

When shame, self-criticism and self-disgust contribute to the impact of humiliation on depressive symptoms

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Introduction

Humiliation is considered an important risk factor for depression (e.g., Kendler et al., 2003). It refers to an intense emotion related with the experience of being or perceiving oneself as being debased, scorned or ridicule. The experience of humiliation is felt as unfair and as an external attack to one's self (e.g., Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). Often, people feel powerless and inferior and start to believe that the others are looking down to the self. These self-evaluations may lead people to develop an internal relationship characterized by harsh criticism, hatred and disgust (Gilbert, 2015). It is also known that shame, self-disgust and self-criticism can predict depressive symptoms (see Kim, Thibodeau, & Jorgensen, 2011 for a review).

Aim

This study aims to explore the mediator effect of shame, self-disgust and hated self (self-criticism) in the relationship between humiliation and depressive symptoms.

Methods

Participants

- 423 adults from both genders, 289 females (68.3%) and 134 males (31.7%).
- Mean age of 32.17 (SD = 11.33)
- Mean of 13.93 years of education (SD = 3.07)

Measures

- Experiences of Humiliation Scale (EHS; Goss & Allan, 2010)
- Other as Shamer Scale (OAS; Goss, Gilbert & Allan, 1994)
- Self-Disgust Scale (MSDS; Castilho, Pinto-Gouveia, Pinto, & Carreiras, 2014)
- Forms of Self-Criticizing and Reassuring Scale (FSCRS; Gilbert, Clarke, Hempel, Miles, & Irons, 2004)
- Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)

Results

Table 1

Pearson's Product-moment coefficients between all the variables in study.

	Humiliation	OAS	Self-disgust	Depressive symptoms
Humiliation	-			
OAS	.58**	-		
Self-disgust	.48**	.57**	-	
Depressive symptoms	.43**	.58**	.60**	-
Hated Self	.28**	.39**	.55**	.57**

Note. **p < .01

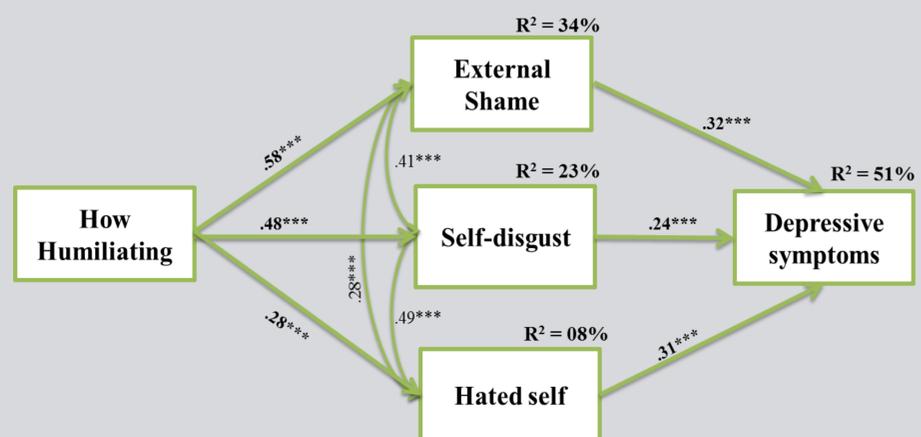


Figure 1. Final Path Model. Standardized path coefficients among variables are presented. All path coefficients are significant $p < .001$.

Discussion

Results suggest that shame, self-disgust and self-criticism play an important mediator role on the relationship between experiences of humiliation and depressive symptoms. Overall, the mediation model accounted for 51% of depressive symptoms. In our model the experiences of being humiliated were not directly associated with depressive symptoms. This association occurred through the effect of experiences of humiliation on the self-to-self relating. Our findings point out that humiliation may lead people to believe that others look down to the self and, therefore, to develop a harsh and self-attacking internal relationship, where some characteristics are perceived as disgusting. In turn, this negative, critical and severe view of the self may lead to depressive symptoms. Thus, interventions with people that suffered humiliating experiences should focus on developing emotional regulation strategies (such as acceptance and self-compassion) to deal not only with depressive symptoms but also with feelings of shame, self-disgust and self-criticism.

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