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# Confrontation versus withdrawal: Cultural differences in responses to threats to honor

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## Abstract

This study compares evaluations by members of an honor culture (Turkey) and a dignity culture (northern USA) of honor threat scenarios, in which a target was the victim of either a rude affront or a false accusation, and the target chose to withdraw or confront the attacker. Turkish participants were more likely than American participants to evaluate positively the person who withdrew from the rude affront and the person who confronted the false accusation. Participants in both societies perceived that others in their society would endorse confrontation more than withdrawal in both types of scenarios, but this effect was larger for Turkish than American participants. Honor values were associated with evaluations of the targets most strongly among Turkish participants who read about a person who confronted their attacker. These findings provide insight into the role of cultural norms and individual differences in the ways honor influences behavior.

## Keywords

honor threat, cultural psychology, Turkey, perceived norms

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Imagine yourself in a situation where someone implies that you are lying or suggests dishonesty on your part. What would you do? Would you ignore the person, knowing that you have been honest and truthful, and tell yourself that this person's opinion does not matter? Or would you confront the person and convey your disapproval?

A person's decision in such situations is likely to depend on many factors, including his/her cultural background. In a culture where maintaining one's own respect and the respect of others is a central virtue, individuals might be expected to respond quickly and vigorously, even aggressively,

to such attacks. In a culture where a person's worth is inalienable and not diminished by false accusations, the individual who refrains from retaliation is often viewed as the more mature person.

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This study compares the reactions and evaluations of members of these two kinds of cultures to situations that involve a rude insult or false accusation. In specific, we focus on personal beliefs and perceived social norms about how an individual should behave in such situations among people from Turkey and the northern region of the United States. We contrast these two groups because they differ in the importance and salience of the construct of *honor*, and because relatively little social psychological research has focused on honor in eastern Mediterranean societies.

### Cultures of Honor or Dignity

Why might we expect the reactions of Turkish and northern American people to differ? Northern parts of the USA have been described by Leung and Cohen (2011) as “dignity” cultures, in which all people are assumed to have inherent worth. The individual’s inherent or inalienable worth is, at least theoretically, neither increased by others’ esteem nor diminished by others’ contempt. People are expected to develop an internal, stable sense of value or worth, which is (ideally) impervious to the influence of others (Ayers, 1984). Young people are socialized to ignore the taunts from playground bullies with the response that “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Many parents have attempted to mend hurt feelings with the bromide, “It doesn’t matter what others think of you; what matters is what you think of yourself.” In short, children and young people are often taught to measure themselves against their own personal standards and to pay less attention to other people’s opinions of them. As Leung and Cohen (2011) suggest, good behavior is expected to derive from a “sturdy core” of personal commitment to moral values and principles, good character, and one’s own self-worth, not from fear of punishment or the condemnation of others.

In contrast, Turkey and other Mediterranean societies have been described as cultures in which being a person of honor is the most important

characteristic of a person (Bagli & Sev’er, 2003; Gilmore, 1987; Gregg, 2007; Kardam, 2005; Peristiany, 1965; Rodriguez Mosquera, Fischer, Manstead, & Zaalberg, 2008). Honor here is defined as “the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society” (Pitt-Rivers, 1965, p. 21). In honor cultures, individuals’ worth is determined not only by how they behave and evaluate themselves, but, perhaps more importantly, by how others evaluate them. Furthermore, Leung and Cohen (2011) have characterized honor cultures as marked by strong reciprocity norms. Cooperation is enhanced when a person has a reputation for trustworthiness and reciprocation of gifts. Individuals must also develop a reputation for being willing to reciprocate “negative” gifts (such as insults or attacks; Miller, 1993). Traditionally, a man in an honor culture needed to carefully cultivate a reputation for toughness and willingness to retaliate against any threat to himself, his family, or his property (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). To “turn the other cheek” in the face of a false accusation is to concede that the attack is warranted and to allow the other to damage one’s reputation. In Turkey, traditional family values emphasize shame in child rearing (Kağıtçıbaşı & Sunar, 1992; Taylor & Oskay, 1995; Yağmurlu, Çıtlak, Dost, & Leyendecker, 2009), characterized by parental behaviors such as chiding the misbehaving child with the statement, “Shame on you! What will others think of you?” Thus, people from honor cultures are very aware that others are likely to observe and evaluate their behavior, so they tend to respond to threats to their honor and reputation more strongly than do members of nonhonor cultures (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996). The person who fails to do so may be the target of gossip, ostracism, and subtle or not so subtle discrimination (Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001; Wikan, 2008).

### Honor and Politeness

Paradoxically, honor cultures are often also known as places of great politeness (Cohen & Vandello, 2004). Turkish people are known for their kindness and generosity (Kerper, 2009; Wasti, Tan, &

Erdil, 2011), whereas northerners in the USA are often viewed by others as lacking warmth and hospitality (Reed, 1986). Cohen and Vandello (2004) suggest that people in honor cultures cultivate patterns of politeness and hospitality so that they do not offend others. An offense, even an unintended offense, can spark violence, which may initiate a cycle of retaliation and retribution, leading to long-term blood feuds. Cohen, Vandello, Puente, and Rantilla (1999) found that members of an honor culture, American southerners, were slower to respond to a series of annoyances than were American northerners, but when southerners did respond, their reactions were much more aggressive and hostile than the northerners' reactions. In other words, southern men are "slower to anger or panic, but absolutely without reason or mercy once the fat is in the fire" (Thompson, 1966, as cited in Cohen et al., 1999). The American northerners, in contrast, responded more quickly to the annoyances in Cohen et al.'s (1999) study, perhaps in order to communicate a warning to the offender to stop and thereby reduce the likelihood that violence will erupt. Furthermore, their levels of hostility and anger stabilized at a lower level compared to the southerners' hostility and anger. Thus, in honor cultures, politeness and civility may emerge as ways to reduce the likelihood of violence and aggression. People in an honor culture may have a relatively high threshold for responding to affronts, but once that threshold is passed, they react more vigorously to the offender.

For members of honor cultures, therefore, it may be especially important to distinguish between situations in which one should respond slowly and those that require a swift and strong response. Evidence of this distinction comes from our earlier work, in which Turkish and northern American participants described the types of situations that would be most likely to threaten another person's honor (Uskul, Cross, Sunbay, Gercek Swing, & Ataca, 2012). Overall, both Turkish and northern American participants generated a large number of situations that involved being called names or explicit humiliation, but Turkish participants were much more likely

than Americans to generate situations in which someone had done something unjust to the target, such as tell lies about the person. In fact, situations that reflected false accusations comprised the largest proportion of honor-threatening situations generated by Turkish participants (approximately 34% compared to only 4% among northern Americans). This finding suggests that Turkish participants view situations in which one is falsely accused of misbehavior as especially important threats to one's honor; these responses may also be representative of an aspect of the honor code described as *integrity in social relations* by Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead, and Fischer (2002). They argue that this component of the honor code includes attributes such as honesty and integrity, which serve to strengthen social bonds and maintain interpersonal relationships. If a person's honesty or integrity is impugned, he or she loses honor, which can have extensive social and economic consequences.

Thus, in this study we compare Turkish and northern American participants' evaluations of and behavioral reactions to scenarios that involve rude or humiliating behavior inflicted on the target person (such as being called a vulgar name or being ridiculed) versus situations that are based on false accusations (such as being accused of lying). The targets of the honor attacks are depicted as either exercising restraint and withdrawing from the situation, or confronting their attacker and showing disapproval (see also Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2008). With respect to the rude honor attacks, we hypothesize that Turkish participants will tend to report more approval for the person who behaves in a restrained fashion than for the person who confronts the attacker.

We expect a different pattern of behavior with respect to the false accusations. Because such accusations may have serious repercussions for the individuals' own and their family's honor, Turkish participants are expected to approve of the person who confronts much more than the person who withdraws from the attack. In some cases, an unanswered attack may be viewed as admission that the accusation is true. The person who withdraws from such an attack will lose

honor and respect of others, and their family and friends may feel dishonored as well. Thus, Turkish people who care about their own honor and the honor of their family must respond quickly and vigorously to a false accusation.

Northern Americans, who are less accustomed to cycles of violence in response to rude or disrespectful treatment, may not have strong beliefs about what a person should do in response to rude or humiliating situations. Northern American society is relatively “loose” (Gelfand et al., 2011), and there is considerable leeway for a person to decide to either withdraw from an insult or to express disapproval. Following findings of Cohen et al. (1999), one may expect northern Americans to lean toward approval of restraint in response to rude affronts, but their evaluations of the person who exercises restraint versus the person who confronts may not differ as strongly as those of Turkish participants. In response to false accusations, Northern Americans may, like the Turkish participants, show more approval for the person who confronts than for the person who withdraws, but we expect this difference to be smaller than observed among the Turkish participants. The personal costs of an unanswered attack are lower for northern Americans, in part because there is less importance placed on the diligent protection of one’s social image. Theoretically, the false attack does not affect one’s inherent dignity. In short, we expect the personal evaluations of Turkish and Northern U.S. participants to show similar patterns in response to rude attacks and false accusations, but the differences in the evaluations of targets who withdraw versus targets who confront are expected to be larger among the Turkish participants than among the northern U.S. participants.

### Culturally Shaped Psyches and Situations

Personal evaluations of another’s behavior reflect one component of culture—the ways in which culture influences individuals’ attitudes, values, beliefs, and so on (what we will call culturally shaped *psyches*). Culture also resides in environmental

affordances, expectations, norms, situations, and the like—what we will call culturally shaped *situations*.<sup>1</sup> In this approach, researchers have investigated how cultural differences in common situations may elicit different cognitive or affective reactions, leading to observed cultural differences in behavior (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Miyamoto, Nisbett, & Masuda, 2006; Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2002; Uskul et al., 2012). Other studies have demonstrated that sometimes individuals’ perceptions of social norms or of others’ attitudes toward a situation influence their behavior more than their own beliefs or attitudes (Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Shteynberg, & Wan, 2010; Wan, Torelli, & Chiu, 2010; Zou et al., 2009). To better understand the social context, we asked participants to report how they thought others in their society would evaluate the target in the scenarios and how others in their society would behave in that situation. We compare participants’ personal evaluations and behavioral tendencies to their social perceptions to uncover their beliefs about cultural norms in honor-related situations.

Cultural norms and expectations can begin to change when individuals reject the social norms or encourage others to behave counternormatively (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Individuals are active agents in the process of culture maintenance or change; their willingness to challenge social norms can lead to changes in society. For example, attitudes toward smoking and homosexuality in the USA have changed markedly as individuals and small groups challenged cultural norms (de Walque, 2010; Loftus, 2001). Thus, in this study, we also examine how individual psyches shape cultural norms and expectations by asking participants to indicate what they would tell *another* person to do in the situation.

### Unpackaging Cultural Differences

Finally, researchers can unpackage the cultural differences in behavior by identifying constructs that account for these differences (Singelis, Bond, Sharkey, & Lai, 1999). For example, differences in

interdependent self-construal sometimes account for cultural differences in some behaviors (Lewis, Goto, & Kong, 2008; Singelis et al., 1999; Uskul, Hynie, & Lalonde, 2004). This approach recognizes that people in a society vary in their endorsement of cultural values and beliefs. Although Turkey can be described as an honor culture, individuals' attitudes and beliefs about the role of honor in everyday life are relatively diverse and may be changing. Young people in Turkey today encounter many Western attitudes and philosophies, and university students are often educated by Western-trained scholars. Thus, for many young people, there may be a reaction against traditional honor norms and the behaviors they promote (Sev'er & Yurdakul, 2001; Wikan, 2008). For example, in our own work, when we asked Turkish university students to answer the question "What situations would be most likely to attack a person's honor?" many students responded with a statement such as "I do not believe in honor, but if I did, here are the situations that would be more important: ..." In this study, we assessed participants' endorsement of honor values and examined its relations to their evaluations of a person who confronts or withdraws from a rude attack or false accusation. Given that Turkish society more strongly affirms the importance of honor than American society, Turkish participants are more likely to have easily activated attitude structures when they read about honor-related situations. Thus, we anticipate that individual differences in honor values will be more strongly related to the evaluations of the targets among Turkish participants than among northern American participants.

## Method

### *Participants*

The Turkish sample consisted of 186 undergraduate students (106 women,  $M_{\text{age}} = 20.45$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ) from a public university in Istanbul. The American sample consisted of 196 undergraduate students (109 women,  $M_{\text{age}} = 19.53$ ,  $SD = 2.29$ ) from a northern public university. Participants in

both countries completed the questionnaire booklets in classrooms of 15–20, and they received course credit for their participation. These materials were created in English, translated to Turkish, and back-translated by two assistants fluent in both Turkish and English. American participants completed the measures in English, and Turkish participants completed the measures in Turkish. Three participants (two from Turkey and one from USA; all male) who were identified as outliers on the Honor Values Scale (more than 3  $SD$  below the mean; see below) were excluded from the analyses.

### *Materials*

We created multiple scenarios based on the situations generated by participants in an earlier study (see Uskul et al., 2012, Study 1). In that study, participants were asked to respond to the question, "If someone wanted to attack/insult somebody else's honor, what would be the most effective way to do so?" We randomly selected situations that represented rude honor threats (e.g., "someone calls you a name") and situations that represented a false accusation (e.g., "someone accuses you of lying") and created scenarios that reflected these situations. After multiple iterations and consideration by natives to both cultures, we selected six scenarios that depicted other people treating the target person rudely (e.g., "calling the person names, insulting, and explicitly humiliating the person"; Uskul et al., 2012, Table 1) and four scenarios<sup>2</sup> that depicted other people treating the target person unfairly (e.g., "being falsely accused of acts one has not committed or being subjected to unfair treatment one does not deserve"; Uskul et al., 2012, Table 1). Each scenario described a situation in which someone's honor was attacked by another person, and the target person was described as either confronting the attacker and expressing disapproval or withdrawing from the situation (see Appendix for sample scenarios). The scenarios were selected on the grounds that the situations were familiar parts of student life in both cultures and were easily translated into both languages. We chose to

have a male protagonist in both societies due to the influence of different gender roles on women's behavior. Each scenario used a different name, and Turkish and U.S. participants read names that were common in their society.

We divided the scenarios into two sets, and each participant responded to three of the six rude scenarios and two of the four false accusation scenarios. The results for the two sets of scenarios were very similar, and so we collapsed across the questionnaire sets in presenting the results. We randomly assigned participants to read about targets who ignored or withdrew from the attacker (the *withdraw* condition) or who confronted the attacker and expressed disapproval (the *confront* condition). These scenarios were embedded in a questionnaire with several filler scenarios. After each scenario, participants evaluated the target person's behavior on several dimensions.

### Measures

*Culturally shaped psyches.* We assessed cultural differences in participants' reactions to the target person's behavior in the scenarios in two general domains: cognitive evaluations and behavioral tendencies to respond similarly. To assess cognitive evaluations of the target's behavior, we focused on two dimensions. We assessed the *perceived justification* of the behavior described in the scenario by asking participants to rate the following four bipolar items (using the same 7-point scale): *necessary–unnecessary*; *bad–good*; *justified–unjustified*, and *acceptable–unacceptable* ( $\alpha_{\text{rude}} = .88$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{false}} = .89$ ). An overall *approval* measure asked participants to evaluate the target's behavior from their own perspective on four bipolar items: *weak–strong*, *immoral–moral*, *detestable–admirable*, and *irresponsible–responsible*, using a 7-point scale (1 = *very unlikely*; 7 = *very likely*,  $\alpha_{\text{rude}} = .89$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{false}} = .88$ ).

Behavioral tendencies focused on two general dimensions. Two items assessed participants' *friendliness* towards or willingness to interact with a person like the one described in the scenario: "How likely is it that you would be friends with a

person like Ahmet/John?" and "How likely is it that you would enjoy interacting with a person like Ahmet/John?" (1 = *very unlikely*; 7 = *very likely*;  $\alpha_{\text{rude}} = .84$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{false}} = .82$ ). Participants were also asked what *they would do* in the situation, in response to an item that read "If you were in Ahmet/John's shoes, how likely is it that you would respond similarly?" (1 = *very unlikely*; 7 = *very likely*;  $\alpha_{\text{rude}} = .60$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{false}} = .44$ ).<sup>5</sup>

*Culturally shaped situations.* To assess the socially constructed norms and expectations embedded in these situations, participants were asked to rate the extent to which others in their society would approve of the target's behavior (e.g., "Please think about how Ahmet/John would be seen by most people in your society based on his response in the situation described above"). The four bipolar items used to rate personal approval above were also used for this index of social approval ( $\alpha_{\text{rude}} = .74$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{false}} = .66$ ). In addition, participants were asked to report their estimate of how others would respond in the situation ("How likely is it that the average young man, if he found himself in this situation, might behave similarly?"), using the same 7-point scale.

*Psyches shape culture.* Finally, we assessed the extent to which participants would transmit cultural values to others. Two items tapped whether participants would *encourage others* to behave like the target: "How much would you encourage or discourage Ahmet/John's behavior in your friends?" and "How much would you encourage or discourage Ahmet/John's behavior in your son if you had one?" (1 = *very likely to discourage*; 7 = *very likely to encourage*;  $\alpha_{\text{rude}} = .83$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{false}} = .82$ ).

After completing the scenarios, participants also completed the Honor Values Scale (Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2008), followed by demographic items. The Honor Values Scale is composed of five items that tap traditional honor values with items such as "It is important to me that others see me as someone who deserves respect" and "How others think of my family is important to me." Participants responded using a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all important*; 5 = *extremely*

important;  $\alpha_{TR} = .80$ ,  $\alpha_{US} = .78$ ). There was no cultural difference in this measure, ( $M_{TR} = 3.90$ ,  $SD = .72$ ,  $M_{US} = 3.89$ ,  $SD = .71$ ),  $t(378) = 0.14$ , *ns*. Although the lack of cultural difference in this measure is contrary to usual expectations, it may be due to reference group effects, in which individuals respond on the basis of comparisons with others in their own society (Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002). Reference group effects can lead to failure to find expected cultural differences on Likert-scaled measures, such as this one.

*Structural equivalence of measures.* We examined the cross-cultural structural equivalence of the scales separately for rude scenarios and false accusation scenarios, as well as for the Honor Values Scale. Using the recommendations of van de Vijver and Leung (1997), we calculated factorial agreement using the most stringent identity index. This analysis revealed that the identity coefficient was greater than .98 for all the measures, which indicates very high levels of factorial similarity across the two cultural groups.

## Results

### *Analysis Plan*

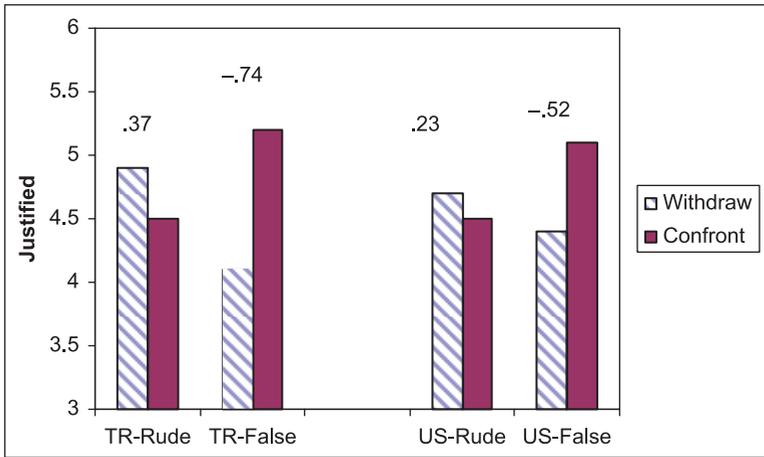
To examine the effects of scenario type, condition, and culture on participants' evaluations of the target's behavior, we conducted a three-way mixed ANOVA on the dependent measures. The within-subject factor was scenario type (rude attacks vs. false accusations); the two between-subjects factors were culture (Turkey vs. USA) and condition (withdraw vs. confront). We included gender as another between-subjects factor, but there were few interactions with gender, and these are discussed in Endnote 4. For measures on which participants reported their own judgments and their perceptions of the judgments of others in their society (the approval measure and the measure asking whether the person would behave similarly), we conducted four-way ANOVAs which included the additional personal versus social judgment

factor. We followed these analyses with regressions to investigate whether the relations between honor values and the evaluations of the target depended on culture and condition.

### *Culturally Shaped Psyches*

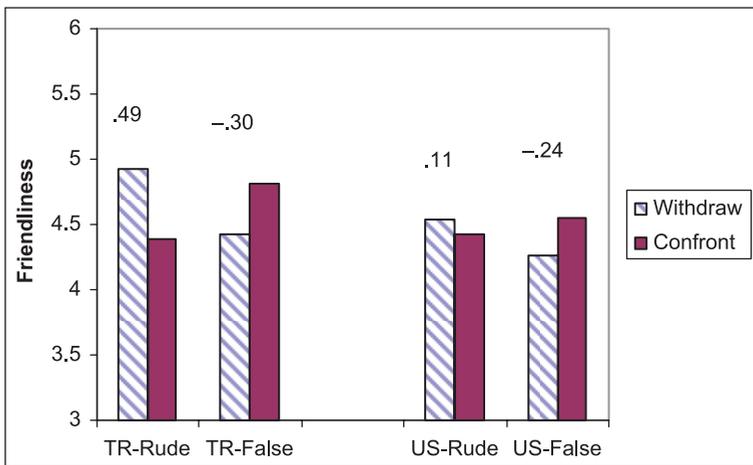
*Cognitive evaluations of the behavior.* We first examined participants' evaluations of the perceived justification of the target's behavior (either withdrawal or confrontation). As shown in Figure 1, the repeated measures ANOVA of the ratings of how *justified* the behavior was revealed a significant interaction between scenario type, condition, and country,  $F(1, 371) = 7.11$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .019$ . The two-way interaction of scenario type and condition was significant for Turkish participants,  $F(1, 180) = 79.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .307$ , and for American participants,  $F(1, 191) = 28.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .128$ . As expected, Turkish participants viewed withdrawal as more justified than confrontation in the rude scenarios, but responded the opposite in the false accusation scenarios. The differences in the two conditions was significant for both the rude  $t(183) = 2.52$ ,  $p < .02$ , and the false accusation scenarios,  $t(183) = -6.12$ ,  $p < .001$  (effect sizes are presented in Figure 1). Among American participants, the difference in the ratings of the rude scenarios for the participants in the two conditions was not significant,  $p > .10$ . In the false accusation scenarios, American participants rated confrontation as significantly more justified than withdrawal,  $t(193) = -3.63$ ,  $p < .001$ .

*Behavioral tendencies.* We assessed participants' behavioral tendencies with respect to the situations by asking them to indicate the extent to which they would be willing to interact with or be friends with the target (termed *friendliness*), and whether they would be likely to respond as the target did. We found that the scenario type moderated the effects of culture and condition for participants' friendliness toward the target,  $F(1, 371) = 4.94$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .013$ . The two-way interactions of scenario type and



**Figure 1.** Turkish and northern American judgments of how justified the target’s behavior is when he withdraws or confronts in response to rude or false accusation scenarios.

Note. Values above the bars represent the effect size (*d*) for the difference in the two conditions.



**Figure 2.** Ratings of the likelihood of friendly interactions with the target in response to rude or false accusation scenarios.

Note. Values above the bars represent the effect size (*d*) for the difference in the two conditions.

condition were significant for each cultural group: for Turks,  $F(1, 180) = 26.86, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .13$ ; for Americans,  $F(1, 191) = 7.60, p < .01, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .038$ . As expected, Turkish participants reported more friendliness toward the person who withdrew in the rude scenarios than the person who confronted (see Figure 2 for effect sizes). Conversely, they reported more

friendliness toward the person who confronted than to the person who withdrew in the false accusation scenarios. The comparison of the two conditions for each type of scenario was significant: both  $t_s > 2.03, p_s < .05$ . For Americans, the difference between conditions for the rude scenarios was not significant,  $p > .40$ , and the difference between the conditions for the

false accusation scenarios was only marginally significant,  $p < .10$ .

### *Culturally Shaped Situations*

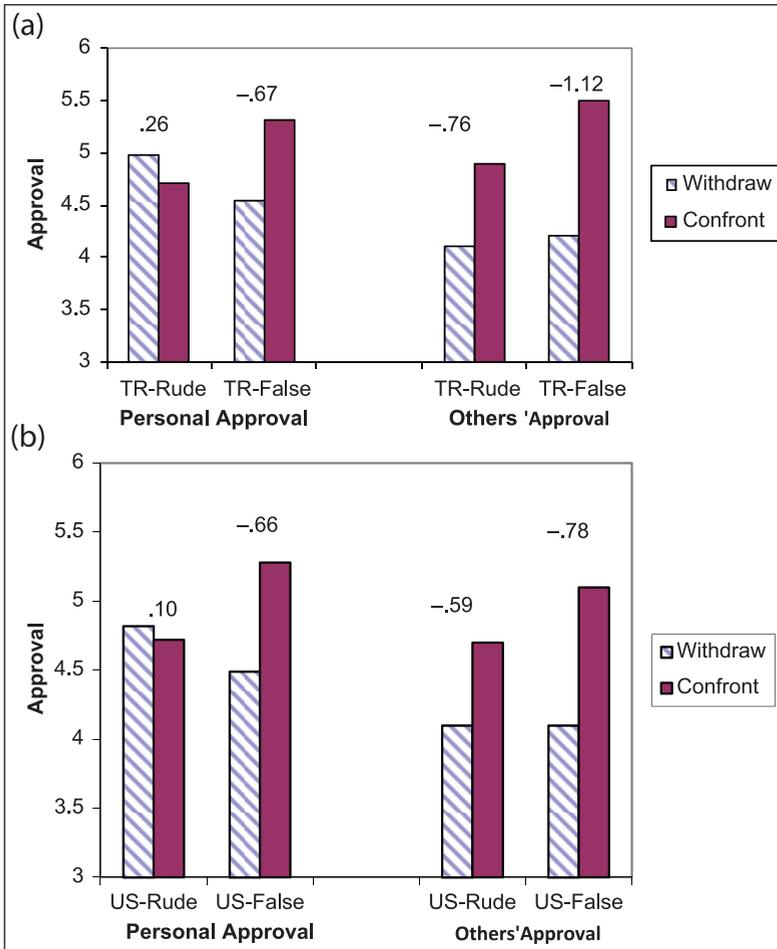
*Personal versus social approval.* Participants indicated their personal approval of the target and the extent to which they would respond similarly (if they were in the target person's position) as well as their perceptions of the approval and behavior of others in their society. We conducted a four-way ANOVA, with evaluation (personal vs. perceived social approval) and scenario type as within-subject measures, and culture and condition as between-subjects measures. This analysis revealed two three-way interactions (but not a four-way interaction). There was a significant Evaluation x Scenario Type x Condition interaction,  $F(1, 371) = 30.63, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .076$ ; and an Evaluation x Condition x Country interaction,  $F(1, 371) = 5.56, p < .02, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .015$ . To unfold these two effects we conducted an Evaluation x Scenario Type x Condition ANOVA within each cultural group. These analyses revealed significant three-way interactions within both cultural groups: for Turkish participants,  $F(1, 180) = 12.44, p = .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .065$ ; and for American participants,  $F(1, 191) = 19.48, p < .01, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .093$ .

As shown in Figure 3a, Turkish participants were somewhat more likely to approve of the person who withdraws in the rude scenarios,  $t(183) = 1.77, p < .08$  (two-tailed), but they were more likely to approve of the person who confronts in the false accusation scenarios,  $t(183) = 4.53, p < .001$ . In contrast, they perceived that others in their society would be more likely to approve of the person who confronts in both types of scenarios, both  $ts > 5.2, ps < .001$  (effect sizes are provided in Figure 3). As shown in Figure 3b, Americans' approval of the two responses to the rude scenarios was not significantly different, although there was a small preference for the person who withdraws,  $t(193) < 1.0, ns$ . Like the Turkish participants, Americans approved of the person who confronted their

accuser in the false accusation scenarios much more than the person who withdrew,  $t(193) = -4.71, p < .001$ . Also like the Turkish participants, Americans perceived that others in their society would approve of the person who confronts more than the person who attacks in both the rude and false accusation scenarios, both  $ts > 4.1, ps < .001$ . As expected, the effect sizes for these differences were larger for the Turkish responses than for the U.S. responses, which may suggest a stronger perceived social norm in support of confrontation among the Turkish participants.

*How likely is it that you or an average person would respond similarly?* We also compared participants' estimates of how they would behave if they were in the target person's position, and their perception of how the average young man in their society would behave in a four-way ANOVA with self versus other rating and scenario type as within-subject measures, and culture and condition as between-subjects measures. This analysis revealed a significant four-way interaction,  $F(1, 371) = 5.86, p < .02, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .016$ . Separate three-way analyses conducted within each cultural group were also significant; for Turkish participants,  $F(1, 180) = 35.54, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .165$ , and for Americans,  $F(1, 191) = 7.32, p < .01, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .037$ . As shown in Figure 4a, there was no significant difference between the conditions in Turkish participants' ratings of the likelihood that they would respond like the target in the rude scenarios,  $t(183) = 1.11, ns$ . In the false accusation scenarios, however, Turkish participants reported that they would be more likely to confront than to withdraw,  $t(183) = 5.66, p < .001$ . In contrast, they perceived that the average man in their society would be more likely to confront in both scenarios, both  $ts > 12.23, ps < .001$ .

Americans differed from the Turkish participants in their personal responses to the rude scenarios; they reported they would be slightly more likely to behave like the person who confronts than the person who withdraws from the rude affront,



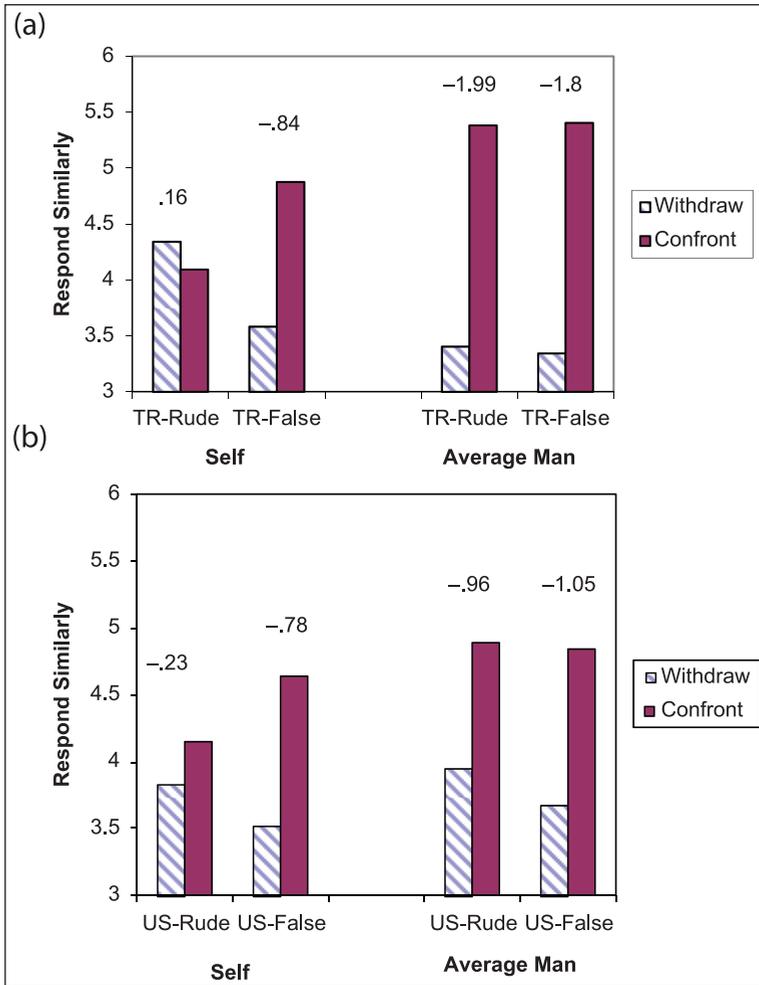
**Figure 3a and 3b.** Turkish (a) and northern American (b) participants' ratings of their own approval and their perceptions of how much others in their society would approve of the target who withdraws or confronts in response to rude or false accusation scenarios.  
*Note.* The values above the bars represent the effect sizes (*d*) for the differences in the conditions.

$t(193) = -1.62, p < .11$ . Like the Turkish participants, U.S. participants were more likely to imitate the behavior of the person who confronts than the one who withdraws in response to false accusation scenarios,  $t(193) = 5.45, p < .001$ . U.S. participants also perceived that the average person in their society would be more likely to confront than to withdraw in response to both types of scenarios, both  $t$ s  $< 6.64, p$ s  $< .001$ . Again, as expected, the effect sizes for these differences were larger for the Turkish responses than for the U.S. responses,

indicating a stronger perceived social norm in support of confrontation among the Turkish participants (see Figures 4a and 4b for effect sizes).

### *Psyches Shape Culture*

We examined the extent to which participants would encourage others to respond similarly to the target person. The analyses revealed a significant interaction between scenario type, country and condition predicting participants' reports that they would



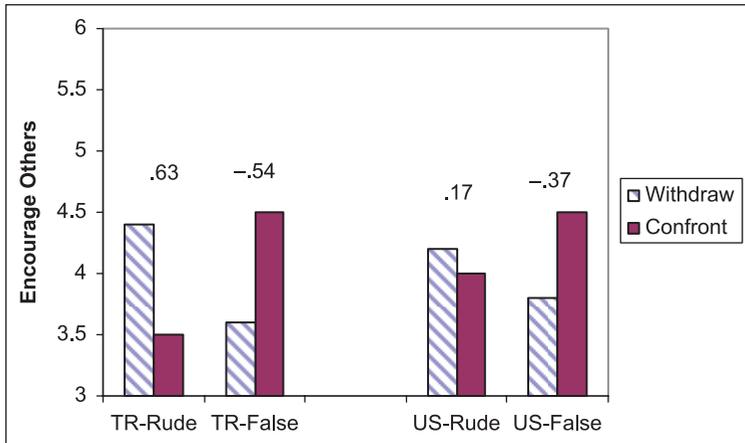
**Figure 4a and 4b.** Turkish (a) and northern American (b) participants' responses to the questions, "How likely is it that you would respond similarly to the target?" versus "How likely is it that the average man would respond similarly?" in response to the target who withdraws or confronts in rude or false accusation scenarios. *Note.* The values above the bars represent the effect sizes (*d*) for the differences in the conditions.

encourage others to respond like the target they read about,  $F(1, 371) = 10.67, p = .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .028$ . There were also significant interactions between scenario type and condition within both cultural groups: for Turks,  $F(1, 180) = 76.30, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .298$ ; for Americans,  $F(1, 191) = 14.19, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .069$ . The Turkish participants were much more likely to encourage others to withdraw rather than to confront in the rude scenarios,  $t(183) = 4.28, p < .001$ , and more likely to encourage confrontation rather than withdrawal in the false accusation

scenarios,  $t(183) = -3.63, p < .001$  (see Figure 5). The Americans were approximately equally likely to encourage others to withdraw as to confront in the rude scenarios ( $p > .20$ ), but were more likely to encourage confrontation in the false accusation scenarios,  $t(193) = -2.57, p < .02$ .<sup>4</sup>

### Summary Thus Far

Across a variety of evaluations, the Turkish participants distinguished between the two types of



**Figure 5.** Responses to the question “Would you encourage your friend/son to behave similarly?” in response to withdrawal or confrontation in rude or false accusation scenarios.

*Note.* Values above the bars represent the effect size ( $d$ ) for the difference in the two conditions.

scenarios (rude vs. false accusations) and the responses to them (withdrawal vs. confrontation) more than did the American participants. The differences in evaluations were most marked for the rude scenarios: Turkish participants viewed the person who withdrew from the rude honor threat more favorably (across most dimensions) than the person who confronted, whereas American participants often evaluated the two responses fairly similarly (i.e., ratings of their personal approval of the behavior and how likely they were to be friends with the person were not different for the two conditions). In response to false accusations, both Turkish and American participants endorsed confrontation more than withdrawal, but this effect tended to be stronger among the Turkish participants compared to the U.S. participants. This supports our hypothesis that members of honor cultures will be especially attuned to the distinction between situations which promote politeness and withdrawal (rude insults) and those that require a swift confrontation of the accuser (false accusations). Finally, both Turkish and American participants perceived that others in their society would approve of confrontation more than withdrawal in response to both rude affronts and false accusations. Again, however, the differences in ratings

of withdrawal versus confrontation were much larger for Turkish participants than for the U.S. participants.

#### *Unpackaging Cultural Differences: Moderation by Honor Values*

In our final analyses, we examined whether individual differences in honor values moderated the relations between culture, condition, and the evaluations of the situations. We conducted hierarchical regression analyses in which the dependent variables were regressed on the dummy-coded variables for culture (0 = USA, 1 = Turkey), condition (0 = withdraw, 1 = confront), and the standardized Honor Values Scale (HVS). In Step 2, we entered the two-way interactions of culture, condition, and HVS, and then in Step 3, the three-way interaction term was entered. Our dependent variables included the set of ratings for the rude and false accusation scenarios.

These analyses revealed no significant three-way interactions, but they did reveal a significant or nearly significant increase in variance explained by the set of two-way interactions of culture, condition, and HVS for the assessment of how *justified* the behavior was, whether the participant

**Table 1.** Step 2 of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Examining Moderation by Honor Values, with the Correlation of the Honor Values Scale with the Dependent Measure in Each Condition.

Dependent variable	Step 2 $\Delta R^2$	TR withdraw	TR confront	US withdraw	US confront
		N = 96 <i>r</i>	N = 89 <i>r</i>	N = 102 <i>r</i>	N = 93 <i>r</i>
Rude scenarios					
Perceived justification	.018+	.13	.33**	.05	.25*
Respond similarly	.04**	.10	.38***	-.12	.14
Average young man	.05**	-.10	.20+	-.09	.01
Encourage others	.02*	.05	.27**	.06	.15
False accusations					
Perceived justification	.03**	-.08	.29**	-.07	.15
Respond similarly	.02*	.00	.34***	-.07	.06
Average young man	.03**	-.11	.22*	.02	.02
Encourage others	.02*	-.07	.29**	-.06	.06

Note. The column labeled “Step 2  $\Delta R^2$ ” reports the additional variance explained by the set of two-way interaction terms, controlling for the main effect terms.

+  $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

or the average young man would *respond similarly*, and whether the participant would *encourage others* to respond similarly to the target for both rude and false accusation scenarios (see Table 1). To examine these interactions more closely, we computed the correlation of the Honor Values Scale with each dependent variable separately within culture and condition. As shown in Table 1, a clear pattern emerged: honor values were more strongly associated with participants’ responses in the confrontation condition than in the withdrawal condition, and this association was most marked among the Turkish participants. Turkish participants who scored high on the Honor Values Scale tended to view confrontation as more justified than did low scorers, and they endorsed responding similarly (for themselves and for others) more strongly than did low scorers. For Americans in the confrontation condition, the Honor Values Scale was only significantly related to judgments of how justified confrontation was in response to rude scenarios.

### Discussion

Honor cultures offer an intriguing contrast: They are at the same time places of great hospitality and politeness and also places where violence can

easily erupt in response to a perceived affront (Cohen et al., 1999; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). This study examined that contrast by having Turkish and northern American participants read and evaluate scenarios that depicted a person either ignoring and walking away from an honor threat, or confronting their attacker. We hypothesized that Turkish participants, who are from a traditional honor culture, would respond differently to different sorts of honor threats. Turkish participants showed higher levels of approval for a target person who overlooked a rude insult (such as being called a vulgar name) than for a person who confronted the insulter. In contrast, Turkish participants showed more approval for the person who confronted a false accusation than for the person who walked away. This pattern is consistent with the notion that members of honor cultures may be slow to respond to some types of honor threats, because they seek to avoid setting off a cycle of violence (Cohen et al., 1999). Other honor threats, however, especially those that are false accusations, must be dealt with strongly and immediately, so that others will not assume the accusation to be true.

Members of a dignity culture, such as the northern part of the USA, are socialized to care less about what others think of them, but instead

to develop a “sturdy core” of convictions, beliefs, and self-views that guide their behavior (Leung & Cohen, 2011). In this cultural context, walking away from an insult may be viewed as the mature thing to do, but a false accusation can threaten the individual’s self-views, so confrontation may be a more acceptable response. Our results revealed that Americans did not show a strong preference for either withdrawal or confrontation in responses to rude scenarios, but they tended to approve confrontation in response to the false accusations. The difference in endorsement of the two responses (withdrawal or confrontation) was usually much stronger among the Turkish participants than among the American participants, which indicates that there may be stronger cultural norms for desirable behavior in such situations.

This study attempts to straddle the divide between the examination of culture as “inside” the head of participants and a focus on perceptions of the expectations of one’s society (Chiu et al., 2010; Wan et al., 2010; Zou et al., 2009). Asking participants to estimate how others would evaluate or respond in each situation provided an interesting counterpoint to participants’ personal evaluations. Although participants differentiated between rude and false accusation scenarios when reporting their own feelings of approval or likelihood of responding similarly, they perceived that others in their society would approve of (and respond similarly to) confrontation in response to both types of scenarios. Once again, the effect sizes for these social perceptions were much larger in the Turkish group than in the American group, suggesting there is more consensus among the Turkish participants about normative behavior in such situations. This perception can perpetuate honor culture norms (Vandello, Cohen, & Ransom, 2008), even if individuals personally disavow them. Future studies that actually expose participants from these two societies to these different types of honor threats would answer the question of whether personal evaluations or social norms are more likely to influence behavior.

Culture is found not only in perceived norms and social expectations, but it also influences

individual’s values and beliefs (creating culturally shaped psyches). Our Turkish and northern American participants responded similarly to the Honor Values Scale (Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2008), which, like other Likert-scaled measures, is susceptible to reference group effects (Heine et al., 2002). When participants complete such measures, they tend to compare themselves to others in their own society. For example, an American, when comparing himself to other Americans, may indicate that protecting his family’s reputation is very important to him, and give himself a high score on the scale. Compared to Turkish people, however, his standing on this dimension would likely warrant a lower score. Thus, reference group effects can obscure existing cultural differences. The use of correlations to study associations of different variables within cultures is less subject to methodological challenges such as the reference group effect (Bond & van de Vijver, 2010). As the pattern of correlations in Table 1 shows, the Honor Values Scale was more strongly related to justification and encouragement of confrontational behavior for Turkish participants than for American participants. Because honor is a central value in Turkish society, these participants likely had more elaborate and salient attitude structures for this construct. Consequently, they may have been especially alert to scenarios related to honor, and their attitudes and beliefs were activated when making these evaluations. Members of a non-honor culture, even when they score high on the honor values measure, are less likely to have well-formulated schemas for situations that are honor-related. For them, these situations may have seemed unconnected to each other and to the construct of honor, reputation, or social image, and their responses may be driven by other concerns (such as dignity or self-esteem).

### *Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions*

The present study teases apart two kinds of honor-threatening situations that one may encounter in both cultural contexts, which were

based on previous participants' descriptions of important honor threats (Uskul et al., 2012). By demonstrating the differential preference for withdrawal and confrontation responses to these two kinds of honor threats, these findings point to the importance of not treating all honor-related situations monolithically (also see Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2008). Moreover, this research focuses on an honor culture that has received relatively little attention in the research literature, but which may provide insight into the thoughts and feelings of a large and increasingly important population of people in Islamic and Near Eastern cultural contexts.

Studies that employ a scenario paradigm such as this have their drawbacks. Participants' reports of what they would do may not coincide with actual behavior in real-life situations. The participants were also asked to respond to a one-time event, whereas situations that affect an individual's honor may roll out over time. Certainly, *in vivo* studies are necessary to observe whether participants' behaviors coincide with their evaluations. Nonetheless, this approach provides important insight into Turkish and American young people's attitudes toward the appropriate responses to different types of honor threats.

In this work, we have focused on scenarios in which men were the victims of affronts. Honor in Turkey and other Mediterranean societies is very gendered; there are different honor codes for men and for women (Abu-Lughod, 1999; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2002; Se'ver & Yurdakul, 2001; Wikan, 2008). Perceptions of manhood may be more precarious or easily undermined than womanhood, leading men to respond aggressively to challenges to their masculinity (Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008). Furthermore, different honor cultures may respond to different kinds of affronts or perceive different situations as related to one's honor. Future cross-cultural research that focuses on gender differences in response to different types of honor threats and that compares different honor cultures (e.g., southern USA, Latino, and Turkish) is necessary to fully understand this important cultural value and its impact on society.

## Conclusions

In societies like Turkey, where honor is a value deeply ingrained in individuals' social worlds, the pursuit of honor results in both politeness and confrontation. This study helps uncover the types of honor threats that are likely to result in one reaction or the other: Turkish participants may overlook a rude or humiliating affront in order to prevent further violence, but they will challenge and express disapproval of the person who falsely accuses them of misbehavior or treats them unfairly. The construct of honor may seem outmoded or old fashioned to some, but these results show that individuals who belong to an honor culture and who strongly endorse traditional honor codes will tend to encourage and justify confrontational responses to affronts. Our results show that an understanding of honor cultures requires investigation into differing types of honor threats, perceived social norms, and individual values. To do otherwise risks overlooking a variety of similarities and differences in attitudes and perceptions across cultures.

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## Notes

1. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out these distinctions.
2. We initially used six scenarios that involved a false accusation, but two of these scenarios were found to have unexpected ambiguities that caused participants to respond quite differently to them than to the others. Thus, these two scenarios were dropped from the analyses.
3. The low reliability of this measure is in part because it is composed of only two items. Due to this low reliability in the false accusation scenarios, we computed the analyses separately for the two scenarios used in this composite. The results revealed very similar patterns of responses across the two scenarios in both groups, but the differences in responses to withdrawal versus confront situations for one scenario were somewhat larger than for the other.

4. There were significant interactions between gender, condition, and scenario type for the evaluations of how justified the behavior was, how friendly the participant felt toward the target, and how much they would encourage others to behave like the target for the rude scenarios. For each of these dependent variables, the pattern was similar: the condition had weaker effects on men's ratings of the scenarios than on the women's ratings. For the rude scenarios, the differences in the ratings of those men who read about someone who withdrew and those who read about someone who confronted were sometimes not significantly different, whereas the women always rated withdrawal more positively than confrontation in response to the rude scenarios. No significant interactions with gender were observed for false accusation scenarios.

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## Appendix

### Sample Scenarios

#### *Rude or Humiliating Scenario*

It is the first week of the academic year and the new professor teaching a third-year research course divided his students into pairs to work on creative research questions in psychology. Trying to be creative, Rick/Ahmed suggested a few research questions to his partner. His partner started making fun of him saying that even a first-year student would not come up with such cliché research questions.

Withdrawal ending:

Instead of confronting him and starting a fight, Rick/Kemal ignored him and let it go.

Confrontation ending:

Instead of ignoring him and letting it go, Rick/Kemal confronted this person and said "Who are you to make fun of me?!"

#### *False Accusation or Unfair Scenario*

Tony/Murat had been working in the same company for quite a while and he was hoping for a second promotion soon. Recently a new employee, Chris/Selim, joined his work team. Tony felt that Chris/Selim was doing things to make Tony look bad in the team, such as downplaying his contributions or trying to get some of Tony's/Murat's tasks reassigned to him. All this upset Tony/Murat, because he knew Chris/Selim was trying to create obstacles for him.

Withdrawal ending:

Instead of confronting Chris/Selim and starting a fight, Tony/Murat ignored it and let it go.

Confrontation ending:

Instead of ignoring Chris/Selim and letting it go, Tony/Murat confronted him. He walked up to Tony/Murat and said "Why are you doing these things to prevent my promotion?"