss of honor. In order to know how to effectively manage conflicts involving honor culture members, it is important to understand what motivates their behavior in a given context. The observed behavior alone might not be an accurate indication of what is actually going on.

Interventions

Additionally, the current findings suggest that when honor is salient, different conflict stages require different interventions to ease the process of conflict resolution. Honor-related concerns result in appeasing behavior and avoidance of competition in the initial stages of an encounter. If not responded to in the right way, for example by reciprocating a favor or giving space, these honor-related concerns may be thwarted resulting in even more frustration. However, avoiding the conflict at hand altogether may be detrimental in the long run, because nothing is actually resolved. In order to promote active conflict engagement, without risking destructive reactions to confrontations,

affirmation tactics might be effective in buffering self-related concerns associated with honor. The goal of such an intervention would be to make people less sensitive to the negative consequences of confrontations that they may consider offensive. As a result, they are able to endure longer before reaching the point at which they feel they should retaliate. The findings of Chapter 5 provide initial evidence for this notion and show that a social affirmation is effective in postponing the need to become aggressive in response to offensive feedback. Additionally, results of this chapter showed that traditional self-affirmation procedures, which rely on boosting self-esteem, might not be an effective way of reducing aggression after an insult among participants high in honor might not be. Apparently, socially-defined self-worth might fuel the need to respond more aggressively when it is accompanied by a high level of self-esteem.

However, different interventions need to be considered once a conflict escalates past the breaking point. This stage of conflict is characterized by the need to restore one's damaged honor, often by means of retaliatory aggression towards the transgressor. At this point, interventions that aim to prevent one's honor from being damaged are no longer effective. Other interventions should be considered to help restore the damaged honor. A method that might be effective at this point is an apology. An apology is a message that conveys an admission of guilt and regret by the transgressor and it may also involve the desire to restore the sustained damage to continue the relationship (Tomlinson, Dineen, & Lewicki, 2004). Apologies have been shown to restore the moral character of the perpetrator (Gold & Weiner, 2000) and restore the social identity (Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989) of the person perpetrated against. Therefore, apologies are likely to be effective in diminishing the need to retaliate a transgression, providing that the apology is sincere (Ohbuchi, et al., 1989; Tomlinson, et al., 2004; Zechmeister, Garcia, Romero, & Vas, 2004). Based on findings discussed in the current dissertation, showing that moral concerns and social worth are two central aspects of honor, an apology might be

particularly promising in reducing insult-elicited aggression among those concerned with honor. The effectiveness of apologies in reducing insulting elicited aggression specifically should also be investigated empirically in future research.

Strengths, limitations and future directions

In four empirical chapters, I discussed different lines of research investigating the underlying psychological mechanisms explaining why people concerned with honor respond differently when offended and what can be done to prevent this response. Each chapter is followed by an extensive discussion of possible strengths and limitations specific to that chapter. For the purpose of the current reflection, I will focus on a number of issues that address overlapping strengths and limitations.

One strength of this research is that I employed a multi-method approach to address the research questions. For example, I used correlational studies to link differences in —intercultural and interpersonal— honor endorsement to self-reported emotions and cognitions following insults. However, correlations do not allow for causal inference about the impact of insults on the observed patterns. Therefore, I reassessed the same research questions in experiments, using hypothetical situations in which people had to imagine being insulted or not and indicate their emotions and intentions. Still, self-report measures only reflect intentions, which may not always be in line with actual behavior, particularly in heated situations like conflicts. Hence, in other studies I used controlled offenses to insult participants who were unaware of the true purpose of the study and assessed cardiovascular patterns and behavioral indicators of aggression. This approach adds to the validity of the findings across different samples and in different contexts.

Of considerable interest in this respect is that, besides considering honor as a cultural phenomenon, I developed an experimental manipulation to activate or deactivate honor in a mono-cultural sample of participants. This is a novel approach that allows for the examination of honor as a situational factor and

permits causal inferences directly related to honor endorsement. Additionally, it isolates the impact of honor from other social confounds, such as financial and societal status, belonging to an ethnic minority group and language barriers. This attempt to causally link findings directly to honor endorsement has been lacking in previous research, where honor endorsement is sometimes assumed and generalized based on ethnic background.

One limitation of the current research is that when using multi-cultural samples, the dignity group was usually very homogenous — consisting of Dutch participants — , while the honor group was fairly heterogeneous — mainly consisting of Turkish and Moroccans, but sometimes also other ethnicities. This method was sometimes necessary as the number of Turkish and Moroccans participants alone was not enough to ensure satisfactory honor-culture-sample sizes, but may have introduced additional error in our honor culture sample. Additionally, although all honor culture participants included in the analyses were from an honor culture background, most of them had grown up in the Dutch society. As a result, their cultural values had integrated at least to some extent with Dutch culture, making honor-related characteristics less noticeable in this sample. A such, it is recommended that the findings discussed in this dissertation should be replicated in future research among more homogeneous groups of honor culture members.

At this point, I note that the field of social psychology has gone through rapid changes during the past years, in particular regarding research practices and methods. An important development relates to the desire to avoid false positives, which has resulted in changing practices with respect to interpretation of significance levels around $p = .05$. Another important change is that more importance is now placed on a priori power analyses for the purpose of participant sampling. However, most of the studies described in this dissertation were conducted, written up and submitted for publication before these changes came about. Moreover, my research involves cultural groups that are not easily accessible - especially within academic environments - and complicated data

collection techniques. Both these features make it difficult to obtain sample sizes that would be ideal from a statistical point of view. Nevertheless, especially because it is relatively difficult to gain access to this target group for research purposes, there is added value in considering the potential implications of observations made, even if these were obtained with relatively small participant samples and were sometimes only marginally significant. This is why I have discussed these findings and their possible implications within the context of this dissertation. Of course, caution should be practiced in generalizing conclusions from these findings, and the robustness of the patterns observed here should still be established in future research using larger sample sizes to ensure sufficient statistical power.

The current research offers interesting new perspectives on why insults have such destructive effects on conflict management when honor is at stake and how these effects might be diminished. Nevertheless, future research could more thoroughly consider methods that may help prevent or resolve honor related conflicts. Chapter five of this dissertation, that examines the effect of a social affirmation on insult-elicited aggression, is a first step in this direction. However, it is yet unclear whether the additional effect of a social affirmation is only specific to honor cultures, or that it pertains to affirmations in general, also in dignity cultures. Although theory suggests that it is not, because self-worth is defined more internally in such contexts, it is important to assess this point empirically. Additionally, the current intervention pertains to insults administered through chat messages and aggression in the context of a laboratory setting. Though promising, this knowledge has yet to be transformed into specific interventions that are applicable in real-life conflicts. Applied research in the field of conflict management should be considered to take the interventions beyond the laboratory setting and assess the effectiveness of different interventions in real-life settings.

Additionally, the current findings do not yet provide information about ways to reduce anger and aggression once conflicts have escalated past the

breaking point, where a party feels that honor has been lost and needs to be restored. The current findings together with research on apologies do suggest that apologies may be particularly effective in this respect, Unfortunately, knowledge about the effect of apologies in different cultures is scarce (Merolla, Zhang, & Sun, 2013; Shariati & Chamani, 2010). Therefore, more research is required to formulate recommendation for this specific stage of conflict resolution in respect to honor-related concerns.

Finally, future research should also consider the positive side of honor endorsement. As stated before in Chapter 5, almost the entire body of literature examining honor has focused on aggression or retaliation. This paints a rather one-sided picture of the characteristics and function of honor. However, anthropological findings highlight the notion that in general, honor culture members are gracious, friendly, and hospitable (Gilmore, 1987; Peristiany, 1965). They are proud, have high concerns for personal integrity, and go to great lengths to pay back dues. However, these and other positive observation associated with honor have never been seriously investigated in social psychological research. Only recently, some researchers have started doing research in this area. For example, Harinck and colleague's also showed that in the absence of offensive encounters honor culture members actually prefer more cooperative conflict management styles than dignity culture members (Harinck, et al., 2013). Additionally, Leung and Cohen demonstrated that honor culture members will show more effort to payback a favor and cheat less (Leung & Cohen, 2011). In order to have a clear and full understanding of the function of honor and its influence on social psychological processes and behavior, the positive side of honor has to be considered as well.

Conclusion

The discoveries made in the context of this dissertation paint a more balanced picture of the role of honor in conflict management and inform us on possible avenues of effective conflict intervention. I demonstrated that the moral imperative of treating others with respect is a core concern in honor cultures and

insults are considered more of a moral violation of this norm among those high in honor. As honor is the worth of an individual predominantly based on their value in the eyes of other, insults are more likely to threaten self-worth than when people endorse dignity. Therefore, in the face of potential conflicts, preventing loss of honor becomes a major concern. This concern initially results in more appeasing and less dominating conflict management styles to prevent conflict escalation. Nevertheless, if confrontations or offensive behavior persist, the same concern may evoke more aggressive reactions. One way to avert this reaction is by affirming the social worth of those concerned with honor, in order to postpone the point at which people feel the need to defend their honor by means of aggression. Such interventions may help advance the process of intercultural negotiation and conflict resolution before they escalate.