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Title: The Role of Culture in Appraisals, Emotions, and Helplessness in Response to Threats

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Abstract

In honour cultures, such as Turkey, reputation management is emphasized, whereas in dignity cultures such as northern US, self-respect and personal achievements are central. Turkey is also a collectivistic culture, where relationship harmony is as important as reputation management. When Turkish people's reputation is threatened, they may experience an internal conflict between these two motives and display helplessness. The purpose of the present study was to examine how people from Turkey (an honour culture; $n = 52$) and northern US (a dignity culture; $n = 48$) would perceive and respond to reputation threats as opposed to self-respect threats. As predicted, Turkish participants anticipated stronger anger, shame, and helplessness in response to reputation threats than self-respect threats, whereas differences were smaller or non-existent in northern US. Moreover, shame was a mediator between appraisal and helplessness for reputation threats in Turkey (shame positively predicted helplessness); anger was a mediator between appraisal and helplessness for self-respect threats in northern US (anger negatively predicted helplessness). These results are novel in their inclusion of helplessness and appraisal theory of emotions when examining responses to threats in honour and dignity cultures.

Key words: honour culture; reputation; threat; anger; shame; helplessness

The Role of Culture in Appraisals, Emotions, and Helplessness in Response to Threats

How would you feel if someone insulted you in front of others? What if someone harshly criticized you about something very personal? Your reactions to these incidents may be influenced by your cultural background. In this research, we compared individuals from an honour culture (Turkey) and from a dignity culture (northern US) in their responses to threats to their reputation and self-respect.

Honour and Dignity Cultures

The term *honour* has different definitions and implications across cultures. Some cultures describe it as virtue and as having self-worth in one's own eyes (self-respect), whereas in other cultures, it additionally means being valued and respected by others (social respect, reputation; Pitt-Rivers, 1966). In honour cultures (Southern US states, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and Latin American countries), the social respect component of honour is more central than the self-respect component (e.g., Rodriguez-Mosquera, Manstead, & Fisher, 2002). In these cultures, honour can be easily lost, especially through public insults, and it is difficult to regain once lost. Therefore, members of honour cultures experience strong anger and shame when faced with threats to their reputation; they may retaliate against the threat source as a means of restoring their reputation (e.g., Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996).

In dignity cultures (Northern US states, Western Europe), however, self-worth primarily depends on the individual and, theoretically, is less likely to be damaged by reputation threats (Leung & Cohen, 2011). This does not mean, however, that members of dignity cultures are immune to these threats. Being insulted in front of one's colleagues, for example, would probably be perceived as a strong threat and generate anger, regardless of the person's cultural

background. What is different in dignity cultures is that they strongly emphasize positive self-esteem and personal achievements (e.g., Cohen, Hernandez, Gruschow, Nowak, Gelfand, & Bowkowski, in press). In these cultures, lack of achievement and failure are the most common examples of threatening and shameful situations (Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2000; Uskul, Cross, Sunbay, Gercek-Swing, & Ataca, 2012). Therefore, people in dignity cultures may be as sensitive to threats to their self-respect (e.g., being harshly criticized) as they are to reputation threats.

Appraisal Theory

Knowing how people perceive an interpersonal threat and what they feel in response to it allows researchers to understand and predict behaviour in similar situations. In this work, therefore, we investigated the antecedents of behavioural responses to interpersonal threats, specifically people's appraisal of such situations (rude and humiliating) and how these appraisals influence their emotional responses (anger and shame).

Appraisal theory suggests that the way individuals interpret situations determines which emotions they will experience (e.g., Ellsworth & Smith, 1988). Members of honour cultures, for example, may perceive public insults as highly humiliating and rude, and as a result, experience strong anger. In turn, these emotions motivate individuals to act in specific ways. States of action readiness are defined as readiness to engage with the environment, to approach the object of the situation (e.g., retaliate), or to move away from it (e.g., withdraw; Frijda, Kuipers, & Terschure, 1989). Anger, for example, can lead to aggressive actions in both honour and dignity cultures (e.g., Rodriguez Mosquera, Fischer, Manstead, & Zaalberg, 2008). Shame, accompanied by the appraisal of condemnation and fear of rejection, can lead to withdrawal in dignity cultures (e.g., Gausel, Vignoles, & Leach, 2016) but not in honour cultures (Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2008).

An action tendency that has not been included in research on honour, but that is especially relevant to collectivistic honour cultures is helplessness. Helplessness arises when the person cannot take any action but has a desire for change (Frijda et al., 1989). Collectivistic cultures emphasize preserving relationship harmony, achieving group goals, and secondary control (i.e., adjusting oneself to the environment; Morling, Kitayama, Miyamoto, 2002; Triandis, 2001). In a collectivistic honour culture (e.g. Turkey), reputation management is also a central motivation (Cross et al., 2014). In situations where one's reputation is threatened (e.g., by being publically insulted), therefore, individuals from collectivistic honour cultures may experience all these motives, resulting in an internal conflict: Anger and shame may provoke retaliation to restore one's damaged reputation, but retaliation can harm social harmony. Consequently, the individual may feel helpless to change the situation. Dignity cultures, however, have emerged in individualistic societies (e.g., northern US), where personal goals override group goals, and primary control (i.e., influencing others and one's environment) is emphasized (Morling et al., 2002; Triandis, 2001). Therefore, people in dignity cultures may be less likely to experience this conflict or display helplessness after feeling angry or ashamed, as it may be acceptable to take action when it serves personal goals.

The Present Research

This research was designed to contribute to the literature on culture and emotions in three ways. First, most research on cultures of honour and emotional responses to threats has compared an honour threat to a no-threat condition (for an exception, see Rodriguez-Mosquera et al., 2002). This practice does not consider the sensitive situations for members of dignity cultures - threats to their self-respect. Therefore, we included both types of threats (reputation vs. self-respect) to explore their relative importance in two cultural contexts. Second, this is the first

study in cultures of honour research that utilizes appraisal theory by examining the path from appraisals to action readiness through emotions. A few studies that focused on appraisal theory primarily compared each component separately across different cultures (appraisals, emotions, and action readiness) rather than examining the relations among them (Maitner, Mackie, Pauketat, & Smith, 2017; Mesquita, 2001; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2000), or they examined the mediating role of motivations (e.g., motivation to punish the offender) between emotions and behaviours, without including the appraisal of the situation in their model as an antecedent of emotions (Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2008). Finally, this is the first study that examines helplessness as a response to reputation threats.

We predicted that compared to a US sample, Turkish participants would be more likely to perceive threats to their reputation as rude and humiliating than threats to their self-respect (Hypothesis 1). We also expected Turkish participants to be more likely to anticipate anger and shame (Hypothesis 2), as well as helplessness in response to reputation threats relative to self-respect threats (Hypothesis 3). Although reputation concerns may not be as central for people from dignity cultures as they are for people from honour cultures, a public insult may be a severe threat for most people because of its social consequences (e.g., others may respect the person less). In dignity cultures, however, threats to one's self-respect may be perceived as equally severe as reputation threats, due to the strong emphasis on self-esteem and personal achievements. Therefore, we did not expect a difference in northern American participants' perception of and responses to reputation threats relative to self-respect threats. Finally, we explored whether emotional responses mediated the relation between appraisal of threats and helplessness within these two cultures.

Method

Participants

Undergraduates in Turkey (n = 52, 35 women, M_{age} = 18.46, SD = 1.11) and European-American undergraduates in Northern US (n = 48, 32 women, M_{age} = 18.23, SD = 1.82) participated in this study for course credit.

Materials and Procedure

In an online questionnaire, participants were presented with three situations depicting a *reputation threat,* which consisted of public insults or criticisms based on the target's shameful acts (e.g., someone insults you in front of other people) and three situations depicting a *self-respect threat,* which included criticisms on the target's personal achievements or self-worth, without specifying an audience (e.g., someone criticizes everything you have done in your life; see Supporting Information). These situations were selected from a larger pool of honour-threatening situations generated by participants in Uskul et al.'s study (2012). Situation order was randomized. All materials were translated and back-translated by bilingual research assistants.

Manipulation check. In our selection of situations, we tried to make sure that the two types of situations (reputation threat and self-respect threat) differed primarily in their focus on reputation but not in in their importance. This would ensure that the differences we find across cultural groups in people's responses to the two threat types would result from differences in people's emphasis on reputation rather than in the severity or importance of those threats. To inspect if our selection was successful, we asked participants in this study to indicate to what extent they viewed each situation as important (1: *unimportant* to 7: *important*) and to what extent each situation would decrease their reputation (1: *large increase* to 9: *large decrease*).

Appraisals, emotions, and helplessness. Participants then reported to what extent they would view each situation as rude and humiliating (1= *not at all*; 7= *very much*; adapted from Frijda et al., 1989 & Mesquita, 2001). We created an index of *appraisal* by averaging scores on these two items (*r*s > .42, *p*s < .01). Subsequently, participants indicated to what degree they would experience *anger-related emotions* (anger, frustration, resentment) and *shame-related emotions* (shame, embarrassment) if they found themselves in each situation (1= *not at all*; 7 = *strongly*). We used average scores for these emotions in our analyses (*α*s > .76; *r*s > .54, *p*s < .001). In the next section, participants indicated the extent to which each situation would make them helpless (*I would not know what to do; I would feel paralyzed;* 0 = *not at all*, 4 = *totally; r*s > .59, *p*s < .001; adapted from Frijda et al, 1989). Finally, participants reported their age and gender.[1]

Results

Comparison of Threat Situations within Cultures

To test our hypotheses, we conducted repeated-measures ANOVAs within each culture by entering threat type as a within-subjects factor.[2]

Manipulation check. Participants from both cultures perceived reputation threats and self-respect threats as similarly important, F_{Turkey} (1, 51) = .64, F_{US} (1, 45) = .14, *p*s > .43, *d*s < .11, but expected their reputation to decrease significantly more in reputation threat situations than in self-respect threat situations, F_{Turkey} (1, 51) = 32.54, F_{US} (1, 45) = 13.30, *p*s < .01, *d*s > .46 (Table 1). We concluded that our situation examples were successful in manipulating reputation threat without affecting participants' perception of importance.

Appraisals (humiliating and rude). Contrary to expectations, Turkish participants did not differ in the extent to which they perceived reputation threat and self-respect threat situations as rude and humiliating, $F(1, 51) = .05$, $p = .83$, $d = -.01$. As expected, however, this was the case for northern American participants as well, $F(1, 45) = .16$, $p = .69$, $d = .04$ (Hypothesis 1; Table 1).

Anger and shame. As predicted, Turkish participants were more likely to anticipate anger-related emotions in response to reputation threats than self-respect threats, $F(1, 51) = 5.93$, $p < .05$, $d = .27$, whereas for northern Americans, there was no difference between the two, $F(1, 47) = 1.11$, $p = .30$, $d = .09$ (Hypothesis 2). Participants from both cultural groups were more likely to anticipate shame-related emotions for reputation threats than self-respect threats, $F_{Turkey}(1, 51) = 115.50$, $F_{US}(1, 47) = 23.36$, $ps < .001$. As expected, however, the difference was greater in Turkey than in northern US, $d_{Turkey} = 1.48$, $d_{US} = .56$ (Hypothesis 2).

Helplessness. As predicted, Turkish participants were more likely to anticipate helplessness in response to reputation threats than self-respect threats, $F(1, 49) = 9.15$, $p < .01$, $d = .31$, whereas for northern Americans, there was no difference between the two, $F(1, 41) = 1.10$, $p = .30$, $d = .10$ (Hypothesis 3).

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Manipulation Check and Outcome Variables across Cultures and Threat Types*

| | Turkey | | | | Northern US | | | |
| | Reputation Threat | | Self-Respect Threat | | Reputation Threat | | Self-Respect Threat | |
	Mean	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*
Importance	3.40	1.75	3.57	1.62	3.48	1.56	3.55	1.63
Decrease in reputation	6.31	1.03	5.73	0.84	6.11	1.25	5.59	0.97
Appraisal (humiliating and rude)	6.25	0.68	6.26	0.70	6.09	0.95	6.05	1.01
Anger-related emotions	5.35	0.98	5.06	1.16	4.77	1.20	4.88	1.29
Shame-related emotions	4.71	1.39	2.69	1.34	4.47	1.16	3.80	1.24
Helplessness	1.74	1.09	1.42	0.99	1.54	0.95	1.64	1.02

Importance, appraisal, and emotions were measured on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (strongly); reputation decrease was measured on a scale from 1 (large increase) to 9 (large decrease); helplessness was measured on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 4 (very much). SD: Standard deviation.

Path Analyses

Next, we examined whether participants' emotional responses (anger & shame) mediated the relation between appraisal of threats (humiliating & rude) and helplessness. We estimated the direct and indirect effects using bootstrap sampling (5000 resamples; Shrout & Bolger, 2002) on MPlus Version 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017; see Figure 1).

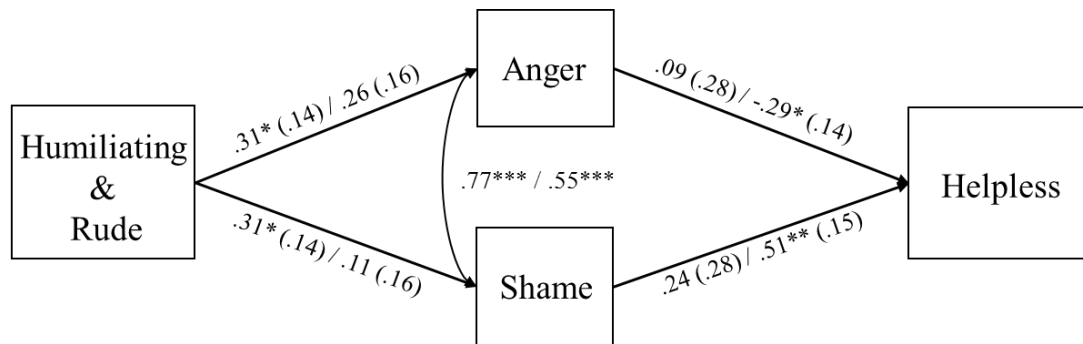**A. Turkey**
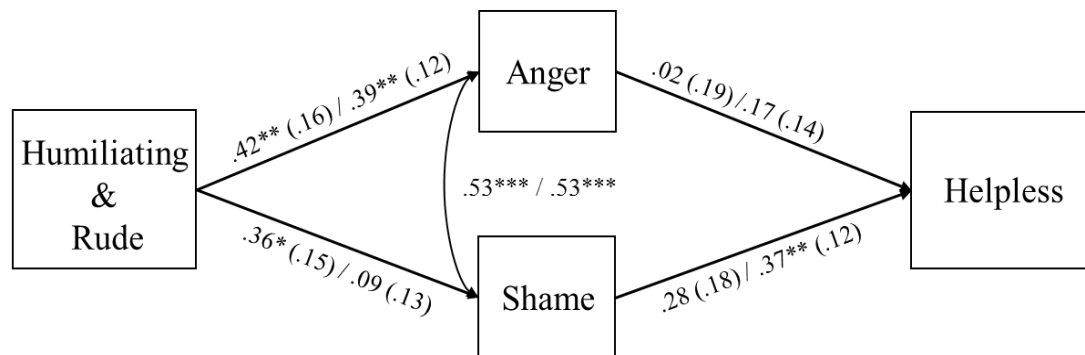
B. Northern US

Figure 1. Path models show standardized estimates (StdXY). Values on the left of the slash sign belong to reputation threat, values on the right belong to self-respect threat situations. Values in parentheses indicate standard errors. Model fit information is provided in the Supporting Information document.

Turkey. Regardless of threat type, the more Turkish participants perceived the threats as humiliating and rude (appraisal), the more they expected to be angry. Moreover, shame was a mediator between appraisal and helplessness for reputation threat situations (Table 2). The more Turkish participants perceived reputation threats as humiliating and rude, the more likely they were to anticipate shame, and in turn, the more likely they were to expect helplessness. For self-respect threats, there was no mediation of emotions but shame positively predicted helplessness.

Northern US. The more northern American participants perceived reputation threats as humiliating and rude, the more they expected to be angry and ashamed. Unlike in Turkey, emotions did not mediate the relation between appraisal and helplessness for reputation threats. For self-respect threats, however, anger was a mediator (Table 2). The more northern American participants perceived self-respect threats as humiliating and rude, the more likely they were to anticipate anger, and in turn, the less likely they were to expect helplessness. Finally, shame positively predicted helplessness in self-respect threats.

Table 2

Bivariate Correlations and Indirect Effects among Appraisals, Emotions, and Helplessness across Cultures and Threat Types

	Turkey			Northern US		
Bivariate Correlations	2	3	4	2	3	4
Reputation Threats						
1. Appraisal	.42**	.36**	.27+	.31*	.31*	-.11
2. Anger-related emotions	1	.60***	.18	1	.75***	.28*
3. Shame-related emotions		1	.29*		1	.30*
4. Helplessness			1			1
Self-Respect Threats						
1. Appraisal	.39**	.09	.18	.26+	.11	-.03
2. Anger-related emotions	1	.52***	.37**	1	.54***	0
3. Shame-related emotions		1	.46**		1	.36*
4. Helplessness			1			1
Specific Indirect Effects	*Estimate*	*SE*	*95% CI*	*Estimate*	*SE*	*95% CI*
Reputation Threats						
Appraisal → Anger → Helplessness	.01	.08	[-.081, .189]	.03	.09	[-.118, .167]
Appraisal → Shame → Helplessness	.10	.08	[.003, .281]	.07	.10	[-.045, .292]
Self-Respect Threats						
Appraisal → Anger → Helplessness	.07	.06	[-.015, .181]	-.07	.06	[-.207, -.001]
Appraisal → Shame → Helplessness	.03	.05	[-.039, .118]	.05	.09	[-.076, .204]

Standardized estimates (StdXY) are displayed. SE: Standard error. $+p < .10$, $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Discussion

Consistent with our hypotheses, Turkish participants were more likely to anticipate anger, shame, and helplessness when someone threatened their reputation as opposed to their self-respect. Moreover, threats to reputation were especially informative in predicting helplessness in Turkey; those who perceived reputation threats as humiliating and rude were more likely to anticipate shame, and in turn, helplessness. These findings are in line with the emphasis on reputation management as well as relationship harmony and secondary control in collectivistic honour cultures such as Turkey (Cross et al., 2014; Morling et al., 2002). Members of these cultures expect to be angry and ashamed when someone insults them in front of others; at the same time, they may feel helpless and take no action because they may not want to seem disruptive in their relationships.

In northern US, threats to self-respect, but not to reputation, were informative in predicting helplessness; the more northern Americans perceived self-respect threats as humiliating and rude, the more they anticipated to be angry, which made them less likely to expect helplessness (or more likely to take action). These findings are in line with the emphasis on self-respect, personal achievements, and primary control (influence motive) in individualistic dignity cultures such as northern US (Morling et al., 2002; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2000). This research highlights the need to investigate within-culture variation of constructs and their relation to each other.

We did not find support for our prediction regarding the appraisal of threats in Turkey; participants perceived reputation threat and self-respect threat situations similarly rude and humiliating. Moreover, regardless of threat type, the more rude and humiliating Turkish participants perceived these situations, the more likely they were to anticipate anger. These

surprising findings could be related to the characteristics of the situations that were selected for this study. For example, self-respect threat situations may have been perceived as more global than reputation threat situations. Even though Turkish participants indicated that reputation threats would decrease one's reputation more than self-respect threats would, the global nature of the latter situations may have made them perceived as highly rude and humiliating. Nevertheless, we found support for our predictions regarding the pattern of emotions and helplessness across threat types in both cultural groups.

We tested our predictions using self-report responses given to hypothetical scenarios. Future research should be conducted in laboratory settings allowing behavioural responses to actual threats to achieve greater external validity. Moreover, we did not manipulate the source of threat in this study. Future research could examine whether helplessness is especially pronounced in honour cultures when the offender is an ingroup member rather than an outgroup member, as the conflict between motives of harmony and reputation may be stronger in the former situation. Finally, we did not have a specific manipulation check measure for self-respect threat situations. As mentioned earlier, the concept of honour has a dual structure: A self-respect component and a social respect component (i.e., reputation; Pitt-Rivers, 1966). The situations we selected for this study were generated by participants as examples of honour-threatening situations in a previous study (Uskul et al., 2012). Our manipulation check revealed that self-respect threat situations (focusing on people's personal achievements and self-worth) were less relevant to reputation in both cultural groups than reputation threat situations were. Therefore, we concluded that these self-respect situations adequately represent the self-respect component of honour rather than the social respect component. Future research can include additional measures to clarify this distinction.

People respond to interpersonal threats differently depending on their cultural norms and expectations. In today's globalized world, an increasing number of people from diverse cultural backgrounds interact with each other. This research can improve cross-cultural understanding by shedding light on sensitivities of people from honour and dignity backgrounds in interpersonal interactions. Moreover, this research contributes to the literature on cultures and emotions by distinguishing between threats to self- and social-respect (reputation), by going beyond aggressive responses to honour threats and examining helplessness, and by focusing on emotions as a process from appraisals to action readiness in an honour and a dignity culture.

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[1] This study was part of a larger project, in which we included additional measures such as retaliation, honor values, and inalienable worth. For the sake of brevity and novelty, we did not report them in this manuscript. Moreover, gender was not included in our analyses because we did not have any hypotheses about it. Details can be provided upon request.

[2] Our hypotheses focused on within-culture patterns rather than cross-cultural comparisons. Nevertheless, we conducted equivalence tests to decide whether cross-cultural comparisons could be made. We found construct equivalence but no metric equivalence, which suggests that there may be systematic response biases and comparing the means across cultures would be inappropriate (see Supporting Information document).