

## "Childhood, Humiliation and Conflict: Reproduction of the Cycle"

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One of the most challenging things I have discovered (and help students discover) about childhood in teaching a class called "Violence in the World of Children" for the past 20 years is that childhood is not simply a period of life measured and bracketed by time. These discoveries are grounded in student descriptions about their experiences of support and violation of their human dignity in childhood.

To understand violence in the world of children it is important to understand childhood as a collection of experiences and reactions to experiences and reactions (by adults) to children's reactions to their experiences that shape individuals and a social category of individuals we describe as children. Ultimately these experiences and reactions shape the adults children become. The 'cycle of violence' that transcends and encompasses generations and perpetuates specific forms of violence is a phenomenon that can be linked to the structural place of humiliation and conflict and the legitimized threat of or use of force by one generation upon another.

These structured, unequal relationships between the adult world and the world of children are supported by a language violence definition, justification and rationalization; by the expectation that childhood can be separated from adulthood and the 'denial' of harm experienced in childhood; social role / reference group expectations associated with childhood and adulthood; by power differentials, between children and adults (Alice Miller). These structured unequal relationships are coped with in childhood by self and other directed dehumanization, the learning of moral justifications and rationalizations (Coles). (Perry, Anda, Straus) Over time, the adaptive strategies of childhood become maladaptive patterns of relationships and cultural formations (Combs) that lead to the dominance of humiliation and coercion as behavioral strategies, the trivialization of human dignity, and a reduced saliency of non-violent alternatives to coercion and humiliation. This process then forms the relationships of difference and "odious comparisons" that support violence in a variety of settings.

In this structured relationship between children and adults as social groups we find the functional equivalent of 'colonial relationships' that characterized political relationship between colonizer and colonized populations (Memmi), men and women, race relations, relationships between gay and straight communities, religious groups, ethnic groups where domination is both the means and result of

structured inequalities. Viewed from this perspective, *childhood is the last colony*: a set of relationships (Memmi) reproduced through humiliation in childhood and whose dominion is passed from generation to generation.

While relationships between colonial powers and the peoples they colonized, between workers and owners of capital, between races, between men and women, and more recently between straight and gay communities, have been challenged and changed in the direction equality and respect over the last 60 years, relationships between childhood and adulthood have changed very little. The perpetuation of structural inequalities and the use of force, humiliation, creating the other (the tools of colonial relationships) in childhood has remained a constant supported by law and social norms in almost every culture. (Pinerio UN Study of Violence Against Children)

In the last 25 years the adoption, nearly universal ratification and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the global movement to eliminate corporal punishment of children in all settings, and emphasis on positive parenting / active participatory educational, political participation of children and social media strategies is providing a set of principles and processes that has the potential for creating alternatives that can break the cycle of violence.