Universality of humiliation

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Humiliation will be universal but has an ethnography that can be distinctive. I am in a culture of very rigorous 'face-saving' in Thailand, where many acts of criticism and other dimensions of interpersonal interaction are perceived as highly damaging to 'face' and thus humiliating or gravely insulting. That is common in particular patterning for various East Asian cultures.

'Face' is fairly identical with 'ego' and 'preserving one another's ego' is a basic rule of all Thai interactions, up and down a power pyramid, something known in Thai discourse as kreng jai. Very central to interpersonal behavior dynamics, is adherence to 'respect', coupled with 'criticism avoidance', whose violation is also perceived as an act of insult that will border on humiliation. What 'respect' encompasses is of course an ethnography anywhere.

There is a probing discussion of this in Suntaree Komin, *The Psychology of the Thai People: Values and Behavioral Patterns* (Bangkok: NIDA 1990, esp. pp. 160 ff). Komin has done a lot of empirical work. A good article online that looks at some of this is S, Niphon, 'The Thai Character' (http://thaiwebsites.com/thaicharacter.asp). Niphon draws heavily on Komin; see some discussion at http://lox1loxinfo.co.th/%7Esniphon/, especially section 5.1. To what extent there is a Theravada Buddhist matrix here is a further question. Words like 'insult', 'hurt' to feelings appear in this analysis, but perhaps not the lexical term humiliation.

My own interest in this complex was sparked in exploring why many Thai, with quite critical minds, seem so reluctant to openly criticize what is obviously wrong, on the job, in schools, as students and colleagues. Even perhaps as teachers are reluctant to give students an 'F'.* Kreng jai is a great 'barrier' to critique and change. My sense is that my Muslim students also follow kreng jai cultural precepts closely. Of course Islam, in West Asia and East, is a whole separate universe for a typology of what is considered insult and humiliation.

In any event, East Asian cultures of 'face-saving' should be looked at in the context of the question Don raises, because any ethnography of 'humiliation' will have to perhaps operate with a typology and decline of ego damage and its degrees. It is very important here not to be Eurocentric. Inside science, there is a lot of Eurocentricity embedded in the discourse, the method and much else.

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*As perhaps in Alfie Kohn's 'From Degrading to De-grading' (http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/fdtd-g.htm) , grading as a tool of 'humiliation' in the schools. This article does not contain the word 'humiliation' but certainly the concept.