

Humiliation Dynamics and A Therapy of Social Action: **A Path to Restore Dignity after Domestic Violence**

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This paper presents a different approach for experts to focus on when doing domestic violence interventions. Instead of addressing the batterer obvious need for self-control, it reinforces the violence victim’s identity and self-esteem.

Through a therapy of social action, violent interactions are worked through in and with the family group, making people responsible for their actions through a process of taking ownership of violent acts, apology offering and accepting and reinforcement of the concept of shared responsibility for maintaining a peaceful and respectful household.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Humiliation Dynamics and A Therapy of Social Action:

Part I.- Humiliation Dynamics and A Therapy of Social Action:

1. The experience of being humiliated by a loved one
 - The Victim is Forced to be Below Others:
 - The Victim is Excluded and Made to Feel Insignificant
 - There is a Destruction of Self-Respect
 - There is An Invasion of the Self
 - There is Social or Public Pain
2. The Humiliation Component in Domestic Violence
3. Humiliation can be Lethal
4. The Humiliation Component in Domestic Violence
5. Women's Humiliation as the Means of Social Control
6. The difference between Shame and Humiliation
7. Review of Domestic Violence Repair Approaches
8. The Humiliation Reparation Process
9. The difference between socio-emotional reconciliation and instrumental reconciliation

Part II:

Dignity Restoring Dialogues: Cloe Madanes' Therapy of Social Action:

The principles that guide the Dignity Restoring Dialogues, proposed by Madanes as the "Therapy of Social Action"

Principles that guide the repair process:

What are the practical consequences of this approach?

A comparative view of approaches towards healing domestic violence

The Process of the Therapy of Social Action:

Part II:

The Dignity-Restoring Dialogues

"Dignity-Restoring Dialogues" are processes that have:

The Process Three Steps: Apology, Respect, Reconciliation

Step 1. Objective: Restore Respect

EXPLANATION:

Step 2. Objective: Restoration of Recognition of Each Person's Value

EXPLANATION:

And check out these episodes looking at aspects of resilience:

Step 3. Objective: Restoration of some kind of respectful connection

EXPLANATION:

CONCLUSIONS:

Nora Femenia, Ph.D.

Bibliography:

Part I.- Humiliation Dynamics and A Therapy of Social Action:

This workshop invites participants to reflect on one aspect of peace studies and conflict resolution where our intervention is greatly needed. A global phenomenon still prevalent is the domestic control and domination of one group by another, inside the family group, which results in the dynamics of family violence.

Domestic Violence (or domestic abuse) occurs when a family member, partner or ex-partner attempts to control and overpower physically and psychologically another family member. Our individual focus is in the humiliation aspect of domestic violence.

Humiliation¹ is caused by the violation of personal boundaries of a victim, because of the moral and physical aggression by the other person.

Humiliation means the enforced lowering of a person or group, a process of subjugation that damages or strips away their pride, honor or dignity. To be humiliated is to be placed, against your will and often in a deeply hurtful way, in a situation that is greatly inferior to what you feel you should expect. Humiliation entails demeaning treatment that transgresses established expectations. It may involve acts of force, including violent force. At its heart is the idea of pinning down, putting down or holding to the ground. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of humiliation as a process is that the victim is forced into passivity, acted upon, made helpless.²

Apart from being a crime, here we will consider the four aspects of the humiliation of the victim of domestic violence, that shape the denial of the victim's dignity as a person.

1. The experience of being humiliated by a loved one

How can you describe the experience of humiliation? Women who were subjected to domestic abuse, whether emotional or physical, said they felt:

- Disabled, confused, in pain, crippled, full of rage, but unable to express it
- Stabbed in the heart or kicked in the stomach, flooded with despair
- Desiring to be so small as to disappear or become invisible or to be swallowed by the earth, as a shrunken, helpless child
- The humiliation produces an unpleasant feeling associated with being accused of something or being perceived as unjustly degraded, ridiculed, or made to feel inferior. In particular, it is the identity that has been degraded.

¹ Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2006): "Making Enemies. Humiliation and International Conflict," Westport, Ct: Praeger Security International.

² Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2005): Humiliation, Killing, War, and Gender.

- The humiliation is also perceived in the body, as an intense physical pain.

For Lazare³ (1987), the experience of being humiliated by the aggression or violence from a loved one means:

1. Feeling exposed, stained, stigmatized
2. Given a reduced social position, dwarfed by force
3. Degraded, dishonored or devalued
4. Attacked with ridicule, insult and / or contempt
5. Making her feel an urge to disappear from the earth, wanting to cover her face in front of others

No matter how many years have passed humiliating experiences are always remembered vividly. Margalit⁴ (2002) says that humiliation is a formative experience that organizes the way people perceive themselves. The experience of humiliation shapes the identity of the individual or group on a permanent basis. The humiliating events that occur at the group level impact the collective sense of group identity.

Clearly, humiliation involves some sort of definite and unpleasant interaction with others. We can look point-by-point at what is involved:

The Victim is Forced to be Below Others:

If one has to placate the humiliator, because the victim has no strength to resist, this amounts to telling the victim to "eat dirt." It is the same as to keep smiling and excusing the offender's actions, knowing that the victim is a deeply unfortunate and unhappy human being. She imagines that there is no other way out but to appease the offender.

The Victim is Excluded and Made to Feel Insignificant

Being humiliated means to be excluded of group identity and to be made to feel that she is less than others so as to be excluded from the group of people who control the world. "One is less than the others that judge us, not worthy of being recognized, as if that person were invisible. Since being excluded, she feels as she does not belong and can be cast out with impunity." She is prevented from knowing about the reasons of the violence done to her that anyhow she has to suffer, and of course, she is excluded from the necessary repair to the psychological injury.

³ Lazare, A. (1987) Shame and humiliation in the medical encounter, *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 147, pp. 1653-1658

⁴ Margalit, A. (2002) *The Ethics of Memory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Humiliation is part of the fact of gender discrimination in many societies, where the contributions of women are not recognized at the same social level where they live. They are kept out of the circle of power, they do not make their own or family decisions, and they are assimilated with little girls, inferior people, or useless slaves.

There is a Destruction of Self-Respect

Being humiliated is to lose self-respect, suffer damage to identity, and the sense of self.

The tragedy of being beaten by the partner that she has chosen shows all the world (who acts as witness), how clumsy, stupid and useless the woman is who made that choice. After an episode of violence, the victim finds it hard to believe in her own judgment because she blames herself for having chosen the same person who now beats her.

This shows her family and friends that she is not able to take care of her own safety, and although they might pity her, and they might question why she chose to be in that situation, they don't take any positive action to help her out of that situation.

The circle of destruction of self-esteem begins with the loss of respect. And her family is not very motivated to intervene (again demonstrating to her that she is not worthy of affection or respect).

The family may fear that she will return to the offender. This would involve the rest of the family in the perceived humiliation, and this is the reason they would prefer to use denial to keep away from her plight.

There is An Invasion of the Self

Being humiliated is to have personal boundaries violated and personal space invaded. Any physical maneuver, whether rape, torture or domestic violence, destroys the necessary respect for each one's personal space.

We can imagine the interpersonal situation of a person humiliating another physically, or we can imagine situations where groups humiliate other people for being of a different religion, or race, or gender, or disabled, or members of any rejected caste.

The perception is that the victim has suffered public violence. Everyone who knows the victim can comment negatively about her identity as a battered woman, and make value judgments about her. There is no good way to protect her privacy once domestic violence has begun.

In some countries this aspect is quickly remedied by taking battered women into a shelter where even her identity is kept secret, in order to begin the healing process in a protected situation.

The Social or Public Pain

Social and public abuse and humiliation are painful experiences. For the victim, this creates a perception of unjust psychological and social distance between herself as the object of abuse and the social group to which she belongs. This perceived distance makes the object of abuse identify with a special class of people seen as "pariahs," and as pariah, being excluded from "normal people," which facilitates further victimization.

The victim's connections with other people weakens, and as her contact with other people diminishes, she feels excluded from society, and soon she feels as though she has nothing more to lose. The break is the path to permanent exclusion. Some people may return to the group to take revenge by a massive and anonymous attack on the those people who will have nothing more to do with them.

This type of identification with an identity beneath the dignity of the human being produces immediate and far-reaching consequences, because the pain it causes also provokes:

- A diminished self-perception
- A diminished ability for self-regulation
- Increased reckless or defiant behavior
- An enhanced experience of social isolation and disconnection

It is the premise of this paper that humiliation imparted in relationships, where control and abusive exercise of power goes beyond domestic violence and physical punishment, is unwarranted and cruel treatment. It describes a situation where the mere implementation of protection and distance from the perpetrator is woefully inadequate to repair the trauma of humiliation suffered.

2. The Humiliation Component in Domestic Violence

We define violence as all types of abusive maneuvers against a member of the family. There may be all sorts of abuse, from physical to emotional abuse, and denigration. It is accepted that the easiest way to discern motivation is the desire or compulsion to maintain control over others in the same family circle, and exercise power over them.

These forms of abuse are able to produce physical or mental harm to the abused people, and even motivate them to commit suicide. The Office on Violence Against American Women defines domestic violence as a pattern of abusive behavior in any

relationship that is applied by one of the members to maintain power and control over the other partner.⁵

Domestic violence can take many forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, financial, and psychological abuse. Physical violence is the intentional use of physical force with the potential to cause damage, injury, disability or death; for example, hitting, pushing, kicking, biting or using a weapon. It can be a single episode (an instantaneous and unique explosion of rage) or it may form part of a system of other-control if you add permanent humiliation techniques.

Emotional or psychological abuse includes the use of humiliation to control what the victim can and cannot do by using restriction of information and decision-making. This causes the victim to do things that make her feel embarrassed or diminished in public and in private, and this generates isolation from family or friends, and restricts her access to money or to other basic resources that would help her.⁶

In this particular definition of humiliation, we differentiate feelings of humiliation that a person can feel in day-to-day life, from the purposeful humiliation process that one person exercises over another person. Klein proposed the term "dynamic humbling/humiliating" to mean a permanent interpersonal process, not just the infrequent personal experience of humiliation.

3. Humiliation can be lethal

There are strong reasons to stop the interpersonal humiliation process before it is established and it escalates into more real, physical violence. We know that in the escalation of violence, the controlling urges of an overpowering spouse don't stop short of crime in too many cases.

Researchers from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and the South African Medical Research Council analyzed 118 studies that included data on 492,340 homicide cases from 66 countries.

Results of their examination determined that 38.6 percent of all murder cases involving a female victim were caused by a domestic partner, compared to 6.3 percent of all male murder cases.

⁵ [About Domestic Violence](http://www.ovv.usdoj.gov/domviolence.htm). Office on Violence Against Women, <http://www.ovv.usdoj.gov/domviolence.htm> Visited on 2008-03-02

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic_violence, Visited on 2008-03-8

"Our results underscore that women are disproportionately vulnerable to violence and murder by an intimate partner, and their needs have been neglected for far too long," stated Dr Heidi Stöckl from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine in the UK.

"Such homicides are often the ultimate outcome of a failed societal, health, and criminal justice response to intimate partner violence."⁷

To have one partner experiencing progressive loss of personal power and security at the hands of the other, a process of humiliation has to be consistently applied.

4. The Humiliation Component in Domestic Violence

By using physical or mental violence, the perpetrator will establish a process geared towards destroying the previous identity as an equal partner that the victim can be familiar with. The perpetrator installs and reinforces an imbalance of power based on generating the feelings of humiliation. The overpowering person will do this in the privacy of their home less than in shared places. The humiliation has to be public, so really destroy victim's self-esteem. This is achieved through the introduction of the violence witness: the children, the extended family, or the general public.

The humiliation dynamics of control can be described as the "Triangle of Humiliation."

The Dynamics of Humiliation is a relational concept focused on the interaction between people and their social environments. The prototypical experience of humiliation involves a triangle:

1. The humiliator
2. The victim, who experiences being humiliated
3. A social witness, near the couple, who witnesses the humiliation

We have all played one of the three roles, but the role of witness is the most common, because we are all exposed daily to public performances of ridicule, degradation, and disregard for others.⁸

Included here as witnesses is everyone who perceives the situation of domestic violence. Neighbors, family, friends, relatives, church members, and the patriarchal society all become witnesses. These witnesses have a dilemma: either they decide to

⁷ Stöckl, Heidi, (2013) <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23791474?dopt=Abstract>

⁸ Klein, Donald. (2008) The Humiliation Dynamics, at:
<http://www.humiliationstudies.org/documents/KleinHumiliationDynamic.pdf>

recognize what they see as a violation of human rights of a person at the hands of another (and feel compelled to intervene and stop abuse), or deny the perception of the violation, and pretend they have not seen anything unusual or illegal. In both cases the witnesses are in a difficult position.

The acceptance of family violence develops with the silent consent of the witnesses who, knowingly or not, validate this attack. The fact that in so many instances witnesses decide to play a passive role of "don't get involved," begs us to ask why society, (by not helping or getting involved) allows the abuse to continue.

The violence is perpetuated by the witnesses in part because they perceive they lack appropriate tools to stop this atrocity, so they decide to do nothing. Also personal fear of being attacked by the aggressor is a deterrent for intervention. The increasing number of deaths of victims of domestic violence year after year, raise bitter questions about what can witness do to really stop the beatings that end in killing, without entering into danger themselves.⁹

Another sign that there is complicity of social witnesses vis-a-vis the humiliation of women, is that even when society has designed numerous aids to rescue women from immediate dangers, there are not so many programs that will help them become established independently so that they will be able to keep and support their children. Society caters to police urgencies, but the underlying problem is that the needs of humiliated women for personal and financial support remain perfectly ignored, so much that they prompt the woman to go back to the home shared with the abuser as a choice against becoming homeless or putting small children in danger by living in the streets.

Going to a shelter is a difficult choice also, because it presents many risks to personal safety (most women are attacked and killed by their husbands when they decide to go to the shelter) and financial risks (no financial resources are allocated to help them rebuild a decent economic situation).

And yet, there are no other solutions offered by society, other than to temporarily remove her from the line of fire. Programs that are geared toward reconstructing women's self-esteem that make the offender accept responsibility for his attack, offer his apology, and deliver some reparation, are scarce.

5. Women's humiliation as the means of social control

The humiliation of a woman by her partner serves all other women as a reminder of their social status. The degradation of one is shared by all others in the same condition.

⁹ Devries K, Rotstein A, Abrahams, Watts C, Moreno C, Stöckl H. (2013) The global prevalence of intimate partner homicide: a systematic review. *The Lancet*. 2013

And what is the message received? The message has to do with the center of the process of humiliation¹⁰, which is power and control. It serves men who have learned this method of control of women. It is a legitimate weapon in the abuser's repertoire.

When boys are growing up, boys are always learning different aspects of the "pecking order" (order of authority) and how to position themselves in their right place by demeaning others so that they can be perceived as more powerful than other boys.

Within a competitive social paradigm of win-lose, boys learn that in life there are always winners and losers. In early childhood they have to learn to manage their environment so as to receive rewards and avoid punishments.

They also have to discover that the love of parents depends on good behavior (i.e., it is conditional) and that he will suffer humiliation and punishment if he behaves incorrectly; it is the central theme. Older boys dealing with younger children put them in their right place by using irony, gay-bashing or accusations of being gay, physical punishment, and the ever-looming threat of publicly humiliating the younger boys in front of others (friends or relatives).

Groups of school boys and teens learn to compete almost automatically, to position themselves over the other, and they learn how to fight for acceptance and recognition with all available weapons of control. None of it comes free. Public humiliation is the weapon that tunes methods of control to a high pitch, whether one is a target or is the witness to the humiliation of others. One of the techniques of group control is gang bullying.

Thus, men learn that humiliation is a powerful weapon, that they themselves should not suffer humiliation at the hands of anyone, and that in the status that the pecking order confers, they must be respected by those below. Thus men in development learn to avoid any risk of being perceived as subject to a humiliating situation, and they learn how to redirect the humiliation towards others. The simple ability to accept criticism from others decreases relative to the need to maintain status and control over others.

People who are humiliating others are forced to repeat the aberrant behavior they have passively suffered from childhood on. This now puts them in the position of perpetrators. Humiliating others does not heal their primary wound, but it provides a transitional relief from that primary wound.

This aberrant behavior is driven by social teachings that allow them to imagine a relief from past sufferings if they are put in the role of the powerful and put others into a

¹⁰ Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2003) Definitions of Terms as proposed in her text:
<http://www.humiliationstudies.org/documents/evelin/WorsethandeathNewRoutes.pdf>

position of powerlessness—much like the powerlessness they suffered when they were younger.

It is very easy from here to attribute the subordinate women's status as a permanent and naturally determined condition, to interpret the women's emotional or financial independence as a threat to the established order, and try to control them using threats of violence, or strategically applied violence, so that it has a dual educational value—either against children or relatives. This is a lesson received by all, in a consistent and automatic way. It is the foundation of the patriarchal order, so all can recognize it and abide by it.

6. The difference between Shame and Humiliation

Shame and humiliation are different dynamics and are processed differently at the individual and collective levels. A key difference is that the humiliation occurs when interacting with another person or group who is able to put one in a helpless and diminished position, because it has the power to do so. Shame involves primarily a value judgment of the self to itself.

Shame occurs when we have not been able to live according to our own ideas of value or moral judgments. It refers to the skill to measure oneself about what constitutes appropriate behavior in one's eyes and in the eyes of the community where one is situated.

Humiliation is what one feels when one is ridiculed, debased by what one is, rather than by what one does. Being humiliated because of being a woman is the basic feeling, and it hurts because it attacks the primary beliefs about the basic equality of all human beings.

People think we can judge ourselves and we can accept shame, but nobody believes people deserve to be humiliated, because it humiliates another person based on criteria that such a person is not responsible for and can not change. Humiliating someone because he is black or she is a woman means burdening the individual with an impossible demand: the person can not change being a woman or being black.

Humiliation is not equal to shame; a person may feel ashamed of her own shortcomings, but this does not mean that others can humiliate her by those same flaws. Here is a failure of human rights expectations, because the victim is subjected to idiosyncratic criteria from a particular group in power and she will not be accepted because of being different. One need not be ashamed of who one is. One need not experience humiliation at the hands of others.

Although sometimes a humiliating episode causes individual embarrassment, it is useful to consider these two situations (the accidental shame and the intentional humiliation) as different, at least for the purpose of working for a more just order and to promote emotional health.

Above all, agents should try to prevent victims identifying themselves with the perpetrator. The victim and the perpetrator are two separate, unique people, and the victim should always be treated with dignity.

There are some unpleasant consequences of experiencing permanent humiliation, such as:

- Identification with the aggressor and the experience of shame because of who one is
- To see one's life from a cynical and negative outlook as a sequence of humiliations provided by God or any other higher being that causes human suffering
- Getting seriously depressed because of anomic thinking about identity loss.
- To get a kind of vicarious revenge for past and present humiliations by inflicting physical and emotional abuse on other people weaker than oneself
- To build a paranoid view of the world and of others
- To accept self-destruction through suicide

7. Review of domestic violence repair approaches

So far, there have not been too many approaches proposing methods to repair not only the effects of domestic violence on its victims, but also to identify and cure the humiliation component included in the attack.

Some helping procedures offered by governments at the social level try to prevent further damage, by separating the victim from the abuser, and encouraging the victim's future independent life.

Shelters, numerous treatments offered for battered women by mental health providers, and literature on the subject only offer the solution to separate the victim from the perpetrator. This protects the victim from more immediate danger while leaving any process for repair of the victim's dignity as a worthy human being postponed to an

indeterminate future. The problem with this intervention is also that the perpetrator has not learned to manage his aggression in a more socially acceptable way.

Here we argue that individual help for the victim is socially acceptable, but what is not included is questioning *why* the victim suffered social humiliation, as this would have a major effect on the rules of social interaction between men and women in the patriarchy.

We see the lack of respect for human rights of women in marriage denied, often diverting attention from the necessary repair of her insulted dignity, and even worse, society usually ends up blaming the abused victim.

Why? This is the classic question. This question fuels the talk of therapists and professionals serving domestic violence cases. They ask, "Why is she not leaving the house and leaving the offender? Why is she going back to him?"

In case after case, we see that the woman returns to the home, to be exposed to the same situation of violence. Here we risk a different explanation for the classic question, "Why?" without denying up front current answers' relative explanatory value ("she's a masochist," "wants to be beaten," "is dependent," "can not get enough money to live alone," etc.). Whatever the reason at hand, it is not enough to explain why women take the risk of being exposed to even more violence!

Unless a larger interest of hers: the repair of the humiliation, is satisfied, the women can not learn to value themselves—and begin the healing process. In this paper, we argue that the battered woman needs a positive closing attitude. She needs the perpetrator to acknowledge a different, whole, positive, and powerful image of herself.

She needs confirmation, coming exclusively from him, no one else but her partner, that she is the person worthy, valuable, and at parity with him, that he chose when they got married!

Among couples there is a pact of mutual recognition that breaks down when he hits her and thus he debases her to a lower level, a sub-human level, defining her as an inferior being who he has the power to humiliate and beat.

She needs the reversal of this process of humiliation, created by specific behaviors from him, that return her to her full and secure identity. Until this repair is produced, she cannot leave. Maybe she will consent to leave when she discovers that by remaining in the abusive situation there will be a greater risk for uncontrolled violence against her, and in that extremely abusive situation a possibility of recognition does not exist.

For recognition to be produced, a special dialogue, which is the one that we propose below, is required. We offer a way of constructing this process of reparation of marital humiliation, as the help to transform domestic abuse into a learning experience.

Recognition should be included in all aid packages offered to battered women by official entities

8. The Humiliation Reparation Process

We have come to describe the role of humiliation included as part and parcel of abusive relationships and domestic violence. Here we will offer a couple of suggestions for including recognition to repair the humiliation aspect in the treatment of domestic abuse, by using ideas from Madanes.¹¹

The main point I focus on here is about restoring the power of the victim, through processes of recognition and reconciliation. It is clear that this proposal is different from the official focus on domestic violence, because it recognizes the value of including the perpetrator in an active repair process.

It has been shown that to exclude the offender is dangerous and increases the risk of unleashing more violence; to manage that strong reaction here we propose a unique role for the abuser as the protagonist of an active process of reparation of the dignity of the victim(s) he hurt. In this sense, both parties in the conflict of domestic violence must be considered during therapy. When both parties are involved in the healing process, then the process of therapy works to restore some decent connection between both members of the couple.

The big difference from the classical approaches for the treatment of domestic violence is that the presence of the perpetrator is included in a program of reparation. His inclusion is both very challenging and necessary.

Recalling a common discussion in the field of family mediation on the subject of: "Can a case including domestic violence be mediated?" Here the answer is a complex, "YES."

This is a reformed mediation, in which the emphasis is on a predetermined process to achieve specific goals, and the issue of violence and abuse is precisely the focus of the process. Some traditional mediators will not accept that this process can be done from a classic mediation frame, and prefer to leave the processing of domestic violence to family therapists.

We would say that now the "mediated agreement to be achieved" is to get an explicit consensus by the couple or the family about certain facts:

- The violence really existed: it's disgusting, illegal, and humiliating
- The person who exercised violence must be held accountable,

¹¹ Madanes, Cloe, with Keim, James & Smelser, Dinah (1995) *The Violence of Men. New techniques for working with abusive families: a therapy of social action.* Jossey-Bass, Inc.

- And apologize and provide reparations to victims and witnesses.
- All parties affected by the domestic violence, including children, will witness the repair process.

In Madanes' words:

*"Everyone, no matter what he has done, has the possibility of self-determination, deciding to do the right thing for the future, to completely change one's life for one's own benefit and that of society. This approach requires that the individuals find meaning to their existence, despite the crime committed. He must live, whatever the costs, to repair the damage he has caused to his family, and take his future actions within the framework of this repair."*¹²

Going still further in this proposal to include both parties in the intervention to restore dignity, is Human Needs theory, as proposed by Arie Nadler and Nurit Schnabel¹³, consisting of four consecutive levels of propositions:

1. The experience of humiliation of the victims is a threat to their identity as valued members of society. Also, offenders experience a threat to their identity as moral actors.
2. On the other hand, offenders seek information of the degree to which they are accepted by others and are seen as moral entities. Victims need to rebuild their power and seek to obtain recognition of the injustice done to them. The frustration of these needs leads to feelings of moral inferiority and powerlessness that are barriers to reconciliation.
3. Finally, there is the possibility of constructing messages of social acceptance and empowerment, which will meet the emotional needs of victims and offenders, and from there develop a greater willingness to reconcile with each other.
4. The cycle described here of apology and forgiveness is a social interaction that meets the psychological needs of both the victim and the victimizer.

When the perpetrator apologizes, admitting the liability for damages committed, the perpetrator gives to the victim the power to give or deny forgiveness. This returns to the victim the power and self-control that was taken from her in the episode of victimization.

¹² Madanes et al (1995) p 3-5.

¹³ A. Nadler, T. Malloy & J.D. Fisher (eds.) (2006) Social Psychology of Intergroup Reconciliation. New York: Oxford University Press.

If the victim understands the circumstances that led the offender to commit such crimes, and now the offender seeks to be forgiven, and not to be perceived in the future as a "moral monster"; if the victim understands that the offender now wants to be accepted back into the social community at some future time, the process is successful.

Completion of this cycle of "apology-forgiveness" allows the victim and the victimizer to move beyond the emotional barriers of helplessness and moral inferiority, and this increases their ability to grow as individuals.

In his analysis of the psychological consequences of this process of accountability-forgiveness Gobodo-Madikizela,¹⁴ presents this argument:

"The decision to forgive may paradoxically raise the victim to a position of strength, as the person who holds the key of the perpetrator's desire...the victim becomes the driver of the wishes of the person who did the humiliation."

Offenders, on the other hand, are facing a challenge to their identity as valuable and moral people. Being identified as guilty of victimizing another may result in expulsion from the community, from the same group where he belongs, when not a legal punishment by the courts. When the victim offers forgiveness for his crimes, this feeling of being excluded becomes more bearable, and gives hope of being respected again.

The point here is not that both partners get reconciled and live together again as if nothing had happened. The point is to teach them both a new lesson:

- For the perpetrator, who has to be responsible for his own actions and their consequences and thus pay the price of violating barriers of respect for another human being.
- For the victim, to recover her own power to decide what treatment she wants to receive from others, and learn to set limits against unacceptable behavior as part of her ability to claim her power as a mature woman.

9. The difference between socio-emotional reconciliation and instrumental reconciliation

It is necessary to distinguish between socio-emotional reconciliation, and instrumental reconciliation. The instrumental reconciliation is a conscious non-aggression pact, which shows, through repeated actions, that the parties can trust each other.

¹⁴ Gobodo-Madikizela, P. (2003). *A human being died that night: A South-African story of forgiveness*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

It is the reconciliation between enemies intended to resume any contact to execute a project in the future. It focuses on the present and requires an acceptance that some cooperation is needed between adversaries in order to plan a reconciled future.

If the therapist's only plan is to enable the parties to have a separate coexistence, as divorced people, maybe just a formal reconciliation, that looks to the future and not the past of the relationship is sufficient. To this end, we must rely on the terms of the agreement between parties held by the legal structures, but we know this does not repair the destroyed emotional aspects; it only provides a basis for peaceful settlement and legalizes the desired status quo.

The socio-emotional reconciliation, being based on past events, supports a constructive confrontation, able to help both sides overcome episodes of victimization, and provides the key to a future of reconciliation.

The socio-emotional reconciliation is more consistent with the objective of reintegration. It seeks to restore the valuable identities on both sides through the cycle of apology-forgiveness, that frees couples from the threat that each other's identity represents. Both have to stop seeing each other as a threat, and perceive that both are included in a broader, more inclusive identity.

The socio-emotional reconciliation has the power to effect a change in the identity and self-image of each of the parties. It is more than instrumental, it is reparative. There must be some bit of trust to believe that apologies for the aggressive act are now genuine, and not just another trick or maneuver to keep control or escape doing jail time.

Maybe it is necessary to start with an instrumental reconciliation, taking only some aspects of Madanes' rules of interaction (the will of the offender to participate, tell the whole truth of the assaults made, and accept all his responsibility), and from there to go to the social-emotional reconciliation described by Nadler.

In a level of conflicts affecting not a couple, but society itself, we have seen that the process of social reconciliation and truth have been institutionalized at the end of the mediation of internal conflicts in order to promote the goal of social integration.

The basic decision on the project of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa, was that the project of reconciliation between blacks and whites would be facilitated through the process of telling the true facts of aggression by the aggressors, on condition of receiving forgiveness from their victims.

Part II:

Dignity Restoring Dialogues: Cloe Madanes' Therapy of Social Action:

There are some principles that guide the Dignity Restoring Dialogues, proposed by Madanes as the "Therapy of Social Action"

Principles that guide the repair process:

1. People change when their social environment changes, so the agent (therapist or mediator) intervenes by modifying the meaning of certain relationships (by offering a re-framing).
2. The agent is directive, and has to know what indications to give the affected family group.
3. The most important objective is the protection of the human rights of those affected. If the agent does not protect them, it is quite possible that no other social entities that can protect them.
4. A group of people must organize to do what is morally and ethically correct. In problems of violence and abuse, this principle is fundamental. Therapists can't avoid treating both sides of the dyad: abused and abusers, because therapists have to know what is right, what is wrong, and be able to draw the line so that the family group can understand what to do.
5. In abuse cases, the pain is not only moral, but spiritual. Since the humiliation hurts a person's spiritual and moral sense, to do the right thing means to restore the spirit of the people inside the right relationship. This spiritual sense is located in feelings rooted in the family network: the belief that in a family, people who love us don't attack us, and that we will protect each other in cases of need. A man who beats his wife violates this family law of mutual support and care, by abusing the wife's powerlessness.

What are the practical consequences of this approach?

In a Therapy of Social Action, each person is responsible for his or her own actions. No matter what the provocation might be, there is always a peaceful alternative. If the father chooses to behave violently, we accept that he had other choices, but decided to actively use violence directed at his wife or children. This cannot be justified by his nature, his character, or the strength of his emotions, nor can it be justified by being under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

As in the processes established in the Truth and Reconciliation committees, establishing a consensual truth is important to Madanes. She devotes much time to finding out everything about each of the episodes of violence, until she is sure that all participants share the same information. This reaffirms the fact that violence is a serious issue, regardless of whatever level it is present today. It is an abuse of power and control, and it is important that everyone in the group share and accept this information. Madanes calls this point: “promoting the sense of reality” of all members, thus avoiding the continuation of the group’s denial about the severity of the attacks.

A violent father should not only believe and accept that he is solely responsible for his violence, and that violence is very bad; he must also express such belief to those he has hurt, and convey his genuine regret for the acts committed.

To Madanes, this regret must manifest in concrete ways: ***she invites the man to apologize to the abused wife on his knees, and she does not accept any other form of apology.*** The woman must be there, see the man on his knees asking for her forgiveness, and decide when the apology seems so genuine that deserves her forgiveness; only then, will she decide if she can, or wants to, forgive him.

Even when the form of this apology request can appear very strong or unacceptable to a male audience, there is an important logic to this demand.

Madanes believes it to be the only way that the basic assumption of male power and male control over women is definitely broken. The aggressor will consider this a humiliating request; for Madanes, it is precisely for this reason (having caused humiliation to his wife) that he should kneel—to restore his spouse’s power.¹⁵

He can not replace this action with only a verbal request for forgiveness, because the man is not in a position to ask for anything. This social therapy is based on repentance and reparation. It is not based on obtaining forgiveness. The demand on him is not only having him asking for forgiveness, but is also to kneel and show his grief. And then, the therapist asks the family or wife if the repentance seems sincere to them. If not, the husband will have to apologize again. Even if he would not apologize for the attack, he has to apologize for the bad relationship with the spouse, and the hostility shown towards her.

Throughout the process of researching violent acts, we must be careful to reframe the meaning of the acts of male violence, from a framework that denotes male violence as accepted symbol of power and of the control of men over women, towards a different meaning. Men’s violent acts define them now as immature and weak persons; therefore, the father of a family including violence in the relationship, has lost leadership.

¹⁵ Madanes et al (1995), *The Violence of Men*, p 161

A comparative view of approaches towards healing domestic violence

To contrast with different examples of domestic violence treatment used in other developing countries, see the proposal by Paz Ruiz Castillo¹⁶ (2001), in his account of treatment of male aggressors in Nordic countries:

The Process of the Therapy of Social Action:

- Is open and the therapist plays a crucial role in focusing the therapy on domestic violence.
- All participants must reconstruct, in minute detail, in front of the others, the acts of violence (in some cases participants are forced to use the proper name of the person assaulted).
- Once the violence is made visible and recognized, the individual responsible for the violence is helped to recognize the stages of escalation, and to speak about what techniques for control to use. ("Time out" is one of the best known).
- The individual must also recognize that his conduct was conscious and avoidable, that he is responsible, because there are always options, he could do otherwise, and that his conduct involved an attempted degree of control over the victim.
- On the other hand it helps him to see the consequences of violence (for the man and his family) and other options or outcomes.
- There is a family consensus about all the components of this process.

Here is the difference between both processes: the one described by Paz Ruiz Castillo proposes training the abuser not to abuse more in the future; Madanes' approach is focused on repairing the victim. The one described above includes observing the signals of escalating male aggression resulting in interpersonal violence, but lacks any inclusion of observing the battered spouse's humiliation feelings.

¹⁶ Paz Castillo Ruiz (2001) Treatment of Men Batterers in Nordic Countries, IDB (Inter-American Development Bank Publication).

The domestic violence repair method includes only the male side's education to modulate the tendency toward aggression, restoring the ability of the attacker to control himself. There are no indications that repairing the broken bond in the couple is included somehow, beyond getting the abuser to use less violence in the future. Therefore, we can't say that this technique developed in Nordic countries would fulfill the task of repairing the humiliation of the abused party produced by the violence.

The last aspect of my critique has to do with the lack of recognition of the damage done to the victim's self identity, and the duty to provide repair. By focusing only in the batterer's needs as the center of attention, the last challenge to male dominance is never issued.

Part II:

The Dignity-Restoring Dialogues

In this paper we want to reinforce Madanes' proposal of peaceful methods for restoring respect for human rights of physical and emotional integrity; reparation of the humiliation inflicted, and in general, the implementation of appropriate systems for healing and restoring the couple's dignity.

We have called this method the "Dignity-Restoring Dialogues."

This is done by proposing organized discussions with all the parties concerned, possibly the couple or the whole family suffering from domestic violence, either from the role of a family therapist, a social worker, or therapist-mediator. There may also be two professionals intervening at the same time. These can be a series of two or three meetings, and up to ten meetings, depending on the case, having a fixed duration of sixty to ninety minutes.

The cases proposed by Madanes, given the existence of domestic violence, have been referred to these therapeutic sessions by state entities. She describes the role of social therapist as: "To change relationships, reorganizing the natural network of family, or tribe, and then withdraw and let the group members care for and protect each other."

"Dignity-Restoring Dialogues" are processes that have:

- A declared purpose: to change the family power relations
- An outline of steps already established, to follow
- The use of new, more appropriate language to narrate facts.

The Process Three Steps: Apology, Respect, Reconciliation

In these dialogues, we will propose the objective of each stage, and the contents of the conversations, listing the issues and the communication style or technique chosen.

Step 1. Objective: Restore Respect

- Suspend judgment of value up until listening to the whole story
- Reflective listening to both parties
- Discover and name the assumptions (control, power) underlying behaviors
- Invite the perpetrator to take full responsibility for his acts of aggression
- Invite the perpetrator to show sincere repentance for all acts of aggression and each of the assaults, kneeling before the victims
- Manage resistance and emotions
- Demonstrate empathy and respect to both sides

EXPLANATION:

Since these discussions are focused on working on both physical and emotional violence, and its component of interpersonal humiliation, it is important to maintain focus.

In fact the only major family issue is the balance between control and violence, and between love and respect. So therapists have to provide a space for dialogue about what the couple's wrong and right perceptions of the issue of control and violence are.

Questions will be directed to invite the narrative of the victims, using reflective listening with them, giving them proper respect, and focusing on the reasons for violence in terms of control and power. The same narration by the offender will be received, re-framing any incident of abusive power, with the words "abuse" and "power exercise."

Once it has been clearly established that there is no excuse for any act of violence and all of the violent acts are remembered in detail, the coordinator invites the offender to show remorse for the actions that he has already recognized he did.

Finally, observing carefully the aspects of emotional honesty during the act of repentance will serve to strengthen the shame and sorrow produced by the damage inflicted on the spouse. From here, if necessary, agent can ask for reparative actions the abuser can do to improve the abused wife's situation.

Step 2. Objective: Restoration of Recognition of Each Person's Value

- Identify and recognize the human needs of respect and recognition of both parties
- Give appreciation for positive qualities: her resilience and the children's resilience despite physical assault and domestic violence
- Praise his ability to experience shame for acting in a violent way
- Provide narratives about how each party can re-evaluate the situation of the other, identifying the valuable personal aspects that both parties can agree on.
- Giving appreciation to positive aspects motivate people to do the difficult task of apologizing.

EXPLANATION:

Revise episodes of aggression, emphasizing the aspects of human rights violation:

- Of the right to privacy
- Of the right to physical integrity
- Of the right to have physical and emotional security, etc.
- Of the right of inclusion within the family group

And check out these episodes looking at aspects of resilience:

- How did the victim try to protect herself? How did she try to prevent the attack? How did she try to heal later? How did she try to make herself safer and happier?
- What did the offender do to feel human again? What did he do to help victims feel safe again? At what point did he allow himself to feel shame or sorrow?

Step 3. Objective: Restoration of some kind of respectful connection

- Teach expressions of respect for the dignity of others

- Teach narratives of co-responsibility
- Identify the circumstances where the other person could feel humiliated
- Validate group traumas of the past, without repeating them, by using rituals and symbols
- Propose using appreciation in interactions between relatives every day!

EXPLANATION:

The expressions of respect must be proposed first by the therapist/mediator, and then those respectful expressions must be used in the session, and later applied at home. At the next meeting everyone will be asked how and when they expressed appreciation for each other.

If there are minor children, it is important to develop narratives of co-responsibility: when spouses are already divorced, both parties need to have a plan that says who is responsible for doing what, and when they are responsible for that activity.

Make lists of the responsibilities of co-parenting and divide the tasks so that everyone knows what the other will do and who is responsible for each piece.

Help the family see what kind of behaviors / phrases / actions produce humiliation. Think about what phrases / actions facilitate humiliation repair through appreciation.

Identify activities or programs that will repair the damage of the past, and plan how to create those activities.

Give family members a list of appreciative phrases based on the reality of each behavior. Ask, "What do you appreciate about him / her?"

CONCLUSIONS:

We have proposed a new approach for the treatment of domestic violence within the framework of humiliation and its compensation using restoration of respect and dignity. We reviewed workshop proposals that include repairing humiliation through carefully designed dialogues, with specific objectives defined in advance.

We hope that this approach brings something new to the urgent need of transform the problem of violence in all its forms within the family dynamics.

The frequent practice of the elements of restorative dialogue to create dignity within family groups will increase therapists' repertoire of tools for building peaceful families and satisfying family members' needs for respect, safety, and trust.

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