

Human Dignity & Humiliation Studies
Mapping the Experience of Humiliation: Research Meeting

Oslo, Norway
June 25 & 26, 2008

Notes by Linda Hartling

Contributors included: Vegar Jordanger, Finn Tschudi, Linda Hartling, Evelin Lindner, Bert Wyatt-Brown, Hildegunn Nordtug, Hroar Klempe, and Jack Goldstone.

Questions/Observations:

- When does “blaming the victim” distract us from challenging instigators or challenging conditions that perpetuate humiliation?
- Does humiliation have a “threshold of seriousness” ?
- Can humiliation become a “state of mind”?
- What is the physiological response to humiliation (e.g., social pain/physical pain theory)?
- What does humiliation teach us about the regulation of negative emotions?
- What can we learn about the human capacity to “anticipate” potentially humiliating situations?
- How can we evaluate humiliation when it involves subjective perception of the experience?

It may be helpful to describe complete examples of humiliation, i.e., “bathing” us in stories (Finn). We shared specific stories and described responses to humiliation.

Feelings and fears associated with stories of humiliation (e.g. humiliation in school):

- Fear of being picked and/or picked on
- Feeling spotlighted
- Feeling exposed
- Feeling crushed
- Reacting with scorn
- Fear of being laughed at
- Feeling that one is flawed
- Feeling of inadequacy
- To have these feelings, does one have to care about the other person’s perception?

How does humiliation involve negative comparisons.

When does humiliation result in no memory of the experience?

Is there such an experience as “humiliation by proxy” (...when someone uses another person to inflict humiliation on another person)?

What are the effects of humiliation?

- Humiliation is a profound violation that can cause people to “divorce” themselves from themselves.
- Humiliation can cause individuals to “stop living.”
- Humiliation can be profoundly isolating, inducing separation, diminishing our hope for connection with others.

What happens to individuals who are forced to perpetrate humiliation?

- What happens when they are coerced to be an instrument of humiliation, forced into a role that one can’t escape?

How is the experience of living in humiliation compounded by the experience of shame?

- What are the invisible forms of humiliation (e.g., humiliation that is built into institutionalized practices, structural violence)?

Can humiliation have a positive effect?

- Can humiliation help people learn humility?
- What are the risks of teaching humility by using humiliation?
- Perhaps experiences of humiliation can “move” people in a new direction? Perhaps it can lead to transformation or movement when one has the resources to respond (e.g., emotional support, economic resources, etc.)

Do people have “degrees of vulnerability” to humiliation?

- Where do these degrees of vulnerability come from?
- How do we become conscious of humiliation (...self-reflection? ...intelligence? ...having the ability to look outside of oneself?).
- How would we describe macro vs. micro humiliations?

Humor and humiliation:

- Humor can be used to “resist” humiliation, e.g., recognizing the absurdity of a humiliating experience.
- Humor changes our perspective and our experience of a humiliating experience.

Power/status and humiliation:

- In honor societies, can aristocrats or elite be humiliated by underlings?
- Does humiliation have to be between equals?