Evelin Lindner, Ph.D. Public Conversation on Professional, Cultural, and Personal Topics with Michael H. Prosser, Ph.D., July 17, 2012 [Post 566]

Michael.H.Prosser A founder of the academic field of intercultural communication
http://www.michaelprosser.com/2012/07/evelin-lindner-ph-d-public-conversation-on-professional-cultural-and-personal-topics-with-michael-h-prosser-ph-d-july-17-2012-post-566/

Biography of Evelin Lindner

   Evelin Lindner is a transdisciplinary social scientist and humanist. She draws on a wide range of fields, from neuroscience to political science and philosophy. She holds two Ph.D.s, one in medicine and the other in psychology. She is the Founding President of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies, a global network of academics and practitioners (HumanDHS) and principal initiator of the World Dignity University initiative. Lindner lives and teaches globally, affiliated, among others, with the University of m

 I.1.   You were born in the United States, dear Michael. For many years, you have lived and taught in China, among others [Canada and Swaziland]. You are a bridge builder between people from different cultural realms. When you look at your biography, at your family background, for example, what do you see as reason or backdrop for your life path?

"I am neither a citizen of Athens, nor of Greece, but of the world." Socrates

   As an adopted child, my adopted parents were of lower middle class background and adopted me when they were both 44 years old. My father jumped out of the school window in the seventh grade, and that was the end of his formal education. I do not remember him ever reading a book, and his newspaper reading was probably limited to the front page, sports page, and comics. However, he became a foreman in dye production at General Motors in Muncie, Indiana. His final annual salary was $9,000 in 1 956. His view was that he had never lost anything in Europe, and therefore he had no need to go there to find it. Still, he encouraged me when I decided that I wanted to go to seminary to study for the Catholic priesthood, and later when I was a student in Ball State University and when I wanted to travel overseas. A heavy smoker, he died of multiple myloma when he was 64, and I was 21 (54 years ago).

   My Irish mother had two years of college, but living in southern Indiana, the Klu Klux Klan prevented her from teaching because she was a Catholic. When I was going to be 14, she wanted to take me on a Holy Year pilgrimage to the Lourdes shrine (in France, which I later visited when I was 22), to the Fatima shrine in Portugal, and to the Vatican in Rome (which I have visited three times, first when I was 22). For some reason, this trip never developed. However, being a student in St. Meinrad Archabbey in southern Indiana (founded by Swiss Benedictine monks), a number of the older seminarians were being sent to study in Rome or Innsbruck, Austria, and this no doubt stimulated my interest in traveling to Europe. As a seminarian, I also had courses in Greek, Latin, and French which may have added extra interest in European culture.

   Later, in college, I was a member of the international club, and I made the decision to go for two months to Europe after I graduated from college, earning $1,000 for the trip from Montreal to Liverpool by a student ship, hitchhiking, and staying in youth hostels in 12 European countries, attending an international student conference in Bavaria, and returning by plane from Frankfort. The next summer, I spent five weeks in Europe, including participation in an international youth hostel conference in Germany, visiting the four Scandinavian capitals, and going with a group youth tour to Leningrad and Moscow. Over my life, I have now visited the Soviet Union/Russia four more

times. In 1968 (for conferences in Oxford and Heidelberg) and again in 1975 (for a course on British media in London), I took my three children to Europe. In 1977, I attended a conference in Berlin, and traveled to Poland, Hungary, Czechloslovakia, and East Germany. Thus I was very Europeanized, both in my study and travel.

   In 1974, I attended a bicultural Japanese/American communication conference in the resort town of Nihonmatsu, my first of four visits to Japan as well with travel to Mexico and Haiti. In 1980, I gave lectures in South Korea and Singapore, and in 1981 I participated in a faculty study tour in Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and its occupied territories. In 1983 and 1986 I returned to Europe for conferences in Italy, Sweden, and the Netherlands. In 1982, my children and I became the host family for an exchange student from Sweden, later for a student each from Belgium, France, Spain, Brazil, and South Africa and a young refugee from El Salvador. In 1990-91, I was a Fulbright Professor in Swaziland, becoming Africanized and bringing home two young Swazis for more study. While living in Rochester, New York , I was the host for several young adult male refugees from Sudan.

   I retired from the University of Virginia and the Rochester Institute of Technology in 2001, and then began teaching in Chinese universities (Yangzhou University, 2001-02; Beijing Language and Culture University, 2002-05; Shanghai International Studies University, 2005-09; and Ocean University of China in the spring of 2011).Ten of my edited or authored books have been published in the US and three of my recent coedited or coauthored five books have been published in China, with the other two in press there. I have now traveled in a number of Asian and Pacific countries ,twice more in Europe, and more recently in Latin and Central America. In the autumn of 2011, I was the academic coordinator for the lifelong learners on the University of Virginia/Institute for Shipboard Education around the world three and a half month study tour, with 450 students, faculty, staff, dependents, and 187 crew members. Thus over time, I became more and more multicultural, not only in my travel experiences, but also in my teaching and research. Now, I can say that having traveled in 69 countries, and teaching in Canada, China, Swaziland, and the US for more than 50 years, I am pleased that my life has become so intercultural and multicultural, giving me the hope that I can echo Socrates's quote over time.

 I.2.   Although, you are born in the United States, for many years, you have lived and taught in China. How did this path evolve in your life, chronologically?

   Going to China in 2001, I thought that it might be interesting to be a sojourner for a year rather than as a settler as Professor Steve Kulich and his family are in Shanghai after more than 20 years (his wife is a German medical doctor and his two daughters speak fluent English, Chinese, French, and German, both of whom are now in German universities). However, in October 2001, I got invited to teach the next year at the Beijing Language and Culture University, which turned into 3 years. In my last year there, I was invited to join the faculty at Shanghai International Studies University where Kulich was initiating and building a master's program in intercultural communication, currently the largest such graduate program in the world, with more than 180 MA degrees awarded since he began the program in 2002. I began to serve as the senior coeditor for Kulich's intercultural series of books. Finally, Li Mengyu, the coauthor of our intercultural communication text book for Chinese students, Communicating Interculturally (2012, Beijing: Higher Education Press), invited me to come to teach at Ocean University of China (in Qingdao, along the Yellow Sea) in the spring of 2011, and while I was there, I was invited to be a faculty member on the Semester at Sea program for autumn, 2011. Certainlly, the period from 2001 to 2012 have been among the most interesting professionally and as an intercultural communication learner

and teacher. Toward the end of my teaching in China, some of my students started calling me a "ChiAmerican."

I.3.   Given your global experience, what is your definition of culture and culture difference? How do you use terms such as cross-cultural, trans-cultural, inter-cultural, and so forth? What are your views on terms such as assimilation or integration?

There are so many definitions of culture, perhaps 200, but from my view we are passing vertically downward and horizontally outward our customs, beliefs, attitudes, values, and language patterns. Bertrand Russell once said that culture is a memory chain backwards and forward. Clifford Geertz identified that culture creates humans and humans create culture. Edward T. Hall argued that communication is culture and culture is communication. Kenneth Burke suggested that as humans we are symbol makers, symbol users, symbol abusers, and the creators of the negative and that while language is the soul of culture, the metaphor is the soul of language.

Edward C. Stewart posited that the chief reason for studying intercultural communication is to understand and overcome differences, rather than celebrating similarities, for if we are all similar, why study this topic. On the other hand, in my book, The Cultural Dialogue I felt that we create positive similarities by our effective cultural dialogues. Toward the end of the 1970s, Molefi Kete Asante, Eileen Newmark, and Cecil Blake proposed that at that time there were two major trends— cultural dialogue as represented by me and others, and cultural critiques, represented by Stewart and others. More recently, a major concept in intercultural communication has been the notion of identify. For example, at the Hangzhou China multicultural discourses conference which you and I attended, Molefi astonished the audience for calling for Afrocentrism rather than Eurocentrism, and some Chinese attendees challenged that concept by calling for an Asiancentric perspective. Basically, we are discussing the absolute notions of truth proposed by the west, versus the relative notion of truth expounded by the East (Asia, Africa, and Middle East). What has happened over the years is that we have agreed that those of us promoting cultural dialogue stress becoming multiculturalists, or even world citizens, while those promoting cultural diversity, seek to establish specific cultural identities. Transcultural communication crosses many cultural boundaries, and often relates to international communication, or even global communication.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, we began to define a number of terms, such as intercultural communication being interpersonal communication between people of two different cultures, whether within a society or internationally. We offered the idea that cross-cultural communication crosses cultural and societal boundaries in a comparative or contrastive perspective. Your idea of an interhuman communication is a very good one, perhaps moving forward from such ideas as my edited 1973 book, Intercommunication among Nations and Peoples. The academic field of intercultural communication has matured a great deal since our early musings, and now there are many testable hypotheses on a wide range of subjects, including international relations. L. Robert Kohl proposed that intercultural communication might better have been called intercultural relations, but that the anthropologists, sociologists, and international relations experts didn't take the early lead in creating this highly interdisciplinary study (often because they were fighting over their own disciplinary domains), leaving it to the early leaders from the rhetoric and communication studies fields to create what is now a very widely studied field in many different countries and more calls for practical intercultural communication competence experiences. Li Mengyu's and my recently published intercultural communication text book for Chinese university students, Communicating Interculturally, continues my own academic approach to intercultural communication through dialogue, with each chapter and the epilogue have imaginary dialogues with a group of imaginary Chinese students, and imaginary Chinese professor, and me before the

beginning of each chapter, an idea intended to bring the chapter concepts into their own reality as young Chinese.

 I.Given your global experience, what are your views on identity, for example, national identity? Would you say that you have a national identity? What are your views on global citizenship, World Federalism, World Government, and so forth? See, see information on this chapterin one of my books on www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin02.php. Your views would be most welcome!

    When I was heavily involved in the late 1990s in Rochester , New York with the South Sudan refugee community, having several of them living in my home, and welcoming many of the "Lost Boys" to our community in 2001, before I went to teach in China, a lot of the South Sudan community called me "the father of the Rochester South Sudan Community," or "a white African." As many people in the Rochester church communities provided many material items for them to get resettled, some commented that I provided them an expanded education, as I would get them books that they requested on American culture, business, and economics, so that while others were helping them physically, I was helping them mentally. As I noted above, some of my most recent Chinese students in Shanghai began calling me a "ChiAmerican," partially Chinacentric and still Americancentric. In neither case did I lose my American national identity, but I did make efforts to related in a positive way to their own national identities. One of the young South Sudanese who lived with me was the first in their community to graduate from university, and the third to receive an American citizenship. Now, however, since the creation of South Sudan, he has returned there to assist in building that country from the start.

    So what happens perhaps in such situations is that we maintain our own cultural practices, while adapting to the reasonable cultural practices of the new setting. Perhaps, in this case, we end up being dual or multicultural beings. For you, you call yourself a global ambassador or "intercultural voyager" (some would call you a "global nomad"). In both of our cases we are seeking with Socrates, "I am neither a citizen of Athens, nor of Greece, but of the world." It certainly is our joint goal to become global citizens, and in my teaching in China in the period 2001-2011, I specifically encouraged them to seek also to become global citizens.

    In terms of world federalism and world government, we note that it is not an easy development, since in the immediate past, the European Union is having serious problems in even remaining a Union, because of differences politically and economically. This is where cultural diversity remains a dominant factor. Personally, I have never advocated either world federalism or world government, and no doubt this comes from my own national identity as an American.

    Still, I have been a strong supporter of the United Nations since my graduate study period when I wrote my doctoral dissertation on speeches at the United Nations in 1964, I am a strong supporter of the concept of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; I have been the President in the late 1900s of the Rochester New York United Nations Association; and I have attended a number of NGO conferences at the United Nations in New York. At the same time, I recognize its fundamental weaknesses—with a strong but undemocratic Security Council and a weak but more or less democratic General Assembly ; Its inability to function as needed is evident in many international crises; its failure to fully implement the UN Millennium goals; and even its inability since 1990 to reform the Security Council by increasing its size from 15 nations to 25. The Security Council five permanent members' veto power means that only resolutions that can be agreed upon by the permanent powers without the use of a single veto or watered-down versions without much meaning can pass.

As you quote UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, "the world's single most destructive problem: the biggest crisis, is a lack of global leadership….There are too few citizens with an entirely new vision for the world; a vision that is informed by a sense of global responsibility."

I.5.	Given your global experience, what is your view on unity in diversity and subsidiarity?

There is some unity in diversity through organizations that seek a common goal, typically, however without giving up their individual identities, for example regional economic and political state interests joining together, interreligious activities, and federal and state or provincial cooperation. In the US, our currency has the slogan, "E Pluribus Unum," ("From many, one.") it is a good idea which I always support. Instead of a "melting pot" left over from a 1908 play, we are better called a "Salad bowl," or as the Canadians call themselves "a mosaic of cultures."

To quote you again, you identify that "unity in diversity is layered. The decision to treat everybody as equal in dignity defines unity at the core, while diversity can flourish at a more peripheral level as long as it does not destroy unity."

I must confess that "subsidiarity" is a term that I rarely use and cannot give much attention to here. However, Wikipedia gives two examples of subsidiarity:

1. (Christianity / Roman Catholic Church) (in the Roman Catholic Church) a principle of social doctrine that all social bodies exist for the sake of the individual so that what individuals are able to do, society should not take over, and what small societies can do, larger societies should not take over

2. (Government, Politics & Diplomacy) (in political systems) the principle of devolving decisions to the lowest practical level

I.6.	Given your global experience, and the fact that humanity faces global challenges, what would you suggest as strategies to address these global challenges? What would be the roles of China and the United States, among others, in these strategies?

Your views on this topic are probably far more macroscopic (etic) than mine, and because I am involved with promoting intercultural communication more at the interpersonal, and thus microscopic (emic) level. plus your ongoing research and earlier publications with Praeger International Security Press, you are much more an expert on these global challenges than I. I can say, however, that books emphasizing the "China threat," "Iran threat," and "America threat," while sensational and typically best sellers, really are not helpful to fruitful cross national dialogue. Also the current US national election, making Europe, or China, or Iran political scapegoats also is not useful or productive. Teaching for about ten years in China, with 2300 students, and giving lectures to about 8800 students there, Cambodia, India, Japan, and Russia during that period, there appears to be widespread friendliness for Americans as individuals, while also having strong and profound distrust or American governmental policies. Perhaps this is one difference between positive intercultural communication and aggressive international relations and sensationalization of foreign policies from countries outside of the US for rather shallow, but often effective political gains for one party or the other.

I.7.	What is your view on dignity and humiliation?

My international blog, www.michaelprosser.com has many examples stressing the concepts of dignity, social justice, gender equality, and harmony. With your encouragement, and based

primarily on my blog, Mansoureh Sharifzadeh from Tehram, Iran, my former student , fellow traveler, and long-time one of my best young Chinese friends, Jacky Zhang, and I are now completing a book which is observational/opinion-oriented and attitudinal/academic in nature, Finding Cross-cultural Common Ground. It has both researched academic articles and many short essays as well as book reviews of books on major intercultural, international, and global topics.

Perhaps dignity (respect) is the opposite of prejudice (power plus negative attitudes towards those considered to be inferior). The humiliation, for example, of rape, is a combination of power and the sense that others are inferior and do not deserve the same dignity as those who consider themselves to be superior humans. Dignity is a daily experience that all of us should strive for, and power and prejudice are negative drives which should always be avoided, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights calls for (the dignity, integrity, and social justice both in one's own ingroup, culture, or society, but also for those in outgroups, cultures, or societies.

To quote you again, in your book: Gender, Humiliation. and Global Security, you say, "Global brotherhood and sisterhood, global connectedness, global cooperation, cohesion, mutuality, solidarity and loving care for our human family and its habitat are desperately needed. In Europe, the term 'social cohesion' is preferred, while in Asia, the phrase 'the harmonious society' is more commonly used. Whatever the phrasing, the meaning behind the words is solidarity among all of humankind for the common good."

I.8.   Which research on dignity and humiliation in fields such as political psychology has been most valuable to you?

Paulo Friere's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Gustavo Guterriez's books on liberation theology, and other liberation theology authors, Mark Mathabane's Kaffir Boy, and Archbishop Oscar Romero's books are among those which informed much of my thinking about dignity and social justice in the 1980s and 1990s. Now I have read your own four books, and look forward to the next one on terrorism and humiliation studies. I have recently read Haidt's book, The Righteoous Mind, and have reviewed it for the blog, and also for the forthcoming coedited book, Finding Cross-cultural Common Ground .Typically, I read two to three books a month, in many different areas. A recent novel, Help, was very interesting to me on quite a different level.

I.9.   I know that you have used my notion of global interhuman communication, I would love hearing what are your views on this concept today. I developed this thought, just to remind you. See more information on this paper on www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin02.php.

I strongly support your concept, and hope that readers of the blog will go to your link and learn more for themselves. I believe that your ideas relating to global interhuman communication and the Socratic view of global citizenship are very much like my own views which I have mostly synthesized over many years as an editor, author, teacher, and lecturer. We are clearly on the same page philosophically.

I.Here comes a kind of "side-question": What are your views on the connection between humiliation and terrorism? As you know, I am working on a book with that title, and your views would be most welcome!

This is clearly a case where I am waiting to be a learner from you in your next book. Humiliation, terrorism, and prejudicial power are certainly at the heart of your forthcoming book. We will explore this more when I ask you my own set of questions in our next public conversation. Thanks. Michael

Loving admiration,
from Evelin Lindner

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