

The Differential Effects of Collective-level vs. Personal-level Humiliating Experiences

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Project Scope: Humiliation is considered a central factor contributing to the protracted nature of conflict (Coleman, 2003; Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2004; Friedman, 2003; Lindner, 2002). However, our knowledge is severely limited regarding the precise role humiliation plays in conflict (Hartling and Luchetta, 1999), especially concerning the comparative effects of different types of humiliation. The purpose of this research is to determine whether humiliating experiences that involve collective-level identity characteristics (as opposed to personal-level identity characteristics) cause more negative affective and cognitive reactions and more aggressive behavioral reactions, both immediately after the humiliating experience occurs as well as in the longer term.

Research on relative deprivation suggests that people who experience collective-level relative deprivation show more negative attitudes and intentions to aggress than people who experience personal-level relative deprivation (Koomen & Frankel, 1992; Walker & Mann, 1987). Because the constructs of humiliation and relative deprivation both involve feeling “lower than” a referent party (see Lindner, 2002), I hypothesize that like relative deprivation, humiliation regarding a collective-level characteristic will produce more negative affective and cognitive reactions and aggressive intentions than personal-level humiliation.

Recent Progress: A pilot study was conducted using an on-line survey in which participants (n = 52) were asked to place themselves “in the shoes” of a main actor who was humiliated by another actor. Immediately after reading the scenario as well as one week later, participants answered a series of Likert-scale and open-ended questions to assess their reactions. The results of the pilot study confirmed a number of aspects of the hypothesis. As compared to participants who were humiliated regarding a personal-level identity characteristic, those who were humiliated regarding a collective-level identity characteristic tended to feel more humiliated, experience more negative affect, think the event would serve as a more formative, guiding force in their lives (both immediately after reading the scenario and one week later), and ruminate more about the event. These results suggest that collective-level humiliating experiences do have more negative effects in the short- and longer-terms than personal-level humiliating experiences. These results, if they are replicable with larger and more diverse populations, may suggest implications for policymakers regarding the need to prevent collective-level humiliating events from occurring in order to prevent negative reactions over the long-term.

Future Plans: Based on pilot results, I am in the process of revising the theory and methodology for a second study. I will then run the second experiment with a larger population, collect and analyze data, and since these studies are part of my dissertation, defend my dissertation.

References

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