

# Humiliation

## A New Basis for Understanding, Preventing, and Defusing Conflict and Violence in the World and Our Lives

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### Foreword by Morton Deutsch

I first met Dr. Evelin Lindner in December 2001 when she was the speaker at a Colloquium of the Peace Education Program at Teachers College, Columbia University. I was attracted to attend the Colloquium by the title of her talk, "Humiliation and the Roots of Violence." At her talk, I was impressed by the importance and originality of her ideas. She showed how humiliation – a profound emotion which, unfortunately, has been little studied by psychologists – has often played a critical role in leading to destructive international and interpersonal conflicts. Her talk was illustrated by fascinating examples drawn from her rich and varied international experiences in such countries as Rwanda, Somalia, Egypt, Germany, and the United States.

As a result of her talk, she was invited to teach a Workshop course on the psychology of humiliation in the Program on Conflict Resolution at Teachers College during the summer sessions of 2002 and 2003. Her course was extremely well-received by the students and faculty in the Program. During the summer of 2002, I read many of Dr. Lindner's papers and had an opportunity to talk with her about her work. I was very much impressed and urged her to write a book which would present her ideas to a wider social science audience as well as to policy makers and the intelligent lay public. During the period from the Fall of 2002 through the Spring of 2003, she wrote the book despite a very painful illness.

This book is a very valuable and original contribution to understanding how the experience of humiliation can lead to destructive interaction at the interpersonal and international levels. She aptly describes humiliation as the "nuclear bomb of emotions." It has profound and devastating effects. It shakes the foundation of one's identity by devaluing one's worth and by undermining one's inherent human right to care and justice.

Dr. Lindner develops, with great insight, the important idea that humiliation has emerged only recently as an increasingly powerful and pervasive experience in human affairs. She attributes this emergence to two phenomena: *egalization* and *globalization*. Egalization refers to the development of the political ideal of equal dignity, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was reflected in the American and French revolution of 1776 and 1787. Globalization refers to the increasing interdependence and interconnectedness of the peoples throughout the world. Thus a woman in Afghanistan who has previously accepted that her husband has the natural right to beat her if she disobeys him begins to feel humiliated when she learns (through her exposure to television) that, in other parts of

the global village, women are viewed as equal to men and husbands are imprisoned for beating their wives.

Dr. Lindner is a very thoughtful woman who has read widely and deeply in the social sciences. She has also had a rich, varied experience in many countries as a researcher doing interviews, as a psychotherapist and counselor working with clients, and as a global citizen immersing herself in and embracing diverse local cultures. As a result, this book is of unique value. It is well-grounded in the relevant social science literature and its ideas are richly illustrated with interesting case studies and interviews. In addition to its main ideas, throughout the book there are many thoughtful comments and useful psychological suggestions which reflect her wisdom and professional experience. Finally, her passionate commitment, as a global citizen, to helping our world become a global village in which all of its inhabitants can live with human dignity permeates the book and leads her to devote a major section of the book to what can be done about humiliation. Here, she addresses what a victim can do, what the United States can do, what the UN can do, and what the reader can do.

The book should be of interest to a wide audience. Psychologists and other social scientists will find new ideas to enrich their understanding of how humiliation contributes to destructive conflict and violence at the international as well as interpersonal levels. Policy makers will not only be exposed to these new ideas but also to their policy implications. And, beyond the foregoing, all readers – whether they have a professional interest or not – will find much of value to their personal lives.

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