"Meanings of Violence"

Cohen and Vandello
What will article be about?

• Empirically:
  – a "culture of violence" in the American South

"In the South, insults have very serious meanings, and they must occasionally be answered with violence. This has been true historically, and as we will try to show, it is still true today" (67.8).
What will article be about?

• Theoretically:
  – Relationship between ideas about honor and violence
  – as a way to understand
  – violent cultures.
Main Points

• Southern meaning of insult different

• Behavioral rituals accommodate this meaning

• Structures and systems perpetuate meanings
Region → Patterns of Violence

Meaning of Insult → Behaviors
Survey Says...

- Is Violence OK
- Punch a drunk who insults your wife?
- Shoot man who assaulted your daughter?

Percent Saying Yes

North

South

Division of Social Sciences
“Historical” Psychology Story

• Early settlers of South from “Celtic fringe”*  
  • Primary livelihood from open-range herding  
    – Constant need for vigilance  
       Culture of honor/violence  
       Elevation of family/kin ties  
       Rejection of external control

Doesn’t that sound like something I said?

Means of livelihood  →  Style of Thinking?

* McWhiney, Grady. 1989. Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South
Hobbesian Story

- At frontier, can’t depend on law/government
- Depend on Self defense
The Shoe
“Culture of Honor”

• Insult reduces one’s social standing
• Violence can restore social standing
But Why Does It Persist?
Experimental Evidence

1. Northerners: Amused, Anger
   - 1. Insulted Southerners more likely to write narrative with violence
   - 3. Insulted Southerners more aggressive in subsequent interactions
   - 4. Different physiological reactions to insult
   - 5. Insulted Southerners assumed witnesses think less of them.
Violence and Politeness

Meaning → Threat of Violence → Violence Avoidance (Politeness)

Anger → Politeness → Hidden Hostility → Bad Info
- Actual feelings
- Tolerance levels
- Intentions
Violence and Politeness

Threat of Violence

Politeness

+ + +
Conflict Resolution

• Insulted
• Blow up
• Apology
• Forgive
Institutions

Culture of Honor ——— Individual Mindset

“Collective Representations”

“Stand your ground” laws
Job App Study (“we understand”)
Gun Control/ Rights
Military “Hawkism”
Media Spin Study
Social Organization

Conventional Theory: Social Disorder → Violence

NORTH
- Community/Family Stability
- Level of Conflict

SOUTH
+ Community/Family Stability
+ Level of Conflict
Fleck

- Not that Southerners endorse violence
- Participation in thought community changes what is “violence”
What Would You Add to Diagram?

- Region
- Patterns of Violence
- Meaning of Insult
- Behaviors