

Review of: "Testosterone and the “Honor Culture” of Young Black Men"

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This article and its associated study test the novel hypothesis that “honor cultures” of inner cities increase Testosterone (T) levels among Black teens, compared to other racial groups. The author tested this hypothesis using a large national dataset and found that young Black men with lower education levels have higher T levels than other comparable racial and age groups, but that these differences disappear with age.

The biggest issue I find with this analysis, and the author is forthright in addressing it, is the conflation of education level as an assessment for inner-city/honor culture. One way the author could bolster the honor culture hypothesis would be to provide evidence to support the association between higher T and aggression among Black teens, as opposed to measuring only T levels.

Other issues I identified with the paper are outlined below.

I am not sure it is accurate to claim that cultural differences and evolutionary psychology are “rarely connected” bodies of research (p. 1). For example, seminal work by Daly and Wilson used evolutionary psychology to test for cultural and social influences on behaviors such as risk-taking and homicide. Additionally, large-scale cross-cultural studies by Buss and colleagues have tested cultural influences on sexual preferences and more recently Ko et al. tested for cultural differences in evolved social motives. Overlooking such examples makes the authors’ claim seem rather dismissive of past research.

In the explanation of Cohen’s research on honor culture, it might be beneficial to provide some background on why honor cultures are thought to develop (see work by Nisbett & Cohen).

When providing statistics on race and murder rate (p. 2), why are the data provided from 2016? The FBI updates crime records yearly and the most recent available data should be provided.

I appreciate the author’s careful use of language when providing evidence linking testosterone to violence (i.e., noting that “High T does not appear to contribute directly to violence.” P. 3).

In the study cited on p. 4 (Mazur, 1995), did younger Black men with lower education levels have higher T relative to other racial groups who also had lower education levels? These comparisons should be made clear to tease apart sociodemographic variables.

For those readers who have no medical background, including myself, it would be helpful to provide some baseline

information about T before providing the sample data. What are considered healthy or average levels of T for the age ranges assessed?