How Humiliation Fuels Intractable Conflict:
The Effects of Emotional Roles on Recall and Reactions to Conflictual Encounters

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Abstract

The present research study empirically tests one way in which the emotional experience of humiliation may contribute to the enduring nature of some conflicts. This study contends that the ways in which emotions are socially constructed affects how emotions are experienced, acted upon, and recalled. The degree to which conflicts escalate and become stuck in cycles of violence is affected by these emotional dynamics. In the present study, participants were asked to place themselves in the shoes of someone who was being confronted publicly by an authority figure. As compared to participants who did not perceive the norms to privilege aggression, participants who did perceive such norms to privilege aggression reported a) intentions to be more aggressive in reaction to the event, and b) a higher degree of humiliation and anger when they recalled the event one week later. The results of this study suggest that differing perceptions of the social norms regarding acceptable emotional and behavioral reactions to social encounters affect not only individuals' immediate reactions but also their long-term reactions, which may perpetuate the humiliation-violence cycle in protracted conflicts.

Introduction

What are the factors that lead some conflicts to escalate and endure while others do not? In particular, what leads some conflicts to become self-perpetuating and to involve unending cycles of violence while others are responsive to intervention efforts? A multi-faceted research agenda based on a complex understanding of intractable conflict is necessary to answer these questions. In order to begin this process, we have identified one area that, based on theoretical and qualitative studies, seems particularly central to the intractability of social conflict.

In a meta-framework for understanding intractable conflict, Coleman (2003) identifies intense emotionality as an important social psychological variable that contributes to the intractability of conflict systems. The present research empirically tests one way in which emotional experiences may contribute to the endurance of conflict systems. This paper contends that the ways in which emotions are socially constructed affects how emotions are experienced, acted upon, and recalled. The degree to which conflicts escalate and become stuck in cycles of violence is affected by these emotional dynamics. In particular, this study seeks to empirically test one way in which the emotion of humiliation may be central in perpetuating cycles of violence.

This paper has seven sections. First, it examines the role that emotions may play in intractable conflict situations. Second, it analyzes and extends the construct of humiliation. Third, it discusses the concept of emotional roles, and describes how emotions can be socially constructed to determine how individuals experience and act upon their emotions. Fourth, it looks at the relationship between humiliation and aggression, and fifth, it discusses the persistence of emotions, and the impact this may have on individuals' subsequent behavior. Sixth, it describes the methods, procedure and results of the present study, and concludes with a discussion of limitations, suggested areas for further research, and practical implications of this research.

The Problem: Emotions and Intractable Conflict

Intractable conflicts can be defined as conflicts that are extremely destructive, difficult to resolve, and enduring. They can be distinguished from more tractable conflicts in that they tend to be more complex and symbolic, involve paradoxical issues, and cause deeper physical, psychological and emotional trauma. Intractable conflicts

tend to become self-perpetuating and seem irresolvable (Coleman, 2003). Intractable conflicts can occur at many levels, from the interpersonal to the international.

Regardless of whether conflicts take place at the individual or international level or somewhere in between, emotions are thought to be among the central dynamics contributing to the intractability of conflict situations. Lederach (1997) writes that contemporary conflicts are driven by "social-psychological perceptions, emotions and subjective experiences, which can be wholly independent of the substantive or originating issues" (p. 15). He suggests that these subjective perceptions and emotions can, in and of themselves, perpetuate cycles of violence and counter violence, distinct from the issues that began the conflict in the first place. Others have proposed that emotional experiences are at the core of extreme behavioral reactions in conflict settings (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997).

In some circumstances, intense emotional experiences such as humiliation, anger and rage can motivate aggressive behavior. When individuals act aggressively, those actions can in turn provoke strong emotional reactions in others, which can lead to aggressive retribution, setting in motion a destructive cycle of violence. Recent worldwide events provide examples of how intense collective emotional experiences of humiliation, anger and rage motivate violent activity in the form of terrorism. For example, in a speech in October 2003, Malaysia's then departing Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said,

> *I will not enumerate the instances of our humiliation…We are all oppressed. We are all being humiliated…Today we, the whole Muslim [community], are treated with contempt and dishonor…There is a feeling of hopelessness among the Muslim countries and their people. They feel they can do nothing right…Our only reaction is to become*

> *more and more angry. Angry people cannot think properly.*
> (Friedman, 2003, Sunday, November 9)

The former prime minister suggests that because his people have been humiliated, they may be unable to think clearly about how to respond behaviorally. His speech implies that this emotional experience justifies violent action against the humiliators.

In a similar vein, the experience of humiliation can serve as a perpetrator's moral justification for aggressive action. Public speeches given by those involved in terrorist activities highlight the ways in which their experience of humiliation has fueled morally justified violent acts. For example, according to the New York Times, on a videotape showing the beheading of American captive Nicholas Berg in May 2004, a masked terrorist referred to photos showing the humiliation of the Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison, and read a statement saying,

> *The shameful photos are evil humiliation for Muslim men and women in*
> *the Abu Ghraib prison…Where is the sense of honor, where is the rage?*
> *Where is the anger for God's religion? Where is the sense of veneration*
> *of Muslims, and where is the sense of vengeance for the honor of Muslim*
> *men and women in the Crusaders prisons?*
> (Filkins, et. al., 2004, Wednesday, May 12)

This excerpt demonstrates how the experience of humiliation on a collective level can lead individuals to feel justified in expressing rage and seeking violent revenge for the humiliation cast upon their group. Lear (2003) writes, "Indeed, because humiliation is supposed to be so awful, some kind of retaliation is thought to be justified." This suggests that, under some circumstances, humiliation can be so vexing that it can inspire retaliatory action and aggression.

However, under other circumstances, individuals may feel humiliated but do not seek violent revenge or retribution. For example, a front page article in the

New York Times (Sharkey, 2004, Tuesday, November 23) highlighted a story about American women who have complained to the airport authorities about being humiliated by security guards at airports across the U.S. As a result of new rules that require more frequent and intense "pat-downs" at airport security checkpoints, many women are saying the pat-downs, often conducted in public settings, are humiliating. While the women interviewed in the article felt the situation was humiliating, many of them felt there was not much they could do about the situation. One woman described her experience being searched by a male security officer at an airport checkpoint: "I said, 'I am really uncomfortable having you feel me up,' but I basically had no choice. It was either that or miss my flight." Another woman has retained a civil rights lawyer to object to the harsh public pat-downs in a class-action lawsuit. In this story, the women's humiliation was not cause for violent revenge. Rather, the women kept quiet, complained to authorities, and/or sought a lawful route to establishing the legitimacy of their claims of humiliation.

What are the factors that led the women to seek justice for their humiliation through non-violent and legal action, but that led the terrorist to seek justice for his people's humiliation through violent revenge? There are numerous possible reasons for the differences between the women's and the terrorist's reactions. For instance, perhaps the women are more psychologically stable than the terrorist, and therefore are able to deal with their humiliation in a less violent way. Another possible explanation is that the women may have better access to lawful systems in which to bring their situation to justice than the terrorist does.

For example, the terrorist may believe that the only effective method for demonstrating his frustration and rage is to act violently, while the women may realize that they have access to fair court procedures (see Gurr, 2000). However, a third possibility is that differences may exist in the cultural contexts in which the women and the terrorist live and act. While each of the above reasons is plausible and worthy of empirical investigation, the focus of this paper is specifically on the influence of contextual or societal norms on individuals' responses to humiliating events.

<u>Humiliation</u>

In order to discuss how the emotion of humiliation relates to situations of conflict, background on humiliation in the psychology literature will be offered.

<u>Humiliation has not been well defined or studied.</u> Researchers have traditionally paid little attention to the role that emotions in general play in conflict (Barry & Oliver, 1996). In particular, compared with emotions such as shame and embarrassment, research on the emotion of humiliation has been conducted much less frequently (Lindner, 2002). When it has been examined, the constructs of shame, embarrassment and humiliation have often been used interchangeably (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Lindner, 2002), making it difficult to identify the defining qualities of humiliation as opposed to other related emotions. In addition, while the role that humiliation plays in conflict has received some attention in qualitative research investigations as well as in the popular media, very few quantitative empirical studies on humiliation and conflict have been published in the social psychology or related literatures (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999).

Background. Lindner's (2001, 2002) qualitative research on the social psychological aspects of humiliation in diverse conflict settings provides a core frame from which to explore this topic. In her research, Lindner (2002) described a 4-year study in which she interviewed 216 individuals who had been involved in violent, deadly conflict in Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi either as parties to the conflict or as intervenors. She found experiences of humiliation to be central to the perpetuation of conflict in these settings. She describes how humiliation begot humiliation when parties who were once underlings rose up and rebelled against their humiliators, only to commit the very same humiliating atrocities on them. On the other hand, she also describes how some individuals, such as Nelson Mandela and Somalia's former first lady Edna Adan, refused to become humiliated at the hands of those who tried to humiliate them, either by ignoring and moving above their taunts as was the case with Mandela, or by engaging others to support them in avoiding what was meant to be a humiliating situation.

Some proposed definitions. In this section, an analysis of the psychological construct of humiliation will be offered by reviewing and extending existing definitions of humiliation. Humiliation generally occurs in relationships of unequal power in which the humiliator has control over the victim. This power imbalance is reflected in the English word "humiliation" which is rooted in the Latin word "humus" meaning earth. This root connotes being made lower than, being pushed down to the ground, or literally having one's face "being put into the mud" (Lindner, 2002, p. 127). In keeping with the idea that humiliation inherently involves an imbalanced relationship between at least two people, Lindner (2002) defines humiliation as:

> *Enforced lowering of a person or group, a process of subjugation that damages or strips away their pride, honor or dignity…To be humiliated is to be placed, against your will and often in a deeply hurtful way, in a situation that is greatly inferior to what you feel you should expect. Humiliation entails demeaning treatment that transgresses established expectations…The victim is forced into passivity, acted upon, made helpless (p. 126).*

This definition highlights several important aspects of humiliation. First, as previously noted, it points out that humiliation involves a figurative lowering to the ground, or a sense of being made to feel inferior. Second, it notes that humiliation involves a departing from an existing norm or expectation about how one should be treated. For example, Lindner (2002) writes that as a result of the popular acceptance of the concept of human rights, which suggests that all people have a right to equal dignity and freedom, many people who at one point may have accepted their subjugation as normative (such as in the caste system in India, for example) began to think of themselves as humiliated.

Hartling and Luchetta (1999) define the internal experience of humiliation as "the deep dysphoric feeling associated with being, or perceiving oneself as being, unjustly degraded, ridiculed, or put down—in particular, one's identity has been demeaned or devalued" (p. 264). Margalit (2002) writes that humiliation is a formative experience that has the power to shape how individuals view themselves. These understandings of humiliation highlight how the experience of humiliation can have a significant impact on an individual's identity. In fact, it seems possible that a humiliating event can significantly impact not only individual identity, but also collective identity. For example, descendants of African-American slaves may collectively identify with the humiliation and

disgrace that has happened to their people. Or, when Holocaust memorials exhort Jews to "never forget" the atrocities that befell their people, in encouraging the remembering, they also encourage a collective identification with the past humiliation.

Klein (1991) defines humiliation as experiencing "some form of ridicule, scorn, contempt, or other degrading treatment at the hands of others" (p. 94). He proposes that humiliation is essentially an interaction-oriented emotion, involving three roles: the humiliator, the victim, and the witness. This suggests that humiliation is a public emotion in the sense that the humiliating experience either takes place in front of, or is otherwise known about by, at least one witness.

Lewis (1971) and Negrao, et. al. (2004) suggest that humiliation is a "hybrid" emotion that involves both shame and anger, including a unique combination of self-blame and other-blame. While shame is understood to be an emotion that is focused on the self, and anger is understood to be focused on the other, the hybrid view of humiliation suggests that humiliation is both self- and other-focused.

In addition, humiliation can be characterized as a moral emotion. Moral emotions are those that are considered to motivate ethical behavior towards others (Margalit, 2002). Some emotions are considered moral emotions because they inspire what is generally considered to be positively-oriented ethical treatment, such as when compassion or sympathy leads to helping behavior. Other emotions, such as humiliation or rage, can be considered moral emotions because they motivate moral behavior in a negative way, such as violence or aggression.

Humiliation may also be considered a moral emotion in the sense that, as a result of experiencing humiliation, individuals may feel permitted to engage in activities that previously seemed socially and morally unacceptable. This may happen because being a victim of humiliation either makes it acceptable to cross over existing moral boundaries, or because the moral boundaries themselves become extended. In either case, as a result of experiencing humiliation, more extreme, usually violent behavior against another individual or against an out-group becomes morally and socially acceptable.

Taking into account the various definitions outlined above, an integrated definition of humiliation is provided here. *We define humiliation as an emotion, triggered by public events, which evokes a sense of inferiority resulting from the realization that one is being, or has been, treated in a way that departs from the normal expectations for fair and equal human treatment. The experience of humiliation has the potential to serve as a formative, guiding force in a person's life, such that depending on the context in which it occurred, it can significantly impact one's individual and/or collective or group identity. Finally, humiliation is a moral emotion. As such, the experience of humiliation motivates behavioral responses that may serve to extend or re-define previously existing moral boundaries, thus in some cases leading individuals to perceive otherwise socially impermissible behavior to be permissible.*

How Social Conditions Influence Emotional Experience and Behavior

According to Frijda (1986), emotions can be defined as action tendencies. In other words, emotions refer to an inner state that predicts forthcoming behavior. For example, if someone is angry, we can expect to see him or her behaviorally act out

that anger. Emotions are tendencies to establish, maintain, or disrupt a relationship with the external environment.

Different types of action tendencies correspond to different emotions. For example, Frijda (1986) considers fear to be the urge to separate oneself from aversive events, and anger to be associated with the urge to regain freedom of action and control. Many emotions can be labeled interchangeably with the action they tend to motivate; this qualifies them as primary, or basic emotions. However, other emotions are considered to be blends, such as the notion that humiliation may be a mixture of shame and anger. When an emotion is considered to be a blend (and not a primary emotion) it is said to be elicited by a specific constellation of events, or a story that elicits the emotion. Unlike primary emotions that tend to elicit the same actions over time, blend emotions can elicit many different types of actions depending on the particularities of the story (Frijda, 1986). This view of emotions and behavior suggests that under different social conditions, certain emotions, especially those considered to be blend emotions, might be acted upon differently.

While some may take the stance that emotions are psychological constructs that are not subject to influence by social variables, studies on how emotions vary between cultures (Frijda, 1986; Wong & Bond, 2004) and other conceptualizations of emotions depict them as influenced and constructed by social and cultural messages and norms (Averill, 2001; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997; Harre, 1986; Markus & Kitayama, 2001). Averill (1997) describes emotional experience as shaped by social rules and norms regarding how people should understand, value, and behaviorally respond to their emotions. Emotional rules established by societal norms correspond

with a set of emotional roles that individuals take up when they experience an emotion (Averill, 1997).

These emotional roles can be described in three broad categories: privileges, restrictions, and obligations. *Privileges* refers to the emotional roles that allow a person to engage in behavior that would be discouraged under normal circumstances. This is behavior that people can "get away with" as a result of being in a certain emotional state. For example, an individual who is grieving for a deceased family member may be entitled to miss work and be unresponsive to voicemails and emails without facing the normal organizational penalties for doing so. *Restrictions* refers to the limits placed on what a person can do when in an emotional state and "get away with it." In this case, the norms of the culture limit individuals' emotional responses by restricting how mild, strong, expressive, or drawn out the behavioral response should be. For instance, a person who is grieving for a deceased spouse may feel restricted from dating new people for a certain period of time. In contrast, *obligations* refers to the things that a person must do when in an emotional state (Averill, 1997). For example, at a funeral, a grieving spouse may feel obligated to wear black, speak in a soft tone, show signs of sadness, and greet other mourners.

These distinctions regarding how emotions are shaped provide a useful framework for thinking about how social norms affect the humiliation-aggression cycle. They help us understand why a humiliating experience may produce vastly different emotional and behavioral reactions in individuals, depending on their perception of the social norms surrounding the situation. They may help explain why individuals in some

communities would react much more strongly than individuals in other communities to the same type of humiliating event.

Humiliation and Aggression

Theoretical and empirical work has been conducted on the relationships between guilt, shame and aggression (see Tangney, et. al., 1992) and anger and aggression (see Averill, 2001). By comparison, relatively little theoretical and empirical work has been conducted on the relationship between humiliation and aggression. However, following are a few notable exceptions.

In a study conducted on aggression that occurs within the context of dating relationships, (Foo & Margolin, 1995), 111 male and 179 female participants reported their own aggressive behaviors directed toward their dating partners. Feelings of humiliation contributed to the prediction of both males' and females' dating aggression, while other variables, including the perceived need for self-defense, which was highly endorsed as justifying aggressive action, did not predict aggressive behavior.

On the political level, Steinberg (1991) demonstrates how the experience of being humiliated, the fear of humiliation, and the wish to retaliate by inflicting humiliation on the other motivated aggressive behavior by Khrushchev and President Kennedy in the Cuban missile crisis. She proposes that feelings of humiliation and shame are often followed by narcissistic rage that is expressed in acts of aggression in an attempt to alleviate the painful emotions and to increase feelings of self-worth. Steinberg's analysis of the Cuban missile crisis suggests that publicly humiliating international leaders may invite their desire for revenge, retaliatory behavior, and in

some cases, can set the stage for mass destruction and war. In line with this assertion, Scheff (2003) suggests that the humiliation that befell Germany after World War I led Hitler and the German public to become trapped in an on-going cycle of humiliation, rage and vengeful aggression, which ultimately resulted in the perpetration of the atrocities of the Holocaust.

The Recall of Emotions

In his book *The Ethics of Memory*, Margalit (2002) suggests that it is not only the *experience* of moral emotions like humiliation that motivates aggressive behavior, but also the *memory* of such emotions. He writes that the memory of a humiliating event can be akin to re-living it. Margalit proposes that, under certain conditions, individuals can become attached, or even addicted, to the emotion, thus serving as a constant source of retaliatory action.

Why would individuals become attached or addicted to such vexing, horrible emotions? Individuals may become addicted to the "benefits" conferred upon those who are humiliated. This is similar to the notion that a victim receives some benefit as a result of his or her victim identity or status. For example, in studies involving Israeli and Palestinian participants, Nadler (2002) notes that individuals who are perceived as (and who perceive themselves as) victims become socially "exempt" from recognizing and taking responsibility for the pain they have caused the Other. They become exempt from their status as perpetrators, even if, in addition to being victims, they have also perpetrated aggressive acts against the other.

This paper takes this argument one step further to suggest that not only does status as a humiliated person confer exemptions from responsibility for causing pain, but that

status as a humiliated person may lead one to feel morally justified to aggress against the other. The satisfaction and pleasure that may arise from feeling morally justified to aggress may lead individuals to hold onto their humiliated status. To give up the status as a humiliated person would mean that the aggression would no longer be morally justified, and no further pleasure or catharsis could be derived from it. It would also mean having to face the reality of one's own perpetration, and one's own responsibility for the other's pain.

If it is true that the memory of humiliation is akin to reliving it in some way, and feelings of humiliation can motivate aggressive action under the right conditions, then the memory of one's own humiliation may serve as a perpetual motivation to take revenge on the perpetrator, leading to unending cycles of perpetration and violence.

<u>The Present Study</u>

This study tests whether differences in emotional roles (i.e., the perception of social norms) affects individuals' immediate emotional reactions, behavioral intentions, and delayed emotional reactions to a social encounter. This study is conceived as a first step in a broader research agenda to better understand the relationship between moral emotions and behavior.
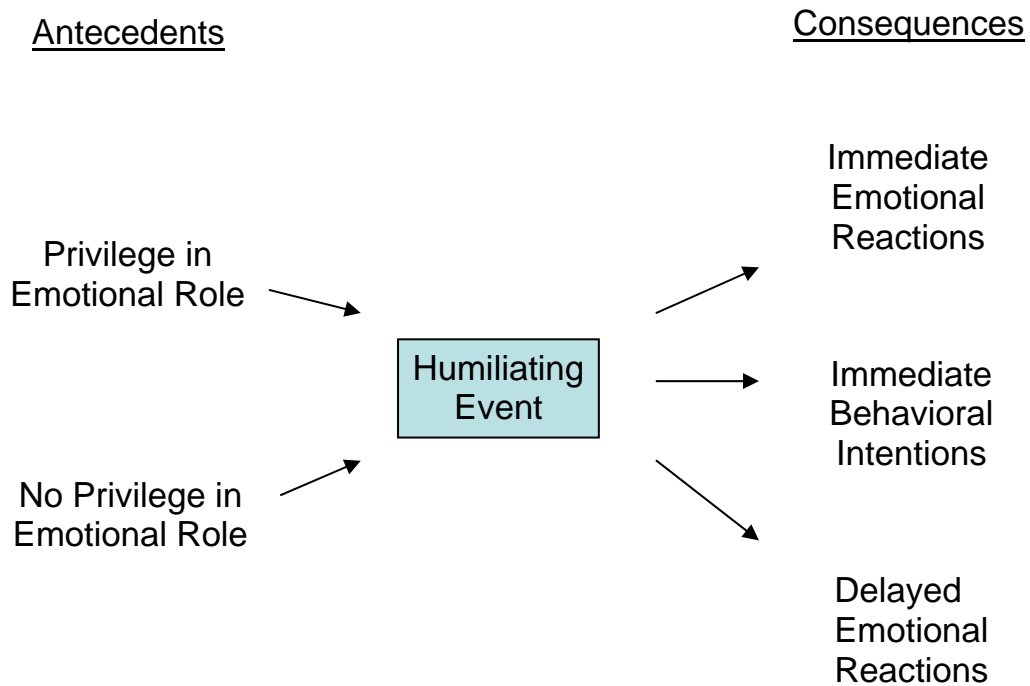
<u>Hypotheses.</u>

Hypothesis #1: As compared to individuals who do not perceive social norms to privilege aggression in response to a social encounter (i.e., non-privilege in emotional role), individuals who perceive social norms to privilege aggression (i.e., privilege in emotional role) will report a higher degree of negative emotions immediately after the encounter.

Hypothesis #2: As compared to individuals who do not perceive social norms to privilege aggression in response to a social encounter (i.e., non-privilege in emotional role), individuals who perceive social norms to privilege aggression (i.e., privilege in emotional role) will report intentions to be more aggressive in reaction to the event.

Hypothesis #3: As compared to individuals who do not perceive social norms to privilege aggression in response to a social encounter (i.e., non-privilege in emotional role), individuals who perceive social norms to privilege aggression (i.e., privilege in emotional role) will report a higher degree of negative emotions when they recall the event one week later.

Figure 1.

Antecedents

Consequences

Privilege in Emotional Role

No Privilege in Emotional Role

Humiliating Event

Immediate Emotional Reactions

Immediate Behavioral Intentions

Delayed Emotional Reactions

Methods

<u>Subjects</u>

There were 42 participants in the study. 18 were graduate students and 17 were undergraduate students at a Northeastern university and 5 were employees at a global professional services firm. Following Cohen and Nisbett (1994) and Cohen, et. al. (1996), the participants were all males. The rationale for this is that since men are responsible for the majority of the aggressive acts committed in American society (Cohen and Nisbett, 1994) including only men our analyses would enable clearer identification of relationships among variables. Participants ranged in age from approximately 22 to 45 years of age, were of varied ethnic backgrounds, speakers of English (either first or second language) and of varied socio-economic status. Participants were randomly assigned to two conditions, with 20 participants in the *privilege* condition, and 22 participants in the *no privilege* condition. Data from one participant in the *privilege* condition were dropped from analyses because his responses were insufficient.

<u>Procedure</u>

This study had an experimental design. Participants completed a 20-minute questionnaire in which they read a one-page case study, and subsequently answered a series of short-answer, multiple choice, and Likert-scale questions based on the case. Upon completing the questionnaire, participants were thanked and were told that one week later, they would receive an email with 6 follow-up questions about the study, after which they would receive a debriefing letter and an opportunity to debrief by phone. One week after completing the initial questionnaire, all participants were sent the follow-up questions by email. 31 participants (76%) responded by email to the follow-up

questionnaire. All participants were emailed the debrief letter and were offered the opportunity to debrief their experience by phone.

Independent Variables

In the one-page case, participants were asked to place themselves in the role of a Vice President of Sales at a multinational company who was publicly verbally humiliated by the Chief Operating Officer at the company (see case in Appendix). The case varied by condition with respect to the independent variable, emotional role. In the *privilege* condition, the text was designed so that participants would interpret the social norms in the company as those that privileged, or encouraged, an aggressive response in reaction to a humiliating event. In the *no privilege* condition, the text was designed so that participants would interpret the social norms in the company as those that did not privilege, or did not encourage, an aggressive response in reaction to a humiliating event.

Measure of the Independent Variable

Upon finding no significant results using the experimental manipulation, participants' emotional role (i.e., subjective understanding of the social norms) was measured. Two blind independent raters coded participants' subjective understanding of the social norms (regarding the degree to which the norms privilege aggressive behavior in response to a humiliating event at the company in the case) on a scale from 1 (extremely restricting of aggressive behavior) to 5 (extremely privileging of aggressive behavior). The inter-rater reliability was .69.

Dependent Measures

There were three dependent measures in this study: immediate emotional reactions, aggressive behavioral intentions, and delayed emotional reactions. Immediate

emotional reactions were measured using one open-ended and five Likert-scale questions to assess the participant's emotional reactions immediately after reading the case study. Behavioral intentions were measured by responses to five open ended, one yes/no, and 11 Likert-scale questions regarding the participant's behavioral intentions (i.e., whether and to what extent the participant would engage in aggressive acts). Delayed emotional reactions were measured by responses to Likert-scale questions to assess the participant's emotional reactions when they recalled the case one week later.

Results

A t-test for equality of group means was conducted comparing the means of the experimentally manipulated groups (privilege in emotional role vs. no privilege in emotional role) on each of the dependent measures. As discussed above, the t-test did not yield significant results.

However, using the measure of emotional role, analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted with emotional role (i.e., subjective perception of social norms) as the independent variable ("privilege to aggress" emotional role vs. "no privilege to aggress" emotional role) and immediate emotional reactions (as measured using one open ended question, behavioral intentions (as measured using three questions examining intended behavioral response, level of intended destructiveness, and aggressive intention) and degree of feeling upset, angry, and humiliated one week later as the dependent measures. The ANOVAs were all significant. (See Table 1.) The dependent measures of intended behavioral response $F(1, 38) = 4.44$, p < .04, level of intended destructiveness $F(1, 38) = 9.54$, p < .004, aggressive intention $F(1, 38) = 7.33$, p < .01, degree of feeling upset one week later $F(1,11) = 8.57$, p < .01, degree of feeling angry one week later $F(1,11) = 5.06$, p < .046, and degree of feeling humiliated one week later $F(1,11) = 11.39$, p < .006, each varied as a function of emotional role.

Table 1. ANOVA Table

DV	GROUP	Mean	SD	F	N
Response	No Privilege	2.900	.852		20
	Privilege	3.500	.946	4.44*	20
Destructive	No Privilege	1.750	.850		20
	Privilege	2.700	1.08	9.54**	20
Aggressive	No Privilege	1.250	.444		20
	Privilege	1.650	.489	7.33**	20
Recall Upset	No Privilege	2.429	1.39		7
	Privilege	4.333	.816	8.57**	6
Recall Angry	No Privilege	2.714	1.38		7
	Privilege	4.667	1.75	5.06*	6
Recall Humil.	No Privilege	2.000	1.15		7
	Privilege	4.500	1.51	11.39**	6

Specifically, participants who perceived the social norms to privilege aggression reported intentions to have a more aggressive behavioral response M = 3.5, SD = .95, than those who did not feel privileged to aggress, M = 2.9, SD = .85. They reported higher likelihood to engage in destructive action, M = 2.7, SD = 1.08, than those who did not feel privileged to aggress, M = 1.75, SD = .85. They reported more aggressive intentions, M = 1.65, SD = .49 versus M = 1.25, SD = .44. Participants who felt privileged to aggress reported feeling more upset one week later, M = 4.33, SD = .82 than those who did not feel privileged to aggress, M = 2.43, SD = 1.39; more angry one week later, M = 4.67, SD = 1.75, than those who did not feel privileged to aggress, M = 2.71, SD = 1.38; and more humiliated one week later, M = 4.50, SD = 1.51, than those who did not feel privileged to aggress, M = 2.00, SD = 1.15.

An ANOVA was conducted with emotional role as the independent variable and immediate emotional reactions as the dependent measure. Results were not significant. [Insert Table 1.]

Discussion

The empirical results of this study support two of the three initial hypotheses. As compared to individuals who did not perceive social norms to privilege aggression in response to a social encounter (i.e., non-privilege in emotional role), individuals who perceived social norms to privilege aggression (i.e., privilege in emotional role) reported a) intentions to be more aggressive in reaction to the event, and b) a higher degree of negative emotions when they recalled the event one week later. These findings suggest that the social construction of emotions plays a significant part in shaping how individuals respond, emotionally and behaviorally, to humiliating events. In particular, the findings suggest that the way individuals perceive the broader social context (i.e., emotional role) makes a difference in the degree to which they intend to engage in aggressive behavior, and in the degree to which their emotions about the humiliating event stay with them over time.

An interesting finding in this study is that despite finding no significant differences in immediate emotional reactions between individuals who perceived the broader social context as more or less privileging of aggressive behavior (i.e., emotional role privileging of aggressive behavior versus not privileging), there was a significant difference in delayed emotional reactions. One possible explanation for this is that methodologically, since the questions on emotional experience were among the first questions asked in the initial survey but among the last questions

asked in the follow-up survey, the difference in placement of the questions within the initial and follow-up surveys is responsible for the discrepancy in answers. However, another plausible hypothesis for this discrepancy is theory-driven and has to do with the nature of social information processing.

According to social information processing theory, individuals look to their own past behavior in order to make inferences about how they feel and how they should act in future situations (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). If individuals who perceive the social norms of a situation to privilege an aggressive behavioral response intend to respond more aggressively than those who do not perceive a social privilege to aggress (as the findings in this study indicate), then it could be that those individuals who intended to aggress in response to a humiliating event look back at their own intended behavior one week later and infer from those intentions that they must feel humiliated. Salancik & Pfeffer (1978) write, "Individuals use their own behavior to construct reality…Perception is a retrospective process: though the [emotional] experience is immediate, it derives from recall and reconstruction" (p. 228).

Thus, social information processing theory suggests that even if individuals' immediate emotional reactions to a humiliating situation are moderate, if they perceive the social context to privilege aggression and they do in fact intend to aggress, their emotions may become more extreme over time. Additional research is needed to explore this possible explanation in further detail.

Regardless of the exact nature of, and explanations for, this phenomenon, this dynamic sheds some light on how emotions such as humiliation fuel the intractability of conflict situations. Margalit (2002) theorizes that remembering a humiliating event

provides as much justification for violent retribution as does the event itself. The results of this study suggest that remembering a humiliating event may provide even *more* justification for violent retribution than does the event itself. If intensity of emotional reaction is correlated with intensity of aggressive reaction, then an individual who experiences a more intense emotional reaction one week after an event takes place will be likely to behave even more intensely one week later than he did immediately after the event took place.

This provides us with a brief glimpse into one way the cycle of humiliation and violence works. For instance, let us imagine that an individual perceives a situation to be humiliating, and receives messages from his society that when humiliated, it is OK to lash out against his humiliator. Thus, he reacts aggressively, and also remembers his initial experience of humiliation and anger intensely over time. Therefore, even in the absence of another specific humiliating event, the persistence of these intense emotions fuels him to commit further, and perhaps more extreme aggressive acts against his initial perpetrator (and/or members of the perpetrator's group), which provokes further acts of retribution from the other side, perpetuating the cycle of violence and humiliation.

<u>Limitations</u>

Given that this is a study conducted in a relatively new field of research, there are a number of methodological limitations in this study. The primary limitations are regarding the stimulus materials. First, the humiliating situation described in the stimulus materials took place between co-workers in an organizational work setting, a context that has been shown to inhibit employee-on-employee aggression (LeBlanc and Barling,

2004). Since one of the dependent variables was intended aggression, the effects were likely not as strong as they would have been had the setting been different, such as at a party or other social setting. Second, the scenario took place between a Vice President and a Chief Operating Officer in a company—a relationship in which there are clear differences in power. The participants in the study were asked to place themselves in the shoes of the Vice President who is humiliated by the COO, and then answer questions about their intentions to aggress against the COO. The power difference between the Vice President and COO may have led participants to intend to be less aggressive than they would have if the situation had taken place between individuals with more equal power.

Second, this study was not able to draw upon existing scales to measure the dependent variables. This required writing and piloting each survey item without the ability to be confident in the validity and reliability of the items. In addition, there were only 42 participants, which reduced the likelihood of finding the predicted effects.

<u>Areas of Further Research</u>

Two additional studies are currently underway to add to this body of research and to refine this study's methodology. The first is a correlational study in which the independent variable, emotional role, will be measured and correlated with five dependent variables: immediate emotional reactions, immediate intended behavioral response, delayed emotional reactions, delayed intended behavioral response, and culture of honor. This study will be run with double the number of participants, and is designed to test whether: a) those who perceive the social context to privilege aggression will not only experience more intense feelings of humiliation and

intentions to react more aggressively in the immediate short-term, but also will experience more intense feelings of humiliation and stronger intentions to aggress one week later, and b) those who perceive the social context to privilege aggression also more closely identify as those from a "culture of honor" in which one's honor is held in high regard.

The second study has an experimental design that seeks to improve upon the manipulation that was attempted in the present study. The independent and dependent variables will be the same as those described for the correlational study above. If the manipulation is successful, and the results support the hypotheses, this will bolster the idea that the social context can be altered to affect not only immediate emotional reactions and intentions to aggress, but also cycles of violence in the long-term through prolonged emotional reactions and intentions to aggress based on the initial humiliating event.

A third study is planned using male and female participants to test whether gender role identity (i.e., the extent to which an individual identifies with characteristics traditionally associated with male or female identity) moderates the effects of emotional roles on behavioral intentions and emotional recall in humiliating situations.

Implications

This topic is quite relevant today, as individuals and groups at the community, national and international levels struggle to deal with the effects of humiliation, anger and rage on violence in schools, ongoing wars between ethnic groups around the globe, and in the terrorism that continues to occur in our world today. The results of

this study suggest that the way individuals perceive social norms regarding aggressive responses to a humiliating event affects not only individuals' immediate behavioral reactions to a humiliating event, but also their long-term emotional and behavioral reactions that influence on-going patterns of violence. Thus, the results imply that one way to prevent protracted conflict at every level of society is to influence how individuals perceive the social messages regarding how they should respond, emotionally and behaviorally, when they are faced with a humiliating event. Currently, social messages differ drastically in different countries, governments, organizations, schools, communities, and families about what is and is not socially permitted, emotionally and behaviorally, in reaction to humiliating events. The point of altering the existing messages in any given society or organization is to try to break the cycle of humiliation and aggression so that even when humiliating events do occur they are less likely to lead to ongoing cycles of violence.

At the societal level, altering social messages can be done through a variety of channels, including the media, the political arena, and formal and informal education initiatives. For example, in advertising campaigns and political speeches, community and national leaders can repeatedly send the message that it is best to deal with one's own anger and humiliation in a constructive way—by talking the situation out with the other side if possible and finding other non-violent means of addressing the situation. Within formal education systems, programs similar to conflict resolution or anger management initiatives could provide training for students and teachers regarding how to handle humiliating situations constructively, and could encourage them to brainstorm non-violent ways to respond the next time it happens. Education

and media initiatives at the national and community levels could provide training for

leaders on how to prevent collective-level humiliating events from occurring in the

first place, and how to develop and send the right social messages to diminish the

effects of humiliating events when they do occur.

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Appendix A: Cases

(The two conditions are identical, except for bolded paragraphs.)

Please imagine that the following events are happening to you.

You are a Senior Vice President of Sales at a highly successful multinational high-end furniture company. For the last 14 years, you have been one of the top executives at the company—you have been responsible for huge increases in sales and have helped the company grow from a relatively small player into a top competitor. You have been very successful with your customers and have gained respect from the CEO, President and Board members as well as major executives in the industry at large. People know you wherever you go. You spend a lot of time not only working with these people, but also socializing, playing golf, and going to dinner parties and other events. You're always surrounded by friends you've made in the industry over the years, which is very important to you, particularly since you and your wife split up last year.

[Privilege condition:]
The climate of the company tends to be polite and efficient. There is a certain formality to it: but that's okay with you. This organization is very successful and well-respected in the industry. People work here because they're the top professionals in their fields, and they know they deserve to work in the best possible environment. This is a place where people take a lot of pride in what they do—it's important to treat each other with respect, honor and personal dignity. This is a tightly-run ship.

[No privilege condition:]
The climate of the company tends to be intensely competitive, demanding, and at times somewhat abusive: but you're OK with that. You've lasted here for years and grown a thick skin. You find it keeps people on their toes and motivated to always do their best. When the boss yells, people listen, and that's why the organization works as smoothly and successfully as it does. It's just a more efficient way to do business.

You're about to attend an Executive Committee meeting with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the Chief Operating Officer (COO) and 5 other VPs. You consider the COO and the 5 VPs to be among your closest colleagues. The purpose of this meeting is to report on the status of the business. Each week, you and your colleagues present the current financial situation to the Executive Committee. These meetings typically run pretty smoothly. However, in the past few months, there have been some sudden changes in the market conditions, and the sales numbers have plummeted. You've been working late and pushing your direct reports, but your problems with your wife have only made it harder for you to concentrate on your work. You know you're going to have to present some bad news to the Executive Committee at this meeting because the market conditions are just not getting any better.

When it's your turn to present, you hand out your financial report, and before you can even begin to speak, the Chief Operating Officer (COO) glances at the summary and shouts, "Here we go again. This shit is becoming a pattern with you!" He then gets out of his chair, clearly exasperated, and walks past all of your colleagues until he's standing directly behind your chair, where he continues to yell: "We're not paying you $250,000 a year to bring us shit news every week! I don't think you can handle this job. You've somehow been able to get by for the last few years, but ever since your wife left you…Maybe we should send you back to school to learn how to sell!" He sneers, still hovering over your chair. Looking at your colleagues, he screams: "Why the hell did we ever hire this guy?"