

Humiliation: Assessing the Impact of Derision, Degradation, and Debasement<sup>1</sup>

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Running head: HUMILIATION: ASSESSING THE IMPACT

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### Abstract

This paper describes the development of a self-report scale to assess the internal experience of humiliation. After defining the construct, an item pool of 149 items was generated, utilizing a five-point Likert scale response format. A sample of 253 individuals ages 15 to 51 ( $M = 20.66$ ) was used to conduct the item trial. The item pool was evaluated through item and factor analyses. Factor analysis identified two correlated factors accounting for 58% of scale variability. The 20 items loading on factor one were labeled the Fear of Humiliation Subscale and the 12 items loading on factor two were labeled the Cumulative Humiliation Subscale. The full scale of 32 items is called the Humiliation Inventory. Reliability analyses indicate that the subscales and the full scale have high internal consistency. Exploratory analyses of mean scores across six demographic groups indicate significant differences between male and female mean scores on the total scale and the two subscales.

## Humiliation: Assessing the Impact of Derision, Degradation, and Debasement

Humiliation has been implicated in the pathogenesis of numerous psychosocial maladies including low self-esteem (Stamm, 1978), school-related difficulties (Brantlinger, 1993; Rothenberg, 1994), pernicious child-rearing practices (A. Miller, 1983), delinquency (Klein, 1991b), poverty (Duhl, 1992), social phobia (Greist, 1995), anxiety (Beck & Emery, 1985), depression (Brown, Harris, & Hepworth, 1995), paranoia (Klein, 1991b), marital discord (Vogel & Lazare, 1987), domestic violence (Browne, 1993), sexual aggression (Darke, 1990; King, 1992a), rape (Herman, 1992; King, 1992b), other forms of violence (Gilligan, 1996), serial murder (Hale, 1994), torture (Silver, Conte, Miceli, & Poggi, 1986), and suicide (Hendin, 1994; Klein, 1991b). On a larger scale, humiliation has been associated with the practice of social control (Silver, Conte, Miceli, & Poggi, 1986), discrimination (Griffin, 1991; Kirshbaum, 1991; Swift, 1991), numerous forms of oppression (Klein, 1991b), and international conflict (Scheff, 1994). While social scientists have suggested that humiliation is a pervasive experience in our society, it has remained unexamined by empirical research. The purpose of this study is to illuminate the dynamics of this phenomenon by developing a reliable, internally consistent instrument by which the experience of humiliation may begin to be evaluated.

### Theoretical Perspectives on Humiliation

#### Based on a Relational Paradigm

Why has humiliation been neglected in the research on human behavior? An examination of the paradigms that guide scientific investigation provides a possible explanation of this oversight. Psychodynamic paradigms, when examining personality organization and development, have typically taken an individualistic, intrapsychic stance which emphasizes the “self.” Since the age of Freud, individualistic, intrapsychic models of personality theory have dominated psychology. As J. B. Miller (1991) states, modern theorists have tended “to see all of development as a process of separating oneself out from the matrix of others” (p.11). This bias has resulted in the minimization, neglect, or omission of certain forms of experience. Humiliation is an example of this negligence. It is a relational form of human behavior stemming from interpersonal dynamics that cannot be adequately explained by individualistic, intrapsychic theories.

This study attempts to understand humiliation from an interpersonal or relational perspective, similar to Baumeister, Stillwell, and Heatherton’s (1994) recent study of guilt. The foundation for a relational approach is

derived from the work of theorists primarily at the Stone Center at Wellesley College (Jordan, 1995; Jordan, Kaplan, J. B. Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; J.B. Miller, 1986, 1988, 1991; J.B. Miller & Stiver, 1991, 1995, 1997; Surrey, 1991; see also Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982, 1991). Unlike many traditional models of personality development which emphasize progressive separation and independence, these theorists formulated the Relational-Cultural Model of development. This model proposes that growth-fostering relationships (or connections) are a central human necessity throughout the life span, and disconnections are the source of psychological problems. From a relational perspective, repeated, unresolved experiences of disconnection, such as “past neglects, humiliations, and violations” (J.B. Miller & Stiver, 1995, p.1), can have profound and enduring negative consequences. Accordingly, actual or threatened experiences of humiliation may cause individuals to seek safety through withdrawal, behavioral constriction, or isolation, ultimately diminishing their opportunities for necessary growth-fostering relationships. Thus, humiliation may be a significant source of profound relational disconnection leading to numerous forms of psychological or behavioral problems. The application of a relational, rather than an individualistic, model of personality development may begin to bring the dynamics of humiliation to the foreground.

#### Understanding the Impact and Dynamics of Humiliation

Only a few contemporary scholars have explored the impact of humiliation on individual and social behavior. Silver, Conte, Miceli, and Poggi (1986) analyzed humiliation as a tool of social control which undermines the individual’s sense of identity. Their analysis referred to examples of humiliation ranging from commonplace interactions to experiences endured by prisoners in Nazi concentration camps. They highlight the characteristics of powerlessness and dehumanization which often accompany the experience of being humiliated. Other scholars identify the virulent nature of humiliation affecting individual self-esteem (Stamm, 1978), marital relationships (Vogle & Lazare, 1990), interactions in medical settings (Lazare, 1987), suicidal behavior (Hendin, 1994), and acts of homicide (Hale, 1994).

The most comprehensive discussion of humiliation was initiated by Klein (1991a), who identified what he refers to as the “Humiliation Dynamic,” i.e., patterns of behavior associated with the experience of humiliation. In a series of articles, Klein (1991b, 1992) and other scholars discuss the relationship between humiliation and academic failure, mental illness, family discord, racism (Griffin, 1991), sexism (Swift, 1991), disabilities (Kirshbaum, 1991),

ageism (Secouler, 1991), poverty (Duhl, 1992), criminal justice (Smith, 1992), community strife, organizational inefficiency, and international conflict.

According to Klein, the relational component of humiliation is comprised of three roles: (1) the humiliator, (2) the victim, and (3) the witness. Although individuals may most often remember being in the role of the victim, it is likely they have operated in all three roles at some point during their lifetime. Typically, humiliation occurs within relationships of unequal power where the humiliator has power over the victim. While a humiliator may be emboldened by feelings of power, a victim of humiliation will feel degraded, confused, powerless, paralyzed, ostracized, violated, or assaulted. Witnesses of humiliating events may escape being cast as the target, but they may develop a fear of humiliation that influences their behavior to an equal or greater degree as those who have been the victims of humiliation. Regardless of one's role in an interaction, fear of humiliation can have a formidable influence on an individual's behavior. Klein (1991b) and Silver et al. (1987) state that fear of humiliation alone can compel an individual to risk death to avoid being humiliated while Hendin (1994) suggests that some individuals will choose suicide in response to the threat of humiliation.

#### Differentiating Humiliation from Other Constructs

Before an instrument to evaluate humiliation can be developed, humiliation must be distinguished from related constructs. The experience of humiliation might be considered a member of a family of emotions known as the "self-conscious emotions" (Tangney & Fischer, 1995). These emotions are characterized by (1) a consciousness of the self and (2) some form of evaluation of the self. Tangney and Fischer, along with other scholars, identify and describe "key" self-conscious emotions which include shame, guilt, pride, and embarrassment. While humiliation appears to meet the criteria for being classified as a self-conscious emotion, these scholars have not explored the specific qualities that make humiliation a unique and significant experience.

Of all the constructs associated with humiliation, shame shares the most common characteristics. Shame and humiliation are often used interchangeably in the literature, but similarities and differences between these two constructs can be identified. In terms of similarities, both experiences require an individual to make an interpretation that an event is shaming or humiliating. Both experiences are considered to have an impact on the whole self rather than an aspect of the self (Klein, 1991b; Lewis, 1987). Both events can cause an individual to exhibit similar responses such as feeling exposed, angry, or anxious. Furthermore, both shame and humiliation can have temporary or enduring consequences.

Unlike shame, humiliation involves more emphasis on an interaction in which one is debased or forced into a degraded position by someone who is, at that moment, more powerful (S.B. Miller, 1988). The experience of shame emphasizes a reflection on the self by the self; in other words, the internal process of negatively evaluating oneself is accentuated. In contrast, the experience of humiliation draws more attention to an interpersonal event. Klein (1991b), in clarifying the distinction between shame and humiliation, suggests that: "Shame is what one feels when one has failed to live up to one's ideals for what constitutes suitable behavior in one's eyes as well as the eyes of others. Humiliation is what one feels when one is ridiculed, scorned, held in contempt, or otherwise disparaged for what one *is* rather than what one *does*. *People believe they deserve their shame; they do not believe they deserve their humiliation*" (p.117). Additionally, theorists have suggested that shame can serve an appropriate adaptive function by inhibiting aggression or protecting an individual from unnecessary personal exposure. In contrast, humiliation has not been identified as serving an adaptive function.

The characteristics of humiliation must also be distinguished from embarrassment and guilt. Embarrassment and humiliation share an emphasis on an interaction. Frequently embarrassment is viewed as a lesser form of humiliation, but there is a significant difference between these two experiences. When individuals feel embarrassed, their discomfort typically stems from some aspect of their behavior or persona (Babcock, 1988; Babcock & Sabini, 1989). Behavior and persona are mutable; we can make changes in these areas. Humiliation, on the other hand, involves the whole self. It is an attack on an individual's identity that is not readily changeable. Embarrassment seems to occur on the surface of personal experience while humiliation strikes at the very essence of the individual's sense of being.

Guilt and humiliation are not as closely related as the concepts discussed thus far, but there are several connections between these two constructs. Recently, scholars have begun to explore guilt through an interpersonal

rather than the traditional intrapsychic lens (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton 1994; Tangney, 1995). From an interpersonal view, humiliation and guilt share a characteristic involving transgression against another, which left unresolved taints the relationship. Other scholars, utilizing the traditional intrapsychic view, associate guilt with recognizing that one has violated a personally relevant moral or social standard (Kugler & Jones, 1992).

Humiliation often involves powerlessness before another. If an individual's standard is that he or she should be able to protect him or herself in the presence of others, then he or she will feel guilty for not being able to do so. The aftereffect of guilt as a result of humiliation can remain as a chink in the armor of one's defenses. This internalized guilt makes one more vulnerable to future humiliations. Finally, it's possible that over time a generalized feeling of guilt could be the result of feeling powerlessness in the face of humiliation. Children who grow up in humiliating environments may internalize feelings of guilt for not being able to overcome the assaults of their humiliators. Moreover, guilt may be induced in children to minimize their awareness and possible rebellion against their humiliation. Facilitated by guilt, children may come to believe their humiliation was for their own good (A. Miller, 1983).

#### Defining the Construct

The word humiliation refers to two different forms of experience: the act of humiliating or being humiliated and the state or feeling of being humiliated. In other words, humiliation can refer to an external event or an internal state. The construct of humiliation defined in this research refers to the internal state of humiliation from the victim's point of view. With this in mind, the following definition of the construct was developed: *The internal experience of humiliation is the deep dysphoric feeling associated with being, or perceiving oneself as being, unjustly degraded, ridiculed, or put down--in particular, one's identity has been demeaned or devalued.* This definition guided the development of an instrument to begin to assess the experience of humiliation.

#### Scale Development

#### Participants and Procedure

The sample consisted of 253 respondents, 170 (67.2%) females and 83 (32.8%) males. Respondents were recruited from a variety of academic institutions: 81 (32%) were from a small, private, four-year college, 94 (37.2%) respondents were from a four-year university, 46 (19.2%) respondents were from a four-year high school, and 32 (12.6%) respondents were from a two-year technical school. The age of the respondents ranged between 15 and 51

with 86% of the sample between 16 and 22 years of age ( $M = 20.66$ ,  $SD = 5.06$ ). The majority of the respondents were students who completed the questionnaire in classes or small groups and received extra credit for their participation. Besides responding to a large set of items comprising the original pilot scale (see below), participants provided personal and demographic data, as well as informed consent.

### The Pilot Item Pool

An item pool was generated by applying information derived from a review of the literature, interviewing individuals in focus groups, examining instruments that evaluate similar constructs, and consulting with colleagues who have written about the experience of humiliation (Klein, 1991a, 1991b, 1992; Swift, 1991). Information acquired through these four methods was shaped into a pool of 149 items reflecting two aspects of the internal experience of humiliation: (a) the cumulative impact of past humiliation (e.g., “Throughout your life how seriously have you felt harmed by being teased?”) and (b) the fear of humiliation (e.g., “At this point in your life, how much do you fear being ridiculed?”). The items were structured as a sentence stem followed by a number of response options utilizing a five-point Likert scale format. Reversed scored items were included to reduce the incidence of respondent acquiescence and other response sets. All items were written to be comprehensible to individuals with a minimum of an eighth grade reading ability.

## Results

### Item Evaluation

The first evaluation was an analysis of the item pool which identified items sufficiently correlated with the total score as recommended by Nunnally (1978). Items with corrected item-total correlations of .30 or greater were retained (DeVellis, 1991), thus identifying 137 items with corrected item-total correlations of .30 or greater. This item set had an alpha reliability coefficient of .97. When a scale has an alpha coefficient greater than .90, DeVellis recommends shortening the scale to optimize the length of the instrument. Therefore, items with corrected item-total correlations of .50 or greater were retained and items with corrected item-total correlations below .50 were discarded. Item analyses were repeated until all items demonstrated corrected item-total correlations greater than .50 and the full scale demonstrated an alpha reliability coefficient greater than .90. This phase of the item evaluation resulted in the retention of 40 items.

### Factor Analysis

In the second phase of evaluation a factor analysis was performed on the remaining 40-item set. As stated earlier, items were written to evaluate two aspects of the internal experience of humiliation. It was hypothesized that the remaining 40-item set would comprise two factors: one factor corresponding with items concerning cumulative humiliation and the other factor corresponding with items related to the fear of humiliation. Responses to the remaining 40-item set were subjected to a factor analysis using squared multiple correlations as prior communality estimates. The eigenvalue-one criterion (Kaiser, 1960) and the scree test (Cattell, 1966) method identified two significant factors. These two factors were subjected to an oblimin (oblique) rotation which resulted in two correlated factors. Factor loadings of the correlated factors were examined to determine which items loaded sufficiently on factor one or factor two. While items with factor loadings greater than .40 can be considered significant (Hatcher, 1994), to further refine the scale, items with a factor loading of .60 on one factor and less than .20 on the other factor were retained. Items with factor loadings of less than .60 and items loading on both factors at .20 or greater were discarded. Thirty-six items remained as a result of this phase of the item evaluation.

In the final phase of item evaluation four more items were eliminated for technical reasons (Hartling, 1995). Of the final 32-item set, the 20 items loading on factor one were labeled the Fear of Humiliation Subscale (FHS). These items accounted for 46% of the scale variability. The 12 items loading on factor two accounted for an additional 12% of the scale variability and were labeled the Cumulative Humiliation Subscale (CHS). To explore the relationship between the two subscales, their scores were subjected to a correlational analysis. The subscales produced a Pearson product-moment correlation of  $r = .57$  ( $p < .01$ ).

The full scale of 32 items, accounting for 58% of scale variability, is called the Humiliation Inventory (HI). A concluding item analysis confirmed that each of the remaining 32 items had corrected item-total correlations of .50 or greater. Table 1 presents the corrected item-total correlations for the scale items which are listed in the order they appear on the final scale. Factor analysis established that the scale items represent two related factors, with items loading on one factor at .60 or greater and loading on the other factor at .20 or less. Table 2 presents the factor loadings from the rotated factor pattern matrix and the factor structure matrix for each subscale. A final item analysis determined that the CHS, the FHS, and the HI demonstrated alpha reliability coefficients of .95, .94, and .96 respectively.

Table 1

Humiliation Inventory - Final Items and Corrected Item-Total Correlations

| Humiliation Inventory Items   | Item-Total<br>Correlations |
|---|----------------------------|
| <b>Cumulative Humiliation Subscale (CHS)</b>                                    |                            |
| Throughout your life how seriously have you felt harmed by being...             |                            |
| (1.) ...teased?.....  | .575                       |
| (2.) ...bullied? .....  | .558                       |
| (3.) ...scorned?.....   | .579                       |
| (4.) ...excluded? .....   | .625                       |
| (5.) ...laughed at?.....  | .609                       |
| (6.) ...put down?.....  | .657                       |
| (7.) ...ridiculed? .....  | .677                       |
| (8.) ...harassed?.....  | .599                       |
| (9.) ...discounted?.....  | .624                       |
| (10.) ...embarrassed?.....  | .584                       |
| (11.) ...cruelly criticized?.....   | .610                       |
| (12.) ...called names or referred to in derogatory terms? .....                 | .615                       |
| <b>Fear of Humiliation Subscale (FHS)</b>                                       |                            |
| At this point in your life, how much do you fear being...                       |                            |
| (13.) ...scorned?.....  | .638                       |
| (14.) ...bullied? .....   | .651                       |
| (15.) ...ridiculed? .....   | .715                       |
| (16.) ...powerless? .....   | .611                       |
| (17.) ...harassed?.....   | .664                       |
| (18.) ...put down?.....   | .739                       |
| (19.) ...excluded? .....  | .696                       |
| (20.) ...laughed at?.....   | .746                       |
| (21.) ...cruelly criticized?.....   | .749                       |
| (22.) ...cruelly disciplined? .....   | .569                       |
| (23.) ...made to feel like an outsider?.....                                    | .719                       |
| At this point in your life, how concerned are you about being...                |                            |
| (24.) ...teased?.....   | .680                       |
| (25.) ...embarrassed.....   | .643                       |
| (26.) ...treated as invisible?.....   | .647                       |
| (27.) ...discounted as a person?.....   | .691                       |
| (28.) ...made to feel small or insignificant?.....                              | .695                       |
| (29.) ...called names or referred to in derogatory terms? .....                 | .642                       |
| (30.) ...unfairly denied access to some activity, opportunity, or service?..... | .553                       |
| How worried are you about being...  |                            |
| (31.) ...viewed by others as inadequate?.....                                   | .658                       |
| (32.) ...viewed by others as incompetent?.....                                  | .569                       |

Note. CHS  $\alpha = .94$ ; FHS  $\alpha = .95$ ; Full scale  $\alpha = .96$ .

Table 2

Factor Loadings from Rotated Factor Pattern Matrix and Factor Structure Matrix of Subscale Items

| CHS<br>Items | Factor Loadings |          |                  |          | FHS<br>Items | Factor Loadings |          |                  |          |
|--------------|-----------------|----------|------------------|----------|--------------|-----------------|----------|------------------|----------|
|              | Factor Pattern  |          | Factor Structure |          |              | Factor Pattern  |          | Factor Structure |          |
|              | Factor 1        | Factor 2 | Factor 1         | Factor 2 |              | Factor 1        | Factor 2 | Factor 1         | Factor 2 |
| 1.           | -.01            | .77      | .41              | .77      | 13.          | .73             | -.02     | .72              | .39      |
| 2.           | -.05            | .77      | .38              | .74      | 14.          | .66             | .07      | .70              | .44      |
| 3.           | .00             | .76      | .41              | .75      | 15.          | .74             | .07      | .77              | .47      |
| 4.           | .05             | .77      | .48              | .80      | 16.          | .71             | -.02     | .69              | .37      |
| 5.           | -.05            | .87      | .43              | .84      | 17.          | .72             | .04      | .74              | .44      |
| 6.           | -.03            | .88      | .46              | .87      | 18.          | .80             | .03      | .81              | .47      |
| 7.           | .00             | .87      | .48              | .87      | 19.          | .69             | .10      | .75              | .48      |
| 8.           | -.04            | .84      | .42              | .82      | 20.          | .77             | .07      | .80              | .49      |
| 9.           | .13             | .71      | .52              | .78      | 21.          | .82             | .01      | .82              | .46      |
| 10.          | .05             | .68      | .42              | .71      | 22.          | .61             | .02      | .62              | .35      |
| 11.          | .00             | .78      | .43              | .78      | 23.          | .77             | .03      | .79              | .46      |
| 12.          | .10             | .73      | .50              | .78      | 24.          | .68             | .09      | .73              | .37      |
|              |                 |          |                  |          | 25.          | .72             | .00      | .72              | .40      |
|              |                 |          |                  |          | 26.          | .76             | -.05     | .73              | .37      |
|              |                 |          |                  |          | 27.          | .78             | -.02     | .77              | .41      |
|              |                 |          |                  |          | 28.          | .85             | -.10     | .80              | .38      |
|              |                 |          |                  |          | 29.          | .76             | -.02     | .75              | .40      |
|              |                 |          |                  |          | 30.          | .63             | .00      | .63              | .35      |
|              |                 |          |                  |          | 31.          | .76             | -.04     | .74              | .38      |
|              |                 |          |                  |          | 32.          | .69             | -.07     | .65              | .31      |

Note. CHS = Cumulative Humiliation Subscale; FHS = Fear of Humiliation Subscale.

Exploratory Analyses of Demographic Data

After the items for the full scale and the subscales were identified, exploratory analyses were conducted to examine the relationship of mean scores to the demographic variables of gender, ethnic background, highest level of education, marital status, income, and data source. Before these analyses were performed, subscale and full scale scores were computed for each respondent. Of the 253 respondents, valid total scores were computed for 247. Scores

for six respondents were not analyzed because of missing data. The individual scores of the remaining 247 respondents were used to determine the sample's mean score on the CHS ( $M = 32$ ,  $SD = 10$ ), the FHS ( $M = 46$ ,  $SD = 17$ ), and the HI ( $M = 78$ ,  $SD = 25$ ). Then individual scores were grouped by demographic categories. A frequency analysis revealed that five of the seven demographic categories included response levels that were endorsed by fewer than 10 respondents. To enhance balance within these subgroups, levels were collapsed in the categories of age, ethnic background, highest level of education, and estimated highest level of household income. Marital status was not collapsed because there were no logical alternative groups. Instead, three levels were eliminated because they contained less than 10 respondents in each group. The mean scores of the remaining levels were compared. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to evaluate the differences in mean scores across subgroups. With the exception of gender, no significant differences in mean scores were observed across levels of demographic variables. The mean scores of female respondents on the two subscales and the full scale were significantly higher than the mean scores of males. Table 3 summarizes the mean scores and standard deviations for males and females on both subscales and the full scale.

Table 3

Summary of Subscale and Full Scale Means and Standard Deviations by Gender

| Scale      | Females (n = 166) |           | Males (n = 81) |           | One-Way ANOVA<br>F (df = 1, 245) |
|------------|-------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------------------------------|
|            | <u>M</u>          | <u>SD</u> | <u>M</u>       | <u>SD</u> |                                  |
| CHS        | 33.23             | 10.50     | 29.90          | 9.94      | 5.92*                            |
| FHS        | 49.67             | 17.86     | 39.43          | 15.60     | 19.37**                          |
| Full Scale | 82.90             | 25.33     | 69.25          | 22.51     | 16.95**                          |

Note. CHS = Cumulative Humiliation Subscale; FHS = Fear of Humiliation Subscale.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

### Scale Development

Humiliation is a complex and pervasive experience that has remained relatively unexamined by empirical research. The purpose of this study was to develop an instrument by which an aspect of this phenomenon may be

investigated empirically. Through a process of item analyses and factor analyses, the 32-item Humiliation Inventory (HI; see Appendix) was developed to assess the internal experience of humiliation, hypothetically comprising: (a) cumulative humiliation and (b) fear of humiliation.

An item analysis of the HI indicates that it is an internally consistent instrument. This suggests that the scale is homogeneous in content, yet a factor analysis identified two related dimensions accounting for the majority of scale variability. An examination of the items may explain the underlying factorial structure. The scale items could be viewed as evaluating the construct of humiliation within two different time frames. The CHS evaluates the internal experience of humiliation from the past to the present and the FHS evaluates the fear of experiencing humiliation in the future. A comparison of the subscales reveals that all the items on the CHS appear in a slightly altered form on the FHS. The distinction between these two sets of items involves their orientation in time. The sentence stems for the CHS imply a period of time up to the present. The sentence stems for the FHS suggest a future orientation. The eight items that appear on the FHS and not on the CHS appear to be difficult to rate as past experiences because they are less concrete than the other scale items. Viewing the HI as an instrument that evaluates the internal experience of humiliation over a period of time explains the high internal consistency of a scale composed of two factors.

The correlational analysis of the two subscales demonstrated that CHS scores were moderately but significantly correlated with FHS scores. This indicates that the subscales are related but distinct. This evidence supports Klein's observation, "that one doesn't have to be an actual victim of humiliation to develop a desire to avoid it" (1991b, p. 96). Klein suggests individuals may learn to fear humiliation through witnessing humiliation or through participating in the humiliation of others. An individual who has a high score on the CHS but a low score on the FHS may have resolved his or her past experience of humiliation in such a way that he or she maintains a reduced fear of humiliation. It is also possible that some individuals have a low score on the FHS because they have developed strategies to dissociate from or dismiss their fear of humiliation.

Limited analyses were conducted to explore the construct validity of the HI. It was predicted that the HI would reflect a two dimensional model of the internal experience of humiliation. Factor analysis confirmed that the scale items represented two factors, thus providing evidence of factorial validity (Comrey, 1988). Additionally, scale validity is suggested through item analysis. All 32 items of the HI correlated with the total score at a level of .50 or greater, thus providing evidence of the instrument's internal consistency.

### Exploratory Analyses

Exploratory analyses compared mean scores of the development sample across levels of demographic variables, including gender, ethnic background, marital status, highest level of education, household income, and data source. With the exception of gender, no significant differences in mean scores were observed. The absence of significant differences in six of the seven categories may be due to the homogeneity of the development sample. Beyond gender, the sample did not adequately represent all levels within each demographic category. Different results may be obtained if the 32-item HI is administered to a sample sufficiently representative of all demographic groups. Furthermore, while the analyses of gender differences included an adequate number of men and women, the sample was primarily composed of white men and women. Additional analyses are necessary to determine if differences in mean scores would be significant between *all* men and women. With these limitations in mind, we can proceed to discuss the gender differences in mean scores.

Women scored significantly higher than men on the two subscales and the full scale. The difference was particularly salient on the FHS. One interpretation of these data is that women genuinely experience more humiliation and fear of humiliation than men. Indeed, Klonoff & Landrine (1995) report empirical data suggesting that sexist degradation is a common experience among women. It is reasonable to presume that the women in the present study experience higher levels of humiliation than the men because they live in a society where it has been the tradition for women to be subordinate to men. This inferior status puts them at risk for being humiliated or threatened with humiliation by the dominant group. Silver et al. (1986) point out that it is to the advantage of the dominant group to humiliate the subordinate group. Humiliation undermines the identity of its victims and makes them easier to control by making them feel inadequate and powerless to respond. Humiliation can be used as a potent form of social control to gain and maintain power over subjugated individuals. It is possible that women experience more humiliation because they live in a society where the dominant group uses humiliation or the threat of humiliation as a form of social control.

Beyond the potential daily humiliations of degrading media messages (Kilbourne, 1994) and the socially condoned practice of evaluating women by their physical appearance (Wolf, 1991), women may also have a higher risk than men of experiencing the humiliation associated with being a victim of emotional and physical abuse (Browne, 1993; Fitzgerald, 1993; Goodman, Koss, Fitzgerald, Russo, & Keita, 1993; Koss, 1993). This includes

sexual harassment, sexual assault, incest, rape, and domestic violence. All these experiences belong on the continuum of events that are humiliating. Many of these events are perpetrated by the very individuals women care for and love: husbands, lovers, fathers, brothers, and friends. Compounding these experiences, women who attempt to seek justice can find themselves degraded and humiliated by a court system that unreasonably questions their motives, their actions, and their integrity.

Men are subject to many of the same risks of humiliation as women in this society. But, for various reasons, men may experience less humiliation. The dominant group defines the standards for normalcy and the standards by which subordinate groups are deemed substandard or inferior (J. B. Miller, 1986). The dominant group in Western-European society has traditionally viewed many forms of male behavior as the standard of normal behavior (Tavris, 1992). Women experience more humiliation because they are evaluated by male-defined standards of behavior. It has been demonstrated that masculinity is highly valued in our culture and associated with a range of positive psychological attributes, while femininity is not (Broverman, 1970; Schur, 1984). Men may experience less humiliation and fewer forms of humiliation because they exhibit behaviors that are generally accepted as the norm.

There are many other explanations for the disparity between men's and women's mean scores on the HI. Men are socialized not to disclose their humiliation or their fear of humiliation. Admitting that one has been humiliated or fears being humiliated is admitting a weakness and men are not encouraged to divulge their vulnerabilities. In contrast, women are more willing than men to endorse test items with negative personal connotations (Adler, 1993). This may be due to women's accurate perceptions of their experiences or it may be that women are more attuned to negative interpersonal experiences and attend more closely to their perceptions of alleged humiliation. These are only a few of the hypotheses that might explain the difference between women's and men's mean scores on the HI.

#### Future Studies

While this study suggests that the HI demonstrates sufficient psychometric properties to warrant continued research, the HI remains in the early stages of development. Further studies are necessary to establish the instrument's reliability and validity. Research should examine convergent and discriminant validity by administering the HI along with other scales to sample groups. The known-group method could be employed to determine if the

HI can distinguish between a comparison group and a group of individuals who are known to have a higher level of the construct. Known-groups might include victims of domestic violence, individuals who are incarcerated in prisons, survivors of sexual assault, and people who are homeless. Cross-validated research should explore the gender differences found in this study as well as differences among a variety of other demographic groups. Assuming that an accumulating body of research supports the reliability and validity of the HI, the process of standardization should lead to the development of norms useful for test interpretation.

With the support of additional research, the HI could be used as a tool to enhance many efforts in both treatment and prevention. For example, scholars have noted the link between experiences of humiliation and psychopathology (Beck & Emery, 1985; Brown, Harris, & Hepworth, 1995; Greist, 1995; Klein, 1991b). Use of the HI could help clarify to what extent humiliation or the fear of humiliation may be contributing to an individual's psychological problems. Hence, treatment could more effectively focus on untangling and resolving the debilitating consequences of the individual's actual or perceived experience; restoring the individual's sense of self to a more optimal level of self-respect and self-worth; strengthening the individual's resistance or resilience in the face of possible, frequently inevitable, future humiliations; and empowering individuals to challenge and change social and environmental factors which are likely to support or promote humiliating social practices.

As a tool in prevention, the HI could be used to identify individuals or groups at increased risk of developing psychological, social, or behavioral problems in the context of chronic or acute experiences of ignominy. Ideally, victims of profound or disabling humiliation could be detected and assisted before they exhibit clinically significant symptoms. In addition, the HI could be a part of research exploring factors that reduce the impact of demeaning interpersonal experiences and factors that facilitate resilience. Further, the scale may assist in studies to distinguish the characteristics and consequences of humiliation-prone or humiliation-free (Klein, 1991a) environments.

Finally, children may be particularly vulnerable to the detrimental effects of humiliation because their growth and survival requires reliance on more powerful others, such as parents, extended family members, siblings, educators, and peers. These more powerful others may implicitly or explicitly employ humiliation or the threat of humiliation to secure cooperation or compliance in their charges (A. Miller, 1983). To gain a broader understanding of the experience of humiliation, it would be useful to develop a scale similar to the HI for children. Such a scale might determine which children have an increased risk for developing psychological or behavioral problems in

response to their experiences of being devalued, degraded, or debased. A greater understanding of the impact of humiliation on children may foment the formulation and application of effective social and environmental interventions which prevent or diminish this phenomenon, and the related consequences, long before more costly clinical or legal interventions become necessary. Furthermore, a scale for children may help in the process of illuminating protective factors which could minimize children's vulnerability.

### Summary

Many scholars have noted and described humiliation as a maleficent experience; however, a thorough understanding of this experience has been hindered by the paucity of empirical research. In response, this study initiated the process of developing a reliable and valid instrument to assess one aspect of the complex and multifaceted dynamics of humiliation. Through item and factor analyses a scale was developed evaluating two dimensions of the internal experience of humiliation. The psychometric properties of this scale provide evidence that it will be useful in future research. Furthermore, exploratory analyses of demographic data suggest that the scales can differentiate the experience of humiliation among some groups, offering researchers one method for identifying individuals who may have an increased risk for experiencing the detrimental effects of humiliation.

While the research described in this paper is a beginning, it will take the efforts of many researchers to fully understand the psychological and social consequences associated with humiliation, which include school-related difficulties, delinquency, anxiety, paranoia, depression, marital discord, numerous forms of abuse, violence, torture, homicide, suicide, discrimination, and even international conflict. These consequences have been veiled by the lack of empirical research and what Klein (1991b) calls a "conspiracy of silence" which discounts, denies, and, therefore, perpetuates the practice of humiliation in our society. The development of the HI is a step toward fully acknowledging the pervasive ramifications of this behavior. Future research will provide the impetus for formulating strategies to reduce and ultimately prevent the disabling and destructive consequences of humiliation.

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APPENDIX

HUMILIATION INVENTORY

This questionnaire asks you to summarize your feelings about the following questions. Please read each item below carefully and circle the rating that best describes your feelings.

Example: Throughout your life to what degree have you felt...  
 ...happy?.....1 2 3 4 5

Throughout your life how seriously have you felt harmed by being..

|   | Not at all |   |   |   | Very Seriously |
|---|------------|---|---|---|----------------|
|   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| (1.) ...teased? .....   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| (2.) ...bullied? .....  | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| (3.) ...scorned? .....  | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| (4.) ...excluded? .....   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| (5.) ...laughed at? .....                                       | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| (6.) ...put down? .....   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| (7.) ...ridiculed? .....  | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| (8.) ...harassed? .....   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| (9.) ...discounted? .....                                       | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| (10.) ...embarrassed? .....                                     | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| (11.) ...cruelly criticized? .....                              | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| (12.) ...called names or referred to in derogatory terms? ..... | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

At this point in your life, how much do you fear being...

|   | Not at all |   |   |   | Very Much |
|---|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
|   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (13.) ...scorned? .....                       | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (14.) ...bullied? .....                       | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (15.) ...ridiculed? .....                     | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (16.) ...powerless? .....                     | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (17.) ...harassed? .....                      | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (18.) ...put down? .....                      | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (19.) ...excluded? .....                      | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (20.) ...laughed at? .....                    | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (21.) ...cruelly criticized? .....            | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (22.) ...cruelly disciplined? .....           | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (23.) ...made to feel like an outsider? ..... | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

At this point in your life, how concerned are you about being...

|  | Not at all |   |   |   | Extremely |
|--|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
|  | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (24.) ...teased? .....   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (25.) ...embarrassed? .....  | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (26.) ...treated as invisible? .....   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (27.) ...discounted as a person? .....   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (28.) ...made to feel small or insignificant? .....                              | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (29.) ...called names or referred to in derogatory terms? .....                  | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (30.) ...unfairly denied access to some activity, opportunity, or service? ..... | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |

How worried are you about being...

|   | Not at all |   |   |   | Extremely |
|---|------------|---|---|---|-----------|
|   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (31.) ...viewed by others as inadequate? .....  | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |
| (32.) ...viewed by others as incompetent? ..... | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5         |