

Combined Open Space Session:

“What is Humiliation?” By Keadu M. Gebremariam and

“Humiliation and Suicidal Behaviour” by Latha Nrugham

Introduction to the Topic by the Hosts

Latha: Humiliation diminished our sense of worth, both as we perceive ourselves and as others perceive us. In short, it hurts our inner self, humiliation damages the subtle identity of who we think we are. When this identity is hurt/damaged or perceived to be so, and the person does not have the inner or outer resources to cope with this damage/hurt or live with it, can suicide appear as a practical solution to the inner pain?

Whether intended or not, humiliation can be perceived as the complete loss of social face or apparently irreparable and irreversible damage to it.

If the person is able to keep the humiliation aside and move on, or move on with the humiliation, is suicidal behaviour as likely to happen? However if the person is unable to neither bear the humiliation nor keep it aside, can suicidal behaviour emerge?

Is it the loss or stressful life events per se that makes one consider suicide or is it the perceived humiliation in it and the inability to face it or accept it, within oneself and in relation to others?

When this inner face, which may or may not be the social face one has is lost, does it appear that all is lost? However if one accepts that change is one able to stand the storm, no matter how hard it rages within and outside? Could perceived humiliation and the inability to cope with it or accept it be one of the pathways to suicidal behaviour?

Keadu: What is humiliation? How can we define it?

Is humiliation not / less possible if we have a better self-respect? Self-worth? Self-Esteem?

How do we see ourselves and how are we seen by others?

Can I stop humiliation? Can I just not let it come to me?

Discussion

Carmen shared a personal experience to highlight the difference between an intended and an unintended humiliation. If you recognize that another person's behaviour or saying is not intended to be humiliating, you do not feel humiliated;

Carmen then talked about the 3 selves:

- 1) The self-perception (how you see yourself is influenced by your environment, e.g., you are perceived as a minority by the dominant culture)
- 2) The real self (who you really are, only God, the creator, knows this real self of you)
- 3) The ideal self

Latha: If I do not depend on what others think, can I avoid being humiliated?

Kebadu: Can an insult not be humiliating?

We then talked about unintended humiliation vs. intended humiliation, when people are put down.

Kebadu: there is a difference between a humiliation against the self-worth of a human being and a humiliation due to hierarchy or a something you did.

Carmen: it's important to forgive people who have hurt you. It can take a long time until you can overcome anger and hate but to forgive is essential for moving on. It is also important to forgive yourself for something you have done.

Steve: Forgiveness plays a role in conflict resolution models, too. Key-word "non-adversarial justice". Bringing people together with a mentor to discuss and to solve issues.

Carmen: Police in New Zealand is using racial profiling. → "illusory correlation"

Maori youth reacts to that and start to see police as the opposition/enemy...

Latha: There is something beyond this social face, it's only one of many faces. Even if one of my faces is hurt, I have others!

Latha tells us about two poor children (a boy and a girl, siblings) she met in the streets in India. She invited them for tea and food and started a conversation. While the boy was shy and not looking into her eyes while talking, the girl seemed confident and would even speak up/protest if necessary.

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Although they were siblings, growing up in the same conditions, it was astonishing to see their different attitudes/reactions. This girl had something in her – dignity that her brother had not (yet) obtained.

Kebadu: If we take the following example from the war in Bosnia: a mother being raped in front of her husband and children. Who is humiliated here and for what reasons.

The intention of the rapist is to dehumanize the woman, she is a thing to be used

The husband feels humiliated because of the loss of control, he is unable to protect his family

The mother is humiliated by the rape itself. But the rape also humiliates the whole family.

Latha: This powerlessness, is it always humiliating?

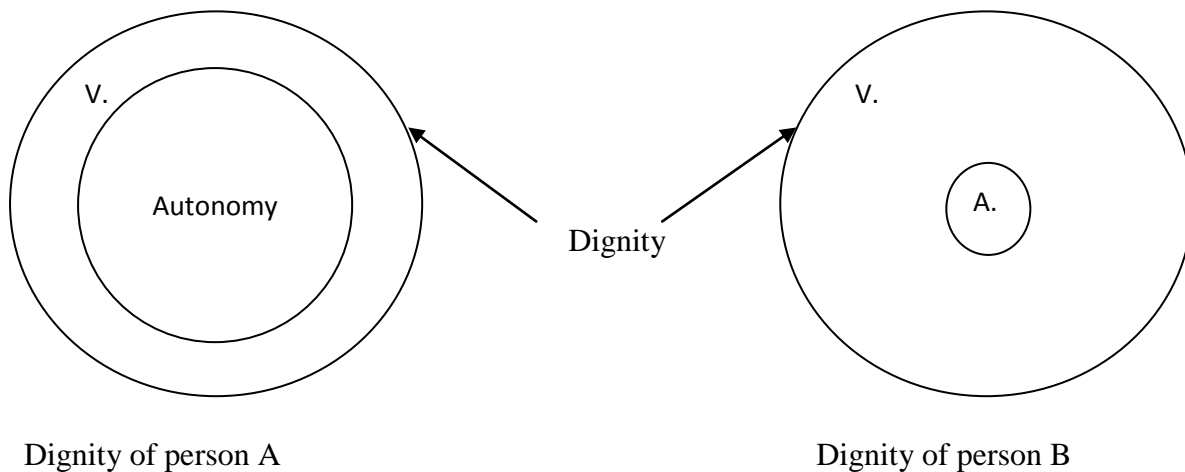
Sigurd: the mother is humiliated and suffers from a deep trauma. Reactions of other people who feel empathy/love for her suffer in a similar way.

Latha: humiliation is not static, it's changing over time, depends on the context

Latha then tells us an ancient story from India about 100 brothers vs. 5 brothers (Pandava)

one of those five brothers lost everything in the game of dice. He first lost his wealth, then all his 5 brothers one by one and finally the 5 brothers' wife. The wife was dragged to the court where she asked "has my husband lost me first or himself?" that question is not answered and people try to take of her saree (clothes) away. She prays / asks for divine help. Whenever someone would try to remove her clothes, a new cloth would come on her. Her dignity is protected. She is brought to the king who sets her free and gives her the lost kingdom and her 5 husband back. She becomes empress and never lets anyone forget about her humiliation. She presents herself in dignity even after humiliation – which is not possible for everyone! She is an ideal of dignity. But even after a long time she is crying for justice. The story shows changing meanings of humiliation.

Hans Morten: in the past, dignity meant status. Then the term evolved (after the French revolution) into "the essence of being human". Dignity is not performed, it's about being human. The dignity of two persons can be seen as two circles of the same size. Both circles consist of an inner circle that stand for autonomy and the outer circle stands for vulnerability. We differ in our resilience! Although both persons hold the same dignity, the size of their vulnerability (V.) and autonomy (A.) can change:



Latha: it also depends if the humiliation comes from the inside or outside and if one accepts that change to one's dignity. (Hans Morten then clarified that dignity cannot change or be lost, it is always there in the same size but the person might have a very little autonomy and high vulnerability – Latha is asking what it is then what we lose inside when being humiliated) and Latha continues with a personal encounter with a man who considered suicide. It was not the loss of his job that was humiliating, but the ultimate consequence thereof which was not having enough money to keep his car/mobility. This mobility and independence was the most important part of his life. His boss did not intend to humiliate him, he was not aware that if he fires him, he would lose the car/mobility and that this could lead to suicide!

Kebadu: when is humiliation justified? A situation might be humiliating, e.g., slavery, but the slave himself might not even feel humiliated!

Sigurd: Humiliation is a personal and private thing. Sigurd shared a personal experience with us in which he learnt how to forgive and dignify another person who had hurt him before. If we understand the reasons of the other person for his hurting behaviour, we can heal. We have to talk with each other, also and especially with the next generation. "this was dignifying, this was humiliating, etc." it needs to travel through generations.

Hans Morten: Dignity is objective, humiliation is subjective.

Hans Morten and Kebadu then disagreed about if dignity can diminish and about the terms self-esteem and self-respect. They agreed that dignity itself does not diminish, but that our

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sense of it can diminish and that dignity and self-respect should not be mixed – they have different meanings.

Dignity can be violated and tramped upon but can't be taken away.

Latha: a lady was gangraped in Pakistan. Instead of taking this shame she chose to do a complaint. When journalists came and told her story, the court accepted her case. She was powerless, had lost her social face but still she had dignity.

Sigurd: you have to be aware of your inner identity, which endures (Latha calls it the core, an enduring entity). Is the loss of honour always humiliating?

Kebadu: what makes us human? We have a capacity for rationality and for freedom.

Hans Morten: capacity has conditions, every human is different.

Hans Morten was talking about the debate that was going on in Norway about the Roma people. Within the EEA you can move freely and stay up to 6 months in a foreign country. Although Roma have been living in Norway for over 500 years they were now perceived as a foreign invasion. There are Roma who are not aware of their roots because they were assimilated forcefully.

Latha: during the subjectal experience of humiliation – is there a loss? If yes, what are we losing? Please share your experiences: What did you perceive, what did you lose/feel when you were humiliated?

Mai-Bente: Ibsen says in Doll's House "for men, honour is more important than love"

Kebadu: if humiliation is trampling on self-respect and self-respect is the respect the self gives itself – why / how can we be humiliated by the outside? If we ourselves give the respect to the self.

Michael shared a personal experience with us. He said when he had hope, but it was uncertain and finally denied, he withdrew from trying again. He was ashamed and decided not to be himself.

Mai-Bente: a person who is put down, automatically puts himself down. We keep saying that anger is bad, but sometimes it's good to let this anger out. It's easy to be a victim. It's also important **who** humiliates you. If someone you love puts you down, it's a shock/trauma. And we tend to give others the guilt for our own trouble.

Latha: I was exactly thinking in the pattern that Michael described in his experience

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- 1) We have hope
- 2) We realize that it's hopeless
- 3) The actual disappointment
- 4) Accepting the disappointment
- 5) Withdrawing
- 6) Not trying again

Michael: if you have experienced/learnt that anger and protest is heard / fruitful, then you don't withdraw. How your reaction is perceived by others influences you and your reaction.
→ Suicide vs. homicide

Latha: How can we help to form that sense of someone's worth? When anger towards others (homicide) is not possible, when does it turn towards oneself (suicide)?

Kebadu: Is humiliation a reason to act in a different way? Does it justify the act?

We then talked about Breivik's terror attack in Oslo and killings on Utøya, that he might have been humiliated throughout his life. But this humiliation does not justify his deeds. Mai-Bente: That's also what the court decided: that he is responsible for the murders.

The evil deeds (e.g., of Breivik) and the good deeds (e.g. of Ghandi) stand regardless of how the actor was humiliated.

Humiliation leads to a range of different reactions: a desire to change society, resignation, aggression etc.

Latha shared a story of an Indian street child with us. This boy she was working with for some time, came one day with a burnt lip. She kept asking him what happened, but he said it didn't matter because it is over, it's past. Finally he admitted that someone had pressed a cigarette on his lip because he was not willing to take part in a homosexual act. But again he emphasized that this was past. For him, it was gone. This ability or protective behaviour to leave things behind where they happened is unique in people living in the streets. If they carried everything with them, they would not be able to live this hard life. So there is a choice, to leave it behind, to get angry or react in any other way.