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Retaliation In Interpersonal Relationships A Case Study: Analysis Of Men With Feminine Behavioral Expression

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Abstract

Background: Men with feminine behavioral expression may experience social pressure and discrimination in interpersonal relationships, potentially affecting their psychological responses. **Objective**: This study aimed to analyze the forms, triggers, impacts, and expectations associated with retaliation in the interpersonal relationships of men with feminine behavioral expression. **Method**: A qualitative case study approach was employed involving three male participants aged 19–21 who had experienced interpersonal conflict. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, then analyzed using thematic analysis. **Results**: Retaliation emerged as a response to perceived injustice and an attempt to preserve self-esteem. Its forms included passive, active non-destructive, and active destructive behaviors. Key triggers included emotional distress caused by bullying, peer pressure, discrimination, and social rejection. Although retaliation provided temporary relief, it also resulted in guilt, regret, restricted social relationships, and a risk of isolation. **Conclusion**: The findings highlight the need for psychological support that strengthens emotion regulation skills and promotes inclusive social environments to reduce conflict escalation and foster healthier interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: Retaliation, interpersonal relationships, men with feminine behavioral expression

Abstrak

Latar Belakang: Laki-laki dengan ekspresi perilaku feminin dapat menghadapi tekanan sosial dan diskriminasi dalam hubungan interpersonal yang memengaruhi respons psikologis mereka. **Tujuan**: Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bentuk, pemicu, dampak, dan harapan terkait retaliasi dalam hubungan interpersonal pada laki-laki dengan ekspresi perilaku feminin. **Metode**: Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif dengan tiga partisipan laki-laki berusia 19–21 tahun yang mengalami konflik interpersonal. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan observasi partisipan, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. **Hasil**: Retaliasi muncul sebagai respons terhadap ketidakadilan dan upaya mempertahankan harga diri. Bentuknya meliputi tindakan pasif, aktif non-destruktif, dan aktif destruktif. Pemicu utamanya mencakup luka emosional akibat perundungan, tekanan teman sebaya, diskriminasi, dan penolakan sosial. Retaliasi menimbulkan kelegaan sementara, tetapi juga memunculkan rasa bersalah, penyesalan, keterbatasan hubungan sosial, dan risiko isolasi. **Simpulan**: Temuan ini menunjukkan perlunya dukungan psikologis yang memperkuat regulasi emosi serta lingkungan sosial yang inklusif untuk mengurangi eskalasi konflik dan mendukung hubungan interpersonal yang lebih sehat.

Kata Kunci: Retaliasi, hubungan interpersonal, laki-laki dengan ekspresi perilaku feminin

Introduction

Gender constitutes an individual's identity, encompassing roles within their environment. The psychosocial concept indicates that masculinity is generally exhibited by men, while femininity is exhibited by women (Nevid & Chozim, 2021). This gender concept is determined based on societal stereotypes, each with its advantages and disadvantages. For instance, in men, the privilege of masculine stereotyping makes men appear stronger, possess leadership qualities, be more rational, and have dominance over women. However, adherence to traditional masculinity ideologies can become disadvantageous for men, as it imposes restrictions on emotional expression such as sadness, shame, and vulnerability which substantially compromises their psychological well-being (Levant et al., 2020; Seidler et al., 2019).

When men deviate from these hegemonic expectations by displaying vulnerability, they often face social penalties and are positioned within marginalized or subordinate masculine identities (Gough & Novikova, 2020; King et al., 2020. This masculinity is the opposite of hegemonic masculinity, which is labeled as the ideal standard for a man. In other words, subordinate masculinity will certainly be difficult to accept from traditional stereotypical perspectives. The subordinate masculinity referred to in this study is men with feminine behavioral expression. With feminine behavior identified in a man, it can be stated as something that deviates from the norms of hegemonic masculinity, especially from traditional stereotypical views. This deviation often results in significant social consequences for individuals who exhibit such behaviors. Research across 62 nations demonstrates that masculinity is viewed as a precarious social status requiring continual validation, making men particularly vulnerable to identity threats when they deviate from masculine norms (Bosson et al., 2021).

Feminine behavior performed by men is generally to avoid gender role stress. The ongoing pressure to conceal one's authentic identity encompassing sexual orientation and gender expression triggers acute identity conflict and discrepancy stress, which significantly elevates the risk of depression, anxiety, and general psychological distress (Pachankis et al., 2020; Sarno et al., 2020). The forms of femininity adopted by men are diverse, including transgender women (men who identify as feminine gender), waria/bencong (identity as women for certain purposes), and boti (receptive sexual role in homosexual context). Each concept has its own uniqueness. Meanwhile, men with feminine behavioral expression refer to men whose behavior resembles or adapts feminine traits but still identify as male. Emotion regulation strategies significantly impact mental health outcomes, though effectiveness varies across cultural contexts (Chen et al., 2025). This distinction is crucial in understanding the specific challenges faced by this population.

Embracing traits and behaviors conventionally characterized as feminine fosters gender-role flexibility, enabling men to transcend restrictive emotionality and authentically articulate their emotional vulnerabilities, relational needs, and affective desires (Elliott, 2020; Levant et al., 2020). However, it faces challenges from hegemonic masculinity and traditional stereotypes. Men with feminine behavioral expression require self-acceptance and social acceptance, especially in interpersonal relationships. In this process, they experience rejection, bullying, and discrimination that impact their mental health. Contemporary neuroimaging research confirms that social rejection and ostracism activate the brain’s salience networkp redominantly the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex (dACC) and anterior insula which functionally overlaps with the neural substrates that process physical pain (Moieni & Eisenberger, 2020; Mwilambwe-Tshilobo & Spreng, 2021). When unable to mitigate rejection risk in relationships, individuals may engage in defensive strategies including withdrawal or retaliation to protect their psychological well-being (Murray et al., 2025). This neurological evidence underscores the profound impact of social rejection on individuals with non-conforming gender expressions.

Situations occurring in men with feminine behavioral expression can generally become problems both internally and externally. These problems can influence significant emotional impacts (Dalimunthe et al., 2024). Therefore, this can trigger behaviors or actions that have negative impacts both for oneself and others. Based on the results of the needs assessment found, men with feminine behavioral expression experience negative behaviors such as bullying and even rejection. With these problems, men with feminine behavioral expression perform direct or spontaneous revenge mechanisms against perpetrators of unfair treatment as a form of self-preservation. Research on retaliatory behaviors in digital contexts reveals that revenge motivation is strongly associated with both proactive and reactive forms of retaliation, with significant gender differences in expression and underlying motivations (Liao et al., 2025). This defensive response, while understandable, often leads to complex psychological and social consequences.

The revenge performed by men with feminine behavioral expression is generally called retaliation. Interpersonal retaliation does not manifest solely through overt physical or verbal aggression, but operates across passive strategies (such as silent treatment, social withdrawal, and relational cut-offs) and proactive

confrontations aimed at enforcing relational boundaries (Bastian et al., 2020; Chester, 2023). Within contemporary evolutionary psychology, retaliatory behavior is conceptualized as a tit-for-tat negative reciprocity mechanism rooted in humans' evolved sensitivity to unfairness (Strimling et al., 2021). This response primarily functions to restore perceived psychological equilibrium, deter future exploitation, and signal personal boundaries against repeated victimization (Molho et al., 2020). Although retaliatory countermeasures historically offered adaptive value in ancestral group survival, their deployment in modern peer networks often precipitates counter-retaliation, reputational costs, and secondary relational deterioration). The evolutionary perspective suggests that retaliatory behavior may have served adaptive functions in ancestral environments, though its effectiveness in modern social contexts remains questionable.

In the context of men with feminine behavioral expression, retaliation is performed as a form of mechanism itself. Previous research by Aisha and Natasha (2024) shows that negative actions such as discrimination and exclusion of individuals or groups can trigger cycles of revenge or vendetta. This can occur in individuals experiencing situations such as social pressure, including men with feminine behavioral expression. Although retaliation paradoxically exacerbates long-term psychosocial maladjustment, for men with feminine behavioral expression, enacting counter-aggression functions as a compensatory mechanism that offers transient emotional relief and a momentary restoration of perceived control (Chester, 2023; Eder et al., 2020). However, existing research has primarily focused on retaliation in mainstream populations, with limited attention to marginalized groups experiencing intersectional forms of discrimination based on gender expression.

Despite growing research on masculinity and interpersonal conflict, there remains a significant gap in understanding how men with feminine behavioral expression specifically navigate retaliatory behavior in their relationships. Although contemporary scholarship has extensively examined retaliatory aggression across general populations (Chester, 2023; Molho et al., 2020) and delineated the psychosocial disparities confronting gender-nonconforming individuals (Levant et al., 2020; Puckett et al., 2021), the intersection of these two phenomena remains largely unexplored. Specifically, existing empirical literature has not adequately addressed how subordinated masculine identity shapes the unique behavioral forms, psychosocial triggers, and subsequent consequences of retaliation in close interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, there is an absence of nuanced analysis concerning the post-retaliation affective paradox namely, how men with feminine behavioral expressions navigate lingering remorse and reconciliation desires to restore belonging. While modern extensions of social identity threat theory (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019) posit that marginalized individuals enact compensatory defenses to protect self-esteem, the empirical application of this framework to feminine-presenting men navigating peer conflict remains a critical, unaddressed gap.

Based on the explanation above, this research is important because it can provide in-depth analysis regarding retaliation behavior in men with feminine behavioral expression. By understanding the phenomenon more comprehensively, this research can contribute to identifying psychological intervention strategies and more inclusive social support. This research is expected to be reference material for counselors, psychologists, and social workers in dealing with cases involving emotional conflicts and social rejection. Therefore, this research aims to analyze in-depth the phenomenon of retaliation in the interpersonal relationships of men with feminine behavioral expression, including the forms, triggers, impacts, and expectations of retaliatory actions. This study seeks to fill the identified gap by providing nuanced understanding of how retaliatory behavior manifests in this marginalized population and offering evidence-based recommendations for intervention and support.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. This method was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of retaliation in the interpersonal relationships of men with feminine behavioral expression in their natural social context. Case studies enable researchers to understand complex dynamics and unique individual experiences that cannot be captured through quantitative measures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design was particularly appropriate for this research as it facilitated detailed examination of retaliatory behaviors within the specific sociocultural context of men with feminine behavioral expression, allowing for rich, contextual understanding of the phenomenon. This approach aligns with the exploratory nature of the research objectives, which seek to uncover nuanced patterns and meanings in participants' lived experiences.

Participant

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling technique with specific criteria established to ensure relevance to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria were: (1) men aged 18-25 years old, (2) exhibiting feminine behavioral characteristics as evidenced by self-identification and observable mannerisms, (3) having experienced interpersonal conflict involving bullying, discrimination, or social rejection within the past year, and (4) willing to participate voluntarily in this research with full understanding of the study's purpose and procedures. Three participants meeting these criteria were involved in this study. Narrative findings revealed distinct chronological trajectories regarding the onset of victimization and retaliatory behaviors across the participants. Participants RSD (21 years old) and MBH (19 years old) first endured verbal bullying and harassment upon transitioning into junior high school at ages 12–13. Conversely, participant IA (20 years old) experienced social discrimination and verbal mockery later during senior high school. In the initial phases of mistreatment, all participants responded passively through emotional withdrawal and parental reliance. Retaliatory actions only emerged following prolonged periods of accumulated psychological strain. RSD initiated direct verbal counter-attacks during late junior high school due to emotional exhaustion, whereas IA and MBH adopted verbal sarcasm and deliberate interpersonal cut-offs during university life to firmly defend their self-esteem boundaries.

The recruitment procedure began with establishing contact with local LGBTQ+ support groups and student organizations that advocate for gender diversity. The research team presented the study objectives and criteria to organization leaders, who then facilitated initial introductions to potential participants. Interested individuals were contacted directly by the researchers and provided with detailed information sheets explaining the study's purpose, procedures, time commitment, confidentiality measures, and potential risks and benefits. Those who expressed continued interest were scheduled for in-person meetings where the informed consent process was conducted. Before data collection commenced, all participants were provided with comprehensive verbal and written information about the research. Each participant signed an informed consent form indicating their voluntary agreement to participate, their understanding of the study procedures, and their awareness that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants were assured of complete anonymity through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of any identifying information from research materials. The informed consent process emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary and that declining to participate or withdrawing would not result in any negative consequences. Participants were also informed about data storage procedures, their right to review transcripts, and the planned use of research findings for academic publication.

Data Measurement

Data were collected through two primary methods: semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Semi-structured interviews served as the main data collection instrument, designed to capture in-depth accounts of participants' experiences with retaliation in interpersonal relationships. The interview guide was developed based on existing literature on retaliation, interpersonal conflict, and gender expression, and consisted of open-ended questions organized into five thematic sections: (1) experiences of interpersonal conflict and perceived unfair treatment, (2) retaliatory responses and behaviors enacted, (3) psychological and emotional triggers for retaliatory behavior, (4) impacts of retaliation on self and relationships, and (5) expectations and hopes for future interpersonal relationships. Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and was conducted in a private, comfortable setting chosen by the participant to ensure their safety and emotional comfort. Interviews were audio-recorded with explicit permission and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The interview questions were carefully formulated to be non-judgmental and to encourage participants to share their narratives freely and comprehensively. Example questions included: "Can you describe a situation where you felt treated unfairly in a relationship?", "How did you respond to that situation, and what actions did you take?", "What thoughts and feelings motivated your response?", "Looking back, how do you feel about how you handled that situation?", and "What are your hopes for your relationships moving forward?". Follow-up probing questions were used flexibly to elicit deeper understanding, clarification, and elaboration of participants' experiences. The semi-structured format allowed for consistency across interviews while maintaining flexibility to explore unexpected themes that emerged during conversations.

Participant observation complemented interview data by providing contextual understanding of participants' social interactions and behavioral expressions in naturalistic settings. Observations were conducted in environments where participants typically interact, such as campus spaces, cafeterias, and social gatherings, with participants' full knowledge and consent. The observation protocol focused on documenting:

(1) how participants expressed their gender identity through behavior, mannerisms, and social interactions, (2) how others responded to participants' gender expression, (3) visible signs of conflict, tension, or negative interactions in interpersonal exchanges, and (4) participants' responses to various social situations. Field notes were systematically recorded during and immediately after observation periods, capturing behavioral details, verbal exchanges, contextual factors, and the researcher's reflective observations. The combination of interviews and observation allowed for methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of data by capturing both participants' self-reported experiences and researchers' observations of social interactions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves systematic identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within qualitative data. The analysis process consisted of six sequential phases applied rigorously to ensure trustworthiness of findings. In Phase 1 (familiarization), all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim by the primary researcher, and transcripts were read and re-read multiple times alongside listening to audio recordings to achieve deep immersion in the data. Initial observations and ideas were noted during this familiarization process. In Phase 2 (generating initial codes), systematic coding of the entire dataset was conducted using both manual coding and NVivo qualitative analysis software. Codes were generated inductively, meaning they emerged from the data itself rather than being predetermined by existing theories. Each segment of text relevant to the research questions was assigned descriptive codes capturing semantic and latent meanings.

In Phase 3 (searching for themes), codes were collated into broader potential themes by grouping related codes together and gathering all data extracts relevant to each potential theme. Visual maps and tables were created to organize codes into theme hierarchies and explore relationships between themes. In Phase 4 (reviewing themes), the coherence and distinctiveness of themes were evaluated through two levels of review. First, coded data extracts for each theme were reviewed to ensure they formed coherent patterns. Second, themes were evaluated against the entire dataset to ensure they accurately reflected the meanings in the data. Some themes were merged, split, or discarded during this refinement process. In Phase 5 (defining and naming themes), each theme was clearly defined with a detailed description of its essence and scope. Theme names were refined to be concise yet informative, capturing the central concept of each theme. Sub-themes were identified where appropriate to provide structure within complex themes.

In Phase 6 (producing the report), the final analysis was written up by weaving together analytical narrative with vivid data extracts to illustrate each theme. Extracts were carefully selected to represent the essence of themes while maintaining participant anonymity. Throughout all analysis phases, reflexivity was maintained through regular journaling of analytical decisions, interpretations, and researcher positionality. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary themes and interpretations with participants to verify accuracy and resonance with their lived experiences. Two participants provided feedback confirming the analysis captured their experiences authentically, while one suggested a minor clarification that was incorporated. Peer debriefing sessions were conducted with co-authors to discuss emerging themes, challenge interpretations, and ensure analytical rigor. These trustworthiness strategies enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings, ensuring the analysis remained grounded in participants' voices while offering meaningful insights into the phenomenon of retaliation in interpersonal relationships among men with feminine behavioral expression.

Result

Observational assessments and screening interviews (verified through behavioral checklists) revealed distinct manifestations of feminine behavioral expressions among all three participants. Non-verbally, participants consistently exhibited rising pitch intonation at the end of declarative sentences (uptalk), expressive facial affect, and fluid, graceful physical movements (gestur lentik dan gemulai) without traditional masculine swagger. Aesthetically, their feminine role expression manifested through meticulous grooming routines (body, hair, and facial care), the incorporation of soft-colored wardrobes, and gender-nonconforming accessories such as tote bags and light makeup (e.g., lip balm and blush). In navigating their daily psychosocial environments, participants established clear interpersonal boundaries: they actively sought social comfort within female peer groups and gender-affirming campus organizations while strategically concealing or moderating their expressive traits in heteronormative and familial spaces to avoid hostility.

To ensure empirical trustworthiness, the primary interview data were systematically triangulated with real-time behavioral observations and collateral interviews with each participant’s designated significant other

(SO: MA for P1, NRA for P2, and NR for P3). The significant others corroborated that all three men possessed fundamentally gentle, highly empathetic, and non-confrontational baselines. Crucially, the SOs affirmed that aggressive or defensive outbursts were strictly reactive—triggered solely when perpetrators transgressed relational boundaries. Following thematic analysis of these triangulated data, five major themes emerged: (1) forms of retaliatory behavior, (2) purposes of retaliation, (3) underlying psychological dimensions, (4) triggering factors, and (5) psychological impacts, social costs, and relational hopes.

Forms of Retaliatory Behavior

Participants engaged in both verbal and non-verbal retaliatory strategies to counter mistreatment: Direct Verbal Confrontation and Counter-Attacks: When provoked in public settings, participants defended their dignity through immediate verbal counter-strikes. P1 (RSD) described his direct, vulgar retaliation when targeted with homophobic slurs: "He shouted at me, 'Hey, faggot (bencong)!' so I immediately retorted, 'Why the fuck are you bothered? (kenapa ko puki)". Observational field notes documented P1 leaning forward with a tensed facial expression and elevated vocal volume to assert dominance during such recollections.

Witty Sarcasm and Status Neutralization: P2 (IA) favored sharp sarcasm to dismantle the aggressor's public authority rather than resorting to raw profanity: "When someone mocked my clothing for looking like a girl's, I fired back, 'Look at yours, you look completely tacky (jamet).' When they called me 'boti' (a pejorative for receptive gay men), I sarcastically replied, 'Why, honey? Do you want my WhatsApp or Instagram?".

Status-Degrading Retort: P3 (MBH) countered verbal abuse by verbally undermining the perpetrator's socioeconomic standing: "I told him, 'Even if I'm feminine (bencong), I have everything I need from my family, while you remain stuck doing nothing with your life".

Non-Verbal Retaliation (Deliberate Interpersonal Cut-Off): Across all cases, participants enacted passive retaliation through complete emotional withdrawal, intentional avoidance, and unilateral relationship termination (baku bombe). As P3 stated: "I chose to completely cut him off. I observed his toxicity, and I decided to silence him permanently from my life". P2's significant other (NRA) confirmed this pattern: "If he knows someone dislikes him, he doesn't create chaos; he immediately cuts them off and acts as if they no longer exist".

Purposes of Retaliation

Retaliation served functional, goal-directed motives rather than being an act of senseless malice: Equaling the Score (Tit-for-Tat Reciprocity): Participants sought to restore emotional equilibrium by subjecting perpetrators to the same pain they had endured. P1 explained: "I wanted him to know how it feels... to feel the exact same hurt I felt when he bullied me". P2 echoed this retributive logic to strip the aggressor of social power: "When they humiliate me in public to display power, I retaliate to humiliate them back so their authority collapses".

Enforcing Justice and Behavioral Deterrence: Retaliation operated as an instrumental boundary-setting mechanism. P1 reported: "The only response I wanted was for him to permanently stop bullying me". Similarly, P3 sought to psychologically silence the abuser: "What I wanted was to knock him speechless (tak kenokki), so he would shut his mouth and stop spreading negative talk".

Underlying Psychological Dimensions of Retaliation

The internal drive to retaliate was governed by three interrelated psychological mechanisms: Affective Outrage and Moral Indignation: Retaliation was fueled by deep resentment following unprovoked hostility. P1 noted: "Initially, I felt intense vengeance; I felt like punching him, but I lacked physical strength". P3 added: "It was pure emotional anger; when they pushed me, my fury forced the words out".

Neurocognitive Spontaneity vs. Instrumental Goal: Retaliation exhibited a dual cognitive nature. While initial verbal outbursts were reflexive, limbic threat responses "It came out completely spontaneous because of anger", they simultaneously served a deliberate cognitive script: establishing a reputation that prevented further victimization.

Social Reinforcement and Peer Facilitation: Internal motives were significantly amplified by peer group dynamics. While P2 derived motivation from an internal need for autonomy "The drive came from inside myself", P1 and P3 noted that close friends validated their right to resist and actively incited counter-aggression "My friends provoked me, saying, 'Why do you let him treat you like that? Fight back!' which pushed me to retaliate".

Triggering Factors of Retaliation

The aftermath of retaliation revealed a poignant intrapsychic and relational dilemma: The Catharsis-Dissonance Paradox: Immediately after retaliating, participants experienced transient cathartic relief and empowerment "My mood? I felt relieved and satisfied in that moment". However, this satisfaction quickly dissipated into acute cognitive dissonance and remorse. Because their core self-concept was gentle and

empathetic, acting aggressively violated their moral standards: "After the anger faded, I felt immense guilt... I asked myself, 'Why did I say such awful things? That is not who I truly am".

Relational Constriction and Social Isolation: Retaliation severely compromised social networks. Relationships devolved into prolonged estrangement (baku bombe), leaving participants with contracted peer circles and heightened hypervigilance regarding their social reputations.

Enduring Longing for Affiliation (Need to Belong): Despite suffering severe hostility, none of the participants desired permanent enmity. All three expressed an enduring yearning for interpersonal reconciliation and authentic belonging. P1 wished for past bullies to reconcile and understand his humanity, P2 expressed readiness to forgive if granted mutual respect, and P3 actively hoped for restored friendships once boundaries were recognized. Ultimately, retaliation represented a paradoxical plea for dignity a defensive armor utilized until an inclusive space of genuine acceptance could be attained.

Expectations for Future Relationships

Despite engaging in retaliatory behavior and experiencing negative consequences, all participants expressed hopes for reconciliation and healthier relationships. P1 shared: "Deep down, I don't want to be someone who seeks revenge. I hope that one day I can have friendships where I'm accepted for who I am without having to constantly defend myself. I want relationships built on mutual respect, not fear of retaliation." This reflected a fundamental desire for authentic acceptance.

P2 articulated hopes for personal growth: "I want to learn better ways to handle conflict and hurt. I know retaliation isn't the answer, but in those moments, it felt like my only option. I hope I can develop the strength to respond to discrimination with dignity rather than destruction." This demonstrated awareness of the need for emotional regulation skills.

P3 expressed optimism despite past pain: "I still believe there are people out there who will accept me as I am. I want to build relationships where I don't have to hide or prepare for attack. I hope that as society becomes more accepting, people like me won't have to choose between authenticity and belonging." This hope for societal change reflected participants' resilience and desire for systemic transformation. All three participants demonstrated a paradoxical combination of defensive retaliation and deep yearning for connection, suggesting that beneath retaliatory behavior lies a fundamental human need for acceptance, respect, and healthy interpersonal relationships.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that retaliatory behavior among men with feminine behavioral expressions functions fundamentally as an assertive, compensatory coping mechanism to preserve threatened self-worth, rather than as an act of unprovoked interpersonal malice. The empirical findings reveal that participants (RSD, IA, and MBH) utilized retaliation to actively challenge systemic power imbalances after enduring repeated peer victimization. This pattern strongly aligns with contemporary extensions of Social Identity Threat Theory (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019), which posit that when an individual's core identity is publicly devalued, they mobilize behavioral countermeasures to restore self-integrity. In the context of this study, participants' gender-nonconforming expressions placed them within subordinated masculine positions (Elliott, 2020), rendering them targets of hegemonic sanctions. Retaliation thus emerged as an essential behavioral strategy to negotiate dignity and resist marginalization within hostile peer networks.

In terms of behavioral manifestation, the findings show that retaliation operated along a dynamic spectrum ranging from active verbal confrontation to passive relational termination, rather than conforming to a monolithic pattern of physical violence. Empirically, participants tailored their responses based on situational demands: RSD employed direct vulgar retorts ("kenapa ko puki") to immediately halt hallway bullying; IA utilized calculated verbal sarcasm ("Look at your clothes, you look tacky") to publically neutralize the aggressor's social dominance; while MBH deployed socioeconomic counter-attacks ("Even if I am feminine, I have everything I need from my family") to challenge the perpetrator's superiority. Concurrently, all participants engaged in passive non-verbal retaliation through deliberate interpersonal cut-offs (baku bombe), strategically severing communicative access. These diverse manifestations expand upon recent aggression typologies (Chester, 2023; Molho et al., 2020), demonstrating that retaliatory actions among marginalized men represent calculated, tit-for-tat negative reciprocity designed to establish psychological boundaries while avoiding physical escalation.

Regarding triggering factors, this study found that retaliation was catalyzed by acute external boundary violations targeting an already sensitized, vulnerable self-concept. The empirical data illustrate that participants carried cumulative emotional scars dating back to early junior high school, which were reignited by severe peer victimizationsspecifically pejorative slurs ("bencong", "boti"), institutional exclusion (IA's

dismissal from the Paskibraka marching squad due to feminine mannerisms), and non-consensual physical trauma (MBH being forcibly kissed on the lips by a male peer). Neurobiologically and psychologically, this intense reaction reflects contemporary evidence that social exclusion and identity rejection activate the brain's salience network (dACC and anterior insula) in patterns that directly overlap with physical pain processing (Moieni & Eisenberger, 2020; Mwilambwe-Tshilobo & Spreng, 2021). When faced with chronic gender-role discrepancy stress and identity-based attacks (Levant et al., 2020; Puckett et al., 2021), participants reached an emotional saturation point where retaliatory aggression became the only viable mechanism to discharge affective pain and reassert personal agency (Stanaland & Gaither, 2021; Vescio & Schermerhorn, 2021).

Crucially, the findings uncover a striking post-retaliatory psychological paradox: an acute conflict between transient emotional relief and subsequent moral distress. Immediately after enacting retaliation, all participants reported an instant sense of catharsis, psychological satisfaction, and empowerment ("My mood? I felt completely relieved", RSD; "I felt satisfied seeing him speechless", MBH). However, this momentary emotional repair rapidly devolved into severe cognitive dissonance, guilt, and self-reproach ("After the anger cooled down, I felt guilty... That is not who I am", RSD, MBH). This observed trajectory challenges outdated notions of cathartic relief and corroborates modern empirical findings showing that aggressive venting provides only temporary hedonic pleasure while compounding negative affect and moral remorse over time (Bastian et al., 2020; Eder et al., 2020). Because these men possessed an underlying baseline characterized by empathy, gentleness, and prosociality (as confirmed by their significant others: MA, NRA, and NR), violating their own moral standards to harm another generated acute internal turmoil.

Socially, while interpersonal cut-offs (baku bombe) and retaliatory confrontations succeeded in temporarily halting immediate abuse, they exacted severe relational costs by precipitating peer isolation and network constriction. Participants found themselves alienated, trapped in prolonged standoffs, and constantly hypervigilant regarding their peer reputation. Nevertheless, the most profound insight emerging from this study is the participants' persistent desire for reconciliation and interpersonal belonging. Despite enduring years of victimization and engaging in defensive retaliation, none of the participants harbored permanent enmity; instead, all three expressed a sincere willingness to forgive and rebuild healthy connections if mutual respect were granted. This reveals that retaliatory behavior does not stem from a desire to destroy social bonds, but rather from a thwarted need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Puckett et al., 2021). Retaliation serves as an uncomfortable protective armor utilized until an inclusive environment of genuine social acceptance can be achieved.

Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

Theoretically, these findings enrich masculinity studies and social identity frameworks by illuminating how subordinate masculinity is actively defended in non-Western, collectivist peer environments. Practically, the results underscore the urgent need for campus-based psychosocial interventions that move beyond punitive measures. Universities should implement emotional regulation workshops, assertive communication training, and gender-affirmative counseling services to help gender-diverse young men manage minority stress without resorting to costly retaliatory spirals. Furthermore, institutional anti-bullying policies must explicitly address microaggressions and covert harassment targeting non-normative gender expressions.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, this study was conducted with a small case-study sample of three undergraduate students in Makassar, Indonesia; while providing rich idiographic depth, the findings may reflect unique regional cultural scripts that limit direct generalizability to other sociocultural settings. Second, retrospective self-reports regarding adolescent victimizations may introduce recall bias, although this was mitigated through triangulation with significant others. Future research should employ longitudinal or ecological momentary assessment (EMA) designs across broader geographical contexts to capture the real-time temporal unfolding of interpersonal conflict, retaliatory coping, and relational repair among gender-diverse populations.

Conclusion

This research concludes that retaliation in the interpersonal relationships of men with feminine behavioral expression is a complex phenomenon driven by both psychological and social factors. In addressing the research objectives, the study identified three distinct forms of retaliatory behavior: passive retaliation manifested through silent treatment and social withdrawal, active non-destructive retaliation characterized by direct confrontation and relationship termination, and active destructive retaliation involving deliberate actions to harm perpetrators' social standing. These forms represent a spectrum of responses shaped by individual circumstances and the severity of perceived injustice. The triggering factors emerged as a complex interplay of psychological dimensions, particularly emotional pain from bullying and discrimination that threatens self-

esteem, and social dimensions including peer pressure and systematic non-acceptance of gender expression. These triggers create a hostile environment where retaliatory behavior emerges as a coping mechanism to maintain self-esteem and restore a sense of justice.

The behavior emerges as a defensive mechanism to maintain self-esteem and restore perceived fairness, consistent with social identity theory, but ultimately has negative impacts on both psychological well-being and social relationships. Psychologically, participants experienced guilt, regret, increased rumination, and emotional instability following retaliatory actions, contradicting the expectation that revenge would provide lasting relief. Socially, retaliation led to relationship limitations, damaged reputations, and increased isolation risks, creating vicious cycles that further marginalized participants from social networks. Paradoxically, despite engaging in retaliatory behavior, all participants expressed hopes for reconciliation and healthier relationships, revealing a fundamental human need for acceptance that underlies defensive responses. The findings emphasize the importance of psychological interventions focusing on emotional regulation skills, assertiveness training, and adaptive coping strategies, as well as the creation of more inclusive social environments that challenge hegemonic masculinity norms and promote acceptance of diverse gender expressions. Future research should explore intervention effectiveness using longitudinal designs and involve larger, more diverse samples to enhance understanding of this phenomenon in various social contexts, ultimately contributing to the development of comprehensive support systems for men with feminine behavioral expression who face discrimination and social rejection in their interpersonal relationships.

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