My Friend is a Palestinian Bedouin:

VII. Cultural Differences--Honor and Aggression

Daniel Weishut, Psy.D.

When referring to conflict it is inevitable to relate to issues of aggression, power and honor. The concept of honor is central in Arab culture and not obeying to rules of honor may result in aggressive reactions. Moreover, the aggressive atmosphere and large power differentials are blatant in the cultural context of the studied friendship. Issues of honor, power and aggression exist also within the friendship itself, as will be described later.

Face and Honor

The literature refers to the concepts of face and honor separately, and chooses the use of one or the other depending on the culture(s) in discussion, with the use of the concept of face usually preserved for cultures in the Far East. However, the two concepts seem to be closely linked and sometimes even indistinguishable, and therefore they will be discussed here together. Although we may dispute this conception, face is considered more inclusive than honor, while honor could be viewed as a special kind of face that is claimed by certain groups in society. Furthermore, it was suggested that face-related issues are an inevitable component in human conflict (Ho, 1976).

We may define face as "the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in his social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in that position as well as acceptably in his general conduct" (Ho, 1976, p. 883). The concept of "face" has its origin in Asian cultures, but each person, culture and society has its face-saving practices, which in many Western cultures may be named tact, diplomacy or social skills. People may want to save their own face, but also that of others. Furthermore, in cultures with high emphasis on face one can expect to be sustained in a particular face, and feel that it is morally proper that this be so. Moreover, face is something that can be given to others (Goffman, 1955). The importance of "face" was found to be related both to the individualism/collectivism distinction and to power distance. Communities with a higher level of collectivism and those higher on power distance tend to be more concerned with "face" (Oetzel et al., 2001).

Facework are "the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face" (Goffman, 1955, p. 12). Facework is performed to protect one's face from threat, possibly by avoidance or through corrective processes, and sometimes in aggressive ways (Goffman, 1955). Awareness to issues of face and facework were suggested as crucial in intercultural relations, and in specific in intercultural training (Imahori & Cupach, 2005; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998).

Let us consider cultural differences as regarding face and facework. Before doing so, we need to be aware that there are also individual differences, since individuals vary in the extent to which they endorse or reject a culture's ideals. As regarding honor, face and dignity, only when we take into account both culture and individual factors we can meaningfully interpret behavior (Leung

& Cohen, 2011). Findings from one study on students, asking how they would act in certain imaginary situations, showed that U.S. Americans report on more direct, competitive and hostile ways to protect their face than Syrians. Syrians tended more to cooperation and ritualistic actions to save face. The American facework strategies corresponded to individualistic, weak power distance, masculine and low uncertainty avoidance cultural dimensions while the Syrian way corresponded to collectivistic, high-power distance, moderately masculine and high uncertainty avoidance. As for communication with Arabs, it was suggested that the first rule is not to make them lose face, e.g. be less direct – and thus less offensive - in communication. Furthermore, it was suggested that Americans be aware of the importance for Syrians of social rituals and of nonverbal communication (Merkin & Ramadan, 2010). A study on four different cultures concluded that despite the cultural differences as regarding face and facework, the association between face *concern* and facework is consistent over cultures (Oetzel et al., 2008).

I will now discuss more specifically the studies on honor. Honor was defined in many ways, the simplest definition being "reputation". Cultures of honor are common in places where there is a lack of resources, where the benefit of crime outweighs the risks, and where law enforcement is lacking. In cultures of honor, a man's reputation is key to his economic survival, and men want to be seen as strong and powerful. In these cultures, violence in response to an insult, in order to protect one's home and property or socialize children was found to be acceptable, and ideas about gender and masculinity were found to be related to acts of violence (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). Honor was also found to be related to risk-taking, presumably because the latter provides social proof of strength and fearlessness (Barnes et al., 2011). However, adherence to honor codes may as well result in acts of heroism and generosity. It was suggested that one cannot

understand these acts and the rituals that surround them without comprehension of the socio-cultural meaning systems that they spring from (Cohen et al., 1998).

A distinctive feature of honor cultures is the extent to which one's personal worth is determined interpersonally. A cross-cultural study on Spain and the Netherlands found that Spanish participants attach more importance than their Dutch counterparts to honor, family-related values and social recognition, while Dutch participants rate individualism-related values as more important (Mosquera et al., 2000). In honor cultures, one's own honor and the honor of intimate others are interdependent. In honor cultures as compared to other cultures, not only is one's own honor more vulnerable to humiliations and insults by intimates than by non-intimates, but also being offended by others in front of intimates may lead to more negative feelings, especially of shame. Moreover, it was suggested that if one's honor is diminished, the honor of one's intimates also will be diminished (Mosquera et al., 2000).

Several studies referred to the relatively strong emotional reactions to insults by individuals from honor cultures. One study on men in the South of the United States, where norms of honor are adhered to, found that insulted men may react with aggressive or violent behavior (Cohen et al., 1996). A couple of studies compared individuals from Spain (more concerned with honor) and the Netherlands (less concerned with honor). In Spain, honor was found to be more closely related to family and social interdependence, whereas in the Netherlands honor was associated with self-achievement and autonomy (Mosquera et al., 2002b). Spanish participants responded especially intensely to insults – as compared to Dutch participants - when their family was involved (Mosquera et al., 2002a). Another Dutch study found insulted men adhering to norms

of honor to be more angry, less joyful, less fearful, and less resigned (IJzerman et al., 2007). A study on Brazilians and Americans from different cultural backgrounds found that "(a) female infidelity damages a man's reputation, particularly in honor cultures; (b) this reputation can be partially restored through the use of violence; and (c) women in honor cultures are expected to remain loyal in the face of jealousy-related violence" (Vandello & Cohen, 2003, p. 997).

In the Arab world, where the family is the corner stone of society, honor is central. Moreover, among the Arabs honor is often perceived as being related to sexual purity (Dodd, 1973). Issues of honor may turn into long-lasting family disputes, which through escalation may become violent. The urge to protect the family's honor can take severe forms and in extreme cases lead to blood vengeance (also named "honor killing"), the obligation to kill in retribution for the death of a member of one's family or tribe, and a form of maintaining honor (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 1997).

Aggression and the Use of Power

As described previously, honor may lead to aggression. The concepts of culture, power and aggression seem to be interwoven. Issues of power are central in group relations, and will become evident in any large group (Cottam et al., 2004; Weinberg & Weishut, 2011). Power may be used in positive ways enhancing society, but may as well be used by the dominant group in coercive ways in order to subjugate other groups or individuals. It seems that no culture can do without power struggles, which may become obvious by the following definition of culture (Bond, 2004) as

a set of affordances and constraints that channel the expression of coercive means of social control by self and others. All cultural systems represent solutions to the problems associated with distributing desired material and social resources among its group members while maintaining social order and harmony. Norms are developed surrounding the exercise of mutual influence in the process of resource allocation, favoring some and marginalizing others. Violations of these norms by resource competitors are conceptualized as "aggressive" behaviors and stimulate a process of justified counterattack, escalating the violence (p. 62).

Aggression is influenced by individual characteristic as well as by cultural factors (Cohen & Leung, 2010; Leung & Cohen, 2011). Aggression is valued differently in different cultures, and in some cultures may be justified as a way to solve interpersonal conflict, in particular in cultures that emphasize honor (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Cohen et al., 1996). Those in power regularly use a variety of measures to stay in power. Aggression is often used to maintain pressure on people or subgroups to conform to the norms of the majority (Hopper, 2003). Generally, men tend to be more aggressive than women are. Fear of losing status and respect in the eyes of fellow men was found to be the major concern that evokes their aggression (Fischer & Mosquera, 2002). Also, the threat to manhood was found to activate physically aggressive thoughts (Vandello et al., 2008). Much of men's aggression is directed against women. Frequent use of aggression can create situations of inequality and injustice, particularly for women and within the family (Haj-Yahia, 2002; Herzog, 2004; Malik & Lindahl, 1998; Vandello & Cohen, 2003).

Justifying the use of power does not necessarily mean that people are themselves more aggressive. For example, an Israeli study found that Arab parents and teachers were more

aggressive than their Jewish counterparts and Arab adolescents tended more to justify aggression

Nonetheless, the Jewish adolescents were actually more aggressive and violent in their families,

neighborhoods and schools than the Arab adolescents (Sherer & Karnieli-Miller, 2004). Cultural

dissimilarities on the expression of aggression in the workplace were found also between Jewish

and Arab Israeli employees. Jewish employees tended to express overt aggression toward their

superiors, whereas Arab employees displayed a tendency to express covert aggression. This

difference was linked to a divergence on individualism/collectivism (Galin & Avraham, 2009).

According to Anderson & Bushman (2002):

> Human aggression is any behavior directed toward another individual that is
> carried out with the proximate (immediate) intent to cause harm. In addition, the
> perpetrator must believe that the behavior will harm the target, and that the target
> is motivated to avoid the behavior (p. 28).

Interestingly, when it comes to evaluating perpetrators' aggression, there are cultural variations

pertaining to the relative importance of intent of harm. For instance, Israeli Jews of European

origin put more emphasis on the intent of a perpetrator and Israeli Arabs and Oriental Jews more

on the extent of created harm (Lubel et al., 2001). Anderson & Bushman (2002) developed a

General Aggression Model, in which they differentiated between two kinds of aggression: hostile

and instrumental aggression. *Hostile aggression* refers to impulsive behavior intended to harm

the other in response to a perceived provocation, whereas *instrumental aggression* is the planned

behavior - not necessarily in reaction to a provocation - intended not just to harm the other but

also to reach some other goal.