

**Humiliation and Power in the Dissolution of Close
Relationships:**

Narratives of Poor Treatment in Romantic Relationships and
Friendships

by

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Abstract

The dissolution of close, interpersonal relationships is a previously unexplored social context in the current body of humiliation literature. Antecedents of ending a romantic relationship or a friendship may include poor treatment by a close relationship partner. In the present study, we collected narratives of poor treatment by former close relationship partners from eighteen participants that ended a romantic relationship and 23 participants that ended a friendship within the last year from the Wesleyan University undergraduate population. In addition, we measured participants' self-rated appraisals (cognitive evaluations), emotional experience, perceptions of power and sociability, as well as perceived power and sociability in their former close partner. Results indicated that poor treatment by a significant other led to appraisals and feelings of humiliation and negative effects on self-esteem when participants perceived themselves as more powerful (i.e. more dominant in the relationship), whereas perceived power had no correlation to these appraisals in friendships.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
<i>The Humiliation Dynamic</i>	1
<i>The Emotional Experience of Humiliation</i>	3
<i>Consequences of Humiliation</i>	9
<i>Power Dynamics and Humiliation in Close Relationships</i>	10
Overview of Present Study	13
<i>Hypothesis</i>	15
Methods	17
<i>Participants</i>	17
<i>Measures</i>	18
<i>Procedure</i>	20
Results	21
<i>Content Analysis of Narratives About Negative Treatment</i>	21
<i>Emotional Tones in Content Analysis</i>	40
<i>Trends in Content Analysis Response Category Themes</i>	44
<i>Quantitative Analyses</i>	44
<i>Limitations and Future Directions</i>	48
Conclusion	55
References	56

Introduction

The Humiliation Dynamic

The Humiliation Dynamic is a widely accepted model in humiliation literature that characterizes the interpersonal process (i.e., the patterns of relational behavior) of a humiliating experience. The Humiliation Dynamic is comprised of three parties: the humiliator (perpetrator), the humiliated (victim), and the witness (audience) (Klein, 1991). By this model, humiliation must be inflicted by the perpetrator, interpreted as a humiliating experience by the victim, and also perceived as a humiliating event by the witness. In other words, an individual debases another person, that other person feels the emotion of humiliation, and a third party acknowledges the humiliation. Klein conducted extensive interviews, collecting data from participants' (n=5) experiences in all three roles: humiliator, humiliated, and witness. He also collected experiences from the perspective of each of the three parties from accumulated personal memories, a literature review, and sourced autobiographies and novels, in order to illuminate the humiliation dynamic (Klein, 1991). Some previous studies have emphasized the pivotal role that a witness plays in a humiliating event (Elison & Harter, 2007), while others have proposed that humiliation can occur without a third party (Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993). Proponents of the Humiliation Dynamic assert that an experience is only humiliating if witnessed by others. According to Klein's model, the witness plays a defining role in a victim's experience of humiliation; therefore, the emotional experience of the victim necessitates a third party witness of his/her denigration (Elison & Harter, 2007).

Humiliation is an Interpersonal Phenomenon

The Relational-Cultural Model of Development asserts that relationships and meaningful connections with others are essential to maintain one's wellbeing (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). The subjective experience of humiliation feels intensely personal to a victim, but is actually a deeply relational process rooted in social interaction (Klein, 1991). The emotion of humiliation is the consequence of an individual's evaluation of another person's behavior as a put down through the process of cognitive appraisal. Cognitive appraisal is the cognitive process by which an individual evaluates an event or situation in relation to his/her concerns, values, beliefs, and goals. Cognitive appraisals are key elicitors of emotional experience (see e.g., Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988). Even when individuals conduct cognitive appraisals individually, the objects of their emotions are often social. Individuals experience a plethora of emotions during social interactions. Therefore, interactions with other people are common elicitors of emotion. An emotional appraisal of humiliation necessitates two other people: a humiliator that demeans, devalues, or subjugates a victim with malicious intent, and a witness of the humiliating event. Recalling past experiences of humiliation typically involves the reenactment of situations with other people – scenarios and images related to the social world (Parkinson, Fischer, & Manstead, 2005).

Social Contexts of Humiliation

Humiliating events can occur in various social contexts and all age groups, from childhood teasing and other forms of social ostracism to disparagement by friends, significant others, or colleagues as adults (Klein, 1991). The diversity of

potentially humiliating circumstances contributes to humiliation's complexity and multifaceted nature as an emotion. Existing humiliation literature has examined humiliation in inter-gender dynamics (Swift, 1991), domestic violence (Strauchler, McCloskey, Mallow, Sitaker, Grigsby, & Gillig, 2004), and interpersonal relationships (Baumeister et al., 1993). Previous scholars have also elaborated upon the social uses of humiliation, namely, humiliation's role as a tool to control others (Strauchler et al., 2004). In the context of larger social structures, cultural leaders may use humiliation to ensure socially acceptable behavior among group members (Solomon, 2001). Those in positions of power humiliate those who violate culturally ascribed social norms, thereby punishing them for their transgressions (Kemper, 2006). The impending threat of humiliation in interpersonal interactions prevents us, by and large, from committing social blunders.

The Emotional Experience of Humiliation

Antecedents of Humiliation

Humiliation can involve “some form of ridicule, scorn, contempt, or other degrading treatment at the hands of others” (Klein, 1991, p. 2). Antecedents are the situations that elicit the cognitive appraisal of humiliation (Parkinson et al., 2005), the circumstances that lead to feeling humiliated. Antecedents of humiliation include “being bullied, put down, excluded or made less of” (Klein, 1991) and being “lowered in the eyes of others—losing esteem, social status, or dignity” (Elison & Harter, 2007). Elison and Harter (2007) employed emotion prototype theory (Shaver, Wu, & Schwartz, 1992) to elucidate prototypical causes and correlates of humiliation

among college students (n=95). Participants were asked to list three events that would cause them to feel humiliated in order to identify common causes of humiliation. The authors used content analysis to identify correlations between constructs and specifically coded narratives for mention of an audience. Participants were then asked whether number of witnesses would impact the level of humiliation experienced. Responses provided examples of prototypical causes of humiliation in three general categories. One source of humiliation was being teased, harassed, ridiculed, or put down. Two other sources were public behaviors or accidents that violated social norms and incompetence or mistakes observed by others. Narratives strongly suggested that the presence of an audience was an integral factor of a humiliating experience (Elison & Harter, 2007).

Hartling and Luchetta (1999) designed a Cumulative Humiliation Subscale (CHS) in order to assess types of humiliating experiences and their prevalence. In this subscale, humiliation was operationalized as “being harmed”. Self-report questions on five-point Likert scales were used to assess the prevalence and cumulative impact of past humiliation in high school and college students (n=253). These questions were created in order to evaluate the Humiliation Dynamic previously defined by Klein (1991) using a reliable and consistent measure. The authors sought to understand the experience of humiliation from an interpersonal and relational perspective. The CHS indicated that participants felt most seriously harmed by being put down and ridiculed. Being excluded and discounted were the next most distressing factors (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). The data collected from the CHS shed light on the aspects of humiliation most frequently experienced among participants.

On an interpersonal level, humiliated individuals may internalize the negative views of close others with social or emotional significance (i.e., romantic partners, friends), since victims would particularly value the opinions of their close others. In a two-part study of unrequited love, romantic rejection was identified as an antecedent for humiliation (Baumeister et al., 1993). Baumeister et al. (1993) elucidated the markedly unique emotional experiences and motivations for would-be lovers and their rejectors by collecting narratives from upper-level male and female university students in their early 20s (n=71). Narratives of unrequited love following romantic rebuke were content analyzed and humiliation was measured in terms of statements regarding lowered self-esteem, self-blame, and appraisals of negative changes in the self. Humiliation experienced by would-be lovers was also measured with self-report dimensions of feared rejection, lowered self-esteem, and devaluing statements made by their rejectors. Would-be lovers experienced reduced self-esteem and humiliation following their rejector's romantic rebuke, which may be due to their interpretation of romantic rejection as a reflection of their own deficiencies as a potential romantic partner (Baumeister et al., 1993).

At the group level, social exclusion is a potential elicitor of humiliation. Studies have examined the phenomenology of humiliation experienced due to an attack on oneself as a member of a social group (Leidner, Sheikh, & Ginges, 2012). Strong identification with one's social group could lead to negative feelings following social exclusion due to the value one places in being a member of that group. Ostracism, a form of social exclusion by in-group members, can make individuals feel unimportant or discounted. Victims could interpret social exclusion and

ostracism by in-group members as a negative evaluation by those held in esteem to the victim. Social derision could be interpreted as a direct reflection of one's revoked status as an in-group member, compromising the integrity of a victim's social image, which in turn affects the self-concept, and potentially leading to the emotional experience of humiliation (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999).

Phenomenology of Humiliation: Appraisals and Feelings

Phenomenology refers to the consciousness of emotional experience, and the appraisal of these emotional experiences themselves as part of the emotional process (Roseman, Wiest, Swartz, 1994). The phenomenological experience of humiliation can include appraisals of unfairness, powerlessness, and in some extreme cases of repeated humiliation, even dehumanization (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). The experience of humiliation can occur at varying levels of intensity depending on personal significance of the perpetrator to the victim or amount of witnesses (size of audience). Victims have more intense experiences of humiliation when they place more value in their perpetrator or audience members. The size and intentions of an audience also augment the experience of humiliation. Larger audiences amplify the humiliator's debasement, triggering more intense humiliation experiences (Klein, 1999).

Hartling and Luchetta (1999) used the working definition of 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" (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999, p. 7). In Klein's (1991) study, interviewees reported feeling powerless and physically ill with

accompanying somatic sensations, and feeling flushed. Similarly, another study identified characteristics of the experience of humiliation including feeling reduced, deficient, and attacked (Lazare, 1987). Humiliation may co-occur with other emotions like feeling hurt, exposed, angry, or anxious, in response to being put down (Klein, 1991). Participants in Elison and Harter's (2007) study were also asked to generate other emotions they would feel during a humiliating event to identify emotional correlates to humiliation. Anger was the most frequently reported emotional correlate, followed by embarrassment and sadness, and less frequently, shame (Elison & Harter, 2007).

Self-conscious emotions are characterized by a consciousness of the self and some form of evaluation of the self; in other words, "thoughts and feelings about oneself are the focus of the emotional experience" (Tangney & Fischer, 1994; Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2000, p. 834). Appraisals of humiliation occur in relation to others, characterizing humiliation as a self-conscious emotion. Humiliation plays an important role in the negotiation of a person's relationships, and in doing so draws focus onto a person *in relation to* those around him/her. In fact, shame and humiliation are both self-conscious emotions and therefore share certain similarities, but differ in important ways. Humiliation is typically elicited in situations in which a person is devalued, or put down, by another. By contrast, shame is typically experienced by violation of moral standards or a heightened sense of social image (Rodriguez Mosquera, Fischer, Manstead, & Zaalberg, 2008).

Elison and Harter (2007) employed facet theory and multidimensional scaling to differentiate humiliation from the other negative self-conscious emotions (e.g.,

embarrassment, shame, and guilt) in terms of eliciting conditions, intensity, and correlates. They developed three sets of 30 vignettes incorporating hypothesized variables of emotional intensity and distinguishing factors between negative self-conscious emotions. University students (n=123) were asked to rate their emotional and behavioral reactions to the scenarios in the vignettes. Accuracy ratings were determined for each negative self-conscious emotion by asking participants to rate how accurately humiliation, embarrassment, shame, or guilt described their initial feelings in response to each vignette on a five-point Likert scale (Elison & Harter, 2007).

Participants characterized vignettes containing a hostile audience as exemplars of humiliation. Vignettes involving the *exposure* of a social or moral violation that reflects one's character and results in debasement by others were also considered prototypical of humiliation. Prototypical embarrassment was characterized by the presence of an audience, but an audience with less hostile intent compared to the audience that characterized humiliation. Furthermore, embarrassment was described by participants as an emotion elicited by less serious (e.g., faux-pas) situations compared to humiliation. Guilt and shame were found to have similar antecedents, including a moral standard violation, and were not characterized by presence or hostility of an audience. Shame differed from humiliation in its occurrence in the absence of an audience; feelings of shame were elicited in the absence of a third party. Furthermore, shame often occurred in the face of a moral standard violation, whereas feelings of humiliation also arose in situations that the victim deemed as unfair (Elison & Harter, 2007).

Consequences of Humiliation

Humiliation, an educating experience, breeds identity...in general, identity germinates from humiliation's soil...Humiliation isn't merely the basement of a personality, or the scum pile on the stairway down. Humiliation is the *earlier event* that paves the way for "self" to know it exists.
(Koestenbaum p. 16)

Humiliation Can Affect the Self-Concept as a Self-Conscious Emotion

Koestenbaum's book, *Humiliation*, explores the topic of humiliation and describes the importance of humiliation in the development of the self-concept, a person's idea of who (s)he is (Klein, 1991). Specifically, Koestenbaum suggests that the self-concept is crafted by earlier experiences of humiliation. Self-conscious emotions such as humiliation are related to self-esteem (Tangney & Dearing, 2002) and can threaten self-esteem at various intensities, depending on context and significance of the humiliating event, humiliator, and witnesses (Klein, 1999). Pathogenesis refers to the manner of development of a psychopathological state, such as low self-esteem and negative self-concept. Hartling and Luchetta (1999) explored behavioral reactions to repeated debasement and its attack on the self-image. In chronic negative social contexts such as domestic violence, humiliation can contribute to the pathogenesis of low self-esteem (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). Persistent humiliation in extreme circumstances can undermine an individual's sense of identity and impact the whole self rather than an aspect of the self, especially in instances of chronic negative situations like domestic violence (Klein, 1991; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). Hartling and Luchetta (1999) made a distinction regarding humiliation's impact on the self-concept. "Humiliation is what one feels when one is

ridiculed, scorned, held in contempt, or otherwise disparaged for what one *is* rather than what one *does*” (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). In their study, participants were more concerned with being viewed by others as inadequate than incompetent (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). Incompetence implies a participant’s inability to perform a certain task, which is not directly tied to identity. Inadequacy, on the other hand, implies some failure in one’s existence as a human being. This reflects the greater fear of defect at the core of the self rather than a defect in a skill or aspect of one’s personality.

Power Dynamics and Humiliation in Close Relationships

Power inextricably factors into the Humiliation Dynamic. “Humiliation involves emphasis on an interaction in which one is debased or forced into a degraded position by someone who is, at that moment, more powerful” (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999, p. 5). Processes of power are defined as “interaction patterns and interpersonal behaviors associated with assertiveness and control” (Bentley, Galliher, & Ferguson, 2007, p. 485). Within interpersonal relations, elicitation of humiliation in others (i.e., humiliating acts) can be used to measure processes of power. Humiliating others can also be a tool of social control in contexts ranging from commonplace bullying (Elison & Harter, 2007) to domestic violence (Browne, 1993). For example, bullies and abusive spouses exert their social power and dominance through shaming, denigration, and debasement of their victims (Gilbert, 1998). Humiliating others can be used as a “direct strategy for establishing and maintaining control across relationship types” (Bentley et al. 2007, p. 486). Power dynamics are invariably

present in maintaining a close interpersonal relationship. The dominant partner in a relationship may be more likely to humiliate a subordinate partner. In power-humiliation relational scenarios discussed in previous literature, the dominant member of the relationship can use debasement or the threat of humiliation to dominate a significant other and exert power over them (Strauchler et al., 2004). Often, debasement increases the power of the humiliator and decreases the power of the humiliated. The perpetrator may gain the ability to profoundly impact the victim's social behavior to conform to his/her will (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999).

Bentley et al. (2007) adapted items from a multidimensional assessment of interpersonal power in adults for adolescent heterosexual romantic couples 14-18 years of age (n=92) to examine indices of relationship power and functioning in a previously unexplored age demographic. The Others as Shamer Scale (OAS; Goss, Gilbert, & Allan, 1994) assessed respondents' perceptions of shaming, disparaging, and humiliating behaviors by a romantic partner. These included (1) "My partner sees me as not measuring up to him/her", (2) "I think that my partner looks down on me", (3) "I feel that my partner sees me as not good enough", (4) "My partner sees me as small and insignificant", (5) "I feel insecure about my partner's opinion of me", (6) "My partner sees me as unimportant compared to others", and (7) "My partner sees me as defective as a person" (Bentley et al., 2007). Results indicated a negative relationship between the experience of humiliation and relationship satisfaction in both genders. Girlfriends who perceived themselves as disadvantaged (i.e., in a position of less power) in their relationships experienced poorer overall relationship quality. Meanwhile, girlfriends who viewed themselves as possessing greater prestige

or status (i.e., more powerful) as romantic partners were more satisfied with their relationships. Boyfriends were more likely to make final decisions, another measure of power in the relationship, which could be attributed to the patriarchal structure of European-American society, where men have greater authority and influence (Bentley et al., 2007).

Power discrepancies in romantic relationships have been associated with negative relationship outcomes in adult relationship partners (Bentley et al., 2007) and may elicit humiliation as “humiliation often involves powerlessness before another” (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). In exploring the relationship between emotional abuse and humiliation, victims of domestic violence cited humiliation as a factor in the assessment and conceptualization of domestic violence (Strauchler et al., 2004). Furthermore, participants reported humiliation as abuse “rooted in the batterers’ desire for power and control in the relationship” (Strauchler et al., 2004, p. 351). These findings help illuminate the role that humiliation plays in the power dynamics of domestic violence. At a lesser intensity, humiliation is utilized in romantic relationships and friendships as a power play. Furthermore, the power differential in a close interpersonal relationship could elicit humiliation in itself, especially if a stereotypically dominant partner plays the role of a submissive partner (Shields, 2002). In close relationships, “potentially humiliating power differentials greatly influence sense of security in relation to others and is inextricably involved in the process of creating one’s personal self” (Klein, 1991).

Overview of Present Study

The present study examines instances of humiliation at the end of a close relationship, a time frame that would likely elicit negative feelings. We wanted to illuminate the phenomenology of the emotional experience of a break-up that involved negative treatment by a close romantic partner to examine the naturalistic examples of humiliation in close relationships. Therefore, we specifically asked participants to recount situations in which they ended a relationship because they were treated badly. Poor treatment by a close other that would drive a participant to end a close relationship may have involved some type of humiliation. We predicted an overlap between the events and actions preceding the end of a relationship and the antecedents of humiliation. Power disparity, another factor in relationship dissatisfaction as well as humiliation, between members of a dyad (i.e., partners in romantic relationships or friendships) could also contribute to the dissolution of a relationship. Furthermore, humiliation in the dissolution of close, interpersonal relationships has not been extensively investigated. Therefore, this study aimed to elaborate upon the body of humiliation research in a specific subtopic that has had little attention in existing literature.

The participant pool drew from college undergraduates ages 18-22. Participants were old enough to have experienced significant and meaningful relationships, but could also be prone to difficulties in maintaining these relationships in light of the many personal and situational changes that occur in the process of attending college. We anticipated narratives expressing difficulties with commitment,

long distance relationships, and other factors common to the college dating experience. Long distance friendships that occur between individuals living and attending college in different areas could also be susceptible to falling out of touch.

To minimize bias in terms of the relationship that participants chose to write about, we asked participants to recount their most recent breakup with a close relationship partner. By asking participants to describe how their ex-significant other treated them and explain what caused the end of their relationship, we avoided priming them with emotion words – which could have occurred if we specifically asked participants to recount a time where they were humiliated by a former close relationship partner. We sought to identify the role of power discrepancies in the dissolution of close relationships by measuring participants' perceptions of their own as well their ex-friends' or ex-romantic partners' power and dominance in the relationship. As a comparison dimension, we also measured participants' perceived benevolence and sociability of themselves and their ex-friend or ex-romantic partner in order to explore the effects of a personality component hypothesized to be less associated with humiliation on self-evaluated appraisals and feelings than dominance. Appraisals of unfairness, appraisals of relationship partner's power, and appraisals of lack of personal power by participants were measured in order to examine their role in the intensity of feeling humiliated. We also measured negative effects on self-image following poor treatment in the relationship, due to the relationship between self-conscious emotions and self-esteem.

Contradictory to the humiliation dynamic, Baumeister et al. (1993) explored humiliation in the absence of a third party. In this study, we support the functional

model of humiliation employed in Baumeister's study of interpersonal humiliation, where a humiliator can elicit humiliation in the absence of a witness if of particular significance to the victim (i.e., a significant other or close friend). In other words, if a close relationship partner debases a humiliated individual, (s)he may fill the roles of humiliator and witness. Therefore, at the end of a romantic relationship or friendship, a partner made less of in the eyes of his/her close relationship partner could experience humiliation without third party involvement. The dissolution of a close relationship would most likely involve a change in the behavior or feelings toward a close relationship partner, and we expected that humiliating events could take place in this context. Loss of power in a close relationship or being reduced in status by one's relationship partner may be considered another antecedent for humiliation, again, in the absence of a witness or audience. Demonstrating that humiliation can occur without a third party in the dissolution of close relationships would challenge Klein's Humiliation Dynamic (Klein, 1991).

Hypothesis

This novel study of humiliation examines the role of perceived power in humiliation experiences using a narrative approach. The general expectation was based on the finding in previous literature that those in positions of higher power typically humiliate their subordinates. More perceived power by the participant in his/her relationship could lead to more intense negative responses to being treated badly (Bentley et al., 2007). Poor treatment of a participant preceding the dissolution of a close relationship could be perceived as a loss of power. Thus, as our key

hypothesis, we anticipated that the more participants perceive themselves as powerful (i.e., dominant) in their relationships, the more that poor treatment by a close relationship partner will “hurt” as measured by more intense appraisals and feelings of humiliation and negative effects on self-esteem.

Methods

Participants

Participants were Wesleyan undergraduates aged 18-22. We collected data from 42 participants and offered them \$10 in compensation for completing a 30-45 minute questionnaire. Students were recruited through ads at the website wesleying.org and through flyers on campus as a study on Relationships and Emotions. The ad included a link to an online short survey interested participants completed so that we could assess their eligibility for the study. In the short survey, participants were asked to report class year, gender, age, whether they have a supportive group of friends, and whether they have had a romantic breakup or falling out with a friend within the last year. If participants answered 'yes' to the last question, we asked them whether it was them who ended the relationship, when it happened, and how long the relationship with the other person lasted. We asked these questions to be able to select participants who had recently ended a significant relationship. In addition, we only included participants in the study who reported having a supportive group of friends, just in case remembering the end of a relationship elicited some negative feelings.

Forty-five participants completed the measures. Four of these participants were excluded from further analyses because they did not report a situation in which they ended a close relationship due to being treated badly by a relationship partner. Of the remaining 41 participants, 32 self-identified as female and 9 as male. With regards to ethnic background, 24 participants self-identified as European-American,

11 as Latino/a, 11 as Asian-American, 4 as African-American, 1 as Native-American, 1 as Arab-American, 1 as multiracial, and 1 as Caucasian.

Measures

Participants were first asked to rate their own benevolence and power. We used the measures developed by Leach, Ellemers, and Barreto (2007). In this model, benevolence and power are two independent dimensions of self-evaluation that include various components. The power component of dominance-subordination was chosen as this component most clearly indicates the extent to which the participant felt in either a dominant or subordinate position in the relationship. Participants were prompted, “How much do you think you possesses the following characteristics?” and presented with a list of adjectives describing sociability, power, and dominance constructs of personality. On a six-point Likert scale from 0 (Not at all) to 5 (Extremely), dominance-subordination was measured with the items ‘pushy,’ ‘forceful,’ and ‘dominant’ (alpha: .84; Leach et al., 2007). The key hypothesis in this study was that seeing oneself as having a dominant position in the relationship would be associated with more intense negative appraisals, feelings of humiliation, and a negative self-image in response to being badly treated. Further, the sociability component of benevolence was chosen to explore the effects of a personality component less associated with humiliation on self-evaluation on appraisals and feelings. Sociability was measured with the items ‘pleasant,’ ‘warm,’ and ‘friendly’ (alpha: .78; Leach et al., 2007). Participants also rated sociability characteristics on a six-point Likert scale from 0 (Not at all) to 5 (Extremely). We expected that one’s

perceived sociability would influence appraisal and feelings less than one's perceived dominance.

Next, we asked participants to think about a recent situation in which they ended a close relationship due to poor treatment. We asked participants to specifically describe how they were treated by their close other in as much detail as possible. Our prompt stated: "We have all experienced the end of an emotionally intimate relationship. Please think of an emotionally intimate relationship in which you were treated so badly that led you to end the relationship. It can be a romantic relationship or a close friendship. By emotionally intimate we mean a relationship with another person with whom you felt close and with whom you shared intimate thoughts and feelings about your personal and family life. In the space below, please tell us about how this person treated you. Please tell us as much as you can about it. We would like to remind you that this questionnaire is anonymous and that your narrative won't be shared with anyone."

Participants completed measures of appraisals and of feelings of humiliation (Rodriguez Mosquera, 2014). To measure appraisals, the participants were presented with a series of statements and asked the extent to which the statements reflected the way they thought about the situation they just reported. Three appraisals were measured: appraisal of unfairness (4 items, e.g., 'What happened was unfair;' 'What happened was undeserved;' alpha: .88); appraisal of relationship partner's power (3 items, e.g., 'this person was trying to control me;' alpha: .85); and appraisal of lack of personal power (3 items, e.g., 'I felt I could not influence the other person;' alpha: .71).

Further, we measured feelings of humiliation (5 items, e.g., ‘I felt humiliated,’ ‘I felt shamed;’ alpha: .88) and negative effects on self-image (3 items, e.g., ‘I felt bad about myself,’ alpha: .93; Rodriguez Mosquera, 2014). Participants were asked to report how much they felt as described by these items about the situation they reported (i.e., being treated badly by their relationship partner). Specifically, participants were asked to “Please rate how well these statements reflect the way you thought and felt about what you described in your narrative (how this person treated you). By ‘this person’ we mean your ex-friend or ex-romantic partner” on a seven-point Likert scale from 0 (Not at all) to 6 (Extremely).

Finally, participants were asked to rate their relationship partner on the same items of sociability and dominance (alpha other-ratings sociability: .78 ; alpha other-ratings dominance: .81; Leach et al., 2007). Specifically, participants were asked, “How would you describe this person? Please rate how much this person possesses the following characteristics:” on a six-point Likert scale from 0 (Not at all) to 5 (Extremely).

Procedure

Participants were recruited through ads on Wesleying and flyers on campus over a two-month period. Once participant eligibility was determined by a preliminary survey, participants completed an online survey on Qualtrics in one sitting. Participants were given until the end of Winter Break to complete the survey and received \$10 in compensation upon completion.

Results

Content Analysis of Narratives About Negative Treatment

Emotional Tones of Narratives

General emotional tones were assessed for each narrative as a whole story before content analyzing each statement within a narrative into response categories. We chose to assess the overarching story that each narrative told in order to preserve the richness of the narratives and identify general emotional tones of poor treatment in a close interpersonal relationship that could be compared to the content analysis findings. We identified two major emotional tones of narratives, emotional abuse and emotional distance. Narratives with tones of emotional abuse contained themes of betrayal, denigration, manipulation, and aggression by a former relationship partner. Narratives with tones of emotional distance contained themes of emotional neglect, lack of attention, and inconsistent behavior by a former relationship partner. Some narratives had more than one emotional tone. Generally, more narratives had tones of emotional abuse than emotional distance. Tones of emotional abuse and emotional distance were represented equally across narratives of romantic relationships and friendships.

Response Category Themes

Narratives recounting an instance in which participants were treated badly and subsequently ended a relationship were content analyzed using a bottom-up approach. Narratives were broken up into statements and response categories were created that closely reflected the narratives verbatim in order to avoid subjective interpretation

and extrapolation. Narratives were content analyzed by two separate coders. The first coder read all narratives and created a preliminary coding system with response categories. Response categories are the themes that emerged from the participants' narratives (Smith, 2000). Response categories are created based on the statements from the narratives rather than preconceived before conducting the content analysis in order to avoid coder bias and remain as close to the original narrative material as possible. Next, a second coder read all narratives, separated them into statements, and examined whether the preliminary coding system was an accurate reflection of the narratives. Disagreements (less than 5%) were resolved through discussion between the two coders.

Given the richness of participant responses and the collected narrative data, we created higher-order response category themes that included smaller, more specific response categories within them. Higher-order response category themes and their respective response category frequencies are presented in Table 1. The higher-order response categories included: (1) Negative actions of ex, (2) Reasons for ending the relationship, (3) Inability to let go of the relationship, (4) Negative feelings ex elicited in me, (5) Change in relationship, and (6) Lack of communication.

Negative actions of ex

Statements within narratives that described negative actions of a former close relationship partner that led to the dissolution of the relationship comprised the *Negative actions of ex* category theme. Within this higher-order category, 144 statements (romantic relationship: 80; friendship: 64) were further organized into the following five response categories: (1) Ex did something negative to me (romantic

relationship: 40; friendship: 40), (2) Ex would say negative things (romantic relationship: 18; friendship: 11), (3) Ex did something negative (romantic relationship: 11; friendship: 7), (4) Ex did not accept/acknowledge my thoughts/desires (romantic relationship: 7; friendship 2), and (5) Ex influenced my behavior negatively (friendship: 4). The *Ex did something negative to me* response category included statements describing direct negative actions of a former close relationship partner that affected the participant (“My ex-girlfriend hit me;” “My ex-friend would disrespect my personal space”). The *Ex would say negative things* response category arose from statements that characterized negative things said to the participant by a former close relationship partner (“My ex-friend would say passive aggressive things toward me;” “My ex-girlfriend began to target my way of life to blame for the way our relationship had gone”). The *Ex did something negative* response category included general negative actions of a former close relationship partner (“My ex-friend was very mean to other people;” “I heard that my ex-girlfriend was unfaithful a number of times to her new boyfriend”). The *Ex did not accept/acknowledge my thoughts/desires* response category was comprised of statements that described former close relationship partners’ refusal to listen to participants when they expressed their feelings (“My ex-boyfriend insisted that he knew I did love him even when I said I wasn’t sure”). The *Ex influenced my behavior negatively* response category included statements that described former close relationship partners as bad influences to participants (“I felt like I was becoming a bad person because of my ex-friend”).

Reasons for ending the relationship

The *Reasons for ending the relationship* category theme included 137 total statements (romantic relationship: 78; friendship: 59) that described the reasons, situational and emotional circumstances, and actions that caused participants to end their close relationship. Nine response categories were created within this higher-order category and included: (1) Actions of ex (romantic relationship: 19; friendship: 15), (2) Resolved to end relationship (romantic relationship: 11; friendship: 19), (3) Not treated badly (romantic relationship: 6; friendship: 13), (4) Couldn't be with ex anymore (romantic relationship: 13; friendship: 4), (5) Not feeling as strongly for ex (romantic relationship: 14), (6) Realization of negative changes in ex (romantic relationship: 6; friendship: 5), (7) Reasons unrelated to ex (romantic relationship: 6), (8) Deceptive/Suspicious behavior of ex (romantic relationship: 3), and (9) Took for granted by ex (friendship: 3). The *Actions of ex* response category contained statements that described the actions of a former close relationship partner that led to the dissolution of the relationship ("My ex-friend broke a promise that she asked both of us to keep;" "I ended the relationship with my ex-girlfriend because it was getting somewhat physically abusive"). The *Resolved to end relationship* response category was comprised of declarative statements by participants about ending their close relationship ("I was done with any sort of friendship my ex-friend and I had;" "I called it quits"). The *Not treated badly* response category included statements indicating that participants did not feel that they were generally treated badly by their former close relationship partner throughout the relationship ("There was no

animosity or anything;” “There wasn’t any bad treatment in the relationship”).¹ The *Couldn’t be with ex anymore* response category included statements of participants’ inability to remain in their close relationship (“I could not reconcile with what my ex-friend did;” “The strain of the relationship became too much”). The *Not feeling as strongly for ex* response category characterized participants’ emotional distance leading to the dissolution of their close relationship (“I consistently felt like other people would judge me for being friends with this person;” “I ended a romantic relationship because I was not as interested in my partner as he was in me”). The *Realization of negative changes in ex* response category included statements characterizing how a negative change in participants’ former close relationship partners led to the dissolution of the relationship (“I came to understand that my best friend rarely asked me how I was doing because she did not care;” “There are two distinct memories that stick out in my mind as the moments I realized my ex-boyfriend was treating me badly”). The *Reasons unrelated to ex* response category was comprised of personal reasons for ending a close relationship (“I ended my relationship because I was uncomfortable feeling loved”). The *Deceptive/Suspicious behavior of ex* response category included statements that described suspicions that a former romantic partner was communicating with an ex and that a friend was being dishonest (“My ex-friend seemed to be spinning two different stories;” “I had extreme suspicions that my ex-boyfriend was talking to his ex-girlfriend”). The *Took for*

¹ The *Not treated badly* response category reflected the participants’ general view on the relationship, and not the fact that the participant reported that they were not treated badly, as narratives were presented in the context of being treated badly by a close relationship partner. Participants’ narratives suggested that they generally did not experience many instances of bad treatment in the context of the entire relationship as a whole, despite the instance of poor treatment they recounted in the narrative.

granted by ex category involved direct statements of being taken for granted by a former close relationship partner (“My ex-girlfriend abused my care and generosity”).

Inability to let go of the relationship

The *Inability to let go of the relationship* response category theme included 106 total statements (romantic relationship: 96; friendship: 10) regarding the reasons, events, and actions of participants maintaining a long, “on-and-off” relationship with their former close relationship partner. Seven response subcategories were created, including: (1) Ex unable to let me go (romantic relationship: 28; friendship: 6), (2) Continuously forgave ex (romantic relationship 14; friend: 4), (3) On-and-off relationship (romantic relationship: 17), (4) Residual feelings toward ex (romantic relationship: 11), (5) Ex had residual feelings toward another (romantic relationship: 10), (6) Failed attempts to end relationship (romantic relationship: 8), and (7) Unable to let ex go (romantic relationship: 8). The *Ex unable to let me go* response category included statements characterizing a former close relationship partner’s unwillingness to let go of the relationship with the participant (“My ex-girlfriend told me she wanted to come see me after not talking for several years”). The *Continuously forgave ex* response category characterized participants’ forgiveness of their former close relationship partners’ transgressions, typically despite knowing better (“Mostly because my ex-girlfriend and I already knew a lot about each other I eventually relented and accepted being friends with her;” “I said fine, I’ll talk to you so my ex-boyfriend and I talked for hours and hours”). The *On-and-off relationship* response category included statements that characterized a tumultuous, “on-and-off” relationship between participants and their former close relationship partners (“My

SO and I spiraled in a wheezy cycle of hir feeling insecure, us fighting, breaking up, and then getting back together, which continued for two years”). The *Residual feelings towards ex* response category included sentimental statements by participants who retained positive feelings for a former close relationship partner even after the dissolution of the relationship (“I stuck the relationship out though because I really did have what I thought a ‘love’ for her”). The *Ex had residual feelings toward another* response category included statements detailing scenarios where a romantic partner had feelings for another former partner while still in a relationship with the participant (“My ex-friend could not get over his breakup with his ex-girlfriend”). The *Failed attempts to end relationship* response category contained statements about how participants tried and failed to end their close relationship (“I tried to end the relationship a couple times before we broke up for good”). The *Unable to let ex go* response category contained participants’ statements of being unable to let go of their close relationship amidst the dissolution of the relationship (“The relationship was even worse but I hung onto our relationship;” “I would run back to my ex-boyfriend any time he asked”).

Negative feelings ex elicited in me

The *Negative feelings ex elicited in me* category theme included 72 total statements (romantic relationship: 34; friendship: 38) of participants’ reported feelings subdivided into three response categories: (1) How ex made me feel (romantic relationship: 31; friendship: 14), (2) Actions of ex caused negative feelings in me (romantic relationship: 1; friendship: 23), and (3) Ex elicited negative feelings in my close others (romantic relationship: 2; friendship: 1). The *How ex made me feel*

response category contained participants' statements describing negative feelings caused by their former close relationship partner ("The sight of my ex-friend hurts my heart;" "I felt stifled"). The *Actions of ex caused negative feelings in me* response category included descriptions of former close relationship partners' negative actions and participants' subsequent negative feelings ("What my ex-friend did was extremely hurtful;" "I felt as though my ex-girlfriend's actions were a betrayal of trust"). The *Ex elicited negative feelings in my close others* response category described the actions of an ex-girlfriend's negative effect on a participant's new girlfriend's feelings ("My current girlfriend's problems with my ex-girlfriend are more deep-set than she or I knew").

Change in relationship

The *Change in relationship* response category theme included a total of 52 statements (romantic relationship: 32; friendship: 20) describing a negative change in former close relationship partners, a change in the participant, or a change in the nature of the close relationship, divided into five response subcategories: (1) Ex became distant/began treating me poorly (romantic relationship: 22; friendship: 10), (2) I changed (romantic relationship: 7), (3) Relationship grew from platonic to romantic (friendship: 7), (4) Inconsistent behavior in ex (romantic relationship: 3; friendship: 2), and (5) Dislike change (friendship: 1). The *Ex became distant/began treating me poorly* response category contained statements noting a change in former close relationship partners where they became aloof ("My friends began to pull away;" "How my ex-boyfriend was acting was definitely off"). The *I changed* response category included participant accounts of drifting apart from former close

relationship partners preceding the dissolution of the relationship (“I had my life in order, it just didn’t include my ex-girlfriend nearly as much as she needed it to”). The *Relationship grew from platonic to romantic* response category was a unique subcategory in this overarching theme of change. Rather than characterizing a negative change, this response category included a pattern of statements that described a relationship evolving from platonic to romantic (“After that night we started to cultivate the sort of romantic relationship that had always been an undercurrent to our close friendship”). The *Inconsistent behavior in ex* response category statements involved ambivalent behavior of a former close relationship partner towards the relationship (“my ex-friend was a big bag of mixed signals and still is to this day”). Finally, there was one additional statement “I have never been a fan of change” that stood alone in its own response category, *Dislike change*.

Lack of communication

The *Lack of communication* category included a total of 29 statements (romantic relationship: 25; friendship: 4) that described poor communication between participants and their former close relationship partner preceding the dissolution of their relationship. Four response subcategories included: (1) Ex communicated poorly with me (romantic relationship: 12; friendship: 2), (2) Ex and I did not discuss an issue between us (romantic relationship: 9; friendship: 2), (3) Ex and I both communicated poorly with one another (romantic relationship: 2), and (4) Rejected ex’s attempts to communicate (romantic relationship: 2). The *Ex communicated poorly with me* response category statements blamed former close relationship partners for lack of communication (“There's just a selfishness about how my ex-

girlfriend wants every scenario to play out that she never verbalizes”). The *Ex and I did not discuss an issue between us* response category held both parties accountable for neglecting to address an issue (“My ex-friend and I didn’t talk about it the next day but we spent the whole day together;” “My ex-boyfriend and I never had a conversation about whether we were girlfriend and boyfriend”). The *Ex and I both communicated poorly with one another* response category included statements that described unsuccessful attempts at communicating between a participant and his former significant other (“My significant other and I both began yelling at which point no one was really listening”). The *Rejected ex’s attempts to communicate* response category included statements of a participant rejecting a former significant other’s attempt to communicate (“My ex-girlfriend asks if we can talk for a bit. I say that I had been up working since 8 a.m. and that I needed sleep”).

Table 1: Category Frequencies for Dissolution of Relationship Narratives

Response Categories	Romantic Relationships (345)	Friendships (195)
Negative actions of ex (144)	80	64
Ex did something negative to me (84)	44 (55%)	40 (63%)
Ex would say negative things (29)	18 (22%)	11 (17%)
Ex did something negative (18)	11 (14%)	7 (11%)
Ex did not accept/acknowledge my thoughts/desires (9)	7 (9%)	2 (3%)
Ex influenced my behavior negatively (4)	0	4 (6%)
Reasons for ending the relationship (137)	78	59
Actions of ex (34)	19 (24%)	15 (26%)
Resolved to end relationship (30)	11 (14%)	19 (32%)
Not treated badly (19)	6 (8%)	13 (22%)
Couldn’t be with ex anymore (17)	13 (16%)	4 (7%)
Not feeling as strongly for ex (14)	14 (18%)	0

Realization of negative changes in ex (11)	6 (8%)	5 (8%)
Reasons unrelated to ex (6)	6 (8%)	0
Deceptive/Suspicious behavior of ex (3)	3 (4%)	0
Took for granted by ex (3)	0	3 (5%)
Inability to let go of the relationship (106)	96	10
Ex unable to let me go (34)	28 (29%)	6 (60%)
Continuously forgave ex (18)	14 (15%)	4 (40%)
On-and-off relationship (17)	17 (18%)	0
Residual feelings toward ex (11)	11 (12%)	0
Ex had residual feelings toward another (10)	10 (10%)	0
Failed attempts to end relationship (8)	8 (8%)	0
Unable to let ex go (8)	8 (8%)	0
Negative feelings ex elicited in me (72)	34	38
How ex made me feel (45)	31 (91%)	14 (37%)
Actions of ex caused negative feelings in me (24)	1 (3%)	23 (60%)
Ex elicited negative feelings in my close others (3)	2 (6%)	1 (3%)
Change in relationship (52)	32	20
Ex became distant/began treating me poorly (32)	22 (69%)	10 (50%)
I changed (7)	7 (22%)	0
Relationship grew from platonic to romantic (7)	0	7 (35%)
Inconsistent behavior in ex (5)	3 (9%)	2 (10%)
Dislike change (1)	0	1 (5%)
Lack of communication (29)	25	4
Ex communicated poorly with me (14)	12 (48%)	2 (50%)
Ex and I did not discuss an issue between us (11)	9 (36%)	2 (50%)
Ex and I both communicated poorly with one another (2)	2 (8%)	0
Rejected ex's attempts to communicate (2)	2 (8%)	0

Among narratives of the dissolution of a close relationship, the most frequent statements were those that listed evidential statements about the negative aspects of the former relationship partner (i.e., negative traits of an ex and negative actions of an ex). These informational statements may have been participants' justifications for the dissolution of the relationship. Along with this theme, the second most prevalent type of statement was also a form of fact listing, where participants gave reasons for why they ended the relationship. In slight contrast, the third most common statements more closely resembled justifications of why a relationship lasted as long as it did before it ended, and why participants' remained in relationships amidst the dissolution of the relationship. Four higher-order response category themes arose in the content analysis that aligned with the general emotional tones of the narratives. Statements within the higher-order response category themes of *Negative actions of ex* and *Negative feelings ex elicited in me* aligned with the general emotional tone of emotional abuse and manipulation by the former relationship partner. Two other response category themes, *Change in relationship* and *Lack of communication*, contained statements that characterized the general emotional tone of emotional distance in either the participant or their close relationship partner.

Romantic Relationships vs. Friendships

More participants provided narratives of friendships (n=23) than romantic relationships (n=18), yet more statements were identified and categorized into response categories in narratives describing romantic relationships than narratives describing friendships (romantic relationships: 345; friendships: 195). In other words, participants said more in romantic relationship narratives than in friendship

narratives. *Negative actions of ex*, *Reasons for ending the relationship*, and *Change in relationship* higher-order response category themes had slightly more statements from romantic relationship narratives compared to friendship narratives. Being treated badly in romantic relationships may require more cognitive resources since the dissolution of romantic relationships may be a more complex emotional experience to cope with. This potential explanation would account for the higher frequency of statements made in romantic relationship narratives. The *Negative feelings ex elicited in me* higher-order response category theme had slightly more statements from friendship narratives but the difference between friendships and romantic relationships appeared unsubstantial (romantic relationship: 34 narratives; friendship: 38 narratives). *Inability to let go of the relationship* and *Lack of communication* higher order response category themes had statements predominantly from romantic relationship narratives, with much fewer statements from friendship narratives.

Analysis of Variance

Eighteen participants reported being treated badly in the context of a romantic relationship, whereas 23 participants reported being treated badly in the context of a friendship. To examine the different emotional profiles of these two types of relationship contexts, a series of analyses of variance were carried out with type of relationship (romantic, friendship) as the independent variable. The appraisals and feelings served as the dependent variables. Sex of participant was not included as an independent factor as only 9 males completed the measures.

Type of relationship did not have a significant effect on appraisal of unfairness, $F(1, 39) = .81, p = .37, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .02$ (romantic relationship: $M = 4.07, SD = 1.95$; friendship: $M = 4.60, SD = 1.79$); appraisal of relationship partner's power, $F(1, 39) = .27, p = .61, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .007$ (romantic relationship: $M = 4.13, SD = 2.37$; friendship: $M = 3.80, SD = 1.75$); appraisal of lack of personal power, $F(1, 39) = .05, p = .82, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .001$, (romantic relationship: $M = 4.59, SD = 1.65$; friendship: $M = 4.71, SD = 1.64$); feelings of humiliation, $F(1, 39) = .79, p = .38, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .02$, (romantic relationship: $M = 3.81, SD = 1.69$; friendship: $M = 3.29, SD = 2.01$); or negative effects for self-image, $F(1, 39) = .52, p = .48, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .01$, (romantic relationship: $M = 3.94, SD = 1.89$; friendship: $M = 3.45, SD = 2.39$).

This means that the emotional profiles for the two types of relationship contexts were similar. In other words, participants who reported being treated badly by a romantic partner or a friend appraised the situation as unfair and as indicating that the partner had power over the situation/relationship and that they lacked power over the relationship/situation to a similar extent. Further, participants who reported being treated badly by a romantic partner or a friend reported similar levels of feeling humiliated and their self-image was negatively affected by the negative treatment to an equal extent.

Regression

To examine the extent to which appraisals and feelings are based on perceptions of self and other in the context of a close relationship, a series of regression analyses were carried out separately for romantic relationships and

friendships. Results are presented first for romantic relationships and next for friendships.

Romantic relationships

In a set of regression analyses, appraisals were regressed onto self-ratings and other-ratings (i.e., ex-romantic partner, ex-friend) of sociability and dominance. For appraisal of unfairness, the regression model explained 44% of variance in the appraisal. Self-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .37, p = .11$), other-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .06, p = .79$), and other-ratings of dominance ($\beta = -.01, p = .96$) did not predict participants' scores on appraisal of unfairness. Self-ratings of dominance was the only significant predictor of appraisal of unfairness ($\beta = .59, p = .03$). The more the participants perceived themselves as dominant (e.g., forceful), the more they evaluated being treated negatively by their romantic partner as unfair.

With regards to appraisal of relationship partner's power, the regression model explained 77% of variance in this appraisal. Self-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .05, p = .70$), dominance ($\beta = .13, p = .40$), and other-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .16, p = .29$) did not predict the appraisal. In contrast, other-ratings of dominance was a significant predictor of appraisal of relationship partner's power ($\beta = .73, p = .001$). The more the participants perceived their romantic partner as dominant, the more they evaluated this person as having control over them and their relationship in the context of being treated negatively by them.

In relation to appraisal of lack of personal power, the regression model explained 52% of the variance in the appraisal. As it was the case for appraisal of

unfairness, self-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .22, p = .28$), other-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .26, p = .23$), and other-ratings of dominance ($\beta = -.19, p = .43$) did not predict participants' scores on appraisal of lack of personal power. Self-ratings of dominance was the only significant predictor of the appraisal ($\beta = .71, p = .007$). The more the participants perceived themselves as dominant, the more they evaluated being treated negatively by their romantic partner as indicating a lack of personal power (e.g., having influence and control over the other and the situation).

Further, the regression model explained 62% of the variance in feelings of humiliation. Other ratings of sociability ($\beta = -.04, p = .84$) and other ratings of dominance ($\beta = .08, p = .70$) did not predict feeling humiliated in response to being treated badly. Interestingly, self-ratings of dominance significantly predicted feeling humiliated ($\beta = .72, p = .003$). As expected, the more the participants perceived themselves as dominant, they more humiliated they felt in response to being treated negatively by their romantic partner. In addition, self-ratings of sociability was a marginally significant predictor of feeling humiliated ($\beta = .33, p = .08$). This means that the more the participants perceived themselves as friendly, the more humiliated they felt.

Finally, the regression model explained 66% of the variance in negative effects on self-image. Other ratings of sociability ($\beta = -.15, p = .43$) and dominance ($\beta = .18, p = .39$) did not predict participants' scores on negative effects of the situation on their self-image. As it was the case for feeling humiliated, self-ratings of dominance ($\beta = .69, p = .03$) and self-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .38, p = .04$) were significant predictors of negative effects on self-image. The more the participants

perceived themselves as dominant and friendly, the more their self-images were negatively affected in response to being treated negatively by their romantic partners.

Taken together, these results show the importance of self-evaluation in emotional responses to being treated negatively in a romantic relationship. Seeing oneself as dominant was especially important for how much participants appraised the negative treatment by a romantic partner as unfair and indicating a lack of personal power. Moreover, seeing oneself as dominant was also a significant predictor of increased feelings of humiliation and negative feelings about the self in response to being treated negatively by a romantic partner. Self-ratings of sociability also played an important role in participants' responses, especially with regards to feelings about being negatively treated. In particular, the more the participants perceived themselves as friendly, the more humiliated they felt and the worse they felt about themselves. Finally, perceiving one's romantic partner as dominant only affected how much participants evaluated being treated negatively as an expression of their romantic partners' influence and control over them and the relationship.

Friendships

In a set of regression analyses, appraisals were regressed onto self-ratings and other-ratings of sociability and dominance. For appraisal of unfairness, the regression model explained 19% of the variance in the appraisal. Self-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .42, p = .14$), other-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .38, p = .10$), self-ratings of dominance ($\beta = .31, p = .28$) or other-ratings of dominance ($\beta = -.02, p = .92$) did not predict the appraisal.

With regards to appraisal of relationship partner's power, the regression model explained 39% of variance in this appraisal. Self-ratings of dominance ($\beta = .14, p = .57$) and other-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .09, p = .69$) did not predict participants' scores on this appraisal. Other ratings of dominance ($\beta = .47, p = .02$) was a significant predictor and self-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .47, p = .06$) was a marginally significant predictor. Thus, the more the participant rated their friend as dominant and themselves as friendly, the more they evaluated being treated negatively as an expression of their friends' power over them and their relationship.

In relationship to appraisal of lack of personal power, the regression model explained 22% of variance in this appraisal. Self-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .27, p = .32$), other-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .12, p = .58$), and self-ratings of dominance ($\beta = .33, p = .24$) did not predict participants' scores on this appraisal. Other-ratings of dominance ($\beta = -.36, p = .10$) emerged as a marginally significant predictor. The more the participants rated their friends as dominant, the less they appraised being treated negatively by their friends as indicating a lack of personal power.

For humiliated feelings, the regression model explained 6% of the variance in the appraisal. Self-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .004, p = .99$), other-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .08, p = .76$), self-ratings of dominance ($\beta = .15, p = .61$) and other-ratings of dominance ($\beta = .21, p = .91$) did not predict participants' scores on feeling humiliated in response to being treated badly by a friend.

Finally, the regression model explained 11% of variance in negative effects on self-image. Self-ratings of sociability ($\beta = -.005, p = .99$), other-ratings of sociability ($\beta = .16, p = .49$), self-ratings of dominance ($\beta = .25, p = .39$) and other-ratings of

dominance ($\beta = .21, p = .36$) did not predict participants' scores on how much being treated badly by a friend negatively affected their self-image.

In sum, perceptions of self and other were less strongly related to appraisals and feelings in response to negative treatment in the context of friendships when compared to a romantic relationship context. Other-ratings of dominance and self-ratings of sociability emerged as the only significant predictors for only two of the five emotion measures: appraisal of relationship partner's power and appraisal of lack of personal power.

Discussion

Emotional Tones in Content Analysis

Forty-one participants provided narratives in response to our prompt. Four narratives were excluded from content analysis, as participants did not report a situation in which they ended a close relationship due to poor treatment by their former close relationship partner. Of the remaining 37 narratives, 33 contained emotional tones of emotional abuse while 23 contained tones of emotional distance and neglect (some narratives contained both themes). Two major themes that appeared in narratives of the dissolution of close relationships were emotional abuse by a significant other (romantic or platonic) that caused the participant to end the relationship or a negative change in a former close relationship partner that caused emotional distance. Emotional abuse was a more common tone in both types of narratives, suggesting that emotional abuse may be a stronger or more frequent form of poor treatment by a close relationship partner than emotional distance. Emotional abuse and emotional distance were represented equally between romantic relationship narratives and friendship narratives, suggesting that these scenarios may be equally present and important in both types of close relationships.

Emotional Abuse

Emotions are complex and high cognitive processes used to negotiate relationships with others. Often the root of manipulation involves the emotions that one evokes in others to accommodate one's social motives. In this sense, emotions are essential tools to maintain social relationships (Keltner & Haidt, 1999). Emotional

manipulation may be tied to poor treatment in close, interpersonal relationships, as well as the subsequent feelings of humiliation following the dissolution of the relationship. Betrayal, distrust, jealousy, and dishonesty were themes that appeared in eleven narratives. These narratives described moral transgressions by an ex such as cheating on participants and leaving participants for another person. In nine narratives, participants described being put down, insulted, bullied, yelled at, made to feel like nothing, and objectified by their former close other. Manipulation and controlling behavior were described in eight narratives. For example, participants felt trapped in their romantic relationship, were made to feel guilty by their significant other, or felt that their significant other intruded on their personal space. Five participants described cases of outright passive aggression, unjustified anger, mean actions, physical violence, poor treatment, and hurtful words committed by their former close relationship partners in their narratives. Participants described accounts where an ex blatantly manipulated them, and they struggled to end a tumultuous push- and pull- relationship where their ex refused to let them go. In these scenarios, former close relationship partners employed tactics to make participants jealous, said cruel things, or even became physically violent. These negative actions by former close relationship partners expressed patterns of emotional abuse (Strauchler et al., 2004).

Emotional Distance

In close interpersonal relationships, members of a dyad constantly engage in emotional discourse, expressing their emotions with one another. The utterances of a significant other that one cares for become the objects of one's emotions (Parkinson

et al., 2005). The behavior of a close other touches upon their concerns with the relationship; what people respond to emotionally is a reflection of their concerns, what they care about. Social functional applications of emotion in a dyad revolve around power and status. Emotions may be expressed through tone of voice, nonverbal expression, facial expression, body posture, and verbally engaging in “emotion talk” and using emotion words, all of which help one partner of a close relationship to know the other partner better (Hochschild, 2008). Emotions are the window into another’s personality, beliefs and values. Within a dyad, more emotional satisfaction occurs if one’s partner has a similar emotional expression style (Parkinson et al., 2005). Given the importance of emotional communication in close, interpersonal relationships, sudden emotional distance from a close relationship partner may contribute to the dissolution of the relationship.

Participants reported emotional neglect by their relationship partners in eight narratives. Five narratives described being ignored and a lack of attention by a former close relationship partner. Two narratives indicated that participants felt that they were being taken for granted or taken advantage of, while two other narratives suggested that participants felt that their ex did not make enough time for them. One narrative noted hot and cold, inconsistent behavior from a former close relationship partner. Another type of behavior described in the narratives involved a sudden change in a close relationship partner where (s)he became withdrawn and participants experienced emotional distance from their partner. Partners would become emotionally withdrawn, treat significant others like friends, or disregard significant others or friends completely, which compelled the participant to end the close

relationship. In most of these narratives, participants weren't actively emotionally abused by their significant others but were emotionally neglected, or taken for granted.

Lying and Deceptive Behavior

Both types of emotional tone narratives described lying and deceptive behavior in the characterization of poor treatment by a former close relationship partner. Instances of deceptive behavior by former close others in the form of emotional abuse were characterized by betrayal, distrust, jealousy, and dishonesty. The behaviors of ex-significant others in romantic relationship scenarios included cheating and leaving for another person. Distrust and weariness were present in narratives regarding a former partner's sudden contradictory behavior (e.g., pursuing a relationship very strongly but then returning back to a former relationship partner), or sudden emotional withdrawal (e.g., failing to return calls). Sudden emotional distance in a romantic partner or friend was also considered a form of deceptive behavior of a former close other. Individuals who suddenly reduce their interpersonal expression of emotions may cause mistrust, confusion, and hurt feelings in their close relationship partners. Emotions allow us to see the other person better, which nurtures trust and disclosure (Parkinson et al., 2005). Therefore, participants would perceive emotional distance in their partners as deceptive behavior, an instance of being treated badly, warranting the end of the close relationship.

Trends in Content Analysis Response Category Themes

Inability to Let Go and Lack of Communication in Romantic Relationships

Inability to let go of the relationship and *Lack of communication* higher order response category themes were more prevalent in narratives of romantic relationships than friendships. The lack of statements from friendship narratives in the response categories associated with *Inability to let go of the relationship* may suggest that when individuals decide to end friendships, they are less likely to go back and forth with their decision, and they find it less difficult to definitively end the friendship. Meanwhile, in the dissolution of romantic relationships, individuals may be more reluctant to end a romantic relationship that has perhaps more personal significance and therefore a more direct tie to their self-esteem. Furthermore, the predominantly romantic relationship-focused *Lack of communication* higher-order response category theme may reflect the greater importance placed on communication in romantic relationships compared to friendships. Lack of communication may be a deal breaker in romantic relationships, which functions as an antecedent to the dissolution of the romantic relationship. In a platonic close relationship context, lapses in communication may be more acceptable and less likely to be appraised as poor treatment by a friend.

Quantitative Analyses

Analysis of Variance

There were no major differences between emotional profiles of romantic relationships and friendships in analyses of variance. Appraisals of unfairness,

relationship partner's power, lack of power, and negative effects for self-image were reported at similar levels in both types of close relationships. This lack of variation suggests that feelings elicited by poor treatment are not exclusive to romantic relationships or friendships, but can happen in either case of close interpersonal relationships. Poor treatment also caused similar levels of feelings of humiliation and negative effects on self-image between participants who ended a romantic relationship and participants who ended a friendship. The lack of variance between emotional profiles suggests a potential commonality between the emotional phenomena associated with ending close relationships in general.

Perceived Power, Self-Image, and Humiliation in Romantic Relationships

We explored the association between three prominent factors that arose in our investigation of the dissolution close relationships: perceived power, poor treatment, and the emotional experience of humiliation. We measured feelings and appraisals of humiliation in the context of being treated badly in a close relationship. Perceived power in the relationship affected the intensity of feelings and appraisals of bad treatment. We asked participants to provide narratives on the behavior of mistreatment in a close relationship and measured appraisals and feelings of humiliation. We measured participants' perceived power of self and their relationship partners in order to assess how well these variables predicted an appraisal of humiliation when one is treated badly. Appraisals and feelings of humiliation occurred in a relationship context in which perceived power mattered. We also investigated other feelings involved in the appraisals that arose in the relationship context of being treated badly when participants perceived themselves as powerful.

Higher levels of perceived power made individuals more susceptible to experiencing humiliation upon poor treatment by a romantic partner. More perceived power before experiencing debasement (or any form of poor treatment) led to a greater loss of power (a more intense negative experience that could trigger humiliation). In other words, the more power one has, the more power one has to lose, and the more power one loses, the more humiliated one may feel. For example, a dominant partner rarely subjected to put-downs may be more likely to respond to poor treatment with stronger negative emotions like humiliation. Conversely, if someone perceives his/her partner as the dominant member of the relationship, when treated badly (s)he may not experience humiliation with the same intensity as a dominant partner. Less perceived power could circumvent typical antecedents of humiliation such as feeling lowered in the eyes of other, appraisals of unjust treatment, and a perceived loss of power (Elison & Harter, 2007).

Among participants who perceived themselves to be more influential and dominant, poor treatment by former close relationship partners was also associated with more intense negative effects on self-image. Self-evaluation factored into emotional responses to negative treatment by a former significant other. Aspects of poor treatment by a romantic partner such as emotional abuse and manipulation have also been previously shown to have negative impacts on self-esteem (Strauchler et al., 2004). Identification as a dominant romantic partner may imply more personal significance of power status in the self-concept of these individuals.

Our findings emphasized the complex nature of humiliation and how it varies across social contexts based on the nuanced results shown. The results from our study

illuminate the other means by which humiliation can manifest through relationship power dynamics. By focusing on the susceptibility of more powerful individuals to the experience of humiliation following poor treatment (rather than those in positions of less power), we essentially examined the other side of the power-humiliation relational scenario that previous studies have focused on.

Perceived Sociability and Humiliation in Romantic Relationships

Another relationship that arose among participants that ended romantic relationships was between perceived sociability and the intensity of humiliation and negative feelings about the self in response to poor treatment by a former significant other. If participants perceived themselves as sociable, then they found that poor treatment by their ex was not nice and “hurt more”, and subsequently experienced humiliation. Sociable individuals may be more likely to appraise poor treatment by romantic partners as unfair because they perceive themselves as essentially good, friendly people. Among this participant group, poor treatment also led to more negative feelings about the self. Frequent and intense negative feelings about the self could lead to lowered self-esteem, consistent with the connections drawn between self-conscious emotions such as humiliation and self-esteem in previous literature (Tangney & Fischer, 1994). Perceived dominance appeared to be a determinant of appraisals of unfairness and a lack of personal power in response to poor treatment by a romantic partner. Appraisals of unfairness following poor treatment by a romantic partner increase the likelihood of subsequent humiliation in sociable individuals.

Partner's Power and Sociability in Friendships

In friendships, other ratings of dominance and self-ratings of sociability predicted appraisals of relationship partner's power and appraisals of lack of personal power. Participants evaluated negative treatment by a former friend as a reflection of their friend's power and dominance in the relationship. The more dominant a friend was to a participant, the less they felt that poor treatment was indicative of a lack of personal power. However, self-ratings of dominance had no effect on humiliated feelings and negative effects on self-image in the context of friendships. These findings may indicate less importance placed on perceiving oneself as the dominant partner in a friendship compared to romantic relationships. The dissolution of friendships may be a less intense experience compared to romantic relationships. Friendships may be tied less to the participant's self-image, so that humiliation and negative effects on self-image are not elicited as intensely when friendships end.

Limitations and Future Directions

Replicating Findings in a Larger and More Evenly Distributed Sample

Due to the time constraints of the study and the limited availability of the participant pool, we did not have enough participants to make definitive conclusions about statistical correlations based on our acquired p-values. At the expense of a larger participant pool, however, we were able to collect rich narratives on a phenomenon that is difficult to study – the dissolution of close relationships – which is arguably more important for a pioneering study of this nature.

Given the stronger associations between perceived dominance, humiliated feelings, and negative effects on self-esteem in the dissolution of romantic relationships over friendships, in replicating our findings in a larger sample size we would focus exclusively on romantic relationships. The dissolution of romantic relationships may be a more intense emotional experience, as this type of close relationship appeared to elicit stronger feelings of humiliation and negative feelings about the self upon ending.

In this study, we did not collect narratives from individuals who were broken up with by a close relationship partner or relationships that ended mutually. We chose to exclude these participants due to potential confounding factors of the complex emotional experience of romantic rejection from a former significant other (or abandonment by a close friend). Replicating the study and including participants who recently broke up with a romantic partner, were broken up with by a romantic partner, or had a romantic relationship end mutually, may further illuminate the inner workings of the dissolution of relationships from both perspectives, the partner who has a say in ending a relationship and the partner who does not. Presumably, narratives of participants who were recently broken up with in a romantic relationship context would characterize the strong negative feelings and threats to self-esteem associated with romantic rebuke by a close and valued former romantic partner. Another avenue that would minimize variation between subjects would be collecting narratives from participants about a time that they ended a romantic relationship as well as a time that a romantic relationship was ended by their significant other (i.e., within-subjects design). Differences between findings would be indicative of the

differences in the emotional experience of breaking up with someone versus being broken up with, rather than indicative of the types of partners that break up versus are broken up with.

Disclosure of Personal Information in Close Relationships

We postulated that the threat of the disclosure of personal information by a significant other or friend could be a potential antecedent for the dissolution of a close relationship. Reported threat of humiliation by a former close romantic partner may reflect the influence of fear of humiliation on avoidant behavior (i.e. ending the relationship).² There were six coded statements in the content analysis where participants disclosed personal information to their former friend or significant other that aligned with our postulation. In addition to these statements, nine additional coded statements indicated that a participant's ex disclosed personal information to them.³ The disclosure of personal information appears to be an integral aspect of close relationships. Therefore, the threat of a significant other's disclosure of participants' personal information could be a valid reason for ending a close relationship. Due to the limited number of participants who provided data on the disclosure or threat of disclosure of personal information by a former close relationship partner, we were unable to draw any definitive conclusions regarding its role in the dissolution of close relationships.

² We collected participant narratives on disclosure or threat of disclosure of personal information by their close relationship partners that were not reported due to the low frequency of provided narratives.

³ We did not include this response category in the final content analysis due to small response category frequencies.

Threat to Social Image in the Dissolution of Friendships

Threat to social image arose as a reason for ending a relationship in one narrative regarding the dissolution of a friendship. Coded statements in content analysis included: “I consistently felt like other people would judge me for being friends with this person”, “I was uncomfortable with these thoughts that other people would judge me”, “I became uncomfortable about how other people may have viewed me as a result of having this friendship”.⁴ A narrative alluded to a former friendship as a threat to the participant’s social image. This desire to end the relationship in order to preserve social image could be related to an effort to avoid a perceived threat of humiliation, by having social image lowered due to a close relationship. As these statements were not explicitly related to poor treatment at the dissolution of a close relationship, we did not include them in our final content analysis in our study. Future studies could further elucidate the role that perceived threats to social image might play in ending a close relationship in order to avoid humiliation.

Inter-Gender Perceived Power and Humiliation in Romantic Relationships

Future studies could replicate our procedure with more participants, namely, more male participants, and furthermore, more LGBTQ participants, so that there would be an equal representation of genders and sexual orientations, as well as same-gender and opposite-gender power dynamics. Due to the largely female and heterosexual participant pool in our study, we were unable to closely examine gender and sexual orientation differences in power dynamics surrounding the dissolution of

⁴ The narrative containing these statements was excluded from the final content analysis as the participant failed to recount an instance of poor treatment in the friendship that led to the dissolution of the relationship.

close relationships. Inter-gender power discrepancies have been examined as a source of humiliation (Swift, 1991) and may be a potential factor in the dissolution of heterosexual romantic relationships. On the CHS, mean scores of female responders were significantly higher than the mean scores of males on all scales of humiliation (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). This reflected a higher vulnerability of women toward humiliating experiences in this study. In slight opposition with previous literature, the larger number of female respondents received in this study may indicate that in the context of this study, women felt empowered to end close relationships and typical gender power dynamics may not apply to these scenarios.

Attachment Theory

Fraley and Shaver described the powerful role of attachment in close relationships, whether romantic or platonic, and its effect on emotional life within the framework of their attachment theory. Attachment theory contextualizes the role of personality in the interactions between members of a dyad in the formation, as well as dissolution, of a close, interpersonal relationship (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Levels of attachment have been closely associated to power dynamics in romantic relationships. How much one “puts into a relationship” is a strong indicator of that relationship’s significance in one’s life (Keltner & Haidt, 1999). Attachment theory plays a significant role in the power dynamics of a relationship where one partner is more attached. This power discrepancy could contribute to the partner with lower attachment exerting power over their submissive partner and, as the dominant partner, potentially humiliating them in the process. The more attached a partner feels toward his/her significant other, the less power (s)he can exert over that person. Therefore,

the member of the dyad who cares less in a relationship can hold the position of power. Future studies could include the analysis of attachment scale measures to assess participants' attachment styles in close relationships, in addition to personality measures of power.

Follow-up Dyad Study

By conducting a narrative study on humiliation in individuals who have recently experienced a romantic breakup or friendship estrangement, we have collected ecologically valid data to conduct a follow-up dyad study. A future dyad study could incorporate narratives similar to those collected in this study and present them as vignettes to both members of a romantic relationship. Both parties of the romantic relationship would be asked to respond to the vignette as if the experience happened to them in their relationship. This type of dyad study would be another means of elucidating how power differentials in romantic relationships affect humiliation.

This study would be able to delve deeper into the specific power dynamics that occur in romantic relationships and identify correlations or discrepancies between responses in the dyad itself. A dyad study that presented two people in a romantic relationship with the same scenario to examine how their responses relate or differ would be a completely novel and incredibly detailed approach to studying interpersonal dynamics of power and humiliation in close relationships. In this study, we would explore whether discrepancies in power dynamics in a functioning (as in existing) relationship elicit humiliation. By collecting data on perceived power characteristics and attachment style of self and partner from both members of the

dyad, we could also identify the discrepancy between self-perceived and partner-perceived power in relationships. Greater disparities in perception of power may also strain relationships and be an elicitor of humiliation.

Conclusion

Though humiliation may not be used frequently as a colloquial label for a current feeling state as compared to guilt or embarrassment, the desire to avoid humiliation greatly impacts our social behavior. Our efforts to avoid humiliation significantly regulate and suppress socially unacceptable behaviors; therefore, humiliation can be classified as a hypercognized emotion (Levy, 1984). In other words, our adherence to social norms and need to belong enforce the strong desire to avoid humiliating experiences (Miller, 2004). The impact of the experience of humiliation in our collective consciousness and the pervasiveness of its effects on social behavior emphasize the importance of continued humiliation research. The present study's novel examination of humiliation in the dissolution of close relationships is a new social context of humiliation research that can be elucidated further in future studies. The wide variety of social contexts in which humiliation may arise also has implications for expanding the scope of humiliation research among different types of relationships, cultures, and other social contexts. The correlation between perceived power and susceptibility to experienced humiliation and negative effects on self-esteem emerged in the context of romantic relationships. Untangling and illuminating the nature of the relationship between these three constructs is another potential avenue for future humiliation research.

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