



Emotional intractability: gender, anger, aggression and rumination in conflict

Emotional
intractability

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate how people's gender-role identities (self-identified masculinity and femininity) affect their perceptions of the emotional role of the humiliated victim in conflicts (and the norms surrounding the role), and how these perceptions affect the negativity and aggressiveness of their responses and the degree to which they ruminate over conflict and remain hostile over time.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper builds on literature on humiliation, aggression, gender, and rumination and presents a correlational scenario study with 96 male graduate students from a large Northeastern University.

Findings – Males with high-masculine gender-role identities are more likely to perceive the social norms surrounding a humiliating conflictual encounter as privileging aggression, and to report intentions to act accordingly, than males with high-feminine gender-role identities. Furthermore, participants are more likely to ruminate about the conflict, and therefore maintain their anger and aggressive intentions a week later, when they perceive the situation to privilege aggression.

Research limitations/implications – This paper sheds light on how aspects of peoples' identities can affect their perceptions of social norms (i.e. whether or not aggression is condoned), and degrees of dysphoric rumination and aggression in conflict. Subsequent research should investigate the social conditions influencing these processes.

Originality/value – Research on the psychology of humiliation has identified it as a central factor in many intractable conflicts. However, this is the first study to begin to specify the nature of this relationship and to investigate it in a laboratory setting.

Keywords Conflict, Gender

Paper type Research paper



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 Crusader's prisons? (Statement by masked terrorist on a video of the beheading of American Nicholas Berg, 2004 (Friedman, 2003).

If we listen carefully to the words of many of those who express a desire to annihilate the western world, the reason they give is revenge for humiliation. Feelings of humiliation are among the strongest emotions in humans (Lindner, 2002), and when used to mobilize people to conflict, can be all-consuming and become deeply woven into an individual's basic sense of who he or she is (Maalouf, 2001; Margalit, 2002). As we look at the many violent conflicts around the globe today, it is not difficult to see the connections between severe emotions such as humiliation and rage with retaliation and aggression. However, our understanding of how these emotions operate psychologically in conflict, and when they lead to prolonged patterns of counter-humiliation and violence, remains unclear.

This paper builds on previous research on humiliation, gender, rumination and aggression, and presents a study which investigates how people's gender-role identities affect their perceptions of the emotional role of the humiliated victim in conflicts, and how these perceptions affect the negativity and aggressiveness of their responses and the degree to which they ruminate over conflict and remain hostile over time. It has four sections:

- (1) a brief discussion of humiliation and anger;
- (2) an overview of how emotional experiences are psycho-socially determined and how emotional roles and gender-role identities can influence people's experiences of and reactions to social conflict;
- (3) the hypotheses, methods, and results of our study are presented; and
- (4) the implications of the research are discussed.

Introduction

Humiliation and anger

Humiliation has been difficult to define, and as a result the constructs of shame, embarrassment and humiliation have often been used interchangeably in the literature (Hartling and Luchetta, 1999). Compared with emotions such as shame and embarrassment, research on the emotion of humiliation has been conducted much less frequently (Lindner, 2002). In an effort to better specify humiliation, several scholars have proposed definitions. Klein (1991, p. 94) defined humiliation socially as experiencing "some form of ridicule, scorn, contempt, or other degrading treatment at the hands of others." He suggests that humiliation is essentially an interaction-oriented emotion, involving three roles: the humiliator, the victim, and the witness. This suggests that whereas shame may be considered a private emotion (i.e. one may experience shame on one's own), humiliation may be considered a public emotion in the sense that the humiliating experience either takes place in front of, or is otherwise known about by, other witnesses. Similarly, Lindner (2002, p. 126) defines humiliation as the:

[...] enforced lowering of a person or group, a process of subjugation that damages or strips away their pride, honor or dignity [...] in a situation that is greatly inferior to what you should expect.

Hartling and Luchetta (1999, p. 264) define the psychological 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.” 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 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. Finally, Margalit (2002) has categorized humiliation as a “moral emotion”, because of its tendency to predispose people to act in moral or immoral ways towards others.

We build on the work of these scholars to offer the following definition of humiliation:

Humiliation is a complex emotion, triggered by public events, which evokes deep dysphoric feelings of anger and shame 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[1].

Previous research has found anger to be highly correlated with aggression, while shame has been found to be connected to feelings of self-consciousness (Roseman *et al.*, 1994). Thus, the current study will focus on the link between humiliation and anger towards others, and the affects it can have on aggression against others.

Humiliation, conflict, and aggression

Previous research on the psychology of humiliation has illustrated its central function in enduring conflicts. Lindner (2001, 2002, 2006) 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 partially responsible for the atrocities committed during 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 operating, that they permeated people’s lives with an all-consuming intensity, and that they were among the most potent forces creating rifts between people and groups. Lindner suggests that the unique force of humiliation often leads to reciprocal acts of humiliation, which if not addressed carefully, can escalate overtime into spirals of violence and counter-violence.

While it seems evident that, under some circumstances, humiliation will lead to aggressive behavior and escalated conflict, this is not necessarily always the case. For example, while Lindner (2002) notes that many individuals she interviewed 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 to indignities suffered at the hands of their enemies. Mandela (1995) ignored taunts and other indignities and did not allow himself to feel less worthy than his humiliators, and Adan engaged others to support her in avoiding what were meant to be humiliating situations.

What are the factors that lead people to respond to humiliation in an aggressive versus non-aggressive manner? There are a variety of possible explanations for such differences. However, studies on emotions across cultures (Frijda, 1986; Wong and Bond, 2004) describe emotions as consistently influenced by social and cultural messages and norms (Averill, 2001; Harré, 1986; Hochschild, 1979; Marcus and Kitayama, 2001; Pearce and Littlejohn, 1997; Thoits, 2004). More specifically, Averill (1986, 1997) contends that emotional experiences are shaped by rules and norms that define the meaning and the values placed on certain emotions, as well as how people

should respond to them. Emotional rules help to establish a corresponding set of emotional roles, which are the various syndromes we recognize in ordinary language (for instance, a grieving widow, a jealous lover, an angry young man, a nervous, expectant father, etc. Averill, 1997). Such roles are typically transitory, but, in some cases, can become chronic.

Emotional roles can be analyzed through three broad categories: privileges, restrictions, and obligations (Averill, 1997). Privileges refer to the aspects of roles that allow a person to engage in behavior that would be discouraged under normal circumstances; behavior that people can “get away with” as a result of being in a certain emotional state. For instance, a man grieving the death of his spouse might be allowed to weep openly and display angry outbursts in public. Alternatively, restrictions refer to the limits placed on what a person can do when in an emotional state and “get away with it.” Thus, the grieving husband may not be allowed to be joyful, date other women, or throw parties for months after the loss of his spouse. 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. In contrast, obligations refer to the things that a person must do when in an emotional state (the husband must be sad, quiet, wear black, attend the funeral, etc. Averill, 1997).

The entry requirements and exact specifications for any particular emotional role, such as that of the humiliated victim, can differ dramatically for different groups. Some communities may stress the importance of honor and face, and therefore encourage or require a sense of outrage and aggressive responses when humiliated (Cohen and Nisbett, 1994). Others may value harmony and civility above all, and thus prescribe a more muted response. This was found in a recent experiment on social norms and aggression (Coleman *et al.*, 2007). Participants, when assigned a social role which restricted them from reacting aggressively (a peace-activist humiliated at a party with his/her peers), felt less privileged to aggress and showed fewer intentions to aggress against the humiliator than those assigned a less-restricting social role (friend at a party).

Role-taking and gender-role identity

Averill (1997) suggests that, although group-based emotional roles can provide strong guides for emotional experiences and reactions, people will differ in how they perceive and take-up such roles. Averill (1997, p. 537) writes:

Before an individual is able to enter into an emotional role, and hence to experience and express a specific emotion, the rules and beliefs that help constitute that emotion must be internalized.

Individual differences regarding self-monitoring (Snyder and Ickes, 1985) and tendencies toward social conformity will likely influence role-perception and role-taking in conflicts, as will other aspects of the self that may resonate or conflict with certain roles. Specifically, research on gender-role identity (Bem, 1974; Copenhaver *et al.*, 2000) suggests that it may be a key aspect of individual psychological functioning that affects perceptions of and reactions to social conflict (Skjelsbaek, 2004).

Gender-role identity is defined as the degree to which one identifies oneself as stereotypically masculine and/or feminine (Bem, 1974)[2]. In other words, gender-role

identity reflects how much a person relates to characteristics that are stereotyped for men or women in a given context. People with a strong gender-role identity are motivated to keep their behavior consistent with an internalized gender role standard. For example, people (males or females) with a narrowly defined masculine self-concept will inhibit most behaviors that are stereotyped as feminine, and display most behaviors which are stereotyped as masculine. On the other hand, a narrowly defined feminine self-concept will inhibit behaviors which are stereotyped as masculine. In contrast, a mixed or androgynous self-concept allows individuals to more freely engage in both masculine and feminine behaviors (Bem, 1974).

Masculine and feminine gender roles include culturally mandated standards for appropriate behaviors which can become internalized. They also provide rules against engaging in non-masculine or non-feminine behaviors (Bem, 1974; Copenhaver *et al.*, 2000). Research has shown that for a man with a high-masculine identity it is typically stressful if he experiences himself as behaving in a manner inconsistent with those standards (Copenhaver and Eisler, 1996; Copenhaver *et al.*, 2000). For example, in mainstream society in the USA, being physically inadequate, emotionally expressive, subordinate to women, intellectually inferior, performing inadequately sexually, or responding ineffectually to threats all engender stress in high-masculine identified males. Thus, there is pressure to construe situations and respond to them in a manner consistent with one's gender identity. When strong, internalized gender-role identities are in conflict with the requirements of particular emotional roles, people are likely to interpret those situations, and respond to them, in a manner consistent with their gender identities.

Therefore, we hypothesize that individuals with masculine gender-role identities will be more likely to perceive social norms to privilege aggression in response to a humiliating social encounter, and to act accordingly, than will individuals with feminine gender-role identities.

Rumination and prolonged reactions to humiliation

It is not only the experience of emotions like humiliation and anger, but also the recall of and rumination about such experiences that can motivate the perpetuation of aggressive behavior. Margalit (2002, p. 120) 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." Social psychological research supports this assertion. Highly emotional events, and particularly negative emotional events, are relatively well retained, both with respect to the emotional event itself as well as to information in the event that elicited the emotional reaction (Christianson, 1984; Christianson and Loftus, 1987, 1990, 1991; Christianson *et al.*, 1991; Yuille and Cutshall, 1986, 1989). Margalit (2002, p. 130) writes:

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.

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 something akin to reliving it, and that feelings of humiliation and anger can motivate aggressive action under certain conditions, then the memory of humiliation can perpetuate aggressive behavior.

Emotional memories that are self-defining are likely to be recalled repetitively (Singer and 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 and Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995). A series of empirical studies suggests that rumination increases the emotional experience of anger (Rusting and Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998; Bushman *et al.*, 2005; Bushman, 2002) as well as intentions to engage in aggressive behavior (Konecni, 1974; Bushman, 2002). In contrast to 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.

In summary, we offer the following hypotheses:

- H1(a).* In response to a humiliating conflict, individuals will perceive social norms for privileging aggression (an aspect of emotional roles) differently depending on their gender-role identity. Those with masculine gender-role identities will feel the most privileged to aggress, while those with feminine gender-role identities will feel the least privileged to aggress.
- H1(b).* Individuals with masculine gender-role identities will report the most immediate and delayed anger, immediate and delayed intentions to aggress, and rumination about a humiliating encounter, as compared to individuals with other gender-role identities (feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated).
- H2.* Individuals who perceive social norms to privilege aggression in response to a humiliating encounter will be significantly more likely to experience immediate and delayed anger, immediate and delayed aggression, and rumination than those who do not perceive social norms to privilege aggression.
- H3.* The relationship between masculine gender-role identity and immediate and delayed anger, immediate and delayed intentions to aggress, and rumination is mediated by individuals' perceptions of privilege to aggress.
- H4.* The relationship between individuals' perception of privilege to aggress and their delayed anger and intentions to aggress is mediated by the extent to which they ruminate about the humiliating encounter.

Methodology

Design and sample

The present study is a time-lapse correlational study. The data were obtained through two online questionnaires (a main questionnaire at time 1 and a follow-up questionnaire at time 2).

Following Cohen and Nisbett (1994), Cohen *et al.* (1996), Collins and Bell (1997) and Goldman and Coleman (2004) all participants were men[3]. In total, 96 men participated in the study and completed the main questionnaire, and, of those, 80 also completed the second questionnaire (83 percent). The participants were graduate students of a large Northeastern University, ranged in age from 18 to 64 ($M = 32.4$, $SD = 10.6$ years), and were from various ethnic and educational backgrounds. About 77 percent were raised in the USA, and 30 percent came from abroad.

Procedure

Participants were recruited in graduate-level psychology courses and were offered extra credit for their participation. They were informed that they were participating in a study on “emotions and social interactions” which would take about 15 minutes. The study was conducted through an online survey, which consisted of two questionnaires – one main questionnaire and one follow-up questionnaire. The weblink for the follow-up questionnaire was e-mailed to participants one week after they had completed the main questionnaire. If participants had not completed the follow-up questionnaire after four days, they received a reminder e-mail. If this e-mail remained unanswered, participants were not contacted again. After the second survey was completed, participants received a final e-mail thanking them for their participation and providing a full debrief of the study and an invitation to contact the researchers with questions or concerns.

Design of the questionnaire

The initial questionnaire began with a written scenario asking participants to put themselves “in the shoes” of a person in a potentially humiliating conflict (see below). Next, a series of open-ended and closed-ended questions assessed participants’ emotional and behavioral reactions to the event, as well as their perceptions of privilege to aggress against the humiliator in the scenario. Gender-role identity was assessed (following Bem, 1974) and finally, demographic data were collected.

In the follow-up questionnaire administered one week later, participants were asked to recall the event and indicate their delayed emotional and intended behavioral reactions as well as the degree to which they ruminated about the event. All items on both questionnaires utilized a six-point scale (1 – not at all; 6 – extremely).

Scenario

The written scenario, with which the study began, was adapted from Cohen and Nisbett (1994). Participants were asked to place themselves “in the shoes” of the main actor in the scenario and to imagine that the scenario was happening to them personally.

The scenario read as follows:

You and your fiancée, Jill, are at a party at a friend’s apartment off campus. Just after you arrive at the party Jill pulls you aside, obviously bothered by something.

“What’s wrong?” you ask.

It’s Larry. I mean, he’s already hit on me twice tonight.

Jill walks back into the crowd, and you decide to keep your eye on Larry. Sure enough, within five minutes, Larry reaches over and kisses Jill. It is a long kiss. This causes quite a stir in the room and someone in the back shouts "Alright, Larry!"

You look around and suddenly feel everyone staring at YOU.

Three criteria led to the choice of this scenario. First, it is a simple, brief encounter, which can allow for individual differences in perceptions to emerge. Second, it depicts a public encounter, which provides an opportunity for the participants to take up the emotional role of humiliated victim in the context of a generic setting (party). Third, pilot testing indicated that the event characterized is one which departs from typical student expectations for normal and fair treatment and is likely to evoke a sense of anger/shame. Hence, the scenario met the criteria for experiencing humiliation, as defined previously.

Measures

Perception of privilege to aggress. Following Averill (1997), the perception of privilege to aggress was assessed by asking participants to what extent they thought it was appropriate to aggress against the humiliator, and to what extent they felt encouraged, entitled and felt a duty to aggress. These four items were combined to form one scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.75).

Anger. Immediate (time 1) and delayed (time 2) anger was assessed. An anger scale was formed using three items on a six-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 6 (extremely). The items asked participants to rate the extent to which they felt angry, enraged and vengeful. The main questionnaire asked participants to rate these items based on how they felt immediately after reading the scenario, while the follow-up questionnaire asked participants to rate the items based on how they felt when they recalled the scenario one week later (Cronbach's alpha = 0.80 at time 1 and Cronbach's alpha = 0.86 at time 2).

Aggressive intentions. Participants were asked to indicate their behavioral intentions when imagining themselves in the scenario. A scale for "intentions to aggress" was formed using four items which asked participants to indicate the extent to which they would confront, threaten, and fight with Larry, and to what extent they would aggress against the perpetrator (Cronbach's alpha = 0.90 at time 1 and Cronbach's alpha = 0.88 at time 2). The items in this scale were interspersed with other behavioral intentions, including: talking the matter out, ignoring the situation, and making a joke about the situation.

Rumination. Following Caprara (1986), the dissipation-rumination scale was used. The original 20-item scale was designed to explore individual differences in rumination and dissipation related to aggressive behavior. Nine of the original items were adapted slightly to fit the context of this study. Those nine items formed the rumination scale, which had a reliability of Cronbach's alpha = 0.90.

Gender-role identity. Gender-role identity was measured using items from the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974). The original scale was developed to measure the extent to which an individual identifies her- or himself with internalized gender-typed standards of behavior. The BSRI treats femininity and masculinity as two independent dimensions rather than as two ends of a single dimension, thereby enabling a person to indicate whether she or he is high on one dimension and low on the other

(either “feminine” or “masculine”), high on both dimensions (androgynous), or low on both dimensions (undifferentiated). The masculine and feminine items were logically and empirically found to be independent. For this study, ten items were used: five feminine items and five masculine items. Participants were asked to indicate on a six-point-scale the degree to which different adjectives listed in the questionnaire accurately described them. The following feminine items were used: compassionate, gentle, tender, sensitive to the needs of others, and feminine. The masculine adjectives were: dominant, masculine, forceful, aggressive, and ambitious. The reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) for the masculine items in this study was 0.66, and for the feminine items was 0.80.

For data analysis, the items were used in two ways: first, participants were classified into groups and second, the femininity and masculinity items were used as two independent scales. For the first approach, the median split method was used (following Lenney, 1991), in order to divide participants into four groups: feminine, masculine, androgynous and undifferentiated. The median split method allocated all participants, depending on whether their score was above or below the median of the masculine and feminine scales. Every individual was then assigned to one of the following groups: masculine (high on masculine, low on feminine) feminine (high on feminine, low on masculine), androgynous (high on feminine, high on masculine), or undifferentiated (low on feminine, low on masculine). The number of participants in each group was distributed as follows: 21 participants were identified as masculine, 20 as feminine, 23 as androgynous and 28 as undifferentiated.

Humiliation. The manipulation check showed that participants felt considerably humiliated by the encounter portrayed in the scenario ($M = 3.8$ and $SD = 1.6$ on a six-point scale, 1 – not at all humiliated, 6 – extremely humiliated).

Qualitative data. Additional data were gathered through open-ended questions. These data were not included in the quantitative analysis, however some examples will be given throughout the paper in order to illustrate the findings. The open-ended questions asked participants to write about what they were feeling immediately after reading the scenario and one week later when they recalled the scenario; how they would react behaviorally in the scenario both immediately and one week later if given the opportunity to see the humiliator again; and whether there was anything else they wanted to add about their experience in the study.

Results

Gender-role identity and its relationship to reactions to humiliating conflicts

Consistent with *H1(a)*, participants with masculine gender-role identities perceived the norms in the scenario as most privileging of aggressive responses, while participants with feminine gender-role identities perceived the norms in the scenario as least privileging of aggressive responses. A one-way-ANOVA showed that there was a significant difference in the means of the four groups (masculine, feminine, androgynous, and undifferentiated) regarding their perception of privilege to aggress ($F = 4.177$, $p < 0.05$). While participants with masculine gender-role identities had the highest scores on the perception to aggress, participants with feminine gender-role identities had the lowest scores. All means and standard deviations (SDs) can be seen in Table I.

Table I.
Means (M) and SDs for the
four gender-role identity
groups

Gender-role identity group	N	Perception of privilege to aggress		Immediate intention to aggress		Immediate anger		Rumination		Delayed intention to aggress		Delayed anger	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Masculine	21	4.21	0.80	4.07	1.29	4.56	1.14	3.65	1.24	3.20	1.37	3.67	1.15
Androgynous	23	4.17	1.02	3.50	1.29	4.55	0.98	3.50	1.10	2.51	1.49	3.35	1.42
Undifferentiated	28	3.57	1.09	3.04	1.46	4.07	1.18	3.00	0.91	2.11	1.15	2.43	0.82
Female	20	3.34	1.20	2.68	1.25	4.00	1.37	2.72	0.98	2.13	1.23	3.08	1.61
Total	92	3.82	1.09	3.31	1.41	4.29	1.18	3.24	1.11	2.49	1.37	3.12	1.32

Responses by two participants to the open ended questions provided further support of *H1(a)*:

I imagine that nobody would be surprised if I used physical violence to somehow uphold my sense of masculinity.

I think you are expected to be furious and jealous. What you should do is less clear. People would probably expect you to do something. If you didn't do anything clear and public, people would believe you to be an ineffectual, emasculated man [...]

Results also supported *H1(b)*. Participants with masculine gender-role identities reported the most immediate and delayed anger, immediate and delayed intentions to aggress, and rumination, while participants with feminine and undifferentiated gender-role identities reported the least (Table I). A one-way-ANOVA confirmed that the means of the masculine and feminine identity groups differed significantly on immediate ($F = 4.334, p < 0.01$) and delayed ($F = 2.981, p < 0.05$) intentions to aggress, rumination ($F = 2.918, p < 0.05$), and delayed anger ($F = 3.585, p < 0.05$). These findings were further supported through correlational analysis, which can be seen in Table II. Whereas, significant positive correlations were found between masculine gender-role identity scale and the perception of privilege to aggress, the immediate and delayed intention to aggress, the immediate and delayed anger and rumination, those relationships were not found for the feminine gender-role identity scale. Interestingly, there was no significant difference between the groups concerning their immediate anger. In other words, all participants felt equally angry immediately after reading the scenario, but only the masculine-identified group responded more aggressively, ruminated more, and held onto their anger and aggressive intentions over the week.

Perception of privilege to aggress and its relationship with reactions to conflict

The analysis supports *H2*, which states that the more individuals perceive social norms to privilege aggression in response to a humiliating conflict the more they will report immediate and delayed anger, immediate and delayed intentions to aggress, and rumination about the encounter. All corresponding correlations were significant and can be seen in Table II.

Further support could be found for *H2* when comparing those participants who scored high on perceptions of privilege to aggress with those who scored low on that

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Masculinity	–							
2. Femininity	0.209	–						
3. Perception of privilege to aggress	0.362***	0.009	–					
4. Immediate intention to aggress	0.324**	0.116	0.615***	–				
5. Immediate anger	0.293**	0.028	0.509***	0.598***	–			
6. Rumination	0.288*	0.105	0.451***	0.481***	0.473***	–		
7. Delayed intention to aggress	0.262*	0.168	0.393***	0.716***	0.534***	0.630***	–	
8. Delayed anger	0.306**	0.139	0.531***	0.604***	0.673***	0.605***	0.677***	–

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table II.
Correlations among all dependent variables

scale through a one-way ANOVA. When comparing the group scoring in the top third of this scale with those scoring in the bottom third, significant differences in their means could be found for all of the relevant variables: immediate ($F = 44.13, p < 0.01$) and delayed ($F = 18.65, p < 0.01$) intention to aggress, immediate ($F = 24.33, p < 0.01$) and delayed ($F = 10.98, p < 0.01$) anger and rumination ($F = 16.78, p < 0.01$). In addition, when comparing the group scoring in the top half on perceptions of privilege to aggress with those scoring in the bottom half, the ANOVA comparisons continue to be significant. Participants who perceived high privilege to aggress were found to differ significantly from those who perceived low privilege to aggress concerning their level of immediate intentions to aggress ($F = 33.03, p < 0.01$) and delayed intentions to aggress ($F = 7.86, p < 0.01$) immediate anger ($F = 28.22, p < 0.01$) and delayed anger ($F = 22.59, p < 0.01$), as well as their level of rumination ($F = 6.63, p < 0.05$).

Figure 1 shows a graphical depiction of these results.

One participant commented on his perception of the situation:

I am overall a forgiving person, but there are certain things that one should respect. I don't consider myself violent, and there are only a few things that would bring me to violence. I talk most things out and have, more than once, talked my way out of a violent situation. But in some cases, this being one of them, I believe that violence may have occurred.

Mediation analyses

A series of mediational analyses were conducted in order to determine whether the perception of privilege to aggress mediated the relationship between masculine gender-role identity and immediate and delayed anger and intentions to aggress, and rumination. In other words, we predicted that gender-role identity would affect how participants responded to humiliation "because of how it shapes their view of the norms of the encounter," or their perception of what is or is not an appropriate response.

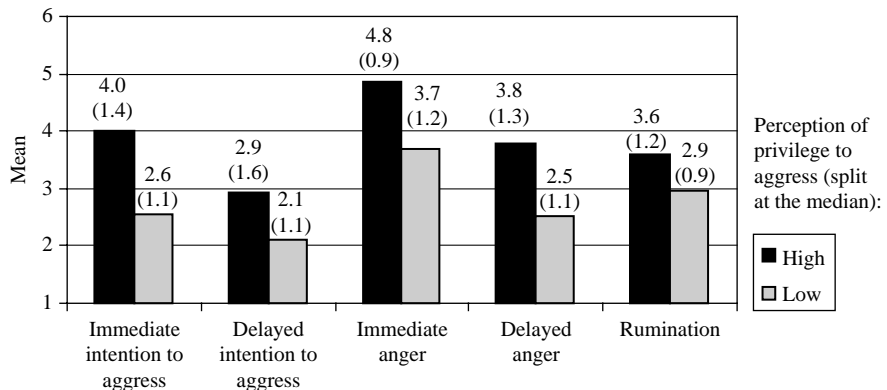


Figure 1. Means and SDs for immediate and delayed anger and intention to aggress as well as rumination of participants with high versus low perceptions of privilege to aggress

Note: Split at the median

The results confirm this hypothesis fully. The perception of privilege to aggress mediates the relationships between the masculine gender-role identity scale and:

- immediate and delayed anger;
- immediate and delayed intentions to aggress; and
- rumination.

Following Baron and Kenny’s (1986) method, the perception of privilege to aggress (the mediator) as well as all five dependent variables were regressed on masculine gender-role identity. Next, the dependent variables were regressed on perception of privilege to aggress and masculine gender-role identity simultaneously. Hence, the relationship between gender-role identity and the dependent variables were found to be mediated by perception of privilege to aggress. Standardized β coefficients from each step can be seen in Table III. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a variable functions as a mediator when a previously significant relation is no longer significant when the assumed mediator is controlled for. This was the case for all the relationships between masculine gender-role identity and the dependent variables, controlling for perception of privilege to aggress. Further the drop in the β coefficients was significant according to a Sobel test, which can be seen in the last column of Table III. Hence, the perception of privilege to aggress can be considered an essential mediating variable in the prediction of how people react to a humiliating encounter.

Two statements of participants illustrate this further:

I would hope that I would walk over, grab Larry and slug him as hard as I could. I think that’s exactly what I’d do, even if it meant getting myself hurt or arrested. [. . .] What else is there to do? This seems like one of the few instances where a violent response is adequate.

Social norms have limits. The guy who kissed my fiancée violated those boundaries and created a climate of violent counter-reaction from my part. A provocation engenders an unpredictable reaction.

The same mediational analyses as described above were conducted in order to test $H4$ and determine whether rumination mediated the relationship between the perception of privilege to aggress and delayed anger and intentions to aggress. The analyses can be seen in Table IV. While rumination fully mediated the relationship between the

<i>Dependent variable</i>	Respective variable regressed on masculine gender-role identity (β)	Respective variable regressed on perception of privilege to aggress and masculine gender-role identity (partial β)	$\Delta\beta$
Immediate anger	0.293**	0.125	0.168**
Immediate intention to aggress	0.324**	0.112	0.212**
Rumination	0.288*	0.139	0.149*
Delayed anger	0.306**	0.159	0.147*
Delayed intention to aggress	0.262*	0.142	0.120*
<i>Mediator</i>			
Perception of privilege to aggress	0.362***		

Notes: Figures show the standardized beta-coefficients. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table III.
Regressions demonstrating the mediating effect of perception of privilege to aggress in the relationship between masculine gender-role identity and immediate and delayed anger and intentions to aggress

perception of privilege to aggress and delayed intentions to aggress, it only partially mediated the relationship between the perception of privilege to aggress and delayed anger. Even though the regression of delayed anger on the perception of privilege to aggress stays significant when controlling for rumination (column 3), the drop is nevertheless significant according to the Sobel test (column 4).

The participants' comments also support Margalit's (2002) proposition that remembering humiliation is like reliving it. Two participants described this at the end of the second questionnaire:

As I filled in those questions I tended to think that the feelings generated in the study have hardened with time.

I find that I keep thinking violently when I spend time thinking about the situation.

Discussion

The results of this study were consistent with the investigators' expectations and can be summarized as follows: participants were found to be more likely to respond to humiliating encounters aggressively when the emotional role of the humiliated victim was perceived by them as allowing for aggressive reactions against the humiliator. Individuals with masculine gender-role identities were more likely to perceive the social norms of the scenario as privileging aggression in response to the encounter, and to intend to act accordingly, than individuals with feminine gender-role identities. Furthermore, people were more likely to ruminate about the encounter, and therefore maintain anger and aggressive intentions, when they perceived the situation to privilege aggressive acts. This is key. Peoples' perceptions of the social norms (i.e. whether or not aggression was condoned), and processes of rumination were central mediating factors in these findings.

In this study, the first of its kind, we had to make hard choices. We have taken a very complex set of relationships between humiliation, social norms, individual differences, rumination, and protracted conflict and narrowed them down to a particular set of theoretical relationships and empirical operationalizations for study in the laboratory. In doing so, we have lost much of the richness and nuance of the philosophical work (Margalit, 2002; Lear, 2003) and the qualitative research (Lindner, 2001, 2006) which this follows. For example, because we assumed that understanding the individual experience of humiliation is important as a first step towards

Table IV.
Regressions demonstrating the mediating effect of rumination in the relationship between the perception of privilege to aggress and delayed anger/delayed intentions to aggress

	Respective variable regressed on perception of privilege to aggress (β)	Respective variable regressed on rumination and perception of privilege to aggress (partial β)	$\Delta\beta$
<i>Dependent variable</i>			
Delayed anger	0.531**	0.318*	0.195*
Delayed intention to aggress	0.393**	0.131	0.262**
<i>Mediator</i>			
Rumination	0.451**		

Notes: * $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.001$

understanding the collectively shared experience of humiliation, we made the decision to look at humiliation on an individual level in this study and not to focus on the societal level. However, even though this understanding is important, shared emotional orientations of societies should not just be seen as being a collection of individual emotions, but may be seen as having their own unique qualities (Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal, 2006). Hence, further research should analyze the conditions and processes involved in the experience of humiliation at the group and societal levels. Further, the method we chose, using a scenario, gave us the opportunity to elicit behavioral intentions and imagined feelings, but it also had limitations. Participants may not have responded to the scenario in the exact same way and with the same intensity as they might have responded to an actual humiliating experience.

However, in exchange for the simplicity of the study, we have begun to achieve more clarity and specification of the relationships between key variables in the emotions of some types of protracted conflict. In particular, the findings that different perceptions of social norms are key drivers of anger, intentions to aggress, and rumination with regard to humiliating experiences, and that rumination is a mediator of long-term intentions to act aggressively, are critically important. Similar connections between aggression and rumination have been found by others (Bushman, 2002; Bushman *et al.*, 2005; Caprara, 1986). When focusing on the experience of humiliation, the hunger to respond to harm with harm seems to grow (McCullough *et al.*, 2001).

In addition, the finding that differences in gender-role identities can be significantly related to peoples' perceptions of social norms, and thus their emotional reactions and aggressive behavioral intentions is central. Other research has illustrated connections between gender-role identity, aggression and violence (Copenhaver *et al.*, 2000; Hoefeller, 1982 as cited in Chase, 2000). Copenhaver *et al.* (2000) found that men who experience gender-role stress evidence more abusive behaviors. Similarly, Chase (2000) found that masculine gender-role stress predisposes men to increased levels of anger, hostility, and rage. This suggests that, in addition to the actual incidents of humiliation and the existing social norms regarding humiliation and aggression, the social-cognitive processes of gender identification, perception and rumination play a significant role in driving and sustaining emotions in conflict. Previous research has also found a relationship between high and low self-esteem and reactions to humiliating experiences (Baumeister and Tice, 1985; Brown and Dutton, 1999), with low-esteem individuals being more susceptible and therefore motivated by humiliation than high-esteem individuals. This research offers an additional avenue for follow-up studies on the role of individual differences in moderating hostile reactions to conflict.

Notes

1. The emotion of humiliation can be experienced by individuals, groups and even by entire societies. Following Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal (2006), our assumption is that it is possible to gain knowledge about collective functioning as well as about individual functioning by looking at how individuals experience humiliation. While there may be qualitative differences between levels, which should be explored in future research, the present study examines individual reactions to humiliating encounters.

2. Deaux (1985) argues that there is more than just a semantic difference between the terms gender and sex, and advocates the use of measures other than biological sex (e.g. gender-role identity) when investigating issues related to gender.
3. Given the complex relationship among sex, gender, and social norms, this study, the first of its kind, worked only with male subjects. Future research will involve men and women of various gender-role identities.

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