**HUMILIATION AND THE POOR:**
**A STUDY OF THE MANAGEMENT OF MEANING**

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by

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Abstract

Humiliation is pervasive among poor and homeless people. Previous studies have defined humiliation as the perception of being derogated or demeaned, which results in feelings of lowered self-worth or self-esteem. Studies have also shown that people make sense of their experiences by telling stories.

Here I explore the process by which this sense-making is accomplished . The study consists of 10 two-part semi-structured interviews with respondents who are living in poverty. The ways they manage the meaning of humiliating encounters are understood as stories about these events, co-constructed and heard in the broader context of dramatic life narratives, responsibility, responses, and unlived stories. The narratives reveal that causation is attributed to self and other specific individuals, general agencies and groups, and systemic causes. Responses to humiliation include anger, depression, and isolation. Patterns of behavior that can be described as strange loops reveal the cyclic nature of life events that result in feelings of humiliation. Broader life narratives depict the role humiliation plays as individuals in poverty seek to retain feelings of self-worth and move toward positive life goals.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

Amy, the young woman sitting across from me, is neatly dressed in the uniform of a waitress. She explains that after working for only 2 months she has been asked by her supervisor to train a new employee. She expresses pride in being entrusted with this responsibility and confidence that soon her income will allow her to move into a permanent home with her four children. She believes that in the near future she will be able to provide adequately for herself and her family.

Her current story of success and hope is part of a larger narrative that describes abandonment, homelessness, and the humiliation of living on the streets. It is a story that roller-coasters through the past 2 years, bottoming out in shelters and soup kitchens before ascending, now, to the possibility of a viable future.

Along with our work and our solitary activities, the relationships we engage in define our lives, and our description of the encounters we participate in contributes to how we determine the meaning of our experiences. Some encounters with others are especially problematic in that we come away from them feeling demeaned and degraded. These are the experiences we call “humiliating.”

Humiliation, the sense of being put “close to the ground” (Ayto, 1990, p. 289) in an interpersonal situation, is frequently alluded to in classical and contemporary literature. It has been recognized as an emotional experience since it was depicted in the biblical record of Genesis. God rejects Cain’s offering in favor of Abel’s (Genesis, 1996). In

response, Cain's countenance falls "to the ground" and he becomes angry (Von Rad, 1961, pp. 100-101).

In the Book of 2 Samuel, Tamar, David's daughter, experiences the equivalence of humiliation when she is raped by her stepbrother Amnon and he sends her away in disgrace. "Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went . . . And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman"(2 Samuel, 1995, p. 266).

Shakespeare's Mulvalio grasps humiliation's meaning in *Twelfth Night* (Harrison, 1952, pp. 845ff), as does Lord Jim in *Lord Jim* (Conrad, 1949), Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 1998), and Jim, the runaway slave, in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1996).

This study examines how co-constructed narrative reflects some of the ways people manage the meaning of humiliation. Part of the impetus for it grows out of the broad public dialog that followed the killings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in 1999. A popular theory advanced in the press at that time postulated that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the perpetrators of the violence, had been subjected to such bullying and humiliation by their peers that they committed murder (Center, 2002). This supposition, along with the recent passage of numerous anti-bullying laws around the country targeting behavior in public schools (CBS/AP, 2004), led me to wonder how people experience humiliation and whether violence is a common response to it. Moreover, if humiliation is fairly commonplace in our society, and most people who are

humiliated do not succumb to violent behavior, how do they deal with it? My initial intention, then, was to understand whether people experience humiliation, and if so how they manage the meaning of those experiences. My focus was sharpened as I began to explore the literature on humiliation, poverty, and narrative.

This study is important because humiliation is problematic. It was revealed that United States troops during the aftermath of the 2003 Iraqi occupation humiliated prisoners of war, causing individual pain, criminal proceedings, and an international outcry (New York Times, 2004). People who are humiliated believe that others, by acting in certain ways, have diminished them as persons. The result is a feeling of powerlessness, the sense of having been deceived, used, degraded, or rejected. They see themselves as having been objectified, often with malice. The way that they manage the meaning of humiliating episodes helps determine who they are and will become as persons. If people who have been humiliated cannot successfully accomplish the task of constructing new meaning about degrading episodes, or of placing those episodes in a more positive context, they risk perpetually defining themselves as persons without worth or value.

When a conversation or interpersonal encounter takes on the tone of humiliation, it connotes abandonment and rejection for the person who feels humiliated. This can lead to an inability to move forward not only in the relationship at hand, but in other relationships as well. Humiliation results in relational collapse, in people being "shut up once more in their separate . . . uncommunicating worlds" (Geertz, 2000, p. 34). When

people are humiliated, they will try to attend to the damage and seek recovery (Hooks, 1989, p. 87). Their success or failure in this enterprise is partly contingent on how they place humiliating episodes in the contexts of their lives.

This study takes a constructionist view of narrative. This view contends that meaning is constructed as people tell themselves and others stories about what is important and what is not. As a result of telling and hearing stories, new meaning is created. The constructionist approach also contends that interpersonal actions have importance only in the context of broader life narratives. An incident out of context has no meaning.

This study addresses an issue, then, that is neglected in the literature; namely, how people contextualize humiliation and derive the meaning of it from this process. Numerous studies have pointed to the importance of narrative in the management of meaning. Narrative provides a way for people to make sense out of human experience, to counter the chaos of life and provide hope for the future. What is missing in these studies is how people arrive at such narrative and the nature of its content. This study explored how the management of meaning of humiliation is accomplished as individuals co-construct narratives in interview settings.

# Chapter Two: Review of Literature

## Humiliation

Little study has been conducted on humiliation per se. Instead humiliation is a phenomenon that has historically been considered with other emotions that include shame, guilt, and embarrassment. Psychological inquiries that have investigated this family of emotions frequently use the terms humiliation and shame interchangeably. Humiliation/shame is what Freud views as a response of inadequacy (Epstein, 1995). It is as though one has experienced the loss of self (Lewis, 1987). Analytic theorists frequently take a cause and effect approach, suggesting that while shame and humiliation are triggered by the words or actions of others, people's reactions come from their efforts to resolve internal psychosexual (Broucek, 1991) or developmental (Erikson, 1963, p. 252) conflict.

These early studies have added to a culturally accepted understanding that humiliation is a degrading experience that is interpersonal in nature. The meaning of humiliation depends on the role one has in the activity. As an act that is done to another, it is the lowering of a person or a group, a process that strips away pride, honor, and dignity. From the recipient's point of view it means being placed in a demeaning situation that is inferior to what one feels one should expect (Lindner, 2002). These perspectives help establish a basis for the cultural understanding of the meaning of the term.

Scheff's extensive work with shame and humiliation incorporates this definition and contributes significantly to my study by showing that degrading experiences, as forms of alienation, must be viewed in a social context. With this in mind I began asking what the nature of the relationships were that the respondents in my study were engaged in, and how these relationships might lay the groundwork for humiliating experiences. Scheff does not explicitly differentiate between shame and humiliation, but groups them together as part of a family of similar emotions. Writing from a family systems perspective, his studies investigate shame in the context of emotions, social bonds, and social structure (Scheff, 1997).

First, Scheff pointed to the need for locating expressions of shame and humiliation in a broad context, one that extends from single words, gestures, and sentences at the micro level to relationships, cultures, and histories at the macro level.

At the micro level, his listing of cues for shame, especially verbal markers, provides a way to identify references to humiliation in a conversation or an interview. Scheff listed several such cues, including "alienated," "confused," "ridiculous," "inadequate," "uncomfortable," and "hurt," along with synonyms for each (see Appendix A).

He pointed out that the meaning of these cues are context related, and their occurrence along with that of other verbal markers such as vagueness, denial, or defensiveness increases the likelihood of identifying shame or humiliation (Scheff, 1997). This is in keeping with the works of Retzinger and Lashbrook. In both of their views,

humiliation is part of a family of emotions that include shame and embarrassment (Retzinger, 1995). Its presence can be identified by language references to abandonment, ridicule, inadequacy, and social discomfort; such feelings often accompany the perception of peer judgment or pressure (Lashbrook, 2000).

Second, Scheff's distinction between types of relationship bonds (secure, isolated, and engulfed) highlights the idea that humiliation is a form of alienation. It is an event in which misunderstanding and rejection occur, and in which social bonds are damaged. His assumption is that in relationships where bonds are not being built, maintained, or repaired, they are being damaged.

This approach encouraged me to look at the verbally expressed feelings of interview respondents and to ask, "Is humiliation expressed?" and "What relationships are these respondents engaged in?" Scheff's study participants are primarily immediate family members, but his studies alerted me to the possibility that all social bonds impact behavior and bring about emotional responses. Social bonds involve relationships not just with immediate family members, but also with service providers, police, and members of the wider culture of which the respondents are a part.

Scheff's understanding of shame/humiliation is that it is the result of rejection, and he is concerned with the conduct that results from it. Part of this conduct focuses on the moral issue of claims of who is right and who is wrong in a given interaction, and how this attribution of responsibility is voiced. He finds that in engulfed relationships, one or both parties overemphasize the claims of the other at the expense of their own claims; in

isolated relationships, one or both parties overemphasize their own claims at the expense of those of the other (Scheff, 1997).

This is significant for my study, which seeks to understand how people manage the meaning of humiliation, and especially how they contextualize humiliating events in narratives. It alerts me to the potential connection between accountability and management of meaning, and invites me to consider whether respondents describe relationships in isolated or engulfed terms, either denying responsibility for their own situation or accepting it, or employing some combination of the two.

While Scheff addressed the matter of shame, he focused almost completely on interfamily dynamics and historical situations. He stressed the importance of cultural perspectives, but his references to these are in the context of literary criticism of historical documents. He did not pursue the implications of humiliation for extra-familial, intercultural groups such as the poor. My research addresses this gap by considering how people in poverty interact not only with family members, but with the wider culture of which they are a part. Humiliation, as Scheff pointed out, may come in the context of any relationship, and so the relationships entered into by the poor, both familial and otherwise, are of interest to me.

Jia (Jia, 2001) adopted a social constructionist perspective in his studies of Chinese face practices with the goal of finding ways of achieving social and cultural transformation in Chinese society. Using circular questioning and appreciative inquiry,

Jia adopted a modified case study approach in his interviews with discussion groups. These groups analyze written accounts of loss of face in Chinese social settings.

The foci of Jia's studies are storied accounts of two individuals who have been culturally positioned in a low social status. One loses face, or is humiliated, when she shows lack of respect for a customer of higher social status and she is publicly criticized for her actions. Another is humiliated when she is prevented from taking part in a public musical competition after another competitor bribes the competition sponsors. Jia asked respective discussion groups to reflect on the cultural meaning and validity of these accounts.

Jia concluded that in China, shame and humiliation are regarded as part of a cluster of cultural concepts that pertain to face. This is a departure from studies that understand shame and humiliation as isolated emotional responses to external events and the immediate actions of others. Jia presented humiliation in the broader context of culture, and stressed that in China humiliation does not have the purely negative connotation that is often ascribed to it in Western culture.

He stated that shame is a socially desirable concept in Chinese culture that signifies, on the one hand, one's failure to meet the moral standards of the community, and on the other one's willingness to conform to such standards in the future (Jia, 2001, p. 32). In his inquiry, the discussion groups conclude that individuals in both case studies seek to restore their sense of face/self esteem by embracing cultural rituals of apology.

Moreover, Jia presented humiliation as part of a grammar of action in the constructionist sense. Following Averill and Scheff, he suggested that emotion is the result of a "series of conscious human endeavors such as discrimination, selection, legislation, regulation by cultural elites, socialization and observation of the rules by ordinary Chinese" (Jia, 2001, p. 28).

Jia's work builds on the studies of Brown and Levinson, which alert us to the idea that in interpersonal social situations, humiliation results when we lose face, and that one's defenses go up when this occurs (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

While Jia's intent was to consider how his interviews affected attitudinal change among discussion group participants and how such an approach might transform broader cultural attitudes and practices, his work raises other significant questions for me.

One is, "How is humiliation connected to power and social positioning in Western culture, particularly with regard to those in poverty? Is it experienced in certain social settings, and if so, how is it expressed by those who experience it?" Another question is, "How do individuals in Western culture respond to humiliation? Do they seek to restore self esteem in ritualistic or other ways?"

Jia's inquiry drew on limited data, but he is confident that the responses by his study group participants are representative of Chinese culture as a whole. His inquiry concluded that humiliation is a definitive part of Chinese culture, and that it serves to maintain social position for its participants.

This brings to the fore the much larger issue of cultural moral imperatives and the impact they have on the responses of individuals in the culture. While the imperatives may be different between East and West, Jia's work prompts the question, "What moral forces are at work in the lives of the poor, and how do those forces help shape their understanding of what humiliation means?"

In the single scholarly book I found with the word "Humiliation" in the title, Miller (1993), in *Humiliation*, took a literary criticism approach to the practices of honor and humiliation expressed in Icelandic and English sagas from the Middle Ages. He related them to current social practices in Western culture. Drawing on the work of Erving Goffman, Georg Simml, and Ron Harré, Miller situated humiliation in the context of a social theory that views it as a means of maintaining boundaries of status and position. Moreover he sought to show how humiliation is socially constructed, growing out of interactions that demand an understanding of social norms and the willingness to adhere to them. For Miller, humiliation takes the form of a sanction when norms are transgressed; it is a way of attributing illegitimacy to those who seek power, position or authority by those who already hold it.

Miller spent considerable time parsing the term humiliation, differentiating it from shame, embarrassment, and guilt. It is Miller's contention that humiliation is an ongoing risk in daily social encounters, and that our common human desire is to avoid humiliation, maintain honor, and protect our sense of self-esteem. His contribution to my study is his conclusion that humiliation is intended to deflate pretension. For Miller, it is

humiliating to be caught attempting to cross social boundaries and trying to attain to a status that is deemed unmerited by others. For me, this supports Jia's findings, pointing out that humiliation can be seen as purposive, not only as a way for one individual to exert control over another, but as a cultural means of enforcing class structure. It encourages me to consider how such enforcement might be expressed in the lives of poor persons living in the midst of a culture of relative plenty.

Miller also differentiated between "the sphere of commonplace humiliation—the comedy of pretension deflation, of unwittingly playing the fool . . . and the horrific domain of brutal and systematic cruelty" (Miller, 1993, p. 165). Miller's categories are rigid, as if there are two separate classes of humiliation with no gray areas in between. He does not clearly define honor and self-esteem, terms he used to postulate the threat posed by humiliation. His description of contemporary culture is the result of reflecting on his own personal experience rather than on extensive social inquiry. Nevertheless, the harmful impact suggested by Miller's description of humiliation in its severe form is of interest to me. It invites me to question how persons in poverty apply the meaning of humiliation to their own experiences, and how these experiences compare in severity to what Miller calls brutal and systematic cruelty.

As Miller described it,

> [Severe humiliation] is not the unmerited claim to a higher social status in the moral and social world that one justifiably merits; rather, the claim of the torturer, the concentration camp guard, the ideologues of ethnic, racial, and religious genocide, is that the humanity of their victims is a pretense. (Miller, 1993, p. 165)

It is this awareness of the potential depths that humiliation can reach that helps shape the question for this dissertation. If humiliation is simply a feeling that attends social faux-pas, a sense of the comedic, then the urgency for managing its meaning would seem greatly reduced. But when humiliation is connected with objectification and the accusation of non-humanity, the question potentially becomes much more relevant.

To be objectified is to be placed in an I-It relationship (Buber, 1958). It is to be treated as a thing instead of an autonomous self. Objectification as a form of humiliation may lead to the collapse of one's interpersonal world, resulting in a kind of vertigo; it is a combination of unexpected exposure, loss of trust, and confusion (Broucek, 1991). The experience of shame and humiliation is directly about the self, leading to a negative self-evaluation (Lewis, 1987). The opposite of self-esteem is a feeling of inadequacy, failure, and being exposed (Shane, 1980, p. 348). From a broader social perspective humiliation comes to the fore when discrimination is present, resulting in economic injustice across broad segments of society, particularly toward the poor (Lukes, 1997).

Humiliation in the sense of Buber's I-It relationship taken to the extreme is potentially a state in which victims experience the suspension of all social norms because they are considered inhuman (Miller, 1993). If this is the case, then the sense of urgency one feels to manage the meaning of humiliation may escalate considerably. Miller did not address the manner in which humiliation is dealt with, but he did emphasize the potential gravity of its impact. Thus the unanswered question that results for me from Miller's

work is, “To what degree is humiliation a serious life event for the poor, and how do they manage the meaning of it?”

Lindner’s extensive work among torture victims and survivors of genocide in Somalia and Rwanda is built on qualitative interviews. In her study she addressed the dynamics of humiliation and their connection with terrorism. She stated that the withdrawal or denial of recognition and respect is understood as humiliation, and it is experienced when the process of subjugation damages or strips away pride, honor, or dignity (Lindner, 2001). Her study took a global perspective and focused on how humiliation might become self-perpetuating in societies where human rights have recently been introduced and persons in power have been overthrown by those seeking power.

Lindner found that humiliation can take many forms, and along with Scheff that feelings of humiliation are among the strongest of human emotions. She recognized at least three cultural contexts in which humiliation is played out: pride cultures, honor cultures, and dignity cultures. She concluded that reactions to humiliation vary according to the cultural setting in which they occur.

Lindner’s goal was to encourage the respondents in her studies to reflect on their understanding of what has taken place in their lives and on its contemporary meaning and significance for them. She concluded that “People react in different ways to being treated in humiliating ways: some just become depressed, some get openly angry, and others hide their anger and plan revenge” (Lindner, 2001, p. 4). This prompts the question for

me, “Aside from torture and survival of genocide, how is humiliation experienced, and how do people react to it?”

Two corollary conclusions from Lindner’s work have a bearing on this study. In her representation, residents of the United States, with the exception of some isolated Southern communities and inner city gangs where honor prevails, would be part of a dignity culture in which human rights are affirmed. In this setting, the economic gap between rich and poor may increase feelings of humiliation among the poor because they feel victimized and objectified by double standards in society. While lip service is given by society to equality, that equality is not conferred on all its citizens (Lukes, 1997). Being objectified humiliates a person, and potentially leads to anger, depression, or violence.

Lindner’s judgment is that “the rich and powerful West has long been blind to the fact that its superiority may have humiliating effects on those who are less privileged, especially during times when the West simultaneously teaches the world the ideals of human rights, ideals that heighten feelings of humiliation” (Lindner, 2001, p. 5). She was speaking about the impact of the West’s attitudes on Middle Eastern countries, but this raises the question, “How do the attitudes and actions of those in power in the West impact the feelings and behaviors of those who are also members of Western culture and are relatively powerless, particularly the poor?” Or to rephrase the question, “Is denial of recognition and respect experienced by the poor in our Western society? Is this interpreted as humiliation? And if so, how is this expressed in their words and actions?”

A second conclusion by Lindner that bears on this study is concerned with the interview process. She is attentive to the possibility that the interview process itself can cause humiliation, and she takes steps to avoid this by building trust and closing psychological distance. For this reason I was intent on approaching the interviews in a way that would build trust with the respondents.

To summarize, social psychological studies acknowledge the occurrence of shame and humiliation in interpersonal relationships and point to linguistic cues as a means of identifying their presence. They do not, however, inquire directly into whether subgroups in Western culture, particularly those in poverty, experience humiliation. Broader cultural studies recognize that humiliation is connected to power and social positioning. It is readily observed in the lives of those who have been tortured. It is experienced as a loss of dignity, but the question of the degree to which those in poverty experience humiliation, how it is experienced, and how this experience might be expressed, is left unanswered.

I draw on the works of Scheff, Jia, Miller and Lindner because they provide a foundation for understanding humiliation as an event that is not to be minimized. Humiliation in all its degrees of severity is recognized by them as a threat to the way one views oneself both as an individual and as a member of society. To experience humiliation is to be negatively positioned both personally and culturally. It is to be subjected to what Pearce termed the most dangerous types of critical statements and

actions, “those that undercut the other’s rights and duties as a person, particularly the right to make statements, own feelings, and make choices” (Personal communication).

I intend to address several issues that these studies overlook. Scheff and Miller are primarily concerned with definitional understandings of shame and humiliation. Scheff placed these understandings in the context of linguistics and categorized them by connecting them with types of relationships. Miller placed them in the context of types of cultures, particularly in what he terms honor cultures, and viewed humiliation as a tool for keeping these cultures socially stable. Neither Miller nor Scheff looked closely at the ways that people respond to humiliation. My study was intended to address this issue.

Jia is concerned with humiliation as a cultural means of enforcing social status in China. I am interested in extending his inquiry to Western culture in order to better understand the role humiliation plays in maintaining the economic status of poverty. Lindner also viewed humiliation as an expression of social enforcement, seeing it as a tool of power in the course of war, torture, and genocide. While her work captures the most horrific expressions of humiliation, it overlooks the more subtle and individual accounts of these experiences. It is my premise that while the poor do not experience humiliation in the context of war, they experience it in more subtle ways that last over longer periods of time. I intend to look at the ways that this may or may not transpire.

I am adopting a qualitative inquiry method (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as a way of hearing expressed understandings of degradation as personal lived experience. For me it is important to focus on individual stories of humiliation (much as I suspect Lindner

has done in her interviews, although she did not present these individual accounts in her research summaries). My intent was to avoid generalizing these experiences into broad categories or numerical summaries which would diminish the sense of individuality that underlies them. For me capturing the personal expression of experience is what lends depth to the understanding of the meaning of humiliation, and shows that meaning cannot be relegated to simple definitional phrases and formulas.

**Poverty**

Poverty and homelessness present pervasive dilemmas for both the individuals who experience them and the societies in which they exist. The extent of these difficulties is partly reflected by the number of persons affected. Numerous studies have quantified the degree of poverty and homelessness in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, poverty is variously measured by the money income of an individual or a family, and by poverty thresholds that define the amount of money people and families need to live (see Table 1 ). The number of people in this country living below the poverty level in 2002 was between 9.9% and 13.2% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). In 2001, 14.4 million families in the United States faced critical housing needs. It was estimated that in that year that about 3.5 million people, or about 1% of the population, experienced homelessness (Homeless, 2002).

While government agencies and advocacy groups have numbered the poor and the homeless, their reports do not allow us to hear the voices of those most deeply affected. But anthropological studies such as those by Jencks (1994), Liebow (1993), and Hopper

(2003) examine firsthand the socially demeaning nature of homelessness and extreme poverty. Hopper's approach is typical. His ethnographic studies of the homeless address shelter conditions in New York City during the early 1980s, a critical look at the work of the Census Bureau in 1990, and a study of homeless African American men in the late 1980s (Hopper, 2003).

Hopper considered homelessness a social problem, and his objectives have included understanding the breadth of this issue, what social factors have contributed to it historically, and ways that it might be alleviated. His methodology takes the form of historical inquiries, field interviews, and notes that record personal observations and feelings experienced in the course of field research.

Hopper's intent was first of all to record the personal and social impact of homelessness, "bearing witness" to a structural reality that "was not supposed to exist" (Hopper, 2003, p. 204). Beyond that he intended to move past a descriptive commentary, speaking out publicly, and engaging in affirmative action to overcome the problems of homelessness.

> Reckoning with the demands of citizenship, with the transfer of anthropological aptitude into political reason and political action, isn't just a nice idea. It goes to the heart of who we are as anthropologists. (Hopper, 2003, p. 205)

Hopper's objective was to portray the plight of the homeless in such a way that the public conscience is stirred and public resources are redirected to alleviating it. His argument is essentially a moral one, incorporating the pain and victimization of the

homeless and the refusal of public officials to acknowledge the extent of their plight as a means of calling for more jobs, better temporary housing, and more effective programs to alleviate violence on the streets suffered by the homeless.

My intent is not to promote social policy. The reason I drew on the works of Hopper and others (Bolland & McCallum, 2002; Bullock, Wyche, & Willliams, 2001; Bunis, Yancik, & Snow, 1996; Higate, 2000; Jencks, 1994; Katz, 1989; Lott & Bullock, 2001; Nunez & Fox, 1999; Phelan & Link, 1999; Seager, 2000) was, first, to better understand the scope of homelessness and attendant poverty in the United States, and second, to draw on first-hand interviews conducted by researchers to hear the voices of the homeless in the midst of what has so often been termed a social problem. This gave me insight not only into what was said, but also how the conversations were structured, the questions were asked, and the responses were framed.

Their findings are telling in several respects. First, poverty places people in a highly transitional state that makes homelessness difficult to define. Individuals and families labeled as "homeless" move back and forth between the streets, temporary shelters, and permanent housing.

Second, poverty is systemic. Poor people in the United States constitute a social class that is stigmatized by the rest of the population and is often discriminated against by political and business leaders as well as the general public (Katz, 1989). This places those in extreme poverty in the position of coping not only with physical survival but also with ostracism on a regular basis (Rimstead, 1997).

Most important, these studies lend a deep sense of reality to the issues of homelessness and poverty. They demonstrate that it is possible to hear the personal accounts of those who live through the humiliation of homelessness in a way that creates empathy and understanding, even though the way the accounts themselves are constructed is not the focus of the studies. Thus these studies address the issue of humiliation tangentially because they contain first person interviews and narratives that describe the difficulties involved with living in shelters and on the streets, meeting with social service representatives, and finding employment. The record is one of a hard life. The story told by the poor is frequently one of shame, embarrassment, and humiliation (Jencks, 1994; Rimstead, 1997; Rowe, 1999; Seager, 2000).

These anthropological studies confirm my own first impressions of poverty and homelessness, garnered during a summer ministry internship at the Baptist Rescue Mission in New Orleans, Louisiana during the summer of 1972. The Mission, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention, provided meals and short-term overnight accommodations to indigent men, and offered temporary job placement through local day labor companies.

Over the course of a summer, living at the mission and assisting with desk registration, meal service, chapel services, and supervision, I had the opportunity to hear the stories of numerous clients who came for shelter, food, and clothing donations. The studies by Hopper and others reinforced my first-hand knowledge that the men who frequent shelters are challenged not only by the lack of physical resources. They regularly

experience violence at the hands of other street people and sometimes at the hands of agency persons who purport to serve them. They find it difficult to maintain respectability and cleanliness. They frequently are alcoholic, and long-term employment, while often part of their history, is not a present accomplishment. Humiliation is an ongoing experience as they deal with the streets, government entities, community shelters, and their own personality issues.

My notes from this internship include summaries of two incidents that suggest the presence of humiliation.

> James came to the mission at 5:00 p.m. requesting housing for the night. I was in the lobby when he arrived because there were several men waiting to register, and my assistance was needed at the front desk. James is a double amputee and has been confined to a wheelchair for several years. He has a record with the mission of problems with alcoholism and incontinence. It was obvious this evening that he had not bathed for some time and the desk clerk refused to admit him because of his hygiene conditions. We negotiated with James for several minutes and he finally agreed to take a shower before registering. I asked one of the "regulars" to assist him with the shower process, which he reluctantly agreed to do.
>
> July 8, 1972, SBRM
> (Southern Baptist Rescue Mission)

> There was a fight in the lobby just before 10:00 p.m. curfew tonight. One of the men working in the kitchen was inebriated after dinner clean-up and had insisted on going up to the dormitory, but the desk clerk had stopped him and told him to leave the mission. I came downstairs just after the clerk had pushed him out the front door. The clerk's eye was swollen from the fight and he was calling the police. The man who was evicted was curled up on the sidewalk in front of the door, and I waited until the police came. They asked if they should arrest him. I said it wasn't necessary, but he couldn't block the exit to the mission. Both officers put on leather gloves and when the man didn't respond to their instructions to move, they dragged him onto the back seat of the squad car and told him to pull his legs in. Both of them struck him repeatedly on the knees, legs and feet with wooden batons until he complied. I later asked the desk clerk if this was a common occurrence, and he said, "Not common enough."
>
> August 9, 1972 SBRM

These were my recorded perceptions of events over 30 years ago. What strikes me now is that I can only assume what each of these encounters looked like from the perspectives of the man in the shower and the man in the squad car. As I look back I wish I knew how they had experienced these incidents, and if they were humiliated by them, how they processed the meanings. Or to put it differently, the question that remains unanswered for me, from both an academic anthropological perspective and a personal one is "How do the stories told by the poor and/or the homeless reflect, and describe the accommodation of, feelings of humiliation?"

Low self-perception further complicates the difficulty of poor and homeless persons, particularly with regard to their perceived ability to reach goals, for example, securing employment and finding permanent housing. Research by Epel, Bandura and Zimbardo (1999) shows that individuals with strong self-efficacy have shorter stays in shelters and spend more time searching for employment than those who are depressed and perceive that they are unable to effect change in their lives. When one's self-appraisal is that of disparagement and helplessness, the risk of remaining homeless grows appreciably.

Public attitudes contribute to a low self-image held by the poor. Studies conclude that sympathy for the homeless rises during the holiday season. Compassion is both encouraged by and reflected by increased media coverage of their plight during the holidays, but the coverage drops off sharply as soon as Christmas and Thanksgiving pass (Bunis et al., 1996).

Studies also show that Americans attribute poverty to personal shortcomings rather than societal causes, and blame poor people themselves for their poverty. The reason for this, again, may rest in part with the media. The poor have historically been portrayed by the media as having failings of morality and character, as deviating from middle-class norms (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001).

A study of media images of poverty by Bullock suggests that media reporting placed blame inappropriately on individuals alone and did little to accurately contextualize poverty or to illuminate its causes (Bullock et al., 2001). A more accurate context suggests that all societal problems, including poverty and homelessness, have a balance of structural and personal factors as their cause (Main, 1996). To have the balance inaccurately tilted toward personal blame increases the sense of alienation experienced by the poor and homeless. As we connect this finding with the conclusion that rejection and alienation frequently result in humiliation, the experience of humiliation among the poor becomes increasingly likely.

In summary, anthropological studies of persons in poverty, particularly the homeless, conclude that humiliation is an ongoing part of their life experience, but these studies are more concerned with the social question of how to alleviate poverty. They relate the stories of the homeless and the humiliation they experience as part of a broader argument that states, in effect, that humiliation is a social ill that attends poverty, and its existence is one reason that poverty should be eradicated. These studies give examples of

how the poor articulate the experience of humiliation but do not explore how they manage its meaning.

Furthermore they suggest that the burden of poverty is inordinately placed on the individual, to the exclusion of systemic or societal causes. This raises the possibility that many people living in poverty are held socially accountable for a situation over which they have only partial control, and this may in turn lead to feelings of degradation and humiliation.

**Management of Meaning**

Story construction is one way to translate what we do and experience into what we know and what we feel others need to hear (Bochner & Ellis, 1995). Moreover the meaning we arrive at is co-constructed in the mutual process of telling and hearing, as the responses of the listener are joined with the words of the speaker (W. B. Pearce, 1989).

Narrative is organizational in nature; it provides a way for people to make sense out of their humanity. The lives of the poor and homeless are often chaotic (Rimstead, 1997). In the midst of this chaos it is necessary to structure experience, and narrative is a way to accomplish this (Bruner, 1990; Sarbin, 1986). Narrative helps organize not only the past and present, but also the future. Without a sense of what the future will bring there is a lack of ability to plan and to hope. It is through narrative that one gains possible plotlines in order to anticipate what may happen next (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Management of meaning is concerned with the question, “How do people organize their lived experiences and make sense of them?” The positivists would say in order to do

this it is important to know and accept the "truth" of the past. It is by isolating and naming a previous event that one makes sense of it and is able to predict its implications for the future. I have found it difficult in my own interactions with others to arrive at mutual understandings of the truth of experiences, especially when those experiences involve emotions.

More helpful to me is the social constructionist approach (Averill, 2000; Gergen, 1991, 1999; Harre, 1984; W. B. Pearce, 1989; W. B. Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997; Shotter, 1993; Tomm, 1987). From this perspective the emotions of shame and humiliation are treated not as innate, irrational, individual, and universal. Social constructionism "reclaims emotion as an inseparable dimension of human communication that is both socially constructed and socially constructionist (Jia, 2001, p. 8) This builds on Averill's argument that emotions are cultural creations, cultural performances, and that we are cultural participants in them (Averill, 1982).

The advantage of the social constructionist approach for my study, with its focus on the management of meaning of humiliation, is that it helps me understand how interpersonal actions lead to the attribution of meaning to the past, present, and future, and by extension, to oneself. Social constructionism is referenced here as a group of theories addressing communication. These theories approach communication not as the transmission of information but as a mutual activity between speaker(s) and listener(s) who build on one another's actions, and thus meanings. It is through human interaction

that social reality is constructed (Gergen, 1991; W. B. Pearce, 1995). It is in the interactive processes of human dialog that reality finds its essence.

Pearce's CMM approach to communication stresses that person position and moral force contribute to the meaning of stories. For Pearce, the usage of language indicates person position and forms of participation. Moral effects of language are represented by words such as can, should, and must. He stresses, citing Harre and Langenhove, that a constructionist orientation encourages us to see how such usage of words creates our patterns of relating, particularly when their usage is outside our consciousness (W. B. Pearce, 2001b).

Individuals act in a moral context. The narratives/stories they tell are a means of defining what they should or must do, and why they have acted as they did in the past. Day (1991) pointed out that people rehearse these narratives to consider alternative actions, and then they seek understanding by elaborating on what they have done. They constantly address a moral audience. Narratives are a way of sorting through not only what has happened in the past, but what potential courses of action might be taken in the future.

To hear a person's narrative, then, is to hear a story of what might or ought to be, told to an audience that one feels accountable to and with which one perceives oneself to be in relationship (Day, 1991). This is especially true when narratives depict humiliation as a compelling experience, "making" one act in a particular way—aggressively, passively, or otherwise. Humiliation is an event that deontically calls for a response. The

narration becomes a story of what one had to do in response to being demeaned because it was the right or the only possible course of action (W. B. Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997).

Day's work suggests to me that narratives are also a way of justifying what has already taken place. In the accounts of the poor, there will be the presence of a moral position with respect to past actions and feelings. The meaning of the story (and by extension, of the events contained therein) is morally encapsulated. As a researcher co-constructs stories with the poor, the meaning of poverty, homelessness, and the challenges that accompany these lifestyles may be configured in images that proclaim what is just and unjust. It also presents an opportunity for those co-constructing the stories to experience these events in the present and to rehearse future courses of action.

This emphasis encourages me to look for patterns of relating that may be outside the consciousness of the poor in the accomplishment and continuation of humiliation as an interpersonal exercise. One pattern that Pearce suggests is that of the "strange loop (Oliver, In Press). Drawing on Cronen, Johnson, and Lannamann (1982), Pearce developed this tool out of "an interest in patterns of connection and, by implication, patterns of disconnection. We look for patterns in how people make meaning, in how they act and in the interplay between the two" (B. Pearce, 2002, p. 2). The diagrammed form of the tool is as follows:

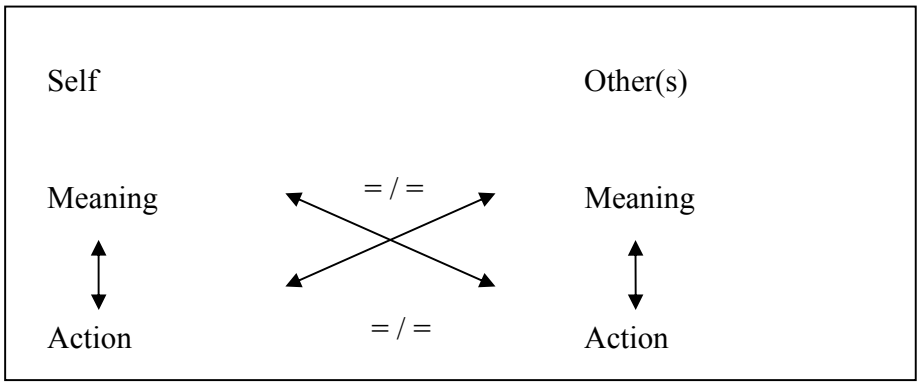


Figure 1. The strange loop tool.

From Refelxive Inquiry and the Strange Loop Tool: Enabling Valuation and Evaluation (p. 3), by W. B. Pearce, 2002, Unpublished Manuscript. Copyright by W.B. Pearce. Adapted by permission.

Strange loops occur when people's self-perceptions shift, or fluctuate, in a circular or repetitive fashion over time. The practices people participate in construct ways of making their social worlds coherent. As Pearce pointed out, a common structure of resources, or way of making life understandable, is a stable hierarchy. This is a behavioral pattern in which contextual force, the sense of obligation to act in certain ways that comes from one's definitions of self, others, and relationships, is the predominant force of social logic. Actions are guided by one's understanding of who he or she is and the context in which he or she finds him or herself. In a stable hierarchy, this understanding of self, others, and relationships is consistent over time. Joint actions cause few revisions in one's perception of self, and the layering of cultural values, relationships, and self-concept remain stable (W. B. Pearce, 1989, pp. 40-49).

In some situations, however, the force of reflection, or what Pearce calls "reflexive force," changes the context of resources (cultural values, relationships, and self-concept) that guides one's actions, and this leads to opposite ways of behaving. When these differing forms of behavior oscillate depending on the situation, a "strange loop" of behavior is formed. The loop is considered "strange" because it reflects a behavioral pattern that is repetitively self-defeating (W. B. Pearce, 1989, p. 47).

People who are caught in these strange loops, or patterns of circular behavior, tend to see their own actions as linear when in fact they are circular. They may, for example, see only the role of others in humiliating circumstances and fail to identify the part they themselves play in such joint actions. Their cause and effect stories about humiliation will necessarily be incomplete because they overlook the shifts that occur in their own actions (W. B. Pearce, 1989).

The Strange Loop tool is helpful in understanding the repetitive joint actions one or more participants perceive as humiliating. The model prompts the question, "What is the context for the behavior in question?" The context is the perception of self, others, and relationships, and this perception leads to certain behaviors. As a person reflects on this behavior, the context shifts and a new concept of self results. This approach offers a way of visualizing how people in relationships, particularly those in ongoing joint actions and conversations, may repeat words and other behaviors that contribute to the cycle of experiencing humiliation.

While the Strange Loop model may not completely describe the behaviors of persons in poverty, it nonetheless provides a descriptive tool for looking at ways that they may get caught up in repetitive actions that do not helpfully move them forward. As patterns are discerned, we gain insight into how meanings build on themselves and contribute to repetition of behavior.

This assumption that meaning builds on itself is present in the work of Rimstead, for example, when she spoke of the received negative constructions of identity that grow out of stereotyping, blaming, and labeling. Such constructions are present in the narratives of poor women; they reflect feelings of shame, self-blame, passivity, and powerlessness (Rimstead, 1997). We story our experiences, and this reflexively determines the meanings we ascribe to them (Shotter, 1993; White & Epston, 1990).

These stories take different forms. In Pearce's view, some stories are unlived. That is, they do not fall into the category of storied experience that has already occurred, nor of experiences that have been lived but not told to others (W. B. Pearce, 1995). Nevertheless unlived stories shape behavior and thus the meaning of people's lives, particularly when they take the form of "I could have acted differently in the past," or "I hope that I can accomplish certain things in the future."

From a constructionist perspective, narrative further informs us about the social grammars of life episodes, about the rules that are at work (Bruner, 1990). These grammars of action grow out of Wittgenstein's perspective that language games and forms of life are shared understandings and practices in the context of human activity,

and show that a person knows how to act in meaningful and appropriate ways (Sass, 2001). Narrative is a telling of what is deemed legitimate and what is not, about what is obligated and what is prohibited. Through stories we are exploring the social grammar of utterances and situations (Vernon Cronen & Lang, 1994).

While grammars of action are influential in all social settings, my focus is on the ways that they impact the lives of the poor. Grammars of action may circumscribe the ability to attain financial assistance, interact with law enforcement officials, and secure food and housing. This raises the question of what social rules are in effect when they apply for disability payments or go to a shelter for overnight lodging, and how they accommodate the meaning of rejection and humiliation when it occurs in these contexts.

Through narratives, the poor inform us about the social rules that help structure their lives. They express their day to day understandings of who they are and what their experiences mean through the stories they tell themselves and others (Payne, 2000). It is the way they map their progress and their success, their setbacks and frustrations. In Gergen's term, they participate in a storied world (Gergen, 1999). Knowing that these stories reflect life-shaping meanings has made it imperative for me to hear and respond to them in ways that reflect empathy and understanding.

Gergen (Gergen, 1999) provided foundational insight for this study by pointing out that the way respondents tell stories helps fashion their identity for themselves and others. Gergen pointed out that stories take many forms. They follow different narrative approaches, have different plot lines, and are brought to varying degrees of public

exposure. He contended that as we identify ourselves through narration, it is the narrative structures themselves that set certain limits over our identity.

This contention informs the discussion of the management of meaning in two ways. First, it points out that we do not see events and interpersonal encounters as isolated happenings. Instead we incorporate them into larger stories that place them in a life context. As a result I intentionally look not only at stories about humiliation, but about the broader context in which these subnarratives occur.

These stories serve a dual purpose. They reveal understandings of how events were experienced at the time they occurred. Also, they reflexively build new meaning as events are placed in the context of one's other experiences and feelings. This raises the question, "Where do descriptions of humiliation fit in the life stories of those who are homeless?"

Gergen's emphasis on story forms is also informative because of his conclusion that narrative reveals a goal state or valued end point. Meaning is not constrained to definition. The meaning of an event is part of a larger story that speaks to the value of one's life. We make sense of events by accounting for human actions across time, and we express the probability of reaching our goals in the way we construct our narratives (Gergen & Gergen, 1986).

Gergen suggested three narrative forms that reveal the degree to which a goal state is achieved: stable, progressive, and regressive. In a progressive narrative one is steadily

moving toward a goal; in a regressive narrative one is moving away from that goal or valued state. In a stable narrative the progress toward a goal is essentially unchanged.

Gergen graphically depicted these three narrative structures in the following way, placing them in a moral context of good and bad, successful and unsuccessful ("Evaluation"). In each portrayal, the arrow direction describes to what extent a goal state is effectively approached over time, as represented by the content of the narrative itself.

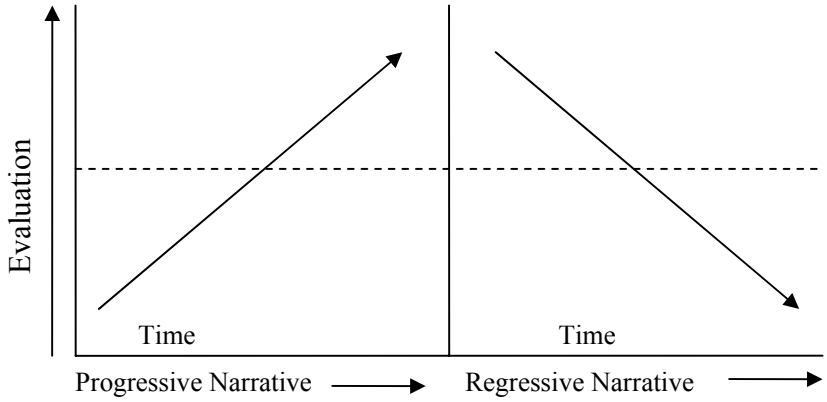


*Figure 2*. Progressive and regressive narratives.

From Narrative Form and the Construction of Psychological Science (p. 27), by K. J. Gergen and M. M. Gergen, in T. R. Sarbin (Ed.), *Narrative Psychology*, 1986, New York: Praeger Scientific. Copyright by K. J. Gergen. Adapted with permission.

He then adapted several classical narrative forms to this approach.

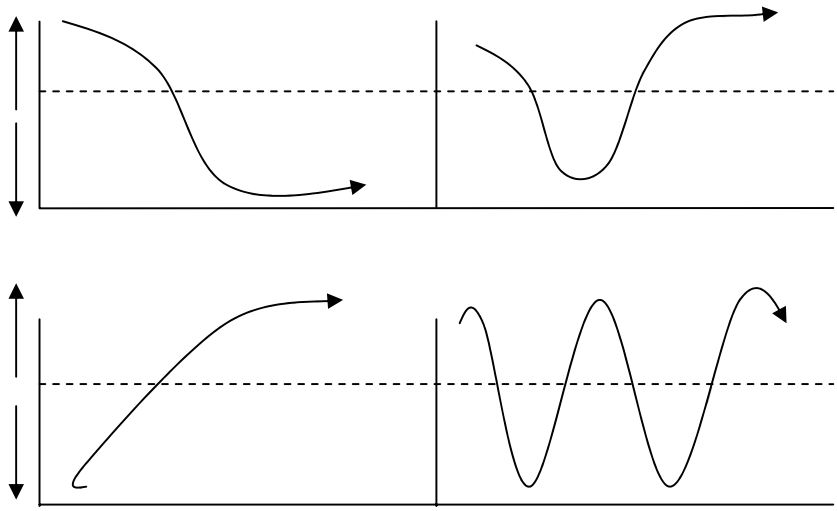

Figure 3. Four types of narrative forms.

From Narrative Form and the Construction of Psychological Science (p. 29), by K. J. Gergen and M. M. Gergen, in T. R. Sarbin (Ed.), *Narrative Psychology*, 1986, New York: Praeger Scientific. Copyright by K. J. Gergen. Adapted with permission.

Gergen's concern in his literary study is with the utility of developmental theories in psychology and the way those theories are expressed in narrative form. He argued that common conceptions of development are shaped by the way developmental theories are narrated; that is, by the way the values of the theorist are incorporated into the story.

> For example, it is now common to view child development as a period of increasing maturity (a progressive narrative), middle adulthood as the stage of full maturity, and old age as a decline (a regressive narrative). Indeed much developmental narrative is based on just such a view. (Gergen & Gergen, 1986, p. 37)

But this portrayal of narrative has important implications for my study because it suggests a way of looking at the stories of the poor. Gergen pointed out that stories are told about life trajectories as well as developmental theories. This invites us to look at

stories of the life trajectories of the poor with attention to their dramatic form. By doing so we are pressed to ask the question, "How do negative experiences, particularly humiliating ones, contribute to the meaning of one's life? That is, how do these experiences serve to advance expressed life goals and values?"

As many authors pointed out, the teller of a narrative is selective about the way a story is told depending on his or her perception of the receptivity of the hearer (Kaufman, 1996; Pasupathi, 2001). As we hear and interact with the stories of poverty and humiliation, we recognize that what is being told is what is recalled and deemed important or useful at the moment in response to a specific question by the interviewer; it isn't the whole story. There may be different stories told at different times about the same event. Likewise the story the respondent tells him or herself may vary from what is given to the interviewer, not only in the "facts" but also in the emphases and the emotional content. This occurs because the respondent and the interviewer are both trying to accomplish certain things in the interview process, and something new is being "made" in the telling and the hearing of each story. As Shotter stated, it is the poetic or "making" aspect of conversation (Gr. poesis = making) that gives form to feelings and activities (Shotter, 1993, p.122).

Recognizing with George Herbert Mead that communication gives rise to consciousness (Coser, 1977, p. 335) and to personal identity (Cronen & Lang, 1994, p. 6), it is helpful to see the narratives of the respondents in this study as reflections on the formation of identity. They are telling about what has taken place in the past in order to

attach meaning and significance to their lived experiences (Bochner & Ellis, 1995, p. 203; Montgomery, 1992, p. 130).

Essays by constructionist theorists alert us to certain linguistic purposes of narratives. They stress that language is not primarily representative in nature; rather its purpose is to coordinate social action, define relationships, and "move" people (Shotter, 1993, p.121).

A work that speaks directly to my data analysis is that of Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (Ochs & Capps, 2001). It stressed the tension that exists in an ordinary social exchange. Dialogue is simultaneously pulled toward narrative closure and narrative openness. When stories are built in everyday conversation, there is a tendency not only to finish the story, but also to keep the conversation going. Ochs and Capps pointed out that traditional narrative is more structured than dialogue, and that dialogue must be reordered to achieve finished narrative form.

Ochs and Capps have focused their studies on the narratives of families and children, and as a result have distinguished between polished narrative and narrative in process. Narrative in process is the rough work that pervades ordinary social encounters. Polished narrative has a finished plot structure and a coherent beginning, middle, and end. Narrative in process is less polished and less coherent because those who are speaking use narrative to grapple with unresolved life experiences (Ochs & Capps, 2001). They point out that spontaneous narrative, of which type an interview is often an example, is filled with pauses and hesitations, and that such dialog is difficult to analyze.

They find that one dimension of narrative is "tellership." This refers to the degree to which conversational partners are involved in narrative construction. Every partner, no matter how passive, has an influence on the shape of the narrative. Ochs and Capps stated,

> telling a personal narrative is a social activity that varies in breadth and type of participation of interlocutors. . . . While typically one person prevails in telling a personal experience, other interlocutors contribute to the shaping of the narrative. Listeners' vocal and non-vocal displays of attention give tellers the go-ahead to continue recounting. (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 32)

This is significant for the research at hand. I recognize that the stories being told in interview settings are co-constructed, and that the role of the researcher is vital to the outcome of the story being told. Moreover I am aware that the several dimensions of narratives of personal experience identified by Ochs and Capps – tellership, tellability, embeddedness, linearity, and moral stance – are central to the narrative process. A central question for my research thus becomes, "In what way is the narrative co-constructed, and how does this process contribute to the outcome of the meanings apprehended in the research itself?"

In listening to the stories of the respondents about their lives in general and the matter of humiliation in particular, I do not seek to arrive at a specific definition of humiliation, nor to say that certain events are always humiliating while others are not. Instead I give attention to what meanings are apprehended in the experiences of living in poverty and how stories told about these experiences reference meaning (Hooks, 1989).

To address this issue, I compiled the following questions that arose from my preliminary concerns and from the literature review.

1. How do the poor perceive the meaning of humiliation? Is their perception in keeping with cultural definitions?

2. What parts of the interviews reference humiliation? Does humiliation occur, and if so, in what relationship(s) and setting(s)?

3. How do the respondents manage the meaning of these events, as indicated by references in the interviews to:

a. attribution of cause (self/other)

b. description of response (physical/emotional)

c. placement of the event(s) in life narrative (frequent, intermittent)

d. offsetting or restorative events and relationships that suggest a balancing of the impact of these events

e. continuing actions that repeat the cycle of humiliation

f. actions that disrupt or discontinue the cycle.

4. What role do unlived stories play in the formation of life goals, and can the co-constructed narratives that grow out of the interviews be portrayed in graphic and/or written form?

For me these questions provide a broad framework for my data collection and analysis. Initial understandings of meaning are important because they offer a beginning point for coordinating conversations with respondents about poverty and homelessness. I

am particularly mindful as an interviewer that I am crossing cultural boundaries in these conversations. To be able to participate in the process of story co-construction I must be able to both understand the frames of reference of the respondents and anticipate what directions the conversations may take next. I found Jia (Jia, 2001) to be particularly adept at this. In his interviews he displayed a remarkable ability to develop rapport with his study group participants and then to encourage them to express detail, ways of reasoning, and feelings. This is what I want to emulate in my interview process.

Capturing personal expressions of humiliation is also important to me, but it must necessarily go beyond linguistic and relational categorization (Scheff, 1988, 1997) or historical documentation (Miller, 1993; Scheff, 1988). It is important to me to discover the social contexts that give rise to the awareness that one has been humiliated. The relationships and social settings that result in feelings of humiliation must be explored because meaning is built on one's understanding of life events (Gergen, 1991). I intend to look carefully at these social contexts, first of all to identify them, and then to see how they are juxtaposed with social encounters that give rise to positive self-regard.

The questions that center on management of meaning (#3, above) grow out of the finding that meaning is attributed to personal events expressed in narrative (Shotter, 1993; White & Epston, 1990). However the categories I selected, as I explain more completely in the Methods chapter, are developed through repeated readings of the respondents' interviews and attempts to group their responses in significant ways. The final groupings above, a-f, are included as reference points because when asked to

describe a humiliating event in detail, respondents would repeatedly talk about why they felt circumstances had resulted in humiliation for them, what their reactions were, and who they deemed to be responsible.

By placing my data analysis in the framework of these questions I recognize that I am taking a philosophical stance on the question of what meaning is and how it is dealt with and expressed. I assume that the making and management of meaning goes far beyond the naming of an event or a feeling. My approach is unapologetically constructionist. Meaning is more than naming, more than a linguistic exercise or categorization. It is an ongoing process that grows and changes with the experiencing of events and the telling of them, and it is added to as the telling is heard and retold by others. It is the process of sense-making in an interpersonal setting (Gergen, 1991). My intent is to explore and better understand the nature of this process, which I find has not been done with regard to humiliation as it is experienced by those living in poverty.

# Chapter Three: Methods

In this chapter I set forth the method I used to conduct interviews as a way of addressing the question, "How do the poor experience humiliation and manage its meaning?" I also tell how I analyzed the transcripts of these interviews. I used an open-ended interview approach (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) because this method allowed the voice of the respondents in the matter of humiliation to be heard in the broader context of their life stories. It also permitted the use of narrative analysis (Creswell, 1998) as a way of understanding the transcripts and the dialog between the respondents and the interviewer.

Prior to these interviews I conducted a pilot study with four individuals who were not living in poverty. The purpose of the pilot study was to hear descriptions of experiences of humiliation and begin to familiarize myself with how individuals responded to those experiences. I learned from the pilot study that humiliating episodes are memorable and readily described. Respondents could recall when they took place, who was involved, and what circumstances led up to them. I also learned that it was necessary to ask several clarifying questions in order to get a more complete picture of what had transpired and what the responses were of the individuals who had felt humiliated. To me this affirmed the validity of Ochs' and Capps' finding that the interview process is often one of story construction and requires joint participation between the interviewer and the respondent.

During the pilot study, I looked for the effect subsequent conversations had on the understanding and resolution of one's sense of humiliation, having assumed that holding

such conversations was an important way of managing its meaning. I found that such conversations were typically non-existent. This led me to look at other ways individuals might manage the meaning of humiliation.

I initially planned to interview individuals for this study who were engaged in divorce dispute resolution under the direction of the El Paso County Court in El Paso County, Colorado, but there were no responses to letters of invitation to conduct those interviews. The intended focus of the study at that time was to be on how people going through divorce and its resolution experienced humiliation. As an alternative approach, I selected individuals living in poverty as my focus group. The reason for this choice was due to my interest in the social world of those living in poverty and the finding that humiliation was part of their life experience (Jencks, 1994; Rimstead, 1997; Rowe, 1999; Seager, 2000).

The population for the interviews in the final study was a group of 10 individuals. At the time of the interviews they were living with little or no income. Five of the respondents were receiving SSD (Social Security Disability Benefits) or SSI (Supplemental Security Income benefits). Under the federal Social Security Disability Act, "disability" means the "inability to engage in any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months or result in death" (Help, 2003). The other five respondents were working only part time or not at all. This

placed each respondent in an income bracket that was below the poverty level. The following table defines national poverty levels for 2003.

Table 1.

U.S. Poverty Levels - 2003

**U.S. Poverty Levels, 2003 - Income Figures in U.S. Dollars**

| **Size of family unit** | **Related children under 18 years** | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | None | One | Two | Three | Four | Five | Six | Seven | Eight or more |
| One person (unrelated individual)……. | | | | | | | | | |
| Under 65 years…..... | 9,573 | | | | | | | | |
| 65 years and over…..……. | 8,825 | | | | | | | | |
| Two persons…..……. | | | | | | | | | |
| Householder under 65 years…..... | 12,321 | 12,682 | | | | | | | |
| Householder 65 years and over….. | 11,122 | 12,634 | | | | | | | |
| Three persons…..... | 14,393 | 14,810 | 14,824 | | | | | | |
| Four persons…..... | 18,979 | 19,289 | 18,660 | 18,725 | | | | | |
| Five persons…..... | 22,887 | 23,220 | 22,509 | 21,959 | 21,623 | | | | |
| Six persons…..... | 26,324 | 26,429 | 25,884 | 25,362 | 24,586 | 24,126 | | | |
| Seven persons…..... | 30,289 | 30,479 | 29,827 | 29,372 | 28,526 | 27,538 | 26,454 | | |
| Eight persons…..... | 33,876 | 34,175 | 33,560 | 33,021 | 32,256 | 31,286 | 30,275 | 30,019 | |
| Nine persons or more…..... | 40,751 | 40,948 | 40,404 | 39,947 | 39,196 | 38,163 | 37,229 | 36,998 | 35,572 |

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2003)

A majority of the respondents (8 of 10) were homeless. At the time of the interview, they were living either on the streets, in temporary housing, or in shelters, often having transitioned between these types of living spaces or “doubling up” with friends or relatives in the recent past. Two of the 10 respondents were living in

apartments. As can be seen in the following table, 5 of the respondents were being temporarily housed by Interfaith Hospitality Network, an agency whose role will be explained in more detail below.

The following table gives an overview of the social world of each participant, including age, marital status, housing status, education level, number of children, and employment status. A total of 10 two-part interviews were held in the course of this study. I summarized these data because they offered a foundation for the life narratives that I later compiled. They also served as a kind of shorthand way for me to differentiate between the study participants.

*Table 2.*

Overview of Respondents' Social Worlds

| **Identifier** | **Age** | **Sex** | **Marital** | **Housing** | **Education** | **Children** | **Employment** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DAV (David) | 35 | M | M | IHN (Interfaith Hospitality Network | 12th | 1 | None (N) |
| BA (Amy) | 24 | F | D | IHN | 11th | 4 | Full Time (FT) |
| SR (Rudolpho) | 38 | M | M | IHN | 8th | 4 | N |
| BJ (Jaime) | 28 | F | S | IHN | 12th + 2 yrs college | 2 | FT |
| HR (Robert) | 46 | M | S | Shelter | Gen'l Education Degree (GED) | 0 | N |
| JB (Jordan) | 25 | F | S | IHN | 12th | 1 | N |
| LJ (Renee) | 51 | F | D | Street | 12th + 2 yrs college | 3 | N |
| MC (Crystal) | 39 | F | D | Apt | 12th | 2 | Part Time (PT) |
| WE (Equilla) | 44 | F | M | Street | 9th | 3 | N |

| Identifier | Age | Sex | Marital | Housing | Education | Children | Employment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| WP (Pam) | 44 | F | S | Apt | $12^{th}$ + 3 | 1 | N |

I requested and received permission from the directors of two local non-profit social service agencies, Interfaith Hospitality Network and Ecumenical Social Ministries, to conduct interviews with their clients (see Appendixes B, C). Both of these agencies, abbreviated IHN and ESM respectively, provide services to the poor and homeless in the city of Colorado Springs, Colorado. Interfaith Hospitality Network offers temporary shelter and job placement assistance to families who are actively seeking employment. Ecumenical Social Ministries provides money or in-kind services for food, transportation, temporary shelter, and job training to both employed and unemployed families and individuals who can demonstrate financial need.

After written permission was received from the respective director of each agency I gave letters of explanation about the study to them to distribute to their caseworkers (see Appendixes D, E), along with letters of invitation for caseworkers to distribute to each client on their caseloads (see Appendix F). The letters of invitation offered a remuneration of $25.00 to each respondent who completed the interview process, and asked those clients who were interested in participating in the study to contact me by phone. Over the course of the study, approximately 350 letters of invitation were distributed. Approval for this study was given by the Institutional Review Board, Fielding Graduate Institute.

Requests to participate came in the form of phone calls from potential respondents. Two of the respondents who participated did not receive letters of invitation directly; instead they were shown the letters by other individuals at a local soup kitchen and called me asking to participate. I made an appointment with each potential respondent to meet for an initial interview after explaining the nature of the study in more detail on the telephone. During this phone call and again during the first interview I stressed the anonymous nature of the interviews and emphasized that respondents could terminate the process at any time.

Meetings were held in private office space in one of several churches in the Colorado Springs area. I chose to hold the interviews in churches because IHN houses families in those settings on a rotating basis. Since many of the IHN respondents had limited means of transportation it was convenient to meet with them after dinner, when they had returned from seeking employment or going to school, in the place where they would be staying that night. I recognized that the locale of the interviews might color the responses given in the interviews themselves.

Two interviews were held with each respondent. From 22 appointment requests, 10 respondents followed through with both interviews. Two respondents did not come for the second interview appointment, and the initial interviews with those individuals were discarded from the study. Eighteen respondents scheduled interviews but did not keep the initial appointments; one of these persons called in advance to say she had decided not to participate.

I had initially planned to conduct two sessions each with 12-15 respondents, but it proved impossible to secure appointments with more than 10 individuals to complete the additional interviews. After completing interviews with 10 respondents I attempted to secure additional appointments by asking the director of each agency on two occasions to distribute additional letters of invitation, which they said they did, but no further successful contacts were made.

The format of the interviews was semi-structured. I began each interview by asking permission to tape record it and by securing a signed consent form (see Appendix G) and background information (see Table 2 above). I then structured the interview around two basic open-ended questions: "When I use the word humiliation, what does it mean to you?" and "Have you ever experienced something like that?" The remainder of each interview consisted of requests on my part for information about details of humiliating episodes, causative factors, and the nature of the social world of the respondent. With regard to episodes they considered humiliating, I asked what led up to them, why they considered them humiliating, and what their reactions were.

Following the first interview with each respondent, I scheduled an appointment for a second interview and typed a transcript of the first. The questions I posed in the second interview were meant to elicit details about information I thought I had missed or that was not clear to me during and after the first interview. Following each second interview, I typed a transcript of it. Each respondent who completed two interviews was paid $25.00. Each interview was approximately 45-60 minutes in length.

More specifically, I took the following approach to data collection:

1. I began each interview by introducing myself as a researcher and stating that the goal of the research project was to understand how people dealt with humiliation. After receiving permission to tape the interview and obtaining a signed consent form, I thanked the respondent for taking the time to participate in the research project. This was a genuine expression of appreciation, and I also wanted to engender a feeling of trust at the beginning of each interview.

One preliminary question I asked each respondent was, "What does humiliation mean to you?" I posed this question near the beginning of each initial interview for four reasons. The first was to gain an understanding of how the term was understood and whether this understanding was aligned with the cultural understanding that humiliation is a "lowering, a form of degradation." This question was intended to provide me with a sense of each respondent's acclimation to the broader culture.

Second, I viewed this question as relatively non-threatening. The deeper question of the study, whether the respondents had personally experienced humiliation and if so, how they had managed the meaning of it, I deemed more personal and intrusive. I thought that asking people, especially strangers, about personal experiences could seem intimidating. I also believed that due to the pre-interview information supplied about the focus of the study, some discomfort on the part of the respondents would be present at the outset of the first interview. I believed that asking a more neutral question to begin with would serve to set a less aggressive tone for the interview process.

Third, and this also addressed the intent of neutrality, I wanted to give respondents a chance to reply to a relatively non-threatening question in their own words. This would give me an opportunity to hear how they spoke, what sort of vocabulary they used, and how they phrased their responses. Knowing these things permitted me to coordinate my way of speaking with theirs (W. B. Pearce, 1995).

Fourth, this question seemed to me to open the way for the next turn in each interview conversation. In its neutrality it offered a logical springboard for the more personal question(s) that would follow. I wanted to begin with a question that had the sense of, "Here is an easy one, and it's a warm-up that will help you anticipate what's coming next."

2. I followed my initial request for a definition of humiliation by asking, "Have you ever experienced something like this?" My purpose in asking this was to begin to find out to what extent humiliation is part of the ongoing experience of those in poverty and how they understand it. My expectation was that since trust was not fully established at this point in the interview, the response to this question would be somewhat general. When a specific event was described in this response, I attempted to "fill in the blanks" of the event by probing for details about who was involved, what led up to the event, and how the respondent reacted to it. I sought to keep the questions brief and open-ended, anticipating that this approach would give each respondent a chance to tell the story in his or her own words.

3. I used the responses to this initial set of questions to begin eliciting a life narrative from each respondent. By making references to the event(s) they described, I asked questions whose answers would offer insight into the respondents' pasts, for example, "What was going on for you before this occurred? Where were you living and working?" I also asked questions about what took place afterward, such as "Where did you go, or live, after that?" In the course of this conversation I was alert to the mention of additional interactions that were potentially humiliating, and then I asked for details about those events.

As I talked to each respondent I envisioned the interview as a kind of construction project where descriptions of specific events were elicited from him or her, providing one or two building blocks, and then I probed for information to fill in the space between them. Next I tried to expand the structure by asking for details about the past and future on either side of the event. I hoped that this would provide a description of the broader life context in which they perceived humiliation (or the lack of it) taking place. When references were made to other events that had seemed demeaning, I encouraged the respondents to fill in the details about those, and then asked about life experiences that connected what had been described so far. In this way, each respondent and I worked together to build an expanding narrative structure.

At the same time, this part of the interview conversation provided the groundwork for answering the question, "What offsetting or restorative events and relationships

suggest a balancing of the impact of humiliation, and what actions tend to repeat its cycle?

4. I used the second interviews with the respondents to probe further into their descriptions of how they had responded to humiliation. I wanted to know whether their reaction to debasing experiences were in keeping with the anger/depression/planned retribution possibilities that Lindner (2001; 2002) described in her work, or if different reactions had taken place.

I had made a conscious effort during each initial interview not to proceed too forcefully or aggressively with my questions on the assumption that this might diminish trust or prove threatening and thus curtail the honesty and the spontaneity of the answers that were provided. By the second interview, I assumed that a deeper level of trust had been established, on the basis that the respondents returned for the second interview. Had they felt overly threatened they would not have returned to continue the conversation despite the promise of monetary remuneration. This assumption of growing trust encouraged me to ask more personal questions about humiliation, e.g., "How did it make you feel?" and also to probe deeper into their daily lives: "Can you tell me more about what it is like to live on the streets (or in a shelter)?"

5. During both interviews I was attentive to the moral forces (W. B. Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997) that may have helped shape the reactions of the respondents to humiliation. I listened for phrases like "I had to respond that way because. . ." and "I responded that way in order to. . .," since these phrases would signal a sense of obligation

to behave in ways dictated by cultural expectations and moral imperatives rather than on analytical thinking.

6. During the second interview, I also sought to define the "end of the arrow" in Gergen's graphic description of life narratives (Gergen & Gergen, 1986) by asking questions that centered on the future, such as, "Where are you now in your journey—what is happening in your life—what are things like for you now—what do you hope for in the future?" I saw the answers to these questions as contributing to the dramatic goals of the narratives I hoped to co-construct with each respondent, with the intent of describing the impact of humiliating events on the respondents' lives.

Following the data collection and transcription of the interviews, I proceeded with the analysis of the data as follows:

1. Reading through the transcriptions, I identified respondents' descriptions of their social worlds. I approached the stories respondents told from the perspective of my own cultural perspective. Mine is one that experiences daily life as taking place in a safe environment with adequate food, shelter, clothing, and transportation. I have a full-time job in pastoral ministry and my wife is employed as a middle school teacher. Moreover I assumed that my economic and social world reflected that of middle class Western cultural standards. I wanted to identify ways that the lives of the respondents differed from mine and each others', with specific attention to the economic and social issues they faced in connection with poverty. Thus I paid particular attention to their descriptions of housing, employment status, modes of transportation, and contacts with public service

agencies, the legal system, potential employers, and family support systems. I was not looking for specific ways to categorize the respondents, but for a sense of their overall life experiences and how they viewed their place in the broader culture. From the segments of the transcripts that I identified, I selected those that I felt were representative of each respondent's social world and highlighted them as such.

2. I identified specific responses to my question, "What does humiliation mean to you?" By isolating these answers I hoped to understand to what extent the definition of humiliation given by each respondent was compatible with the definition of the word as I understood it, and to ascertain whether we were talking about similar kinds of experiences. In Pearce's terminology (W. B. Pearce, 2001a) I was looking for elements of coordination in the conversations between me and each respondent.

3. I identified places in the transcripts where respondents provided explicit descriptions of humiliating events. These were elicited in direct response to the question, "Have you ever experienced something like this?" that I asked near the beginning of the interview and at times later on. I hoped that the initial question, "What does humiliation mean to you?" would bring a general response, and that the more specific question about personal experience would help me flesh out what meaning was ascribed to actual events in the life of the respondent. I identified these events as humiliating because the respondents identified them as such.

4. I identified implicit descriptions of humiliating events in the transcripts, as given by the respondents. To do this I looked for descriptions of events that used language

matching that which Scheff identified, e.g., "alienated," "confused," "ridiculous," "inadequate," "uncomfortable," and "hurt," or their synonyms, but were not explicitly termed humiliating by the respondents. By seeking to identify both explicit and implicit events that could be defined as humiliating, I hoped to isolate one or more incidents that could be situated in each respondent's broader life narrative, and to deepen my understanding of what humiliation meant to persons in poverty. I identified who was involved in these events besides the respondents; that is, family members, institutional representatives, or members of the general public, and also whether the event was private, involving the respondent and another person, or public, in the sense of audience proposed by Goffman (1963).

5. I identified additional life events that the respondents portrayed as being pivotal or important in their lives. To do this I looked specifically at answers to questions I had asked that centered on what had transpired before and after humiliating incidents had occurred. This identification was intended to provide the broad structure for a graphic life narrative that I hoped to construct for each respondent.

6. With respect to understanding how respondents managed the meaning of humiliation, I began with a working definition of management that said,

> Management of meaning is concerned with how people incorporate certain experiences into their broader life story. For example, narrating an incident of humiliation in a way that places all blame on oneself – or on another party – is a way of managing meaning or accommodating the event into one's life experience. Likewise the choice of the person to attribute anger or depression to being humiliated is a way of managing meaning.

With this in mind, I identified ways that the respondents said they reacted to humiliating events, including emotional, physical, and conceptual responses. I interpreted these reactions as examples of how respondents managed the meaning of humiliating events.

I identified passages in the transcripts that attributed causation and blame for humiliating events. I looked for both explicit causes, e.g., "My husband was a jerk, and he humiliated me by abandoning me," and also implied social grammatical causes such as "I can't help but feel humiliated when I don't have the money to pay for the things I need from the store." These passages provided completion of the statement, "When I feel humiliated, I believe that _____ is responsible for bringing such feelings about."

7. Following Gergen's lead, I attempted to construct a graphic life narrative for each respondent (see *Figure 4*). This was an attempt to help me visualize where over their lifespans people experienced humiliating events and sought to manage meaning by acting in specific ways.

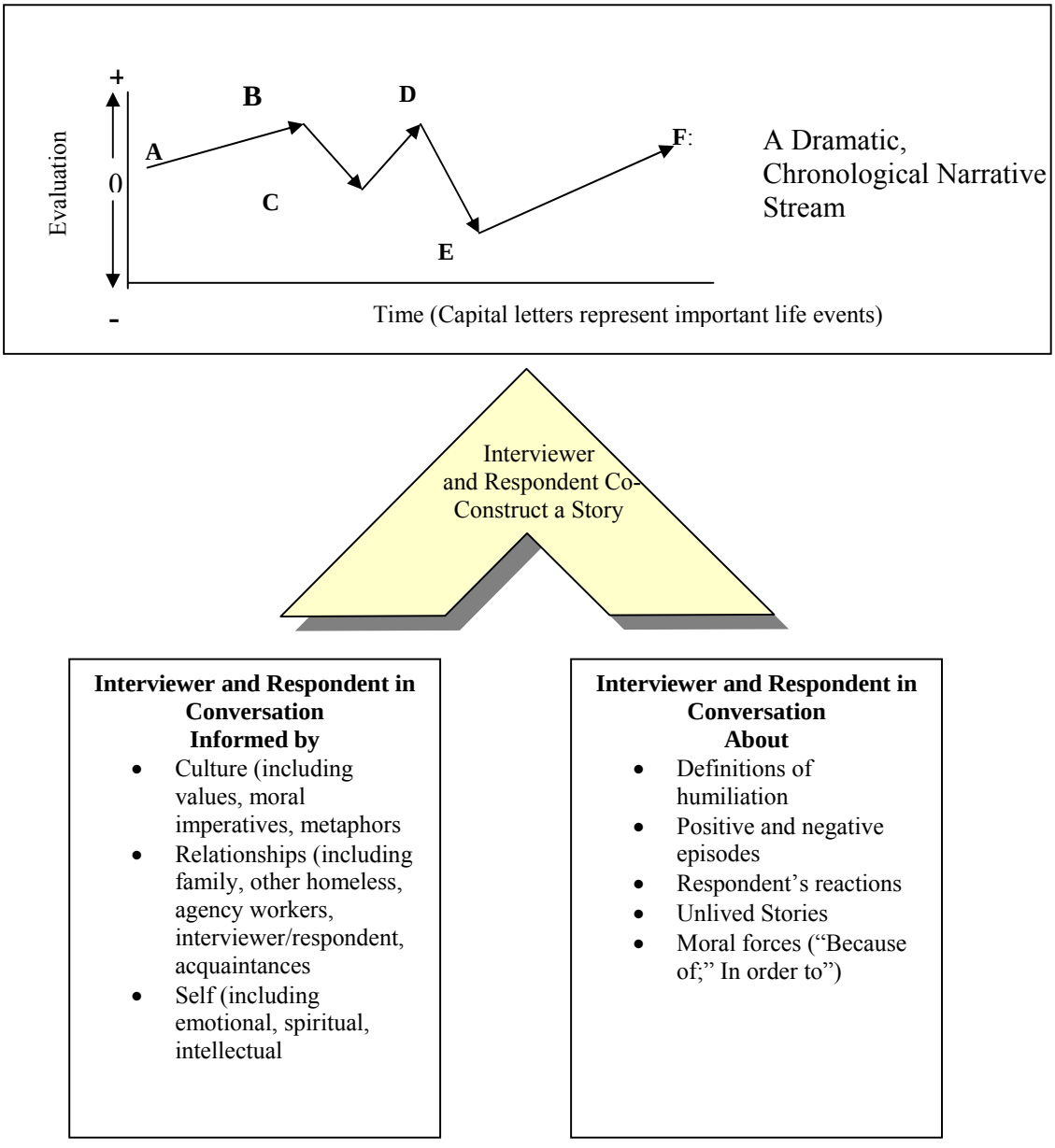


Figure 4. Constructing a narrative stream.

8. I looked for repetitive feelings, behaviors, and responses that would indicate either a continuation of a cycle of humiliation or a disruption/discontinuation of it. I described perpetuating negative patterns as "strange loops" (B. Pearce, 2002). I further coded the transcripts for unlived stories. I looked for two categories of these stories in the interviews. One is "the road not taken," a course of action not chosen at some point in the life of the respondent that might have alleviated his or her situation had it been followed. The other is a category of potentiality, of what the future holds. By placing a story in the first context, that of actions not taken, the respondents would seem to be saying that poverty and/or homelessness, and thus humiliation, might have been avoided if they had acted differently in the past. By placing a story in the second context, respondents were countering humiliation with hope. The broader story then took on the form, "This has happened to me, but now better things lie ahead." Unlived stories indicate one aspect of ways respondents counter the effects of humiliation.

9. I developed written narratives for the respondents that put their stories of the experience of humiliation, their responses to it, and its effect on their life as persons in poverty in my own words as a way of depicting the management of meaning.

# Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

## A. DV (David)

I analyzed the transcripts of the two interviews with David (and for all other respondents respectively) as follows. For each transcript of each interview, I identified the respondent with a pseudonym (e.g., "David") and initials (e.g., "DV"); I appended the letter "A" to the initials for the first interview with this respondent and the letter "B" to the second, and after placing the transcript in table form I numbered all responses sequentially, with the interviewer's words having an "odd" designation and the respondent's having an "even" one.

*Table 3.*

Initial Transcript Layout

| | |
|---|---|
| DVA001 | So, maybe you should give me a little bit of background information. . . your full name? |
| DVA002 | My full name is _____ |
| DVA003 | Okay, and your age? |
| DVA004 | My age is 35. |
| DVA005 | Are you married? |
| DVA006 | Married? Yeah. |

Thus in column 1 of the above table, "DV" indicates respondent transcript, "A" indicates the first of two interviews, and "001" indicates that the request, "So, maybe you should give me a little bit of background information—your full name?" is made by the

interviewer, while in the following row, “DVA002” indicates the words of the respondent, “My full name is _____.”

Next, I identified what appeared to me to be logical breaks in the responses and placed them in paragraph form, putting paragraphs in subsequent rows and numbering them as follows.

*Table 4.*

Transcript Paragraph Layout

| | |
|---|---|
| DVA044 | Yeah, (incarceration) would be a humiliating experience. |
| DVA044.1 | It depends on how you are looking at it. Because, as far as society goes, they might think well, some people might think that you are of a certain stature of a person or as in society to be there. |
| DVA044.2 | But, that’s not necessarily true, because whoever might be thinking that, they’re just one step from being there themselves. . . you meet doctors, lawyers there. I guess maybe they have to be there, because money talks. |
| DVA044.3 | But, anyway, that’s not really a nice thing to go through. Uh, sometimes it takes that for people to realize some of the lessons they need to learn, and sometimes there are good moments in there. Spiritually. You can grow a lot spiritually in (jail), because it’s not about how high you can grow on the outside and around you with material gain. It’s about what you can gain spiritually on the inside. You can grow within and be free on the inside as well. |

As I read through the replies of the respondents in the transcripts, I began to identify several categories of responses. I identified these categories based on what I observed to be common themes in the interviews. Respondents appeared to me to be

accommodating the meaning of humiliating experiences by making reference to these themes. Themes included definitions given to the meaning of "humiliation," specific examples of humiliating joint actions, and the relationships in which respondents were involved. I narrowed the categories down as I studied the transcripts, with the following as a result:

1. Descriptions of respondent's social world
2. Definitional understanding of humiliation
3. Explicit examples of humiliation
4. Implicit references to humiliation
5. Reactions to humiliating events
6. Attribution of blame for humiliation
7. Restorative and balancing activities
8. Ways of continuing or disrupting the cycle

I then coded the transcripts for these categories of responses using the above letters as references, allowing me to sort each transcript according to category.

In the following example (see Table 5 below), David's responses are respectively categorized as "DVA044: 3," because he cites incarceration as a humiliating event, "DVA044.1: 6," because humiliation results from the judgment of society, "DVA044.2: 5," because David cognitively responds to this social judgment by labeling it as "not necessarily true," and "DVA044.3: 7" because he balances the humiliation of incarceration by seeing it as a place for personal spiritual growth.

*Table 5.*

Transcript Category Layout

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| DVA044 | 3 | Yeah, (incarceration) would be a humiliating experience. |
| DVA044.1 | 6 | It depends on how you are looking at it. Because, as far as society goes, they might think well, some people might think that you are of a certain stature of a person or as in society to be there. |
| DVA044.2 | 5 | But, that's not necessarily true, because whoever might be thinking that, they're just one step from being there themselves. . . you meet doctors, lawyers there. I guess maybe they have to be there, because money talks. |
| DVA044.3 | 7 | But, anyway, that's not really a nice thing to go through. Uh, sometimes it takes that for people to realize some of the lessons they need to learn, and sometimes there are good moments in there. Spiritually. You can grow a lot spiritually in (jail), because it's not about how high you can grow on the outside and around you with material gain. It's about what you can gain spiritually on the inside. You can grow within and be free on the inside as well. |

As I continued to read through the different responses, I developed sub-categories to define each category more explicitly. The final categories and sub-categories I used for coding the interviews were as follows:

1. Descriptions of respondent's social world

2. Definitional understanding of humiliation

   a. In keeping with cultural understanding

   b. In opposition to cultural understanding

   c. Example of humiliation given in place of definition

3. Explicit examples of humiliation

   a. Verbal, physical, or both

   b. Theme, i.e., judgment, rejection, impersonal treatment

4. Implicit references to humiliation

   a. Verbal, physical, or both

   b. Theme, i.e., judgment, rejection, impersonal treatment

5. Reactions to humiliating events

   a. Distancing

   b. Anger

   c. Planning retribution

   d. Depression

6. Attribution of blame for humiliation

   a. Personalized toward self, other(s), or both

   b. If other(s), what relationship

   c. Systemic

7. Restorative and balancing activities

   a. Seeking further education, job, housing

   b. Building non-threatening relationships (specify)

8. Ways of continuing or disrupting the cycle

   a. Circular or looping behavior

   b. Non-circular, self-actuating behavior

Finally, I combined all 20 transcripts into one table, allowing me to sort like categories for all respondents. This permitted me to see together all responses coded as "2a: Definitional responses to humiliation in keeping with cultural understandings" by all respondents. It also allowed me to select examples from each category as I summarized the data. For example, David referred numerous times to his background and his current living situation, giving me information to construct a synopsis of his social world.

1. Synopsis of Respondent's Social World

David was raised by his mother and stepfather but he states the family was "dispersed" and as a child he was "basically on his own." He has had numerous encounters with the law and has been in jail several times. He became acquainted with his wife when she was 18, and he began dating her while she was in an "unattached marriage." During this time (the sequence of events is unclear) he was jailed for DUI, at which point she persuaded her (husband/ex-husband – the relationship is unclear) to loan David money for bail. This financial arrangement, the loss of his job, relational problems with his (wife/fiancé?), and her decision to stop working resulted in a state of separation and homelessness. After reconciling with her and staying in shelters and homes of friends, they entered the IHN program with their 3-year-old son. David describes his social world in terms of his present commitment to change, because

> It's time to grow up . . . I always knew I would come to this point sooner or later where I figured it was time to make it or break it. At this point in my life, I've been here, and this is where I want to go right here and now. Unless I stop, I will always have those altercations, confrontations, and all those could be embarrassing, humiliating moments. And, life is hard enough as it is. (DAV 134-138)

2. Respondent's Definitional Understanding of Humiliation ("→" and/or italics indicates passage focuses on the subject at hand).

Here David stresses a) the degrading nature of humiliation in a way that is socially situated, and b) the fact that it is unexpected or unanticipated.

DA: It means to have something *unexpectedly or unforeseen* that might happen in an unexpected time or an event that is totally unexpected not to
→ *turn out for the better* of—for the betterment of a person's body where he will—maybe it might *take him down a notch or two* or something that they are not proud of.
And, humility is something that would actually degrade a person or take from their being as a human being or a man or a woman or wife or husband. Maybe something humiliating is something that is a (? - unclear) result of
→ something that happened that has not quite met up to standards—the person's standards maybe as a role model or maybe whatever their position may be in life (DAV 024-028).

He speaks of different events in potential terms: "It might take him down," underscoring the risk inherent in social encounters, and he links humiliation with degradation.

3. Respondent's Explicit Example(s) of Humiliation

David implies there are different levels of humiliation, verbal being less serious than some other kind (physical?). He talks about the argument that arose over his debt, and how the lender had tried to insult him.

MS: Have you ever had an experience like that? Where you have felt humiliated?
→ DA: Yeah. Yes, *I have been made to try to feel* humiliated, but I have *never recalled* feeling humiliated—*only someone's words*. That's all.
MS: So, how did somebody try to make you feel humiliated?

> DA: Oh, maybe over a debt. But, the only reason why that was is because they were harassing anyway, and they were using *any tool they could get a hold of to degrade me* for their own benefit to make them look better. And, he would try to *put me down* in front of my wife and her daughters. *It's not right* to get children involved and stuff, you know. (DAV 029-032).

Here he suggests there is honor to be found in overcoming the attempts by others to humiliate him. Also, the example is depicted in moral terms when he says, "It is not right."

He also speaks about being incarcerated:

> MS: What was jail like?
> → DAV: Well, it wasn't that nice. It was a learning experience. It builds character. It's a humiliating experience. Uh, well they just *take your clothes off*. Well, they *tie you down*. That's what they do first. You'll
> → sit down take your clothes off—no street clothes. Then they'll issue a bed roll and your jumpsuit or whatever your attire is, and then they will *assign* you to a cell, top bunk, lower bunk, and then that's the admission right there. You are just there until they *classify you* and figure out
> → which ward is best according to what . . . They also *abuse* the people that they bring in.
> MS: In what way, physically or?
> DAV: Physically. Instead of telling them which direction to walk or turn or assist them just by moving them, but holding their shoulder or whatever, they'll just take their arm or wrist behind their back and twist their wrist and bend it to almost breaking the wrist. Just for no reason . . . just because they are having domestics with the wife or something . . . It's just they are on an attitude. I don't know, but none of it's nice, though.

Here humiliation is concerned with being forced to disrobe in public, being "classified," and being subjected to physical abuse. This is a public setting, and the perpetrators are jail guards. A contributing factor would seem to be that it is done "for no reason."

4. Implicit References to Humiliation

This story is told in the context of how David became homeless.

> → My job wasn't steady, and the guy I was working with before wasn't paying me right, so I told him I was wanting to not work for him, because I needed times to do something with the family or pay certain bills or just to take care of responsibilities, and he wouldn't come through with the money. But, basically what I found out was that he *uses people* for a little while. He *gets backed up into their pocket, lets them go, and takes on new people* and does the same thing.

"Being used" is compatible with humiliation. It is a form of objectification, which qualifies it as a humiliating experience, as is being "let go." Here it is the employer who is using David for self-serving purposes.

5. Summary of Life Events (I compiled this summary and those that follow from the transcripts)

Growing up with mother and stepfather in a dispersed family

First marriage, divorce

Numerous arrests

Most recent incarceration, job loss, receives bail loan

Second marriage, homelessness

Enters IHN program, decides to grow up

6. Reactions to Humiliating Events

David becomes angry and fights. The following reaction occurred during the argument over a debt. Note that the understanding of humiliation is enhanced with the reference to the "crown," suggesting loss of honor.

DAV: I put up with that for so long, I couldn't put up with it any more. You know, I walked away from him, I don't know how many times, and the last time he made an issue, I just took care of what needed to be taken care of. I just had enough. I don't like to fight, because I'm a peaceful…
MS: Enough is enough?
→ DAV: Yeah, enough is enough, because, he was trying to take the crown and push it off of my head time after time after time.

For David it becomes a question of "enough is enough," suggesting one can accept a certain amount of abuse, but there is a point where fighting becomes the only viable alternative.

DAV: I can only take so much humiliation, and then you've got to say that's it, you know.
MS: How do you know when that's it?
DAV: Well, there is that fine line when uh they make you look bad in front of someone else, you know, and then you just take it all the time, and you keep on taking it over and over and don't do anything about it. You know? People think your are a pushover and don't have no self pride about you or have any self worth, worth sticking up for. I mean your self worth and your family is the best things to stick up for. You know, I don't like doing that, but . . . because I don't like doing that,
→ because when I go that far, I just, I don't know, *I just don't turn back*.

The social forum is emphasized; humiliation is being made to "look bad in front of someone else." What "other people think of you" is a pivotal reason for David to react aggressively to humiliation.

7. Attribution of Blame for Humiliation

David places responsibility for humiliating events on those who objectify him (previous employer, jail personnel) but he also takes responsibility himself:

DAV: But, sometimes you have to go through those humiliating experiences to realize that *doing those things and subjecting yourself into*

→ *those situations* isn't where it is. Unless I stop, I will always have those altercations, confrontations, and all those could be embarrassing, humiliating moments. And, life is hard enough as it is.

8. Restorative and Balancing Activities

David attributes emotional support to his spouse. He discusses his encounter with his creditor and his delayed refusal to get into a fight. Here David uses the metaphor of a "fight" to describe his life. It is more easily won when you have "someone in your corner." Support comes in the form of being affirmed as a man for showing restraint, and having someone encourage him to hold his temper in check.

→ DAV: That was humiliating, yeah. But, I dealt with it. Well, my wife told me I was a hell of a man for dealing with things the way I had for so long—that I had been a man for doing the things the way I have for so long and being a better man for not letting his ignorance get to me and my temper.
MS: It sounds like she is very supportive.
DA: Yeah. She has been on my side and in my corner all the way, and that is just the way she's been.

9. Dramatic Graphic Representation of Life Events, including Humiliation

Here, and in each of the other graphic representations, I attempt to identify specific events in the life of the respondent; together these offer an abbreviated life history. In David's case these events are labeled with capital letters, and in chronological order include (A) growing up, (B) first marriage, (C) numerous arrests, (D) jail and job loss, (E) 2nd marriage, and the (F) the decision to "grow up." I also place these events on the graph vertically in an effort to convey how I, as an interlocutor, perceive their value, e.g., good or bad, positive or negative. The arrows signify movement toward an end state or

goal. In addition I seek to identify specific humiliating events related in the transcripts, as well as periods of encouragement or renewed self-esteem.

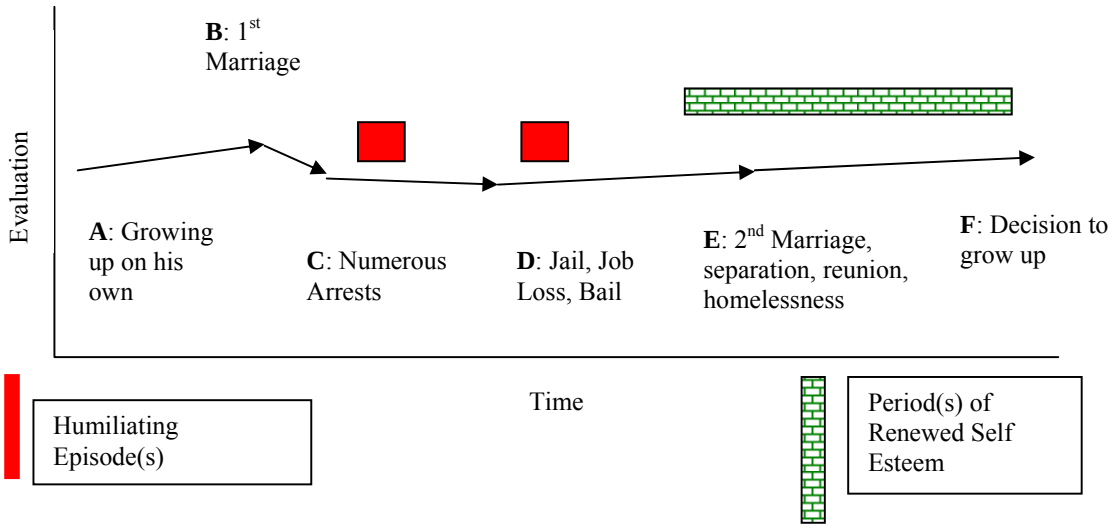


Figure 5. David's dramatic narrative.

10. Continuing or Disrupting the Cycle

David describes repeated confrontations that led to humiliating episodes. His narrative reveals the following pattern:

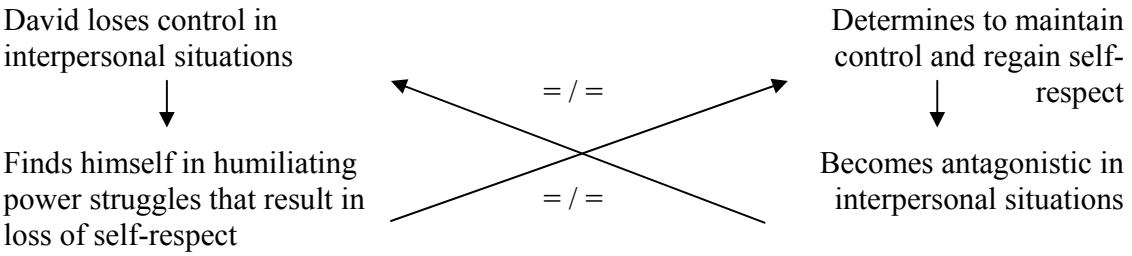


Figure 6. David and his strange loop.

This diagram reveals an ongoing set of actions and reactions on David's part that perpetuate the cycle of humiliation by others and may be diagrammed in a way that is analogous to the "Strange Loop" (V. Cronen et al., 1982). Beginning in the upper left hand corner of the diagram and moving counter-clockwise, David loses control in interpersonal situations. He begins to feel humiliated by the words and actions of others, and as a result of his desire to defend his self-esteem he finds himself in power struggles that result in physical and verbal altercations. They often lead to broken relationships and incarceration, and an ensuing loss of self-respect. The discomfort of these incidents makes David determined to maintain self control when he is insulted by others, but eventually he becomes antagonistic, leading him back to a loss of control. His initial context of resources places cultural values of politeness and the importance of relationships hierarchically lower than his perception of self, which is one of a fighter who needs to prevail in relational conflicts. Humiliation, however, brings about a contextual shift. He is publicly demeaned or ends up going to jail for his actions, causing the need for social acceptance to take precedence over his new self-perception, which is that of one determined to hold his aggressive behavior in check. The new hierarchy remains in place until he finds himself in a conflict that results in losing his temper, wherein the context of resources shifts to its previous form. He is caught up in a "strange loop" (V. Cronen et al., 1982) that has a circular quality to it.

11. Written Narrative Highlighting Management of Meaning and Life Goals

> I find myself embedded in a cultural understanding of life as a fight. When I'm in the ring it's important to have someone who is supportive in

> my corner. And while I consider myself a peaceful person, I repeatedly enter joint actions with the need to defend my "crown," my sense of self esteem and worth. This sometimes works to my disadvantage, leading to incarceration, but it also is restorative, enabling me to both "be a man" and enter further episodes from a position of strength. My efforts at personal transformation are grounded in the choices I make, and now I find myself in a position where I have no other choice but to get my mind right and try to get right spiritually, because I know that the other path I was going in is the wrong path. Sometimes, you will decide it's time. It's time for me to grow up.

B. BA (Amy)

1. Synopsis of Respondent's Social World

Amy is a 24 year old divorced mother of four who was unable to meet her apartment rental expenses after she separated from her husband over a year ago. After living with friends and in shelters for several months she was on the verge of placing her children up for adoption in order to make ends meet. However she decided against this and applied for, and is currently receiving, temporary shelter from Interfaith Hospitality Network.

As a result of a traffic accident her car was damaged, and then impounded because of the tickets she received. This left her without transportation of her own. She has just started working in a local restaurant. The nature of her immediate social world is partially captured in the following interchange:

> MS: You are working 10-hour days. You get tired.
>
> BA: I did talk to a lady that is supposed to help me for the brakes (on my car) to get that done, and she said that she should be getting the (insurance) money on my car by tomorrow, hopefully. So, if I did, then I can get my car back. And, I'll be saying thank you, God. I'm waiting for that. I want my car back so bad. I haven't been without a car for over a year or two now, so having to

> rely on other people taking me to work is—like this morning, my uncle - he's the one that takes me, he'll come here and take me—I overslept. I was like I think it was 45 minutes late. I was like "Oh gosh, you can't do this!" . . . With this, it's been kind of crazy, and I think that's why I'm so exhausted. (BAA 133-144)

Amy's world is one in which her ability to work depends partly on the actions of others. She relies on a social worker to help her navigate legal and insurance issues, and on her uncle for her immediate transportation needs. Her world is "kind of crazy," and there is a frantic quality to the way she tells her story.

2. Respondent's Definitional Understanding of Humiliation

I ask Amy what the word humiliation means to her. She equates it with loss of pride. Her definition is not abstract; rather it is immediate and personal, "basically, our situation right now." Home is a predominant metaphor in her description, suggesting safety, a bounded place where one has freedom. Humiliation represents personal failure and a loss of pride to her.

> BA: Umm, basically, our situation right now, because I have a lot of pride, . . . In a way, it is kind of humiliating that, oh, I'm homeless. I
> → don't have a home. . . . humiliation is something that sticks with you for a while, like you screwed up really good (BAA050). I feel like I'm a failure—like I wasn't able to provide what I could for my kids. (BAA052-053)

3. Respondent's Explicit Example(s) of Humiliation

Having defined humiliation as "our situation right now" the theme is failure, but it is failure in a social context. She speaks of the judgmental attitudes of people she encounters at work or in other public settings:

BA: They'll look at you funny. You don't see the homeless person, but when you hear "homeless," then you start projecting that kind of picture.
MS: Is it judgmental?
→ BA: Yes, there was a lot of judgmental (sic). You know, I get that a lot. When people see me with my four kids, I know I look a lot younger than I really am. I get a lot of people who are like, "You shouldn't be ___ (loud in background and unable to hear what she is saying). It kind of . . . it is a lot of humility, because it really humbles you. It makes you feel
→ you're not . . . like yeah, you failed big time, and it's not good in other people's eyes. You don't reach their standards (BAA080)

The way others look at her is paramount. She perceives these looks as a moral indictment for having so many children and her inability to provide a home for them.

4. Implicit References to Humiliation

While her immediate understanding of humiliation is one of personal failure, Amy also speaks at length about her ex-husband's actions. Describing being dropped off unexpectedly at the Red Cross shelter, she says,

BA: And, the next thing I knew, he was like, "You and the kids need to get together." I knew he meant to get the kids together in the car, so I got them together. I was asking him, "What are you doing?" I had a bad feeling in my stomach. And, he just said, "Well, I'm just taking you guys somewhere, because you can't be here anymore." Well, I'm thinking that means he is taking us somewhere whether it is an apartment or a house or some of our friends. But, he took us there (to the Red Cross
→ shelter). We went inside that building. I recognized it, and I was like, "Why are we here?" He said, "This is where you all need to go." (BAA062)

This event qualifies as humiliating because it involves loss of power and the ability to make choices about one's residence, in this case leading to being placed in the demeaning surroundings of the Red Cross shelter.

For Amy, the experiential sense of humiliation is connected to judgment and rejection. She relates that her husband left her for another girl, and I asked,

> MS: Did you feel dumped?
> → BA: *Yeah, I did*. It felt bad, because when he was with her the first time, she was overweight, majorly. She weighed maybe 20 or 30 pounds more than I did. And, I was kind of like before, I was just laughing like, "He fell for that," you know? . . . Then, when he went back to her, I was like, "What is going on?" And, that made me feel like, kind of like…well, because she is not attractive; I'll get down and say it. She's fat, not attractive, and I just believed her to be an immoral person. (BAA 187-188)

Here humiliation grows out of being rejected for an unattractive, immoral competitor.

5. Summary of Life Events

Abusive home, high school pregnancy

Marriage

Separation

Reconciliation

Abandonment

Present, temporary housing

The future

6. Reactions to Humiliating Events

Amy tells about being depressed and uncertain, and her anger at her husband when he abandoned her:

> BA: I do remember getting up and watching him through — opening the

blinds and looking while he got in the car and left with his friend. After he left is when I *just broke down*, and I just started crying, screaming, cussing.
MS: Were you mad?
BA: Yeah. I was *very mad*, because I thought, I felt like "You can't just
→ get up and leave. You've got responsibilities. You can't just discard them like they're—you know—like they're a ticket. You use it once and it's gone." Basically, what goes through my head is that you know I look back and I think, oh, you know, *I could have done this*, and I could have done that, but I didn't. And, that's what . . . and that's what makes me . . . I mean I have a lot of anger. I get depressed a lot, but I am on anti-depressants right now, and there's just a lot that goes through my head. And, I've got . . . I'm constantly moving something (unclear). But, there is a *lot of anger* and *lot of depressions*, and what ifs.

Here her anger is directed not only toward her husband because he acted irresponsibly, but toward herself because she failed to act in a way to prevent this series of events.

In addition, she responds to persons who humiliate her by dissolving the relationship:

→ BA: I'm divorced now. I finished getting divorced in June, so I'm happy about it.

7. Attribution of Blame for Humiliation

She blames her husband for abandoning her. She also indicates that part of her response is confusion, "not knowing how to repair from that."

BA: He broke the rules. I mean he knew what I believed in. He knew I
→ didn't believe in divorce. He knew I didn't believe in abortion or anything like that, and he knew I was faithful to him and that he was my life. He knew all the facts. And, to see him drive off knowing all of that is what . . . my heart literally broke to pieces, and *I didn't know how to repair from that*. I remember probably a few weeks after he had left, people were telling me, "Oh, you'll get over this. You'll forget the pain.

> You'll get past the hurt." Of course, at that time I was thinking. "You're stupid. You've never been through this."

She is disoriented in her ability to recover; her confusion stems from his rejection of her values of allegiance in the marriage and the rejection of abortion.

8. Restorative and Balancing Activities

There is a shift in Amy's mood as her story nears its conclusion. She feels like a failure, but this failure is being offset by the support of social agencies, family members, God, and friends. As she talks about her husband's sudden departure, her sense of abandonment and humiliation is offset by the presence of her aunt in a time of crisis, by her own persistence, and by the strength she receives from others.

> BA: Well, his aunt was like, well, I'm coming over there. I was crying. I didn't know what I was going to do. I couldn't even speak really on the
> → phone that much. She said, "Stay there, and I'll be right over." So, they came over, and they were over there, and they just pretty much helped me out for a little bit and let me cry and . . . I mean I cried a lot. (BAA 110)

> So, I have been continuous at it. And, of course, I continue to go out job searching. I found a job. I continue to keep up appointments making times for whatever else I need to do like taking care of the car, and making sure I still keep in contact with my family, my friends and people who have supported me.

9. Dramatic Graphic Representation of Life Events, including Humiliation

Here Amy describes her life events of separation, abandonment, and homelessness as humiliating, and they are followed or accompanied by interactions she deems supportive.

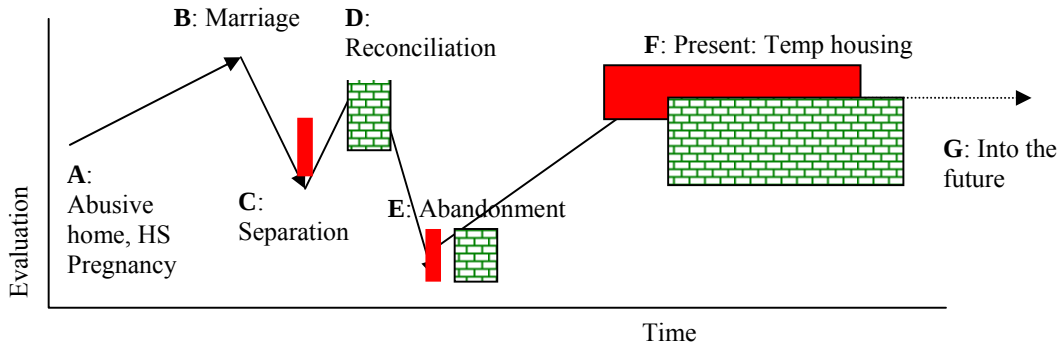


Figure 7. Amy's dramatic narrative.

10. Continuing or Disrupting the Cycle

For Amy, her present situation of homelessness represents humiliation. She seeks to break the cycle of homelessness, and therefore humiliation, by accepting a job and seeking housing. Here, for example, she relates her decision not to save money by placing her children up for adoption, but to enter the IHN program instead.

> → BA: And, then I called my social worker, and I was like, I said, "Okay, *I'm going to try this program*." And, she was like, "Whoa, wait, what made you change your mind?" And, I told her. I told her what happened, and she was like, "Okay, well, what makes you think you can actually do this?" I said, "Let me try it." And, I told her, I said, "I'll try it for 2 weeks, and if after that 2 weeks, I can't do it, then I'll call you." So, I tried it for the 2 weeks, and every day I felt like someone was right there helping me." (BAA 200.1)

Amy expresses the content of unlived stories by talking about how she might have acted differently and about her plans for the future. This content is reflected in expressions of guilt. "I look back and think, oh, you know, I could have done this, and I could have done that, but I didn't." At the same time her plans for the future convey a

sense of hope. She is determined to continue working and looks forward to securing permanent housing for herself and her children, to have a home.

11. Written Narrative Highlighting Management of Meaning and Life Goals

> My understanding of humiliation is twofold. Part of it is being judged negatively by others because I am homeless. Another part is being pushed aside by my husband, whom I thought loved me. A person that I loved, in his self-centeredness and immaturity, treated me in a demeaning way by abandoning me for someone of lesser value. I was partly to blame for this; but while I might have acted differently, he did not reciprocate my values of mutual commitment and loyalty. As a result I am homeless, and I sometimes feel like a failure because I can't provide for my children. But with the help of others I can still survive and look forward to a life where my values are intact. I can work, have a place to live, and care for my children. In addition I feel that God has ordained this in order to strengthen me for the future.

C. SR (Rudolpho)

1. Synopsis of Respondent's Social World

Rudolpho is a 38 year old father of two young children and is caring for them, along with his two stepchildren, while his wife is incarcerated. His appearance is striking because of the extensive tattoos that cover his arms and neck. He has been unemployed for several weeks, and is now part of the Interfaith Hospitality Network housing and job application program. He describes a recent day and his efforts to find work in this way:

> SR: I took off . . . from here we took off at about 7:00 a.m. and went to Interfaith, filled out some paper work for the DHS and took off from there at about 10:30. I took my boys to the soup kitchen, and we ate and then from there we took off to the DHS about 11:30, and I was at the job search from 11:30 to 1:30 looking for a job, making phone calls. At 1:30, my appointment was with TANF from food stamps. (SRA092)

2. Respondent's Definitional Understanding of Humiliation

Rudolpho connects his understanding of humiliation with his personal appearance and the way he is received in public. It is his perception that he is excluded or rejected. Humiliation is

→ SR: The way people look at me. I mean the way they *judge me by the way I look*, because most people see my tattoos and earrings, and I feel kind of humiliated with people when I go and try to look for a job. I go to a church, and people *just look at me from head to toe*, so that makes me feel kind of humiliated with my tattoos.

3. Respondent's Explicit Example(s) of Humiliation

His example is intercultural as opposed to familial. The persons who humiliate him are those he encounters in public places. He experiences it as personal judgment and rejection.

MS: But, when you say it makes you feel humiliated, what is that?
→ SR: In the sense that if I didn't have these tattoos, people wouldn't look at me they way the look at me—like *looking at me like a bad person*. Like when I go to church, there are people that welcome me with open arms, and there are people that just stare at me like "What's he doing here with all them tattoos on him and all them earrings," you know, and that kind of . . .
MS: Like you don't belong?
→ SR: *Like I don't belong*, and sometimes I feel humiliated, so sometimes I really don't want to go to church, because I don't like the way people look at me. And, I am humiliated about that. I know all these tattoos are not a good thing, but it's something I did in my past. I put them on, and I cannot change that.

Here humiliation is tied to the actions of others and how he perceives the meaning of those actions; it qualifies as humiliation because the meaning he imputes to others staring at him is that of rejection.

4. Implicit References to Humiliation

His implicit description of humiliation also centers on rejection, but this comes in the context of his contact with a supervisor at the local Red Cross shelter. He talks about being silenced in his efforts to explain his need for housing (Gilligan, REF). Rudolpho's experience of humiliation denotes a loss of voice. It also is an expression of moral injustice; the shelter rules do not take into account the efforts of those who are sincerely trying to get their lives together, but they should.

SR: I was staying at the rescue mission and the Red Cross shelter when I first got here, but then I went to work one time and didn't get back to the
→ Red Cross shelter until 10:00, *so they kicked me and my boys out* for 30 days.
MS: Is that the rule?
SR: That's the rule. You need to let them know that you are going to be late or whatever, but since I was so excited of going to work, I didn't think about it. I just went and got my kids from this lady friend of mine
→ who'd take care of them when I went to work, and then by the time I knew it, I realized it, I said, "Man I forgot to call the shelter and let them know." *And, when I did call them they said, "You're out."*

Present here is the element of the unexpected. Implied is a social grammar that says, "When I'm trying my hardest to do what is right for me and my children, it is wrong to punish me for the oversight of being late."

5. Summary of Life Events

Got tattoos as a young person

Married and divorced, Long work history, no references; remarried

Made faith commitment, betrayed by pastor

Had faith crisis, made recommitment

Wife in jail; has his two children and her two children.

Stayed at Red Cross shelter, missed deadline, evicted; went to Salvation Army

Began stay at IHN; soup kitchens, job hunting

6. Reactions to Humiliating Events

Rudolpho responds to the dilemma of homelessness and its attendant humiliation not by getting angry, but by setting aside his pride and requesting assistance.

> MS: So, if you are in a bad situation where you feel like . . . okay. Somebody says something to you that puts you down. And, so, what do you say?
> SR: I've never had an anger problem, because if I did, I would probably have a record with the police miles and miles long. Thank God, I've got a clean record. So, I don't consider myself having an anger problem. I guess my problem was back then, because right now I learned how to do my pride. I never went around asking for . . . If I didn't have any place to sleep, I would find a way, you know to provide or whatever. But now, in the situation with my kids . . . So, now I just turn around and ask for
> → help. I'm even at the DHS office asking for food stamps, which I have never done that before in my life. (SRA063-066)

Rudolpho sees pride as a detriment to success. He responds to being "put down" by overcoming his pride and asking for help. At the same time, he experiences a reluctance to enter into some social situations once he has felt rejected:

> → and sometimes I feel humiliated, so *sometimes I really don't want to go to church*, because I don't like the way people look at me.

7. Attribution of Blame for Humiliation

Rudolpho attributes humiliation partly to individuals, but he also sees it as systemic because of the arbitrary rules set by the agencies from which he seeks help. His reasoning

is that if the people in power in the shelters would pay attention to the important things, like disciplining the drunks, people (like him) who have young children to take care of wouldn't be forced out onto the streets just because they are a few minutes late for curfew.

8. Restorative and Balancing Activities

Rudolpho finds strength in his encounters with some agencies, particularly IHN and the soup kitchens.

→ They take care of families, families and kids and parents of kids are the first served. The line is long with single men and whatever, and families go first.

→ They don't care how I look, but they know I've got four boys, so obviously, right there it tells them that I must be doing something good if I am a single parent with four kids having had them for over 6 months by myself. They are always clean and always dressed up and always have on shoes, socks, and are well behaved, so they look intelligent. They know I am doing something good, anyway.

9. Dramatic Graphic Representation of Life Events, including Humiliation

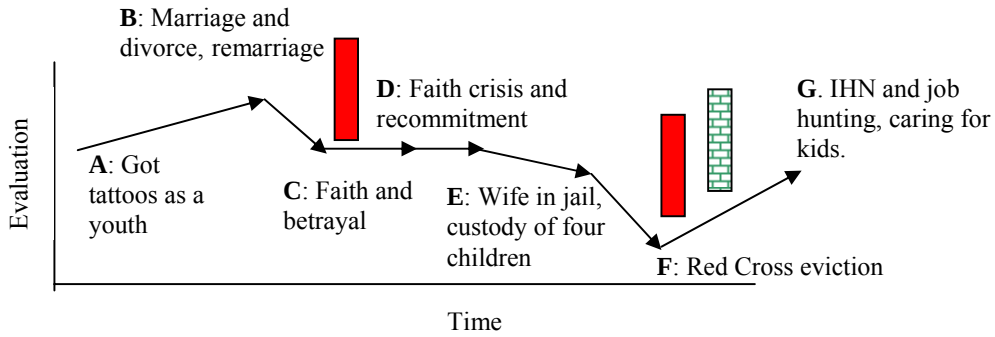


Figure 8. Rudolpho's dramatic narrative.

10. Continuing or Disrupting the Cycle

Rudolpho seeks to disrupt the cycle of humiliation by determining to educate his children, in the hope that they can avoid the consequences of his own poor decisions.

> → I would never . . . now this is one experience I went through having all these tattoos on me when I was a young dude, and now I can pass on my experience to my kids that *it's not a good thing to do*, get tattoos, because people will judge you by the way you look to the outside even though they don't know you how you are to the inside.

He does not say this removes him from the ongoing experience of humiliation; the tattoos are permanent. Instead this suggests that humiliation will be avoided for his children if they follow his advice, and that the impact of it will be lessened for them, and for him as he lives vicariously through them.

11. Written Narrative Highlighting Management of Meaning and Life Goals

> I find myself in a state of cultural conflict. I am homeless in a city of housed persons, jobless in a city of working persons, married to a woman who is incarcerated, the sole caretaker of four young children, and Hispanic in a community that has an Anglo majority. I'm most conscious of humiliation when I try to go out in public, especially to church, and people stare at me because of all my tattoos, but I also experience it when I ask for agency help and the people there don't understand how hard I'm trying to care for my kids.
>
> I bring a strong cultural understanding of "family" to my construction of self. It provides an umbrella for me in my efforts to care for my two children and my wife's two step-children, allowing me to set aside my own pride, and to some extent the judgmental attitudes of others toward my appearance. As a result I am able to seek out agency support in my commitment to find work and other resources. Ultimately my immediate understanding of humiliation, experienced in the judgmental looks of others, is intensified by experiences of powerlessness in social situations. Nevertheless I am a strong person, and I intend to get a job and care for my family.

D. BJ (Jaime)

1. Synopsis of Respondent's Social World

Jaime is a 51-year-old female who is divorced, has three children and has attended 2 years of college. After 16 years of marriage, her youngest daughter told her that she was being molested by her stepfather (Jaime's husband). This led Jaime to divorce, repeated contact with social services, and loss of income. Jaime has been living in shelters and on the streets for 11 years. She was raised in a violent home and abused by her own father as a child. She says that in her first marriage she was beaten. She reports abusing her own children as well. She has a history of contacts with the outreach agencies in Denver and Colorado Springs and is now being encouraged to undergo evaluation at a mental health clinic before receiving further financial aid, a course she is fighting against. Jaime describes her life as vulnerable and often hopeless, balanced to some degree by the beauty of the world and the occasional goodness of others:

> BJ: I think sometimes there's nobody around, there's nobody around to comfort you, there's nobody around to help you, there's nobody around to change anything for you, and you're leaning on you, and sometimes you get to a place of hopelessness, absolute hopelessness, like, pshhh, this is never going to get better, why don't I just die.
>
> It's not that you want to kill yourself or anything, it's just that there's nothing good about this, . . . and I think a lot of the people that live outside, there are times like this, when it's raining, you're going to really suffer, the weather's against you, and it's hard, but then there are those days you're going to wake up and things are beautiful, and you can really rejoice in the creation that is around you, and you can really rejoice in people, but there are days when there's no, and it is just an overwhelming no home, hopelessness. (LJA 108)

2. Respondent's Definitional Understanding of Humiliation

For Jamie humiliation comes from being labeled unfairly and treated unjustly, particularly by social service workers and agency representatives. The setting is inter-cultural. The resultant feeling is "less than," and the implication is "less than human."

> BJ: What comes to mind? You know, having been to uh I was married for 16 years, and then my children and I were violated and we had to literally escape for our lives, because we were in danger at that time. But
> → they kept *stamping me, dis . . . o, gosh, something homemaker, displaced homemaker*. (LJA032)
> → Um, they *treat you inferior*. That whoever is behind the desk is, because of their position of authority, and you're coming in and you're asking for help, they will um through words, through eye contact, it's mostly an attitude that comes across, *an attitude that you are less than*, and my children, um, went through a lot of that where it caused them to feel shame. (LJA036)
> . . . and see that's part of humiliation too, where they treat you like you
> → have not, like you have no intellect, like you are just um a robot, you are just caught in this trap and you just go on and on like if you have no intellect, but you do. (LJA080)

This is not an abstract definition. It is a concrete representation that embraces both the past ("my children and I were violated") and the present ("they treat you as inferior"). The meaning here suggests a continuing life experience rather than one or more isolated events.

3. Respondent's Explicit Example(s) of Humiliation

Jaime's experiences with humiliation are ongoing, and she frequently places them in the context of episodes involving workers in social service agencies. Part of her sense of degradation comes from rejection and from having her past ignored by people who

assume that she is incapable of meaningful employment. It is also connected to the attitude she perceives "the system" has toward her.

> BJ: See I came from a marriage and he provided everything, had what do you call it a tri-level house, we had four vehicles, you know there was no lack for money you could go get a pizza at Dominos every Friday, for nothing, and those things, not medical or anything, and then you just, you
> → become homeless, and you're part of this system, and it is, *it's a system of humiliation*.
> → When you go into a place and ask for a shower you never know what their attitude's gonna be. Is their attitude gonna be, well, I woke up in a bad mood today so I'm gonna treat you terrible, you know, more like you know you're a nuisance and please go away, and then there's some days when they're very sensitive to you, maybe its when they see the exhaustion in your face . . . (LJA054.2)
> . . . but its interesting when you look out on the street at who's homeless, you don't look into their background, you just look and see what you see up front. I actually worked 15 years in construction; I worked for 11 years on the street as a street minister. I did hair for 6 years. I raised three children, you know? There are many, many people like that. (LJA046)

Two things contribute to the meaning of humiliation here. One is the unpredictability of others' responses ("You never know what their attitude's gonna be"). Part of the humiliation for Jaime is the feeling of being caught off-guard. Another is the moral conflict that arises from living in a world where past experiences and accomplishments "should be" grounds for the way others evaluate her as a person, but these are overlooked. She relates that she is judged solely on the basis of personal appearance and her current status of unemployment.

4. Implicit References to Humiliation

It is seen here in the response of other homeless persons toward her when she gets a job working in a resale shop. Again, she places humiliation in the category of rejection.

→ BJ: They don't trust you, don't want to speak with you because somehow you—it's almost like a, um, like a *loss of loyalty*, like you were their comrade in arms and you've become a general or something, just a higher command, so *you become different to them*. As long as you walk with them, and you suffer with them, but when you get into a position where you are doing well, and it's not even doing better or a sense of that but uh, *they have a different attitude towards you*. Then that's a very strange place to be. Very uncomfortable for me,

The implied reference to exclusion makes the experience humiliating.

5. Summary of Life Events

Childhood in abusive family

Abusive first marriage, divorce

Second marriage, abuse of children by self and husband

Divorce, shelters

Mental evaluation encouraged

Deciding between help and independence

6. Reactions to Humiliating Events

Jaime fluctuates between isolation and anger. Her response to humiliating treatment on the streets is to seek out other people in the social service system who will affirm her and give her the assistance she needs for food, housing, and clothing.

→ BJ: Even at (Ecumenical Social Ministries) you know the people, you *start to know the people that are truly sympathetic* with you, and care about you, you know, and the ones that kinda *wish you were gone*. It'll come through the people that honestly do not like the homeless, that may be their job, but that they do not like, and I say homeless, the people that cannot take care of themselves. (LJA088)

On the street she does what she can to conceal her social status:

→ BJ: Um, I don't look and I don't carry myself like a homeless person except for my luggage cart, and I go park it somewhere and hide it, and I'm looking for a job, I don't look like a homeless. (LJA048)

7. Attribution of Blame for Humiliation

Jaime blames those who do not understand her as a person. Eventually her perception of her needs comes in conflict with the system she seeks assistance from. Jamie wants to get housing assistance from a local agency, but they have a record of her requests and her public behavior, and they insist on a mental health evaluation before they will help her further financially. She ends up bargaining with her social service providers in order to get what she needs without going through the testing process. In her descriptions of humiliating events she depersonalizes blame, attributing it not to specific individuals but to larger groups, e.g., the "system," "they," "Bijou House," "a lot of people." Her most specific attribution is to "my family," but again, no one individual is mentioned; Jaime's attribution of cause is other-directed throughout her narrative.

→ LJ: Bijou House wants me to go through the Pikes Peak Mental Health Center, my concern is if they were to say to me, and I have been through this before, the chemical imbalance, you need to take medication. I am against taking medication. I do not need to be inoculated against reality. I need to face reality good or bad, with soundness of mind, with clarity. I don't need to be drugged and put through that kind of nonsense. . . . You know why I say that is because I have been fighting a lot of people, even my own family, who have told me, "You know what, Mom, you're mentally ill." No I'm not. I'm an intelligent woman with a sound mind. (LJB116)

8. Restorative and Balancing Activities

Jaime finds encouragement in relationships with certain agency workers.

LJ: The word of God, and uh, ministry. I am affiliated with Marilyn

Hickey Ministries. Christian Broadcasting Network.
MS: Are there people there that you've become close to?
LJ: Um hm. Yeah.
MS: And they encourage you?
→ LJ: They do. They encourage me a lot. They really do encourage me a lot.

9. Dramatic Graphic Representation of Life Events, including Humiliation

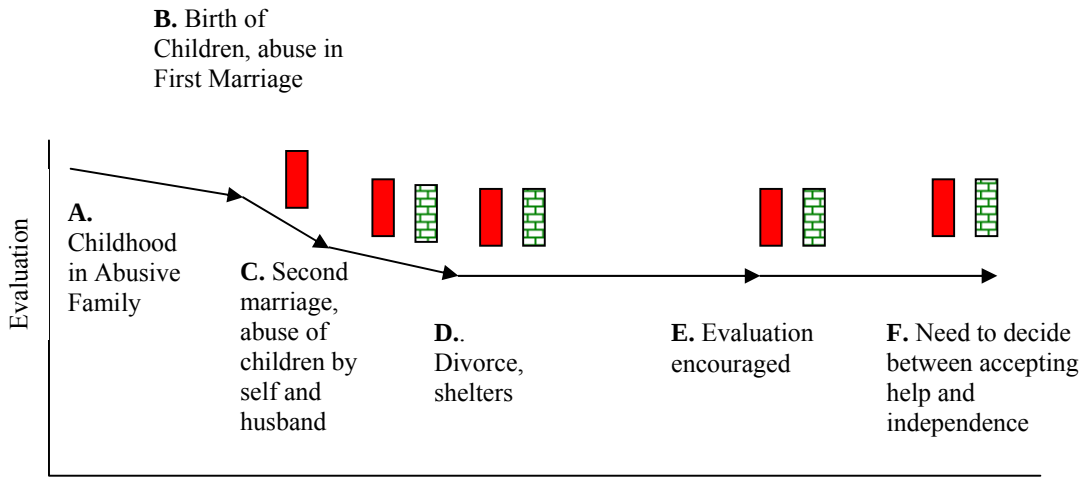


Figure 9. Jamie's dramatic narrative.

10. Continuing or Disrupting the Cycle

In a process analogous to Pearce's "Strange Loop," (W. B. Pearce, 1989, pp. 40-49), Jaime begins with a resource context that includes a self-concept of victim in a cultural world that she perceives as having assets available to those in need. Her efforts to attain these assets, however, come with an unacceptable cost.

Jamie finds herself trying to trade degrees of self-esteem for assets, but reaches a limit when she is about to be labeled mentally ill. Her self-concept shifts to that of a

woman too proud to go through the mental health evaluation the agencies insist on. This leads to a pattern of continuing humiliation and efforts to avoid it. The need for assistance is strong enough that she will sacrifice pride by asking for help, but when the help is made contingent on her getting a mental evaluation (which she considers demeaning) she breaks off the relationship with the agency and forgoes further assistance. But then her physical needs lead her back to requesting assistance from the same agency or another one.

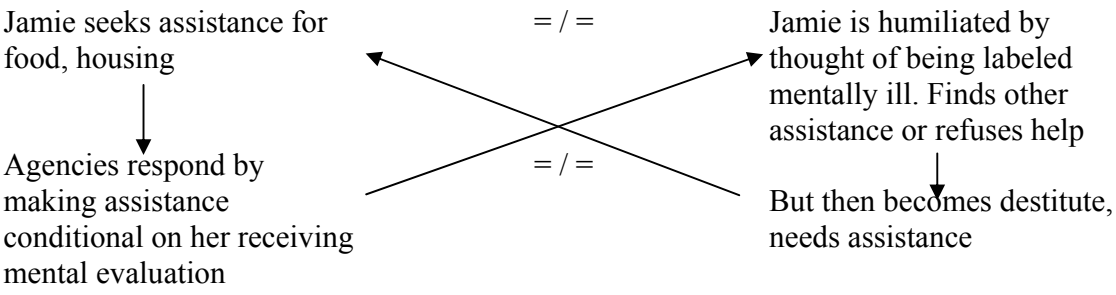


Figure 10. Jaime's strange loop.

Jamie relates unlived stories in her expressed desire to engage in ministry, telling others about Christianity, and to write a book that describes her experiences to the homeless population, with the message that they, too, can survive.

11. Written Narrative Highlighting Management of Meaning and Life Goals

> For me, self-esteem is largely dependent on cultural and relational labels. I'm constantly hurt by the label of "homeless" and I do my best to disguise my homeless status, to "pass" as a non-homeless person. I am upset when agencies label me "displaced," because from my perspective I was abused. That's what caused me to be homeless for all these years. I am most upset with the possibility of being labeled mentally ill, but by avoiding this label, by refusing to negotiate with certain agency workers, I'm cut off from financial assistance and a way out of homelessness.

> Nevertheless I find encouragement in my relationships with religious groups and my relationship with God.

E. HR (Robert)

1. Synopsis of Respondent's Social World

Robert is a 46-year-old widower with no children. He was born into a single-parent abusive family and in early childhood was placed in a Catholic orphanage. He is currently unemployed, but has held jobs in the past as a wrangler and a painter. He has a GED degree. He was married, but his wife died 6 years ago. At one point he was jailed and then fined for felony theft. He says that he suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of his early childhood experiences, and has been receiving disability payments for about 20 years. He has been living in shelters or in his vehicle for much of that time. He is currently living in the Red Cross shelter and has applied for a job as a painter with three local construction companies. He describes a typical day in his life this way:

> HR: Maybe you wake up in the morning, go to the labor pool and there's no work, or there is and they work you to the bone. Uh, they send you out on all the dirty jobs that nobody wants to do, and then you come back, you're dirty, you're tired, you gotta go into the same structure again, and the money that you make due to the inflation and what-not is practically nothing. You're making the money for the labor pools, you're not making, your making just enough to survive day by day. (HRA 082)

2. Respondent's Definitional Understanding of Humiliation

For Robert, humiliation is a lowering, whereby feeling good about himself is reduced. It is intercultural, and involves the perceived reactions of others (a "mindset of

surroundings"). It grows out of specific incidents where derogatory remarks are made and judgmental looks are given, but the effect is cumulative. It results in a continued lowering of his self-esteem.

> → HR: Humiliation is pretty much a mindset of surroundings, the way you dress, the way you carry yourself, um, when you're in a homeless situation, the way the population perceives you, um, and at times when you're in that situation your character, um, tends to get, your character, how would you say, your personality condition of the lifestyle begins to reflect pretty much in a standard way, it affects you mentally, because you . . . *what it tends to do is self esteem, uh your character towards feeling good about yourself is reduced to a very low level*. (HRA 016-030)

3. Respondent's Explicit Example(s) of Humiliation

Robert describes the experience of humiliation as the perception that he is being judged for his state of homelessness:

> → Well, I'm very good at whatever you want to call it, . . . I can look at somebody's eyes and body language and see that they're uneasy, you know, which would in turn *make me feel uneasy because they're judging me* (HRA036). Well, OK, then we're talking again about like situations that arise on the street, being in a poverty situation, where the population of so-called well to do or what not, yes, *you'd feel humiliated* if you ain't got no money, or you ain't got a place to live, it can affect you mentally, and it brings you lower and lower as you see, a lot of people on the street, um, you know, tend to get, they can't take care of themselves well, um you know, they're not eating well, so. (HRA026)

Here is the sense that humiliation is a given when one is in a homeless lifestyle. "Yes, you'd feel humiliated if you ain't got no money." The meaning of the word "humiliation" is reflected for Robert in his uneasiness with the perception he believes others have of him.

4. Implicit References to Humiliation

> HR: I might go to a soup kitchen or what not, and the people sometimes that are serving, sometimes you can feel like an uneasiness, you know,
> → have a *stigma* toward me at that point in time because I'm going through the line, I'm not serving; it could be walking into a store, not having enough money to purchase what I wanted to get, you get kind of like a
> → little bit of a *negative attitude*, uh, might be walking down the street, and getting a *glare or a certain kind of a look* because I have a backpack, um, or a sleeping bag, people might yell out of the car, "Hey, you ahole" or something like that. (HRA 032)

Throughout the interview, Robert describes several incidents in hypothetical terms, "I might go;" "It could be walking into a store." In this way he suggests that he has frequently been the recipient of humiliating encounters. The above example portrays humiliation because it references perceived rejection and pejorative comments.

5. Summary of Life Events

Born into abusive family

Raised in Catholic orphanage

Married, frequently separated

Wife died; convicted of theft

Began living on streets, in shelters, in truck

Job hunting, looking for stability

6. Reactions to Humiliating Events

Robert affects an attitude of distancing, of separating himself from those who humiliate him and from the events themselves.

> HR: Whatever comes across the table, you just deal with it, you don't allow it to affect you, where it's gonna knock you off the side there, you

know what I'm saying? There is really no protection, . . . because if you
→ for whatever reason, allow your *mindset or your focus to be distorted* by whatever comes down the pike, like having a hard time finding a place or finding a job or whatever the case may be, *you don't allow it to affect you* in a way where it's going to *depress you*, where you're just going to give up. I think a lot of people have done this.

I gotta be honest with ya, I'm learning to deal with it every day as to how
→ I'm not going to allow it to affect me to where I'm gonna get sidetracked, I'm just gonna do what I have to do and I know it will happen, because it has in the past many times, it's just that I allowed it because of whatever reason to sidetrack myself, you know, by moving, by letting things bother me, by reflecting on things that happened in the past (laughs), am I getting across? (HRA092-098)

His potential response to humiliation is misdirected focus, depression, and giving up. He has frequently reacted this way in the past. But he also reacts with resolve, "I'm not going to allow it to affect me . . . I'm just gonna do what I have to do." At other times he becomes angry, as seen in the next excerpt.

7. Attribution of Blame for Humiliation

Here humiliation arises from being judged legally instead of socially. He tells about being convicted on theft charges, an embarrassing event. Robert and I develop a sub-narrative that places causation for this situation and the ensuing response he gets from employers and the public on himself and also on others. He did something stupid, but another person misled him into stealing. The theft victim misrepresented the value of the property; the judge punished him too harshly. The tenor of his story is, "I've made mistakes, but a lot of people are complicit in the blame."

MS: Can you remember being in court?
HR: Oh yeah, yeah.

MS: What was it like?

→ HR: Well I was embarrassed, I was a *little angry* too because the story went that it was, we were breaking into the place, which we weren't, the man that owned the property, uh, and he tried to say that the refrigerator (in the alley) was operable, which it wasn't, um, so you know with the pictures and everything else I don't see how the judge could have sided with him and as far as the price that I was fined.

MS: So why was it embarrassing?

→ HR: Uh, *it pissed me off* because of the price that I was fined and because I had to pay, and the point of me being in the back there, getting caught *doing a stupid thing.* (HRA071-76)

At the same time he views the humiliating nature of joblessness and homelessness as cyclical and systemic. He attributes his financial and housing situation in part to the economic and legal system. Once one has a criminal record his opportunities for employment, and hence his self-esteem, are diminished. Comparing the plight of the homeless to victims of big business and slavery, he says,

→ HR: And uh it's a big racket. And I think that in this country – let alone other countries but in this country, it's *big business*. Prison is big business, incarceration is big business, um, labor pools are big business, and when is it ever going to stop? When is it ever going to end? I mean *slavery* has been around for how many years, and it just keeps on, as time goes on we categorize in a different realm, but it's actually the same thing, you know, you're just getting paid for it a little, *because of the laws.* (HRA 086)

While Robert attributes cause/blame in part to himself, his outward attribution is, like Jaime's, general and impersonal. Perpetrators are "big business," "they," "the people who are serving in the soup kitchen," "the system."

8. Restorative and Balancing Activities

Robert employs prayer to find encouragement.

HR: Now what I think with the Lord, ok, I will say, OK, I'll pray

between me and my creator, I'll say, thank you for um the food every day, a place to stay, um if it's your willpower that I find a job, that I find
→ a place to live and get out of the situation I'm in. *Now I have found many things change. It's better when I think positively, and I talk to my creator*. You know. I have peace of mind, I feel better, and a lot of times things just seem to line up and work out for the good. Better.

9. Dramatic Graphic Representation of Life Events, including Humiliation

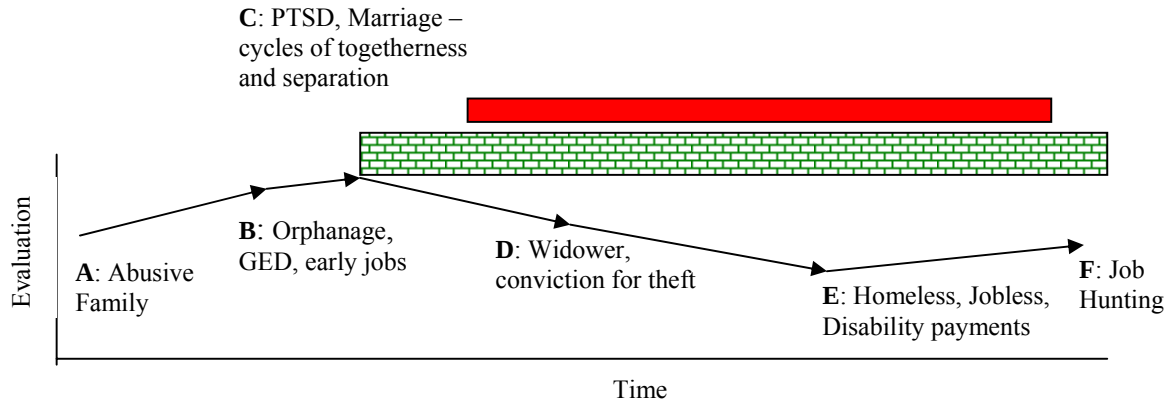


Figure 11. Robert's dramatic narrative

10. Continuing or Disrupting the Cycle

Robert has been enmeshed in homelessness for several years, and his narrative reveals a pattern of becoming discouraged and depressed, then determining to break the cycle. This also becomes cyclical.

For Robert, things might have been different if he had treated his wife better while she was living, and if he had not been raised in an abusive situation. He is optimistic about his recent job interviews, his prospects for employment, and getting off the street, which he combines with a desire to change.

HR: I think through prayer and through God everything can be cured. In time, you know what I mean? It's just up to the mind. Maybe I'll need

→ medication for another year or two until I get established where I get my own place, and I have some time under my belt with work. 'Cause you gotta work, you can't have a lot of idle time, it's just not good, so see I haven't had that in a long time, other than a couple of years in the military
MS: But you look forward to it.
→ HR: Oh yeah, yeah. I want to change. I definitely want to change, because I totally am tired. I'm 46. And I am tired of living like this; I really am, you know? (HRB100-102)

11. Written Narrative Highlighting Management of Meaning and Life Goals

> I have had bad things done to me, and I've made some poor decisions. As a result I'm often feeling put down; I'm not in a good place, and people judge me for that, perhaps fairly, perhaps not. But at this point I've made personal and spiritual commitments to try harder, live more responsibly, and get a job, which makes for a more promising future.

F. JB (Jordan)

1. Synopsis of Respondent's Social World

Jordan, a 28-year-old woman with two children, is currently living in the church shelter arrangement supported by Interfaith Hospitality Network. She is unemployed following separation from her husband. She describes her past in a way that reflects her efforts to cope with changes in marital and economic status, and then having children. In this description there is a distinct change in agency between her earlier life, where she employs the first person active verb form in describing her actions, and the later depiction of herself as a recipient of the actions of marriage and childbirth:

> *I was* a single woman, *I worked*, *I went to school*, in fact my sister would always call me a professional student. I was always in some type of class, some type of skills, learning some trade. I went to school and *I've already learned* about 8 trades and have certificates and what not, but they're all expired, I cannot use the credentials, but as a single *woman I would work and provide for myself*, and if I wanted to go out I could do that, I had the money, you know what I mean, it was, the finances are there . . .

> but now since I've got married I've been, *marriage kind of introduced a level of poverty in my life* that I've never known because I'm um, gosh, you deal with somebody, and maybe that person, the two of you are not united in your thinking, and your goals, equally motivated, so its hard to acquire things, to achieve the more simplistic things in life, it can be difficult if it's not equal between the two of you. Then you have babies that come into it, and if you're pregnant, you know, *the babies seem to keep coming.* (BJA 024)

2. Respondent's Definitional Understanding of Humiliation

Jordan makes a distinction between embarrassment and humiliation, which she categorizes together, and shame, which she says is less trivial. She rejects the idea that she has been humiliated:

> → BJ: Well, (embarrassment and humiliation) are two feelings that I really don't experience very often, even in the situation that I'm in, so they're very hard for me to explain. Now, shame, is one thing, um, but to put it in the category of embarrassment and humiliation, I don't know if that would really fit.
> MS: What's the difference?
> BJ: Um, there is a big difference. Humiliation, embarrassment, is quite trivial, it is very small compared to shame. There are circumstances in your life that bring shame; shame in the choices that you've made, and the results of the choices that you've made, consequences that came as a result of the choices that you've made, um, and the stigma that follows
> → you because of your choices. Or the circumstances in your life that you have no control of, that happen to fall upon you. (BJA 010-012)

3. Respondent's Explicit Example(s) of Humiliation

Jordan denies having felt humiliated or ashamed. She then reconsiders, stating the feeling does come in family settings. However she seems to waver in her description between whether shame is something she feels, or her family feels toward her because of her economic status.

> MS: Have you ever experienced anything like that?
> BJ: Um, no, I haven't. Even in the situation that I'm in now, I really

→ don't feel a lot of shame – *well, I take that back,* at times I do amongst my family members, people, average people on the street, people I'm really not familiar with, that I deal with on an every day basis, there really is no shame there, they're just my life circumstances, but because I'm closer to my family they know where I've been in my life, what I've experienced, um that there has been a time of prosperity for me, and I'm in the position I'm in now and that they would have to see the depravity,

→ and they would have to see the struggle, you know what I mean, and it creates a little bit of shame amongst my family members. (BJA 021-022)

Here the depiction of the feeling, in this case shame, is described as a collective experience rather than a purely individual one. It has the sense of bouncing back and forth between all members of the family, becoming something they know together.

4. Implicit References to Humiliation

None were given.

5. Summary of Life Events

Education, professional certificates

Marriage and childbirth

Separation

Job loss, homeless

Job search, temporary housing

IHN and job hunting, caring for her children

Future, possible reconciliation, employment

6. Reactions to Humiliating Events

While Jordan finds few if any experiences of humiliation in her life story, she does allude to the stigmatization that comes with poverty. Her response is to distance herself

from both the people who treat her this way and from the feelings themselves, and to work harder at recovering her status as a person with a job and a home.

→ Um, I just tend to do my, whatever I have to do, I mean you just overlook it, you know, there are enough things in my day, you know, that are time consuming, energy consuming, that I cannot focus on what somebody may be thinking about me in my situation, I have to, there are many
→ priorities I have to meet in a day's time, it doesn't you, it doesn't stick with you very long, the feeling of it.

7. Attribution of Blame for Humiliation

Jordan takes responsibility for her poverty and any attendant social judgment that may accompany it, but she also has a divine perspective on causation. She states that God has ordained this situation for her, and it is her "portion." This contributes to a broader story of hope for the future.

→ I mean, I'm going through these things because its appointed of me by God, a lot of it is because of choices that I've made, you know what I mean? I think, um spiritually, *God has to purge me of a lot of things*, I think so that I can come out to be a better person in the future for Him, you know what I mean, so I think that He has manipulated, [laughs], so many circumstances in my life, and even played upon the decisions that I've made also, which have been a lot of bad decisions that I've made, and have kind of made them all work together so that they will be a kind of purging process for me. And so the poverty and the affliction that
→ comes with the poverty and whatnot, *is a way of kind of growing me up on the inside*, so that I will be able to handle things better in life. (BJA070)

Here Jordan manages the meaning of humiliation in part by developing a theological stance that puts causation in cosmological terms. She sees homelessness and its attendant shame partly as something that God brings about so that she can become a stronger person in the future. She states that God has led her into this situation in order to

make her "a better person." She concludes that since God has ordained her poverty, homelessness, and whatever feelings accompany it, this must be in her best interest.

8. Restorative and Balancing Activities

Jordan attributes the potential for restoration to faith.

> → If I stay faithful to Him. That is a choice with me. If I stay faithful to God, and if I don't forsake him, then he's gonna see me through it, and I'll come out the way he wants me to be, you know, but if I do foolishly, like a lot of times that I've done, then the process won't be completed, and all this will be in vain, it will be for nothing.

9. Dramatic Graphic Representation of Life Events, including Humiliation

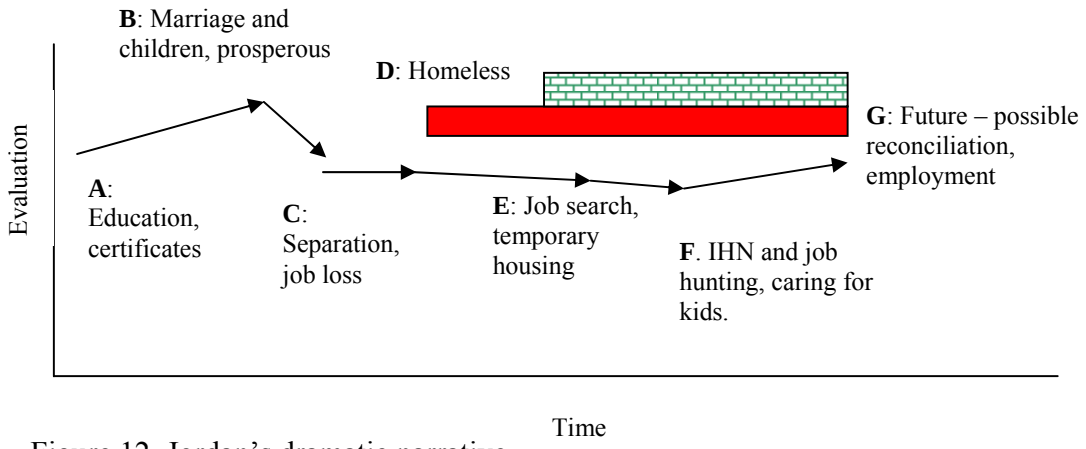


Figure 12. Jordan's dramatic narrative

10. Continuing or Disrupting the Cycle

Jordan's story stresses her intent to learn from her mistakes in the past and to build a new life for herself. She is appreciative of the assistance she has received from social agencies such as IHN, and she describes her determination to regain employment and salvage her marriage.

MS: What have you envisioned for yourself, if you could do what you wanted?
→ BJ: Um, I would buy some houses. I would buy some houses and sell them. [laughs]
MS: Like real estate.
BJ: Yeah. That's what I really want to do
MS: Now, is your husband working now?
BJ: Yes, yes he is.
MS: So is he able to help you out at all?
→ BJ: Yeah, we work together. We work together. The separation and all, but we'll be back together.
MS: You sound pretty optimistic about that
→ BJ: Yeah, we will. We always get back together. [laughs]

Jordan has made "poor choices" and assumes things might have worked differently if she had acted otherwise in the past. Now she wants to be reunited with her husband.

BJ: We've been struggling for so long. We would have a home of our own, both my husband and I would be working, we would be taking care
→ of our children, um, that's what we would be doing.
MS: What would you be doing for work?
BJ: Um, gosh, whatever I could get my hands on [laughs]. I'm so desperate for work right now. Um, just whatever I could do, anything that I could have my babies with me. It probably would be if it's a job outside
→ the home where I could take the kids with me, so, or I would do a home-based business, where I could be at home with the babies.

11. Written Narrative Highlighting Management of Meaning and Life Goals

I have experienced tremendous change in my life, going from a situation of prosperity and employment to poverty and homelessness. I have experienced a sense of shame, but I describe it mostly in terms of what my family, not I myself, feel. I attribute the fact that they are ashamed of me to their lack of understanding of my own situation. From my perspective I was once a proud person who needed to learn the humility God wanted to teach me, and my present circumstances are a result of that education. Thus humiliation is invoked by God for my own good, and if I stay the course, I will learn what I need to learn and become a better person.

G. LJ (Renee)

1. Synopsis of Respondent's Social World

Renee is the 25 year-old single mother of a 3-month-old daughter. Raised in an abusive home by her mother and stepfather, she began living on her own after high school, but she left her apartment and her former boyfriend when he struck her. She then met her current boyfriend who at the time was living on the streets and dealing drugs. He is the father of their daughter, and she considers him to be her husband by common law marriage. They are currently separated because he sent her to a city where more assistance was available, and because he believed their lives were in danger due to a drug deal that "went bad." She believes he is in a drug rehabilitation program in another city at the present time. She is now receiving housing assistance from IHN and is enrolled in a community college. She plans to work after graduation and be reunited with her husband. She describes homelessness this way:

> LJ: It's bad. It's um, living on the streets is like living in a dark cave, because uh you're either sleeping in the rain, sleeping in the snow, you're sleeping wherever, um, the first place I slept with her dad, was in an orchard field right outside a crack house. We could see it through the fence. The other place was a house they were going to demolish this year, and um we stayed in there one night. Another place we stayed was under a bridge. When we stayed under that bridge we had a police officer come every day looking at us and saying, "Can I have your name and your birthdate?" (JBA 038)

2. Respondent's Definitional Understanding of Humiliation

For Renee, the immediate definition of humiliation is found in the judgmental reactions toward her by people who are not homeless. Building on her description of the police officer who was "every day looking at us" (see above) she says,

> → JB: Um. What comes to mind for me? *Staring. People constantly staring* at you. That what comes to mind to me.
> MS: And does the stare mean anything?
> → JB: Why. Why did you let yourself . . . *why did you put yourself in that place*? You know. Why is it blamed on us? Or me? Instead of looking at the whole picture. . . . I experienced that by living on the streets. Uh, people looking, staring at you, so, I mean, eventually you get used to the stares and the whispers and the talking. When you're on the streets. (JBA 016)

Staring is interpreted by her as a judgment of her homeless status, and it occurs frequently.

3. Respondent's Explicit Example(s) of Humiliation

Her experiential descriptions of humiliation are in part an elaboration on her immediate understanding of the term, that it involves judgmental looks by others. . She relates an incident when her husband was working out of a labor pool and he had instructed her to go to the labor pool office and wait for him to get off work. She was tired and fell asleep inside the building on a ledge, next to a window, that looked out on the sidewalk.

> → JB: I fell asleep on this ledge type deal thing, people would go by and knock, and they would *scare me and laugh*. And they'd think it was funny, and people would just stare at you as they walked by. Well dressed people would walk by and go, "Lookit, what is she doing?" We got that all the time. (JBA 056.1)

Included here in her understanding of humiliation is the disparity between her discomfort and the attitude of those who "scared" her, who found her reaction "funny."

4. Implicit References to Humiliation

She extends this understanding, however, with a story of her treatment by her abusive former boyfriend. In it, humiliation results not only from the surprise element of the treatment, but from being objectified and physically attacked.

> → It was very hard. Um, I knew my ex for 10 years. It was hard, 'cause I trusted him, and I told him, if he ever hit me I was going to hit him with an iron skillet, which I didn't have one at the time. Um, but when *he hit me,* I was like, "I can't believe you hit me! Why? The only thing I've been telling you is to stand up for yourself. Be a man, don't let your mom run your life for you!"
> → And *he just didn't care*. And he . . . That is hard. That is so hard, *a person that you love and a person that you thought you knew, would hit you.* Now my guard stays up. (JBB 028-032)

5. Summary of Life Events

Childhood in abusive home

Abused by boyfriend, left him

Lived on streets, met current husband

Continued on streets, gave birth

Separated from husband, lived in shelter

Going to school, planning for future

6. Reactions to Humiliating Events

Renee's anger is apparent when she talks about being stared at on the streets because of her homeless condition. She gets angry, wants to scold the people that stared at her, or to hit them, "beat them down."

> MS: And what was your reaction?"
> → JB: I wanted to go and tell them, beat 'em down. In fact I wanted to go, "In 10, 20 years from now you might be in the same place I am." So um, it was very hard, it was very hard, it was very rough." (JBA056.1)

Also notable here is the social grammar that shapes her response. She is angry because of how people treat her, but also because they should understand their own potential for becoming poor and living on the streets.

7. Attribution of Blame for Humiliation

Renee tells an accusatory story, and she seems to have little sense of complicity in it. It is a portrayal that she shapes to make her own comportment appear morally superior to that of her antagonists. She blames the non-homeless population for not being more understanding, and her ex-boyfriend for treating her abusively. (Ochs & Capps, 2001)

> It was very hard. Um, I knew my ex for 10 years. It was hard, 'cause I trusted him, and I told him, if he ever hit me I was going to hit him with
> → an iron skillet, which I didn't have one at the time. Um, but when he hit
> → me, I was like, "I can't believe you hit me! Why? *The only thing I've been telling you is to stand up for yourself. Be a man, don't let your mom run your life for you!"*
> → Because I feel like I came from this good family morals, and just from one person, it just took one person, and that person put me in that hole. And I feel like . . .
> MS: From the abuse.
> JB: Um hm. And I feel like how can I, why is it me, why should I be stuck in this hole? You know?

It does not seem to strike Renee that her own comments about her boyfriend's lack of integrity and his dependence on his mother may have fueled the dialogical exchange. Instead she says this "one person" put her in an economic and social "hole."

8. Restorative and Balancing Activities

Renee finds support and strength in her relationship with her husband. Her description is grounded in both past experiences and in the possibilities for the future.

→ And when he decided we were keeping the baby, it made me feel more stronger inside. Knowing that we created this baby together, that, this is our child, and our child only, and we're going to keep it. We're not going to kill it, we're not going to give it somebody else, we were going to raise this child ourselves, and we were going to try to fix our lives as much as we could for this child.

9. Dramatic Graphic Representation of Life Events, including Humiliation

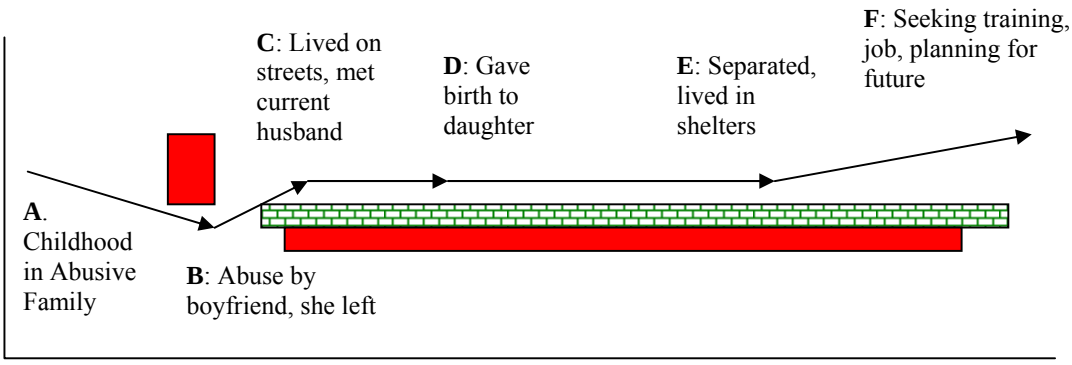


Figure 13. Renee's Dramatic Narrative.

10. Continuing or Disrupting the Cycle

Renee has entered a job training program and is working toward a career as a diesel mechanic. Her efforts to disrupt the cycle of homelessness and the humiliation that

attends it are vested in this education. Yet she seems caught up to a degree in her efforts at self-preservation.

> Um hm. . . . I'm a hard person. But at some point I will be able to trust somebody as long as they don't hurt me. But if they hurt me it goes
> → right back to where it was, and it will stay there. If somebody hurts me again I will never let my guard down. I mean I will be defending myself until the day I die. And I will not let anyone hurt me anymore, because I've been hurt enough. I need to live a life that is considered easy, not hard. No hurt, no anger, you know?

Renee looks forward to formalizing her marriage, having her own home, and employment as a mechanic.

> JB: I learned that there is a hard way for life, and the hard way is the streets, so um I'm just looking forward to getting my life and C___'s life
> → together, so we can have our own place, and we don't have to deal with this. I'll look back on it and go, huh, that was hard then, and see what
> → people say. I would love to go out and educate people, about living in the streets, about being pregnant and homeless, to help them understand what a lot of the homeless go through. With the stares, the looks, the sleeping beside doors, you know, the long lines for food, clothing, stuff like that, just to educate these people and understand that donations are needed on a daily basis.

11. Written Narrative Highlighting Management of Meaning and Life Goals

> I live in a tension between the need for intimacy and the need for safety. There is a cultural element to my understanding of humiliation that says, in effect, it is the uninformed judgments of others that reduce my self-worth. I have experienced this on the streets in the form of people staring at me and making unsolicited comments.
>
> But there is a deeper, more visceral understanding of humiliation that has come to me through my treatment at the hands of abusive men, in both my childhood and adult years. This is the feeling that I have been violated, cannot protect myself, am vulnerable. As I seek intimacy, I leave myself open to the maltreatment of others; as I seek protection, I lose intimacy. For me humiliation most frequently occurs when my guard is down, I trust others to provide the close relationships I feel I need, but

> they take advantage of me and diminish my self esteem. I feel that I'm now at a turning point in my life, going to school and preparing for a career.

H. MC (Crystal)

1. Synopsis of Respondent's Social World

Crystal is a 42-year-old single mother living on the edge of poverty. She has never been homeless, but being employed part-time and having financial responsibility for two children she struggles to make ends meet. She has had ongoing contacts with the social services system, some of which have resulted in a loss of self-esteem. She describes her social world in the context of personal faith, which serves to counter her negative feelings about her life.

> MC: I just keep praying, and when uh when the bad thoughts come in just try to push 'em out with some praise, or try to sing a hymn, just try to get anything in there other than the negative thoughts or the bad feelings, uh, I can, I'm getting better now at seeing when I'm getting sucked down into that. Big hole, you know, when things aren't coming on my time. Cause God does things on his time, and he don't think it's [laughs] the right time, you know? (MCA086)

Crystal speaks here about her ongoing struggles in life. She focuses abstractly on conformity to social norms rather than feelings of degradation. Her story about this meshes with a cultural definition that humiliation is a "lowering," using a metaphorical description of "getting sucked down into that big hole."

2. Respondent's Definitional Understanding of Humiliation

Crystal defines humiliation in a social context, as the perception of others and how she perceives that perception herself, and also as a degree of social conformity.

→ how others are perceiving you, or how you perceive others are perceiving you, and your actions at that time (MCA006). . . . as to what you think these people are thinking, or what the norm or proper behavior according to them is, and now you're not doing it, so now you've humiliated yourself because you're not acting like the rest of the crowd (MCA010).

3. Respondent's Explicit Example(s) of Humiliation

But her references to humiliation do focus on public degradation. One deals with an accusation by her mother when Crystal was in high school that she was promiscuous.

→ MS: You remember what she said?
MC: Yeah, *she called me a whore. In front of my friends.*
MS: Can you picture that?
MC: Yeah! And it still hurts. I can still feel that—still hurts that she thought that. Even with the boys standing by me, she didn't believe any of us, so there wasn't anything we could say. (MCA011-030)

"Whore" is derogatory. It seems to have had all the more impact because it was an accusation leveled when her friends, potentially the ones she was accused of having sexual relations with, were present. This is a public event because her friends are present. Her mother inflicts humiliation (familial).

Crystal also tells a story about her rejection from the Air Force:

→ MC: But more humiliating than that is when *they yanked me out* of swearing in at the Air Force, because I was pregnant from the rape, I'd been raped, and I was going to join the Air Force; I was going to join the Air Force anyway, but I was ready to go, and I was swearing in, and they pulled me out because my pregnancy test came back positive.
MS: It was during the swearing in?
MC: Yep. Pulled me out of the room.
MS: Did anybody else know why?
MC: Well, a couple of my friends who continued on learned why and
→ then of course after my big goodbye going away party *I had to come home with my tail between my legs*, and let everybody know I wasn't going.

The metaphor is one of feeling like an animal. This is a public event because it took place at a swearing-in ceremony. "They" (the instructors?) humiliated her by pulling her out of the ceremony. Later she is humiliated in the presence of "everybody" when her dismissal becomes public.

Finally Crystal describes applying for public assistance as a young mother:

> MC: Because I always made 10—15 dollars over the limit for what being able to be helped was, so I was never eligible.
> MS: Do you remember applying for that?
> → MC: Oh yeah, very embarrassing!
> MS: Really.
> → MC: Yes. I go and I give them everything all that right there and then they turn me down. Why did I give you all this information? Then when I ask for my information back, oh no, they have to keep it on file. Well what do you have to keep it on file for if you're not helping me, and if I come and apply again, I will give you this information and you can turn me down or approve me then; I don't understand why they needed to keep, that makes me very nervous, why did they have to ask for all this important and pertinent information, then they say they can't help me, then they can't give me back the information I just gave them. And they have to keep it on their files. (MCB 017-025)

Here she is evidently in a private setting when she is rejected for assistance, but part of the humiliation by the caseworker seems to involve having her records kept on file. This suggests that keeping a public record of her private financial status is the source of the humiliation.

4. Implicit Example(s) of Humiliation

Crystal describes being raped.

> MC: So I went out on a date with him, and um when he brought me home, in the living room, it and it happened in the living room. When he brought me home.

> MS: And he forced you. MC: Uh huh. And I screamed and I hollered, and I hollered and nobody came; I couldn't believe the dog didn't even come. . . . *he didn't think any more of me* than to stop when I asked him to, like he didn't think, like, whew . . . And then *nobody believed me* that I was an unwilling participant.

The humiliation is partly private, when he objectifies her and forces her to have sex. Later it is public, when "nobody" believes her story, resulting in a loss of honor.

5. Summary of Life Events

Raised in a latchkey setting in Illinois, spent time with her grandparents raised her while her mother worked.

Parents divorced when she was 6; she took responsibility for younger siblings

Experienced humiliation in high school when her mother accused her of promiscuity

Was raped at 19, became pregnant, was rejected from the Air Force, got an abortion

Left home, moved to Colorado Springs, became pregnant, was abandoned by fiancé during pregnancy, gave birth to son

Moved home to Illinois

Married, moved to California, became pregnant

Marriage was abusive, left California, returned to Colorado Springs; received public assistance during pregnancy, but not after birth of daughter

Worked, raised children on own, received public assistance

Raised children, lost job, plans to return to Illinois and find work

6. Reactions to Humiliating Events

Crystal reacts to humiliation with feelings of guilt. Here she describes her guilt reaction when her fiancé abandoned her during her pregnancy, and she connects his desertion with her decision several years earlier to have an abortion following the incident of rape:

> MS: Did you feel like . . . ?
> MC: I felt like it was my punishment for aborting the baby. I thought that was my punishment because I aborted the baby
> MS: And who was punishing you?
> → MC: God. Pentecostal, mean hateful vengeful God that the baby sitter I was raised with taught me about. It was you know, what goes around comes around, God's doing, not—the Pentecostals are, God's mean. God's mean [laughs].

Her remorse is clearly expressed when she talks about the influence her grandparents had on her, and her supposition that she disappointed her grandfather when she was dismissed from the Air Force. At the end of this segment Crystal's story shifts from a narration to one of personal address to her deceased grandparents, and she becomes quite emotional:

> MS: Did they make you feel like you were a good person?
> MC: Oh yeah. I was the bestest in the Westest. Grandpa always said that
> MS: How did they do that?
> MC: Just praise. Forgiveness when you did something wrong
> MS: Maybe it carried you through later on
> MC: Yeah. Oh, I'm sure. Except for them I probably would have been living at the Red Cross Shelter or something. I'm sure I might have turned tricks or something, I don't know. I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have the morals I have except for my grandparents. I mean I thank God for them all the time.
> → And even now moreso that they're gone. *And I apologize that I didn't do it more when you were here* [starting to cry].

She also responds to humiliation by removing herself from relationships. When she experiences verbal abuse in her marriage, she leaves:

> I tried to go to counseling; he wouldn't go, so then I was going by myself, and then when I'd come back he'd ask me did they fit me for a straight jacket. Had they declared me crazy yet. Then when I finally
> → *decided to leave* California and head thisaway, the counselor thought it was a good decision.

The complexity of the meaning of humiliation shows in Crystal's accounts. Events that trigger the feeling of humiliation are not singular in nature for her. They are instead an accrual of incidents that include objectification, rejection, and making private information public. They lead to remorse, guilt, and separation/isolation.

7. Attribution of Blame for Humiliation

As expressed above, Crystal blames herself and her idea of God for her behavior and the feelings that result. At the same time she attributes blame to those who perpetrate humiliation. Here she defines her grandmother's role in the process:

> MS: OK, I want you to make sure to stop me now if this gets too personal, and if you're not comfortable you need to tell me, OK? Um, when was the rape?
> MC: I was 19, it was in uh, in January, cause March, my family wouldn't let me keep the baby because they said it wasn't conceived in love, and it was just going to be a monster, and *my Catholic*
> → *grandmother is the one who pushed the abortion issue, and they made the man who raped me drive me for the procedure. And bring me back home.*

The person who raped her is also blamed for the feelings that are generated.

> MS: During the incident, would you put that in the category of something that was humiliating?
> → MC: I would say well I guess so, I guess it was humiliating *because he didn't think any more of me than to stop when I asked him to.*

8. Restorative and Balancing Activities

Crystal turns to a counselor for support and encouragement.

MS: Who helped you through this? Or did anybody?
MC: God. Me.
MS: How did that . . . ?
→ MC: I finally talked to a counselor. When I moved here, when I moved back here in '94, I finally talked to a counselor, and spoke about it. Before then I just kept it all bottled up.
MS: And what, did the counselor, how was that helpful?
MC: I could release it, and he helped me realize that it wasn't my fault. I did what all I could, I did what I could do. Helped me realize I was a victim. Helped me get past being mad at mom and being upset with grandma, cause they were only doing what they knew how to handle. (MCA065-070)

9. Dramatic Graphic Representation of Life Events, including Humiliation

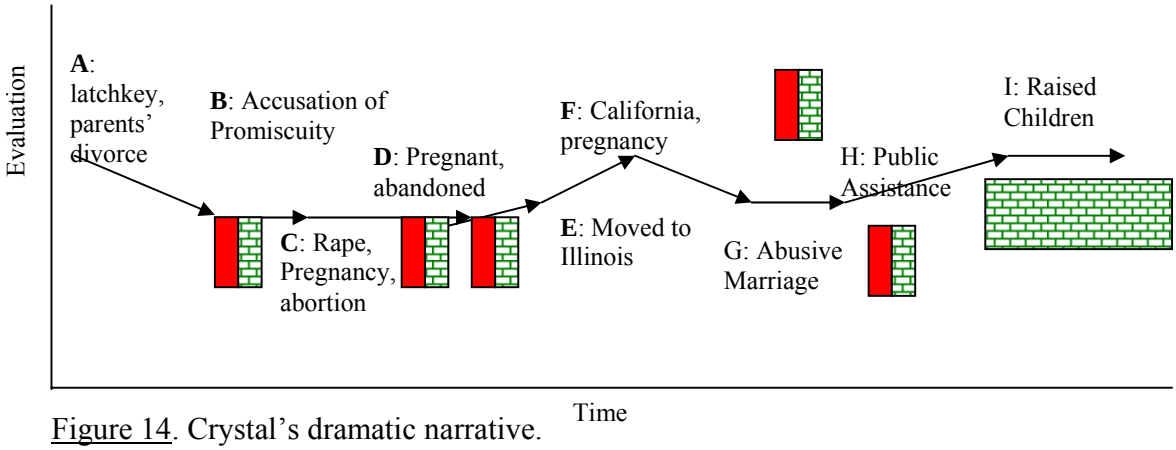


Figure 14. Crystal's dramatic narrative.

10. Continuing or Disrupting the Cycle

Crystal seeks to disrupt the cycle of humiliation through hard work and taking responsibility for herself and her children. A recurring coping mechanism is to distance herself from relationships in which humiliation has taking place, but she often wants to reenter these same relationships, and this leaves her vulnerable to further abuse. She talks about returning to her home town where her mother still resides:

MS: So if you're back there, is it going to be more of that, with her and . . .

→ MC: As long as I'm not living in her house I'm thinking it will be OK. But if I have to move into, she's already planned, she's already she's got this plan and that plan and I said, mom, whoa, slow down. I . . .
MS: She's going to run it?
MC: Yeah. She's going to run my life when I get back there, she's yeah, she's ready, she's already got plans, she's needs this and that and . . .
MS: Can you handle that?

→ MC: I think I'm ready. I was just talking to my counselor last week and I'm ready, I've grown enough I think.

11. Written Narrative Highlighting Management of Meaning and Life Goals

> I'm in a difficult financial situation because of the malicious behavior of others – my ex-husband, a former fiancé, a high school date. Even though I've done the best I can, been as responsible as possible, I've fallen prey to the culture of poverty, and to the irresponsibility of men I depended on.
>
> My immediate emotional response to humiliation is one of frustration, guilt, anger, but I also respond with determination, which I attribute genetics— my Irish stubbornness. I've developed a pattern of being victimized, then using my innate tenacity to pull myself up again with God's help. While my immediate description of humiliation is behaving inappropriately in a group, my experiential understanding is one of being placed in a powerless position. In each case I'm somehow able to recover a sense of self esteem and move forward, but my experience often repeats itself.

I. WE (Equilla)

1. Synopsis of Respondent's Social World

Equilla is a 44-year-old married woman with two adult children and a 13-year-old daughter. I assume that her older children are from a former marriage, and that her youngest child is the result of her current marriage, but this is not clear in the interview. This youngest child is currently living with Equilla's mother-in-law. Equilla's husband is

in jail on drug charges, and Equilla is homeless, a state she attributes to being evicted from her apartment following an altercation with the apartment manager. For the past 3 years she has alternately spent nights on the streets, with acquaintances or strangers, in rooming houses, under bridges, or in shelters. She receives SSI for assistance with her medication, and often comes up short financially for food and housing. She is currently seeking housing assistance from a local social agency.

Equilla describes her social world as a continuing journey with no destination, filled with uncertainty and a lack of physical resources. In her words,

> WE: It's like out there in that street, you ain't got nowhere to go, nowhere to sleep, and hardly enough to eat. I'm a diabetic also with high blood pressure. I gotta walk – when I'm walking what sugar I do get into me it walks right off.And you know, and then again at night you're sleeping with strangers, people you don't know, don't know whether you're gonna get hurt or killed.
> MS: So part of it is not knowing what's going to happen next?
> WE: Right. Not knowing if you're going to wake up alive in the morning. If you're going to wake up period. And it's a fear when you do wake up, where should I go, what can I do? You don't want to go do things that get you in trouble. (WEA018-024)

2. Respondent's Definitional Understanding of Humiliation

Equilla defines humiliation not abstractly, but in terms of her current lifestyle and experiences. Her definition includes being alone and being derogated by others.

> WE: What does it mean? [starting to cry] It means being out here on the street, nowhere to go, nobody to help me. Like for someone to call you a
> → name, you know call you a homeless bum, or they might be joking, but it's not joking, it's embarrassing, it's humiliating.
> MS: And it's humiliating because it makes you feel a certain way?
> WE: Yes, you know, because you know it's the truth, and the truth hurts. It does honestly hurt. (WEA011-016)

3. Respondent's Explicit Example(s) of Humiliation

Equilla makes references to humiliating episodes in which she has traded sex for housing with people she considered dirty, has been held hostage and raped by someone pretending to be a police officer, and has been accused of drunkenness when lack of food combined with her diabetes caused her to stagger on the street. She has been called "poor Black trash." (WEB004)

She has also experienced humiliation in her efforts to secure food and shelter. She defines it as the refusal of agency personnel to provide assistance when her need is great.

> WE: Other places tell you, "Well, it's the law, we can't give you nothing now, we have to wait 'til you get your ID card, and blah blah this and blah blah that, that's, I mean, without a Colorado State ID, you got
> → nothing here, nothing. You can't even go somewhere and say "Well, could I get something to eat?" And then if they give you something, you gotta cook it, or you ain't got a can opener to open it, that's humiliating.
> MS: Um hm. How does any of that fit in with embarrassment?
> WE: How does it fit in with embarrassment? You can't open a can?! You
> → don't think that would be embarrassing to me?! And you're starving?! (WEA078.1-081)

Here the feelings of humiliation are connected with a conflict between Equilla's personal physical needs and a) the rules agencies have for providing assistance, and b) the complete lack of resources needed to make what assistance she does receive viable.

4. Implicit References to Humiliation

Equilla describes her shelter experiences and her reluctance to stay there. She objects to the institutional rules because they infringe on her freedom, and thus on her sense of dignity.

→ WE: I never stayed there too long, I never stayed there too long, it's just the point of, I guess it's dignity or something like that that people have. It's somebody telling you you got to be in at a certain hour. I'm 44 years old. I gotta be in at 10 o'clock? I got a curfew? (WEB020)

5. Summary of Life Events ("(?)" indicates the story is unclear to me)

First Marriage (?), two children, divorce (?)

Second Marriage (?)

Third Child, beaten; husband caused trouble, evicted; husband jailed.

Put daughter in mother-in-law's care

Living on streets, in shelters

Negotiating for food, housing, seeking financial assistance

Survival in the future

6. Reactions to Humiliating Events

Equilla becomes angry when she experiences humiliation in the form of rejection, and she couples this with crying as an expression of discouragement. Here she describes being refused entry to the Red Cross shelter:

→ WE: I get to the shelter, and they tell me the flag is still up, and the only person can put it down is the counselor, so now *I'm getting hostile*. Because somebody else told me to come, and everything would be all right. And then when I get there you tell me "No?" I haven't ate anything, I need to take my insulin, I'm really grouchy now—*I'm really grouchy*.

→ So I just, "Call the police then! 'Cause I'm not goin' nowhere." So they called the police. And the police said, "Did they ask you to leave?" And I said, "Yeah." "Then what are you still doin' here? There's the door. You go outside and I'll be out there to talk to you." So I go outside, and I go up a block and sit on the corner, and start crying, because I didn't know where to go. (WEB 033-038)

It is a response of pain, anger, confusion and guilt. Her anger surfaces when she describes her reaction to being addressed in a derogatory way, saying, "It just burned me up inside." (WEB004) Her pain surfaced later in the interview. "It tears you apart. It tears your heart out." (WEA062) She expresses her feelings of guilt and self-disparagement in this interchange:

> MS: You said, "poor Black trash," and it was . . .
> WE: Yeah.
> → MS: What did you say to yourself when you heard that? Can you remember?
> WE: You know, I can't say anything, because it is the truth. And the truth is what hurts you. It's the truth. I am poor black trash. I ain't got, excuse the expression a pot to piss in. I don't, if I gotta go to the bathroom, I gotta go hide, get behind a tree, and use the bathroom. That's humiliating! I'm a woman. I'm a woman. There might be 10 men
> → standing out there, and you better believe their eyes all on me, all eyes are on me, because I am a woman, and I'm prayin' that nobody attacks me. Trash is to me, trash is I can't wake up, I'm waking up, I look horrible, I can't wash my behind, I can't wash my face, I can't brush my teeth, I don't have anything to eat, I look, it done rained on me all night long, that's trash. And there's nowhere to go. (WEB078-080)

7. Attribution of Blame for Humiliation

Relational causes for Equilla stem from her family situation. She states that her husband's irresponsibility led to a felt need to protect her daughter and her from the consequences of his drug dealing by continually calling 911, which resulted in their apartment manager evicting them, causing her to be at the mercy of a culture of homelessness and the humiliation this entails.

> WE: Yeah. My husband was a bad guy. Ain't no lie about it. Every time he comes out he goes to drugs, he goes to selling drugs, and he tries to
> → bring it to my house and I'm telling him not to and I'm callin the police and the landlord's not liking this. He's not liking this at all. And as long

as I'm letting him stay there I've got a 13-year-old telling me, "Momma, my dad's out there in the street." It's cold. I'm feeling sorry for her. So I'm letting him back in the house, so now I got nothing, He's got a place with a roof over him, he's gonna be there for a long time; he ain't payin no rent, and I'm without nothing.
MS: And the landlord came?
WE: No, I'm callin' the police. 911 is not 'lowed on this property. That's one of the, that's in the lease and I did not thoroughly read the lease. But you not supposed to call 911. You supposed to come to the manager first, and let them call. But hey, time ya'll got there I might not got out of the house to call 911, so I called them myself.
MS: And so he threw you out?
→ WE: Yeah. Because I did it more than one time. Each time I even thought he was in my house doin' anything around my child, I pick up the phone and call 'em.

For Equilla, responsibility is other-directed, but it is also complex. Causation is attributed to a long series of events that become compounded. She says, in effect, that she is humiliated because she is homeless, which is the result of the criminal activities of her husband, the response of her landlord, and the overly strict rules of the agencies to which she turns for assistance.

8. Restorative and Balancing Activities

Equilla turns to a caseworker in hopes of getting housing. She seeks support from agencies and from God.

MS: And you say to yourself, "This is going to work out."
WE: Um hm. Cause I know it is. I know it is. The only way it's not gonna work out is that I don't, this man told me, go get me a lease, with your name on it, stating that it's going to be your apartment, and I will
→ pay for it! What else is there to do? That's Jehovah saying, "OK, I'm giving you a doorway. I'm givin' you the leeway. You got the key and go on in." If I don't, that's stupid! Every night I have a dream. Um, me getting my own place, getting furniture, having dishes, having a TV, cablevision, I have this dream every night, and it's gonna happen. It's

gonna happen. It's really gonna happen. (WEB091-092)

9. Dramatic Graphic Representation of Life Events, including Humiliation

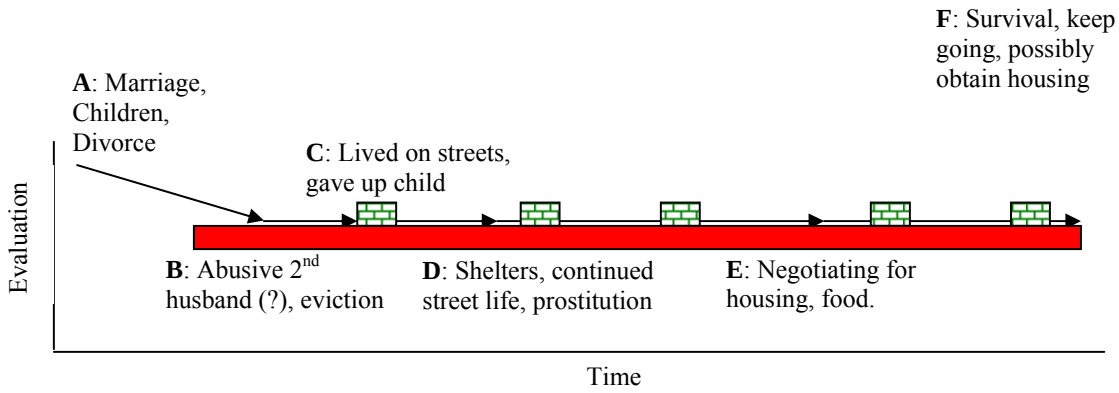


Figure 15. Equilla's Dramatic Narrative

10. Continuing or Disrupting the Cycle

Equilla is enmeshed in poverty and homelessness. She finds herself in a moral conflict with the world around her. She is positioned as vulnerable and without resources, but she believes that it is society's responsibility to supply basic human needs, i.e., food, shelter, and medication to those who are destitute. When those needs are not met she becomes distraught and angry, and she makes accusations against those tho refuse to assist her. Equilla behaves in a way suggested by the following:

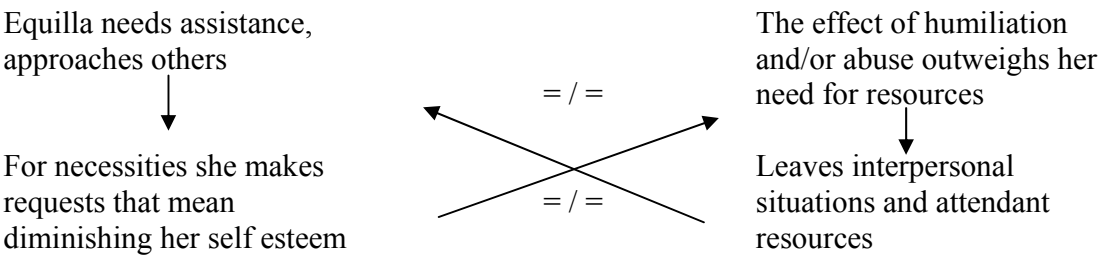


Figure 16. Equilla and her strange loop.

11. Written Narrative Highlighting Management of Meaning and Life Goals

> I have been the victim of other people all my life, and to be powerless is to be humiliated. It is not having resources, not having people to trust, and living a life of constant exposure, and thus vulnerability. I'm determined to keep going in spite of my circumstances, and if I ever get my own place again I'll never let it go.

J. WP (Pam)

1. Synopsis of Respondent's Social World

Pam is a 44-year-old single mother living on SSI. She comes from a home where her parents divorced when she was a young adult, following which she lived with her mother, then moved out to be on her own. As a result of a relationship with a married man she has a 14-year-old son. She is currently going to school, but is not working. She is schizophrenic (her description) and has received disability support for several years. She is not homeless, but lives on a very limited income (SSI) and additionally depends on community resources to make ends meet financially. Here she describes her life in terms of social impositions and a lack of resources and her attendant feelings.

> It's hard in a world where so many people have so much, and there are *a lot of attempts on you* wherever you go. For you to become very materialistic. You can't hardly walk out your front door, "Oh, look at that car, or look at those clothes they're wearing over there," I mean anything like that, and you're like, *physically you just kind of drop*, 'cause you're you and you can't be somebody else, you know. *You can't have what other people have*, you want it. It's hard to watch stuff all day long, it's like in cities it's just buildings and cars and churches and stores and busses and motorcycles and clothes and everything, all the time, and you have to have it all, it kind of cuts you off from doing a lot. (WPA 182-184)

2. Respondent's Definitional Understanding of Humiliation

Pam places her definition of humiliation in the context of the degradation that results when others realize she has no money, making her "look stupid." It is an expression of loss of face.

> → Uh, maybe something degrading, um, nothing specific, mmm, oh, I know a good one, going to the grocery store and finding out you don't have the money on your Quest card to pay for it. And they have to put everything back and everybody's staring at you. That's happened to me before. So, that's about as far as I'll let it go, *something that's beyond your control, but makes you look stupid.* (WPA032)

3. Respondent's Explicit Example(s) of Humiliation

Pam describes experiences of humiliation as an ongoing series of episodes that come and go in the course of her life. She identifies them in the context of relationships with her neighbors and acquaintances whom she says seek to invade her privacy and pass judgment on her. The sense of meaning is one of intrusion on her privacy, criticism of her lifestyle, and a compounding of the negative feelings she already has about herself.

> → WP: It can be embarrassing, because people who have more than you do will *nose around in your business*, and try to criticize your lifestyle, and they *reinforce that negative feeling you already have about it,* so I would have to say that's probably the worst that I've ever had to deal with, over and over and over, other people's curiosity. "Well, what do you do all day, you don't have this and you don't have that." (WPA 056.1)

4. Implicit References to Humiliation

These fall in the category of intrusion as well. Humiliation comes when she is being used to the advantage of others, when she and her son are objectified in the sense of being there only for "their advantage, and we're not here for them, we're here for us."

→ WP: I just got pissed, and sick of it, of people saying, "It goes like this, you have less so you have to grovel, and just people's attitudes about reality, you know, I've been trying to tell [her son] we do not need to adopt other people's versions of reality into our lives because we won't get anything done, we will be even worse off if we think what other people want us to, it's to their advantage, and we're not here for them, we're here for us, we're not doing anybody any good, so shut the door, this is our house.

The sense of being used is fundamental to her understanding of humiliation.

5. Summary of Life Events

Early Childhood

Drug use as a teen

Parents' divorce, onset of schizophrenia

Birth of son

Disability payments, subsidized housing, school

Subsistence, plans for future

6. Reactions to Humiliating Events

Pam reacts by becoming angry and by isolating herself.

→ I couldn't get away from those people fast enough; finally one day I was just like, I don't want to do this, I don't want to be with these people.

7. Attribution of Blame for Humiliation

Pam's sense of attribution is both self- and other-directed. For Pam, invasiveness, the root of humiliation and embarrassment, is traced through a number of causes that might be ordered this way: In her opinion her excessive use of drugs and alcohol in high school led to emotional problems and a diagnosis of schizophrenia. This led to the

inability to work, dependence on SSI, and a lifestyle of poverty. This in turn often results in the judgmental behavior of other people. Causation becomes a combination of personal choices she made when she was young and the inclination of others to be intrusive and judgmental.

This understanding, that other people are intrusive, leads to a sense of discomfort and embarrassment. In her narrative, however, there are some emergent patterns that suggested further cause. There is a reflexive nature to her conversations with her son in which she instructs him on the propriety of interpersonal relationships, and she reinforces her own behavior through that instruction. It forms a "strange loop," a pattern of behavior that is recurrent and often self-defeating (see #9 below).

8. Restorative and Balancing Activities

Pam depends on agencies and neighbors for support and encouragement.

→ WP: Because there can be times in my life when I feel like, somebody do something, we're not making it, and nobody's there to do anything, so most of the time it's a good experience, because the people who give out food and clothing vouchers and bus tokens and help you look for jobs, and stuff like that really honestly care or they wouldn't be doing it.

→ And that way you regain a lot of hope in humanity, when you're sitting at home and you have nothing and you don't know what to do, um, and you don't want to go to somebody who's busy and working every day and it just kind of relieves the destruction that can result because of blaming yourself for not being more, you know, more financially secure.

9. Dramatic Graphic Representation of Life Events, including Humiliation

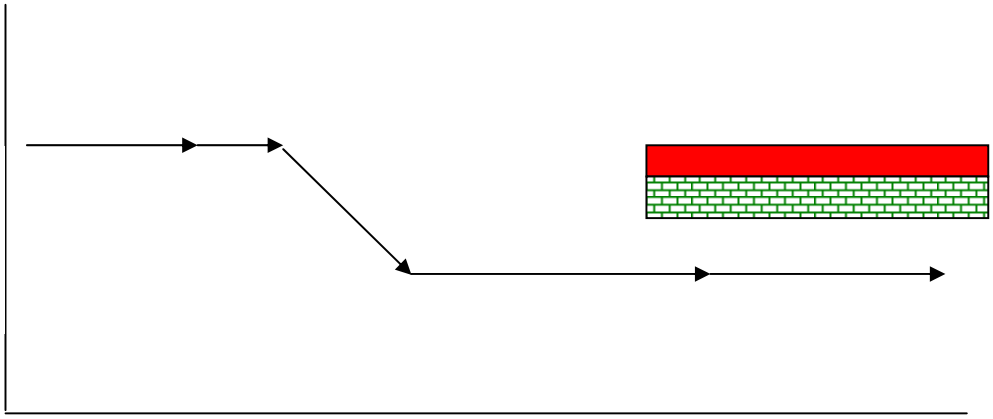

Figure 17. Pam's dramatic narrative

10. Continuing or Disrupting the Cycle

In this diagram, Pam's close relationship with her son is depicted. She manages the meaning of humiliation in part by instructing him about his relationships with casual acquaintances. She tells him that neighbors are intrusive and not to be trusted, because they intend to take advantage of him and use him.

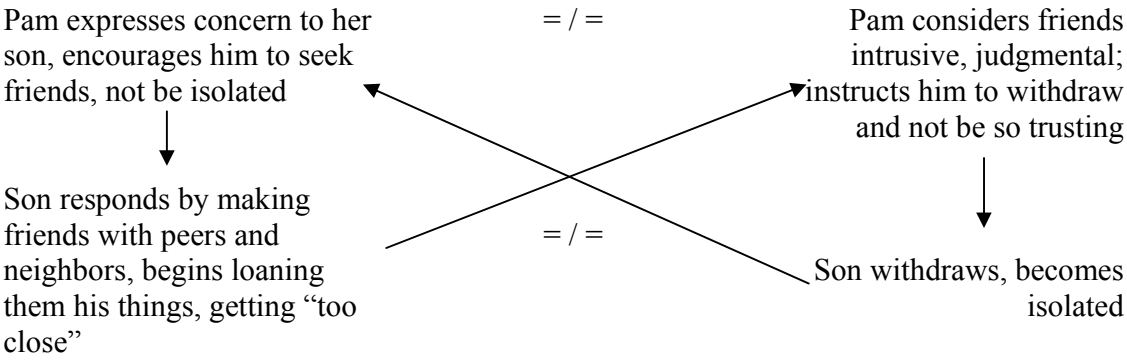


Figure 18. Pam and her son's strange loop.

11. Written Narrative highlighting Management of Meaning and Life Goals

> I find humiliating moments in the judgmental comments of others, which I encapsulate in a story that is set in a culture of poverty. It is a narrative of moving toward and away from people. I frequently feel the need for intimacy with others besides my mother and my son, but I push it away.

# Chapter Five: Discussion

In this section I will connect the analysis of the interviews with the questions raised in the literature review.

1. How do the poor define humiliation? Is their perception in keeping with cultural definitions?

The respondents in my study describe humiliation in terms that concur with the understanding of others in Western culture. To them humiliation means a negative experience. It is degrading, a negative judgment by others, inferior treatment, blame for things that are out of one's control. None of the respondents define humiliation as a positive experience. Some initially equate it with embarrassment, and one views it as a "rather trivial" event. This finding confirms my assumption that Miller's (1993) depiction of humiliation as either comic or horrific is too simplistic. Humiliation occurs on a continuum of lesser to greater severity.

I regard the responses to the preliminary question about the meaning of humiliation as part of the groundwork for an unfolding conversation that will result in the co-construction of narratives between me and the respondents. In this light, a significant element of the responses is the allusion to agency. This represents an initial place-marker for how respondents position themselves with regard to the meaning of humiliation. It addresses the issue of to what degree individuals see themselves as being responsible for the repercussions of humiliation.

Two of the respondents expressed a positive sense of agency in their initial definition of the word: humiliation is when "You screwed up," "You're not living up to expectations." Six respondents expressed a negative sense of agency. "It might take [a person] down a notch or two;" it is "The way they judge me by the way I look."

Two respondents expressed a mixed sense of agency. For them, humiliation involves something one has done, but there is a social stigma that follows as a result.

This shows that people view agency in mixed ways, on a continuum from negative, seeing themselves to varying degrees as victims, to positive, seeing themselves as responsible parties. It is notable that eight of the respondents defined humiliation in abstract terms: "It is a lowering;" "It is being degraded." Two defined it in concrete terms; it is "my present homeless situation;" it is living on the streets as a homeless person.

Thus, at the outset of the interview conversation, respondents expressed an understanding of the meaning of the term "humiliation" and assume differing degrees of personal responsibility for its accomplishment, and they also begin to express their level of investment in its meaning. The level of investment appears to me to be much higher when they say it is my life right now, living on the street, being homeless, than when they use abstract terms to define the word.

2. What parts of the interviews reference humiliation? Does humiliation occur, and if so, in what relationships and settings?

As respondents are asked about experiences of humiliation their descriptions become more concretized. Eight of the 10 respondents immediately referenced specific situations in which they felt humiliated. Of the two who did not, one said at first that people have tried to humiliate him in the past but have been unsuccessful; he later described several events that both he and I interpret as humiliating. The second person said humiliation is not part of her experience, but she has experienced shame.

All 10 respondents described humiliation/shame as occurring in interpersonal contexts. It is not something that takes place in isolation. Some made reference to specific individuals that were part of the event that led to humiliation when it took place. These include spouses or lovers, family members or close acquaintances, and certain agency workers. The rest made reference to other participants in general terms, describing them as street people, shelter residents, neighbors, law enforcement personnel, or the general public. Further, respondents indicated that humiliation occurs in both private settings, with only the respondent and a perpetrator present, or in public, where onlookers or observers are present.

I found that respondents identified humiliation in two ways. One way was by directly labeling certain interpersonal episodes as such. I did not challenge the understandings of the respondents during the interviews. If I asked whether they had experienced humiliation and when they responded with specific examples, I accepted their interpretations of the events.

They also identified events as humiliating by using specific terminology that reflected their personal feelings, even if they did not specifically categorize those events as humiliating during the interview. This terminology included “loss of self” (Lewis, 1987), “alienated,” “confused,” “ridiculous,” “inadequate,” “uncomfortable,” and “hurt,” along with synonyms for each (Scheff, 1997), “shame” and “embarrassment” (Retzinger, 1995), and references to abandonment, ridicule, inadequacy, and social discomfort (Lashbrook, 2000).

Additionally, respondents described humiliation as taking a variety of forms. In some cases it is physical, e.g., being struck, being raped, being ejected from a shelter. In other cases it is verbal, taking the form of personal criticism, baiting, insults, and questions that are interpreted as intrusive. In the overwhelming majority of the examples respondents give, however, the form is both physical and verbal. They recall both words and actions of others that caused them to feel humiliated.

Especially notable in this last category is the number of examples (14 given by all respondents) where something might have been said aloud, but it is the look others give them that is interpreted as a criticism of their dress, their behavior, or their economic status. Stares and looks are defined as judgmental, and thus humiliating.

Moreover respondents repeatedly described humiliating events as occurring unexpectedly. One respondent was surprised by her mother’s accusation that she was a whore; another was taken off-guard when he and his children are unexpectedly put out of the shelter; a third was astonished when she and her children were taken from the house

and dropped off at the shelter; a fourth was stunned when her boyfriend hit her. The unexpectedness lends a mood of drama and surprise to each story. From the standpoint of meaning management, respondents find it important to talk about their feelings of astonishment as a way of positioning themselves as victims, taken unawares. This agrees with Broucek's (1991) conclusion that humiliation is in part a combination of unexpected exposure and confusion.

Part of this confusion is revealed in the respondents' understandings of agency as they move from a definition of humiliation and begin to tell specific stories about humiliating events. Amy said, "I feel like I'm a failure," then she said "They'll look at you funny and there is a lot of judgment." Crystal said humiliation occurs when one is not conforming to the expectations of others "so now you've humiliated yourself," but when asked for an example, she described the time her mother called her a whore without justification.

This is an indication to me that management of meaning is difficult. The definitional meaning of the word is understood, but it is a personal experience that is often unanticipated and leaves those who go through it unsure of whether they did something to initiate it or not. The tension over agency reflects the sorting out of responsibility that occurs as part of the process of managing the meaning of humiliation.

In the course of story construction, the respondents' understandings of how humiliation is perpetrated, verbally and/or physically, helps the listener put it in the context of what happened. Humiliation is being "named" as equivalent to the emotional

result of events that are degrading, insulting, or demeaning. But what is being "done" is a process of story building, in which the respondent is encouraged by the interviewer to historically locate humiliation as one or more specific events that transpired at certain times and places, with identifiable characters and a distinguishable mood. In this progression, both the interviewer and the respondents are "making sense" of humiliation. They want to understand what happened, when, why, and how.

3a. How do the respondents manage the meaning of these events, as indicated by references in the interviews to attribution of cause (self/other)?

Attribution of causation is an extension of the discussion of agency. I find that respondents attribute causation for humiliation not just in their initial definitions and ensuing examples of humiliation, but also in the broader descriptions of their life experiences.

In addition to the specifically demeaning words and actions of others, systemic factors are deemed humiliating. Foremost among these are the rules enforced by agencies and institutions. Respondents who have turned to shelters for assistance concur that it is demeaning when freedom is removed. Curfews, searches of personal belongings, and restrictions on coming and going during the night are viewed as degrading. Moreover, the ways these rules are enforced are considered arbitrary and unduly harsh. Being ejected from a shelter for missing curfew means not only having no housing for the night; violators are barred for at least a month. They suffer feelings of uncertainty and hopelessness as a result. In these situations, cause is not attributed to the behavior of

individual agency workers so much as it is to the agency structure, with its rules and regulations. Causation is depersonalized, as if to say, “This wasn’t the fault of any single person; it was the system that was to blame.”

Respondents also attribute cause to broad social factors. They perceive a clear class demarcation between housed and homeless, rich and poor. In conjunction with this, the poor/homeless perceive hostility from those who have housing, employment, and transportation. They interpret looks as objectifying and dismissive: “Through words, through eye contact, it’s an attitude that comes across that you are less than human.” “It’s the way the population perceives you, getting a glare or a negative kind of look because I have a backpack.”

The dialogic nature of the interview process encourages me to remember that meaning is co-constructed. In the interview, the respondent is defining humiliation, while the interviewer is prompting for details and further elaboration. The respondent’s understanding of meaning is reflected in the narratives that he or she supplies, and the interviewer is interpreting what the respondent’s sense of this understanding is. By extension you, as the reader of this discussion, also reach conclusions about what humiliation means for the respondents, how they arrive at that meaning, and how they accommodate it.

For this reason, it is valid for the interviewer to look beyond the specific attributions of causation of humiliation supplied by each respondent and be attentive to the allusions to cause voiced in the narratives.

Notable in this regard is that humiliation results when others transgress moral boundaries. The narrative dialogues confirm Pearce's finding (W. B. Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997) that certain interpersonal encounters lead to a collision of world views. Humiliation results when Amy believes her husband should be understanding and loyal but he is not, and abandonment, hence humiliation, ensues. It takes place when Roberto thinks shelter managers should be more supportive of the efforts of single parents; instead they are more lenient toward alcoholics who are not making an effort to find employment or take care of a family. It occurs when Jaime thinks that her past accomplishments and achievements should be considered when she applies for a job; when she is judged solely on her dress and her homeless status she feels objectified. Here there is an attribution of cause to what I define as a divergence of moral values. It leads to respondents being on the losing end of power struggles that are frequently experienced as humiliation.

From the standpoint of managing meaning, these descriptions of rejection and moral conflict show that the understanding of humiliation by the respondents is not confined to specific incidents. It is an encompassing condition of life when they see themselves trapped in a state of poverty, and the meaning expands from immediate feelings of degradation to a sense of hopelessness and despair. Jaime expressed it by saying, "and sometimes you get to a place of hopelessness, absolute hopelessness, like, pshhh, this is never going to get better, why don't I just die." Pam said, "Because there can be times in my life when I feel like, somebody do something, we're not making it, and nobody's there."

3b. How do the respondents manage the meaning of these events, as indicated by references in the interviews to description of response?

Response to humiliating circumstances and social interactions lends insight to the management of meaning because from a social constructionist point of view the response is the next turn in the conversation between respondent and perpetrator, or between respondent and self. The response in part portrays what happens next, and thus how meaning itself is extended by the way one is accommodating the event.

I find the responses detailed in the narratives to be in keeping with Linder's (2002) findings of anger and depression. Amy is representative when she says, "I have a lot of anger. I get depressed a lot, but I am on anti-depressants right now, and there's just a lot that goes through my head. There is a lot of anger and lot of depressions, and what ifs."

I notice no instances of Linder's (2002) third finding, suppression of anger and planning for retaliation. However, I do notice additional responses to humiliating circumstances. They include confusion, as reflected in Amy's statement about "what ifs" above. They also include remorse and guilt, observable when respondents hold themselves accountable for bringing about the humiliating event in the first place.

The most notable response I find is that of attempted isolation. Several respondents seek to sever their relationships both with those they feel have humiliated them and with those who may potentially do so in the future. Crystal divorced the husband who accused her of being crazy. Renee left the boyfriend who hit her. Pam repeatedly distanced herself from neighbors whose actions she found intrusive and degrading, and she determined to

limit her future social world to her relationship with her son in order to avoid future humiliation. Jaime sought to avoid agency representatives who demanded she undergo a mental evaluation before receiving further assistance. Robert said of the homeless (and by implication, himself), “Them type people just keep to themselves.”

This prompts two conclusions. One is that the respondents in this interview are not surviving victims of genocide or physical torture as were those in Lindner’s (2002) studies. They may have more latitude in their response repertoire, not being imprisoned and thus being freed to leave.

Another conclusion is that in the response of distancing, respondents reveal the intolerable nature of humiliation. Repeat performances are avoided at the expense of intimacy, security, and the procurement of physical resources. The meaning of humiliation embraces experiences that are deemed painful enough that the respondents have chosen seclusion over continued relationships with individuals who have demeaned them in the past or those who may do so in the future. This way of managing meaning is concerned with more than an intellectual grasp of definitions or a visceral emotional response to it. It involves seeking to extricate one’s self from the circumstances that converged to create humiliation in the first place.

3c. How do the respondents manage the meaning of these events, as indicated by references in the interviews to placement of the events in life narratives?

As I sought to position incidents of humiliation in the broader life narratives of the respondents, I was struck by the difficulty of this task. First I became aware that I was not

hearing about every incident of humiliation, but just a few; nor was I hearing about all the supportive or encouraging experiences these individuals had experienced. This awareness shifted the focus of meaning management away from the respondents onto me as a con-constructor of the story. I wondered how I would have responded if I had been asked these questions by a person I did not know. I concluded that I would have been selective in my replies, perhaps omitting those events that had been most humiliating in my life or for which I felt most responsible. While I do not attribute this way of responding to the people who participated in my study, I do recognize that their replies may have been selective. If this is the case, then one way of managing the meaning of the more painful experiences of humiliation is to place them in the background, simply internalizing them and moving on with one's life.

A second difficulty centered on the confusing nature of the stories themselves. Timelines were unclear. Placing specific events in a temporal sequence was difficult. Attempting to establish a cause and effect relationship between humiliation, positive relationships, and life goals was not possible.

Thus the diagrams of life events that I constructed with respect to positioning of humiliating episodes and nurturing experiences seem overreaching. I attribute my initial efforts to construct these diagrams to my own approach to the management of meaning. It is helpful to me to see the meaning of events in the context of similar and different experiences and to try to place them causally in the framework of a life history. With the information provided by the respondents, this did not prove to be a viable approach.

Moreover, this led me to the conclusion that the social constructive perspective with its emphasis on the complex nature of human relationships and the way those relationships collectively influence one's understanding of different events has merit. Attempting to distinguish exclusive cause and effect in the lives of respondents is not possible because too many events, reactions, and understandings, told and untold, impinge on the process.

The diagrams do, however, offer groundwork for understanding the trends of the lives of the respondents. Again, this necessarily throws the understanding of meaning management further into the area of interpretation by the interviewer and/or the listener.

One possible interpretation is that there is tremendous variation of what represents humiliation in people's lives. It extends from comments and looks to rape and other forms of harsh physical abuse. This suggests that people make meaning of humiliation by associating events that some might consider minor with past experiences that have had more gravity for them. The interpretation of a comment or a look "means" humiliation when it is associated with past acts of hostility, violence, or social exclusion.

I heard the respondents talking about humiliating events in the context of their other life experiences, including their hopes for the future. It is my conclusion that three of the respondents, Jaime, Pam, and Equilla, are enmeshed in a lifestyle of poverty and resultant humiliation. There is a chronic tenor to their narratives. If I were to represent their stories again graphically, each arrow would describe a constant downward slope. For a fourth respondent, David, the movement toward the life goal of behaving in a less

self-destructive way is unclear; while he professes his desire to do so, his story does not reflect appreciable progress.

The remainder of the respondents, to a greater or lesser degree, told stories that reflected hope for the future. Amy is employed, Renee is attending school and hopes to graduate and get a job, Robert and Jordan have applied for and are determined to find housing and employment. While newly constructed graphic pictures for each of these respondents would not necessarily fall into Gergen's "happily ever after" portrayal of narrative form (Gergen & Gergen, 1986), they also would not reflect the despair of the stories of Jaime, Pam, David, or Equilla. The arrows, after many dips and turns, would gradually slope upward, taking on the following general characteristics.

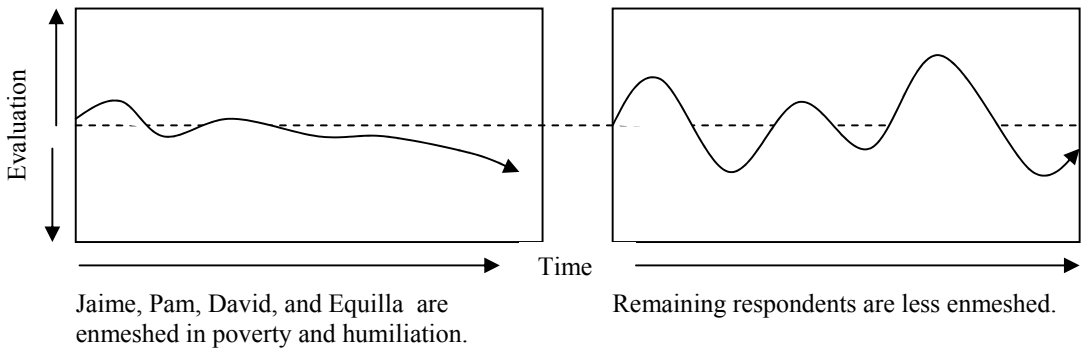


Figure 19. Narrative forms.

3d. How do the respondents manage the meaning of these events, as indicated by references in the interviews to offsetting or restorative events and relationships that suggest a balancing of the impact of these events?

Meaning of humiliation is managed as people accommodate demeaning experiences into their overall life story. An insight that occurs in making this statement is

that I am speaking about "managing meaning," and humiliation as a "demeaning experience" at the same time. Part of our cultural perception of humiliation, as expressed in our language, is that humiliation implies not just degradation, but a fracturing and disintegration of the sense of meaning in one's life. In this light, "management" by necessity becomes a process of restoration of wholeness, of regaining what has been lost.

Efforts to accomplish this are reflected in the interviews. The narratives reveal areas of support and encouragement as respondents are prompted to talk about where their support comes from. These are evident in relationships with neighbors, case workers, family members, and friends. The inclusion of positive, offsetting relationships lends a sense of balance to the overall narrative, demonstrating that the lives of the respondents are not entirely negative and without hope. I found that some respondents, however, notably Pam, Equilla, and Jaime, had stories that were less frequently punctuated with descriptions of support and encouragement than those of the others in the study. Here the meaning of humiliation is being managed by the effort on the part of the respondents, to a greater or lesser degree, to find the sense of balance that says, "I got hurt, but then I got nurtured; I was humiliated but then I was affirmed by others."

3e. How do the respondents manage the meaning of these events, as indicated by references in the interviews to continuing actions that repeat the cycle of humiliation?

I find continuing patterns of behavior in the stories of the respondents that contribute to the repetitive nature of humiliation. I am able to graphically describe these using Pearce's concept of "strange loops" (W. B. Pearce, 2001b). Jaime gets caught up in

the pattern of seeking assistance and rejecting it. Pam fluctuates between intimacy and isolation. Equilla seeks assistance from people that demean her, then goes without assistance until she becomes desperate. From this I conclude that while the goal of managing the meaning is in part to extricate one's self from such experiences, not all attempts to do so are successful. I find that I am able to identify these loops in the actions of the same four respondents whom I view as chronically caught up in lives of poverty and humiliation.

3f. How do the respondents manage the meaning of these events, as indicated by references in the interviews to actions that disrupt or discontinue the cycle?

Conversely, the remaining respondents tell stories that reflect disruption of the cycle of humiliation. The primary element in this disruption is the ability to contextualize humiliating experiences in a broad framework instead of a narrow one. A narrow focus views each demeaning incident as detached from other life experiences and events. The looping pattern in this view becomes one that is almost stimulus-response in nature. The respondent feels humiliated, reacts with anger, depression, and/or isolation, then repeats the process.

By placing events in a broader framework, there is the ability to say "This happened—but . . . " The experience is accommodated into a wider perspective that includes caring for children and taking concrete steps to become employed, to be reunited with one's spouse, or to have one's own residence. There is a sense of purpose in the stories of Crystal, Jordan, Renee, Robert, Rudolpho, and Amy. They are willing to forgo

pride and further sacrifice self-esteem, which has already been diminished in humiliating encounters, by seeking assistance. They have a tenacity about them in the pursuit of these objectives and do not get trapped in unproductive patterns of behavior.

4. What role do unlived stories play in the formation of life goals, and can the co-constructed narratives that grow out of the interviews be portrayed in graphic and/or written form?

Narrative construction itself informs the management of the meaning of humiliation. First, I observe from the transcripts that there is a continuing dialog between me and each respondent. The understanding of the process by which meaning of humiliation is managed grows out of cooperative discussions between interviewer and respondents. This dialog is a clear example of Ochs and Capps' story building in process (Ochs & Capps, 2001). The transcripts do not portray finished narratives and resolved feelings. Instead they reflect the working through of sense making. I note that while I pose open-ended questions, I do not minimize my input. I continually ask clarifying questions in order to better understand what each respondent is feeling during certain interpersonal episodes and how he or she responds. I ask what they felt in the past, not what they are feeling during the course of the interview.

As an interviewer, I bring not only my own cultural assumptions and (marginal) degree of familiarity with homelessness and poverty to the conversations, but also my need to make sense out of the stories respondents are telling me. For their part, the respondents spoke in general about humiliation and in detail about humiliating events.

Some of the transcripts are much easier to follow than others. I attribute this in part to the way I posed the questions, and in part to the way respondents chose to answer the questions. For my part, I tried to put what was said in an orderly fashion that made sense to me.

I conclude from this that the understanding of management of meaning is primarily my understanding and not necessarily the understanding of the respondents. It is on the basis of this understanding that I compiled separate summarizing narratives for each respondent. I do not claim that these narratives accurately depict the meaning of humiliating episodes or their places in the life events of the respondents. I only claim that they represent my interpretation of each interview. As Barbara Czarniawska so aptly put it,

> It is important to understand that interviews do not stand for anything else: they represent nothing else but themselves. An interview is an interaction that becomes recorded, or inscribed, and this is what it stands for. Such a pitiless definition of an interview situation, however, worries many a researcher. Of what value is an interaction between a researcher and a practitioner? In social studies this value is quite obvious. An interview is not a window on social reality but it is a part, a sample of that reality. (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 49)

# Chapter Six: Conclusions

This study shows that management of the meaning of humiliation can be recognized in the co-constructed narratives of interlocutors, specifically between this interviewer and each of 10 respondents living in poverty. The narratives reflect the following.

First, they show that the respondents, and the interviewer, concur that humiliation is a negative experience. The ways they define humiliation is in keeping with the cultural understanding of the term, that it is a lowering, a degrading episode, or a loss of pride or self-esteem. They further concur that humiliation is interpersonal in nature. By concurring with the culturally accepted meaning of the term, the respondents confirm that the subject matter at hand, the meaning of humiliation, is mutually understood and accepted by them. In these segments of the conversations between researcher and respondents, a sense of coordination is established, and a way of moving forward to topics of greater intimacy is provided.

Second, the narratives, with one exception, show the ability of the respondents to recall specific interpersonal events deemed humiliating, and to position these events in time and place. The events have been consequential enough in their lives to be considered influential. Humiliation is accommodated as prominent in memory. These events are either explicitly labeled “humiliating” or are referenced as such through verbal expressions employed by the respondents. Frequently the respondents use metaphors to describe humiliation, such as “homeless” or “losing one’s crown.”

Third, they indicate that humiliating experiences take place on a number of continuums. One is agency, or the degree to which respondents assume responsibility for the occurrence of the events. The continuum ranges from negative (no responsibility) to positive (full responsibility). Most common, however, is a sense of mixed agency or responsibility, that is, it is shared with other(s).

The narratives reflect attribution of cause or blame as a way of managing meaning. Responsibility is attributed to oneself, to specific individuals such as family members and acquaintances, and also to impersonal groups, particularly agency representatives and the well-to-do public. Responsibility is also attributed to systemic forces such as unfair agency rules and employment restrictions due to one's legal history.

When causation and responsibility is attributed to self it is often accompanied by expressions of determination to act preventatively in the future, or to behave in ways that will not invite further debasement. But as the stories of cyclical or looping behavior indicate, such attempts at prevention are not always successful.

Likewise, when cause is attributed to other individuals, groups, or systems, respondents express attendant feelings of anger and the determination to sever relationships that have been humiliating. Here again, the resolve to distance oneself from such relationships is not always successful. This may be due in part to the strength of the relationships or systems people are embedded in. The individual who wants to avoid humiliation in the shelter setting, for example, is nevertheless dependent on such institutions because of his or her economic circumstances. This finding builds on Scheff's

(1997) description of some relationships as engulfed. He sees the overemphasis of claims of the other at the expense of their own claims as an indication of engulfment. I would add that engulfment can be recognized when people express the need to remove themselves from certain relationships but they repeatedly return to these relationships or similar ones.

Consideration of the respondents' emotional responses to humiliation confirm that people become angry and/or depressed when they experience it. Plans for retaliation do not reveal themselves during these interviews. Also notably lacking is participation in culturally ritualistic forms of behavior, described by Jia (2001) as commonplace in Chinese culture, that would have the effect of reversing the effects of humiliation. The woman in Jia's study recaptures her social position by kneeling before the man she has offended and apologizing for what he considers an offensive attitude. There is no apparent socially proscribed ritual in place for the homeless person in Western culture to redeem him or herself. Those who have offended members of the broader population with their backpacks and their modes of dress would seem rooted in a social structure that fosters the reliving of humiliation instead of the exorcising of it.

Another continuum is that of the form humiliation takes, verbal or physical. Again, the most frequent understanding is that humiliating episodes contain elements of both. Notable in the findings is that "looks" directed at the respondents are frequently perceived by them as being judgmental, and creating feelings of humiliation.

Moreover, cause may be attributed to clashes between the values of parties involved in humiliating episodes. Humiliation is perceived as coexisting with physical violence, abandonment, insulting language, or economic depravation, and when these events take place the perpetrator(s), both individuals and institutions, are frequently seen as not sharing the moral assumptions of the people who feel victimized. Thus respondents manage humiliation not only by claiming a sense of personal injury, but also by accusing the perpetrators of acting in opposition to what is culturally good and right.

Humiliation is important enough in 9 of the 10 narratives to necessitate a response as part of the story. Responses are emotional and take the form of anger and depression. They are also physical and may involve arguing or fighting. Most notably they frequently involve emotional and physical distancing; narratives about humiliation are stories of personal isolation. The significance of humiliation is such that people are willing to forgo security or intimacy in order to avoid its pain.

Fourth, the meaning of humiliation is better understood as stories of humiliating experiences are heard in the context of broader life narratives. In these broader narratives, humiliation can expand from particular events to a more expansive tone of helplessness and hopelessness. This is particularly evident in the stories of the chronically homeless. Along with this mood, it is possible to recognize ongoing patterns of repetitive behavior that contribute to cycles of humiliation and attempts to avoid it.

While it is not possible for a co-constructed narrative to accommodate every interpersonal episode that has taken place in a person's life, it is possible to hear, in the

narratives, attempts to recover pride and self-esteem. It is the combination of these efforts and stories about humiliation that lend plot to the stories told by the poor. Their stories are dramatic because humiliation is often introduced as a surprising or unanticipated turn. Narratives move toward hoped-for outcomes that are reflected in present actions and unlived stories. Ultimately the understanding of meaning management is an ongoing enterprise that changes shape as stories are told, retold, co-constructed, and heard. It is not a concrete undertaking with fixed outcomes or permanent conclusions. Instead, meaning is informed by the narrative process itself, and management is effected by the ongoing dialog about it.

Narratives are also dramatic from the standpoint of how severity of experience is described. The stories told by the poor are not Lindner's accounts of genocide and torture, nor Miller's depiction of brutality (Lindner, 2001; Miller, 1993). They do not have the tone of abrupt dehumanization that attends the actions of rape and imprisonment of invading armies or repressive governments. Yet respondents living in poverty portray their experiences of humiliation as severe nonetheless. Their stories are not about isolated experiences of brutality as much as they are about repetitive incidents of denigration. They recount an erosion of self esteem that builds over the months and years. These are not stories about one or two highly destructive encounters but about managing an ongoing assault that slowly diminishes one's sense of personhood.

In both instances, the presence of humiliation is lasting. Women in Somalia and the Congo report that rape is commonly used by invading soldiers as a way of suppressing

opposition and claiming dominance. Victims are branded on the hands as a reminder of their experience, and they are frequently divorced by their husbands and ostracized from their communities because of the humiliation that attends their resultant social positioning as "damaged goods" (Beaubian, 2004; Kelemen, 2004). The poor and homeless may not have experienced the violence of rape and branding, but humiliation that attends poverty is both disgraceful and ongoing. In neither Somalian nor Western social rejection is the meaning of humiliation founded on one or two singular incidents. The understanding of degree of severity is a matter that depends not so much on a precipitating event as it does on what takes place next. Meaning is enfolded in the continuing words and actions of the society one lives in and one's memories of past experiences, and this meaning shifts with the reactions of the individual and the social responses that come in turn.

To summarize, the meaning of humiliation becomes a function of cultural understanding and values, linguistic expression, attribution of cause and responsibility, expressions of helplessness and unanticipated rejection, and a desire to recover self-esteem. These components of meaning are managed as people tell and retell stories about their experiences and seek to use their understanding to avoid future, potentially humiliating situations.

This paradigm may allow counselors and others to hear people's stories in a constructionist context and better understand what they are naming, doing, and making. When Amy, the waitress whose story laid the groundwork for this dissertation (p. 1),

speaks about being rejected by her husband and the anger she feels as a result, she is naming the experience of humiliation. What she and the interviewer are doing is managing the meaning of it by co-constructing a story about responsibility, moral expectations, and plans for the days that are ahead. She is making a life experience that places past humiliation in the context of present accomplishments and hope for the future.

Likewise Tamar, whose co-constructed story appears in 2 Samuel (NIV) has named humiliation in the context of rape and rejection. A woman embedded in her culture, she has responded by retreating to her brother's home to live out her days in isolation. She has made a singular event of degradation all-encompassing.

The paradigm invites the question, "Why is Tamar's story—or Amy's—co-constructed in this way and not another?" In Tamar's case, one might conclude that it is expressed in a form that will provide sympathy for her as an individual. It may be an attempt to reinforce the legal code Amnon had broken (Leviticus, 1996). But it also justifies Absolom's future murder of his step-brother Amnon and lays the groundwork for his attempts to wrest control of the Kingdom of Israel from his father, David. (2 Samuel, 1995)

For Amy, there may also be an attempt to gain sympathy, but more telling is the quality her story has on its own merit of constructing a life meaning that diverges from degradation and renews self-esteem. She and I begin telling a story together that acknowledges humiliation but also makes it something that is being surmounted in the

course of current events. Meaning making and management are resident in the process of narrative itself.

The writer or writers who hear Tamar's experience and record it do so in the context of both her life story and their own, and they speak to a moral audience (Day, 1991) with the intent not only of persuading their listeners, but making understanding for themselves. Likewise, I as a researcher interact with the stories of Amy, Robert, and Crystal, and develop a sense of what the stories mean, and invite you to continue the process.

The consideration of meaning-making as co-construction invites those who are hearing accounts of humiliation to look carefully at their own role in what is being done and made. I found the procedure to be a complicated one. It was not possible to be an impartial observer while listening to stories that were both disturbing and hopeful. In some instances I spent many hours trying to decipher the stories themselves from the transcripts. Respondents spoke in ways that were often confusing. When, where, and how events transpired were not clearly expressed, and I did not realize this until the second interviews were concluded, making it impossible to go back to the respondents and ask for further clarification.

I was also attentive to my own responses during the analysis process. I asked myself, "How would I have responded if I had been in David's position, in a confrontation over an unpaid debt, or Robert's, being repeatedly denied employment due to my felony record?" "What would it be like to be a woman like Amy, turned out on the

street with four small children? Would I have the fortitude to keep the family together while I sought employment, or would I place the children with an adoption agency?" While I had no clear answers to these questions, the fact that they intruded on my thinking affirmed that accommodating humiliating events is a tumultuous process. It is both physically taxing and emotionally draining.

Co-construction demands selective decision-making, determining what to include and what to omit. I found myself variously positioned by the respondents as confidant, agency representative, and on one occasion as in league with those who were responsible for the plight of poverty. As I review the written narratives highlighting management of meaning and life goals (numbered "11" in the respective Analysis sections) I find that I have co-constructed stories that emphasize the possibility of a "good" outcome wherever possible. My optimism shows through, and my discouragement is evident to me when the pieces do not seem to be in place for the respondents to have a hopeful future.

Part of that discouragement arises from the institutionalized nature of humiliation. In Tamar's case, degradation is socially constructed in a culture that treats a victim of incestuous behavior as soiled goods. She "has no choice" but to feel degraded, regardless of her degree of responsibility for Amnon's actions, to remove herself from mainstream society, and live in isolation.

In the case of the poor and the homeless there is institutionalization as well. The stories of the respondents relate an ongoing struggle against social judgment that is leveled against the poor because they are poor, and because it is assumed that had they

made better choices they would not be such a burden to society. They are caught between wanting a better future and experiencing the humiliation many in society feel they deserve. Some are fully accepting of society's judgment. Others are not.

In this context, humiliation may be viewed as a tool of repression, a way of keeping the poor in a status of poverty, sanctioning them for their attempts to gain a better economic future (Miller, 1993). They are caught between who they are as residents of the streets or shelters and who they strive to become when they ask for resources to alleviate their condition. One way to manage the meaning of this dilemma is to construct a narrative that shifts blame away from one's actions onto uncaring others, or, that portends a positive outcome and increased hope for the future. In this way meaning is not constrained to the description of a humiliating encounter; rather it is contextualized in stories about causation, moral justification, and possible reversals of fortune.

This offers some direction for further study. For both respondent and listener, how do we arrive at this story instead of another? Why are some elements of the story emphasized while others are negated or ignored? How might a person who tells a story that places overwhelming importance on a degrading life episode be helped to balance it with recollections of positive experiences and hope for the future?

The paradigm also invites those responsible for providing resources for the poor to recognize that the life accounts they hear from those in severe economic straits are stories that are mutually constructed. It invites a response to the question, "How might providers

of services assist in constructing more hopeful, less humiliating narratives as a way of interrupting the cycle of poverty and homelessness?"

Admittedly, this study consists of a small sample of respondents, most of whom are poor but not abjectly so. The persons who responded to letters of invitation and subsequently followed through with the study were a very small percentage, less than .03, of those invited to do so. One might speculate about the reasons for such a low response rate, and several possibilities present themselves. The study protocol demanded completion of two interviews before remuneration would be given, and this may have been an obstacle for those lacking transportation. Twenty-five dollars may have been an insufficient incentive for the time required. Most likely in my mind is that the invitation to take part in the study, which set forth the expectation that people would relate stories of experiences that had proved humiliating, was sufficiently threatening that many were dissuaded from participating.

The sample included only two individuals who were living almost exclusively on the streets, even though many of the others had been in that position in the past. The study does not paint a clear picture of the attitudes or experiences of the chronically homeless. It does, however, provide insight into the lives of individuals living in relative poverty, the humiliation that attends their experiences, and some of the ways the meaning of such experiences are managed in the telling and hearing of narratives.

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