

Conflict and Humiliation

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- a. The question: "Why do some conflicts endure and lead to repeated cycles of escalation and violence?" sets the stage for this work.
- b. Thus, the phenomenon of interest (enduring conflicts) is complex and multiply-determined. They eventually stabilize as malignant social processes which vary over time by degree of destructiveness.
- c. These malignant social processes have a powerful emotional component that, we believe, contributes to their endurance. In fact, some scholars contend that extreme reactions seen in many conflicts are primarily based in emotional responses (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). However, until recently researchers have paid little attention to the role that emotions play in conflict (Barry & Oliver, 1996).
- d. Some of these emotions can be characterized as "moral emotions", in that they motivate moral behavior.(see Bonanno).
- e. Of these moral emotions, humiliation is key, and has received some attention in research and much attention in the popular media.
- f. Humiliation is a particularly toxic emotion (see Frost, 2003), destructive to oneself and one's group, and associated with escalatory spirals of humiliation and violence.
- g. Research on the psychology of humiliation has illustrated its central function in intractable conflict. Lindner (2001, 2002) conducted a four-year research project in Somalia, Rwanda, and Burundi entitled *The Feeling of Being Humiliated: A Central Theme in Armed Conflict*. The study was inspired by the popular assumption that the humiliation of the Germans brought on by the Versailles Treaty after World War I was partly responsible for the Holocaust and World War II. From interviews with 216 disputants in these settings in Africa, the author found feelings of humiliation to be among the strongest emotions available to humans, that they can permeate people's lives with an all-consuming intensity, and that they are among the most potent forces that create rifts between people.
- h. Humiliation, like all emotions, is also a complex, multiply-determined phenomenon. It is comprised of both shame and anger (Bonanno).
- i. One key factor which contributes to the emergence and maintenance of humiliation is the normative context.

j. However, it is not merely the type, depth, and staying power of emotions that distinguishes tractable from intractable conflict, but rather differences in the structures and processes that imbue them with meaning. Our feelings of raw emotion (hate, rage, pride) are often labeled, understood, and acted on in ways that are socially constructed (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). Averill (1986) describes emotional experience as shaped by rules and norms that define what certain emotions mean, whether they are good or bad, and how people should respond to them. Thus, similar raw emotions may be constructed and acted upon differently in dissimilar families, communities, and cultures.

Communities entrenched in an intractable conflict may unwittingly encourage emotional experiences and expressions of the most extreme nature, thereby escalating and sustaining the conflict. Other communities might in fact discourage such extreme responses to emotions, labeling them as superficial or passing, in an effort to maintain community harmony. This is a relatively unexplored area of research in the conflict literature.

k. Averill has conceptualized one aspect of these normative contexts as "emotional roles". He defines these as "the various emotional syndromes that we recognize in ordinary language" (p. 535).

l. Emotional roles have certain components associated with them such as privileges, restrictions, and obligations.

m. Privileges allow a person to engage in behavior that would be discouraged in ordinary circumstances.

n. Margalit & Lear suggest that in certain settings, humiliation offers a privilege of disinhibition of aggressive impulses.

o. In these settings, individuals can become attached, perhaps addicted, to these emotional states (recalling them again and again), despite their high toxicity, because of the privileges they bestow.

p. Margalit suggests that it is only through a realization of the toxicity of such emotional patterns, for self and ingroup, that people might be likely to move-on to a state of forgiveness (not forgetness).

q. Thus, emotional roles can differ in the degree to which they disinhibit (perhaps implicitly) the expression of aggression, and thus affect the attachment or addiction to the emotional state.

r.. [emotional roles can also differ in their strength, and people can differ in the degree to which they accurately read and take-up such roles. Grist for future studies.]

s. So we are attempting to conduct research on the following. Experimental and Correlational studies that examine the different affects of situations which provide emotional roles that disinhibit aggression and extra-moral behavior from those that do

not-- examining their relative effects on attachment to emotional states (perhaps by type of recall and longevity of recall), perceptions of instrumentality (manipulation check), and behavioral responses (aggressive/ non-aggressive -- moral/extra-moral).