

Evelin --

Sorry to be so slow and submitting our introductory materials for the upcoming Humiliation Studies conference. This has been one of those extraordinarily busy (and stimulating) semesters with both recent events and our continuing work in the field of intractable conflict highlighting the enormous importance of the conference topic.

By way of introduction, the primary focus of our work has been the construction of a comprehensive knowledge base of both theoretical and practical information related to the fostering of more constructive approaches to intractable conflict. This highly interdisciplinary project integrates contributions from the full range of peace-related fields. [Everything is freely available on the Web at Beyond Intractability (www.beyondintractability.org).]

The project's roots lie in academic analysis and an underlying assumption of rationality in which the key to promoting more constructive approaches is to help people do a better job of analyzing available options for dealing with difficult conflict situations. In the course of our work, however, it has become increasingly clear that this rational approach does not adequately account for the role that complex and non-rational, social-psychological dynamics play in determining conflict behavior. In order to address this problem, we have begun an intense effort to incorporate nonrational (or "alternative") ways of knowing and learning. (Many of our participants don't like the word "non-rational" as it sounds too much like "irrational," but we don't have consensus on an alternative term.)

Our goal is for the knowledge base to offer users a clear understanding of the dynamics through which subjective, subconscious learning takes place. More important and difficult, however, is the incorporation of materials which contribute directly to constructive, sub-conscious, learning processes. Here, for example, we're interested in including inspirational stories and works of art that foster this type of learning.

As we develop this aspect of the system, the importance of humiliation and related dynamics becomes increasingly clear. They constitute a major, and largely unnoticed, driver of ongoing Iraqi resistance to US forces and the US conflict between social liberals and conservatives. We really need to find effective ways of discouraging humiliating behavior, fostering of mutual respect between contending parties, and developing helpful interventions to deal with the aftermath of humiliation once it has occurred. We have some material on this topic on Beyond Intractability, but this primarily comes from an essay written by one of our students (Sarah Rosenberg) based on your work. So we want to stress that we do not have personal expertise on humiliation, just a deep interest in it, and a concern that it (along with the other significant causes of intractable conflict) be better understood and addressed by conflict resolution theorists and practitioners.

To give you a little more information about our background and our current work, we have enclosed four essays. You can post these if you think they will be helpful, or not, if they are too far afield. The first reprints this message in pdf form so you can post it on your website easily. The second briefly introduces an information theory of the field and explains the reasoning

behind our focus on web-based educational systems. The second outlines areas in which the conflict resolution field might be able to take the conflict resolution field to the next level of development by moving "outside the box." One of those items is reducing the focus on "rational" appeals. The third essay outlines the beginnings of a 20-year plan for advancing the field (called knowledge-gaps).

We are looking forward to meeting everyone next week. Thanks for inviting us.

- Guy and Heidi

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