



NOTES ON A CONFERENCE

**Annual Meeting of the Human Dignity and Humiliation
Columbia Teachers College, New York City, December 14-15, 2006**

Brian Lynch, M.D.

I start with a sense of appreciation for having been afforded the opportunity to attend this very special gathering, a unique forum which I count as one of the special experiences of my life.

Such thoughts as these must be informed by whatever theoretical stance one brings to the table and so they are. I thus offer my perspective in the spirit of discussion only and not as a view that is “right” albeit if we did not think we were “right” we would all fall to pieces and this is one of the obstacles that we all have to keep always in mind in this most delicate of projects and why a “frame” is so important. I hope I stay within some semblance of a frame. To expound a bit on this; a theme of mine is and will be our deep “images” and “interests”, therefore what we feel as being “right” for us. If we did not have a “right” it would be, in the main fairly difficult to be humiliated if we did not “want” something. As I briefly mentioned in my only contribution, that I thought that albeit we talk of “conflict of interest” we fly by the “interest” part and always concentrate on the conflict part never really understanding the “interest” part.

These are my remembrances of what took place I did not take any actual “notes” and so am relying only on my auditory memory and what I glean from the pictorial memory I have through my photography. I make little or no effort to assign attribution to ideas albeit it will be obvious that certain themes were clearly

articulated by certain people. That said, it seemed to me the spirit of the gathering was one of a shared experience where ideas quickly meshed in the true spirit of dialectic. And these should only be consider “notes” as I am aware that concurrent with my writing there is an official version of notes that I could access on line so better these musings might better be labeled just that “musings” or commentary.

INTRODUCTION

My life was changed one Sunday afternoon some nine years ago when I came upon my own personal understanding of “shame”. I hesitate to put the modifier “personal” as I have come to believe that it is an understanding that is universally teachable. But for the moment that is another story. The importance, for the moment, is that it leads me here. It leads me recently in the last year to have contemplated more and more the use of the word “humiliate”. I had, for so long, concentrated on the word “shame” and only rarely focused on what I considered a continuum of shame – humiliation. Shame I felt, and still feel, is central to our being and identity and as such is a complex and slippery word as became so evident during the intense two days of the conference. That said about shame, about a year ago I started thinking about using the word humiliate or humiliation more in my work instead of shame as I thought that patients or audiences would relate more easily to it as everyone has been humiliated and so it is something that can be put in terms of a specific experience. I recount this mostly as this, I am sure, has much to do with why one of Dr. Lindner’s papers caught my eye that had “humiliation” in the title and why I contacted her a short time ago and why I find myself here.

Thus I found that she was substantially ahead of my thinking, by years, having developed a whole model based on humiliation.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT

Dr. Lindner's explication of the evolution of the separation of the concepts of humility and humiliation as documented in 1757 is most intriguing and powerful. Shortly before the conference I read this account in one of her papers and was gratified to hear an oral presentation of it the first day.



Briefly, my understanding of the position is that until approximately the mid 18th century the idea of a “higher” and a “lower” was simply taken for granted, within everyone’s consciousness. One was born, say, into a cast and that was that. Pretty much everyone “served” somebody and in turned stepped on somebody or where “served” unless you where on the top or the very bottom. Therefore the idea that someone below you could humiliate you simply could not enter anyone’s consciousness or likewise that you could humiliate someone above you. But you could be humiliated by someone above and likewise humbled. Therefore the two words had very much the same meaning.

In open discussion this concept was challenged in that it was brought up, for example, that Roman Emperors would role play taking on the role of slaves realizing that at any time they might fall from power and in fact become slaves.



I would suppose that the “truth”, as always, lies in-between in that all generalities are false and that the broad push of history is an evolution toward democratization and equality. As Lindner points out that shortly after this documented change in language that separated “to humiliate” and “to be humble”, where I can say “you humiliated me” “You hurt me”, or “I have the power to humiliate you”, came the American and French revolutions that championed individual freedoms and rights. Certainly no other ancient society had done so to such a degree. Ancient Athens, we quickly learn, was a democratic aristocracy limited to some 20 or 30 thousand with some 80-100 thousand slaves.

We can look also to such technological advances as the invention of the helicopter by Leonardo, or recently the knowledge that Archimedes invented a form of The Calculus. And there are many other examples, but the point being there was not the great social, economic and political context for the technologies to fully flourish.

ON SHAME AND HUMILIATION

Much discussion took place, especially on the first day, centering on the meaning of the terms “shame” and “humiliation”. By the second day, it seemed, albeit, there was not so much discussion that there might have been some tacit agreement on the subject. These are my thoughts:

First, while these certainly are “loaded” words I do think that they will eventually come to have fairly standard meanings as I think they are quickly evolving to that

and we here are very much apart of that evolution. As you all are aware fifteen years ago you could barely find an article on “shame”.

Otherwise there are very distinct disciplines or narrative contexts in which the words are used. We are a diverse group. I maintain that eventually they will all merge. I take the position that we are, in the end, biological beings that create abstractions. In the end everything is grounded biological. This is my bias. I think shame is a biological phenomenon that we then explain cognitively. First and foremost we get “all shook up” in our brain cells. This is shame. Shame is interest gone array, it is the blues, the neck gone soft so that we can not keep the gaze going forward. Why? Often because we where humiliated, but not always.

So we can easily feel shame and humiliated all at once but we need not feel them at the same time.

Anything, it seems to me can shame or humiliate us.

Once I was leading a group therapy session, these where a particularly reticent group of withdrawn schizophrenics¹. I was more than pleased when a moderately obese gentleman stood up and recounted how humiliated he was because he could not zip up his pants.

I gently tanked him for sharing such an intimate experience with the group.

So, I would say he experienced great shame and humiliation based on his interests which where multilevel. Simply, first getting on his pants! But then what? His disgust about his weight? Guilt in gaining the weight? In not being able to lose it? In possibly having lost it and regaining it? In having schizophrenia? In knowing the medication causes weight gain? I do not know the answer to any of these questions but any or all of these thoughts could have gone through his mind. What we know for sure is that he felt humiliated by a zipper.

I have learned also the concept that it is “little things” that can be the most humiliating precisely because they are the little things. Haven’t we all had this experience? Not getting a bottle cap off can bring us to tears. This has been expressed under the concepts of affective amplification and magnification (after Tomkins).

And so someone becomes a suicide bomber after experiencing the “last” straw.

So I think that say, my wife has an affair, my idea would be that actually you would always have to ask the people involved what they exactly felt. Actually they might both be happy. No kidding aside. But if shame and humiliation where involved I posit that if she had the affair she could have any combination of feelings.

I would most definitely feel shame because my interest in her would be broken.

Then I may or may not feel humiliated. This I suppose has most to do with my sense of self. But the sense of shame is inevitable as it has a pure biological component, my sense of interest or connection de facto has physically been broken.

For her, she certainly could feel shame and or humiliation under any scenario, discovered or not. That is I may know and she may not know I may know or we might both know etc. It seems to me again you have to know her mind. You have to know her cognitions. She may easily feel humiliated that she was “weak” and had the affair and will definitely feel shame as her bond with her husband has been broken. Anyway, so think I. And what do you think?

ON SHAME-HUMILIATION AND WITHDRAWAL

A suggestion was made that a major consequence of humiliation was withdrawal and isolation. This I agree with that it is one option but not the major one, I think this narrows the scope much too much. I won't attempt to address the specifics of the particular presentation as to not trust my memory but only roughly take note of this one aspect of withdrawal.

I offer first the suggestion of Lindner recounting of Mendela's response upon being taken into prison on Robben Island. Here his response was definitely not one of withdrawal. Physically he had no choice to do much of anything although in a bit I will recount a scenario I saw of a prisoner in chains to illustrate a point. But he did have a mental space in which to move. His preparation to that point enabled him to form a strategy to take a leadership role and stand up to his guards. Note I did not say he "choose" not to be humiliated.

I myself want to be very clear about this as I think we do ourselves and others a great disservice when we use the language of "choice". I think feelings have little or nothing to do with choice. I think they are in no way cognitive processes. They come upon us and then we have to deal with our emotions. Yes, I believe "Humiliation" comes into cognition. The shaming process is a process from feeling shame to humiliation and sensing "I am humiliated". But again it is not a "choice". And there is still a very important distinction to be made between the feeling, the cognition and the action that is taken on either the feeling and or attendant cognition. Who really knows what the feeling was that Mandela had? It certainly could have been humiliation or something very akin to it. The important thing is the way he acted or the "scripted" response he had to it. Now, why was he able to act that way? Again I am suspicious of a great deal of faith in "choice". I believe that he was able to "be in the moment" because he was Nelson Mandel with his myriad of life experiences that brought him to that point.

So one of my points is that often the best we can do, which is a great deal is to make people aware of the phenomena of humiliation. Be very clear about it. This is eloquently done through stories such as Mendel’s story. On the other hand it is dangerous to say that someone can choose to be or not to be humiliated.



Now as to whether withdrawal is the major consequence of humiliation. As I have said, I think this narrows the scope of thinking of the subject greatly. And as I have already made clear that I think there is a shame-humiliation continuum, in general what applies to the dynamics of shame applies to humiliation. What are our options when we feel shame?

I immediately state that at the time I felt I understood “shame” nine years ago I also came upon the paradigm developed by Dr. Doanald Nathanson which he derived form the work of Dr. Silvan Tomkins, which I am sure many are familiar with. Over the years I have found it amazingly useful personally, and in helping people delimit their world so as to help them manage it.

So it is stated that when we are suffering shame, that is, say when we are in the troughs of being humiliated or someone is attempting to humiliate us (You see here I would say for example in the Mandela case that at the very least Mandel would have to have been suffering if not humiliation some level of “shame” as he certainly did not “want” to be in shackles and being lead to prison and being called a “pig”. His interest in being a human, in connection with others and the broader world was being interrupted. So for me he was suffering “shame”?) It is said that we have five choices and they are:

Yes, Withdraw but also,

Attack Ourselves(Blame Ourselves)

Avoid (here we put all addictions)

Or Attack Other (Blame Others)

Or we Solve the Problem

Mandela because he must have felt shame (according to me) yet faced with a humiliating circumstance (and according to me might have had cognitions and feelings of humiliation) nevertheless had the “scripts” or actions of “Solving the Problem”. Again why? This is not necessarily a mystery but for me certainly not a “choice” because it is what we would all do if we could. No, he did what he did because he was “ready” and prepared to do it. He was now “free to choose” to do what he did.

By the way I believe Karen Horney came very close to formulating the same options but stopped at three.

But it is obvious the paradigm is very important for understanding humiliation and violence. The dynamic of humiliation → shame → Attack Other, or again, so I think. What do you think?

One final note, I noted, at the beginning of this section that I was going to recount a story about a prisoner in chains. It is to illustrate a point. It was a show done by the news anchor Ted Koppel, a special on Texas Prisons. It showed a young man being transferred in full irons surrounded by something like three guards in a small holding cell that separated one cell block from another. What could the man possibly do? Well he could do something. First of all why? It seems to me he is completely humiliated and shamed. No place to withdraw to. No way to avoid the situation. Not probably much into blaming himself. And not really going to solve the problem right now. So what does he do? He finds a why to attack. He lunges at one of the guards several times pinning him against the cell. I thought what a beautiful but sad example of the paradigm.

TYPES OF HUMILATION

At least once in the public forum the subject of intentionality came up. That is whether the humiliator intends to humiliate. Along with this I would like to note “types of humiliation”.

This is not meant to be exhaustive but I can think of :

Interpersonal(Public)

Intentional

Inadvertent

Private

Intentional(is this possible? Can someone intentionally humiliate themselves? I think so)

Inadvertent

The comment that I remember coming up in the discussion was the experience that is so common in sports where coaches “humiliate” athletes so as to motivate them to do better. It was suggested by someone that in the coaches mind that they are not humiliating the athlete.

I myself would not be so quick to draw this conclusion. I would, at best, say that the coach has never given it much thought and if asked may well say “hell yes I am humiliating the SOB so he remembers the next time”. Or I am only doing “it” for his own good. Or as many a parent has said “this hurts me more than it hurts you”. In these later cases again, never having thought beyond this and if pressed they might get angry or embarrassed. Or, who knows maybe contemplative. Point being,

and why we are gathered together, is that in the main, people have not articulated their actions much. Again it seems we ourselves are here having substantial difficulty with these terms and put even more simply and bluntly we are here because basically no one has really ever bothered thinking much about these terms, people have simply acted.

So one rule of thumb might be is that “humiliation” is much in the doing. If someone feels humiliated then humiliation has taken place. You cannot say “get over it”. It is time for repair. And repair is unfortunately often not an option and culturally bound, e.g. honor killings.

We are in this conference necessarily working within a “frame” that is not inclusive of all experiences of shame-humiliation as was made evident by the sharing of the experience of someone when they recounted their experience of their bi cultural American- Japanese marriage. If I remember correctly there was some familial connection or acquaintance of an airline stewardess that had the misfortune to be head stewardess on a flight on which a number o people died due to food poisoning. A few days later it was noted that she had committed suicide. The attendee lamented to his wife how sad it was that this had happened as after all how was it her fault. She could not have known in anyway or had any responsibility for the preparation of the food. To which the wife replied “what else could she have done”? The attendee had noted many similarities between American and Japanese cultures. Again “a private universe” that is so hard, often, to access.

In any event, being form Chicago and boarding on Indiana yet not being much of a sports fan I still have used more sports analogies than I could ever have imagined since coming upon the concepts of shame and humiliation as somehow they seem excellent tools efficiently imparting emotional messages. So I ask people if they would rather play basketball for Phil Jackson or Bobby Knight. For those of you not familiar with the two, Phil Jackson couched the Chicago Bulls and won six world championships with Michael Jordan and a talented bunch with evidently nigh

a harsh word. The hippie NBA coach. He has since gone on to do much the same with the LA Lakers. He was famous for doing things like giving his players, of all things, books to read or lighting candles in the locker room without explanation. To me he was creating “interest”. A “who is this guy” atmosphere.

On the other hand Bobby Knight, next door in Indiana, spent years at the university gaining a following as an idol winning many championships but through a “macho” persona. Famous for a temper and at least one incident caught on camera of throwing a chair across the court and near the end again caught on camera taking a player in a choke hold. In a controversial firing under a “zero tolerance” clause he was fired when a student evidently yelled out something innocuous such as “Yeh couch” and Knight grabbed his arm it seemed like it could, and probably was in affection, but he was fired anyway.

But again point being, who would you want to play for Knight or Jackson?

What is Knight’s intention when he couches? I wonder if he knows?

I think it might have been suggested that humiliation is not much recognized in popular culture still or yet. I tend to disagree. Obviously it is still not well recognized or we would not be here doing what we are doing. That said over the last few years I have watched a great many movies and lately a great deal of T.V. for which I make no apologies and often have, over the last ten years, maybe been too impressionable or naively impressed by the writing on T.V. Maybe I am just too impressed by a certain type of intelligence but nevertheless there is a type of intelligence and quick wit and capacity to absorb a great deal of information and culture of the moment synthesize it and present it, often in extremely thoughtful ways. Granted often ways I don’t agree with or I wish where *more* thoughtful but still by no means chopped liver I argue.

So as for humiliation, as I said I do not think humiliation is ignored. For one the explicit use of humiliation as a dramatic tool that brings a great element of excitement to the narrative and as it has become more articulated and understood it has been picked up on more and more. On the positive side the writer often explicitly incorporates poignant scenes using the language of humiliation and shame in medical and legal drams. The artist as we know always gets there first. The phrases “I feel humiliated”, “I was humiliated” are quite common. The word shame is very common now. One of the best teaching sequences on shame-humiliation that I have ever seen, and it was quite explicit, and which I use in my practice was on “Desperate Housewives”. The writer could not have made it up. That is he must have gotten it from some serious study himself of shame.

Two other examples from current T.V. as far as intentionality and the use of humiliation come from a show that I can’t bear to watch any more, although I was an accidental view to begin with, and one that still intrigues me precisely because of the ambiguity of the motivation of the use of humiliations. They are “Law and Order: Special Victims” and “House M.D.”

For those who have no idea what these shows are or have never seen them I think I can give a brief enough synopsis.

Law and Order: Special Victims is a spin off of a parent show Law and Order a long running show, it along with several other spin offs usually bases each episode on New York or national criminal case files. In this show a detective with his female counter part humiliation plays a vital role in the “hook” of the show. The detective is a brilliant psychologist that can profile the criminal. The profile leads, of course, to the ultimate arrest. For some reason that I have never understood, but of course there does not have to be a logic it just “makes” the show, the climax of the show is the detective “getting off” on staging a grand humiliation of the criminal just before the arrest or during the arrest. That is it serves no purpose whatsoever in my mind. I would expect some disagreement here and of course throughout the ages there has

been disagreement. Does this provide some catharsis for the public? I say it does but it is exactly this kind of emotional upheaval that we are saying that we need to reevaluate and that is inhumane and serves no one *in the long term*. But it leads into something that I might as well address here and that is Shame vs Shaming.

I would hope from what little I have said that the majority of my readers would agree that the detective above is engaging in “humiliation”. Now, his end is evidently ostensibly “honorable” but here in lies the rub. From whence comes this “honor”? I say that it comes not from “honor” for if we start to dissect “honor” we get in a quagmire that ends in his psychopathology which is basically a sadism. That is a full circle to “humiliation”. That is I never see a justification for “humiliation” or “shaming”. I don’t see how you can separate the two. I have heard that there are episodes where his colleagues have become concerned by his zeal.

Finally, in terms of humiliation being in the public eye it is obvious that this role is either written by or has several very expert psychological advisors who must be familiar, by now, with at least current literature on shame.

I recall a recent article about a story in some state, which happened to be Southern, unfortunately, where they had reduced the incarceration for first time DUI offenders from 48 hrs to 24 hours and substituted so many hours of highway trash pick up. But the trash pickup included wearing a vest emblazed with the phrase “I am a drunk driver”. There was, to my way of thinking, a very positive out rage to this including an objection by MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving). This was despite the Sheriff saying many of the offenders being rather “giddy” about it.

Two points: One, obviously the labeling is an attempt to “shame the offender into appropriate behavior”. The MADD mothers have learned or are learning enough about shame too know that this may only drive them into a vicious cycle of more drink. Two, the “giddy” response is, for me, obvious “avoidance” or a “macho” response to the “punishment. What else are these men going to do?- break down

and cry, maybe, but rarely. This is locker room behavior. Again the mothers are right, dollar to donuts, 6/10 of these guys are at the bar an hour after they done.

As for “House M.D.” we have a brilliant infectious disease specialist in a New Jersey hospital that heads a crack diagnostic team. At his point all relation to reality ends and everything becomes stylized. The medicine is all real, and everything looks real it is just that this guy would never be tolerated in any hospital nor would such a team exist anywhere or such a concentration of bizarre cases fall in anyone’s lap in a million years. That said the man has a painful leg consequence of an infraction in the thigh and subsequent botched medical care and now is addicted to Vicodin. The reality of the pain vs the severity of the addiction is played out over the show and the effect on his personality is played out. Is he a jerk because of it or was he a jerk before the injury or is he just more of a jerk and of course under it all he really is a loving doc, which he is because he is a brilliant diagnostician that will do absolutely anything to advocate for his patients (this is why he would not last a minute in any hospital). Central to his character is that on every show he has at least one instance, and usually several, of a major humiliation of someone, usually of a patient and it is claimed that it is always with some intention of motivating them to get their act together in some way. I have continued to watch the show, in part, to see how this is played out. At first it seemed that the humiliation was being used simply for its shock value and of course much of it is I suppose and as such I am sorry for that. But as it has gone along the characters have become much more complex and vulnerable and House has become more complex. All have become more concerned for one another. But enough said and that said can we guess Houses’ motivation for humiliating others? Well, he is a T.V. character but I think the writers have in mind two things; one, a very damaged soul that cares deeply for his patients and wants to save each one of them and like most of us is simply deeply flawed especially when it comes to intimacy and two, in his interpersonal relationships his acts of humiliation sometimes turn to acts of destruction.

So we have a number of examples of humiliation from sports, one from current law enforcement and two from popular television programs.

In the end I contend we cannot tell anything much about the motivation of the people who humiliate. To be sure in all cases some “good” is wanting to be done *at least some of the time* but I certainly contend no one can say this is so all of the time and no one can say whether or not any of these people, if asked, had any clear idea of what they were doing in the above cases. It is clear to me, at least, that when we do so that we are projecting our own wishes and hopes onto them. Again if not then why are we here discussing things? It would seem that millions of people would already have a clear idea of exactly what humiliation is and why and how it is used? It is certainly clear the people humiliate out of blind rage and hate and a myriad of pathological syndromes.

So far, as it turns out, as in most things of this nature, nothing much is clear. Is my distinction of inadvertent and intentional useful? Maybe a bit. All the above examples would seem to be, at least at first glance intentional, but again we are saying we cannot be sure of anyone’s intention unless we ask them. But in general I would not use these examples for inadvertent examples of humiliation and will not list any at this time but have elsewhere given examples of how the inanimate world can humiliate us such as a bottle cap as I state above.

In any event throughout history the “act” of humiliation has been used for many purposes in real life and in art. It has been an “accepted way to get things done”. More than anything we just accept that *the world works this way*. We all learned maybe at one point or another that the world or life at least is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."(Hobbes). But we are here I suppose because we think we can advance. Psychology is only a little over 100 years old and advanced neuro science, a baby. We are defining ourselves constantly.

So I return to this paradigm of five, the five choices I mentioned above:

Of solving the problem, attacking ourselves and others, withdrawing or avoiding.

It seems clear the act of humiliation is an act of attack.

And so I will say that , for myself that I think I know way people ultimately humiliate and that is, again it is a form of attacking others and if we attack others its is because, ultimately we have been shamed. Obviously then humiliation breeds humiliation.

Humiliation is a way of solving a problem that now should be considered antiquated.

The intention of the humilator is no longer of much concern. But the motivating circumstances certainly are because much of those circumstances feed back to humiliation. A vicious circle.

It is clear that in all the above examples that there are better ways of solving the problems, at least this is my opinion. But here goes the sports analogy again, who would you rather Phil or Bobby?

As for those times when we are humiliated by the world, by that bottle cap or even our own complex of emotions. Here too I think we are seeing techniques that can help us overcome. To start with we have now a clear understanding, there for the taking, of such words as shame, guilt, ashamed and embarrassment. For the internal world I have learned that confusion about these words and slavery to guilt, being ashamed and being embarrassed can certainly be a constant humiliation that no one knows about. So in simply educating people about what I think we know about this vocabulary can liberate many.

The most important case in point under my umbrella is that “shame” is actually a variant of “interest”. Yes, we need to understand that shame is actually at its very

root a very “good” feeling. I have come to be able to see it as nothing else, so as they say either I am right or crazy.

I have come to see shame as that feeling of “not getting what I want”. A baby in a crib that is calm and turning its head this way and that searching, searching for what? Often a face. The parents, the mother face? The mother comes in the room either she comes to the baby or maybe comes in and her back is to the baby and she sits at a desk. There is no face to face – interest to interest – contact. There is rupture. I say this is shame, an impediment of or to ongoing interest. “Ongoing”, the baby wanted the mother’s attention and still wants it. The gaze will not continue to be steady but the head will turn away in the characteristic gaze of shame, at least momentarily and then the face probably quickly, instantaneously will turn to one of distress and there will be a whole of a cry of distress.

If on the other hand the mother comes to the crib with a smile and the baby is smiling there will be affective resonance: happy baby, happy mother. Of course all kinds of other scenarios can take place.

But so it is all through life, we want something and we don’t get it and we feel hurt, confused, shame? Shortly after birth these moments are setups for the humiliator to teach us to feel guilt, embarrassed and ashamed of ourselves. At the moment of shame when we have missed stepped (and thus already feel bad ie, shame,) and thus supposedly have done something wrong we are made to feel “guilty” by being told that we will “pay” for our misdeed in the future as well as presently with some punishment. That is we now must carry *anticipatory fear* around with us along with anticipatory shame if we should ever screw up in the same way again. And we have to fear not only the act but running into the humiliator again or the substitute humiliator that has been designated spiritual, legal or other wise.

So if one can master the idea, and it has been a great help to me albeit I have by no means “mastered” it, that shame is a “signal” that something is amiss. It is a signal that “I am not getting where I want to go”.² I have hit a brick wall.

So I have encountered a moment of HUMILIATION. I now am somewhere on a shame-humiliation axis. I am “not getting where I what to go”. My interest is being impeded. “What is the best I can to at this moment?”

This is Mandela in the line going into Robben Prison. Even in this situation there are more than one option. Silence is one. One is no less of a person for being silent and no one, I am sure, is saying that. This is always a problem with selecting people “heroes” and models. That is it can send the message that again “I should be able to “choose” to be like them and if I can’t then I am weak and bad. That is I feel humiliated. That is why I do not like the idea that we choose much of anything or that Mandela choose not to be humiliated. I rather think of it as that he was “ready” to be in that place at that time. Two people in front of a burning building, one runs in and saves a family and the other doesn’t. Neither for me is a coward or hero. One’s amygdala simply physiologically prevented them through over whelming fear from entering.(of course there are other scenarios and “reasons”) The other, for whatever reason did not have the same reaction. And I take most “heroes” at their world when they say they just “did it”. (Think just recently of the New Your Subway “hero” that saved the boy by covering him as the train passed over both. The man had two young daughters with him yet he reacted. He could not have done differently.)

ANGER

Anger was discussed but not at length.

I won’t attempt to reconstruct so much the content but state what I said at the time and expound a bit on it.

In several conversations I posited the ideas that I thought we often start at “the wrong end” of the dynamic and often that end is anger.

As far as “anger” we so often speak of “anger management”. Anger of course so often results from being humiliated.

As I have said above I feel there is a shame-humiliation continuum.

So there is someone/something that humiliates that leads to the experience of shame/humiliation that then can lead to anger, “can” lead to anger. I believe, with others, that anger is almost always a learned “scripted” response. It is then further coupled with some behavior. That is of course the affect/feeling is separate from what we “do” when we feel the feeling.

So stimulus (act of humiliation) → shame/humiliation → anger → action (withdraw, attack, etc.)

Continuing my interest in “interest” I say if we look to the root of it all it all started with someone’s primary “interest”, all any of us wanted was something.

Behavior → Anger → shame/humiliation → stimulus (humiliation) → Why was I humiliated? Because I was INTERESTED IN SOMETHING.

Now what is interest? I think it is a primary emotion. It is a feeling. Our primary interests, are primarily not rational. This is a primary problem. It seems to me a primary reason we are so easily humiliated is because we feel our primary interests are so reasonable. As I said when I started these notes: “Such thoughts as these must be informed by whatever theoretical stance one brings to the table and so they are, I thus offer my bias in the spirit of discussion only and not as a view that is “right” albeit if we did not think we were “right” *we would all fall to pieces and*

this is one of the obstacles that we all have to keep always in mind in this most delicate of projects and why a “frame” is so important. I hope I stay within some semblance of a fame.”

Primary interests are then linked to primary “images” that I think become our goals. When something or someone gets in the way of these goals, once again we are humiliated, angered?

So summary? To focus on anger is never the issue. Anger management seems like giving someone a hot potato. Anger is maladaptation, poor learning in the great majority of cases. Certainly there is “just anger” but even here it seems to me it is always a question of going behind the anger then going behind the shame/humiliation to whatever the interest of the person was. Now maybe the interest of the person was quite unreasonable but it was their interest. Maybe they wanted to kill me. But it was their interest. I use the example of a famous American bank robber of the early 20th century Willie Sutton. He is very famous for having been apprehended and when being brought in a reporter yelled out “Hey, Willie why do you rob banks?” Willie shot back, “Because, that’s where the money is!” Willie’s interest was definitely getting the money. His interest was different than the communities which was preserving their money.

DIGNITY AND APPRECIATION

I ended the above section with the theme of community. So we strengthen community with preserving the dignity of each person and I would say appreciating the interests of each. This of course becomes tricky. Do we appreciate Willie Sutton’s interest? Well no. But we must believe that he has other interests and that we all have ultimately interest in connection with other human beings. I believe, in the main, the overwhelming majority of cases of aberrant pathological behavior are consequence of the frustration of the primary human interest in other humans. Pathological behavior, i.e. humiliation is consequence of frustrated interest.

ON RELATIVITY

Some time ago in my study of medical ethics as a physician I came across a theory that tried to “ground” ethics in the physiology of medicine. I forgot now the name that was given to the theory. It is no secret that ethics or in short the study of “what one *should* do” and all of philosophy has been famously in a state of “relativity”. Morals have been said to be very much subject to context. Is there, that is, anything that can bind us together and give us any common ground?



Since coming upon this study of shame and humiliation I have revisited my thoughts on medical ethics and have thought much about man's commonality of body.

I have already, here, tried to hint at and pique interest in the thought that “interest” and “shame” have their origins in physiology. If so, then they are common to all human kind. If common to all human kind they are not relative.

Lindner's humiliation model is, I take it, obviously meant to be universal. Humiliation is a universal phenomenon. What is not universal are cognitions of shame or what constitutes humiliation in various cultures such as the example of the Japanese stewardess taking her life due to her passengers dying due to food poisoning. Something say, that an American stewardess would never think of doing.

That said we are trying to “go behind” cognitions and the relativity of various cultures to what? To what may I ask? To some communality, to, again, a commonality of the experience of “humiliation” and I say that that is grounded ultimately in a physiological feeling of shame and that the act of “humiliation” is that generic act that causes that feeling. Each culture will fill in the blanks. What binds us is the AH HA moment of understanding that we from different cultures

can understand that we understand that we both understand that we feel that same feeling, a feeling that so rarely has been articulated. This is the first step. It is recognition of a physical and psychological feeling (and physiological feeling is ultimately physical). It is the basis for and the grounding for the harder step of understanding the complexities of what we or any culture might consider the bizarre cultural contexts that caused the cognitions that caused the physical feelings.

Things start to become not so relative because pain is pain is pain and there is now a basis of empathy and a commonality. [Linda M. Hartling](#) and [Pain as Physical](#)



One segway to this was when Hartling spoke of an article that has been known to me that described an experiment in which subjects were placed in a functional MRI and taught a “virtual” game in which they played “catch” with two virtual players. At first they were included in the game but slowly they were left out.

I remember the news account that I read was entitled something similar to “Like Being Kicked In The Gut”. The idea being that this age old saying has basis in fact. The study showed that the same brain area that lights up when a patient has visceral (gut) pain lights up when they feel the emotional pain of being left out of a game.

Earlier in the fall of this year I had attended a conference on pain management and heard of a similar MRI study but this one had to do with patients in pain that then were distracted by getting their “interest”. This caused their pain to decrease. I have tried to reach the speaker to get the reference but so far have been unable but he seemed to have been talking about the same area of the brain.

So again, we are beginning to have some physical basis, or “grounding” or “substrate” for our common human experience of humiliation.

I say therefore that it is a place to start when we as therapist or physicians or mediators are confronted with multicultural and cross cultural dilemmas.

First of all I argue that there is a something illogical to start with to say that each cultural is sacrosanct within itself and is to be respected at all cost under the umbrella or “moral relativisms” when the very act of contacting another cultural and opening a dialogue seems to me to admit to other realities. So in the case of someone asking someone’s advice from outside of their culture in terms of say honor killings, either my world is just as relative as theirs and I have nothing to offer or I have something that I consider grounded and not relative to offer that breeches the gap. I say that we should not sell ourselves short and exactly what we are offering is the common experience of shame-humiliation (NB I am not claiming here that I am very clear on anyone’s else’s stance on this “relativism” theme, I only know that it came up and I am stating my opinion here.) and in so having we have something very unique and powerful. We have in fact the one thing that I think can be a unifying key to what divides cultures and heal most destructive forces within cultures.

And I am offering from the other side of the coin, shame/pain/humiliation being one side, the concept of “interest” and as a variation of that “hope”. As I quoted at the conference the director of the film “The House Of Sand And Fog”, “The film “ exposes the unsettling truth that sometimes it is our hopes, rather than our hatreds, that divide us.”

FORGIVINESS

With trepidation I would speak for all and say that I think it was quite moving to hear Anie Kalayjian speak of the Armenian experience and have the conference come together after two days on the theme of forgiveness. Of course the French are credited with the phrase “to understand is to forgive”? This phrase over these nine

years that have been so important to me has been such an important refrain. It has because it has seemed that interest-shame-humiliation has explained the human animal in it's entirety to me. It has made Seneca's refrain "Nothing that is human is foreign" real. It seems to me without a full understanding of interest-shame-humiliation no one can really truly appreciate Seneca's refrain and then you spend the rest of your life appreciating the complexities of the interaction of those words. And so the complexities of what it is to forgive.



It was eloquently stated how it seems awkward or absurd how the most personal of things can be humiliating, as mentioned already, and the largest of atrocities are connected vis-a-vi this one word "humiliation". But they are. So no one has to make apologies for not having suffered through a great war or atrocity. This is one gift being a therapist has taught me. People in general live horrible often barely bearable lives in their own private universes. The link, of course, is the human brain. We are biological entities with one and only one affective limbic system that will be affected by a tyrannical parent and or genetics or by a year or ten in a concentration camp.

INNOCULATION THROUGH SPREDING THE WORD

In recognition of our shared medical paradigm I offer the analogy of inoculation to the world wide reach of Dr. Lindner's words.

When an inoculation campaign is undertaken it is now well known that it is not necessary to inoculate an entire population. There is what might be said a definite "tipping point" or threshold that is reached when a disease will no longer spread.

This was just recently demonstrated locally to me when in Indiana a young women traveled abroad without being vaccinated for measles. Upon returning she came down with the measles. Subsequently about ten other children became ill. An epidemic was averted due to a high rate of vaccination, contrast this to the early nineties in Chicago. I remember well as I was working in Emergency Medicine and there was a moderate epidemic and it could be traced directly to a recent down turn in vaccinations.

So we think of Dr. Lindner's or our own work it might be easy to be discouraged but when we think of it in this way of creating "clusters" of vaccinated groups of people around the world it might not be so discouraging. What do you think?

INVITATION TO COME DOWN AND NOT BRING DOWN



In the Lindner theoretical model and Mandel's lived model the essential concept would seem to be "dignity" of all. As is clear the South African experience could have been much different. A Massacre could have ensued. It did not.

At the conference there was a poignant moment, an important moment in day two of clarification of what is meant when we mean when we invite those in power down. Lindner takes pains to be clear that this does not mean that all people are equal in all ways and she uses the simple and excellent example of an airline pilot. We do not expect that under our new world of common appreciation and dignity that the pilot will ask our advice on how to fly that plane or tolerate much our interference. We on the other hand enter into a social contract and expect the same from him or her. We are his or her charges and have inherent dignity.

Confusion about these matters have been very clear to me as a physician over the last twenty years and have played such a great role in my life and career that they have caused me in great part to modify my career in drastic ways.

To explain, first, as we have already noted and as Lindner has brilliantly pointed out in her explication of the parsing of the terms “to humiliate” and “to humble” in the 18th century along with the subsequent argument that this has much to do with the rise of human rights. Well, we note that it is only a short two hundred years from there to the American civil rights movement and then the whole “general rights movement” we have seen. As at least for the American audience we have all suffered through, for good and ill, and are still sorting things out. Certainly the articulation of the concepts of shame and humiliation help us understand our confusing feelings and sometimes guilt about some of these goings on.

As a physician I have been in a position to experience this change in a unique way. Just as many others have that have had perceive or real power. The experience is exactly the type that came up in discussion on day two. Often it has occurred that, especially in lesser facilities, than hospitals or my own office, such as extend care facilities or nursing homes or clinics where I am not the one in charge and the staff is hired by someone else that as each year passes the idea of equality has crept into the consciousness to such a degree to be corrupted to mean that indeed I am equal to you in all things. I have in fact been caused to be fired by a janitor. I have been running groups and simply on various occasions been irrupted by maids. I had a social worker, when I had been give permission to use the office for a group come in and hold a cell phone conversation off in a corner and think noting of it. There are probably many smiles on the faces of many a readers thinking “what he thinks he is special let me tell him something.” No I don’t. So we all have our stories. I have mine. I just know my experiences. I will just say it is I think a special problem for some special professions such as medicine. To be sure doctors need to be more collaborative but that is really a separate issue, we like pilots do indeed need often to

be captain of the ship. And the complexities of our personalities and the harm we can do is legend which also in a separate issue, I believe.

It is for sure a common societal phenomenon that we are all suffering, this confusion of what I call a confusion of rights vs say, an understanding of “self worth”.

It permeates everything. In business relations, as an entrepreneur it is well nigh impossible to hear someone with them not immediately turning the situation around and making you feel as if you are working for them. This is certainly a danger of outsourcing. For in a way you are working for them or at minimum you have now have a contractual relationship that is fraught with opportunities for shame and humiliation on their part. And of course we being Mr. and Mrs. nice guys we are at their mercy. I have found that I have virtually been put out of business a number of times over the last few years outsourcing my billing no longer being able to sustain in house employees. None of it making much sense on the surface so we learn so much of life we think is about “money” ends up being about well, about shame and humiliation and restaging trauma and such things, it turns out to be about power.

So we are evolving. We got to a point of delimiting humiliation from humbling then defining rights and duties. Now we must move on to seeing acts of humiliation as never being instructive in themselves. If they have been seen as such in the past and even have been seen and deemed useful I claim they have only been so in the short term. The true test of humanity will be if we can grow into finding ways to break through what I see a threshold to a “another” side where we see that a world of mutual interest works a lot better.

Language is interesting is it not? It is interesting that the it is part much as the founding fathers wrote it. All men are created equal with these “*certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*”. Now of course we know that this was not the case at all, for in practice for even the man that penned it but we then we ultimately do not know what was in his soul. And we are arguing

that these words could not have been penned without the common consciousness having been changed by the evolution of the language a few years before. That is just as the artist is way out in front of the crowd so is language. We express in our documents our common, again, hopes and interests, long before they can ever be realized. It is hard to truly have a life. It is hard to have any kind of real liberty and it certainly hard to pursue our own interest and thus achieve any modicum of happiness if we are subject to any form of humiliation especial that is imposed by others. There is plenty of humiliation that we run into that we cause ourselves and that “just happens” we don’t need any extra.

A NEW YORK EPILOUGE

Having not been in New York for a number of years I stayed after the conference for a couple of days. Anyone who knows any locale knows it as a place of many joys and sorrows and thus as a place of pride and shame and so, interest and humiliation. So I “did” Manhattan in much a conventional way given the little time I had and nothing here said will be much remarkable.

That said New York can only be said to hold a special place in our mind concurrent with the onset of the millennia and Evelin’s work on humiliation. Working my way down to the lower Island and “the site” and beyond it was the final juxtaposition given the themes touched upon, of “ground zero” against Ellis Island that I will mostly speak. This small pilgrimage seemed most appropriate after the two days as listening to the testimonials of the immigrants at the island, what rang through all of them was that they were escaping humiliation. Such humiliation that they would in turn, many of them, suicide rather than be forced to return after suffering the humiliation of being rejected by our immigration as we only wanted those “able” bodierd. Yet it was progress. In general a 24 hour cattle chute of a processing and then you were “free” to go to Kansas or Hoboken. Romantic? Hardly.

Somehow things had changed. On this very real estate just a few miles up land but



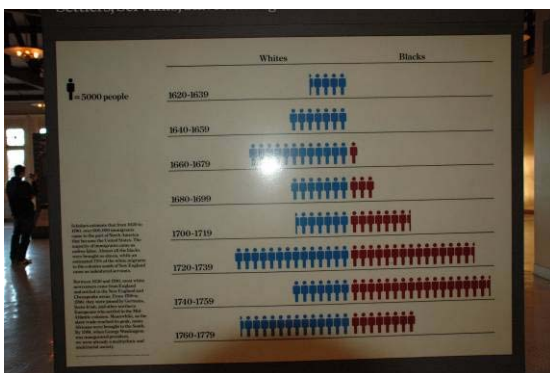
for some fog and lady luck things would have been different. Washington escaped by the skin of his teeth and lived to fight another day. And again comes this idea of of human rights. The right not to be humiliated. Essentially the colonist felt humiliated when they where

taxed without their consent. Each forefather stood their ground and would have hanged for that but for a number of events that now are just fact. But the story turns a bit sour doesn't it?

All those immigrants and now a little over two hundred years and we turn out to be pretty human. The city on the hill has a lot of flaws, it did then too.

Note a remarkable exhibit at Ellis Island.:

Note the blue- non black or “white” immigration for the period noted and the red for “black” immigration for the period noted. So exactly during the period when the language of humiliation starts to change we are at the height of sowing the seeds for our greatest humiliation that is still with us, racism and for the Civil War. The first of the longest red lines is..... and the second represents the years



So we evolve slowly. We fight “a great civil war” and humiliate ourselves. We humiliate our neighbor Mexico over and over in ways we seemingly will never come close to be able to accept.

Then we come out of WW II and have been slowly emerging due to dry runs from the civil war and WWI as a dominate

technological force and economic force. Here I am not arguing one way or another for theories of war as economic boon as I have been convinced that war may certainly not be a strong economic stimulus. In so doing we come a great symbol of “The West” and for so many reasons that are obviously too complicated to go into here we become mostly an unbeknownst and therefore “inadvertent” cause of humiliation for the Muslim Arab world and thus I passed on my way to Ellis Island ground Zero a few steps from the ferry landing.

And once again as Tom Friedman of the Times says recognizing the concept of humiliation is the great missed opportunity in the foreign policy of the Middle East.



Finally, one certainly always errs in not stopping at the Metropolitan, an almost immediate link was made when I happened on the Impressionists. I had been moved by the presentation the second day on gender and at that time had immediately thought of a Renoir of the mid 18th century of a bourgeois family in which is depicted a mother and two children. It first seems that the two children are young females but it turns out that one is and one is not. One learns that it young males to about the age of ten as females. So it is not necessary to look too far for complexities in gender. In any event it was a bit of a shock to find it there all these years hence

from where I found it as a young college kid having just thought of it the day before.
Until next year.



Bibliography with notes

Listed are some of the works that I feel brought me to the above thoughts and to have come to attend the conference?

Immediately:

Lindner: On Humiliation in a Globalizing World and other works

Nathanson, Donald I. (1992) Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex and The Birth of Self, New York: W. W. Norton and Company (This work has to be counted seminal in my life has it introduced me to that idea of innate affect that has framed and grounded the last ten years of my life. And it introduced to the work of Silvan Tomkins.)

**Tomkins, S. Silvan Affect Imagery and Consciousness Volumes 1-3 New York:
Springer (Tomkins speaks quite extensively on humiliation)**

Human Dignity and Humiliation Web Site

Brianlynchmd.com

Tomkins.org

1Schizophrenics I have come to believe along with Tomkins and others that much of schizophrenia has to do with severe consequences of humiliation and or terror states this is not discounting whatever genetic predisposition there maybe etc. (For those who would like a reminder of the conventional thinking on what defines schizophrenia see for example :

<http://www.nym.org/healthinfo/docs/047/doc47.html>

2How's that for a shameless plug for a book?! Lynch, Brian (2005) "How To Get Where You Want To Go": Knowing Your Emotions And How To Use Them PageFree.

All photography by Brian Lynch all rights reserved.