

# New Research From Psychological Science

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Read about the latest research published in *Psychological Science*:

## [The Evolutionary Basis of Honor Cultures](#)

*Andrzej Nowak, Michele J. Gelfand, Wojciech Borkowski, Dov Cohen, and Ivan Hernandez*

In honor cultures, people often fight to defend their reputation, even if doing so is personally risky or costly. Under what circumstances is this type of behavior likely to arise? The researchers created a computerized agent-based model in which each agent — or individual — enacted a different action strategy: aggressive (attack other agents perceived as being weaker), honor (always fight back when confronted), interest (call the police when confronted), or rational (fight back when stronger and surrender when weaker). The researchers manipulated the agents' environment, varying the toughness of the environment and the effectiveness of the authorities (e.g., the police). Honor-based strategies were more successful when the effectiveness of the authority was low, regardless of the environmental toughness, suggesting that institutional authority is a critical element in determining the sustainability and spread of these different systems.

*Michele J. Gelfand will be giving an invited talk at the [28th APS Annual Convention](#) in Chicago, Illinois.*

## [Vicarious Fear Learning Depends on Empathic Appraisals and Trait Empathy](#)

*Andreas Olsson, Kibby McMahon, Goran Papenberg, Jamil Zaki, Niall Bolger, and Kevin N. Ochsner*

The researchers examined whether the vicarious learning of threat is modulated by empathy by manipulating participants' empathic response toward a subject who had been videotaped while receiving shocks that were paired with a color stimulus. The participants were asked to focus on the subject's discomfort (high-empathy condition) or on the relationships between the shocks and the color stimuli (low-empathy condition). Participants' skin conductance responses were then measured during a mock test phase in which they believed they would be shocked — but actually were not. Participants who were instructed to enhance their empathy toward the videotaped subject displayed the strongest evidence of fear learning in the test phase, as measured by the skin conductance responses, and this effect was greatest in those with high levels of trait empathy.