

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

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**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

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This is a fascinating paper with an original and theoretically interesting hypothesis. I recommend that it is published. As I am not trained in statistics, I cannot comment on those parts. Also, as a disclaimer, I am merely associated to and not deeply immersed in this specific field of research.

As the author is very well versed in this subject, he also knows all the pitfalls and challenges. Yet, let me share some of my thoughts from reading it.

First, while theoretical plausible, the paper does not present any empirical support for the association between honor culture and high T. The author could consider developing this link further. See also item 4 below.

A second, and related, issue is whether the observed differences in T levels are causal or correlational in nature. Is the higher T observed in young, black uneducated men a) caused by the honor culture they (likely) are part of or b) do they become immersed in such cultures because of their high T (and subsequently, as a result, miss out on education)? By using level of education as a proxy, the author indirectly makes the case that a) is more likely, but can this be further established? For instance, by eliminating option b)?

A third question concerns whether the higher T is simply related to race and not to social, competitive behavior in a culture of honor. The author seem to lean towards earlier findings indicating that “Among older men or well-educated young men, race made no difference in hormone levels”.

A fourth element, that is indirectly present in this study, but could perhaps be explored further, is whether the higher T is not caused by the honor culture per se, but more generally by experienced threats to ‘manhood’ status. Manhood in this sense is a social status that is expressed differently in different cultures, but is universal in its structure. Its structure lies in its precariousness. It is hard won and easily lost. It may be that experiences of threats to manhood are more prevalent among young, uneducated, black men than among whites or Hispanics, and this explains the higher T levels found in the former group. Yet, one would expect to find similarly high T levels in the latter groups if/when they experience threats to their manhood. As such it could be hypothesized that it is threats to manhood generally and not honor cultures specifically that cause the higher T levels. In that sense, an honor culture is a specific instance where threats to manhood are often experienced. And so, the precarious manhood-thesis may have greater explanatory power than the honor culture

hypothesis, in much the same way as the status-seeking-behavior hypothesis concerning Testosterone has more explanatory power than the anti-social behavior hypothesis. For more on this see for instance: *Vandello, J. A. & Bosson, J. K. 2013. Hard won and easily lost: A review and synthesis of theory and research on precarious manhood: <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2012-24955-001>*

This said, I found the paper fascinating and thought provoking.