

Summary of Dissertations

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This note provides a brief account of the context and purpose of the

1. medical doctoral dissertation on quality of life in Egypt and Germany (1994),
2. psychological doctoral dissertation on humiliation (*The Psychology of Humiliation*, 2000),
3. habilitation-equivalent thesis on humiliation (*Towards a Theory of Humiliation*, 2001), and
4. papers written in the context of the doctoral research on humiliation (1997-2001).

Medical Doctorate (1994)

In 1994 I carried out research for a medical doctoral dissertation in the field of cross-cultural quality of life research at the Department of Medical Psychology at the University Hospital of Hamburg, supported by a scholarship from the Senate of the City of Hamburg. The title was *Lebensqualität im ägyptisch-deutschen Vergleich. Eine interkulturelle Untersuchung an drei Berufsgruppen (Ärzte, Journalisten, Künstler)*.

An ever-increasing number of studies about quality of life had been produced in medical contexts in the period before 1994. In most cases, patients of Western cultures were asked how they define quality of life for themselves. Two levels of target groups were usually not incorporated: firstly exclusively the patients' definition of quality of life was examined, not the doctors', and secondly usually only Western cultures were considered and non-Western cultures neglected. The doctoral research started at exactly these points.

100 German and 50 Egyptian physicians were asked how they define quality of life for themselves and which aspects of life and health are important to them. They were asked also how they think their patients define quality of life. As points of reference journalists and artists were interviewed - 65 journalists and 45 artists on the German side and 10 journalists and 10 artists on the Egyptian side.

The differences discovered can be summarized as follows:

- The German as well as the Egyptian physicians considered themselves as being rather "responsible", whereas they judged their patients as being more "superficial".
- In Egypt a combination of religion and the desire for modern technology was connected with the term quality of life, whereas in Germany social peace and a critical attitude towards modern technology were prominent.

Research on Humiliation (1997-2001)

The research in social psychology on humiliation began with the reflection that if, as is often assumed, the humiliation of the Germans was partly responsible for the Holocaust and the Second World War, then it is important to understand the nature of humiliation and how it is related to the occurrence of genocide and mass violence. The challenge was both theoretical (what is humiliation?) and practical (how can it be prevented or healed?). The academic literature and a pilot study gave very divergent accounts of the nature and dynamics of humiliation, partly – as I have since discovered – because the broader historical and socio-cultural contexts of humiliating acts, processes and relationships were not yet analysed in a systematic way or with proper regard for inter-societal variations.

I investigated the issue by plunging myself into the midst of Somalia, Rwanda/Burundi (and, in a different way, Hitler's Germany) - which are very different cases

but have all experienced intense phases of genocide or mass killings. I took with me to Africa a long and standardised list of questions but quickly found that any attempt to administer the questions in a formal and systematic way reinforced conditions of mistrust that I was trying to overcome. In fact, there was a great danger, I felt, that the process of research, if carried out in that way, would humiliate my respondents. I shifted to a methodology of asking fewer questions, allowing the person I was talking to take the lead to a great extent, and framing the encounter between myself and the respondent as a shared search for understanding. I found that this produced a great deal of important information and insights that would otherwise have been hidden from me.

In making close contact with my interviewees – and there were a very large number of these, for I worked intensively (216 interviews altogether) – I drew upon my interpersonal skills as a cross-cultural psychologist developed during many years in Egypt. Using this approach I began to hear very different accounts of humiliation and its aftermath in Somalia and Rwanda/Burundi. Somalis asserted that their traditional culture meant being untouched by humiliation; on the other hand, people in Rwanda/Burundi confirmed that their lives had been profoundly shaped by social structures that imposed humiliation upon them.

As I discovered these profound differences in social structure and personal experience, I began to realise the importance of understanding where a society is located within a typology that distinguishes between societies according to (a) whether or not there is an established hierarchy of domination and subordination between superior and inferior groups and (b) whether or not the ideology of human rights is widely accepted within the society. I began to develop a conception of humiliation as both a feeling (or experience or state of mind) and a process that occurs between individuals and/or between groups. I also began to distinguish between what might be called a ‘universal core’ of humiliation that is present in all cases and a ‘variable perimeter’ that has to be determined by empirical investigation and theoretical analysis across several cases.

In investigating and analysing the variable perimeter I have drawn upon not only psychology (especially social and cross-cultural psychology) but also a number of other disciplines including history, sociology, anthropology, political science, and international relations.¹ I attempted to place the notion of humiliation (versus respect) within social identity theory, which in turn had to be inserted into a larger framework. My analysis during fieldwork lead me to chose three “logics” in addition to the logic of humiliation (versus respect), namely the security dilemma² (international relations theory), game theory and its focus on the nature of the pie or resources³ (rational choice theory), and length of the time horizon (cross-cultural psychology)⁴.

In the monograph *The Psychology of Humiliation* (doctoral thesis) I have described the process whereby I made the intellectual discoveries just mentioned. The text is also intended to ‘speak’ to the partners in dialogue that I encountered in Africa and elsewhere in the course

¹ In the following I will attach explanatory footnotes only when I introduce material from fields outside of psychology and social psychology, since I assume that allusions to these fields may not necessarily be familiar to social psychologists.

² When institutions of central authority are absent and anarchy prevails, groups tend to seek security above all other goals and take measures that render other groups insecure, obliging those groups to retaliate. Thus a vicious cycle of escalating threats can be set in motion, even against participants’ intentions.

³ Bannock, Baxter, & Davis (1998), ‘Games may be classified into zero-sum games, in which one player’s gain is another player’s loss; non-zero-sum games, in which one player’s decision may benefit (or hurt) all players; cooperative games, in which collusion between players is possible; and non-cooperative games, when it is not.’

⁴ In his more recent writings, Hofstede (2001) has been exploring time horizon as a factor; see also work by Jaques (1982).

of carrying out the research. I was also composing a number of papers and the monograph *Towards a Theory of Humiliation* (habilitation-equivalent thesis) that elaborate and formalise aspects of the theory of humiliation that I am developing.

Taken together, the two monographs and the papers serve the following objects: to provide an analytical description of the process of achieving increased knowledge and understanding of humiliation within the very different societies that were included as cases; to provide an analytical description of the process of establishing a therapeutic dialogue oriented to the shared search for solutions to the challenge of humiliation within those societies; to make contributions to the development of a theory of humiliation that applies to a wide range of societies, past and present; and to make contributions to the development of a widely-applicable methodology for diagnosing the particular kinds of humiliation that are present in particular societies, as well as likely prognoses and potentially effective forms of therapy.

To summarise, the two monographs represent two different moments in the process of research and within the hermeneutic circles that characterised it. The first monograph invites the reader to join the data collection phase itself, the second monograph draws on the collected data in order to systematise the field.

Building a theory of humiliation will take many more years. So will the process of refining the diagnosis-prognosis-therapy methodology for identifying and healing humiliation. The theses and the articles are intended to make a contribution to completing the first passages around the hermeneutic circle. The next phase of the process will be to collect further data in the context of different research designs, ranging from traditional experimental designs to the application of scenarios and the collection of qualitative and quantitative survey material. The task at hand is to place social psychological explanations pertaining to humiliation in relation to the frameworks that are provided by other disciplines, such as Essentialist Primordialism,⁵ Rational Choice approaches such as Group Solidarity theory,⁶ Resource Competition theory,⁷ Relative Deprivation theory,⁸ Strain Theory,⁹ as well as concepts such as “grievances,” and “resentment” that may be instrumentalised by political entrepreneurs¹⁰ who also build on bandwagoning effects.¹¹ Gender aspects have to be highlighted, as well as the deep links that I claim exist between the phenomenon of humiliation and the broader framework of globalisation and human rights. Furthermore, the phenomenon and concept of humiliation has to be anchored more profoundly in social

⁵ Primordialism refers to ‘age-old accumulated hatred,’ see, for example, Kellas (1991); Schermerhorn (1970); Ra’anan (1991); and Geertz (1963). See for a softer, a “ethnic-continuationist” version of nationalism, Smith (1981), and Smith (1996).

⁶ See, for example, Hechter (1987). Hechter, Friedman, & Appelbaum (1982) argue that collective action will only occur to the degree that free riding is prevented through the production of private rewards and punishments” (1982, p. 421).

⁷ Barth (1969) sees ethnic identities as rational within the niches in which they emerged. Hannan (1979) focuses on which identity is functional in getting access to scarce resources. See also Olzak & Nagel (1986); Olzak (1992).

⁸ See for an overview and critique, Walker & Pettigrew (1984).

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¹⁰ Crawford (1998a) theorises that ‘countries whose political institutions politicize cultural identity are more vulnerable to cultural conflict than countries whose political institutions promote social integration of diverse cultural groups. Economic discrimination and privilege outside of those institutions can perpetuate or trigger the political relevance of cultural identity, but strong political institutions promoting social integration can act as a firebreak and reduce the political “charge” on culture’ (1998, p. 556).

¹¹ Crawford (1998b) explains, “This means that when one individual sees others responding to an ethnic entrepreneur or engaging in ethnic protest, the costs of joining decrease; as the costs of joining are reduced, others are encouraged to join; indeed the costs of not joining might go up. Bandwagoning effects can escalate ethnic conflict to violence” (1998, p. 25).

psychology itself. It has to be related in more detail to fields of research that pertain to shame, guilt, honour, trauma, social identity, cognitive dissonance, feelings of relative deprivation, distributive justice, attribution biases, naïve realism effects, research on self-esteem, self-efficacy, narcissistic rage, or altogether the sociology, psychology and biology of emotions, as well as the research in cross-cultural differences relating to all these aspects.

In the task of understanding the current transition towards human-rights based societal structures, that, according to the here presented research, is deeply vulnerable to the emergence of more intense feelings of humiliation than ever, including violent outcomes, I claim that psychology is at the forefront, conceptually and practically. This situation calls for careful research, and for the contribution from all those who have special skills in fields such as communication, empathy, and understanding, so as to prevent the potentially violent consequences of feelings of humiliation. In historic times that are characterised by fear of terrorism, further research is of utmost importance.