

The double insult: Explaining gender differences in the psychological consequences of war

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Abstract

Although women have been shown to be at higher mental health risk following the experience of extreme events in war, this phenomenon is not fully understood. In the present study, we investigate the role of gender norms in determining the interpretation of events and the degree of social support given to victims. Thirty-eight survivors from the Kosovo conflict in 1999 were interviewed and data was analyzed using thematic and content analysis. The findings suggest that events which are seen as affirming gender norms (such as men who were injured in fighting the enemy) evoke pride in the victim and support from the community whereas events that are seen as undermining gender norms (such as women who are sexually assaulted) evoke shame in the victim and rejection by the community. Women, we suggest, are psychologically vulnerable both because they are more likely than men to experience identity undermining events and also because the consequences of such events are more severe for women than men.

Extreme events, such as wars, conflicts and disasters can have a devastating effect on the health and well-being of those who experience them. Moreover, the consequences are not limited to individual distress, but can undermine economic, security and political structures and thereby destroy whole nations (Sideris, 2003; Summerfield, 1999). Yet the burden does not fall equally upon everybody. Overall, women suffer far more than men (Andrews, Brewin, & Rose, 2003; Brewin, Andrews, & Valentine, 2000; Gavranidou & Rosner, 2003; Johnson & Thompson, 2008; Tolin & Foa, 2006).

This paper addresses this gender difference. For, while it is easy to observe, it is far more difficult to account for. The simplest explanation is that women experience different (and more psychologically distressing) types of event than men. This is undoubtedly true, and indeed it will form an important plank in our own approach, detailed below. Research shows that men suffer more direct physical assaults than women. They are more likely to be shot and stabbed, and die in conflicts. Women, however, are more likely to suffer from violations, such as rape and sexual abuse, which are associated with higher levels of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Breslau, Chilcoat, Kessler, Peterson, & Lucia, 1999; Brewin et al., 2000; Gavranidou & Rosner, 2003; Norris, Perilla, Ibanez, & Murphy, 2001; Ormhaug, Meier, & Hernes, 2009; Tolin & Foa, 2006).

However, this cannot be the entire explanation, for there is evidence that women are more vulnerable than men even when both experience the same events. One might be tempted to respond that women are generically more vulnerable than men, but this too cannot be an adequate explanation since it is only for some types of event that women are more likely to suffer (e.g. accidents, physical assault, and injuries due to war or terrorism). For others (e.g. sexual abuse as a child or adult, non-sexual abuse or neglect as a child) there are no gender differences (Brewin et al., 2000; Tolin & Foa, 2006).

More broadly, attempts to make claims about the generic impact of different types or event, or about generic gender differences, can be criticised as being based predominantly on western research, of ignoring the socio-cultural context where events take place (which, in the case of wars, conflicts and disasters is predominantly outside the western world) and, specifically, of treating survivors as passive victims of extreme events (Muldoon & Lowe, 2012; Thakker, Ward, & Strongman, 1999; Watters & Ingleby, 2004).

An alternative approach, then, is to examine the specific ways in which people make sense of extreme events and the active ways in which they seek to deal with them. Such a stress on sense making and coping lies at the heart of appraisal approaches of stress and coping, and, in particular the model of Lazarus and Folkman (1984). They argue that the psychological impact of an extreme event depends, first, on how serious it is seen to be for the actor (primary appraisal) and secondly what resources the actor sees as being available in order to deal with the event (secondary appraisal).

There is ample evidence that men and women differ in terms of both primary and secondary appraisal of extreme events. Starting with the former, women perceive violent assaults as more distressing than men (Olf, Langeland, Draijer, & Gersons, 2007). They also see assaults as more personally threatening since they feel more physically vulnerable than men (Breslau et al., 1999). In the aftermath of events, women, as opposed to men, feel more damaged (Tolin & Foa, 2006), they report a greater sense of loss, lack of control (Olf et al., 2007) and fear (Simmons & Granvold, 2005), and they come to see the world as more dangerous (Tolin & Foa, 2002).

Turning now to secondary appraisals, women and men differ broadly in the type of coping strategies they use. While women are more likely to use emotion and avoidance coping strategies (positively associated to distress), men are more likely to use active coping

strategies (negatively related to distress) (Al-Krenawi, Slonim-Nevo, Maymon, & Al-Krenawi, 2001; Ben-Zur, 2005; Gavranidou & Rosner, 2003). Equally, women are more likely to seek out social support after an event than men, and they are more dependent on others for support. But at the same time they are more likely to receive negative responses from family and friends when dealing with extreme events, (Al-Krenawi et al., 2001; Andrews et al., 2003). But (as we have seen with gender differences in the impact of events) this in part depends upon the nature of the event. Receiving support obviously depends (at least in part) upon ones willingness to acknowledge that one has a problem, and men over-report such things as physical assault while under-reporting the psychological impact of such assaults for fear of seeming weak. Women, by contrast, under-report incidents of sexual abuse (Gavranidou & Rosner, 2003; Norris et al., 2001).

In general terms, then, Lazarus and Folkman's approach seems well suited to addressing the issue of gender differences in the impact of extreme events. However, they have been criticised for taking an overly individualistic approach to the appraisal process. This takes a number of forms. First, the way in which people make sense of events is treated as something idiosyncratic, a reflection of personal predilections. Second, it is assumed that people are concerned purely with the impact of events upon them personally. Third, the role of social support is conceptualised in terms of the nature of personal bonds with other individuals. At no point is the influence of social groups, and of the cultural understandings/practices associated with these groups taken into account (Slavin, Rainer, McCreary & Gowda, 1991).

This becomes especially problematic in regard to extreme events experienced in war or conflicts, where people are targeted largely due to the groups they belong to, notably their gender, rather than anything they may have done as individuals (Baker & Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1999; Sideris, 2003). Equally, the meanings of experience are embedded in group

based ideologies. For instance the significance of rape as embedded in traditional societies is bound up with a definition of womanhood centred on motherhood and sexual purity (Sideris, 2003; UNFPA, 2005). Or again, the significance of economic and geographical displacement to women in war derives from their position as caregivers (Punamäki, Komproe, Qouta, Elmasri, & de Jong, 2005; Sideris, 2003).

Similar points can be made about the group basis of secondary appraisal processes. Whether one receives support from others or not is often rooted in one's group membership, notably gender (Levine & Crowther, 2008; Levine & Thompson, 2004). Equally, the types of coping strategies women and men use are bound up with gendered norms and expectations: men displaying strength by not displaying distress; women displaying strong and even uncontrolled emotions (Al-Krenawi et al., 2001; Baker & Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1999; Gavranidou & Rosner, 2003; Tolin & Foa, 2006; Punamäki et al., 2005).

In response to these, and to similar concerns in other domains, a body of work has developed in recent years that seeks to integrate the Lazarus and Folkman approach with research on group processes - and more particularly, research in the social identity tradition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1985). To date, this work has focussed mainly on processes of secondary appraisal. The key argument is that, when people identify with a social group, they will expect support from this social group and this will allow them to deal better with stressful circumstances (Haslam, O'Brien, Jetten, Vormedal, & Penna, 2005; Haslam & Reicher, 2006). Indeed, the development of group identities as a basis for collective support has been shown to have a wide range of positive effects for health and well-being and also to constitute a prophylactic against the impact of a range of difficult life events - something that Jetten, Haslam and Haslam (2011) dub "the social cure".

However, the effects of social identity processes on the appraisal process apply as much to primary and to secondary appraisal, and they can produce effects that are detrimental as well as beneficial for well-being. Accordingly, Kellezi and colleagues (Kellezi & Reicher, 2011; Kellezi, Reicher & Cassidy, 2009; see also Haslam & Reicher, 2007) propose, first, that events which are seen to undermine a social identity are appraised as being more severe (Kellezi & Reicher, 2011; see also Levine, 1999; St Claire, Clift, & Dumbleton, 2008), while those affirming a salient identity as appraised as being less severe (Kellezi et al., 2009). Strong levels of social identification with a particular group can also influence level of support received in stressful situations (Haslam et al., 2005; Haslam & Reicher, 2006) and improve or reduce the ability to cope with stress (Haslam & Reicher, 2007; Kellezi & Reicher, 2011).

Second, the willingness of people to seek social support, and the willingness of others to give it, will likewise depend upon whether the original event was identity undermining or identity affirming (Kellezi & Reicher, 2011; Kellezi et al., 2009). Where an event is undermining, the target is generally unwilling to speak about it and others are unwilling to acknowledge or respond to it. Conversely, where an event is identity affirming, the targets speak about it while others acknowledge, respond to, and even celebrate the event and the target.

Kellezi illustrates these processes by reference to the Kosovo context of 1998-9 (Kellezi & Reicher, 2011). For instance she contrasts Kosovar men who were hurt or killed fighting the Serbians with those who were injured or killed in their homes. The former case affirms Kosovar masculine identity as a fighter for the nation, it provides a positive dimension to the experience which offsets physical trauma, and family (as well as the wider community) celebrate those involved, display their photos, and publicly commemorate those who died. The latter case undermines Kosovar masculine identity, suggesting that the victims

avoided their public duty by hiding in the domestic space. At best, victims cannot derive any pride and are unwilling to speak about their experiences. At worst, their families and the community ignore them and hide their photos. The aim of this paper is to explore whether such an analysis can be applied in order to explain gender differences in the experience of extreme events in war and conflict. Again, we use the Kosovar conflict as the setting, we explore the nature of gender identities in this context and how these impact both the experience of and the response to the extreme events that men and women were subjected to. Before we specify more closely our precise hypotheses, however, it is necessary to provide a little more detail about the conflict itself.

The Kosovar context and the present study

Kosovo is a small province in the Balkans situated between Serbia and Albania. At the time of the 1999 war, the population was some two million people, of whom roughly 90% were ethnic Albanians (Malcolm, 1998). It is a traditional society, the norms of which are inscribed in a code of customary law. This is the so-called "Kanuni of Leke Dukagjini". At the core of the code are patriarchal gender relations, as encapsulated by the following comment: "The Kanun requires that the bride's family put a bullet in her dowry - for her husband to kill her with should she be unfaithful" (Mangalakova, 2004, p. 6).

As state structures were weakened in the run-up to, and during, the war, traditional structures became more entrenched resulting in reduced education, reduced travel and work opportunities for girls, early age marriage, economic dependence, and exclusion from ownership (UNDP, 2004; UNFPA, 2005). Indeed, at the turn of the millennium Kosovo had one of the lowest gender-related Development Indexes (including the highest economic discrepancy between women and men) in South-East Europe (UNDP, 2004).

The conflict itself arose out of an independence movement which had been growing since the 1980's. Originally it took a constitutional form and in 1989 the Kosovo Albanian delegates to the Kosovo Assembly declared Kosovo a Republic. The Serbian dominated Yugoslav Government under Milosevic refused to accept this and responded with repression. During the 1990's a strategy of "passive resistance" to Serbia gradually gave way to active resistance as expressed in the formation and growing support for the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). It was in response to this active resistance by the KLA that the Yugoslav/Serbian Army intervened in Kosovo at the start of 1998.

Concerns about widespread attacks on the Kosovo Albanian civilian population led to a "humanitarian" intervention by NATO. From March 1999 aerial bombardments were conducted against the Yugoslav/Serbian forces and against targets in Serbia itself. The war ended in June 1999 when Milosevic agreed to withdraw his forces and these were replaced with the NATO led international Kosovo peacekeeping force (KFOR).

Exact statistics about losses in the war are hard to come by and are politically highly controversial. Nonetheless, it has been estimated that there were over 10,000 deaths on the Kosovar side, that some two thirds of the population were displaced either internally or externally, of whom the great majority (up to 88%) were women and children (Judah, 2000; O'Neill, 2002; UNFPA, 2005). More specifically, Human Rights Watch concluded that there was widespread rape and that this was not a matter of occasional incidents but rather sexual violence was used as an instrument of war (Human Rights Watch, 2000).

In this study, we are concerned with the war experiences of male and female Kosovo Albanians. For those who lived through the war and who suffered during it, what was the meaning of these events? What was the nature of their experience, how did they respond to it and how did others respond to it?

Insofar as we are concerned with the nature of lived experience and the fine texture of meanings, our study is small scale and intensive, based on interviews with a population who had either experienced or witnessed extreme acts during the war. Because we cannot presuppose the ways in which people understand events, we are not in a position to employ large-scale survey instruments with a priori response categories. Nor are we in a position to produce population figures concerning exactly what sorts of events people were subjected to and how this differs between men and women. Rather, we use the interview material both qualitatively and quantitatively to address three questions.

First, we examine gender roles and the general norms concerning the behaviour of men and women. Second, we look more closely at the extreme events that happened to people in the conflict and examine what sort of event were identity affirming or else identity undermining for men and women. Third, we examine the reaction of other community members to men and women who have been subjected to extreme events that are identity violating or those who violate social norms.

In general terms, we expect that the norms for behaviour, and hence the types of event that will be identity affirming/identity undermining, will be very different for men and women. We also expect that, for both genders, identity undermining events will be seen as more negative, shameful and hard to talk about than identity affirming events. Finally, we expect that those who experienced identity undermining events will be shunned and even excluded from the community and we examine whether the nature of the exclusion will be more severe for women than for men.

Method

Participants, interview schedule and procedure

Thirty eight interviews were conducted with Kosovo Albanians who had been in Kosovo during the war, who were still living in Kosovo at the time of the interviews (May 2003 to September 2004), and who, according to their own assessment, had witnessed and/or experienced extreme events during the war. Twenty two (58%) of the respondents were male and 16 (42%) were female. Ages ranged from 19 to 61 with a mean of 35 yrs.

Participants were recruited using a combination of contacts in Kosovo (largely members of NGOs working in the country), and then snowballing from the initial respondents. The use of a personal contact was very important in a context where feelings about the war remain highly polarised and where it is critical to gain trust before people will speak. The sensitivity of the issues also made it very important for the interviewer (the first author) to be adequately equipped to deal with any signs of distress. This was partly assured by previous psychotherapy training. Additional training was provided by a refugee centre in Rome (Italy) administered by an Italian NGO "Casa dei Diritti Sociali". Approval for the study was granted by the Ethics Committee at the University of St. Andrews.

The interviews were mostly conducted in the respondent's own home. Before the interviews began, respondents were told the topic of the research, they were assured of confidentiality and also informed of their right to withdraw at any time and their right to decline from answering any question (as a result, not all questions were asked of all participants and this is reflected in different participant numbers for different section of the analysis). Respondents were also asked to give their permission for audio-recording the interview.

The interviews themselves were semi-structured and organised around a timeline, which also allowed different conceptual topics to be introduced: i) life before the war (exploring norms and values in the context), ii) life during the war (exploring events experienced and primary appraisal), iii) life immediately after the war (exploring coping and social support), iv) and life in the present and thoughts about the future (exploring long term effects of war and the future). After the interviews, respondents were fully debriefed.

Analytic method

The length of interviews varied from 50 to 210 minutes with a mean of some 90 minutes. All interviews were fully transcribed and then translated by the first author. The transcription included the verbal content, indicators of mood such as laughter and tears, and events that interrupted the session such as family members bringing tea and coffee.

The analysis itself took place in two stages. The first was qualitative. It involved a procedure akin to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in which we employed an iterative process of initial coding, searching, reviewing and defining themes. This process was organised around our three core questions: what are the key norms for men and women; what sort of extreme events are experienced as identity affirming or as identity undermining by men and women; how do others respond to men and women who have experienced extreme events as a function of whether these are identity affirming or undermining .

For each question, we seek to enumerate broad categories. This then allows us, in a second quantitative stage of the analysis, to conduct content analysis (i.e. counting systematically frequency of “instances” occurred in the data) (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). On the basis of this content analysis we are then able to conduct statistical analyses looking for differences between men and women.

For both stages of the analysis reliability was assured through the use of two coders - the first and second authors. In all cases, the first author coded all the data. In the case of the thematic analysis, 11% of the data was read and coded by the second author and there was an iterative process of discussion until both authors reached a consensus around the core analytic categories. In the case of the content analysis, 5% of the data was coded by another researcher. Inter-rater reliability varied between 88% and 100% for the allocation of instances to different analytic categories. Considering the complex cultural background and the presence of latent meanings in the text, this is highly satisfactory (Neuendorf, 2002; Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

Results

The results of our analysis are divided into three sections corresponding to our three research questions. In each section we start by summarising the outcome of the qualitative analysis, using extracts from the interviews in order to illustrate the different analytic categories. Each extract is given a number followed by a code number for the respondent along with their gender and age (e.g. P25, M, 37 would indicate participant 25, a male aged 37 years). Next we provide summary statistical findings deriving from the content analysis.

Gender norms

Qualitative analysis: All participants, male and female, were asked to describe the characteristics of 'real Kosovar men and women'. The responses serve largely to confirm that the terms of the *Kanun*, especially those which relate to gender, serve as social norms which regulate the everyday lives of Kosovo Albanians. Whether they personally agreed or not (and many did) all of our participants agreed that the preservation of "moral values" (i.e. sexual abstinence outside of marriage) is the most crucial element for women in the eyes of family and community. To cite just one of them:

Extract 1: P12, F, 40: *If she [a Kosovo Albanian woman] does not respect others she has nothing. You should listen to those who are older than you. Always keep your head down. You don't have to show you are alive. You have to be submissive, always lower and lower than the others.*

The importance of women's sexual "morality" derives from the fact that any act of impropriety brings shame not only upon the woman herself but also upon her husband and family. He and they have failed both in instilling the appropriate values or else in protecting her from depredation.

Extract 2: P4, M, 19: *If a female is dishonoured then the family and the house are dishonoured.*

It follows from this that one of the principle norms for men is to "protect" the "honour" of his womenfolk. To cite P4 again:

Extract 3: P4, M, 19: *Men sacrifice for the family honour, to the point of dying for it.*

This also introduces wider themes: bravery, a sense of honour, a commitment to the collective cause and a spirit of self-sacrifice. One woman, for instance, described Kosovo Albanian men in the following terms:

Extract 4: P37, F, 39: *They are brave, strong as people... And they should be, and they are.*

Next, a man takes up the theme of collective commitment and self-sacrifice. Importantly, here it is the national family, the patriotic cause which takes precedence and for which men will give up their biological families:

Extract 5: P31, M, 22: *Patriotism... The latest example was when they went to the mountains for the national cause. They left the families, the children, in some cases they had no economic support for the family, but they left everything, and went to fight.*

Quantitative analysis: The characteristics which emerged from the qualitative enquiry were used as the basis for a systematic quantitative analysis. Each interview transcript was coded in order to identify which characteristics were associated with Kosovar men and which with Kosovar women. The results are shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Women, more than men, were expected to behave well (McNemar's χ^2 (N = 38) = 9.00, $p = .004$), to be morally virtuous (McNemar's χ^2 (N = 38) = 10.00, $p = .002$) and to be submissive (McNemar's χ^2 (N = 38) = 14.00, $p < .001$). Men, more than women, were expected to be faithful to the country (McNemar's χ^2 (N = 38) = 23.00, $p < .001$), to fight for family and country (McNemar's χ^2 (N = 38) = 13.00, $p < .001$), and to be strong (McNemar's χ^2 (N = 38) = 7.00, $p = .016$).

These results clearly support our expectation that norms for men and women will be different. Women are expected to be publicly virtuous and privately submissive. Men are expected to be public patriots and private patriarchs. In the next section, we examine whether and how these general norms frame the way in which they respond to extreme events which occurred during the Kosovo conflict.

Participant responses to extreme events

Qualitative analysis: In this section we turn from general expectations about how men and women should behave to the specific events that men and women experienced.

Participants were asked to report freely what happened to them during the war.

As illustrated by the next extract, female participants predominantly emphasised incidents in which they had suffered while protecting their family.

Extract 6: P23, F, 45: *I hid my son inside my breast, and I thought, let the bullets take me, only my son should survive.*

Male participants, by contrast, stressed mostly incidents where they had suffered in choosing to stay and fight the Serbian enemy:

Extract 7: P26, M, 45: *I could have done like the other doctors, but I stayed. The Kosovo Albanian army needed medical and moral support.*

What is noteworthy in these accounts is that, when people relate their own experiences, they focus on identity affirming events. That is, both women and men tell stories of such times when, in suffering, they conformed to gendered expectation of how they should behave - respectively protecting the family or else fighting for the nation. Despite extended efforts to establish trust, not a single participant disclosed an experience which violated such expectations.

It is possible that this simply reflects the fact that our respondents never experienced identity undermining events (that is, they suffered in ways that constituted a violation of gendered norms). However, more plausibly perhaps, it could be that respondents were simply unwilling to talk about such events. Indeed, precisely because such events are both physical and psychological violations, they become quite literally unspeakable. How, then, can we get at the unspeakable? Obviously not by asking people to relate their own experiences. But we can request that people tell us about the experiences of others and to indicate the things which people have experienced but are not willing to talk about.

While we asked our respondents to focus on specific events that they knew to have happened, they also generalised from these and spoke of general classes of event which would be unspeakable were they to have happened. In using such secondary accounts, then, we are not only drawing on direct knowledge of what happened in the war, but also (as in section 1 of the results) on cultural and group membership knowledge and we are examining what both women and men know about what is unspeakable for women and men respectively.

As can be seen, when asked about what is unspeakable, respondents focus on norm violations. This means, given the gendered nature of such norms, that they focus on somewhat different events for women and for men. When it came to women, the stress was overwhelmingly on rape and sexual violence - but less as an assault on the woman herself and more as an assault on the family:

Extract 8: P4, F, 19: *It's not important what the female is feeling inside. The most important thing is for the family honour not to be broken*

Indeed, such is the insult brought upon the family that some consider that it would be better for the family, and even for the victim, were she killed rather than raped or survive rape:

Extract 9: P16, F33: *The family would have preferred to have them killed than raped in front of them, which has happened in Kosovo. It would have been better if they were gone, because people are born once and die once. At least she and her family would not live with that feeling inside.*

But more than this, rape signifies a failure for the man as well as the woman since it signifies that he has failed in his responsibility to protect his family:

Extract 10: P6, M, 23: *Not protecting your family? It is a shame that is going to weigh on men. Because they are considered the strong ones. Men have the strength and the courage.*

This is one of several ways in which weakness and a failure to protect is considered unspeakable by men. It can be a failure to contain emotion. One participant mentioned the first time she saw her father crying and remarks "that killed him". Another explained:

Extract 11: P1, F, 19: *Males have to show they are strong, that is why they don't talk and they don't say what they have inside.*

But, most of all, the unspeakable was associated with a failure to protect the nation. One participant was asked about the implications of men leaving in the face of the Serb assault. He replied with incredulity:

Extract 12: P25, M, 28: *Leaving?! Of course he can't talk about it. He should have been in the mountains, where the place for men is.*

Quantitative analysis: This analysis is in two parts. First, we consider the types of event which men and women respectively report that they themselves experienced. From the qualitative material we identified three principal categories of event: (1) personal strength in the face of suffering; (2) suffering in the context of fighting for the nation; (3) suffering in protecting the vulnerable and weak. We then coded each transcript for the presence or absence of each category. The results are shown in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Men were more likely than women to report Category 1 events involving strength in the face of suffering ($\chi^2(1, N = 38) = 4.71, p = .030$). They were also more likely to report Category 2 events involving suffering when fighting for the nation ($\chi^2(1, N = 38) = 7.03, p$

= .008). Given the low numbers involved, gender differences in terms of Category 3 events involving protecting the weak were analysed using Fisher's Exact Test. The difference was non-significant ($p = .160$).

The second part of this analysis addresses the types of event which participants as a whole (women and men combined) considered unspeakable for men and women. The categories of event which emerged from the interviews were (1) failure to fight for the country; (2) failure to show strength; (3) failure to protect the weak; and (4) experiencing sexual assault. We then coded each transcript for whether each of these categories were considered unspeakable respectively for men and for women. The results are shown in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Each of categories (1), (2), and (3) were mentioned as unspeakable more often for men than for women (respectively, McNemar's χ^2 ($N = 36$) = 13.00, $p < .001$; McNemar's χ^2 ($N = 36$) = 10.00, $p = .002$; McNemar's χ^2 ($N = 36$) = 27.00, $p < .001$). However, sexual assault was identified as unspeakable for women far more often than for men (McNemar's χ^2 ($N = 36$) = 28.00, $p < .001$).

Overall, then, these findings indicate that people are willing and even proud to talk about extreme events that are consonant with group norms (identity affirming) but that events which are dissonant with group norms (identity undermining) are considered unspeakable.

Others responses to extreme events

Qualitative analysis: In this third and final section of the analysis, we turn from how participants respond to extreme events to how others in the community respond to those who

have experienced extreme events and, more specifically, identity undermining events. Given the difficulties of getting people to talk about identity undermining events that have happened to them personally, we again rely on secondary data - that is, what do our participants of either gender report on the way that others respond to men and to women whose experiences involve a violation of their respective gender norms.

Participants report in general terms about the consequences of acting in ways that violate social norms. Sometimes, as in the following extract which refers to norm violations by men, the “offender” meets with ostracism in the community:

Extract 13: P18, M, 44: *Before the war, a man who broke the norms was ignored and detested by everyone. ... He would not be invited to weddings, joyful situations and no-one would go to visit him even if someone in his family died. He was immediately isolated. That was an imprisonment. From an economical point of view, if he had a shop, none would buy from him.*

At other times the “offender” meets not only with disapproval in the community but even with exclusion from the community. This, in this next extract which refers to norm violations by women, the phrase “in the streets somewhere” indicates being sent from ones village to a town where prostitution is one of the few options that are available for survival:

Extract 14: P2, M, 32: *One can do many bad things if she is a bad person. Have bad relations with family, husband, very bad with the society. After this a catastrophe is expected, a very bad end for her. In the streets somewhere.*

Participants also report about the consequences of specific acts of norm violation, and a similarly gendered pattern emerges. Thus, for men who suffer while failing to fight, the

response is largely in terms of negative consequences – shame and ridicule within the community:

Extract 15: P24, M, 41: *Running away from the Serbs and abandoning the family, the house. ...It is more rational to fight than do nothing and be killed. It would be a shame for men to stay there [not fight]. Or moments when men went to war, and abandoned the arms because the Serbs were attacking. That would be a failure. People would make fun of him.*

But, far more frequently our participants responded to questions about community responses to norm violating events by talking about rape. In such cases the victim would not merely be ridiculed in public. She might be blamed for what happened ("the family and husband would think she agreed, she wanted it to happen" said one participant). She might be excluded not only by the community in public but by the family in private:

Extract 16: P29, F, 40: *There were women who were divorced by the husbands. The husband left her. I know of a case... he asked her to go away from his house. He told her "you can't be here anymore. I can't be with you".*

What is more, the exclusion could extend from the woman victim to the family as a whole:

Extract 17: P29, M, 20: *The others maybe would not think something bad for the family, but no-one would try to get close to that family. The girl would be deprived from the right of being loved or married. ... They try to hide it [the rape] because people would not understand what happened to her and they will identify the whole family with this problem.*

Quantitative analysis: Two types of analysis were undertaken. First, we looked at the consequences of norm violation in general terms (that is, when there is mention of some

violation without specifying any particular event). Two types of response were identified: (1) minor, involving consequences within the community such as ostracism, and (2) major, involving exclusion from the community. We then coded all transcripts, looking at how these different responses were applied to norm violations by men and by women. The results are shown in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

Men who violate norms are more likely than women to face the milder sanctions such as ostracism (McNemar's χ^2 ($N = 30$) = 14.00, $p < .001$). By contrast, women who violate norms are more likely to face harsher sanctions involving exclusion (McNemar's χ^2 ($N = 30$) = 13.00, $p < .001$).

Second, we looked at the consequences of specific acts of norm violation that happened during the war. This time we identified three types of response: (1) minor, involving denigration in the group (including ostracism, ridicule, and derision), (2) major, involving rejection by the group (including divorce, exclusion from the family home, and exclusion from the community), (3) negative consequences for the wider family. We then coded all transcripts to look at how these different responses were applied in the case of specific violations by women (predominantly rape) and specific violations by men (predominantly suffering in the context of a failure to fight). The results are shown in Table 5

Insert Table 5 about here

There were no significant differences between men and women on likelihood to experience mild consequences to individual (derision and ostracism in the community) following specific acts of norm violation during the war (McNemar's χ^2 ($N = 22$) = 3.00, $p = .250$). By contrast, women were more likely than men to face extreme consequences to the

individual like exclusion from family, divorce/broken relationship, and exclusion from community (McNemar's χ^2 ($N = 22$) = 10.00, $p = .001$). There were also more likely to be negative consequences for the wider family in the case of violations by women as opposed to men (McNemar's χ^2 ($N = 22$) = 6.00, $p = .008$).

Discussion

We set out to analyse three questions through our analysis: what are the gender norms for men and women in Kosovo; what sort of extreme events during the Kosovo war were identity affirming or else identity undermining for men and women; what was the reaction of other community members to identity undermining events. Our broader aim is to help understand the fact that psychological effects of war are generally more devastating for women than for men. We shall first review what we have found with regard to the specific questions before turning to how they shed light on the broader issue.

First, then, our respondents describe a highly traditional set of gender norms. Men are expected to go out in public, to fight for their country and to act as protectors to their community and family. Women's domain is the family. In that domain they must obey their husbands, protect their children and preserve the family honour (which above all means unimpeachable sexual modesty in public).

Second, the link between these general norms and the meaning of extreme events during the war was quite clear. Those who suffered at the hands of the enemy while observing these norms - being hurt while fighting for men, being hurt while shielding their children for women - were able and indeed willing to talk about these experiences. It can be seen from the interviews that people are proud of what they did and that, at least to some

degree, this mitigates the negativity of what they experienced. By contrast, those who suffered while violating gender norms found the experience, literally, unspeakable. This suggests that, far from being proud, there is a sense of shame. There is certainly nothing to mitigate the direct experience of suffering in the event.

In order to explore the unspeakable, then, we have to turn from primary accounts to secondary accounts - that is what our respondents say about what others will not speak about. For men, it is primarily a failure to fight for their country; it is being hurt while hiding in the family or else fleeing from the enemy. For women, one thing about all stands out. The unspeakable is associated with rape. Irrespective of the fact that victims had no choice in the matter, they are seen to have lost their virtue, to have sullied the family honour and to have dishonoured their families as well as themselves. It is this, of course, which makes rape such an effective tool of psychological warfare and explains why, according to much literature, rape is often a deliberate strategy in Kosovo and in other wars (Kivlahan & Ewigman 2010; Skjelsbaek, 2001; UNFPA, 2005).

Third, in cases where suffering is associated with counter-normative acts, there is no support from others in the community. To the contrary, victims suffer further at the hands of the community irrespective of whether they had any choice over what happened to them. Indeed women, who arguably had less choice than men (men, at least might choose to fight or flee, women could do nothing about rape) suffer more extreme consequences. They are liable to be targeted in the privacy of the family as well as in public. They are liable to be excluded and not simply shunned.

The true horror of rape lies precisely in the fact that it constitutes a double insult. First one is violated by the enemy. Then, far from being consoled, one is rejected by ones family and community. Such social exclusion has been compared to physical pain and is related to

anxiety and depression (MacDonald & Leary, 2005), and alienation and suicide (Williams, Forgas, von Hippel, & Zadro, 2005). What is more, being sent away from the family home puts women in a highly vulnerable financial position, and leads them into circumstances (like prostitution, as we have seen) which damages them still further.

This analysis points clearly to limits in the social support that derives from group membership. It confirms earlier work (e.g. Haslam, Reicher & Levine, 2011; Kellezi & Reicher, 2011; Kellezi et al., 2009) which suggests that this relationship is moderated by group norms and, more precisely, by whether the acts which create the need for support were normative or counter-normative (identity affirming or identity undermining). In this study, however, we go further by exploring how identity undermining events don't simply lead to lack of positive support but also to negative sanctions by the ingroup.

The analysis also provides a basis for understanding the gendered psychological impact of war. To start with, we need to look at the choices and opportunities available to men and women, and hence the types of events they endure. Thus, men have more choice to act in normative ways (notably, to fight), and hence, whatever they suffer, to do so in normative ways. Women have little choice about staying in the home and hence, while they may suffer in ways that affirm their gender identity (defending the home), they are more vulnerable to, and have no control over suffering that undermines gender identity (rape). The key point here is that what counts - and what differs between men and women - is the social significance of events rather than anything inherent to the event itself.

Next, we need to look at the social consequences of enduring identity-undermining events. On the one hand, the experience becomes unspeakable. Given the reactions of others to such events, this is understandable and may even be advisable at the individual level (Summerfield, 1999). However it stops people from expressing and confronting what has

happened to them and rules out positive coping strategies which depend upon disclosure or communication (Gorst-Unsworth, & Goldenberg, 1998; Janoff-Bulman, 2006; Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006). Our evidence suggests that the unspeakability of identity-undermining events, and hence the attendant consequences, apply equally to both genders. However, of course, if women experience more identity-undermining events, it means that they are more likely to be compromised in their coping.

On the other hand, as we have examined at some length, the reactions of others to identity-undermining events serves to exacerbate rather than mitigate negative effects. In this regard, we find that the reactions are more negative for women than for men. It is hard to disentangle whether this is due to the fact that women suffer from different kinds of identity-undermining event to men (that is, rape could be considered a more severe norm violation than failing to fight) or whether women would be treated more harshly even if the event (and its relation to gender norms) were the same. What is more, to the extent that gender norms are highly differentiated, it is hard to see how these could be disentangled. But, empirically at least, the outcome is that women suffer from the ingroup as well as the outgroup.

In sum, we suggest that the negative psychological effects of war upon women stem from the fact that women are more likely than men to experience events that are seen as violating gender norms and lead to negative social consequences, combined with the fact that the consequences of norm violation are more severe for women than for men.

This has important implications for how we think about and how we respond to women's vulnerability. This does not derive from some inherent vulnerability of the female psyche, nor does it derive entirely from something inherent in the events that women experience. In part at least, it is tied to gender norms, to the ways in which these govern the interpretation of events in war and the response to them. It follows that any strategy to deal

the psychological consequences of war must involve the entire community and for which the whole community must take responsibility. It must involve a questioning of shared norms and it must ensure that the response to victims of abuse is not in itself abusive.

Women are themselves already raising such questions. Far from being fragile or passive victims of abuse, women's organisations in Kosovo are campaigning for open acknowledgement of the sexual violence perpetrated during the war and for the need for recognition, redress and rehabilitation in order to support those who have suffered (Ekerstendt, 2014). Such initiatives have both symbolic significance (challenging the silences) and the power to influence policy. In order to be fully successful, however, it is critical that they gain broader support. Rape is an awful enough insult in itself. It is incumbent on the whole community to ensure that it does not become a double insult.

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Table 1:

Characteristics which participants (men and women) associate with male and female gender norms.

Characteristics	Associated with		Difference in association of characteristics with female and male norms (MT)
	Female norm	Male norm	
Well behaved	29 (76%)	20 (53%)	p=.004
Morally virtuous	20 (53%)	10 (26%)	p=.002
Submissive	14 (37%)	0	p<.001
Strong	4 (11%)	11 (29%)	p=.016
Faithful to country	0	23 (60%)	p<.001
Fight for family and country	1 (3%)	14 (37%)	p<.001

Note. n=38; MT = Results of McNemar's test for related samples

Table 2.

Types of event which men and women speak about in personal narratives of the war

Used in accounts of			
Type of event	Women^a	Men^b	Differences in mention of events in women's and men's accounts (C&F)
1. Strong (I was strong /I was not scared / I did not give up)	6 (37%)	16 (72%)	p=.030
2. Nationalism (I wanted to fight /I worked for the country and freedom)	2 (13%)	12 (55%)	p=.008
3. Protect the weak (I defended my family)	2 (13%)	7 (32%)	p=.160

Note. ^a n= 16; ^b n=22; C&F = Results of Chi-Square test/Fisher's exact test for independent samples

Table 3.

Types of event which participants (men and women) identify as unspeakable for men and women

Unspeakable for			
Type of event	Women	Men	Differences in mentions of the inability of men and women to speak about the event (MT)
Failure to contribute to the country	0	13 (36%)	p<.001
Failure to show strength	0	10 (28%)	p=.002
Failure to protect the weak	3 (8.3%)	30 (83%)	p<.001
Experiencing Sexual assault	30 (83%)	2 (5.6%)	p<.001

Note. n=36; MT = Results of McNemar's test for related samples

Table 4.

Consequences which participants (men and women) identify as applying to men and women when breaking gender norms (general)

Type of consequence	Applied to		Differences in the application of consequence to men and women (MT)
	Women^a	Men^b	
Minor (Ostracised/ignored//not respected)	8 (27%)	22 (71%)	p<.001
Major (Sent away/become destitute)	14 (47%)	1 (03%)	p<.001

Note. ^a n= 30; ^b n=31; MT = Results of McNemar test for related samples

Table 5:

Consequences which participants (men and women) identify as applying to men and women when violating gender norms (specific events)

Type of consequence	Applied to		Differences in the application of consequence to men and women (MT)
	Women	Men	
Minor (ostracised/ignored/not respected/shamed)	6(27.3%)	9(40.1%)	p=.250
Major (excluded from family, divorce/broken relationship, excluded from community)	10(45.5%)	0	p<.001
Consequences to the family	6(27.3%)	0	p=.008

Note. n=22; MT = Results of McNemar's test for related samples