A Theoretical Understanding of How Emotions Fuel Intractable Conflict:

The Case of Humiliation

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Abstract

This paper argues that an essential step in investigating the causes and

characteristics of intractable conflict is to understand the role that intense emotions, such

as humiliation, play in perpetuating protracted cycles of violence. Through a series of

hypotheses, the paper proposes that the way emotions are socially constructed influences

the way they are experienced, acted upon and recalled, and that this process directly

affects the intractable nature of some conflicts. Existing social psychological research is

cited in support of the theoretical framework, and implications for further research and

policy are discussed.

Introduction

> First, we must understand and feel the landscape of protracted violence
> and why it poses such deep-rooted challenges to constructive change. In
> other words, we must set our feet deeply into the geographies and realities
> of what destructive relationships produce, what legacies they leave, and
> what breaking their violent patterns will require (Lederach, 2005, p. 5)

The growing field of intractable conflict studies is currently engaged in an

important inquiry to understand why and how intractable conflict occurs. For example,

we seek to know why some conflicts become intractable while others do not, and when

they do become intractable, we seek to understand the variety of mechanisms by which

intractablity occurs. While answers to this inquiry are likely to be quite expansive and

complex and are just beginning to be explored in the literature (for example, see Coleman,

2003; Kriesberg, 1989, 2005), this paper proposes that an essential step in investigating

the nature of intractable conflict is to understand the role that intense emotions, such as

humiliation, play in perpetuating the cycles of violence. Scholars and practitioners (e.g.,

Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2004; Lindner, 2002; Coleman, 2003; Friedman, 2003) have

begun to identify humiliation as among the central emotions experienced by those in intractable conflict situations. However, while a number of scholars and practitioners have identified emotions as central to the problem of intractable conflict, relatively little theoretical and empirical work has been conducted on the role that emotions play in conflict situations (Barry and Oliver, 1996; Hartling and Luchetta, 1999; Lindner, 2002).

In this paper, we explore the role that emotions play in perpetuating conflict, using humiliation as a case example. We contend that the ways in which emotions are socially constructed affects how emotions are experienced, acted upon, and recalled, and that these experiences, actions and recollections directly influence the degree to which conflicts escalate and become stuck in cycles of violence. In this paper, we seek to shed light more specifically on why and how this is so.

This paper has five sections. In the first section, we offer an overview of the role that emotions play in contributing to the intractability of conflict. This section includes a brief definition of what is meant by intractable conflict. The next section offers background and a proposed definition of humiliation, and describes how humiliation is often linked with aggressive behavior. The third section describes how emotions are socially constructed, and how the social construction of emotions influences emotional experience and behavior. An overview of relevant research on the "culture of honor" is provided here, which describes how the social construction of honor codes influences emotional experience and behavior. The fourth section provides an exploration of how emotions are recalled, or remembered, and the role that the recall of humiliation plays in perpetuating conflict dynamics. The paper concludes with a brief overview of some

implications of this theoretical work for future research and policy in the field of intractable conflict.

<p style="text-align:center">Emotions and Intractable Conflict</p>

In order to describe the relationship between emotions and intractable conflict, a basic definition of intractable conflict is provided, and the role of emotions as both antecedent and consequence of intractable conflict is discussed.

<u>Definition of Intractable Conflict</u>

Intractable conflicts are those that stubbornly persist despite continued attempts at resolution. The dictionary definition of "intractable" is "not easily governed, managed or directed; not easily manipulated or wrought; not easily relieved or cured" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2005). This definition reflects our view that intractable conflicts are particularly intransigent and difficult to manage, transform and resolve, but that they are by no means hopeless. We use the term intractable conflict to suggest (as many in the field have; see Burgess & Burgess, 2005) that we must work passionately and rigorously to move these conflicts beyond their current intractable states. (For a more in-depth discussion on the definition and meaning of the term intractable conflict, see Kriesberg, et. al., 1989; Coleman, 2000, 2003; Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2004, 2005; Putnam & Wondolleck, 2003; Burgess & Burgess, 2005).

Intractable conflicts can be broadly defined by three overarching characteristics. First, intractable conflicts are protracted; that is, they persist over a long period of time. In other words, they are characterized by long-standing conflict that manifests itself in cyclical patterns, with frequent bursts of violence juxtaposed with periods of relative quiet as conflict brews beneath the surface (Putnam & Wondolleck, 2003; Coleman,

2000). Second, they are waged in ways that the adversaries themselves or third parties perceive to be destructive, such as by bearing devastating financial costs as well as extremely traumatic physical and emotional consequences. Third, they continue despite repeated attempts by third parties to resolve or transform them (Kreisberg, 2005).

<u>Emotions As Both Antecedent and Consequence of Intractable Conflict</u>

Emotions can be considered both a cause (antecedent), and result (consequence), of intractable conflict situations. Emotions are thought to be among the central dynamics contributing to the intractability of conflict situations, whether those conflicts take place at the individual, communal, national or international levels (Coleman, 2003). Lederach (1997) writes that such 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 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 suggested that emotional experiences are at the core of extreme behavioral reactions in conflict settings (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997; Lindner, 2002; Scheff, 2003).

For example, recent political events show how intense emotional experiences of humiliation, anger and rage can motivate violent, terrorist activity. 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 can lead individuals to express rage and seek violent revenge for the humiliation cast upon their group.

However, intractable conflicts are not only driven by existing emotional dynamics, they also produce further devastating emotional consequences. In other words, when emotional responses and other antecedents drive violent or aggressive behavior, such behavior in turn often produces devastating emotional consequences. For instance, many survivors of protracted conflicts sustain entrenched psychological wounds, and a deep sense of grievance, humiliation and victimization (Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2004; Lindner, 2002; Coleman, 2003). In a four-year study conducted in Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi, Lindner (2002) found experiences of humiliation to be central emotions experienced by individuals and communities involved in conflict in these settings.

In addition, intractable conflicts produce a host of other dire consequences including disease, physical injury, impairment, and death, as well as major financial, educational, and infrastructural losses, all of which engender difficult emotional reactions (for a more in-depth discussion of the general consequences of intractable conflict, see Burgess & Burgess, 2005; Coleman, 2003; Brendt & Scott, 2004; Wallensteen & Sollenberg, 2001; and Brahm, 2005).

Lindner's (2002) study in Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi provides an example of how humiliation served as both an antecedent and a consequence to fuel the cycles of violence and intractable conflict. In a 4-year study, Lindner interviewed 216 individuals who had been involved in violent, deadly conflict in Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi either

as parties to the conflict or as interveners. 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. In this way, emotions fuel intractable conflict, perpetuating cycles of violence that cause continuing, and often constantly increasing, levels of distress.

Humiliation

Humiliation is a significant emotion experienced by those in intractable conflict situations and has been understood to play a central role in perpetuating conflict systems (Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2004; Lindner, 2002; Coleman, 2003). Thus, before discussing further the role of humiliation in intractable conflict, background on humiliation and a proposed definition are provided.

<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 (see Lindner, 2002; Friedman, 2003; Filkins, 2004; Sharkey, 2004), very few quantitative empirical studies

on humiliation and conflict have been published in the social psychology or related

literatures (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999).

<u>Definitions</u>

In this section, an analysis of the psychological construct of humiliation will

be offered by reviewing and extending existing definitions of humiliation,

culminating in an integrated definition of humiliation.

Humiliation is generally thought to occur 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. It also seems reasonable to suggest that humiliating events that occur in the collective realm can significantly impact group members' sense of collective identity.

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 require: the capacity to accurately interpret interpersonal events at a cognitive level, and the motivation to take reparative action towards others in light of those interpretations (Spielthenner, 2004; Tangney, 1991). Some emotions are considered moral emotions because they motivate 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 (such as by committing violent acts against another person), or because the moral boundaries themselves become extended (such as when members of a humiliated group dehumanize members of another group, thereby sanctioning violence against them). In either case, as a result of being the subject of a humiliating event, more extreme, usually violent behavior against the perpetrator (or another individual or group) becomes morally and socially acceptable.

Taking into account the various aspects of humiliation outlined above, an integrated definition of humiliation is provided here. *Humiliation is 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 and can significantly

impact one's individual and/or collective identity. Finally, the experience of humiliation

can motivate behavioral responses that may serve to extend or re-define previously

existing moral boundaries, leading individuals to perceive otherwise socially

impermissible behavior to be permissible.

Clarification on the Use of the Term Humiliation

As Cohen and Nisbett (1994) note, there may be individual and cultural

differences in how people and cultures define what is humiliating and what is not. In

fact, this is one of the central theoretical arguments that will be made in this paper.

However, because of this, it is important to clarify how we use the terms "humiliation"

and "humiliating" in reference to events or encounters described in this paper. The

question arises: Under what circumstances can an encounter be considered a "humiliating

encounter"? For example, is an encounter humiliating if the target does not feel

humiliated? For the purposes of this paper, we refer to a "humiliating encounter" as one

in which someone either consciously or unconsciously intends to humiliate a target

person or group of people, or in which the majority of bystanders would consider the

encounter to be humiliating, regardless of whether the target personally feels humiliated.

For example, consider an encounter that occurs between a jail warden and inmate in

which the warden makes a malicious comment to an inmate. For the purposes of this

paper, the encounter would be considered a "humiliating encounter" if the warden

intended to humiliate the inmate, or if majority of bystanders would consider the

encounter to be humiliating, regardless of whether the inmate him or herself felt humiliated.

Emotions Influence Behavior: The Case of Humiliation and Aggression

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.

While we argue later that humiliation is not a primary, basic emotion but rather is a more complex, multiply-determined emotion, we suggest here that the action tendency that most highly corresponds with humiliation is aggression. In support of this notion, Lear (2003) writes, "Indeed, because humiliation is supposed to be so awful, some kind of retaliation is thought to be justified" (p.22). This insight, along with those of Lindner (2002) and others (Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2004, 2005) suggests that humiliation often motivates aggressive behavior. The following examples provide further empirical evidence for a relationship between humiliation and aggression.

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, and fear, of being humiliated 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. Similarly, 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.

In addition, events reported in the popular media support the notion that intense emotional experiences such as humiliation and anger can motivate aggressive behavior. 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 become angry and therefore unable to think clearly about how to respond. His speech implies that the emotional experiences of humiliation and anger would justify violent action.

The Social Construction of Emotions

While under many circumstances, humiliation may lead to aggressive behavior, this is not necessarily always the case. For example, while Lindner (2002) notes that many individuals she interviewed who were involved in protracted conflicts in Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi reacted to humiliation with violence, she also describes how some well-known individuals, such as Nelson Mandela and Somalia's former first lady Edna Adan, refused to respond aggressively and also refused to feel humiliated at the hands of those who tried to humiliate them. Mandela ignored their taunts and did not allow himself to feel less worthy than his humiliators (Mandela, 1995), and Adan engaged others to support her in avoiding what was meant to be a humiliating situation.

What are the factors that lead people to respond to their humiliation violently versus not? There are numerous possible reasons for such differences. For instance, perhaps those who respond non-violently are more psychologically stable and therefore able to deal with their humiliation less violently. Another possible explanation is that those who pursue non-violent action may (perceive themselves to) have better access to lawful systems in which to bring their situations to justice. For example, some may believe that the only effective method for demonstrating their frustration and rage is to

act violently, while others 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 people live and behave. While each of the above reasons is plausible and worthy of theoretical and empirical investigation, the focus of this paper is specifically on the influence of contextual or social norms on individuals' emotional experiences and behavior.

<u>Social Norms Regarding Emotional Experience and Behavior</u>

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) depict them as influenced and constructed by social and cultural messages and norms (Averill, 2001; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997; Harre, 1986; Markus & Kitayama, 2001). Frijda (1986) writes that while some emotions are considered to be basic emotions, other emotions are considered to be blends, such as humiliation, which is considered to be a mixture of shame and anger (Negrao, et. al., 2004). 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.
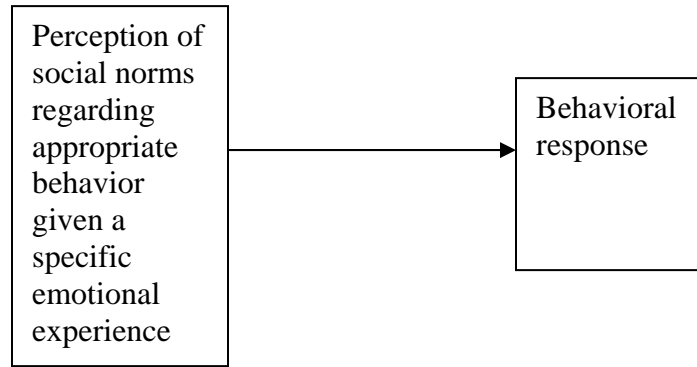
In line with this thinking, Averill (1997) suggests that social rules and norms define how people should understand, value, and behaviorally respond to their

emotions. According to Averill, emotional rules established by societal norms correspond with a set of emotional roles that individuals take up when they experience an emotion. 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.

The above ideas lead to the following:

Hypothesis # 1: Individuals who perceive social norms to privilege aggression given a humiliating emotional experience will respond more aggressively than individuals who do not perceive social norms to privilege aggression.

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┌─────────────────┐                      ┌─────────────────┐
│ Perception of   │                      │                 │
│ social norms    │                      │ Behavioral      │
│ regarding       │─────────────────────▶│ response        │
│ appropriate     │                      │                 │
│ behavior        │                      │                 │
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│ specific        │                      │                 │
│ emotional       │                      │                 │
│ experience      │                      │                 │
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While social rules and norms regarding how people should behaviorally respond

to their emotions influence behavior, such rules and norms also shape people's emotional

experience. For example, a social norm that encourages aggression in response to a

humiliating encounter not only encourages aggressive behavior, it also encourages the

target to experience more intense feelings of humiliation than if the social norms of the

situation restricted an aggressive response. Why is this so? We posit that individuals

who act aggressively will infer from their actions that they must have had a justifiable

reason for acting aggressively (i.e., feeling humiliated). 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). Thus, individuals who perceive social norms to privilege aggressive behavior in

response to humiliating encounters, and who respond aggressively, may look at their own

behavior and infer from it that they must feel humiliated, in order to justify the behavior.

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). In other words, in

situations where it is normative to act aggressively in response to a humiliating

experience, individuals may actually experience feelings of humiliation in order to justify

engaging in aggressive acts. In this environment, feeling humiliated is a pre-requisite, as it were, for engaging in normative behavior.

In addition, in situations where aggression in response to humiliation is privileged, those who derive any sense of satisfaction or enjoyment from aggressing will be likely to feel more humiliated, since the more humiliated they feel, the more privileged they are to be aggressive.

Hypothesis # 2: Individuals who perceive social norms to privilege aggression given a humiliating emotional experience will feel more humiliated in response to a humiliating social encounter than individuals who do not perceive social norms to privilege aggression.

Perception of social norms regarding appropriate behavior given a specific emotional experience → Emotional response
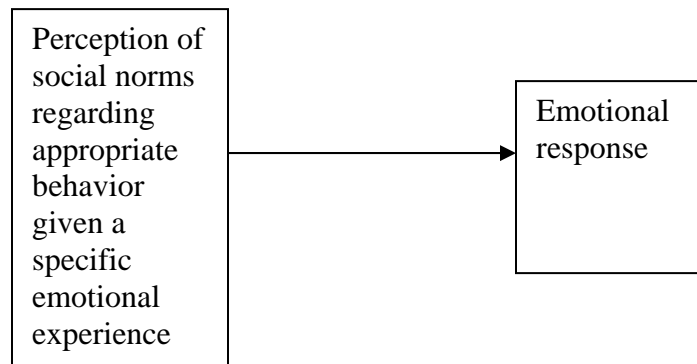
These distinctions show how social norms affect the humiliation-aggression cycle. They help us understand why a humiliating experience may produce different emotional and behavioral reactions in individuals, depending on their perception of the social norms of the situation. They may help explain why individuals in some communities would react much more strongly than individuals in other communities to the same type of humiliating encounter.

Culture of honor.

In fact, Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead & Fischer (2002) note that ethnographic record and social psychological research demonstrate that humiliations and insults do have differential effects in different cultures, and that they have an especially strong impact in cultures of honor (see Cohen & Nisbett, 1994, 1997; Cohen et. al., 1996; Cohen, Vandello & Rantilla, 1998; Miller, 1993; Murphy, 1983; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Peristiany, 1965; Pitt-Rivers, 1977; Stewart, 1994). Cultures of honor can be described as cultures in which even small disputes are contests for reputation and social status, and where individuals are well-prepared to protect their reputation by resorting to violence (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994, 1997; Cohen et.al., 1996; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). Cultures of honor have arisen independently in many societies around the world, across vast expanses of geography and time. Such cultures tend to arise in societies where individuals' livelihood may be at risk of being stolen by others and where law enforcement is inadequate (such as in traditional herding communities). People therefore rely on their reputation for toughness in order to prevent the theft of property (such as herds) that can otherwise be easily stolen (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994, 1997; Cohen et.al., 1996; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). What is notable about cultures of honor is that they tend to persist years, and even generations, after the economic and social conditions that gave rise to them are no longer in existence. For example, this has been found to be the case in the American South by Cohen and Nisbett (1994, 1997) and in Spain by Rodriguez Mosquera (1999), Gilmore (1987), Gilmore & Gwynne (1985), Murphy (1983), and Pitt-Rivers (1965, 1977).

Research has shown that those with high culture of honor values have been found to experience more negative emotions and become more aggressive in response to an

insult than those with low culture of honor values (see Cohen & Nisbett, 1994, 1997; Cohen et. al., 1996; Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead & Fischer, 2002; Beersma, Harinck & Gerts, 2003). In one example, Cohen et. al. (1996) ran an experiment in which participants were insulted and were then assessed regarding their emotional and behavioral reactions to the insult. Participants were assigned to each experimental condition (culture of honor vs. non-culture of honor) based on whether or not they had lived in the American South. Those who had lived in the South for six years or more were considered to be from a culture of honor; those who had lived elsewhere in the U.S. were assigned to the non-culture of honor group. Participants in both experimental groups were insulted by a confederate who bumped into the study participant in a narrow hallway, and then proceeded to call him an "asshole" in front of at least two other observers (who were also confederates). Participants' emotional and behavioral reactions were assessed using a variety of measures including word completion, facial expression ratings, scenario completion, and pre- and post-incident physiological levels of hormones that signal readiness to aggress. The results supported the hypotheses that American southerners (i.e., those from a culture of honor) were more angry and upset and behaved (and showed signs of intending to behave) more aggressively in response to insulting behavior than did those from other parts of the U.S. (i.e., those not from a culture of honor). These findings have been replicated in other experimental research (Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead & Fischer, 2000, 2002; Beersma, Harinck & Gerts, 2003), field experiments (Cohen & Nisbett, 1997) and in survey research (Cohen & Nisbett, 1997).

While the initial research conducted on the culture of honor has conceptualized it as a "cultural" variable (i.e., as a characteristic that varies at the societal level) and has

thus examined between-country (or between-state) variance (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994, 1997; Cohen et.al., 1996; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996), subsequent researchers in this area (e.g., Beersma, Harinck & Gerts, 2003) argue that culture of honor varies not only between-country (and between-state), but within-country (and within-state) as well. Thus, culture of honor can also be treated as a difference on which individuals vary.

If those with high culture of honor values respond with more negative emotions and more aggressively to insults, it seems appropriate to assume that they would respond similarly to humiliating encounters, especially since many of the operationalizations of insults in the culture of honor studies can be interpreted as provocations that are not only insulting, but are also humiliating (for additional examples, see Cohen, et. al., 1996). In support of this idea, Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead & Fischer (2002) note that "a refusal to submit to public humiliation is therefore a core characteristic of what it means to be a man in honor cultures" (p. 145). Additionally, it seems reasonable to assume that if those with high culture of honor values respond with more anger and more intense emotions overall (as has been found by Cohen & Nisbett, 1994, 1997; Cohen et.al., 1996; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996, Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead & Fischer, 2000, 2002), that they would respond with more feelings of humiliation specifically as well. Thus, we extend existing theory and research to propose that:

Hypothesis # 3: Individuals with high culture of honor values will feel more humiliated in response to a humiliating encounter than will individuals with low culture of honor values.
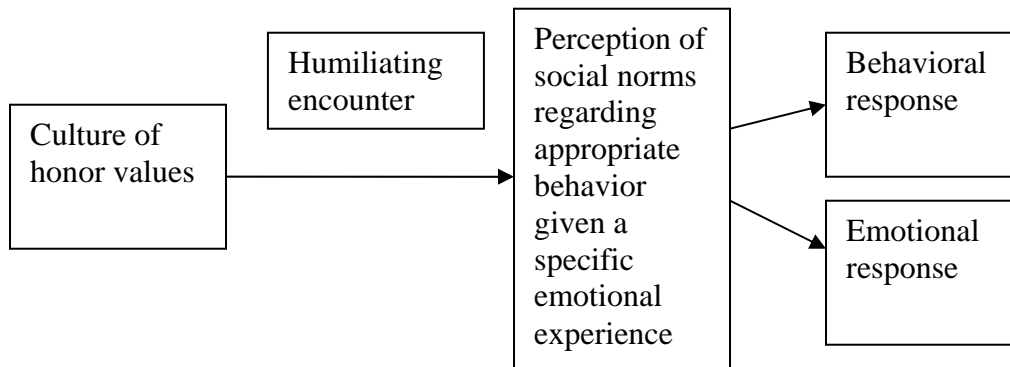
Hypothesis # 4: Individuals with high culture of honor values will respond more aggressively to a humiliating encounter than will individuals with low culture of honor values.
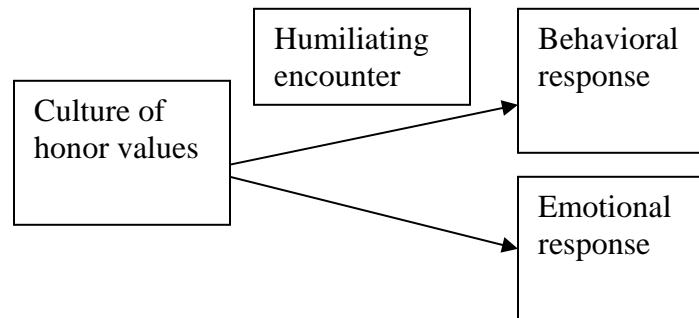
While a number of studies have suggested that culture of honor is correlated with higher levels of negative emotion and aggression, none of the studies has empirically investigated *why* this is the case. The current paper provides a brief theoretical argument on this question. Cohen et. al. (1996) write that "the dynamics and specific mechanisms of the social enforcement of the culture of honor are important topics for future study" (p. 959). While they do not explore these mechanisms in detail, they do suggest that one reason why those with high culture of honor values might respond with a higher degree of negative emotions and aggression is because they "have different 'rules' for what to do once they are insulted" (p. 958). Following Averill's (1997) theory of emotional roles, we propose that culture of honor is correlated with a higher degree of negative emotions and aggression because individuals with high culture of honor values perceive and take up emotional roles that privilege aggressive responses in response to an insulting or humiliating encounter. In other words, in a culture of honor, the expected way to deal with emotions (such as humiliation, embarrassment, shame, and anger) that result from a

threat to one's honor is to respond aggressively. Individuals take up their emotional

roles by responding according to established social norms regarding aggressive

behavior.

Hypothesis # 5: Individuals with high culture of honor values will perceive a higher

degree of privilege to aggress given a humiliating emotional experience, and will behave

more aggressively than will individuals with low culture of honor values.

```
                 ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
                 │ Humiliating  │   │ Perception of│    ┌──────────────┐
                 │ encounter    │   │ social norms │    │ Behavioral   │
                 └──────────────┘   │ regarding    │──▶ │ response     │
  ┌──────────────┐                  │ appropriate  │    └──────────────┘
  │ Culture of   │                  │ behavior     │
  │ honor values │ ───────────────▶ │ given a      │    ┌──────────────┐
  │              │                  │ specific     │──▶ │ Emotional    │
  └──────────────┘                  │ emotional    │    │ response     │
                                    │ experience   │    └──────────────┘
                                    └──────────────┘
```

The Recall of Emotions

It is not only the *experience* of emotions like humiliation, but also the *memory* of

such emotions, that motivates aggressive behavior. Margalit (2002) writes, "[W]e can

hardly remember insults without reliving them…The wounds of insult and humiliation

keep bleeding long after the painful physical injuries have crusted over" (p.120). Social

psychological research supports the validity of this statement. Highly emotional events,

and particularly negative emotional events, are relatively well retained, both with respect

to the emotional event itself as well as to central information in the event that elicits the

emotional reaction (Christianson, 1984; Christianson & Loftus, 1987, 1990, 1991;

Christianson, et. al., 1991; Yuille & Cutshall, 1986, 1989). A number of studies have

found that the process of forgetting events is slowed when the events have an emotional

component, versus when the events are neutral or non-emotional (Reisberg & Heuer, 1992; Christianson, 1984). For example, a child who was teased and humiliated on her first day of kindergarten will be more likely to remember that first day of school and the details surrounding the humiliating encounter many years later than a child whose first day of school did not involve an emotionally charged, negative event. Margalit (2002) would argue that when this adult remembers that first day of school as a child, her memories of it will be akin to reliving the experience.

Margalit (2002) asks,

Why is remembering humiliation a reliving of it? Humiliation, I believe, is not just another experience in our life, like, say, an embarrassment. It is a formative experience. It forms the way we view ourselves as humiliated persons…[it] becomes constitutive of one sense of who we are" (2002, p. 130).

According to Singer and Blagov (2004) formative, or self-defining, memories share five characteristics. They are vivid, affectively intense, repetitively recalled, linked to other similar memories, and focused on an enduring concern or unresolved conflict. Self-defining memories have the power to affect individuals emotionally not only in the past when they first occurred, but also at the moment of recollection. Additionally, self-defining memories are thought to guide behavior as individuals strive to achieve unmet goals and act upon personal concerns. Thus, just as immediate emotional reactions influence behavior, emotional memories, especially those that are formative, or self-defining, influence behavior as well. If it is true that the memory of humiliation is akin to
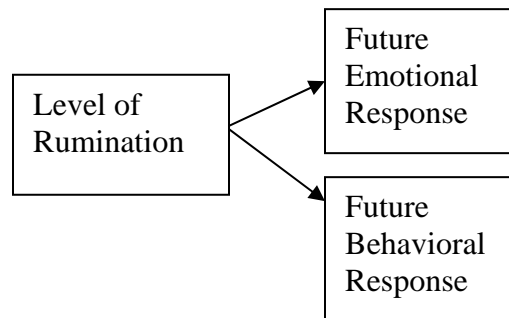
reliving it, and that feelings of humiliation can motivate aggressive action under the right conditions, then the memory of humiliation can perpetuate aggressive behavior.

Emotional memories that are self-defining are likely to be recalled repetitively (Singer & Blagov, 2004); in other words, self-defining emotional memories are likely to be ruminated about. Rumination is defined as self-focused attention, and refers to directing attention particularly on one's own negative mood (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995). A series of empirical studies suggest that rumination increases the emotional experience of anger (e.g., Rusting & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998; Bushman, Pedersen, Vasquez, Bonacci & Miller, 2001; Bushman, 2002) as well as (intentions to engage in) aggressive behavior (e.g., Konecni, 1974; Bushman, 2002). In contrast to the catharsis theory (which states that expressing negative emotions diffuses them), these studies suggest that the more individuals ruminate, the angrier they feel and the more aggressively they behave. For example, in one study, Bushman (2002) asked angered participants to hit a punching bag and either think about the person who had angered them (rumination condition) or think about getting in shape physically (distraction condition). After hitting the punching bag, participants reported the degree to which they felt angry. After this, participants were given the opportunity to administer loud blasts of noise to the person who had angered them. There was also a no punching bag control group. The results of the study demonstrate that participants in the rumination group felt significantly angrier and behaved more aggressively than participants in the distraction and control groups. Rumination increased rather than decreased anger and aggression. Based on the above, we propose the following:

Hypothesis # 6: Individuals who ruminate about a humiliating encounter will feel more

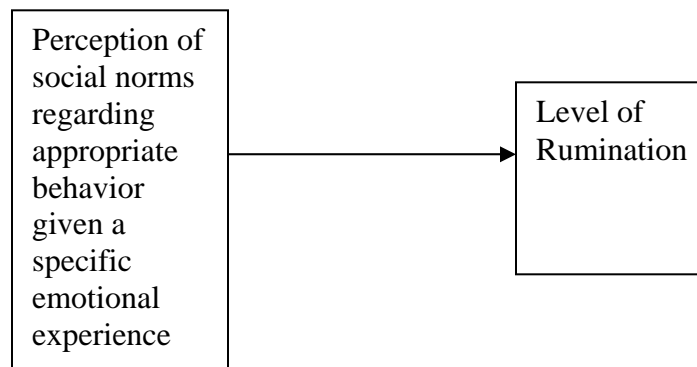humiliated than individuals who do not ruminate about a humiliating experience.

Hypothesis # 7: Individuals who ruminate about a humiliating encounter will behave

more aggressively than individuals who do not ruminate about a humiliating experience.

```
                              ┌──────────────┐
                              │ Future       │
                              │ Emotional    │
         ┌──────────────┐  ┌─▶│ Response     │
         │ Level of     │──┤  └──────────────┘
         │ Rumination   │──┤  ┌──────────────┐
         └──────────────┘  └─▶│ Future       │
                              │ Behavioral   │
                              │ Response     │
                              └──────────────┘
```

Under what circumstances do people ruminate about their humiliation? We argue

that people are more likely to ruminate about humiliating encounters when they gain

some benefit from doing so. Individuals who perceive social norms to privilege

aggression given a humiliating experience gain some benefit from ruminating about it.

When individuals perceive social norms to privilege aggression given a humiliating

experience, they ruminate about the humiliating experience because doing so provides

them with constant motivation to retaliate, which can be pleasurable and feel morally

justified (McCullough, et. al., 2001). For example, in studies involving Israeli and

Palestinian participants, individuals were found to become attached to their "victim

status" because such status allows them moral justification for their aggressive behavior

(Nadler, 2002). Nadler (2002) notes that individuals who are perceived (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 perpetrated aggressive acts against the Other. We suggest that people who feel privileged to aggress will ruminate about their humiliating experiences because it enables them: 1) moral justification for past, current and future intended aggressive behavior; 2) the ability to escape the reality and the impact of their own perpetration of the Other; and 3) the ability to escape their own responsibility for the Other's pain. This leads to the following:

Hypothesis # 8: Individuals who perceive social norms to privilege aggression given a humiliating emotional experience will be more likely to ruminate about it than individuals who do not perceive social norms to privilege aggression.


In summary of this section on the recall of emotions, individuals who perceive social norms to privilege aggression given a humiliating emotional experience will be more likely to ruminate about the experience than individuals who do not perceive social norms to privilege aggression. In turn, individuals who ruminate about a humiliating encounter will feel more humiliated and behave more aggressively than individuals who do not ruminate about a humiliating experience.
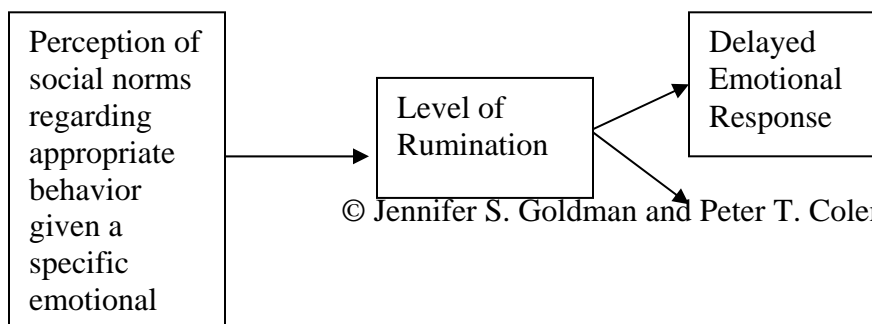
Delayed
Behavioral
Response

In summary, the theoretical arguments made in this paper suggest that the

relationship between culture of honor values and immediate emotional and behavioral

responses is mediated by individuals' perception of the degree to which social norms

privilege aggression given a specific emotional experience. Thus, the arguments made in

this paper add to the existing literature on culture of honor by suggesting that perception

of privilege to aggress is a social psychological mechanism that leads those with high

culture of honor values to have more negative emotional responses and more aggressive

behavioral responses to a humiliating (or insulting) encounter. In addition, the arguments

made in this paper suggest that when individuals perceive social norms to privilege

aggression given a humiliating experience, emotional memories are ruminated about,

leading individuals to perpetually relive the emotions and to behave aggressively, leading

to unending cycles of violence.
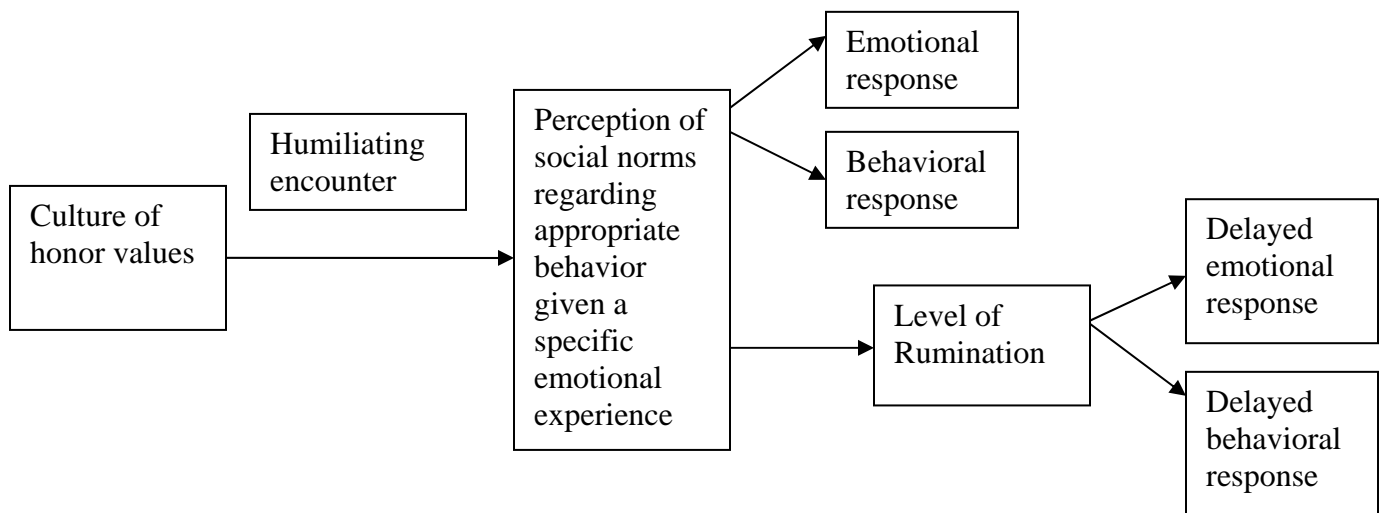
Implications

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 and aggression in protracted violence in schools, ethnopolitical conflicts, worldwide terrorism, and other forms of intractable social conflict. The theoretical proposals made in this paper 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, all of which contribute to the protracted nature of intractable conflict. Thus, this theory implies that one way to prevent protracted conflict at every level of society is to influence the social norms (and/or how individuals perceive the social norms) regarding how people should respond, emotionally and behaviorally, when 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

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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 and 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.

The theoretical arguments in this paper also provide an important guide for conducting research to explore the role that emotions, and particularly the emotion of humiliation, play in settings of intractable conflict. The hypotheses stated throughout the paper should be tested through empirical survey, experimental, and field research.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have sought to understand the role that intense emotions, such as humiliation, play in perpetuating the cycles of violence that characterize intractable conflicts. We have proposed that the ways in which emotions are socially constructed affects how emotions are experienced, acted upon, and recalled, and that these emotional experiences, actions and recollections directly influence the degree to which conflicts escalate and become stuck in cycles of violence. Our hope is that the arguments made in this paper will inspire continued theory generation and empirical research on this topic, and that together, the theory and research will influence policy decisions regarding how

individuals, groups and societies can best deal with humiliating experiences that occur in daily life.

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