



## Male Honor as a Cause of War

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**Abbreviations:** WWI: World War 1

### Commentary

There is now a literature proposing male honor as the cause of most wars [1]. This idea is closely related to studies of wars caused by male leaders seeking revenge for humiliation from earlier defeats [2,3]. Examining the role of male honor might help in understanding the causation of many wars. For example, the origins of WWI may be better understood in this way. It is still a puzzle to most researchers: an example is provided by a highly regarded study by Clark [4]. After reviewing the data and the other studies of how this war began, at the end he seems to be saying that the nations that fought this war were more or less equally involved in starting it.

However, recently it is becoming clear that France played the greatest part of starting the war: revenge for defeat by a group of smaller German-speaking countries in the war of 1870: at that time Prussia and several small German-speaking states fought the war against France. Although altogether much smaller than France, it appears that their superior weapons gave them victory. For 41 years French politics and media were dominated by the cry for revenge [5-9]. The philosopher Bertrand Russell, as a young man in England during WWI, went to jail rather than fight, as he explained at the time: Men fear the sense of humiliation they would have in yielding to the demands of another nation. Rather...than endure the humiliation, they are willing to inflict upon the world all those disasters which it is now (in 1915) suffering and all that exhaustion

and impoverishment which it must long continue to suffer [10].

More recently, 3 US wars, Vietnam, Iran, and Afghanistan, can be understood as attempts by the then presidents to uphold their own honor. Given the danger of any war now, especially with countries like North Korea, who can rocket nuclear bombs, are there any steps that can be taken to make war less likely? One would be to install leaders in male-female pairs: the office of the US President would be filled by two persons, not just one. Like men, most women have honor issues, but they are usually closer to home and therefore less controlling than with most men in inter-nation matters. The current president, Trump, is an example of the massive dangers of a male as sole leader.

If male honor is so intensely offended by humiliation as to cause wars, why haven't most studies taken this direction? One possibility is that shame and its slightly less offensive name humiliation are offensive to most members of modern societies. The psychologist Gershon Kaufman [11,12] suggested that they are taboo, in a way similar to the way that sex is still not mentioned openly in proper groups. The word shame, the "s-word," seems to be just as offensive as the "f-word". Humiliation and embarrassment, on the other hand, are also references to shame, but are somewhat less offensive.

The taboo is also implied in the many studies of shame that do not use the forbidden word at all. Instead, the focus is on one of the many shame cognates [13]. These substitutes serve to hide the underlying unity of the

various terms. One way of hiding shame is to behaviorize it: there are many studies of feelings of rejection, loss of social status or, as in one of the titles below, search for recognition. For example, Rosen's 2005 book on the causes of war mentions anger and fear, but not pride or shame. As a substitute, "status attainment" is suggested as a cause. Surely "status" involves shame and pride primarily [14].

Finally, there is a last gasp hiding that involves only the title of a volume: shame/humiliation is clearly the central thesis in the actual texts, but it does not appear in the title, such as Lindmann's 2010 [3] study of the causes of war. Moisi's [15] volume has humiliation in the subtitle, but it is only one aspect of the three causes in the central thesis, and the word shame is never used.

There are many other studies of what I would call the role of shame in causing war, but going under one of the many substitute words that Ratzinger has named. One example would be saving face, such as Carson [16], about the US role in the Korean War. Although neither Carson nor any of the other articles on war and face-saving state that it is males that is saving face by war, as argued above, it is certainly implied. If it can be proven that many wars are caused by hiding shame, such work might help to avoid further wars.

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