

Resisting Humiliation in Schooling:
Narratives and Counter-narratives

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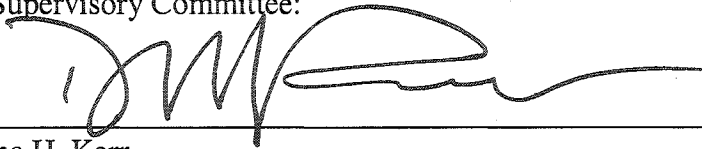
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Abstract

**Resisting Humiliation in Schooling:
Narratives and Counter-narratives**

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Humiliation is so deeply engrained in the structure of mainstream American culture, including in public education, that it is insidious and often considered “normal.” Indeed, many people tell stories of humiliation that they remember as excruciatingly painful (their own or others’ that they witnessed), and say they would do nearly anything to avoid being humiliated. Yet there is a notable lack of attention to humiliation as a problem in schools (both within the schools themselves as well as in the media).

It is first argued that on a personal level, most people seem very aware of the presence of humiliation in schools, whereas on the public level, humiliation in schools is seldom recognized or directly discussed except in the most extreme cases. This disjunction is accounted for by considering the structure of humiliation and how it functions in society and in the individual psyche. More specifically, pertinent literatures are drawn on to account for both the intersubjective and the intrasubjective aspects of humiliation. It is argued that a major overlooked and perhaps unrecognized reason that humiliation persists is because it is embedded in narratives we live by – both shared meta-narratives and individuals’ stories. Next considered is the question of what is humanly at stake if humiliation persists, especially in schooling. Finally, it is argued that because narratives contribute significantly to the persistence of humiliation in schooling and because the stakes are high, consciously constructed counter-narratives are crucial to interrupting cultural, interpersonal and intrapersonal circuits of humiliation. Two types of counter-narratives are considered: the stories we tell in schooling and the pedagogies that are used in classrooms.

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If I did not know before I began this journey, I understand now how interrelated we humans are and how the good will, work and thoughts of each of us are integral to the survival and success of all of us. That said, there is no way I could possibly mention all the people and experiences that brought me to where I am now, so let no one feel slighted, for you are in my heart and you have my appreciation.

DEDICATION

To my parents, whose vast differences taught me more than they will ever know
and
to Aunt Audrey and Uncle Howard, my “enlightened witnesses”

INTRODUCTION: A PUZZLE

Background

My personal awareness of humiliation in schooling came in elementary school. Talkative and social from my first day in school, I often engaged in conversation with my “neighbors” when I finished my assigned seatwork. I don’t remember this as a problem for my teachers in kindergarten, first, and especially in second grade, where the soft-spoken, cheerful teacher fostered collaboration and creativity in an active, busy environment. In fact, in second grade, our teacher “channeled” the energy of two friends and me to write and produce three “plays” during times when we might otherwise have socialized and made it difficult for others to work. There is no doubt in my mind that this teacher, combined with my mother’s encouragement, initiated my lifelong passion for creative writing.

With such a supportive background, then, I was not at all ready for school to be the serious business it was for my third grade teacher. She required students to be seated at all times and quiet unless called on (similar to a dictum at home when there were adults visiting: children are to be seen and not heard). She found my talking troublesome, warned me repeatedly about my social visiting, changed my seat location several times, and called my parents. This latter move upset my autocratic father and increased my anxiety, but did not much decrease my talking. When the teacher did not achieve the compliance from me that she desired, I earned the first of several “C’s” I received that year in “conduct” (although my academic grades were exemplary). When third grade finally came to an end, I was confident that a better experience awaited me in the fall.

Unfortunately, third grade proved to be an inadequate warm-up for the tyranny of fourth grade, where the teacher subjected students who irritated her to humiliations that withered self-esteem and created a tense, fearful classroom learning environment for most, if not all, of my peers.¹ Students caught chewing gum wore it on their noses for the remainder of the day (which could be hours) and those not attending to their work were directed to sit on the floor in the well of the teacher’s desk at the front of the room facing out toward the class for up to an hour. One boy, too large for the well, had to sit on a tall stool facing the wall in the back corner of the room. I remember him because he was there so often and he

¹ Not all of the students in the class irritated her. In fact, she clearly favored a handful of students, but I don’t think they were any more comfortable in that environment than the rest of us were.

was always hunched over, like he was trying to hide, but couldn't. I also remember him because his regular seat was beside mine in class and it seemed to me that his repeated banishment had more to do with talking related to trying to get help with work he didn't understand than it did with any rude or disruptive behaviors.

Naturally, I did my *very best* not to socialize in this class; however, the occasion of one of my few "slip-ups" where I was "caught" resulted in my having to make a large sign (about 15 inches wide and 6 inches deep) on stiff white cardboard that read in all capital letters, "MISS BUSYBODY." Similar to Nathaniel Hawthorne's character Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, when she was forced to wear a scarlet "A" in public as punishment for her "sins," my sign hung around my neck on a thick string attached to either end of the cardboard. The same day, the teacher ordered me to lead my class through the entire length of our large school to an assembly in the auditorium wearing this emblem of shame. Since our school was a combination elementary and junior high school, the halls were filled with "older" students who were between classes as we made our way to assembly. I remember feeling like I was suffocating, my stomach queasy and my thoughts scrambled as students stared, snickered or laughed outright. To make matters worse, the teacher sat directly behind me in the hour-long assembly, I guess to make sure that I didn't talk or adjust my sign so that it wasn't visible. By the end of the assembly, I felt insulated in a nightmarish dream world as I led my class back through the school to our classroom. This experience had a powerful and negative effect on my comfort level in school. While my story is definitely one-sided—the teacher is not here to tell her version or to defend her reasons for her actions—the point is that I felt humiliated and that I still remember it vividly many years later.²

For as long as I can remember, no matter what "roles" I have played (wittingly or unwittingly) in various forms of humiliation—humiliator, humiliated or witness—humiliation has always felt "bad" to me. The basic "unfairness," inequity and obvious negative effects of humiliation probably began to disturb my sensibilities when I was a small child living with my parents, my father who was autocratic, and fond of corporal punishment (like many others of his era) and my mother who was timid and passive and did not resist my

² I thought my parents didn't know about this incident and I was certainly afraid to talk to them about it for fear of further reprisal from my father. Many years later my mother told me that on the day of the incident, she heard the story from the mother of one of my classmates. She felt I had suffered enough already, so she didn't bring it up with either my father or with me.

father's control of the family. Later, when I also experienced humiliating incidents (mine and others) in school, as disturbing as they were, my small size, young age and powerless position told me that I couldn't make humiliators go away no matter how hard I wished, although I certainly fantasized revenge more than once, usually in the form of some mysterious (poof!) removal of the source, rather than in any violent detail.

Even after humiliation became less of a daily issue in my personal life, I was bothered as a parent volunteer and ultimately as a teacher, to observe school personnel using sarcasm (often misunderstood) and other forms of mostly verbal humiliation in school settings with children and colleagues. I watched people wilt or blossom according to the types and quality of interactions (verbal and nonverbal) they had with others in the school environment. However, I did not feel called to concerted action until I witnessed the repeated overt humiliation of a teacher colleague by an entire school community.³

There was no question in my mind from my own experiences and from my observations that humiliation damages relationships, perhaps human lives, and that it "hurts." The experience with my colleague at last compelled me to devote concentrated study to the issue of humiliation in schooling, committed to finding ways to counter humiliating behaviors in school relationships. Thus began the journey of the inquiry presented here.

Opening Pandora's Box

Mentioning to people that I am interested in "humiliation in schooling" feels much like opening Pandora's box. People's reactions are immediate and remarkably consistent. Their facial expressions become serious, visually telling me that they already "know" about this topic that touches something deeply personal in each of them. Most people pour out at least one detailed story of a humiliating school incident that involved them or that they witnessed, events that are vividly preserved in their memories: a hair stylist's repeated ridicule for being left-handed; a research librarian with several family members who are challenged with dyslexia and "know all about humiliation;" a graduate student's description of his K-12 experience as an "absolute nightmare" of bullying and humiliations; a student teacher who "quit writing" for five years following so many red ink marks on her writing papers that they looked like blood on the pages.

³ My attempts to intercede were ignored, not supported or discouraged by administrators, colleagues and parents.

Sadly, the stories are endless, a book or more in themselves. As each person remembers a humiliating incident from his or her student days, some people tell stories from their lives that occurred over 50 years ago. In a chapter entitled, "The Habit of Rejection," from *You Can't Say You Can't Play*, Vivian Paley writes of her early school experiences: "I can still recall the clouded faces of outcast children in the classrooms of my childhood, and also the faces of the confident ones who seemed to know exactly how everything must be done. They owned the secrets to life and it was important to me that I please and placate them."⁴ Paley also relates preschool teacher Lillian Tully's early school memories:

"I was scared and lonely all the time in school. People's anger. The anger of teachers toward certain kids. It was always there. Someone was always about to be punished. It was never me, but that didn't matter. I remember holding my breath when the teacher yelled at someone or did worse. It might as well have been me."⁵

The incidents people describe—many taking place in front of peers or superiors—include bullying, taunting, isolation/lack of recognition, pushing and shoving, sarcastic remarks, direct put-downs or ridicule, rejection, intimidation, theft of possessions, beatings and corporal punishment. Strong displays of emotion⁶ accompany most narrators' varied stories of students humiliated by other students, teachers or administrators; teachers humiliated by administrators, parents, students or other teachers; and administrators humiliated by school board members or parents. With few exceptions, people who relate stories of humiliation in schooling report suffering in silence, feeling ashamed or reluctant to report or discuss what happened and feeling helpless and frustrated in their ability to change their situations. Many people speak of their humiliating experiences as traumatic and formative in their personal, social or professional development and in their attitudes toward learning and "school."

⁴ Vivian G. Paley, *You Can't Say You Can't Play* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 10.

⁵ Vivian G. Paley, *In Mrs. Tully's Room: A Childcare Portrait* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 36-37.

⁶ For confirmation of this observation, see e.g., Lisa Berndt, Victoria C. Dickerson and Jeffrey L. Zimmerman, "Tales Told out of School," in *Narrative Therapies with Children and Adolescents*, ed. Craig Smith and David Nylund (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997) and Julia Johnson Rothenberg, "Memories of Schooling," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 10, no. 4 (1994).

The Puzzle

In private, people readily admit an awareness of the presence of humiliation in the types of incidents mentioned above and they welcome a focus on humiliation in schooling as important and overdue.⁷ However, at the public level, humiliation in schools is often briefly sensationalized (usually in lethally violent incidents such as occurred in Columbine, Colorado in April, 1999 or in Red Lake, Minnesota in 2005), brushed over lightly or ignored entirely.⁸ Most incidents of humiliation in schools go unreported except in surveys where people (students, especially) can remain anonymous or in places where people share their stories privately. Psychologist Max Sugar, whose clientele includes many teachers who have confided their stories of humiliation, writes that teachers fear retaliation from students or students' parents, from job insecurity worries with administrators, and from loss of status with colleagues.⁹ Both students and teachers fail to report incidents of humiliation because they fear that administrators will handle the information inappropriately or that nothing will be done about it at all.¹⁰

Writers and researchers concerned with the education, health, and social issues of children and adolescents have shown increasing professional interest in the past 10 years in "school violence,"¹¹ probing specific aspects of "violent" or "aggressive" behavior in schools, bullying in particular.¹² Intervention programs have been developed for schools to

⁷ A few people minimize humiliation as a painful but "necessary" part of "growing up."

⁸ See e.g., Michael Furlong and Gale Morrison, "The School in School Violence: Definitions and Facts," *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders* 8, no. 2 (2000); Patrick J. Kiger, *School Bullies*, ed. B. Grapes, *School Violence (Contemporary Issues Companion Series)* (Greenhaven Press, 2000); Alice Miller, *The Truth Will Set You Free: Overcoming Emotional Blindness and Finding Your True Adult Self*, trans. Andrew Jenkins (New York: Basic Books, 2001); Pedro A. Noguera, "Preventing and Producing Violence: A Critical Analysis of Responses to School Violence," *Harvard Educational Review* 65 (1995) and Michael Pastore, "The Mission of Alice Miller: How Adults Can Survive a Childhood of Violence and Untruth," *EPublishers Weekly*, November 15 (2002), http://www.zorbapress.com/epweekly/c_epw/c_truthfree.htm.

⁹ Max Sugar, "Abuse and Neglect in Schools," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 44, no. 4 (1990).

¹⁰ Greta Shilling Phinney, "Sexual Harrassment: A Dynamic Element in the Lives of Middle School Girls and Teachers," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 27, no. 3 (1994) and Sylvain-Jacques Desjardins, "Onus Is on Educators to Protect Students for Anti-Gay Bullying," in *EurekaAlert!* (American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2005).

¹¹ Furlong and Morrison define "school violence" as "a multifaceted construct that involves both criminal acts and aggression in schools, which inhibit development and learning, as well as harm the school's climate." Furlong and Morrison, 71.

¹² Dorothy L. Espelage and Susan M. Swearer, "Bullying in American Schools: A Social-Ecological Perspective on Prevention and Intervention," in *Bullying in American Schools: A Social-Ecological Perspective on Prevention and Intervention*, ed. Dorothy L. Espelage and Susan M. Swearer (Mahway, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2004); Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, "The Outsiders," *New York Times Magazine*, August 22 1999 and Dan Olweus, "Bully/Victim Problems in School: Facts and Intervention," *European Journal of Psychology of Education* XII, no. 4 (1997).

target certain student behaviors to increase school safety.¹³ However, few scholars or writers have directly focused on discussions of humiliation or on the role of humiliation in “school violence,” and perhaps even more important, on the climate of acceptance to shame/humiliation that seems to exist behind the violence or aggression that they study or seek to address.¹⁴ Studying types of “school violence” such as bullying as primary phenomena rather than as symptoms of deeper underlying issues can miss considering humiliation as a major factor in the problem. In *Preventing Violence*, James Gilligan makes a direct connection between violence and humiliation: “the basic psychological motive, or cause, of violent behavior is the wish to ward off or eliminate the feeling of shame and humiliation—a feeling that is painful, and can even be intolerable and overwhelming.”¹⁵ Gilligan is not alone in making this connection,¹⁶ and yet humiliation as a central factor in school violence issues remains largely unexamined.

Given the knowledge that many people have humiliation stories that they remember as painful (their own or others’ that they witnessed), and that most people say they would do nearly anything to avoid being humiliated,¹⁷ both the persistence of humiliation and the lack of consistent attention within schools themselves to the dynamics of humiliation as a serious school problem are puzzling. If it is so painful and potentially formative in negative ways in human living and learning, why isn’t discussion of humiliation a “front burner” concern, particularly in schools, where we presumably care about our children and where they learn from our example? Why would people involved in schooling, especially adults, participate

¹³ Michele Borba, *Bully-Proofing Our Kids* (myprimetime: Personal trainer for life, 2001 [cited 2004]), <http://www.myprimetime.com/family/parenting/content/bullying/index.shtml>; Steve Hill, “Dealing with Bullies is Subject of Forum,” *University Week* 2004; M. Christine Mattise, “True Blue: An American Educator Brings Her Anti-Bullying Program to South African Schools,” *Teaching Tolerance* 2004 and Olweus, “Bully/Victim Problems in School: Facts and Intervention.”

¹⁴ See Peter M. Brown, “Humiliation, Bullying and Caring in School Communities,” in *Workshop on Humiliation and Violent Conflict* (Columbia University, New York: 2004) and Robin Warshaw, “Character Education Seeks to Raise Values and Grades,” *Rutgers Focus* (2003) for a notable exception.

¹⁵ James Gilligan, *Preventing Violence* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 69. “Violence” can be directed toward oneself as well as at others.

¹⁶ See e.g., Sugar, “Abuse and Neglect in Schools;” Murray A. Straus and Carrie L. Yodanis, “Corporal Punishment in Adolescence and Physical Assaults on Spouses in Later Life: What Accounts for the Link?” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58, no. 4 (1996) and Neil Altman, “Humiliation, Retaliation, and Violence,” *Tikkun: A bimonthly Jewish & Interfaith Critique of Politics, Culture & Society* January/February (2004) for other evidence of this connection between humiliation and violence.

¹⁷ Gilligan, *Preventing Violence*; Lee Hammel, “The Anatomy of Embarrassment; Umass Psychiatrist Dissects Guilt, Shame,” *Sunday Telegram*, December 8 2002; Adam Phillips, *Equals* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) and Gary Zingher, “Big Humiliations,” *School Library Media Activities Monthly* 12, no. 6 (1996).

in, sanction, or look past humiliation if indeed it is so undesirable in their personal estimation?

This burning question, and the many related questions that grew from it during the course of my inquiry, guide the central focus of the first part of this work. However, my purpose in regard to this question is dual, and fits my interests as both a scholar and as a teacher-practitioner: first, to examine why humiliation persists in schools despite the fact that as individuals we know it is detrimental to healthy human development, learning and overall well-being,¹⁸ and then, based on what emerges from that examination, to think about how to resist humiliation in schooling. This latter effort forms the focus of the second and shorter part of this work. To begin, I present a brief overview of the thinking process that formed the questions to direct this inquiry and of the arguments that I make.

The Process and the Arguments

When I began seeking possible answers to the question of the persistence of humiliation in schooling, my thinking turned immediately to the detailed narratives that people eagerly share with me about humiliating experiences in their lives, as well as to the vividness of my memories of such events in my own life. This thought about the importance of narratives was reinforced by several years of teaching English and history, disciplines where the powerful role of narrative in the preservation of culture and tradition in societies is widely acknowledged. I wondered how these narratives, these stories that we remember so well, that we tell one another and ourselves, that seem to help to define our lives, might be involved in the persistence of humiliation, especially in schooling. Since people generally tell their stories of humiliation with a great deal of feeling, including facial and physical reactions, I was also led to think about the role emotion might play in keeping humiliation narratives alive in people's memories, thereby somehow contributing to the persistence of humiliation. Reading and discussion in two classes taken early in my exploration of these questions both stimulated and validated the direction of my thinking. The first class, designed to think specifically about the phenomenon of humiliation in education,

¹⁸ See e.g., Nita Lutwak and Joseph R. Ferrari, "Understanding Shame in Adults: Retrospective Perceptions of Parental-Bonding During Childhood," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases* 185 (1997); Donald L. Nathanson, *The Role of Affect in Learning to Read - How Shame Exacerbates Reading Difficulties* (Implicitly, Children of the Code and Learning 1st Productions., 2003 [cited December, 2003]); <http://www.childrenofthecode.org/interviews/nathanson.htm> and Bruce D. Perry and Ronnie Pollard, "Altered Brain Development Following Global Neglect in Early Childhood." (paper presented at the Society For Neuroscience, New Orleans, 1997).

encouraged further investigation into the important role narratives play in human formation. The second class, where a central focus was on the examination of the role of dominant cultural/societal narratives in race/class/gender bias, prompted me to wonder if there might be dominant cultural narratives that foster humiliation in schooling.

Together these questions formed the agenda for an extensive interdisciplinary investigation, an approach that worked well for me, because I think best holistically. Additionally, I find that important discoveries often emerge when ideas from research and thinking that are isolated into disciplines that do not “talk” to one another are connected and synthesized. Thus, I chose to access scholars, researchers and writers from several disciplines, including literature, sociology, education, psychotherapy, neuroscience, political theory, psychiatry, anthropology, medical science and the “everyday” media to assist me in thinking about the questions I posed. This approach proved to be both fascinating and fruitful and led me to the central argument that I make in the first section of this work. I argue that a major overlooked, and perhaps unrecognized, reason that humiliation persists in schooling is because it is embedded in multiple ways in the narratives we live by—both shared metanarratives and individuals’ stories. In fact, I argue that humiliation is so deeply engrained in the narrative structure of mainstream American culture, including in public education, that it is insidious and often considered “normal.” Thus, I am using narrative as a primary lens through which to look at the complex phenomenon that is the persistence of humiliation. Work uncovered in the formulation of this argument leads directly to my second major argument and to the core of the second shorter section of this work: because narratives contribute significantly to the persistence of humiliation in schooling, counter-narratives are crucial to interrupting cultural, interpersonal and intrapersonal circuits of humiliation.

I begin the first chapter with an exploration central to this inquiry: that is, what constitutes humiliation? What are the characteristics of humiliation? When exploring a complex idea, it is certainly tempting to begin with a definition in order to narrow the discussion quickly. However, definitions of an idea can be “flat,” closing off a rounder conception that describes the contexts, situations or range of possibilities in which that idea may exist and that promotes a deeper understanding of the idea. Therefore, before attempting a definition, I begin with Margalit’s rich discussion of the attributes of societies that are decent and of societies that are not, including his ideas about what constitutes humiliation in such societies. Second, Memmi’s description of the circumstances that exist for people when

there is a power differential, in this case between the colonizer and the colonized, helps to further circumscribe the conditions present for human humiliation and are useful when considering the idea that most mainstream schools may be a form of colonization where the conditions for the persistence of humiliation are built in. Next, Hutchinson and others offer some parameters for what constitutes humiliation in schooling. Finally, I turn to some definitions. To provide a clearer understanding of the characteristics of humiliation, Hartling and Klein distinguish between “shame” and “humiliation,” two emotions that are often used interchangeably. Then I look at Lindner’s definition of humiliation that evolved from 30 years of work in the area of what she refers to as “humiliation studies.”

In the second chapter, I am concerned with the structure of humiliation and how it functions in society and in the individual psyche. While people seem to readily recognize humiliation when they see it or feel it in isolated experiences, to get a clearer picture of how it is structured, it is helpful to see what it looks like in the individual lives of people and the larger environment in which they live. To demonstrate how humiliation is structured in society and in the individual, I have chosen to use the story and characters in Toni Morrison’s novel *The Bluest Eye*. First, I explain my rationale for the selection of Morrison’s novel before moving to illustrate how humiliation is constituted in the lives of the characters and the world they inhabit in Morrison’s story. Next, I draw on pertinent literatures to account for first, the intersubjective, and then the intrasubjective, aspects of humiliation. To investigate how humiliation becomes an integral part of a society, I turn to psychotherapy; specifically, to Jonathan Lear who, in a description of the formation and structure of the “polis,” helps to explain the process by which the ideas that govern a society come into being. Alice Miller’s theory of the “cycle of poisonous pedagogies” suggests specifically how humiliation can become an integral aspect of a society.

Three theorists concerned with the formation and makeup of the human psyche help me to demonstrate the structure of humiliation in the lives of the characters and their world in *The Bluest Eye*; that is, how humiliation might become lodged in the individual psyche, how humiliation functions in human relationships and why human beings are vulnerable to humiliation. Miller’s perspective on the formation of the individual in circumstances where the primary caretakers are dominating or abusive suggests how humiliation becomes lodged in the individual psyche and complements theories offered by Jessica Benjamin and Adam Phillips. Benjamin describes the formation of the human from birth and explores the

dynamics of “domination” and “mutuality,” both important in understanding the power dynamics in humiliation in human relationships. Phillips, in a discussion of the actual self vs. the perfect self, helps to explain how humans might be predisposed to be vulnerable to humiliation.

In the third and most complex chapter, I undertake a discussion of narratives that will lead me to argue that the formation, structure and function of narratives lend themselves to embedding humiliation into the individual and societal narratives that both define and guide us in our lives as humans. In other words, humiliation is embedded in individual and societal narratives, which in turn contribute significantly to the persistence of humiliation in society (intersubjectively) and in the individual (intrasubjectively). To support this argument, I turn first to an exploration of the characteristics, formation and structure of human narratives to discover why narratives are important. Here, I primarily consider the work of Smith, and of Epston and White. Smith describes humans as “storytelling animals.” He details how narratives are formed, including the influences that affect their formation. “The normative,” he writes, “is organized by the narrative.” Epston and White add to the description of how narratives are formed, explain the role of narratives in human life and discuss how narratives contribute to “problem stories” that can take over or direct people’s lives.

The second part of Chapter 3 takes up consideration of the roles of emotion and memory in narrative formation. Highlighting four important theories drawn from Margalit, Nathanson, Damasio and Miller, I argue that emotion and memory play important roles in what information gets stored as narratives in the human mind. Further, I contend that the need to store information (in the form of narratives) that protects us from humiliation contributes significantly to the persistence of humiliation intrasubjectively (in the individual). Margalit directly discusses the role of memory in the persistence of humiliation. Nathanson’s work in affect theory explains the role of human physiology in the storage in human memory of events that eventually become scripts for the individual to respond to humiliating experiences as well as to “re-live” those experiences. Synthesizing recent and evolving brain research, I call on neuroscientist Damasio, whose work in brain research is not incompatible with other theories discussed in this inquiry, including those of Benjamin, Phillips, Miller, Perry and Nathanson. Damasio adds significantly to understanding the role of emotions in humiliation and in helping me to think about why humans avoid addressing

humiliation. Ironically, this avoidance may contribute to its persistence. Finally, in her description of the cycle of “poisonous pedagogies,” Alice Miller suggests how humiliation becomes lodged in the individual psyche as well as how humiliation can become an enduring practice in society, which helps me to transition to Chapter 4 where I consider how narratives work intersubjectively (in society).

A brief “bird walk” is necessary at this point for three important caveats about using research from neuroscience and cognitive neuroscience to assist in making my arguments about the persistence of humiliation in schooling. First, these areas are rapidly expanding fields of inquiry and the language that is being used to describe similar phenomena varies and can quickly become confusing. For example, what Nathanson calls “affects,” Damasio labels “emotions.” What others call “emotions,” Damasio labels, “feelings.” Second, there is disagreement about how many “emotions/affects” there are, what they are and whether they are “primary,” “secondary,” or “blended.” I am not going to take up these differences as it is the general process and outcomes of the emotions described that interest me here and that help me to understand the possible function of narrative in the persistence of humiliation in schooling. Third, I am not trying to account for all of the recent research into the brain and learning. For the purposes of this inquiry, I am interested only in the research and thinking that is consistent with what is generally known about “emotion,” “affect” and memory and in what that knowledge can offer to my understanding about the persistence of humiliation.

Moving from individual narratives to societal narratives, Chapter 4 opens with a description of an epiphany that came for me during the composition of this manuscript. Next, I consider how shared metanarratives lodged in society contribute to the persistence of humiliation in schooling. Lear’s work is reiterated briefly to recall that “metanarratives” are formed in an interactive dynamic of individuals and the larger society. When humans “agree to” dominant narratives that sanction humiliation, humiliation will persist. Then, to illustrate the way metanarratives of humiliation function in society, I consider four beliefs that are “alive and well” in the U. S., beliefs that stem from a major national (and international) metanarrative that sanctions humiliation. Next, supported by examples from four specific areas in school relations (education legislation and funding, social context of school, language used in referring to schools, and behaviors modeled and sanctioned by school personnel from federal to local), I demonstrate how these beliefs contribute to the persistence of humiliation in schooling. Chapter 4 concludes with a brief summary of the

inquiry undertaken in the first four chapters, followed by the observations derived from that inquiry that lead me to argue that humiliation persists in schooling because it is embedded in multiple ways in the narratives we live by – both shared metanarratives and individuals' stories.

Initially I planned to combine Chapter 4 with the next chapter, but it became obvious in writing that while the stated purpose of this inquiry is to understand why humiliation persists, despite the fact that humans deplore it, there lies an even deeper issue beneath my “burning question:” Why should we care about this? In other words, what is humanly at stake when humiliation is allowed to persist in schooling? This underlying question deserves focus, if for no other reason than to openly acknowledge what is “quiet as it’s kept,”¹⁹ what we are reluctant or unwilling to discuss—the effects, the cost—the impact—to humans when humiliation persists, particularly in schooling. Thus, Chapter 5 is devoted to a discussion of this question. Synthesizing from the rich interdisciplinary body of research that informs what is at stake for humans in conditions of persistent humiliation, I look at this question from two central and interwoven perspectives: what is at stake for humans intrasubjectively (within) and what is at stake for humans in the environment of schooling (intersubjectively). The fact that there is much at stake leads me to the second section and final chapter of this work: because narratives contribute significantly to the persistence of humiliation in schooling, I argue in the final chapter that counter-narratives are crucial to interrupting cultural, interpersonal and intrapersonal circuits of humiliation.

Realizing that ultimately any effort to resist humiliation in schools will take place one person at a time, in Chapter 6 I propose effective means to counter school narratives of humiliation and to accelerate a process to interrupt humiliation in schooling. The means I offer are essentially “counter-narratives,” in that they suggest viewing, narrating, discussing and facilitating “school” in ways different from current mainstream school practices. Here I take both a general and a specific course in my proposals. First, I discuss the general formation of counter-narratives that can be told and put into place in human relationships in schooling and then follow with a specific discussion of how the practice of democratic pedagogies might represent another form of counter metanarratives to metanarratives of humiliation.

¹⁹ Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Plume, 1994), 5. The reason for the use of Morrison’s phrase will become obvious in Chapter 2.

To begin the discussion of the formation of counter-narratives, I first share a personal story. Then I briefly recall how narratives are constructed, referring to an earlier chapter where their construction is discussed in detail. Next I suggest the applicability of the work of White and Epston in narrative therapy and of Freeman, Epston and White, Davis and Giroux to the construction of counter narratives. I discuss why and how counter-narratives are useful in changing “problem-saturated” stories and I also describe criteria for recognizing counter-narratives.

In the second part of Chapter 6, I argue that democratic pedagogies can act as a form of counter-narrative to resist metanarratives of humiliation. That is, how we treat one another, how we “do business together” in the classroom (and in all schooling relationships), can, if conducted democratically, tell a different story of schooling and counter or resist narratives of humiliation. First, drawing on literature in the fields of political, psychological and educational theory, I extract a list of attributes²⁰ of what it means to be democratic. Then as I describe four specific pedagogies that I suggest are inherently democratic in their makeup, I exemplify what each of the attributes might look like in the classroom and how each would help to resist humiliation in schools and in classrooms, as well as to counter the four beliefs derived from a national metanarrative mentioned in Chapter 3. The four pedagogies discussed are The Socratic Seminar,²¹ the Structured Academic Controversy,²² storytelling, described by Paley,²³ and the Scottish Storyline Method.²⁴ My purpose is not to provide an exhaustive description of these methods, rather to demonstrate that pedagogies already exist that are democratic and that, combined with other counter-narratives to humiliation, could provide positive means for resisting humiliation in schooling. Realizing that there is always some resistance to change, to conclude this chapter and my inquiry, I meet the objections of “nay-sayers” by addressing the pedagogical implications for efforts to incorporate counter-narratives to humiliation into schools and classrooms.

²⁰ It is not my intention to undertake a synthesis of the extensive body of work that crosses multiple disciplines available on the subject of what it means to be democratic, only to present what I think is generally accepted.

²¹ Walter Parker, *Teaching Democracy: Unity and Diversity in Public Life*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003).

²² Ibid.

²³ Paley, *In Mrs. Tully's Room: A Childcare Portrait*.

²⁴ Rosalie M. Romano, *Forging an Educative Community: The Wisdom of Love, the Power of Understanding, and the Terror of It All* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

Prior Research

When I first began this inquiry, a comprehensive search of major library resources, as well as of the Internet, yielded precious little research or even mention of “humiliation” except in isolated instances and then often used interchangeably with shame and/or guilt, or more likely, in exploitative sexual references, many of which in fact promote humiliation.²⁵ It turns out that, until very recently, research and writing that focuses directly on humiliation, like research on emotion in general, has been scattered and scarce. Damasio comments on this void. He writes that while Darwin, James and Freud wrote extensively on emotion in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, across the majority of the twentieth century, “both neuroscience and cognitive science gave emotion a very cold shoulder.”²⁶ It is not surprising that empirical researchers did not (and perhaps many still do not) trust emotion both because of its vague and subjective nature and because it is not clear how it is to be “measured.” Only recently has it been more accepted to think of emotion as worthy of exploration, mostly in the fields of neuroscience and cognitive neuroscience, where connections among consciousness, reason and emotion are being studied.

There are some noteworthy exceptions to the dearth of research on humiliation. There is a surprisingly rich body of literature in psychotherapy and psychiatry that explores and connects humiliation to negative affects on human development. In most cases, however, the references to the effects of humiliation are embedded in articles about specific psychological disorders and are not the main focus of the research. The direct study of the effects of humiliation in particular is recent and still not prolific.

A second exception in the area of research on humiliation in particular is the endeavor of physician and psychologist Evelin Lindner to bring together researchers and scholars from multiple disciplines and from across the world in the study of humiliation. This effort has taken place during the time of my inquiry and is in its early stages. Most of what has been published thus far is the work of Lindner herself, work she has synthesized and refined from over 30 years of dedicated study to the phenomenon of humiliation, particularly in its role in

²⁵ In fact, most of the Internet sites were those extolling humiliation.

²⁶ Antonio R. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999).

political conflicts between countries and between factions within countries.²⁷ Her recent writing seeks to build a theory of humiliation from a multidisciplinary and historical perspective. Lindner writes that a theory of humiliation “is still in its infancy.”²⁸ The work of Donald Klein, a member of the group assembled by Lindner is yet another notable exception to the lack of attention to humiliation. His writing focuses on the role of humiliation in human relations and on the affects of humiliation on individuals and on society. For the past several years, both Lindner and Klein have called for increased attention to humiliation as an important phenomenon worthy of study.

My exploration revealed a relatively small body of thought on humiliation in schools in particular: a few media articles deal with specific types of humiliating acts such as bullying, harassment and sarcasm; a humiliation inventory measures the internal experience of humiliation;²⁹ and several papers and articles attempt to distinguish between embarrassment, shame and humiliation. In a personal correspondence with Lindner, I learned that there is interest in thinking about humiliation in the area of education among some of the researchers she has assembled to undertake humiliation studies. While no studies that focus specifically on humiliation in schooling were found, Philip Brown, who works in character education, focuses on the humiliation aspect of bullying in his writing.³⁰

My exploration of narrative began with literacy narratives a few years ago. Literacy narratives, for example, have been helpful to educational researchers seeking to understand how the literacy experiences of preservice teachers affect their approaches to teaching literacy in the classroom. In my experience with literacy narratives in a pilot study of two student teachers in English/Language Arts, I came to understand the power of narratives in human formation and in guiding future actions. However, similar to emotion, narrative has been a neglected or less respected field of study until the past 15 years, when researchers in various fields began to see the value of peoples’ experiences and stories in inquiry and in therapy. I found little mention of narrative specifically tied to emotions, humiliation in

²⁷ See Lindner’s excellent compilation of resources on humiliation research: Evelin Lindner, *Humiliation: A New Basis for Understanding, Preventing, and Diffusing Conflict and Violence in the World and in Our Lives* (Oslo, Norway: University of Oslo, 2003).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Linda M. Hartling, “Humiliation: Assessing the Specter of Derision, Degradation, and Debasement” (PhD diss., The Union Institute, 1995).

³⁰ Brown, “Humiliation, Bullying and Caring in School Communities.”

particular, and no studies or writing related to narratives of humiliation in relation to schools in a scholarly sense.

Placing the Work

Outside of the field of education, I am reluctant to predict how, or if, this work might add to the understanding or thinking about humiliation or about the powerful role narratives play in the persistence of humiliation. Research in most disciplines related to human studies has picked its way carefully around human emotion, especially tiptoeing around or ignoring humiliation in human relationships. The one exception that I find interesting is the existence of a rich body of psychological and psychiatric literature to support the *negative* effects of humiliation on human development, and yet it appears the connection of this literature to the work of schools, entrusted with the development of our children, is weak or nonexistent. Thus, if this work does nothing else, both inside and outside of education, my hope is that it will raise consciousness about humiliation in school relationships, a consciousness that is currently missing as a focus, especially in educational thought.

I suspect that not much thought has been given specifically to the idea that humiliation is basically undemocratic. Herb Kohl is correct when he says that there is no place in the classroom for humiliation (or in schooling anywhere, I would add).³¹ This work, then, might help educators to consider the premise that humiliation is inconsistent with democracy and that democratic education may not take place in schooling environments where there is humiliation. Humiliation is pervasive in the narratives we live by in our personal lives and in the institutionalized metanarratives that control and guide our lives. I see democratic pedagogies as counter-narratives to narratives of humiliation in schooling. I hope this work stimulates a conversation in education about democratic pedagogy as a means for countering or resisting humiliation in schooling.

In *Narratives and Social Movements: The Power of Stories*, Davis³² makes a case for the power of narratives in social change. Where I believe this work might add significantly to such work is in thinking about the role that the narratives we live by play in storing humiliation, thereby contributing to its persistence. In discussing counternarratives to humiliation, including democratic pedagogies, I argue that narratives are accessible and

³¹ Marge Scherer, "Discipline of Hope: A Conversation with Herb Kohl," *Educational Leadership* 56, no. 1 (1998).

³² Joseph E. Davis, "Narrative and Social Movements: The Power of Stories," in *Stories of Change: Narrative and Social Movements*, ed. Joseph E. Davis (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002).

subject to change under thoughtful conditions. If we are aware of the power of narratives in perpetuating humiliation, we can also use narratives to resist or alter the power of humiliation.

Within the new field of humiliation studies, there has been little work in the field of education. However, I see my work directly related to the peace studies focus of this new field because the school is a microcosm of what the world could become as well as a reflection of the world that is built on the past. In the second part of this inquiry, as I take up the idea of using counter-narratives in the forms of the stories we tell and the pedagogies we use in schooling, I am indirectly addressing a vision of schooling as the peaceful society we might become. But first, we must start at the beginning and get a clearer idea of what constitutes humiliation, the subject of my first chapter.

CHAPTER 1: WHAT CONSTITUTES HUMILIATION?

A Decent Society

It occurs to me that when humiliation is an integral part of one's "world," it may be difficult to recognize what counts as humiliation or why it might be a problem. Therefore, an important first step in creating an awareness of humiliation is to describe its attributes: that is, what humiliation looks like. The project in this chapter is to explore what constitutes humiliation. In *The Decent Society*, Avishai Margalit³³ suggests useful guidelines for recognizing humiliation. He describes a "decent society" as one whose institutions (e.g., prisons, hospitals, schools and government agencies) and the people who work within them do not humiliate people under their authority. While Margalit distinguishes a "decent society," where *institutions* and their representatives do not humiliate people, from a "just society" where *people* do not humiliate *one another*, his primary arguments are focused on describing the attributes of the decent society because he believes it is more easily achieved than a just society. However, my interest in discussing the structure of humiliation encompasses both how a society's institutions treat people under their authority and how people treat one another within and outside of institutions, because I believe it is all interrelated. Therefore, I broadly apply Margalit's parameters for what constitutes humiliation to both institutional and individual interactions inside and outside of institutions.³⁴

Margalit specifies that humiliation is "the rejection of a person from the human commonwealth (he later refers to this as the "Family of Man"³⁵) and as the loss of basic control."³⁶ One of his basic tenets is that by virtue of their humanity, people deserve self-respect. Rejecting a person from the "Family of Man"³⁷ includes such humiliating actions as treating a person as less than human (e.g., as a thing, an object or an animal) or rejecting a person for a "legitimate identity trait,"³⁸ for some essential part of one's being, something

³³ Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society* (N. Goldblum, Trans.) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

³⁴ I am taking license with an important distinction Margalit (1996) makes between "decent" and "just" societies based on Rawls' definition of a "just" society, which includes such things as an equitable distribution of wealth.

³⁵ Margalit, *Decent Society* (N. Goldblum, Trans.), 149.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁷ Donald Nathanson refers to this condition as "being shorn from the herd." Nathanson, "The Role of Affect in Learning to Read," 10.

³⁸ Margalit, *Decent Society* (N. Goldblum, Trans.), 133.

that one can't help, such as one's skin color, the language one speaks or one's family economic condition. These situations can cause a person to feel a loss of dignity or self-respect.

A major attribute of humans compared to "objects" or "things" is that humans have "freedom" to make decisions for themselves about their lives. According to Margalit, humiliation can thus occur when there is "the deliberate infliction of utter loss of freedom and control over one's vital interests."³⁹ He writes, "A considerable proportion of the most humiliating gestures are those which show the victims that they lack even the most minuscule degree of control over their fate—that they are helpless and subject to the good will (or rather, the bad will) of their tormentors."⁴⁰

Margalit further suggests that it is the responsibility of the institutions in a decent society to see that they do not humiliate people by rejecting an "encompassing group" or by rejecting any person with a legitimate right to belong to that group.⁴¹ Examples of encompassing groups may include social, ethnic, religious, political, academic and other groups to which people belong.⁴² The groups, as well as the individuals from those groups, have a right to be respected by public institutions, such as hospitals, prisons or schools.⁴³ Any rejection or sanction of rejection by the institution of these people or groups by people *representing* the institution constitutes humiliation and means that the society is not decent.

Finally, one's overall life conditions, such as poverty or homelessness, can also be humiliating, according to Margalit, if they are "man-made."⁴⁴ An example of a "man-made" condition occurs when a city's urban "redevelopment" replaces low income housing with high rent structures, thereby displacing people on low incomes (and often causing them to be homeless and at the whim of others for their well-being). Schools might be considered a "man-made" life condition for students in the United States, since education is compulsory until students are 16 years of age. There will be further exploration of this idea later in this inquiry.

³⁹ Ibid., 115.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 116.

⁴¹ Ibid., 141.

⁴² People often belong to multiple groups.

⁴³ Margalit specifies that respect from public institutions does not extend to groups such as the Mafia or the Ku Klux Klan, groups that do not respect human dignity.

⁴⁴ Margalit, *Decent Society* (N. Goldblum, Trans.), 128.

A Form of Colonization

Margalit's definition of what constitutes humiliation in a decent society is strikingly similar to many of the "man-made" conditions that Memmi⁴⁵ describes in colonial relationships in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. In colonial relationships, the colonizer rejects the humanity of the colonized and often depersonalizes the colonized through the "mark of the plural,"⁴⁶ where the colonized are referred to as "they" or "them" rather than as individuals. Further, there is no provision for freedom in the living conditions that the colonizers impose on the colonized. Memmi writes, "The colonized has no way out of his state of woe . . . he is hardly a human being. He tends rapidly toward becoming an object."⁴⁷ Once these conditions are set in place, the colonizer can use them to justify his attitudes and treatment of the colonized as less than human. The situation of Native Americans in the United States is a case in point. During the 19th century, after the U.S. government stopped making treaties with the Native American tribes in 1871 and forced the removal of the vast majority of Native American people to what were often undesirable, remote and barren lands where resources were limited or nonexistent, the Native Americans were then villainized for their poverty, which was caused by the government in the first place.

Memmi also suggests that the colonized often takes on the attributes of the colonizer, giving up the self. The colonized subjugates the self to the colonizer in hopes of being recognized. Memmi writes, "The first attempt of the colonized is to change his condition by changing his skin."⁴⁸ For the colonized, the model they aspire to is that of the colonizer: "The first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to that splendid model and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him."⁴⁹ However, loving the colonizer means rejecting the characteristics of oneself that do not fit the model: "The colonized does not seek merely to enrich himself with the colonizer's virtues. In the name of what he hopes to become, he sets his mind on impoverishing himself, tearing himself away from his true self."⁵⁰ This position can be as frustrating and powerless for the colonized as the position of the colonized who accepts lower status, because the colonizer never allows the ingratiating colonized to forget that their status is inferior. The colonized who give up their "true selves"

⁴⁵ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Expanded Edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

to gain status with the colonizer also put themselves in a position where they are constantly vulnerable to humiliation. Overall, the conditions in the colonial society described by Memmi disqualify it as a decent society.

In Schools

The “man-made” Native American boarding schools, initiated in the 19th century by the United States government to impose Euro-American culture on Native American children, serve as a grim example of schools that fit the description of the colonial situation Memmi describes. It could also be argued that to a lesser extent, but in a situation nonetheless similar, in many public schools today, where attendance is compulsory, where students have little or no voice in the affairs that govern them or in what is taught, where “democracy is a right of adults, not of young people,”⁵¹ where “they” are treated as objects to be “managed,” students are “colonized” and set up for humiliation, if not humiliated, within Margalit’s framework.⁵²

Hutchinson and Parks write about what constitutes humiliation for students in school cultures in particular. Hutchinson, like Margalit, equates humiliation with a violation of dignity. “Dignity,”⁵³ according to Hutchinson, “which respects the value of each human life,” and which is essential for individual development, begins with students’ stories, the primary way that humans make meaning and sense of their lives. If students’ stories are ignored or disregarded, then students are without dignity,⁵⁴ and “marginalized,”⁵⁵ where a student may be powerless, rendered invisible. In more colloquial terms, Parks a reporter for *The Dallas Morning News*, quotes a Texas public school district official’s definition of humiliation: “That includes anything that depreciates a student, makes them feel unworthy or

⁵¹ Sue Carol Thompson, “One Educator’s Story,” *Democracy & Education* 14 (2002), 22.

⁵² See also: Noguera, “Preventing and Producing Violence: A Critical Analysis of Responses to School Violence;” Muna Al-Jardini, “Kids in Schools: Imprisoned Brains and Muted Voices: School as Violence against Students’ Dignity,” *Democracy & Education* 14 (2002); Juanita Ross Epp, “On Framing the Problem of Violence in School: A Response,” *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, August 2 (1995), <http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/articles/epp.html>; Roxanne Henkin, “Critical Literacy in Democratic Classrooms,” *Democracy & Education* 14 (2002) and Alexander M. Sidorkin, *Learning Relations: Impure Education, Deschooled Schools, & Dialogue with Evil* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

⁵³ Hutchinson describes “dignity” much like Margalit and Gilligan describe “self-respect.”

⁵⁴ Margalit also sees humiliation as a “loss of human dignity.” Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 118.

⁵⁵ Hutchinson’s definition of “marginalization” is congruent with Margalit’s idea of being rejected from the family of man.

singles them out for negative attention, something that makes a kid feel like, 'There's something wrong with me.'"⁵⁶

While Hutchinson's proposal that school personnel humiliate students when they don't listen to students' stories, her work might be equally applicable to others in the school environment. For example, if school administrators do not listen to the stories of teachers, what example is set for teachers to listen to the stories of their students? If the culture of a school is such that the stories told by any members of the school community are ignored, not recognized or disregarded, then perhaps all members of the community are at risk of being or feeling marginalized and without dignity. If humiliation is sanctioned in any school relationships, it is likely to become endemic in all the relationships in the school culture.

Definitions

Many books and articles referred to in this inquiry use the words "shame" and "humiliation" interchangeably. Nathanson attributes to Leon Wurmser the idea that all labels for "shame" are cognates that can be used to describe the entire range of the shame experience.⁵⁷ In *Preventing Violence*, James Gilligan lists synonyms for "shame" and "pride," which he refers to as representing whole families of feelings. Synonyms for pride include self-esteem, self-love, self-respect, feelings of self-worth and dignity. Gilligan comments that there are many more synonyms for the family of shame feelings than for those of pride:

. . . pride must be in much shorter supply than shame, because there are literally dozens of synonyms for shame, including feelings of being slighted, insulted, disrespected, dishonored, disgraced, disdained, slandered, treated with contempt, ridiculed, teased, taunted, mocked, rejected, defeated, subjected to indignity or ignominy; feelings of inferiority, inadequacy, incompetence; feelings of being weak, ugly, a failure, 'losing face,' being treated as if you were insignificant, unimportant or worthless.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Scott Parks, "Education Experts Say Embarrassing Students Isn't Good Discipline," *The Dallas Morning News*, June 1 2003.

⁵⁷ David Boulton, *Dr. Don Nathanson Interview--September 8th 2003* (Children of the Code, 2003 [cited December 2003]), <http://www.implicit.org>.

⁵⁸ Gilligan, *Preventing Violence*, 29-30.

Many of these synonyms for shame could equally be used as synonyms for humiliation. However, it is helpful for the purposes of this inquiry to distinguish between shame and humiliation. Lindner, Hartling and Klein make distinctions that are consistent with and refine the descriptions of humiliation provided by Margalit, Memmi and Hutchinson.

Hartling⁵⁹ compares shame and humiliation, citing both their similarities and their differences. They are similar in the following ways: both require a person to interpret an event as shaming or humiliating; both impact the “whole self” rather than just an aspect of the self; both cause similar responses, such as anxiety, anger or feeling exposed; and both can have either temporary or long term consequences. A major difference between humiliation and shame is that the emphasis in humiliation is on an interpersonal event where a person (or group) is degraded or forced into a lower position by someone(s) more powerful, whereas in shame, the emphasis is on an internal negative evaluation of the self by the self. Hartling writes that humiliation can either be an act or an internal state of being. One can humiliate or be humiliated by another (an external event) or one can feel humiliated (an internal state). Shame, Hartling suggests, can have positive adaptive functions, such as inhibiting aggression, whereas humiliation serves no known positive adaptive role in human behavior.

Klein also distinguishes shame and humiliation:

Shame is what one feels when one has failed to live up to one’s ideals for what constitutes suitable behavior in one’s eyes as well as the eyes of others. Humiliation is what one feels when one is ridiculed, scorned, held in contempt, or otherwise disparaged for what one is rather than what one does. People believe they deserve their shame; they do not believe they deserve their humiliation.⁶⁰

Klein describes humiliation as a “dynamic” that involves three roles: the victim of the scorn, ridicule, contempt or other degrading treatment; the humiliator, the person or institution that commits the humiliating act; and the bystanders or witnesses who see the act where someone is humiliated.

⁵⁹ Linda M. Hartling and Tracy Luchetta, "Humiliation: Assessing the Impact of Derision, Degradation, and Debasement," *The Journal of Primary Prevention* 19, no. 4 (1999).

⁶⁰ Donald C. Klein, "The Humiliation Dynamic: An Overview in, the Humiliation Dynamic: Viewing the Task of Prevention from a New Perspective, Special Issue," *Journal of Primary Prevention Part I*, 12, no. 2 (1991), 117.

Finally, Lindner describes humiliation as “a *downward* movement along a vertical scale,”⁶¹ and writes that the ideas of “*pushing down, holding down, and keeping down*”⁶² are central to definitions of humiliation in many languages. The root word in humiliation, *humus*, comes from Latin and means *earth*; hence, humiliation is “being put down with your face into the dust of the earth.”⁶³ Lindner argues that the idea of the movement downward is important because it implies a vertical scale, which in turn implies a “ranking” of worth of human value. Ranking humans along a scale of worth undermines dignity, according to Lindner. She also describes humiliation as a “violation of the enablement to equal dignity.”⁶⁴

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the primary reason I engaged in a discussion of humiliation, rather than adopting a “simple” definition, is to demonstrate the complexity of the discussion about what constitutes humiliation and to show that there are many circumstances in which someone(s) might feel or be humiliated. To continue in the same spirit, I resist “summing up” exactly what humiliation “is” and move now to an application of the discussion from this chapter to the characters and the world they inhabit in Toni Morrison’s novel, *The Bluest Eye*.

⁶¹ Lindner, *Humiliation: A New Basis for Understanding, Preventing, and Diffusing Conflict and Violence in the World and in Our Lives*, 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 5. Italics are Lindner’s.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

CHAPTER 2: THE STRUCTURE OF HUMILIATION IN *THE BLUEST EYE*

Toni Morrison: “Quiet as it’s kept”

“Quiet as it’s kept,” confides narrator Claudia MacTeer⁶⁵ at the beginning of Toni Morrison’s novel *The Bluest Eye*, “there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. We thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father’s baby that the marigolds did not grow.”⁶⁶ Thus begins the story of Pecola Breedlove and her family that the reader is to be made privy to. “Quiet as it’s kept,” Morrison tells the reader in an “Afterword” written 23 years after original publication of the novel, is a phrase familiar to her from childhood when she listened to black women sharing stories. The words imply a conspiracy, writes Morrison, a passing of secrets that the women know, but aren’t supposed to know, “a secret between us and a secret that is being kept from us.”⁶⁷ Morrison continues, “In some sense, it was precisely what the act of writing the book was: the public exposure of a private confidence.”

The spirit of “quiet as it’s kept” is an appropriate connection for the exploration of the structure of humiliation undertaken in this chapter. As previously mentioned, even as humans hate humiliation as individuals, they still tolerate it, look the other way, don’t want to talk about it or perhaps don’t recognize it because it is so familiar that it is no longer “strange,” despite the fact that it is uncomfortable—all of which give it a kind of conspiratorial quality. Thus, looking at the structure of humiliation might be also be considered a “public exposure of a private confidence,” one we don’t like to think or talk about, but one that might, like a concealed wound, need to be open to the air, to examination and discussion, if the healing is ever to begin.

The notion of “quiet as it’s kept” also assists me in introducing the rationale behind my choice of the Breedlove family in Morrison’s novel *The Bluest Eye* to serve as the vehicle for demonstrating the structure of humiliation in society and in the psyche of the individual. Narayan suggests that it is necessary to seek ideas and guidance from diverse and

⁶⁵ Claudia MacTeer, the central narrator of Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, tells the story of eleven-year-old Pecola Breedlove. At the beginning of the novel, Claudia is nine and the reader might wonder as the novel progresses how a nine-year old could have Claudia’s wisdom. However, by the end of the story, the narrator seems to be older and looking back to relate this story from her memories.

⁶⁶ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 211.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 211-212.

previously untapped resources, especially resources with an “insider”⁶⁸ view. Insiders, according to Narayan, are members of groups that have been historically oppressed and who can provide insights into their oppression that are unavailable to “outsiders” to the specific oppression. In her carefully crafted novels, Morrison makes a view of life available that I cannot access directly as a white woman, a view that has been largely “kept quiet.” In an interview, Morrison states that she began writing because she “had a hunger for something not available, representative of different perceptions.”⁶⁹ She found a dearth of African American literature that spoke to black rather than white people, and wanted to write literature that she could read and relate to “on a visceral, personal cultural level.”⁷⁰ Morrison further states, “White writers wrote black people out of the American experience; the literature of America is incoherent without the contribution of and within black writers.”⁷¹ Morrison wished to reach white audiences and challenge their dominant assumptions and beliefs.⁷² Thus, a close analysis of the richly developed characters in *The Bluest Eye* provides fertile ground for thinking about the structure of humiliation in a context outside of my experience.

Further, for analysis of the structure of humiliation, using Morrison’s work, rather than my own stories or stories that have been related to me, provides the reader with what I think of as “equal access.” The story is equally accessible to my readers and to me in the same form and removes the risk of bias I may have in repeating and using stories of others or using stories of my own. Thus the reader can evaluate my interpretation and analysis of the characters and events on an equal footing. Additionally, my literature background makes it especially attractive and interesting to use an exemplary piece of fiction from a well-known and respected writer for the application of the analysis of the characteristics and structure of humiliation in society and in the individual psyche.⁷³

Humiliation is deeply engrained in the structure of the “world” in which *The Bluest Eye* takes place. It exists on a large scale in the “social-cultural-political” world of the

⁶⁸ Uma Narayan, “Working Together across Difference: Some Considerations on Emotions and Political Practice,” *Hypatia* 3, no. 2 (1988), 89.

⁶⁹ Swiss Television Production, *In Black and White: Conversations with African American Writers; Toni Morrison* (1992).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Even as this is an exaggerated work of fiction, there are many children who come to the classroom with challenges similar to the ones Morrison describes.

United States, the “polis”⁷⁴ that includes Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky and Lorain, Ohio, settings in the story; it exists on an individual level in the conscious and unconscious emotions, feelings and thoughts, the individual reality or “idiopolis”⁷⁵ of each of the story’s major characters under consideration in this exploration—Pecola, Pauline and Cholly Breedlove; and it exists in the interactions of the characters with one another and in the world that sanctions their humiliation in *The Bluest Eye*.

Repeated humiliations are endured by each of the Breedloves in *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison admits exaggerating the stories of Pecola, Cholly and Pauline (“I chose a unique situation, not a representative one.”).⁷⁶ Perhaps if Morrison had not exaggerated the Breedloves’ stories, the humiliations would have been less obvious or unnoticed, because often an important part of the structure of humiliation⁷⁷ is that it is seldom recognized or named aloud, even though it can have debilitating effects on those humiliated,⁷⁸ as well as on those who witness humiliating incidents.

In this chapter I want to think about the structure of humiliation in terms of the world the Breedloves inhabit in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, in terms of what we know about their formation as humans, and in their relationships with one another and with others. We can come to a deeper understanding of the structure of humiliation in the lives of humans by 1) applying the ideas developed in Chapter 1 about the constitution of humiliation as guidance for thinking about how and when the characters are humiliated; 2) thinking about how humiliation is lodged in the social character of the world in which the characters live and interact; and 3) speculating on what happens in the formation of the human psyche that might make the characters in *The Bluest Eye* vulnerable to humiliation in their relationships with one another and in the world in which they live.

⁷⁴ Jonathan Lear, *Open Minded: Working out the Logic of the Soul* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁷⁵ Ibid. The “idiopolis” is the world of the individual.

⁷⁶ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 210.

⁷⁷ Although humiliation is an integral part of the fabric of society, it is not usually an openly espoused positive public value; in fact, most folks want to avoid discussion of humiliation (Nathanson, Miller and others discuss reasons for this avoidance). Interestingly, Goleman in *Emotional Intelligence* completely avoids discussion of shame or humiliation.

⁷⁸ Alice Miller, *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983) and Bruce D. Perry, “Incubated in Terror: Neurodevelopmental Factors in the ‘Cycle of Violence,’” in *Children, Youth and Violence: The Search for Solutions*, ed. J. Osofsky (New York: Guilford Press, 1997).

Humiliation in *The Bluest Eye*

Looking through the lens of Margalit's description of what constitutes humiliation, multiple incidents of humiliation are evident in the lives of Pecola, Cholly, and Pauline in *The Bluest Eye*. In school, a societal institution, Pecola's teachers treat her almost as if she doesn't exist: she is the only student who must sit alone at a desk, her teachers only look at her if absolutely necessary and Pecola tells us "her teachers had always treated her this way."⁷⁹ With no intervention on her behalf by teachers or other school personnel when children use her name as an insult or bully her on the playground, Pecola is further rejected and humiliated by the people representing the institution of the school.

Grocery owner Yacobowski dehumanizes her when she comes to buy candy at his store. He decides it is not worth his effort to look at her "and he does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see."⁸⁰ Pecola experiences "the total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness."⁸¹ Even Pecola's mother does not "see" Pecola except as a responsibility, someone to bend "toward respectability."⁸² Unrecognized or ostracized, Pecola is isolated and effectively "shorn from the herd."⁸³

The life of Cholly, Pecola's father, is a legacy of being treated as less than human, suffering loss of his dignity and self-respect and loss of control over his vital interests. When he is four days old, he is treated literally as trash when his mother abandons him "on a junk heap by the railroad."⁸⁴ Though his maiden Aunt Jimmy rescues him, her regular reminders that she saved him when his parents threw him away reinforce his less than human status and undermine Cholly's self-respect and sense of personal value. When the two white hunters come upon Cholly in the woods and refer to him as "nigger" and "coon baby,"⁸⁵ aim a cocked rifle at him and shine a flashlight on Cholly and Darlene to force the young teens to finish what began as an innocent sexual encounter, Cholly is dehumanized, helpless, and at the complete mercy of his tormentors.

Pauline is subjected to similar treatment in the "institution" of the hospital, when the doctor who comes to examine Pauline when she is in labor, and about to give birth to Pecola,

⁷⁹ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 45.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 128.

⁸³ Nathanson, *The Role of Affect in Learning to Read - How Shame Exacerbates Reading Difficulties* ([cited]).

⁸⁴ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 132.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

fails to recognize her as an individual, lumping her together with others as “these here women,” and dehumanizes her by comparing her birthing process to that of horses. Pauline tells the reader,

When he got to me he said now these here women you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses . . . Only one looked at me . . . He dropped his eyes and turned red. He knowed, I reckon, that maybe I weren't no horse foaling. . . . when them pains got harder, I was glad. . . . I moaned something awful. The pains wasn't as bad as I let on, but I had to let them people know having a baby was more than a bowel movement. I hurt just like them white women.”⁸⁶

Both Pauline and Pecola suffer humiliation for inherent physical features, “legitimate identity traits.”⁸⁷ After Pauline and Cholly marry, they move from the South to the North, where there are better job opportunities. As a young Southern black woman in the unfamiliar North, Pauline receives “goading glances and private snickers”⁸⁸ from Northern black women for not straightening her hair, for her inexpert attempts to use makeup, for her inability to wear fashionable heels on her deformed foot and for the way she speaks. As life in the North brings stresses to Cholly and Pauline’s marriage, he begins to drink and be absent from home, while she tries to adjust to the societal norms of the unfamiliar environment. When Pauline becomes pregnant with her first child, Samuel, and finds herself home alone with nothing to do, she attends the movies as an escape from the poverty in which she lives and the loneliness she feels. Here, in the motion pictures, where “the flawed became whole, the blind sighted, and the lame and halt threw away their crutches,”⁸⁹ Pauline acquires an “education” in the dominant societal norms for romantic love and beauty. As she compares herself to these institutionalized norms, especially norms for “beauty,” she falls short, humiliated in her own eyes and in her mind, in the eyes of others. Cholly adds to her humiliation by ridiculing her when she loses a front tooth to decay.

Pauline applies the dominant societal norms that humiliate her to her daughter, so that Pecola suffers humiliation for her inherent physical traits not only from the taunting of

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Margalit, *The Decent Society* (N. Goldblum, Trans.), 133.

⁸⁸ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 118.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 122.

the boys in the schoolyard who make fun of her dark skin color, but from her mother as well. Pauline's preoccupation with the accouterments of the wealthy white family for whom she works and with their young blond-headed daughter makes it obvious to Pecola that Pecola meets neither society's nor her mother's "adopted" standards of beauty. Pecola's fantasy that having blue eyes might make her acceptable and make her family life better comes largely from the ingestion of her mother's (and society's) conviction that she (Pecola) is ugly.

Pecola's life is filled with humiliating incidents that result either from a "deliberate infliction" of a loss of freedom (recall Margalit) or that demonstrate to her clearly that she has no control over her own interests. Pecola is helpless to defend herself against her father, Cholly, when he rapes her twice. She has no recourse because she is certain that if she tells her mother Pauline, that Pauline will not believe her and might even beat her. When Cholly burns the family residence, thereby putting the family out of a home, Pauline essentially abandons her children to live with the people she works for and Pecola becomes a ward of the state. Claudia comments on Pecola's status, which relegates her to the state of an "object" rather than of a person: "Mama had told us two days earlier that a 'case' was coming—a girl with no place to go. . . . She came with nothing."⁹⁰ Pecola has no control over what happens to her and is subject to the will of others. In the schoolyard, when Claudia, Frieda and Maureen Peel come upon Pecola as she is surrounded and trapped by a large group of taunting boys, Pecola has no escape from her situation and must submit to their harassment and humiliation. Were it not for the arrival and subsequent actions of the three girls, Pecola might have been further humiliated as the boys fed off of one another and the situation escalated.

Many of the Breedloves' conditions and experiences in *The Bluest Eye* mirror Albert Memmi's⁹¹ descriptions of the colonized in colonial relationships. When Pauline comes to Lorain, Ohio from the South as a newlywed with Cholly, she is immersed into the world of the colonized. She says,

"I weren't used to so much white folks. . . .Up North they was everywhere—next door, downstairs, all over the streets—and colored folks few and far between. Northern colored folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-

⁹⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁹¹ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.

count, 'cept I didn't expect it from them. That was the loneliest time of my life."⁹²

When Cholly resists Pauline's heavy dependence on him, first Pauline tries to become acceptable to the Northern black women who make fun of her by buying clothes and makeup, simultaneously rejecting parts of herself that do not fit their standards. Morrison writes, "The sad thing was that Pauline did not really care for clothes and makeup. She merely wanted other women to cast favorable glances her way."⁹³ Later, after Pauline becomes pregnant with Samuel, she takes refuge in the movies and tries to imitate the styles of the white women in the films.

Ultimately, Pauline succeeds in "disappearing" into the white world by immersing herself into the life of the white family for whom she works. However, she forfeits her family. Morrison writes, "It was only sometimes, sometimes, and then rarely, that she thought about the old days, or what her life had turned to. They were musings, idle thoughts, full sometimes of the old dreaminess, but not the kind of thing she cared to dwell on."⁹⁴ While Pauline's personal "virtues are intact," they are embedded in a world to which she can never truly belong, a world in which she is subservient, so in a sense, she has lost touch with, partially torn herself away from, her "true self."

Claudia MacTeer, the primary narrator of *The Bluest Eye*, relates the rejection by others of Cholly's humanity as a result of the humiliation of his putting his family "outdoors;" "Cholly Breedlove . . . had catapulted himself beyond the reaches of human consideration. He had joined the animals; was, indeed, an old dog, a snake, a ratty nigger."⁹⁵ Although Cholly's actions might be considered the cause of his humiliation, in this situation his humiliation can partly be attributed to the poverty that regularly demeans him and his family, keeps them colonized, restricts their freedom and controls their vital interests. Claudia reports that the Breedloves, "poor and black," "live in a storefront" in "anonymous misery" with "their dreams of affluence and vengeance," and "they stayed there because they believed they were ugly."⁹⁶ The Breedloves have internalized the narratives of the "colonizer."

⁹² Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 117.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

I suggest that the life conditions of the Breedloves as a black family in 1941 in Lorain, Ohio are that of a “colonized”⁹⁷ people, plagued by the man-made (U.S., in this case) legacy of slavery and racism that follows them, and that they are frequently subjected to humiliation for the color of their skin (“a legitimate identity trait”), a critical part of their perception of themselves as ugly. Describing racism as, “the deployment of a difference to denigrate the other, to the end of gaining privilege or benefit through that stigmatization,” Memmi⁹⁸ suggests that humiliation and racism are often integrally related. Of institutional humiliation, bell hooks writes, “Black folks are collectively dehumanized by racist oppression and exploitation.”⁹⁹

It is curious how humiliating practices become lodged in the psyche of a society, practices that allow or foster the multiple humiliations such as those suffered by the Breedloves in the world they inhabit. The work of Jonathan Lear,¹⁰⁰ which draws on the thought of both Plato and Freud, provides useful insights for looking at how humiliation can become lodged in the “large world” or the “polis” in *The Bluest Eye*.

Humans Beings and the Polis

Human beings do not exist in isolation. While Margalit¹⁰¹ writes that a humiliator is not required in the act of humiliation, for human beings to be humiliated they must at least be in contact with humiliating conditions created by the institutions within their society. The “man-made” conditions that affect the Breedloves and dehumanize them occur in interactions between the Breedloves and the larger society in which they live. Lear describes Plato’s idea of the “polis,” the “social-cultural-political world” that represents an agreement by a community of humans for how they will live with one another. In Lear’s discussion, a polis is understood to be a city-state or a nation, such as Athens in the time of Plato or in our analysis here, the United States in the context of *The Bluest Eye*. In an interactive dynamic, humans create and sustain the polis at the same time they are created and sustained by it. Human beings internalize cultural influences from the polis as young children and then as children and later as adults they externalize the cultural influences that they internalized. A polis, then, is both a combination and a reflection of the dominant externalizations of the humans living

⁹⁷ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.

⁹⁸ Albert Memmi, *Racism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 37.

⁹⁹ bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 134.

¹⁰⁰ Lear, *Open Minded: Working out the Logic of the Soul*.

¹⁰¹ Margalit, *The Decent Society* (N. Goldblum, Trans.).

within it. The polis becomes an artifact (an institution), independent of “the shifting psychological states of its inhabitants,”¹⁰² that houses the generalized cultural influences of the polis and offers a form of stability in a generally unsettling and never fully explicable world. Lear¹⁰³ writes that Freud, too, saw this interactive dynamic between people and the world they inhabit:

The individual, he realizes, cannot be understood other than as a response to certain forces that permeate the social world into which he is born. And the individual is a manifestation and embodiment of the very same forces to which his existence is a response. The individual, Freud discovers, cannot be understood in isolation.¹⁰⁴

In Lear’s understanding of Plato’s polis, the study of the structure of the polis reveals the structure of the group psyche “writ large.” Furthermore, writes Lear, for a social characteristic of the polis to be “acceptable,” the “enduring commitment”¹⁰⁵ of the members of the polis is required. Without that commitment, the polis (or those elements of the polis without commitment) as constituted would die. Lear points out that the collapse of the Soviet Union represented a “collective disinvestiture”¹⁰⁶ by its participants. He writes, “In general, social institutions—law, medicine, the university, the corporation, art—reflect our interests and depend on our enduring commitments . . . These institutions are artifacts and they help to constitute a social world, a polis, in which we locate ourselves.”¹⁰⁷

Lest I give the impression that I think all people in a polis must agree for a social characteristic to be acceptable, it is important to state that in complex societies such as the United States, not all members of the society necessarily subscribe to all the dominant social characteristics generally ascribed to in the polis. Young-Bruehl¹⁰⁸ points out that there are times when there may be a dominating set of social character traits that “over time, color large segments of the society, making some individuals feel attuned to the dominative configuration and others alien or alienated.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, not all folks have to subscribe

¹⁰² Lear, *Open Minded: Working out the Logic of the Soul*, 66.

¹⁰³ Jonathan Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁰⁵ Lear, *Open Minded: Working out the Logic of the Soul*, 67.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *The Anatomy of Prejudices* (1996).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

for some traits to be dominant, and the non-subscribers may feel alienated or even humiliated by the mainstream. This last point is important because the Breedloves are in many ways humiliated by traits accepted in the mainstream, the psyche writ large. If the Breedloves were not overwhelmed by these traits and their own past experiences that already defined them as “not acceptable,” they might resist humiliation. However, the Breedloves allow themselves to be defined by the mainstream when they internalize the narrative of themselves as ugly. Lear’s point, and the one I want to make here, is that in *general*, an existing social characteristic of the polis must have commitment from a significant number of members of the polis and thus represents part of the group psyche of the polis.

If we look at the polis as Lear describes it, the polis that is the United States, in which the story of *The Bluest Eye* is set, we needn’t look far to find that the psyche writ large includes humiliation as a dominant social characteristic and humiliation as a common element in the lives of the Breedloves as a family and as individuals. Not only do the Breedloves experience humiliation from the conditions and institutions in their lives outside of the family, Cholly and Pauline also habitually humiliate one another and their children within the family. Cholly and Pauline beat and denigrate one another, Pauline beats her children and Cholly rapes his daughter. Humiliation is an integral part of the United States’ psyche “writ large” and of the lives of the Breedloves in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* are exaggerated examples of that psyche at work. For example, in the social institution of the movies, when Pauline gets “educated” into the dominant societal norms, readers are told that she learns to equate “physical beauty with virtue,” and in so doing, “she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap.”¹¹⁰ After this time, too, Pauline has in her mind a scale of absolute beauty that she uses to judge every face she sees, including her own (she “settled down to just being ugly”¹¹¹ after losing her front tooth) and Pecola’s (“But I knowed she was ugly.”¹¹²)

Alice Miller¹¹³ and James Gilligan¹¹⁴ provide a plausible account of the enduring commitment to humiliation by members of the polis in both the United States and in the story in *The Bluest Eye*. Miller’s experience as a psychotherapist and Gilligan’s extensive experience as a psychiatrist working with prison populations led them independently to the

¹¹⁰ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 126.

¹¹³ Miller, *For Your Own Good*. Miller’s work is helpful for understanding the endurance of humiliating practices in modern societies.

¹¹⁴ Gilligan, *Preventing Violence*.

conclusion that there is a cycle of abuse in child rearing that accounts for much of the proliferation of humiliation. Gilligan, interested in why “feelings of shame and self-contempt” are so “bottomless, chronic, and almost ineradicable in the most violent men”¹¹⁵ in prisons, answers his own question:

. . . . in the men I knew, they had been subjected to a degree of child abuse that was off the scale of anything I had previously thought of describing with that term. Many had been beaten nearly to death, raped repeatedly or prostituted, or neglected to a life-threatening degree by parents too disabled themselves to care for their child. And of those who had not experienced those extremes of physical abuse or neglect. . . . they had experienced a degree of emotional abuse that had been just as damaging.¹¹⁶

According to Miller, a central social characteristic of many human societies is that children must be controlled,¹¹⁷ at the very least for social order and for the convenience of the primary caregivers. To effect that control and keep societal order, and “for their [children’s] own good,”¹¹⁸ child-rearing methods that include physical (including spankings and “slaps”) and psychological abuse (“poisonous pedagogies”) are inflicted on a great many infants and young children when they are least developmentally able to make sense of, or resolve the paradox of, such treatment from “caregivers,” and when they have no resources with which to deal with the outrage they feel. Deprived of their rights and respect,¹¹⁹ unable to vent the humiliation and anger they feel, powerless to retaliate on caregivers whom they wish to love, and on whom they must depend to stay alive, children repress and internalize their pain and deny their suffering. According to Miller, unless they are helped by a “knowing” or “enlightened witness”¹²⁰ before adulthood to understand and process “reactions to injuries to their dignity endured in childhood, normal reactions of the body that

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 36.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 34.

¹¹⁷ The reasons for this belief vary, but the results are similar: children need to be controlled, often by whatever means necessary. Miller also suggests that if a child threatens an adult’s defense mechanism that hides the repressed humiliation the adult experienced as a child, this can also lead to adult attempts to control the child. Miller, *For Your Own Good*, 4.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Alice Miller, *The Trauma of Childhood* (Salon.com, 1999 [cited 2003]); <http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/1999/06/04/trauma>.

¹²⁰ Alice Miller, *Childhood: The Unexplored Source of Knowledge* (The Natural Child Project, 1999 [cited 2003]); http://www.naturalchild.com/alice_miller/childhood.html.

were not allowed to express themselves in a safe way,"¹²¹ then as adults, they will "attempt to regain their rights"¹²² lost in childhood, will come to think of humiliating childrearing methods as "normal," will become insensitive to their own and other children's pain, and will be able to take out their repressed and internalized anger and revenge on their own children—thus perpetuating the "enduring commitment" to the cycle of humiliation.¹²³

The characters in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* appear to be caught in the cycle of humiliation that Miller¹²⁴ describes. Cholly is shown to be a victim of abusive childrearing methods through abandonment, denigration, beating, and rejection; in his adult life he has "already killed three white men,"¹²⁵ beats Pauline and rapes his daughter. Pauline's childhood experience with her primary caregivers is primarily one of neglect. Pauline's perception of her place in her family of origin is one of nearly "total anonymity,"¹²⁶ save for the accident that is met with "complete indifference" when a rusty nail "punched clear through her foot during her second year of life" leaving her with "a crooked, archless foot that flopped when she walked."¹²⁷ Pauline's explanation for her treatment within her family exemplifies Miller's contention that young children are developmentally unprepared to make sense of abusive treatment by caregivers: [Pauline's] "deformity explained for her many things that would have been otherwise incomprehensible: why she alone of all the children had no nickname; why there were no funny jokes and anecdotes about funny things she had done. . . . why nobody teased her; why she never felt at home anywhere, or that she belonged anyplace."¹²⁸ As adults, both Cholly and Pauline bear out the theories of Miller and Gilligan and recycle the "poisonous pedagogies" of their own childhoods with their children.

The "Inner" Dynamics of Humiliation

So far I have been considering what I would call the "outer" structure of humiliation, including the dynamic interactive formation of humans with their social environment (including their institutions) and what constitutes humiliation in such interactions. To shed

¹²¹ Miller, *The Truth Will Set You Free*, 1.

¹²² Miller, *The Trauma of Childhood* ([cited]), 7.

¹²³ Perry (1997) writes, "Widespread ignorance of the intimate relationships between cultural belief systems, childrearing practices and the development of violent behaviors will doom any attempts to truly understand and prevent violence." 134

¹²⁴ Miller, *For Your Own Good*.

¹²⁵ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 159.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

light on the “inner” dynamics of humiliation, that is, the psychology, as well as the physiology of what might happen *inside* of humans as individuals and in their humiliating relationships, and to understand what might occur to make humans vulnerable/receptive to humiliation, it is important to think about individual human formation. Clearly, the characters in *The Bluest Eye* are subjected to and inflict multiple humiliations. As stated previously in the introductory discussion of what constitutes humiliation—variously labeled as dominator-dominated, colonizer-colonized, oppressor-oppressed, master-slave, subject-object, victimizer-victim—there is an implied power differential between the humiliator (whether institutional or individual) and the humiliated, with the humiliator somehow holding the power, “the upper hand,” to bring about the loss of control of the vital interests of the humiliated or to cause the humiliated to feel alienated or removed from the family of man.

In one of several somewhat different, though not incongruous, theories about the dynamics in, and perseverance of, humiliating relationships, Jessica Benjamin explores “how domination is anchored in the hearts of the dominated.”¹²⁹ She focuses on the exploration of the origins early in human life of the destructive and pervasive nature of domination in male-female relationships; it is there that she maintains the seeds of domination, which are central to humiliation, are sewn.

According to Benjamin, infants are aware of and interested in life, and seek to relate to the world *from birth* (rather than being passive, physiologically driven beings); and the nature of the relationships the infant/young child has with his¹³⁰ primary caregivers (and the caregivers’ relationship with one another) sets an early pattern for the child’s view of self in relation to others. Benjamin describes a child’s development in terms of the tension between needing to assert himself as an individual, and at the same time accepting dependence on his parents (or primary caregivers) for recognition.

The concept of “recognition,” and further, of “*mutual recognition*,” emerges as the important element in the child’s relationships with his parents and in healthy relationships between people in general. For healthy psychological development the child needs to recognize and be recognized by each of his parents (or caregivers) without either destroying

¹²⁹ Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 5.

¹³⁰ The “gendered” language problem arises here. With no intention to offend, I use “he” because in my example here, I focus on Cholly.

(manipulating) or being destroyed (controlled) by them. Benjamin calls this an “intersubjective view” where,

. . . the individual grows in and through the relationship to other subjects.

Most important, this perspective observes that the other whom the self meets is also a self, a subject in his or her own right. It assumes that we are able and need to recognize that other subject as different and yet alike, as an “other” who is capable of sharing similar mental experience.¹³¹

Further, Benjamin writes, a person involved in an intersubjective relationship, “. . . sees the relationship between self and other, with its tension between sameness and difference, as a continual exchange of influence. It focuses, not on a linear movement from oneness to separateness, but on the paradoxical balance between them.”¹³² In other words, an infant “recognizes” his caregiver(s) when he is very young. Increasingly, he seeks the recognition of the caregiver(s), first as a source of commonality and reassurance, and then later as a need to “differentiate” or “separate” as he comes into his own being. It is important for the caregivers to understand the struggle of the infant and young child and to invite him into this intersubjective zone where each recognizes the other and are recognized by one another, where the caregivers do not seek to dominate the child nor do the caregivers let themselves be dominated, but are willing to live with the tension that exists in this zone and to stay there with the child and with one another as much as possible.

Another important aspect of Benjamin’s work deals with “gender polarity,” which she defines as “the idealization of masculine values and the disparagement of feminine values.”¹³³ She writes,

The . . . structure of subject and object (gender polarity) thoroughly permeates our social relations, our ways of knowing, our efforts to transform and control the world; and it is this gendered logic which ultimately forecloses on the intersubjective realm—that space in which the mutual recognition of subjects can compete with the reversible relationship of domination.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 19-20.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 49.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 220.

Benjamin explains how gender polarity becomes an important issue in parenting by considering the developing relationships of the typical child with each of his parents:¹³⁵ eventually, the male child attempts to repudiate the mother in his attempt to establish independence from her. If the father does not “recognize” the mother, that is, have an intersubjective relationship with her, the son is even more likely to reject the mother (as well as the qualities she brings to the relationship, such as nurturing, dependence, empathy, vulnerability, goodness, attunement, intimacy) in order to identify with the father, who is his role model. Likewise, if the mother crushes (controls) the male child, he is likely to spurn her to resist being consumed by her. In this resistance, he also repudiates the qualities associated with being feminine, which results, according to Benjamin, in “a stance toward women which by no means recognizes her as a different but like subject.”¹³⁶ In this way the mother (and by extension, women) becomes associated with such qualities as weakness and irrationality.¹³⁷

A relationship of “mutuality” between the parents, as well as “dual parenting,” where both parents nurture and rear their child and thus “both . . . become associated with primary oneness,” works against gender polarity. However, even if parents are able to achieve this state with their child, they are working against the culture of the polis where “the cultural dualisms sustain the splitting of gender and recreate parental images as polar opposites.”¹³⁸

Thinking with Benjamin helps to explain Cholly’s¹³⁹ hatred (repudiation) of women, as his experiences with women are unbalanced from his infancy and his experiences with men, especially positive male role models, are limited. His biological mother abandons him soon after he is born. He might have survived this intense rejection with little negative effect because his maiden Aunt Jimmy (much older than he) rescues him and takes over his care. However, she beats him as her method of “discipline” and “takes delight sometimes in telling him of how she saved him.”¹⁴⁰ She gives Cholly the idea that his mother was mentally

¹³⁵ Benjamin considers the relationships of both male and female children with their parents.

¹³⁶ Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 220.

¹³⁷ Benjamin views masculine and feminine values as polar opposites, the masculine being associated with rationality, independence, objectivity, control, and depersonalization, and the feminine associated with dependency, subjectivity, attunement and nurturance.

¹³⁸ Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 218.

¹³⁹ I chose to apply Benjamin’s work to Cholly because his character is often disliked and misunderstood by readers. However, see Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* for the feminine perspective as well.

¹⁴⁰ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 132.

deficient (which perhaps makes him question his own possible deficiencies) and denigrates his father when Cholly's asks about him. Prior to seeking his father after Aunt Jimmy's death, Cholly loves the only positive male figure in his life, the old drayman Blue Jack, who shares stories with Cholly, but who likely is unavailable to Cholly as an enlightened witness because of his drunkenness. When he is older and does seek and find his father, Cholly is "rejected for a crap game by his father."¹⁴¹ Thus, prior to meeting and marrying Pauline, Cholly's experiences include abandonment by, fear of inherited deficiency from, extreme humiliation in the presence of, no sustained healthy male role models with, and domination by and later, of, women. From these experiences we can guess that Cholly never experienced an intersubjective relationship with a caregiver (or perhaps anyone else) and certainly did not achieve "separation" from the domination of women in his life except later as a "reversal" of domination through his violent interactions with women, including his wife Pauline and his daughter, Pecola.

Benjamin's somewhat pessimistic outlook on the power of dominant social characteristics in the polis to work against intersubjectivity in caregiver-child relationships is shared by Alice Miller,¹⁴² but is explained differently. Both Benjamin and Miller center their concerns on the dynamics of relationships between children and their primary caregivers and there is concurrence in their theories that the infant is not fully developed at birth, that the early relationships the infant shares with his caregivers are critical to the development of the child's view of himself in relation to adults and who the child will become as an adult, and that a tension over "control" exists between the infant/young child and his primary adult caregiver. However, Miller writes that most caregiver-child relationships are likely to be asymmetrical because of an unconscious cycle of humiliation that passes from one generation to the next through "poisonous pedagogies." In such relationships, in an effort to "control" the child, the adult dominates the child with greater or lesser degrees of physical/emotional abuse and creates fear, confusion, humiliation and anger in the child, who is not developmentally ready or able to handle such feelings, learning at the same time that such treatment is "acceptable." The child reared with "poisonous pedagogies" will repeat the same relationships as an adult with their own children, unless at some point before

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 160.

¹⁴² Miller, *For Your Own Good*.

adulthood the child is helped by a “knowing” or “enlightened witness” to understand and process the pain and suffering from his childhood.¹⁴³

There is clear evidence of Miller’s theory of the proliferation of the cycle of humiliation through “poisonous pedagogies” in *The Bluest Eye*. Cholly is abandoned by his mother, beaten and emotionally degraded by his Aunt Jimmy, and rejected by his father. In turn, as he became an adult, he “killed three white men,”¹⁴⁴ and participated in violent quarrels with Pauline. Morrison writes, “She [Pauline] was one of the few things abhorrent to him that he could touch and therefore hurt. He poured out on her the sum of all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires. Hating her, he could leave himself intact.”¹⁴⁵ Hating his daughter Pecola for reminding him of his own impotence and lack of self-respect, Cholly raped her.

The neglect suffered by Pauline in her childhood also turns to violence in her adulthood. In the narration of her history, Pauline says, “Sometimes I’d catch myself hollering at them and beating them [her children], and I’d feel sorry for them, but I couldn’t seem to stop.”¹⁴⁶ On her husband “she avenged herself. . . by forcing him to indulge in the weaknesses she despised.”¹⁴⁷ Neither Cholly nor Pauline encounters an enlightened witness to help them understand the abuse encountered in their childhood experiences with their caregivers. In fact, the reader is told directly, “There was no one to talk to” for Cholly¹⁴⁸ and that only Pauline’s foot deformity “explained . . . things that would have been otherwise incomprehensible.”¹⁴⁹

Prison psychiatrist James Gilligan¹⁵⁰ writes that the basic cause or motivation for violent behavior is to avoid the feeling of shame or humiliation. In *Equals*, Phillips¹⁵¹ provides a possible explanation for this cause-effect relationship. Phillips explains that from infancy we humans each have a personal unified image of ourselves (who we would like to be) that we can never live up to. We spend a lot of time comparing the self we present in public (who I am now) to our ideal self (who I would like to be) as well as to other people

¹⁴³ Miller, *The Trauma of Childhood* ([cited]).

¹⁴⁴ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 159.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁵⁰ Gilligan, *Preventing Violence*.

¹⁵¹ Phillips’ work also meshes beautifully with the work of Nathanson in affect theory. See Phillips, *Equals* and Nathanson, “The Role of Affect in Learning to Read.”

and, of course, we fall short. This means that on some level we are always in inner conflict with ourselves because we aren't living up to the person we want to be. We must suppress this inner conflict, as we don't want to be humiliated by having anyone else see that we are falling short of who we want to be. Therefore, to avoid humiliation or "victimhood," we monitor ourselves carefully by imposing an authoritarian order on ourselves, thereby limiting our own freedom of expression. The self, then, is in a kind of prison of its own making by comparing itself to its own unified image as well as to others, by falling short, then worrying about being caught and ridiculed for it, and finally, by protecting itself by warding others off or keeping others at bay. Ironically, by imposing an authoritarian order on ourselves, which by definition places limits on our freedom of expression, not to mention the hard work of monitoring ourselves, we probably keep ourselves from experimenting with becoming more of the idealized self we would like to be, as well as pass up exciting opportunities to be close to and learn from others. Instead, humans are more likely to feel threatened by others and thus to avoid vulnerability to humiliation.

A striking instance in *The Bluest Eye* stands out as a demonstration of the dilemma described by Gilligan and Phillips. In Cholly's story, immediately following his sexual experience with Darlene in the field, when they are interrupted by two white hunters who humiliate Cholly in front of Darlene, Cholly is unable to meet his unified image of himself that he thinks would and should have been able to protect Darlene. He partially internalizes the violence and saves it for later and partially projects it as hatred onto Darlene (and other women by association), hatred that will erupt in violence later with Pauline and Pecola. Morrison writes,

He was, in time, to discover that hatred of white men—but not now. Not in impotence but later, when the hatred could find sweet expression. For now, he hated the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence. The one who he had not been able to protect, to spare, to cover from the round moon glow of the flashlight. The hee-hee-hee's.¹⁵²

Cholly alienates himself from Darlene and finds he has "no one to talk to." He can't even talk to the one person he loves, Blue, because he "doubted if he could reveal his shame to

¹⁵² Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 151.

Blue. He would have to lie a little to tell Blue, Blue the woman-killer.” Cholly keeps it to himself.¹⁵³

There can be no question that a careful analysis of the lives of the characters and the world in which they live in *The Bluest Eye* reveals a world saturated with humiliation. We find that humiliation can lodge in the psyches of both the characters and their society (including the societal institutions) in multiple ways. The characters (humans) are vulnerable to humiliation from their earliest formation as children in their relationships with primary caregivers and humiliation can reside in their psyches to replay in their relationships as adults. One of the primary ways that humiliation persists in the lives of the characters in *The Bluest Eye* is through the narratives they live by, narratives derived from their personal experiences and from the larger narratives that control and guide the world in which they live. The Breedloves’ story of themselves, constructed from their own stories and the stories that define them in their world, is that they are ugly. Digging deeper now, in Chapter 3, I look at the formation and structure of narratives in general and then specifically in the individual to see how they might contribute to the persistence of humiliation.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3: THE POWER OF NARRATIVES IN THE PERSISTENCE OF HUMILIATION IN SCHOOLING

In this chapter, I argue that the narratives that humans tell themselves and others and that they live by contribute significantly to the persistence of humiliation. To support my claim, I first describe the formation and structure of narratives. Next, I explore the power of narratives in human lives and societies. Finally, I look at the roles of emotion and memory in the formation and retention of narratives, focusing on humiliation narratives in particular.

Narrative Construction

Narratives permeate human life and discourses. In their most basic sense, narratives are the stories human beings tell, stories that serve a vital purpose for them to create order from the chaos of everyday living and to make sense of their life experiences, relationships and the world about them. Narratives help humans to answer questions about who they are, why they are living and often serve as a guide for where their lives are going. According to Smith, “Narrative is our most elemental human genre of communication and meaning-making, an essential way of framing the order and purpose of reality, that we moderns need and use every bit as much as our primitive ancestors.”¹⁵⁴

Wertsch writes, “Unless it is integrated into a coherent schema (such as narrative), information is very hard to comprehend and “retain.”¹⁵⁵ The narrative mode of thought,” according to White and Epston “is characterized by good stories that gain credence through their lifelikeness” and that focus on the “particulars of experience.”¹⁵⁶ Smith describes narrative:

[It is] a form of communication that arranges human actions and events into organized wholes in a way that bestows meaning on the actions and events by specifying their interactive or cause-and-effect relations to the whole.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Christian Smith, *Moral Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 81.

¹⁵⁵ James V. Wertsch, *Mind as Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 86.

¹⁵⁶ Michael White and David Epston, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 78.

¹⁵⁷ Smith, *Moral Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*, 65.

A narrative is usually a “single, interrelated account”¹⁵⁸ of actions and events in a temporal sequence that contains several essential elements: characters who are the subjects and objects of action; a plot that has an obviously marked beginning, middle and end (although the plot may not necessarily be presented in sequential order); a narrative voice; events that are connected; and a significant purpose or point to make. White and Epston write, “The success of this storying of experience provides persons with a sense of continuity and meaning in their lives and this is relied upon for the ordering of daily lives and for the interpretation of further experiences.”¹⁵⁹ As humans tell stories, they form an understanding of their world that helps them to feel some measure of security and predictability in their lives, as well as to provide a basis for predicting and understanding the future.

The Power of Narratives

The human desire to understand and make sense of life helps to explain why people are eager to tell me their humiliation stories. Human beings are naturally “story-telling animals.”¹⁶⁰ From her experiences with preschool and primary children, Vivian Paley relates that humans begin organizing their experiences into stories for meaning making very early in life. She writes, “. . . every child has a continuing supply of stories—and furthermore . . . these stories must be acted out.”¹⁶¹ In conversations with preschool teacher Lillian Tully, Paley (P) and Tully (T) discuss why children as young as two are already telling stories:

P: Whatever the message they act out, it comes across as “You are my friend because I am in your story”. . . . It’s such a total group experience with the twos, almost the opposite of the way they handle everything else. By the way, are their stories always about mothers?

T: Mostly, yes. . . . Seems like the best reason to tell a story, when you are two, is to keep Mama in mind. And to get everyone to do something with you on your terms. Maybe you’re not so lonely then Still and all, who knows what else is going on It’s a mystery, don’t you

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ White, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, 10.

¹⁶⁰ This idea is widely accepted. See e.g., Smith, *Moral Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*; Wertsch, *Mind as Action*; White, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, and Jerome Bruner, “Research Currents: Life as Narrative,” *Language Arts* 65 (1988).

¹⁶¹ Paley, *In Mrs. Tully’s Room: A Childcare Portrait*, 47.

think? I mean, the way these babies take to storytelling it's like they were born doing it. Funny thing, most folks I meet at conferences don't even know the twos can do it.

And later:

T: You don't feel so scared when people are telling you stories. It's not only fear of being harmed that scares you. Being lonely, being afraid no one will come pick you up, being worried that no one likes you. . .

P: Or notices you.¹⁶²

Beginning with very young children, both the telling and the acting out of stories provide important vehicles for humans to make meaning of their experiences, to connect with others in meaningful and affirming ways, to feel some measure of control over their lives and to deal with "the atmosphere of terror and mystery in which our life is passed."¹⁶³

While telling stories may be a natural part of being human and may feel to the storyteller like an individual task, the building of a narrative is a complex, socially constructed process, affected and constrained by several interrelated factors (many of which the teller is unaware): the teller, the experiences or events chosen for inclusion, previous stories told by the teller, societal conventions for telling narratives, the audience for whom the narrative is constructed; and the "larger" social, political and cultural contexts (including the dominant societal narratives that prescribe acceptable roles and behaviors) within which the story is assembled and told. Gergen and Gergen observe, "Narrative construction can never be entirely a private matter."¹⁶⁴ Human narratives cannot be seen apart from the social surroundings in which they are constructed.

People ascribe meaning to their experiences through a process that prioritizes which events and details from their lives to keep and which to "let go." Wertsch suggests that the creation of narratives is a process of "reflection," "selection" and "deflection."¹⁶⁵ Narratives "reflect" the perspectives of the people who construct them as they "select" or favor some

¹⁶² Ibid., 38-39.

¹⁶³ T. S. Eliot in Phillips, *Equals*, 91

¹⁶⁴ Kenneth J. Gergen and Mary M. Gergen, "Narrative Form and the Construction of Psychological Science," in *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*, ed. Theodore Sarbin (New York: Praeger, 1986), 184.

¹⁶⁵ Wertsch, *Mind as Action*, 91.

actions, events and people from their lives to include in the narrative and “deflect” other actions, events and people by letting them “fall away.”

This selective process is partly influenced by what people have included in their meaning making stories in the past. White and Epston call events not chosen for a narrative, “events that do not fit with the dominant evolving stories that we and others have about us,”¹⁶⁶ which implies that what we do choose for our narratives is guided by and in line with what we believe and want others to believe about ourselves, as well as by what we perceive others to already believe about us. Thus, as humans shape their stories through the selection of events they choose to include, so they are shaped by the stories they tell. White and Epston write, “Not only do stories that persons have told about their lives determine the meaning that they ascribe to experience, but these stories also determine which aspects of lived experience are selected out for the ascription of meaning.”¹⁶⁷ In Navarro’s words, “[Personal stories] are a means of fashioning identities. It is this formative power of life stories that makes them important.”¹⁶⁸

The meanings people make from their lives and tell in their narratives about themselves help to form their beliefs, which direct their perceptions, thinking and actions. Humans “perform” the stories they come to believe about themselves. White and Epston write, “The particular story that prevails or dominates in giving meaning to the events of our lives determines, to a large extent, the nature of our lived experience and patterns of action.”¹⁶⁹ It might be said that we humans *are* the stories we tell about ourselves. Recall in *The Bluest Eye* that the Breedlove family believes that they are “ugly” and that they live out this belief in their lives.

The construction of narratives is also affected by dominant societal conventions for telling stories; that is, for a story to be intelligible to others, it must adhere to the language typically used in stories, as well as to socially acceptable forms for stories. Navarro writes, “When people tell life stories, they do so according to models of intelligibility specific to the culture.”¹⁷⁰ Smith describes typical criteria for judging the worthiness of a narrative in dominant American culture: the connection of the events described in the narrative are

¹⁶⁶ White, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, 11.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁶⁸ Sharon Navarro, “Border Narratives: The Politics of Identity and Mobilization,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 45, no. 3 (2003), 135.

¹⁶⁹ White, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, x.

¹⁷⁰ Navarro, “Border Narratives: The Politics of Identity and Mobilization,” 129.

obvious and coherent; the narrative “draws from commonly accepted cultural narratives;”¹⁷¹ the narrative provides a feeling of temporal movement in sequentially described events; and the narrative employs an economy of style in the description of the essential elements of the story.

The audience for whom a story is constructed further helps to guide the storyteller’s selection of events for inclusion and way of telling a story (the selection and use of language and other conventions of narrative). For example, one would not be likely to use the same language or choose the identical details to relate the same story to one’s best friend and also to one’s grandmother. Additionally, the identity of the storyteller is shaped in the interaction of the story with the audience. Navarro writes, “The sense one has of being a “self” is partly one’s sense of who one is in relation to others.”¹⁷² The storyteller’s listeners can affirm or alter the storyteller’s identity through their reactions to the story. Freeman, Epston and Lobovits write, “Conversations are social events that we rely on to build consensually based stories that explain our perceptions.”¹⁷³ Our perceptions of ourselves are formed in conjunction with others.

Individuals’ narratives are also influenced by the larger context of the sociopolitical characteristics and constraints of the dominant culture narratives in the society within which the individuals live. Reminiscent of Plato’s concept of humans as “polis animals” discussed in Chapter 2, in an interactive dynamic, humans sustain the polis (the society or the country) at the same time they are created and sustained by it. Human beings internalize cultural influences (including stories or narratives that give the polis meaning) from the polis as young children and then as adults they externalize the cultural influences that they internalized as children. The polis, which is both a combination and a reflection of the dominant externalizations of the humans living within it, becomes an artifact (an institution), independent of “the shifting psychological states of its inhabitants”¹⁷⁴ that houses the generalized cultural influences of the polis and offers a form of stability in a generally unsettling and never fully explicable world.

¹⁷¹ Michael White, “An Outline of Narrative Therapy,” in *Notes*. (Adelaide, SA.: Dulwich Centre, 1997), 6.

¹⁷² Navarro, “Border Narratives: The Politics of Identity and Mobilization,” 135.

¹⁷³ Jennifer Freeman, David Epston and Dean Lobovits, *Playful Approaches to Serious Problems: Narrative Therapy with Children and Their Families* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 105.

¹⁷⁴ Lear, *Open Minded: Working out the Logic of the Soul*, 66.

These “master” cultural narratives, as long as they are accepted by many or most of the individuals who live in a society, become the agreements or norms by which individuals create order and live together. Smith writes, “The larger cultural frameworks within which the morally oriented believings of the human animal make sense are most deeply narrative in form.”¹⁷⁵ The dominant cultural narratives of institutions large and small (e. g., countries, societies, schools, medical and legal communities) are powerful organizers and preservers of the collected experiences (past and present) and beliefs of those within the institutions, particularly the experiences and beliefs of those who have been or are “in charge” (in power). These larger narratives affect the narratives told by individuals living within their authority by dictating what is “accepted.” According to Smith,

We, every bit as much as the most primitive or traditional of our ancestors, are animals who most fundamentally understand what reality is, who we are, and how we ought to live by locating ourselves within the larger narratives and metanarratives that we hear and tell, and that constitute what is for us real and significant.¹⁷⁶

For the most part, humans want to have their stories make sense within the context of the society in which they live so that they won’t feel or be alienated.

Freeman, Epston and Lobovits write, “Stories both describe and shape people’s lives . . . personal narratives are inextricably embedded in sociocultural, political, and economic contexts.”¹⁷⁷ They continue, “Cultural stories affect the way people interpret their daily experience and how their daily actions are influencing the stories that circulate in society.”¹⁷⁸ It is within these dominant narratives that humans construct the stories they tell about themselves that either align with or conflict with an institution’s dominant narratives. Shared narratives can bind humans together just as conflicting narratives can cause confusion and discord and push humans apart. If an individual or group narrative does not align with dominant institutional narratives, the individual or group could feel alienated.

Two important points might be derived from the foregoing discussion of narratives: 1) people tell stories to organize and provide structure and meaning in their lives, and 2) narrative construction seems to be a complex process that plays a central role in the

¹⁷⁵ Smith, *Moral Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*, 67.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁷⁷ Freeman, *Playful Approaches to Serious Problems: Narrative Therapy with Children and Their Families*, 47.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

formation of human personalities and of human societies and institutions within them. Before discussing how these two points relate to the persistence of humiliation in school cultures, it is important to look at how narratives might be stored and function in human memory.

Narratives and Memory

The story of my fourth grade experience happened more years ago than I want to admit and yet, I “remember it like it was yesterday,” as the saying goes. Margalit, Nathanson, and Miller offer explanations for how human memory functions in retaining and reliving past experiences, and in particular, experiences of humiliation. Additionally, when the recent work of neuroscientist Damasio is considered in concert with these scholars, we are helped to understand why the human organism might store these memories and why humans might avoid discussing or dealing with humiliation. Even as each writer presents a somewhat different perspective as lens for thinking about how human memory contributes to the persistence of humiliation, when considered together, the work of the four writers is complementary.

In *The Ethics of Memory*, Margalit writes that human memory is involuntary and not within human control. He suggests that if we are told not to remember something, it is actually more likely that we will remember and conversely, that we often have difficulty remembering when commanded to do so. This idea of the involuntary nature of human memory is important because it supports the idea that memories may “come up” or be “triggered” at any time, without conscious human bidding to do so. (Nathanson and Damasio, whose work follows here, provide a way to understand this phenomenon). Margalit specifically explores the relationship between humiliation and memory and writes about the difference between remembered physical and mental pain. Lasting scars, he writes, can be left by both mental and physical pain. However, physical pain, while it can be excruciating at the time it occurs, is difficult to remember after the fact. On the other hand, mental pain is often lasting and may be relived when it is remembered. It is the mental, emotional scars that endure, according to Margalit, in traces in the memory that can be called up and relived any time. He writes, “The wounds of insult and humiliation keep bleeding

long after the painful physical injuries have crusted over.”¹⁷⁹ Margalit comments on how being humiliated is not like other painful mental experiences:

Why is remembering humiliation a reliving of it? Humiliation, I believe is not just another experience in our life, like, say, an embarrassment. It is a formative experience. It forms the way we view ourselves as humiliated persons—very much the way a serious failure in a project that matters to us greatly brings us to view ourselves as failures. Humiliation, in the strong sense, in being a fundamental assault on us as human beings, becomes constitutive of one sense of who we are. We may try to shrug it off and avoid living it on a daily basis. But if and when we remember it, and still recognize it as humiliation, then in the usual course of events we are more likely than not to relive it.¹⁸⁰

If we accept that humiliation equals rejection from the family of man, being marginalized, feeling “shorn from the herd”¹⁸¹ or losing control of one’s vital interests, and that humans will do almost anything to avoid these experiences, it is not surprising that when we are humiliated, it is so offensive that the experience is etched into the memory as a partial narrative of who we are.

When people observe events of humiliation in school situations, memories of their own experiences and personal narratives of humiliation are often triggered and retold, even if only “internally.” When a humiliating event takes place in front of others (public), those watching frequently appear almost as affected as the one suffering the humiliation. The atmosphere often grows quiet, perhaps as others observe what could happen to them. Educator Vivian Paley writes, “One child scorned is every child’s humiliation.”¹⁸² When one human being is diminished in the eyes of others, we are all diminished, for it is partially the humanness of all of us that is being rejected. Incidents such as these “stick” in the minds of witnesses as well as in the mind of the person humiliated.

¹⁷⁹ Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, 120.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁸¹ This is Donald Nathanson’s term but it has been expressed similarly by others: Nathanson, “The Role of Affect in Learning to Read” ([cited]); Jaylynn N. Hutchinson, *Students on the Margins: Education, Stories, Dignity* (New York: State University of New York, 1999) and Margalit, *The Decent Society* (N. Goldblum, Trans.).

¹⁸² Paley, *In Mrs. Tully’s Room: A Childcare Portrait*, 36.

The work of Donald Nathanson in affect theory complements that of Margalit and offers insights into understanding how human physiology is involved in the storage of our experiences in human memory and in how past experiences of humiliation are “called up” in memory and relived. Additionally, Nathanson offers an explanation for what happens to humans when they can’t effectively deal with the affect of shame/humiliation, an explanation that helps to answer why narratives of humiliation might contribute to the persistence of humiliation in schooling. Nathanson,¹⁸³ building on the work of Silvan Tomkins, describes nine¹⁸⁴ observable innate physiological “affects” that underlie all human emotions. An affect is triggered in the human body when significant information enters the central nervous system. “Affect is vitality,” writes Nathanson, and “occurs only when something is significant; affect is about changing information.”¹⁸⁵ When significant information enters the central nervous system (Stimulus), for each of the nine affects that can be triggered (Affect), there is a particular set of accompanying visible physical responses in the forms of facial expressions, odors, postures and vocalizations. Affects can be observed in the body and facial expressions by outsiders, sometimes before the person experiencing the affect has recognized it. Once the human brain becomes aware of or accepts an affect that has been triggered, it is called a “feeling” and we respond (Response) as best we are able to the information provided. A Stimulus-Affect-Response Sequence is called a SARS, also referred to as a “scene.” According to Nathanson, for an event to enter human memory as a scene, it must first trigger or stimulate an affect that is brought to consciousness and responded to in some way.

SARS (“scenes”) collect in the memory. The brain sorts and groups together scenes with the same or similar sequences into “families of scenes.”¹⁸⁶ When an affect is triggered and recognized, the human brain checks into its memories for prior experiences of the same affect and when the affect combines with a similar family of scenes, it is called an “emotion.” It is then that we spend time reliving past experiences that are raised to consciousness by association with a triggering affect. The time spent reliving past experiences depends on each person’s affective history. Nathanson suggests, “Affect is

¹⁸³ I am attempting to distill the essence of years of Nathanson’s and Tomkins’ interesting and complex work for use here. For further illumination on this work, read *Shame and Pride* by Nathanson.

¹⁸⁴ The nine innate physiological affects identified by Tomkins are Interest/Excitement, Enjoyment/Joy, Surprise/Startle, Fear/Terror, Anger/Rage, Distress/Anguish, Shame/Humiliation, Disgust and Dis-smell.

¹⁸⁵ Donald L. Nathanson, “What’s a Script?” *Bulletin of the Tomkins Institute* 3 (1996), 2.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

always biology, whereas emotion always represents biography. Each of us has the same nine innate affects, but our life experience makes our emotions quite different.”¹⁸⁷ “Moods,” according to Nathanson, occur when we get stuck in reliving past experiences related to an affect “because rather than the operation of innate affect, which normally lasts only a second or so, we continue to think of situations that trigger only that one affect.”¹⁸⁸ Moods can last a long time, although they can also be changed by stimulation from a new stimulus or source of affect.

Let’s return for a moment to an instance where an affect is triggered and recognized and moves us to search our memories for similar families of scenes (SARS). When the affect combines with similar experiences stored in the memory many times over, a new affect is triggered, an affect that becomes related to the family of scenes and that is essentially a “script” for how to react to the entry of new SARS that are similar. Nathanson describes in detail the complex mental processes involved in the synthesis, compression and storage of experienced events (SARS) into families of scenes that are finally organized into “scripts,” “the structures within which we store scenes” which “are sets of rules for the ordering of information about SARS.”¹⁸⁹ He explains further,

Once we have grouped sets of SARS on the basis of some perceived similarity, the group itself becomes a thing, an entity, a structure that is now (as a thing, an entity, a structure) capable of triggering affect and initiating a Stimulus-Affect-Response Sequence that could not have existed prior to the formation of that group.¹⁹⁰

Through observation of physiological signs accompanying different affects, very young children have been found to have “scripts.” Nathanson suspects that affect is triggered in utero in infants and he states, “Past infancy, everything is scripts rather than affect.”¹⁹¹ The brain is a very efficient organizer, sometimes too efficient and not discerning. According to Nathanson, sometimes when we synthesize an experience for storage, in an

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 2.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 7.

effort to efficiently store the memory of an event, we distort our experiences to fit an already made script that causes us to misinterpret the experience.¹⁹²

Narratives, Memory and Humiliation

To apply Nathanson's concepts to one of the nine innate affects, consider the affect "Shame/Humiliation." This affect can only be triggered when there is a disruption in our involvement in one of the two "positive" affects—interest/excitement or enjoyment/joy—and occurs when in our unconscious or conscious we feel we can't or aren't doing or knowing something we "should." For example, imagine I am in school in a class during a writing lesson: I think that I understand the assignment and that I am following the teacher's directions, and I am enjoying what I am doing. The teacher comes by, sees my paper, scowls, rips it out from under my pencil, wads it into a ball, throws it on the floor, and tells me loudly so everyone can hear, "This is not what I assigned! Get a new paper and begin again, and this time, follow directions!" When information enters the central nervous system that disrupts our good feelings, our bodies react in specific physiological ways—slumping, drooping, body reddening—and we may experience a momentary "cognitive shock" where we can't think¹⁹³ and where we feel isolated and alone. To continue my example, I will experience a cognitive shock; when I recognize this in my consciousness, I will "feel" ashamed (emotion) that I didn't do the assignment correctly and I will "feel" humiliated (emotion) that my error was announced publicly to my peers. My body will show the physiological affects of this experience—I will look down and away, my face and neck will "burn" red, and my shoulders will droop.

As we begin to process this feeling of shame/humiliation, we connect to other experiences in our memories (families of scenes formed into "scripts") when we felt this way. When the "shame-humiliation" affect is triggered it stimulates the brain to recall all of the scripts related to it. If we have called on these scripts repeatedly, the scripts themselves produce an affect, thereby magnifying our experience, which may account for the observation that we appear to be "reliving" our experience(s) of humiliation. Recall for a moment Margalit's observation regarding the involuntary nature of human memory. Nathanson's work supports the idea that memories may "come up" or be "triggered" at any

¹⁹² Ibid., 4.

¹⁹³ According to Nathanson, this experience was reported by "sages such as Darwin and Sartre." Nathanson, "The Role of Affect in Learning to Read," 5.

time, without conscious human bidding to do so. This would occur when significant information (of which the conscious is unaware) enters the central nervous system, triggers an affect and sends the brain to search the memory for similar scenes. When a similar family of scenes is found, all the memories associated with it can come flooding into the consciousness without any conscious bidding on the part of the human receiving the initial stimulus.

Back to my example where I am sitting at my seat and my paper is wadded up on the floor: my mind will connect immediately with other events when I felt humiliated or maybe times when I witnessed others' humiliation (in writing, in classrooms, perhaps in schools and maybe in other learning situations, depending on how my brain has organized these experiences). As those events "expand" from their compressed storage, I will relive them and if there are enough of them that they trigger an affect such as anger, I will be angry (Response). I will return to "responses" in a moment after I shift briefly to consider the research of Damasio, which clarifies and expands on Nathanson's work.

Recent brain research seems compatible with the theories proposed by Nathanson. Synthesizing my reading of the current research in neuroscience,¹⁹⁴ the human body (organism) is "designed" to achieve two major objectives: "homeostasis," that is, the preservation or survival of the organism (keeping things "cool," balanced inside so the organism doesn't get far out of whack, thereby doing itself in); and procreation (as part of the survival of the organism, to make more of itself). Toward these two objectives, the organism is further designed to sense (consciously or more likely, much of the time, unconsciously, at least at first) anything that might change the inner balance of the organism or in other words, either threaten the survival of its two major objectives or offer opportunity for pleasure (including opportunities to procreate). According to Damasio, it is the "emotions" (what Nathanson describes as "affects"¹⁹⁵) that sense these changes outside of the organism and that then alert the mechanisms inside the organism to respond. All of this can take place without the human necessarily being consciously aware of anything happening (recall similarly Nathanson's description of "affects"—Damasio's "emotions"—

¹⁹⁴ See Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*; Perry, "Incubated in Terror: Neurodevelopmental Factors in the 'Cycle of Violence'" and Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

¹⁹⁵ This is an example of the variant language used in neuroscience to describe essentially the same process (mentioned in the Introduction to this inquiry).

that trigger observable responses in the body and facial expressions that can be observed by outsiders, sometimes before the person with the affect has recognized it). When the human organism consciously or subconsciously receives a stimulus that signals a change in the status quo or in what it is attending to presently, an emotion/affect is triggered. The brain then searches for what it knows about this (sometimes unconsciously) and gathers from different places in the brain and in the memory the parts of scenes it has stored. If these scenes are related to humiliation, for example, the organism will be threatened by humiliation for any of several reasons previously discussed (such as feeling “shorn from the herd,” not living up to one’s idealized image of oneself or feeling exposed) and will react to protect the inner balance and integrity of itself. This can all take place in either the human unconscious or in the conscious.

However, sometimes when a stimulus (event, object, etc.) outside the organism triggers an emotion/affect in the organism, the organism becomes aware of the emotion/affect and there is a feeling of something happening. When the feeling becomes conscious, then the organism can produce an “automatic” response from a stored script *or* the organism has the opportunity to effect a decision that is not an “automatic” response, one that can override an “automatic” response (this is an important thought for later in the discussion of counter-narratives). Damasio refers to this stage in the process as a “feeling of a feeling.” It is in this space that the organism can decide or reason not to react to a signal it perceives as dangerous (or advantageous). Now I return to Nathanson to discuss his theory regarding “responses” to a stimulus that signals a threat of humiliation.

Usually the shame/humiliation affect calls up some perceived deficiency in the organism (which Phillips¹⁹⁶ might tell us the organism would avoid to protect its idealized image of itself). At the point that the affect of the stimulus is felt by the organism, according to Nathanson, if people haven’t been taught to handle or are unable to deal with the shame/humiliation affect, a situation that Nathanson claims is a frequent occurrence in our world today, then to defend against “these awful feelings, these terrible memories that have been bundled into unpleasant scripts,”¹⁹⁷ people resort to one or more of four “scripts for action.”¹⁹⁸ Nathanson calls these action scripts the “Compass of Shame”¹⁹⁹ (see Figure 1).

¹⁹⁶ Phillips, *Equals*.

¹⁹⁷ Nathanson, “What’s a Script?”

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

Some of these scripts, “withdrawal,” “attack self,” “attack other” and “avoidance” can result in perpetuating more humiliations, often both for the person initially feeling humiliated and for others affected by the person’s adoption of one of the four action scripts.

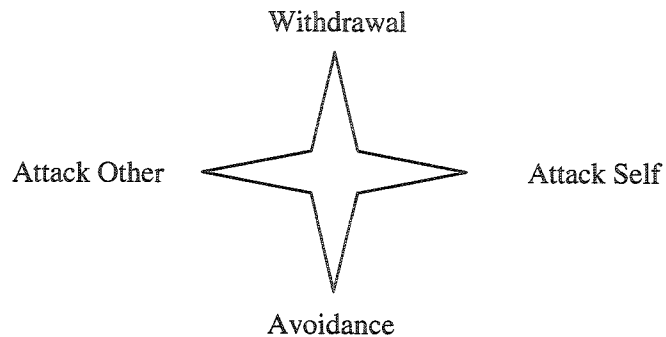


Figure 1: Compass of Shame²⁰⁰

When people feel humiliated and elect to withdraw to protect themselves, they can become isolated, “shorn from the herd,” and depressed, thereby exacerbating their feelings of humiliation. When people elect the “attack self” script, they put themselves down, essentially agreeing to their deficiencies, making themselves dependent on others so they won’t be alone. The story they are telling about themselves, the stories that form their beliefs about themselves, about who they are, put them in a position for repeated humiliations.

The “avoidance” script for action involves trying to make the feeling of humiliation go away by ignoring it. People choosing this script often choose to “drown” or mask the humiliating feelings in drugs or alcohol. Other ways of avoiding feelings of humiliation include a range of addictions such as excessive competition, thrill-seeking, eating disorders and indulgent spending. When people choose the fourth script, “attack other,” they make themselves feel better at the expense of others, using tactics such as bullying, put downs,

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. Nathanson suggests that the “Compass of Shame” scripts “kick in” for the whole range of Shame/Humiliation affects.

²⁰⁰ Donald L. Nathanson, “The Name of the Game Is Shame,” (Report to the Academic Advisory Council of the National Campaign Against Youth Violence, Revised, March 2003), 5.

harassment, and physical abuse. Altman writes, “The need to humiliate someone else often speaks to the urgency of the need to ward off one’s own humiliation.”²⁰¹

According to Nathanson, people who can’t handle shame/humiliation have a tendency to gather either at the Withdrawal and Attack Self Poles or the Avoidance and Attack Other Poles. Nathanson claims that the Avoidance and Attack Other behaviors dominate contemporary responses to feelings of shame/humiliation, and that behavior manifested by Attack Other responses is “always learned from sources available in the culture.”²⁰²

The primary reason I have included the foregoing research from neuroscience, cognitive neuroscience and medical science is because I believe it not only offers insights into how and why memories of humiliation are stored and relived, but also insights into places where we might interrupt the formation of narratives that contribute to the persistence of humiliation. Damasio and Nathanson, along with the recent research of other neuroscientists, help to provide a possible explanation for why people store memories of humiliation, why they relive these memories, why they avoid discussion or acknowledgment of humiliation when they see it and why it persists—human beings biologically react to humiliation as a threat to their survival. Assuming this might be true, it would be logical, then, that humans would store memories (stories, narratives) of humiliation for purposes of self-preservation, to warn and protect themselves from such experiences in the future. Further, if humiliation is as devastating as people who shared stories with me say it is and as my experience tells me it is, then humans would most likely avoid humiliation in whatever way they could (perhaps including not talking about it or not reacting in someone else’s behalf if they witness it). I suggest that people story their lives as much for their survival as they do to make sense of their lives, although these could be the same.

It is worth briefly revisiting Alice Miller’s theory of “poisonous pedagogies,” detailed in Chapter 2 in the discussion of the structure of humiliation in the human psyche. Along with the theories of Nathanson and Margalit, she helps us understand what happens to

²⁰¹ Neil Altman, “Humiliation, Retaliation, and Violence,” *Tikkun*, (2004), <http://www.tikkun.org/magazine/index.cfm/action/tikkun/issue/tik0401/article/040121.html>, 2.

²⁰² Nathanson, “The Name of the Game Is Shame,” 8.

children when some of their innate affects²⁰³ (e.g. fear, anger, distress) are ignored or quashed by primary caregivers. Recall that when children are humiliated often enough in any of a variety of forms by their primary caregivers, the children are unable to resolve the paradox of insults to their dignity from those responsible for their “care.” Too young or small to retaliate, they suppress the anger or outrage that they feel. They may store these narratives as “scripts” that trigger an anger affect, allowing them, as they get older, to “attack others,” and to take out their repressed and internalized anger and revenge on their own children (or students, in the case of teachers)—thus perpetuating the “enduring commitment’ to the cycle of humiliation. Unless they are helped to understand and process these feelings by an “enlightened witness,” they might also come to think of humiliating childrearing methods as “normal.”

Considering the work of Miller and Nathanson together, when children are reared with “poisonous pedagogies,” it could be said that their caregivers are controlling their innate affects, which in a sense is humiliating in itself, because the child’s emotions are held hostage. I am reminded here of caregivers who dole out harsh punishment and then threaten their children with further punishment if they cry! Not only is the child’s humiliation not recognized, this situation is compounded by denial of her sadness or anger, thereby inhibiting her ability to “be herself,” a further humiliation. When these innate responses receive no recognition or response from caring adults, the emotions associated with the responses (anger, sadness, humiliation) are repressed to emerge later when “triggered” by other humiliating experiences.

A second way that the ideas of Miller and Nathanson complement one another is that Nathanson’s Compass of Shame explains what happens to the child who is repeatedly humiliated by her caregivers and receives no assistance in processing the affects she is experiencing at the hands of her caregivers. With no enlightened witness, she takes on one or more of the scripts from the Compass of Shame. Children who become bullies in school may be “attacking other” because humiliation is normalized in their homes and/or may be warding off their own humiliation.

A significant connection can be made between the combined work of Margalit, Nathanson and Miller and the persistence of humiliation. First, when people relive their

²⁰³ See footnote 184 for a list of the nine innate physiological affects described by Tomkins/Nathanson.

experiences, they are “retelling” their story of themselves, as well as reliving the affect associated with the story, perhaps strengthening the affect associated with humiliation. As humans are informed by the stories they select to tell about themselves, if they tell stories of themselves as humiliated, they may come to see themselves in this way and then they may inadvertently invite humiliation (consider Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*). Second, if they can’t manage the affect when it is triggered by a humiliating event, they may resort to one of the scripts for action described by Nathanson in the Compass of Shame. Each of those scripts serves in some way to perpetuate humiliation, either through inviting it for oneself or putting it onto others. The narrative of humiliation from a humiliating experience itself serves to perpetuate humiliation, which points to the deeply embedded nature of humiliation narratives. My purpose in illuminating the work of these scholars is to demonstrate that humans use narratives to store memories of humiliation partially to ensure survival and to warn themselves of danger; that humiliation sticks in human memories to be replayed at a later time; that humiliating experiences affect human formation and identity; and that stored memories of humiliation can play out for many years after the events occur and can contribute to the persistence of humiliation in society and particularly in schooling.

I now move from the formation of individual narratives to a brief introduction to societal metanarratives, the formation of which was discussed at some length in Chapter 2. I consider how shared metanarratives lodged in society contribute to the persistence of humiliation in schooling. However, before I begin, I share an interesting epiphany that occurred in the writing of this section of the inquiry. My respect for the multiple and powerful ways that narratives operate in human life increased from this experience.

CHAPTER 4: SOCIETAL METANARRATIVES

An Epiphany

When I began writing this section of my inquiry on societal metanarratives,²⁰⁴ I was troubled by a comment written by my advisor on one of my drafts. She questioned whether what I was proposing as metanarratives were in fact “beliefs.” I pondered this question and decided to argue that for the purposes of this inquiry, when speaking of metanarratives, the adoption of a more expansive view of narratives was in order than when speaking of personal narratives. I wrote,

There might be some language confusion here and for the purposes of this inquiry, I want to indicate how I will proceed. Some people might apply the label “beliefs” to what I am referring to as “metanarratives.” Our stories, as has already been shown in this inquiry, help to form and sustain our beliefs; thus, stories and beliefs are interwoven and often confounded. At the base of our beliefs are stories that support those beliefs. The beliefs often “become” stories to explain ways of being.

I still felt uneasy about this shift; it felt dishonest somehow, like I was trying this late in the process to write myself out of a bind, which indeed perhaps I was. I turned to Smith²⁰⁵ to reread his perspective on metanarratives. In the margins near his explication of the “Christian metanarrative,” I had written myself a note about Alice Miller’s²⁰⁶ idea that poisonous pedagogies stem from the Christian narrative of original sin—humans are born in sin, therefore they can expect humiliation. I looked again at the metanarratives that I proposed and realized that they are each beliefs that likely are integral parts of the same Christian metanarrative to which Miller refers. Two revelations occurred: first, as an English teacher, I’m pleased to say that “writing to learn” works well; and second, metanarratives are truly “meta,” hard to spot, insidious, like humiliation is in society, with their fingers and influence stretching deeply into the fabric of society, guiding people’s lives and suggesting what is the “truth.”

²⁰⁴ These are variously referred to as metanarratives, “master narratives” and dominant narratives.

²⁰⁵ Smith, *Moral Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*.

²⁰⁶ Miller, *For Your Own Good*.

Now I return to a discussion of metanarratives, including a brief description of the Christian metanarrative, and some beliefs that likely stem from it that sanction humiliation. I begin with a brief reminder of how narratives are situated in multiple levels of society from the individual stories we tell to the larger societal narratives that we contribute to and that at the same time help to dictate our lives. Next, to further solve the puzzle that humiliation persists in schools, even as individuals regard humiliation as painful and potentially formative in negative ways in human living and learning, I provide a brief synopsis of the Christian metanarrative outlined by Smith. Then I propose and provide evidence for four dominant societal beliefs that might be derived from this major governing metanarrative that sanctions humiliation and that operates in the United States²⁰⁷ in multilayers and levels in national, state, community and many family narratives, all narratives that influence personal narratives and that contribute to the persistence of humiliation in schooling.

Reprise: Narratives in the Polis

As “storytelling animals,” narratives provide an important way for humans to organize their experiences and to create a sense of stability in an uncertain world, thereby serving an integral, powerful and under-recognized function in human life. The construction of narratives is a complex process that plays a central and interactive role in the formation of human personalities and of human societies and institutions within them.²⁰⁸ Narratives operate not only in individuals and in individual interactions, but also at multiple levels in societal interactions that form, affect and guide human thinking. Smith writes,

We not only are animals who make and tell narratives but also animals who are told and made by our narratives. The stories we tell are not mere entertainment. Nor do they simply suggest for us some general sense of our heritage. Our stories fully encompass and define our lives. They situate us in reality itself by elaborating the contours of

²⁰⁷ Narratives of humiliation exist in many societies in the world and no doubt impact and influence the United States; the focus of this inquiry is necessarily limited by space considerations to the United States.

²⁰⁸ See e.g., Bruner, "Life as Narrative"; David Epston, Michael White and K. Murray, "A Proposal for Re-Authoring Therapy: Rose's Revisioning of Her Life and a Commentary," in *Therapy as Social Construction*, eds. Sheila McNamee and Kenneth J. Gergen (London: Sage Publications, 1992); Gergen, "Narrative Form and the Construction of Psychological Science" and Craig Smith and David Nylund, eds., *Narrative Therapies with Children and Adolescents* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997).

fundamental moral order, comprising sacred and profane, in narrative form, and placing us too as actors within the larger drama.²⁰⁹

At this point it is helpful to call up a short summary of Lear's useful insights for looking at how narratives are structured in the "large world" or the "polis." According to Lear, in a dynamic that is interactive, humans create and sustain the polis at the same time they are created and sustained by it. A polis is a combination and a reflection of the dominant narratives of the humans living within it, humans who in turn are shaped by these narratives. The polis becomes an institution in its own right (an artifact) and is independent of "the shifting psychological states of its inhabitants."²¹⁰ The institution houses the generalized cultural narratives of the polis and provides a form of stability in a world that is generally unsettling and never fully explicable.

Lear writes that if the structure of the polis is studied, the structure of the "group psyche writ large" is revealed. For a social characteristic of the polis to be "acceptable," the "enduring commitment"²¹¹ of the members of the polis is required. Without that commitment, the polis (or those elements of the polis without commitment) as constituted would die. In other words, the social institutions in the polis, institutions such as education, corporations, medicine, law and art, generally reflect the interests of the polis and rely on the long-term commitment of the polis members. Lear writes, "These institutions are artifacts and they help to constitute a social world, a polis, in which we locate ourselves."²¹² The narratives that animate an institution (including schools) are usually older and larger than any groups or individuals within the institution, exert a powerful influence in shaping the people employed and served by the institution, and are difficult, slow or nearly impossible to change.²¹³ Additionally, Smith states, "Narratives operate at many levels and in many layers." He continues,

Peoples' lives are also always constituted and guided by smaller sometimes autobiographical narratives of personal existence and experience. Narratives not only provide "big picture" frameworks of life but likewise help to construct more specific and personal accounts and

²⁰⁹ Smith, *Moral Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*, 78.

²¹⁰ Lear, *Open Minded: Working out the Logic of the Soul*, 66.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 67.

²¹³ Smith, *Moral Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* and David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

themes of meaning, purpose, and explanation in life.”²¹⁴ Thus peoples’ lives and identities are situated in multiple levels, which Smith writes, “helps to account for the pervasiveness and centrality of narratives in the composition, direction and interpretation of human life.”²¹⁵

Major societal narratives often tell the stories of political movements or of nations. For example, Wertsch²¹⁶ sites the “quest-for-freedom” narrative that informs and guides much of life in the United States. This narrative tells the story of our “forefathers” who came to this land to seek freedom from persecution, enduring much hardship along the way, for the promise of a better life, etc. Smith suggests, however, that some metanarratives can be much larger and “can plot *all* of reality and its meaning in stories.”²¹⁷ He cites the “Christian metanarrative” as an example.

A Major Metanarrative

I propose that in the polis that is the United States, in which the institution of “school” is embedded, the “psyche writ large” includes beliefs that are derived from larger metanarratives that sanction humiliation across all levels of society and that contribute to its persistence, particularly in schools. I further propose that several major beliefs that guide schooling in the United States are likely derived from the Christian metanarrative. I present and briefly discuss four of these major and often interrelated operational dominant beliefs that contribute significantly to the persistence of humiliation in schools. First, an abridged version of Smith’s description of the Christian metanarrative (as he see it) is in order. I know a similar story from my own background and the stories told in my family.

According to Smith, the Christian metanarrative holds that a loving and personal God “created the heavens and the earth,” made humans in his own image and set up a friendly, caring relationship with them. Unfortunately, however, humans chose to rebel against God, “the source of all life and happiness, plunging the world into all manner of evil, death, and spiritual blindness.” But God’s love and grace are more “powerful and determined than the sin of humanity,” so God kept his agreement through Israel to rescue the world “rather than allowing creation to reap death and utter destruction as the full and just consequence of sin.” Thus, God came to human life in the world in the body of Jesus Christ

²¹⁴ Smith, *Moral Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*, 75.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 76

²¹⁶ Wertsch, *Mind as Action*, 88.

²¹⁷ Smith, *Moral Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*, 69. Italics are Smith’s.

and took “those evil consequences” on himself. God “conquered death” through the unwarranted crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, thus repairing the relationship with humans and providing them a way to redeem themselves from their sinful ways. God calls all people to repent their sins through his Spirit and to walk in friendship with obedience to Him “in the church and in the world.” Those people who continue to deny God’s love will “get exactly what they want, the end of which is death.” Those who take up his call will become his people “forever in a new heaven and earth.” This metanarrative fits the characteristics described for a narrative and likely carries with it the messages from all the stories in the *Bible* as well.

It is not my purpose to provide an in-depth analysis of the Christian metanarrative for this inquiry. Even without an analysis, it is possible to see how one might extract some of the following messages or beliefs from this metanarrative: many people are sinful and evil; there are “good” people and there are not-so-good (bad) people; good people are Christian and bad people are not Christian (which includes many people in the multicultural United States); there are people in authority who know what’s best for those who are not in authority; the direction and rules that those in authority provide for those not in authority are “for their own good” to keep them from a worse fate; “good” people follow the directions or orders of those in authority; people who do what they are told to do are rewarded and the people who do not are punished; and people who rebel against those in authority are bad and deserve whatever bad things that happen to them, including death.

Four Dominant Societal Beliefs

Several of the elements of the foregoing ideas are present in the following four beliefs that I propose are derived from the Christian metanarrative and that contribute significantly to the persistence of humiliation in schooling.

1. To keep societal order (and prevent chaos and violence), people (especially those perceived by people in power as less “civilized” or self-disciplined, such as children and those not “white”²¹⁸) must be controlled by whatever justifiable means are necessary.

²¹⁸ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). Jacobson points out that the concept of what constitutes “whiteness” (i.e., “civilized”) has shifted many times over in the political history of the U. S. to suit those in power. However, at the “top” is always the Northern European “ideal” that has held power since the inception of the United States.

Watt writes, "One of the tragedies of our society is its emphasis on using discouragement and punishment as control methods, not only for children but for adults as well. For some reason, we have adopted the strange idea that the way to make people do better is through making them feel worse."²¹⁹ Order and control have been central to the purpose of public schools since their development in the 19th century and are still the overriding focus in most public schools.²²⁰ For those people primarily committed to order and control, concerns about human "emotions" or "feelings" are often minimized or ignored.

In the wake of well-publicized incidents of school violence in the past several years, many schools have adopted "get-tough" tactics that resemble those used to curb crime in adult society: metal detectors; "zero tolerance" policies for student perpetrators of violence (through suspension, expulsion or transfer); staff and student identification cards; searches of students and lockers; police personnel and search dogs on school grounds; fenced, "closed" schools (students locked in) and punitive rather than humanitarian developmental approaches taken to discipline issues, even for nonviolent, routine behavior issues.²²¹ Employment of these methods for controlling students, especially when used in combination, results in a violation of students' dignity and thus violates Margalit's definition of a "decent society," where institutions do not humiliate those who fall under its authority. This belief concerning the necessity of control to keep order also explains the implicit sanction of corporal punishment in schools in several states in the U.S., as well as in families, an issue that will be taken up later in this inquiry.

2. People who break rules must be publicly punished as examples to deter others and to assist offenders in improving their behavior so they can better fit into society.

While this belief is related to a concern for maintaining social order and control, its specific focus is on the positive value of using punishment for deterrence. Paley relates a

²¹⁹ L. Watt, "The Plight of Teachers: Shame and Affect Theory," *Behavior Online*, (2001), <http://www.behavior.net/cgi-bin/nph-display.cgi?MessageID=1660&Top=891&config=shameand affect&uid=nC1M8.user&new=0&adm=0>, 1.

²²⁰ See e.g., Jean A. Baker, "Are We Missing the Forest for the Trees? Considering the Social Context of School Violence," *Journal of School Psychology* 36, no. 1 (1998); Epp, "On Framing the Problem of Violence in School: A Response;" Alfie Kohn, *No Contest: The Case against Competition*, Revised ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992) and Noguera, "Preventing and Producing Violence: A Critical Analysis of Responses to School Violence."

²²¹ Noguera, "Preventing and Producing Violence: A Critical Analysis of Responses to School Violence;" Irwin Hyman and Donna C. Perone, "The Other Side of School Violence: Educator Policies and Practices that May Contribute to Student Misbehavior," *Journal of School Psychology* 36, no. 1 (1998).

conversation with preschool teacher Lillian Tully as Tully reveals her observations of punishment as a deterrent from her first teaching experience:

The public school I started teaching in was a punitive place—kids sent out in the hall, into a coat room, to the principal’s office. That’s the way problems were handled. You get on the teacher’s nerves—Bam! Out the door! Banishment. Believe me, that kind of place makes you go into hiding. It’s no place for telling stories. Or for learning.”²²²

The kind of punishment Tully describes qualifies as “the rejection of a person from the human commonwealth,” and “as the loss of basic control,” both qualities of humiliation²²³ perpetrated by a societal institution on those under its authority.

This same rejection operates at both the state and federal education levels in the United States, where school districts and states that have widely different circumstances are compared, ranked and judged on a number of educational factors, where the “good” or “best” schools (states) “win” and the “worst” or “bad” schools (states) and their communities, staffs and students “lose” in the designations and negative media attention they receive. When states and schools do not achieve the goals set for them at the federal level, one of the federal government’s “punishments” is to threaten to withhold funds (or to actually withhold them), further reducing the opportunity for the schools to achieve their goals. These tactics are supposed to motivate states, schools, administrators and teachers to work harder to bring their students up to one-size-fits-all “standards” to fit better into the society envisioned by those in power or in control.

3. Teachers (educators)/parents are naturally “good” people entrusted with the welfare of children and wouldn’t do anything that is not for children’s own good.

Miller’s theory of the “cycle of poisonous pedagogies,” a cycle that perpetuates humiliation from one generation to the next, and described in detail in Chapter 2, at least partially explains this third belief. She writes that a central social characteristic of many human societies is that children must be controlled to keep social order and for the convenience of the primary caregivers.²²⁴ To effect these goals, parents must use whatever

²²² Paley, *In Mrs. Tully’s Room: A Childcare Portrait*, 39.

²²³ Margalit, *The Decent Society* (N. Goldblum, Trans.), 3.

²²⁴ Miller, *For Your Own Good*, 4. The reasons for this belief vary, but the results are similar: children need to be controlled, often by whatever means necessary. Miller also states that if a child threatens an adult’s defense

means are necessary, “for their [children’s] own good,²²⁵ to salvage them from a poor future. Implied in this belief is the idea that parents and teachers are older and wiser (authority figures) who know how it is to live in adult society and therefore know better than children (students) what is best for their children’s (students’) own good. As it is assumed that these adults have the child’s best welfare uppermost in their minds, it doesn’t make sense to infants and children that their “care”-givers would do anything to harm them. When students come to school from abusive backgrounds, the narratives of their experience prepare them to believe that teachers, too, are authority figures who would not do anything that is not for their own good. These children often come to think of humiliating childrearing methods as “normal” and then later repeat these methods with their own children/students. Sugar points to numerous studies that show a correlation between the abuses one sustains as a child and the child becoming an abuser as an adult. He writes, “With the high incidence of physical and sexual abuse of girls and boys, it should be obvious that a high percentage of teachers (male and female) have been abused physically and sexually at an earlier time in life.”²²⁶

4. *“The world is a nasty place” and people/children “have to learn to handle it;”²²⁷ therefore, humiliation is a normal and natural part of being human and it is beneficial (albeit uncomfortable) because it “builds character,”²²⁸ “toughens people up” (“I lived through it and look at me—I turned out okay.”)²²⁹*

As far as the polis that is the U.S. is concerned, all one has to do is look at the newspaper or listen to the news for validation of the world as a nasty place. In New England, middle school teacher Phinney reports that in response to attempts to work with male teachers and administrators to deal with the issue of male students’ sexual harassment of female students in her school, she received little or no support and “they legitimized their lack of support for the girls by intimating that the world was a nasty place and these girls were going to have to learn to handle it sometime.”²³⁰ Multiple studies, as well as media and

mechanism that hides the repressed humiliation the adult experienced as a child, this can also lead to adult attempts to control the child.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Sugar, “Abuse and Neglect in Schools,” 490.

²²⁷ Phinney, “Sexual Harrassment: A Dynamic Element in the Lives of Middle School Girls and Teachers,” 8.

²²⁸ This statement was made by a secondary principal who related several personal stories of humiliation in school.

²²⁹ Miller suggests that a second version of this narrative with a different justification rooted in biblical origins is that people are born evil, in sin, and therefore will naturally suffer trials and tribulations. It’s part of being sinful and human.

²³⁰ Phinney, “Sexual Harrassment: A Dynamic Element in the Lives of Middle School Girls and Teachers,” 8.

personal reports, corroborate Phinney's findings that harassment, as well as other forms of humiliating behavior, are often "normalized" by school personnel as unfortunate, but inevitable.²³¹

This belief also helps to account for why most acts of humiliation are unreported. The reasoning might be that if humiliation is an expected part of life, why report it? Even as "data suggest that the majority of students witness or experience verbal maltreatment at some time,"²³² children who come from homes where they experience what Miller describes as "poisonous pedagogies" are more likely to see incidents where they are humiliated in school as their own fault,²³³ as "normal or natural," and to see teachers as they see their parents, as "good" people who would not do anything that is not for their own good, no matter how painful. Teachers' fear of retaliation may partially account for their reluctance to report abuse from students, parents or administrators.²³⁴ When teachers do report abuse, administrators often do not support them, and students who humiliate or abuse teachers are often not disciplined.

Additionally, if students who eventually become teachers experienced an "apprenticeship of observation"²³⁵ from their own schooling that normalized humiliating methods of "classroom management" or control, then when they teach they are probably more likely to see such teaching strategies as "normal" and to use such strategies in their classrooms, especially when they don't get quick results from other less punitive strategies.

The Interaction of Beliefs with Areas of School Concern

The foregoing beliefs help organize the way schools operate. I have chosen to highlight below four areas of concern within education that are impacted by these beliefs: education legislation and funding; the "structure" and policies of schools; the language used to discuss education and schools; and modeled and sanctioned behaviors in schooling.

²³¹ See e.g., Frank J. Barone, "Bullying in School: It Doesn't Have to Happen," *Phi Delta Kappan* 79, no. 1 (1997); Thomas D. Fields-Meyer, Diane Herbst, Angie Isidro Bresnahan, Lorna Grisby, et. al., "Too Cruel for School," *People* 60, no. 18 (2003); Hill, "Dealing with Bullies Is Subject of Forum;" Hyman, "The Other Side of School Violence: Educator Policies and Practices That May Contribute to Student Misbehavior;" Nancy Imperiale, "What's a Concerned Bystander to Do When Witnessing Public Shaming of Kids?" *Orlando Sentinel*, July 27 1993; and Sandra Mickens, "No Child Left Maligned," *Teacher's College Record*, April 19, 2003.

²³² Hyman, "The Other Side of School Violence: Educator Policies and Practices That May Contribute to Student Misbehavior," 7. Corroborated in studies reported by LeBlanc: LeBlanc, "The Outsiders."

²³³ Rothenberg, "Memories of Schooling."

²³⁴ Sugar, "Abuse and Neglect in Schools."

²³⁵ Dan C. Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

Education Legislation and Funding

Most educators and many parents know that neither the federal nor state governments can legislate policy sensitive enough to meet the specific needs of individual children in local schools. The National Education Association (NEA) also suggests that any law that implies that “one size fits all” punishes the many children who “do not wear the same size” (e., g., learn in the same ways, develop at the same rate, need the same resources).²³⁶ However, educational initiatives passed at federal and state levels in recent years suggest government officials are more concerned about control of the U. S. educational process than about honoring the complexities of educating children. Biddle, Sacks and McKenzie²³⁷ write that policies and legislation adopted and enforced at the federal level of government, designed to foster uniform higher, tougher “standards” are not only “wrongheaded”²³⁸ but “punish” those children the government standards are designed to help and ignore the much deeper longstanding problems of inadequate and unequal funding and rates of child poverty that affect the achievement of many children. Boyd makes the connection that “the use of state tests appears to be associated with increased administrative control over both the process and the content of instruction.”²³⁹

Emphasis on standardized testing as the primary means of measuring student achievement means that for many “low achieving” or “failing” schools, raising test scores and “teaching to the test” becomes paramount to avoid the many problems that can accompany negative labels applied to the school, the students, the teachers and the administrators through humiliating press coverage and application of sanctions such as the withholding of funds. Schools suffering negative labeling can incur problems that include lower property values (and thus fewer funds collected from school taxes), loss of students and loss of revenue to the school (not to mention low morale and lowered self-esteem for the

²³⁶ Alain Jehlen, "The Fix," *neatoday* 22, no. 7 (2004), 31.

²³⁷ Peter Sacks, "Predictable Losers in Testing Schemes," *School Administrator*, December (2000), http://www.aasa.org/publications/sa/2000_12/sacks.htm, Jamie McKenzie, *Gambling with the Children* (NoChildLeft.com, 2003 [cited 2004]), <http://nochildleft.com/2003/jancov03.html> and Bruce J. Biddle, "Foolishness, Dangerous Nonsense, and Real Correlates of State Differences in Achievement," *Phi Delta Kappan* 79 (1997).

²³⁸ McKenzie, *Gambling with the Children* ([cited]).

²³⁹ Victoria Boyd, "School Context: Bridge or Barrier to Change," (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1992), 5.

entire school population).²⁴⁰ On top of the punitive aura associated with the standardized tests, in what some parents and students view as a punishing move, many schools across the country are suspending or cutting activities and subjects not being tested such as music, physical education, creative writing, art, and in some cases, even social studies.²⁴¹ Jehlen reports one teacher's reaction in a Maryland school: "Teachers feel discouraged and the kids feel as if they're being punished."²⁴² In addition to the many negative and humiliating aspects of standardized testing, parents and students have lost control over their vital interests through the policies of their social institution, a situation Margalit would describe as humiliating.

Social context of school that contributes to humiliation

A plethora of research exists that expresses concern about how the social context of "school" contributes to humiliation.²⁴³ Nathanson pens a strong argument for how the structure of schools sets students up for humiliation:

"One of the reasons our schools have become a particular focus for shame related activity/danger is simply that education by its nature focuses our attention on what we don't know and does it while we are in the company of others. No one would attend school if s/he knew everything that was going to be taught. The process of learning always must involve sequences of interest in what is being taught, shame or pride at our efforts to master the material, and some form of ranking as in each class we see who learns most rapidly or thoroughly . . . the currently and potentially deadly medievalization of modern life turns not knowing into shame that is handled by Avoidance and Attack. Other behavior (making the classroom a place of conflict rather than sanctuary), and ranking becomes little more than an ancillary source of shame through invidious comparison to one's fellow students. The best

²⁴⁰ Michael Fletcher, "States Worry New Law Sets Schools up to Fail: Use of Test Scores Would Label Most Poor Performers," *Washington Post*, January 2, 2003; Jacques Steinberg, "Public Shaming: Rating System for Schools; Some States Are Finding That Humiliation Leads to Improvement," *The New York Times*, 1998.

²⁴¹ Jehlen, "The Fix."

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁴³ See e.g., Baker, "Are We Missing the Forest for the Trees?"; Epp, "On Framing the Problem of Violence in School: A Response"; Henkin, "Critical Literacy in Democratic Classrooms"; Kohn, *No Contest: The Case against Competition*; Nathanson, *The Role of Affect in Learning to Read - How Shame Exacerbates Reading Difficulties* ([cited]) and Noguera, "Preventing and Producing Violence: A Critical Analysis of Responses to School Violence."

among us increasingly risk attack rather than respectIf we're going to bring back the sense of pride in educational accomplishment, we've got to make it safer for kids to do well in school, just as we've got to make it equally safe for kids to do poorly."²⁴⁴

Epp argues that society is implicated in the creation of school violence (which can take many forms) in "all that we have traditionally accepted as schooling."²⁴⁵ Her long list includes "acceptance of violence as long as it is 'necessary,'" (for adults to use on children to control them, but not acceptable for children to use on adults or on one another), "lock-step conformity of the grading system and the personal violence perpetrated through a value grading of personal worth," 30 or more students of the same age confined with one adult for the same time period every day, students confined to desks with their physical activities limited, the assumption that "all students need the same things at the same time" and "the relentless subjugation to conformity combined with the threat of physical violence."²⁴⁶

Adults can often elect to get away from humiliating circumstances, but children in school are "trapped." Henkin writes, "The difference between students and adults . . . is that children often find themselves in situations over which they have no control, especially in school."²⁴⁷ Recalling that Margalit suggests that one's overall life conditions, such as poverty or homelessness, can be humiliating if they are "man-made,"²⁴⁸ schools might be considered a humiliating "man-made" life condition for students in the United States, where education is compulsory by law until students are 16 years of age.

If schools are embedded in a culture of humiliation and students have no viable option except to be there and immersed in it, then the society in which they live is not decent, according to Margalit's criteria. In an atmosphere that values order and control, most public schools are hierarchical in nature with all but a few students at the bottom of the heap, buried in preset conditions in which they have little or no control over their lives. Students have limited or no opportunities to affect their schedules, curriculum, teacher selection,

²⁴⁴ Nathanson, *The Role of Affect in Learning to Read - How Shame Exacerbates Reading Difficulties* ([cited]), 10.

²⁴⁵ Epp, "On Framing the Problem of Violence in School: A Response," 1.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

²⁴⁷ Henkin, "Critical Literacy in Democratic Classrooms," 4.

²⁴⁸ Margalit, *The Decent Society* (N. Goldblum, Trans.), 128.

school operating procedures, rules, or discipline procedures.²⁴⁹ The expression of students' individual differences is shaped and constrained by the social context of the school, with the heaviest burden falling on students who are not represented by the dominant culture in the school.²⁵⁰ Epp and Watkinson label this "systemic violence" and include "exclusionary practices, overly competitive learning environments, toleration of abuse, school disciplinary policies rooted in exclusion and punishment and discriminatory guidance practices."²⁵¹

Language and Schools

The four dominant cultural beliefs suggested earlier enable much of the demeaning, humiliating language of "failure" that is used inside and outside of schools in regard to educators, students and schools. For example, under pressure from the federal government for higher standards and high stakes testing, states are embracing the language of public shaming as a method of getting schools to improve,²⁵² punishing school districts by publishing their names, and threatening such things as diminished funds and loss of school autonomy. The narrative that often results in such schools is that "we are inadequate" (or worse). Teacher educator Elison reports, "Teachers are being shamed!!! On any given day in this country articles are being published about how the educational system is failing and the finger is often pointed at the teachers. 'Let's rub your nose in it until you come around.'"²⁵³ Punitive measures await some students as well if they do not pass the required tests, as in some states either their diploma or their driver's license, potential "passports" to employment, will be withheld.

We are surrounded by language of humiliation in regard to schools in the U.S. culture. Three headlines demonstrate the language used by public officials and the media when they refer to schools: "Public Shaming: Rating System for Schools; Some States Are

²⁴⁹ Al-Jardini, "Kids in Schools"; Baker, "Are We Missing the Forest for the Trees?"; Epp, "On Framing the Problem of Violence in School: A Response"; Sidorkin, *Learning Relations: Impure Education, Deschooled Schools, & Dialogue with Evil*, and Alexander M. Sidorkin, *Beyond Discourse: Education, the Self, and Dialogue* (New York: State University of New York, 1999).

²⁵⁰ Baker, "Are We Missing the Forest for the Trees?"

²⁵¹ In Hyman, "The Other Side of School Violence: Educator Policies and Practices That May Contribute to Student Misbehavior," 7.

²⁵² Steinberg, "Public Shaming: Rating System for Schools; Some States Are Finding That Humiliation Leads to Improvement."

²⁵³ Jeff Elison, "The Plight of Teachers". Shame and Affect Theory (Behavior Online, 2000 [cited 2003]); <http://www.behavior.net/cgi-bin/hph-display.cgi?MessageID=891&Top=833&config=shameand affect&uid=nC1M8.user&new=0&adm=0, 1>.

Finding That Humiliation Leads to Improvement;”²⁵⁴ “Predictable Losers in Testing Schemes;”²⁵⁵ and “States Worry New Law Sets Schools Up to Fail.”²⁵⁶

Multiple national media articles reporting various forms of abuse that take place in schools (mostly of students) attest to the presence of humiliation in schools as “normal.” In a kind of “double-edged sword” effect, at the same time that these stories report humiliating events, the tenor of the content suggests that humiliation is a natural, accepted part of school and of the socio-cultural values in the U. S. For example, in an ironic discussion about language and schools in relation to laws, *Washington Post* columnist Jay Mathews admits that the language we use in discussing school achievement is problematic. He writes, “It is almost impossible to avoid using some derivation of the word “fail” when writing about the law. I have tried to do it and, well, failed.”²⁵⁷ He mentions that U. S. Education Department personnel referred to “failing schools” in their early discussions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, but dropped this language amidst public protests. In an ironic twist, Mathews then defends his own use of “failed” to refer to schools not meeting standards, leaving the reader feeling that we are “stuck” with language that humiliates.

The author of an article designed to raise awareness of bullying in schools for “Opposing Viewpoints,” a curriculum resource for schools and students who want to discuss significant current issues, writes, “Ask most parents to conjure up a schoolyard bully and they’ll remember the big kid who took other children’s lunch money or shoved them around when the teacher wasn’t looking—an *endurable if unpleasant part of growing up*.”²⁵⁸ Even as this writer disparages bullying, he normalizes it.

Behaviors Modeled and Sanctioned in Schooling

Bullying in various forms is a major and growing problem in public schools in the U. S.²⁵⁹ However, it is unlikely that programs developed and instituted to counter bullying will be effective until sanctioned bullying of children by adults is illegal. Currently, the U. S. has the distinction of being the only industrialized nation in the world that has not ratified

²⁵⁴Steinberg, “Public Shaming: Rating System for Schools: Some States Are Finding That Humiliation Leads to Improvement,” B7.

²⁵⁵Sacks, “Predictable Losers in Testing Schemes.”

²⁵⁶Fletcher, “States Worry New Law Sets Schools up to Fail: Use of Test Scores Would Label Most Poor Performers,” A01.

²⁵⁷Jay Mathews, *Learning to Live with No Child Left Behind*. (2004 [cited 2004]); <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A53833-2004Apr6>.

²⁵⁸Kiger, *School Bullies*, 1.

²⁵⁹See e.g., Barone, “Bullying in School”; John Hoover & Carole Miller, “Rituals of Humiliation and Exclusion,” *Reaching Today’s Youth* 3, no. 1 (1998) among many others.

the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, “a treaty which contains several provisions prohibiting the use of corporal punishment on children,”²⁶⁰ and the only industrialized nation in the world that does not have a federal law prohibiting corporal punishment in public schools.²⁶¹ Attesting to Miller’s contention that “poisonous pedagogies” are largely an unquestioned, accepted part of the societal ethic, corporal punishment is legal in schools in 22 of the 50 states in the U. S. and used liberally in such states as Mississippi and Alabama. The practice is also widely used in U.S. homes where 94% of children have been spanked by the age of four.²⁶²

Imbrogno comments, “Corporal punishment in American homes and schools is a well-entrenched tradition.”²⁶³ Although the reported use of corporal punishment has declined steadily in the U.S. over the last 20 years, and substantial evidence has emerged in recent years that hitting children has long-lasting, damaging effects on their physical and emotional development,²⁶⁴ the practice still has advocates who “point to the salutary effects corporal punishment is thought to have on discipline and order” and “insist that the deterrent value of corporal punishment is self-evident.”²⁶⁵

The lack of federal legislation prohibiting corporal punishment in U.S. schools (and in homes) is intertwined and consistent with national beliefs that essentially license humiliation through the use of deterrents to control children and to maintain social order. Corporal punishment constitutes humiliation. In addition to the physical pain children suffer, at the very least corporal punishment strips children of their dignity and causes them to feel rejected and outcast. Children learn what they live and if what is sanctioned and modeled through national and school narratives includes violence and humiliation to children through threats, name-calling and corporal punishment, all strategies that can be

²⁶⁰ Andre R. Imbrogno, “Corporal Punishment in America’s Public Schools and the U. N. Convention on the Rights of the Child: A Case for Nonratification,” *Journal of Law & Education* 29, no. 2 (2000), 1.

²⁶¹ Linda Zespy, “A Review of the Research on Corporal Punishment,” (Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN: Children’s Hospitals and Clinics, 2003), 2. Zespy cites Gershoff’s definition of corporal punishment, which is widely accepted as “the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain but not injury for the purposes of correction or control of the child’s behavior.”

²⁶² Murray A. Straus and Julie H. Stewart, “Corporal Punishment by American Parents: National Data on Prevalence, Chronicity, Severity and Duration, in Relation to Child and Family Characteristics,” *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 2, no. 2 (1999).

²⁶³ Imbrogno, “Corporal Punishment in America’s Public Schools and the U. N. Convention on the Rights of the Child: A Case for Nonratification,” 2.

²⁶⁴ Miller, *For Your Own Good*; Pery, “Altered Brain Development Following Global Neglect in Early Childhood and Zespy, “A Review of the Research on Corporal Punishment.”

²⁶⁵ Imbrogno, “Corporal Punishment in America’s Public Schools and the U. N. Convention on the Rights of the Child: A Case for Nonratification,” 2.

used by teachers, counselors and administrators in discipline procedures with students, the narratives that children live by will sanction violence as a solution to conflicts, a way to bring control, and humiliation will persist.

Two short teacher stories provide examples of the power of institutionalized narratives and beliefs to sanction humiliating behaviors and in these cases, to contribute to the persistence of humiliation in schools. Teachers seldom tell their humiliation stories publicly, according to Max Sugar,²⁶⁶ who found that teachers keep their stories to themselves, share them in psychotherapy or quietly with good friends. The first story, related to me by a former teaching colleague (Judy²⁶⁷) recognized for her excellent work with primary grade students, is about a young teacher (Kristi) in her school who seeks National Board Certification. Kristi humiliates her colleagues, her own students and those of other teachers by shouting at them and by pointing out their defects in front of other students, parents and teachers. In one incident, without warning, Kristi came into Judy's classroom and "launched a tirade" on Judy's students for a minor problem some of them caused in the hallway. Kristi departed abruptly, leaving Judy and her students stunned. Judy spent the next hour working through her students' feelings. A few days later another incident occurred when Kristi stopped a parent of one of Judy's students to point out Judy's "faults;" the parent reported the incident to Judy. Judy spoke to Kristi several times, "at first gently and then more directly," to no avail. Finally, in a series of frustrating attempts (documented letters and an appointment with the principal) to call attention to the situation, Judy's voice was "blown off" by the principal and ignored by the district superintendent. To Judy's knowledge, the issue has never been addressed and she's concerned that Kristi might actually earn National Board Certification (a "travesty of the honor") and worries even more about the many young children Kristi affects every day. In addition to the obvious issue of administrative sanction of humiliation by inaction on a teacher's humiliating behavior toward students and her colleagues, Judy is humiliated by not having her story heard.²⁶⁸

A second story, reported in *Tikkun* by teacher Joshua Grater, instantiates Alice Miller's argument that "poisonous pedagogies" cycle from one generation to the next. One afternoon, Grater, a Hebrew language teacher sensitive to the humiliations that students can

²⁶⁶Sugar, "Abuse and Neglect in Schools."

²⁶⁷ Pseudonyms are used in this story.

²⁶⁸ Hutchinson, *Students on the Margins: Education, Stories, Dignity*.

suffer in school, was writing an article for publication on how to bring kindness into schools. He noticed that it was time for his afternoon Hebrew language class and left his writing to go teach his class. As he arrived in the classroom, he was met with a loud verbal student altercation, and in his words, "I just started yelling, telling them all to sit down."²⁶⁹ Later that evening, Grater reflected on his inability to react in the moment with kindness with his own students and wrote, "My old habits, engrained in me from my own childhood, kicked in, and I punished rather than educated. It was in this moment that I realized just how hard it is to change the culture of a classroom."²⁷⁰ Grater's recognition of his inner conflict between his reasoned desires for schools suffused with kindness and his stored experiences from childhood that led him to seek control of his students might be an important step for him in breaking the cycle of poisonous pedagogies with his students.

A Summary

In the first four chapters of this inquiry, I have explored what constitutes humiliation; how humiliation is structured and how it functions in society and in the individual psyche; the characteristics, formation and structure of human narratives and metanarratives in the individual and in society; the roles of emotion and memory in individual narrative formation; and how the shared institutionalized metanarratives (and the beliefs derived from them) that are lodged in society contribute to the persistence of humiliation, particularly in schooling. I return now to the question that guided the thinking and research for this inquiry: If it is so painful and potentially formative in negative ways in human living and learning, why isn't humiliation a "front burner" concern, particularly in schools, where we presumably care about our children and where they learn from our example? From this inquiry, several observations might be made to help to answer this question.

If the experience of humiliation is like being cast out from one's support system (shorn from the herd), like having one's fears, foibles and weaknesses completely exposed, like having one's face ground into the dirt, then humiliation most certainly represents a serious threat to the survival of the psyche of the human organism. It makes sense that the biological mechanisms designed to protect the inner balance and survival of the human

²⁶⁹ Joshua Levine Grater, "Teaching Kindness," *Tikkun: A bimonthly Jewish & Interfaith Critique of Politics, Culture & Society*, May/June (2002),

<http://tikkun.org/magazine/index.cfm/actopm/tikkun/issue/tik0205/article/020514c.html>, 1.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

organism would assist by storing memories of these insults (personally experienced or witnessed) to be used for future warning. It is also logical that if humans experience multiple humiliations, that memories would collect in the brain (form neural pathways) into “scripts” for responses that protect and preserve the human organism (including the psyche) from such experiences in the future.

Further, if humiliation events are not discussed in ways that process and reduce the stress or threat to the human organism, it also follows that when a humiliation affect/emotion is triggered that the human might not know how to deal with it and will choose one of four commonly observed (and reported) actions to lessen the stress and defend against the danger: withdraw, attack others, attack “self” (take on the humiliation and “own” it) or avoid it by attempting to ignore it or mask it. Several of these protective scripts for action explain why humans might not appear to “see” their own and especially others’ humiliation. It is too threatening and painful for the organism to acknowledge, and yet, the stimulus that triggers the humiliation affect will cause humans to “relive” their narratives of such experiences, reinforcing the power of the negative affect.

And on a larger scale, in a relationship very similar to the one Miller²⁷¹ describes where the primary caregivers repeatedly humiliate their children and control and deny their children’s innate affects/emotions, when the institutional metanarratives that inform and guide the world in which humans reside promote, sanction, accept or ignore the threat humiliation poses to humans, then the humans will have no way to deal with the threat except to store vivid narrative memories to create protective affects and to react to ward it off in one of the “scripts” described by Nathanson in *The Compass of Shame*. When humans live in a culture where the prevalent societal narratives sanction humiliation as an acceptable characteristic, where human dignity is not honored, humans are more likely to have the need to defend against humiliation and in fact, to be humiliated.²⁷² They are also more likely to feel that “retaliation” for humiliations they have suffered are acceptable in a climate where humiliation is sanctioned, which perpetuates the “cycle” of humiliation about which Miller and Lindner write. In the dominant U. S. culture, the way that schools are structured, the language used to discuss schools, the humiliating behaviors that are modeled and permitted in schools, and the punitive ways that some educational policies and funding for schools are

²⁷¹ Miller, *For Your Own Good*.

²⁷² Nathanson, *The Role of Affect in Learning to Read - How Shame Exacerbates Reading Difficulties*.

handled are all supported by national narratives and beliefs that sanction and contribute to the normalization of humiliation. So it is in this narrative view of humiliation that humiliation persists in human life (including in schools), embedded in multiple and interactive ways in the narratives we live by—both individual narratives lodged in the memory and institutional metanarratives lodged in the “psyche writ large” of the polis.

As a teacher/practitioner, my inquiry cannot end with an argument that narratives play a significant role in the persistence of humiliation in schooling. The “bottom (and disturbing) line” is that humiliation currently remains a largely accepted and unquestioned, thus often unrecognized element in society and particularly in the education of our children. While the stated purpose of this inquiry is to understand why humiliation persists, despite the fact that humans deplore it, there lies an even deeper issue beneath my “burning question:” Why should we care about this? In other words, what is humanly at stake when humiliation is allowed to persist in schooling? This underlying question deserves focus, if for no other reason than to openly acknowledge what is “quiet as it’s kept,”²⁷³ what we are reluctant or unwilling to discuss—the effects, the cost—the impact—to humans when humiliation persists, particularly in schooling. In the next chapter, I undertake such a discussion.

²⁷³ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 5.

CHAPTER 5: WHAT IS HUMANLY AT STAKE: TWO INTERWOVEN PERSPECTIVES

In this chapter, I am interested in exploring what is humanly at stake when humiliation persists in schooling. Indirectly, in many ways, this question has already been answered in the process of this inquiry. Just as most people have humiliation stories from their days in school, and just as most people deplore humiliation and would go to great lengths to avoid it, so I suspect most people also know intuitively that there is *much* humanly at stake. However, one explanation for the persistence of humiliation, including all the reasons previously considered in this inquiry, is that it is a topic that is avoided and not openly discussed. Thus, “quiet as it’s kept,”²⁷⁴ in this chapter I address the human cost of persistent humiliation in schooling from two interwoven perspectives.

Similar to the structure of humiliation and the formation and structure of narratives, what is humanly at stake is also intersubjective, intrasubjective and interdependent. As individualistic as humans would like to believe they are in the polis that is the United States (a significant part of one of the dominant U.S. “freedom-independence” metanarratives, I would add), the human cannot be seen entirely apart from the environment in which they exist, especially in schooling where multicultural children are thrown together for a significant portion of their developmental years. Baker writes, “Schools are considered proximal contexts for children’s development because of the amount of time children spend there and their potential to influence children’s life courses. School contexts can exacerbate children’s risk factors or provide protective factors that promote adaptive adjustment.”²⁷⁵ Inextricably tied together are what is at stake for the individual human psyche in the persistence of humiliation and what is at stake for the individual within a schooling environment where humiliation persists. What is at stake in each will necessarily overlap in some respects. I am taking an eclectic approach to this discussion, as much to create in the reader a feeling of the importance of the stakes in allowing humiliation to persist in schooling as to provide empirical evidence. I draw on some literatures not directly related to schooling that add to the understanding of the stakes and that are nonetheless applicable to the school context.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Baker, “Are We Missing the Forest for the Trees?” 29.

First, I would like to clarify what I mean by “schooling.” Typically, when speaking of schooling, what comes to mind is public K-12 education, because outside of those parameters, choices can be and are made about preschool, private or independent K-12 schools and college, none of which is generally compulsory.²⁷⁶ However, “schooling” is a public institution in the United States (an artifact with its own narratives that define and direct it, independent of individuals within it), with Head Start at the “beginning” and public colleges and universities at the “end” of formal public schooling. Thus, this inquiry and the discussion about what is humanly at stake when humiliation persists, speak to all of these levels and educational settings, with heightened, but not exclusive concern for those schooling settings of young children and pre-teens, where the opportunity for harm or good is greatest in the developing human psyche.

Intrasubjective Humiliation in Schooling

A wealth of empirical and other research and writing exists from several disciplines to document or warn of the human cost of humiliation. Perry writes, “Childhood maltreatment has profound impact on the emotional, behavioral, cognitive, social and physical functioning of children.”²⁷⁷ Some of the well-documented internal effects of persistent humiliation for the individual include a long list of physical and psychological or behavioral problems. These include, but are not limited to: damage to the human psyche that ranges from moderate to extreme; irreparable brain damage that leads to many other physical and relational problems; the inability to concentrate and learn; memory problems; elevated defense mechanisms, including violence, to protect the “self;” anxiety and preoccupation with safety at the expense of learning and creativity; a loss of self-esteem and engagement with living; damaged/diminished social relationships or a loss of ability to form affiliative relationships at all.²⁷⁸ According to Hartling, experiences of shame and humiliation can “disrupt our ability to initiate and participate in the relationships that help us to grow.”²⁷⁹

To take up a familiar example, I want to consider for a moment what is at stake for Pecola Breedlove in an environment where humiliation is sanctioned or ignored. Jonathan

²⁷⁶ There may be some exceptions, instances where programs such as Head Start are required for children because of a tie to other programs benefiting parental training or employment.

²⁷⁷ Bruce D. Perry, *The Neuroarcheology of Childhood Maltreatment: The Neurodevelopmental Costs of Adverse Childhood Events*, ed. B. Geffner, K. Franey, and R. Falconer, *The Cost of Child Maltreatment: Who Pays? We All Do* (San Diego: Family Violence and Sexual Assault Institute, Haworth Press, 2001), 1.

²⁷⁸ This list is by no means exhaustive.

²⁷⁹ Linda M. Hartling, Wendy Rosen, Maureen Walker and Judith V. Jordan, “Shame and Humiliation: From Isolation to Relational Transformation,” in *Work in Progress* (Wellesley, MA: 2000).

Lear suggests, "It is possible for the infant that grows up in an unresponsive environment to develop a distorted image of who he is and who he might be." Lear elaborates, "An 'I' must be able to distinguish fantasy from reality," "must be able to perceive itself as part of the world and to be able to do this, the I must split itself off from fantasied-representations."²⁸⁰ As the I is constituted from interactions with the world around itself, the I becomes what it takes the world to be. Lear writes, "Identification is . . . a psychological act . . . I do not reflect the world, I devour it. The world I take in and recreate on the intrapsychic stage is thus not the world as it is in itself, but the world as it has been psychologically metabolized by me."²⁸¹ In other words, much of what I devour from the world around me, I become.

To consider Pecola in Lear's terms, she metabolizes an unloving world; a world that considers her ugly and that does not recognize her. We know that she is aware of other worlds (fantasied representations) that are different from hers—e.g., the world of valued, beautiful, blue-eyed, blonde haired girls—and we also know that in wishing for blue eyes, she hopes to change herself and her world. However, Pecola's experiences reinforce the unloving world she sees. At one point in the story, she is harassed by a group of black boys at school who take out "their contempt for their own blackness"²⁸² on Pecola. Pecola dissolves in this interaction, withdrawing, unable to protect herself. Claudia reports, "Pecola edged around the circle crying. She had dropped her notebook and covered her eyes with her hands."²⁸³ Pecola identifies with the ugliness others have projected onto her and she is unable to fend it off alone. Ultimately, the world Pecola metabolizes becomes too unbearable and she slips into the world of fantasy. While the example of Pecola is extreme, in some ways it is not unlike the humiliation sustained by many young girls, young women and a few young men whose bodies do not conform to the dominant cultural narratives for beauty. The roots of children and teens' eating disorders partially lie in these humiliations.

The combination of recent explorations in neurobiology, exemplified in the work of researcher-practitioner Bruce Perry,²⁸⁴ provides fresh insights for thinking about the workings of humiliation in human formation and human relations, especially in what happens physiologically and psychologically to children who suppress the outrage and anger

²⁸⁰ Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis*, 167.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁸² Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 65.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁸⁴ Perry, "Incubated in Terror: Neurodevelopmental Factors in the 'Cycle of Violence'."

sustained from emotional and physical abuse in early care-giving experiences. Perry's research into the growth and change in the development of the brain, particularly in infancy and childhood, validates research from the early 1970's, when James Prescott,²⁸⁵ a scientist with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, conducted studies that documented the adverse affects sustained by infant monkeys deprived of nurturing or "mother love." Some of the possible negative affects included brain abnormalities that could cause depression, violent behaviors and even death. Perry's work shows that physical and emotional abuse in the first few years of a child's life can cause severe abnormalities, including lesions, in areas of the brain that control emotions such as "love." Perry states,

Maltreatment of a child will always result in some loss of that child's potential and often can result in such impaired development that the child will develop severe problems such as pervasive anxiety, depression, substance abuse and dependence, school failure, vulnerability to future abuse, violent sociopathy, or criminality. Abused children absorb the pain and either pass it on to others in a destructive way (e.g., violence) or keep it and let it eat at themselves like a cancer.²⁸⁶

Perry comments, "Children are not resilient, children are malleable."²⁸⁷ In other words, children do not "bounce back" from repeated humiliations or from living in an environment where they frequently witness humiliating events; rather, they are shaped or formed by these events. "Violence," Perry writes, "alters the developing child," and "experience in early life determines core neurobiology."²⁸⁸

Turning once again to characters in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, while we can't see inside the brains of either Cholly or Pecola, each of them exemplifies aspects of Perry's findings. We can guess that Cholly is not able to actualize his potential partly because he becomes dependent on alcohol (substance abuse and dependence) and passes the pain of his childhood on to others through violence and criminal acts (killing and rape). Pecola is most likely not a candidate for the proliferation of violence on others in the future because she keeps her pain inside as Perry suggests and lets it "eat at her like a cancer." Pecola hides behind her

²⁸⁵ Time-Life, "Rock a Bye Baby: A Time-Life Documentary," (United States: 1970).

²⁸⁶ Perry, "Altered Brain Development Following Global Neglect in Early Childhood."

²⁸⁷ Perry, "Incubated in Terror: Neurodevelopmental Factors in the 'Cycle of Violence'," 124.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 124-125.

mask of ugliness and lives in a fantasy world where she imagines that she has the blue eyes that make her acceptable to others, as well as to herself. Morrison's Claudia reports, "the damage done was total," Pecola "stepped over into madness."²⁸⁹ Claudia tells us that Pecola is regularly seen pacing the streets, her head jerking rhythmically, and her arms like wings beating the air as if in a futile attempt to fly. Pecola's violence is directed inwardly onto herself.

Vivian Paley notes another perspective with which we can add to the explanation of what is happening to Pecola. Paley writes about the experiences of black preschool director Lillian Tully who states that children go into hiding in an atmosphere of fear or ridicule. A place that is punishing is scary and makes children want to disappear. Recall that Pecola hid behind her ugliness, "concealed, veiled, eclipsed—peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom, and then only to yearn for the return of her mask."²⁹⁰ Tully adds that a punishing place is also not a place for learning.

hooks might interpret the many incidents where Pecola is not seen (by teachers, by classmates, by Yacobowski) or is harassed (boys in the school yard), as incidents where, "Psychic wounds [are] inflicted by racist aggression."²⁹¹ hooks observes that this "is the breeding ground for a psychology of victimhood wherein learned helplessness, uncontrollable rage, and/or feelings of overwhelming powerlessness and despair abound in the psyches of black folks," and "are not attended to in ways that empower and promote holistic states of well-being."²⁹² In other words, there are deleterious effects on the human who is humiliated through rejection or nonrecognition. Without a "self" that is formed by others' recognition that one exists and has worth, a human cannot develop agency.

Paley addresses rejection of children when at school. Of early childhood rejection, Paley writes that it is "the forerunner of all the rejections to come," and that once alone at school, children are very vulnerable.²⁹³ Children who are excluded by other children from play don't learn as well as children who are not excluded, and "might become too sad to pay attention."²⁹⁴ In a study of students in grades 9-12, Garbarino and deLara report that the greatest fear of students is rejection. Students' need for acceptance "runs so deep" that they

²⁸⁹ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 206.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁹¹ hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, 137.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ Paley, *You Can't Say You Can't Play*, 27.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

will do whatever they need to do to get it.”²⁹⁵ They write, “Most human beings will pay any price to belong.”²⁹⁶

Returning to learning difficulties, if students are focused on protecting themselves from the painful effects of humiliating practices that take place and that are often tacitly sanctioned in schools, their attention and interest in learning will be diminished and they may have difficulty learning in school.²⁹⁷ Zambo and Brem write, “When self-preservation is at stake, a student’s thinking focuses on short-term solutions instead of long-term goals.”²⁹⁸ Ingleton writes, “Emotion is seen to be constitutive of the activity of learning.”²⁹⁹ “Emotion plays a powerful role in learning in any subject, at any age and ability level, and for any learner.”³⁰⁰ She continues, “In learning, one works hard at minimizing risk, or avoiding risk to shame and the lowering of self-esteem.”³⁰¹ When the atmosphere in a classroom causes students to feel anxious about their ability to take part in a discussion or to succeed at a task, they may “self-handicap,” that is, not do well or not even try in order to counter the effect of possible humiliation.³⁰²

Intersubjective Humiliation in Schooling

The stakes for humans intersubjectively in persistent humiliation are clearly high. Internally, humans are exposed to the development of all manner of unhealthy physical and mental problems in environments where humiliation is promoted, sanctioned, ignored or unrecognized. These stakes magnify and multiply when we consider what is at stake within a schooling environment (intersubjective) where humiliation exists. Therefore, I will go directly to the heart of the matter of what is at stake to make a strong statement. I propose that humiliation is immoral, indecent (Margalit) and undemocratic and that our children and our future as a democratic society are at stake. In schooling environments of persistent humiliation, as a society we risk the loss of the potential of our children as human beings and all that might mean to their futures and to the future of society. Goldman and Coleman

²⁹⁵ James Garbarino and Ellen deLara, “Words Can Hurt Forever,” *Educational Leadership* 60, no. 6 (2003), 18.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ Lorraine B. Wallach, “Violence and Young Children’s Development,” (Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 1994), 3.

²⁹⁸ Debby Zambo and Sarah K. Brem, “Emotion and Cognition in Students Who Struggle to Read: New Insights and Ideas,” *Reading Psychology* 25 (2004), 194.

²⁹⁹ Christine Ingleton, “Emotion in Learning: A Neglected Dynamic,” in *HERDSA Annual International Conference* (Melbourne, Australia: 1999), 9.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² *Ibid.*

suggest that humiliation is moral issue.³⁰³ They write, “Humiliation can be characterized as a moral emotion. Moral emotions are those that are considered to motivate ethical behavior toward others.”³⁰⁴ While some emotions like sympathy and compassion are moral in a positive sense and motivate positive ethical treatment such as helping behaviors, other emotions like humiliation are moral in a negative sense and motivate aggression or violence.³⁰⁵ Next, I contend that humiliation in schooling is basically undemocratic. There can be no real democracy with humiliation. It is at odds with the ideals that underpin the existence of our country and supposedly our education system. The presence of persistent humiliation in the institution of schooling in the United States violates equality, dignity, and respect for each individual, thereby qualifying our society as “indecent” (recall Margalit). Finally, if humiliation in schooling is not addressed, it is possible that the future of civilized society is also at stake.

Children’s Potential

Teicher comments, “Society reaps what it sows in the way it nurtures its children.”³⁰⁶ If we do not see children as our most important resource for the future, worthy of our best time, effort and resources, we are undermining both their future and our own. Perry writes, “Past and present, our society dramatically undervalues children, despite the claims that ‘we love children’.”³⁰⁷ As evidence presented in Chapter 4 demonstrates, we undermine and humiliate our children and our schools in our national school policies that set standards without providing adequate funding to help schools meet those standards. Policy makers that direct schooling and set funding are as responsible for the environment in which the schooling of the nation’s children takes place, as are teachers, other school personnel and parents.

As a society we let our children down when we model or ignore humiliating behaviors, each of which perpetuates the cycle of violence in their lives and in our society. Perry writes that children do not feel safe in environments where adults do not intervene in

³⁰³ Jennifer S. Goldman and Peter T. Coleman, “How Humiliation Fuels Intractable Conflict: The Effects of Emotional Roles on Recall and Reactions to Conflictual Encounters,” (Teachers College, Columbia University, 2004).

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁶ Martin H. Teicher, “The Neurobiology of Child Abuse,” *Scientific American*, March (2002), 75.

³⁰⁷ Perry, “Incubated in Terror: Neurodevelopmental Factors in the ‘Cycle of Violence,’” 137.

humiliating events,³⁰⁸ and that children benefit from the presence of a stable adult when they have been exposed to violence.³⁰⁹ Epp and Watkinson suggest what happens when we do not “own” and openly discuss school violence (which includes humiliation):

School violence is an important component of the daily lives of children in schools. . . It affects where they walk, how they dress, where they go and who their friends are. As long as teachers treat violence at arms’ length, as something that is someone else’s problem, they will continue to neglect the opportunity to intervene in a crucial aspect of the children’s lives. By ignoring school violence, the name-calling, the shoving, the fighting, the harassment, they are condoning it. Children see teachers walking by, pretending not to notice, and they learn that the way we treat others, the way we interact on the street or in the playground, is nobody’s business but our own. Teachers must talk about violence, they must recognize it, examine it, dissect it, and let children see and understand its secrets and its sources. Without this examination it remains an ugly secret that society cannot understand or control.³¹⁰

Further, in prioritizing “one-size-fits-all testing” to a diverse population of schoolchildren and then punishing them and their schools through a ranking system that identifies “winners” and losers,” we are encouraging the persistence of humiliation. When students “become” their grades and test scores more than their social development and our relationships with them, we humiliate them. Classrooms where children are “controlled” and “managed” and their voices are not valued create a potentially humiliating environment where children are more likely to be vulnerable to humiliation.

These comments represent only a fragment of the ways in which we humiliate our children in schooling, where they spend a great proportion of their developmental years in compulsory attendance. We owe them a far better and more thoughtful effort than we currently provide so that their intrasubjective narratives of school and relationships are ones

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Perry, *The Neuroarcheology of Childhood Maltreatment: The Neurodevelopmental Costs of Adverse Childhood Events*, 135.

³¹⁰ Juanita Ross Epp and Ailsa M. Watkinson, eds., *Systemic Violence in Education: Promise Broken*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 193.

of recognition, care and concern for their well-being, growth and dignity. For the institution of school in the United States to be “decent,” it cannot sanction or tolerate humiliation anywhere in its environs.

Morality

We have a moral responsibility to intercede in humiliation when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed by all member nations of the United Nations, states in Article 1: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”³¹¹ Humiliation is often an expression of the intolerance of difference, not of brotherhood. A significant underlying trigger or stimulus for humans in humiliation is the fear of “difference.” Biologically, it makes sense that the human organism is triggered to sense and react to perceived “threats” when encountering unfamiliar sources. For example, when a young child sees a person who looks “different” from her, it is not unusual for her to comment, point and ask questions. She might even be afraid. If she is relatively young and separated from caregivers, she will probably seek them out for safety. If she is with an adult who is also threatened by difference, a negative judgment may be made and be passed to the child that will influence the child’s future thinking about differences. If she is with an understanding adult, the threat can be reduced as she is helped to understand differences and accept them as a reality.

For example, I remember when I first saw a person my age in a wheelchair. I was about six or seven years old and I felt very anxious, although I don’t remember now what might have gone through my head. My mother explained as much as I could ingest about polio and reduced the threat a good deal by telling me that the medicine I had recently taken at the doctor would keep that from happening to me. Once my feeling of safety increased, my mother explained that Mary Ann was no different from me except that she had to live her life in a wheelchair, that she didn’t want me to feel sorry for her and that she loved flowers and cats and friends (things I liked, too). My mother stressed the latter because she said people often make mistakes in thinking about people who live their lives in ways that seem “different” and leave them alone or make fun of them, when in fact, they are human beings who need the same things all humans do—love, attention and respect. I must have been developmentally ready for this “lesson” because I remember it vividly.

³¹¹ U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

A second and similar memory that I have took place in my second grade classroom (the one I discussed to open this inquiry, where the teacher fostered creativity in a collaborative environment), when I was seven. The teacher's two children were students in our class. Her daughter was a second grader like the rest of the students. Her son, however, was considerably older, though very small for his age, and had several severe disabilities that interfered with his learning and his participation in the normal activities in the classroom. Over the course of several months, as we could absorb the information, the teacher helped us to understand John's³¹² unique needs and our role in making him part of the class activities. This rich experience taught me social and life skills I never encountered again in the same way in my K-12 education.

I tell these stories because it reminds me of Memmi, who discusses racism (read "intolerance of difference" and often "humiliation") and why we need to resist it. He writes, Health is fragile, and death is always in the offing, yet we struggle to keep ourselves in good health. The struggle against racism is the condition of our collective social health. It encompasses the fundamental moral discussions of love or hate of the other, of justice or injustice, equality or oppression, or, in a word, one's very humanity. The essence of morality is respect for the other. Our honor as humans will be to construct a more human world. In the meanwhile, so that even animals may some day find a world of peace and security, let us act so that no one is any longer treated like a beast.³¹³

When we allow children to reject one another in school, we are allowing them to treat one another like objects, like "beasts," rather than helping them to learn to have respect for one another. When students are seen as receptacles for information to prepare for "tests" and numbers on test scores rather than as unique, developing individuals, we dehumanize them and rob them of the opportunity to participate actively in their own futures. When we "remove" students from class or from school for suspension, we are contributing to their humiliation, to their being "shorn from the herd" as though they were objects. When school personnel gossip about students in the staff workroom or lunchroom, they not only violate the laws that demand respect for students' privacy (laws they vehemently defend for

³¹² A pseudonym.

³¹³ Memmi, *Racism*, 160-161.

themselves, but deny to their students), but they also violate students' dignity. The ways that school personnel treat one another in school relationships serve as a model of acceptable behavior for students. Boyd contends, "The relationship between teachers and the principal sets the standard for all other relationships in the school."³¹⁴ If adult relationships don't model respect, we perpetuate vulnerability to humiliation for everyone in the school community. Returning to the morality of our treatment of one another, Margalit writes, "Humiliation in the strong sense, by its very definition, hurts the victim's dignity, and the attribute of human dignity is, in my division of labor, the concern of morality."³¹⁵

Democracy

I suggest that humiliation is inherently undemocratic and inconsistent with the equality and respect promised in the democratic ideals in the United States. Paley writes about the rejection children suffer in school and the role of school personnel in allowing it to happen: "The subject of rejection touches a universal sensitivity."³¹⁶ Grounded in her observations of young children over many years of teaching and in her own experiences as a child, Paley observes "how casually one child determines the fate of another" and is allowed by others, including teachers and other adults, to do so.³¹⁷ She writes that by kindergarten, "certain children will have the right to limit the social experience of their classmates"³¹⁸ Her concerns are the dynamics of "rejection" (the loneliness of the outsider) and the effects of rejection on both those who are rejected and those who reject others (the confident ones who "own the secrets to life,"³¹⁹ who are awarded "superiority in advance"³²⁰). Paley asserts, "We still allow children to build domains of exclusivity in classrooms and on playgrounds."³²¹

I will take up the discussion of the incompatibility of democracy with humiliation in schooling in Chapter 6. There I engage in an exploration of the attributes of being democratic and propose several democratic pedagogies that serve as a form of counter-narratives to resist narratives of humiliation in schooling.

³¹⁴ Boyd, "School Context: Bridge or Barrier to Change," 3.

³¹⁵ Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, 86.

³¹⁶ Paley, *You Can't Say You Can't Play*, 34.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

³²⁰ Phillips, *Equals*.

³²¹ Paley, *You Can't Say You Can't Play*, 22.

Our Future as a Society

Neuroscientist and psychologist Bruce Perry issues a strong statement about what is at stake for human society if children are exposed to repeated incidents of violence in any of many forms, whether as victims or as witnesses. Perry alludes to recent neurobiological research that demonstrates the high cost of violence on the developing minds of children. He warns that as humans we put our future as a “humane” (and perhaps “decent” in Margalit’s terms) society in peril if we continue to ignore the effects of violence. Humiliation and violence are often intertwined. Gilligan and others have made a direct connection between humiliation and the kinds of violence to which Perry refers.³²² Perry’s statement is directly applicable to the institution of school where the development of children is the primary concern:

Our problem-solvers must understand the indelible relationship between early life experiences and cognitive, social, emotional, and physical health. Providing enriching cognitive, emotional, social and physical experiences in childhood could transform our culture. . . .The problems related to violence are complex and they have a complex impact on our society. Yet there are solutions to these problems. The choice to find solutions is up to us. If we choose, we have some control of our future. If we, as a society, continue to ignore the laws of biology, and the inevitable neurodevelopmental consequences of chronic exposure to violence in childhood, our potential as a humane society will be unrealized. . . .Parents, caregivers, professionals, public officials and policy makers do have the capacity to make decisions that will increase or decrease violence in our children’s lives. Hopefully, an appreciation of the devastating impact of violence on the developing child will help all of us make the good decisions and difficult choices

³²² See e.g., Sugar, "Abuse and Neglect in Schools;" Murray A. Straus and Carrie L. Yodanis, "Corporal Punishment in Adolescence and Physical Assaults on Spouses in Later Life: What Accounts for the Link?" *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58, no. 4 (1996) and Neil Altman, "Humiliation, Retaliation, and Violence," *Tikkun: A bimonthly Jewish & Interfaith Critique of Politics, Culture & Society* January/February (2004) for other evidence of this connection between humiliation and violence.

that will create a safer, more predictable and enriching world for children.³²³

Turning Point

Certainly humiliation and the democracy we aspire to and profess as individuals and as a nation are incompatible. It is probably also safe to say that humiliation and quality education are incompatible. It's difficult to think freely and to learn when one is protecting oneself from humiliation or depressed from its effects. Therefore, I would ask a new question: Is humiliation what we want for ourselves and especially for our children? What might life and humans be like if there were a conscientious commitment to relate to one another without humiliating one another? Might it be worth our time experimenting with relational means other than corporal punishment, police dogs, locker searches, metal detectors, put-downs and rejection? I contend that the time has come for all of us who have come to share in this social culture to rethink what place we want humiliation to have in our collective lives, especially in the education of our children, and what we might be able to accomplish with one another without it.

As long as we contribute to events that humiliate one another or allow ourselves to be humiliated without thinking or protesting, we perpetuate the story that humiliation is acceptable. Schools cannot be free of, nor can they influence, the cultural narratives of the larger structure of society within which they exist without conscious work by those working in schools to mitigate the pervasive existence of humiliation. When we tell narratives that bring awareness that humiliation is poisonous to human well-being, narratives that honor human dignity, and when we take actions to eliminate humiliating events in schools, an institution entrusted with the future of our children as well as the future of society—then we might stimulate a rethinking process about humiliation in the larger culture. It is to this effort that the final chapter is devoted, to consider how we might rewrite the narratives in schools that encourage, justify or support humiliation and to think about democratic pedagogies available for use in schools to resist humiliation.

³²³ Perry, *The Neuroarcheology of Childhood Maltreatment: The Neurodevelopmental Costs of Adverse Childhood Events*, 238.

CHAPTER 6: THE POWER OF COUNTER-NARRATIVES IN THE RESISTANCE OF HUMILIATION IN SCHOOL CULTURES

*“You cannot stop a hemorrhage with Band-Aids, however many you apply;
for a hemorrhage, you need major surgery.”³²⁴*

Narratives have been shown to be powerful organizers of human life and difficult, slow or nearly impossible to change.³²⁵ “Master” narratives in dominant social-political-cultural institutions are often pervasive, unquestioned and usually older and larger than any groups or individuals within the institution. Human beings are deeply embedded in these social cultural narratives on multiple levels and barely (if at all) aware of their existence or of the influence such narratives exert in human thinking and actions on a daily basis. It is no surprise, then, that narratives can work in people’s lives in ways that contribute to the *persistence* of humiliation. However, an experience with my younger brother causes me to wonder whether narratives also might consciously be used to write alternative stories that have the potential to *resist* dominant narratives that sanction humiliation. Let me begin with my brother’s story.

Paul’s Story

Progressively abetted first by my parents and grandparents, then by my extended family, friends, neighbors and finally “strangers,” I jealously and ignorantly saddled my toddler brother Paul with an unsavory nickname that stuck until he decided to change it when he was eleven years old. While the nickname was “cute” when Paul was little and plump, it was not cute on a slightly overweight, passive boy facing entry into junior high school. Even as I became aware of his increasing discomfort and humiliation whenever I introduced him by the nickname “Chompie,” (shortened from “Chompie paddies” as a baby when Paul chewed on his hands to signal hunger), especially once he entered public school, I persisted in perpetuating his misery. Paul’s identity formed around his unflattering nickname as a friendly, chubby, non-athletic, sensitive boy overprotected by my parents and especially by my paternal grandmother. Four years older, I could be my parents’ “boy”—their high energy, clever, athletic star.

³²⁴ Gilligan, *Preventing Violence*, 10.

³²⁵ See e.g., Lear, *Open Minded: Working out the Logic of the Soul*; Smith, *Moral Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* and Tyack, *Tinkering toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform*.

Finally, in an independent and resolute demonstration of will during the summer between 6th and 7th grades, Paul resisted, “changing” his name, his image and the story he told himself and others about his identity. In a sense, he “recreated” himself. Those of us around him were dumfounded, disbelieving and impressed as we watched his self-selected metamorphosis. To assist us all in making this change, Paul would not answer to any name other than “Paul” (he sat stone faced) and could not be tempted by foods that would cause him to gain weight or that would add to his beginning facial blemishes. He voluntarily cut out his favorite foods—potato chips, peanut butter and cookies—and persevered through all manner of temptations. His new story that summer became, “My name is Paul, I don’t eat fattening food and my face is clear.” After a short period of chiding, most folks attempted to cooperate. I resisted, however, telling others and myself it was a game to see if I could catch him off guard. I persisted in using his nickname and tempting him with his favorite fattening snacks. Even as I recognized Paul’s discomfort, I continued to “tease” (humiliate) him, seeking to hold onto what I perceived as my threatened position in the family hierarchy by the “new” Paul. By the end of summer, a much thinner “Paul” entered junior high school with the respect of friends and family. His “coup” over me was complete that fall when he took a wrestling class that eventually landed me windless on my back, ending both his passive image and my physical and verbal taunting. I finally had to go along or be reprimanded by others for my insensitivity.

As a fifteen-year-old, I knew nothing of the natural inclination humans have for storing their experiences as narratives or of the important role these stories play in human formation and identity. Paul’s story serves as a powerful example of the use of a “counter-narrative” (a narrative or story that calls into question significant or all parts of an established, accepted narrative³²⁶) to shape (and reshape) identity. The new story Paul told of himself—as a self-determined, thin, clear-faced young man with a socially acceptable name—countered the established narrative (constructed and supported by those around him) that defined him for the first 11 years of his life.³²⁷ Changing one’s story, including one’s

³²⁶ The term “counter-narrative” is variously described (as well as variously punctuated), depending on the narrative that is being countered. The definition I have used above is a simplified synthesis of several definitions, hopefully reflective of the spirit of the purpose of counternarratives.

³²⁷ It has been pointed out by an astute observer that, ironically, Paul’s counter-narrative to his family’s narrative about him is in fact an effort to adopt a dominant mainstream metanarrative about “beauty.” Nonetheless, an extensive community that reached far beyond the immediate family supported the metanarrative that defined Paul for the first 12 years of his life.

image in the minds of others, is often no simple matter because to do so requires the cooperation of those with whom one's life is entwined. While as individuals we may feel we control the development of our own stories, in fact, the building of a narrative is a complex, socially constructed process; human narratives cannot be seen apart from the influences of the people and the social environment in which they are constructed. Parry writes,

No one ever fully becomes the author of her/his own story; any such assumption can only lead back into the illusions of control, individual autonomy, isolated selfhood, and single truth. The person goes forth instead to join with others in the universal human action of multiple authorship.³²⁸

It can be difficult or impossible for one to construct a “new” story of oneself without the support and acceptance of those on whom one depends for friendship and encouragement. Recall White and Epston³²⁹ who write, “When a problem-saturated story predominates, we are repeatedly invited into disappointment and misery. Given the natural conservative drifting that we are all subject to, it becomes increasingly difficult to liberate ourselves from habitually re-performing the same old problematic story.”³³⁰ Students who are repeatedly censored at school for behavior infractions frequently validate this scenario. They rarely have the opportunity to rewrite their narratives of themselves after their suspension because they return to the same community of people who identify them as “troublemakers,” where support for changing their identity would face stiff resistance among peers as well as school personnel.

For Paul, the narrative identity others had created for him gradually became an image he was no longer willing to passively accept. Rather than let the existing narrative continue to violate his preferred image of himself, Paul chose to construct a counter-narrative. Clearly, this was an important change for him to make for himself because he risked upsetting the equilibrium of the social community on which he was most dependent for support. Members of that community—particularly my grandmother and I—relied on parts of Paul's old narrative to define our own identities. Acceptance of Paul's counter-

³²⁸ Parry, 43.

³²⁹ White, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, x.

narrative by my grandmother, who thrived in her roles as rescuer and baker for Paul's sweet tooth, meant that she felt unneeded by her favorite grandchild. My cooperation with his new image meant that I had to give up my identity as "first son" at Paul's expense and rethink how to define myself favorably as a daughter in a household where sons were preferred. One could speculate that motivated by the price in ridicule and humiliation he anticipated paying from peers in junior high school with a name like "Chompie," Paul was willing to endure whatever resistance and temporary lack of cooperation he had to put up with from family and friends in order to successfully rewrite his story. He chose to count on our eventual understanding and support.

My first purpose in this chapter is to explore the potential of narratives, in the form of "counter-narratives," to resist humiliation. I will suggest later in this chapter that democratic pedagogies practiced consistently with students and staffs in schools are also an effective means to resist humiliation in schooling. However, as valuable as democratic pedagogies may be in sensitizing school personnel to identify and rethink their own and others' humiliating behaviors, it will take the use of multiple strategies "to liberate ourselves from habitually re-performing the same old problematic story"³³¹ that is fostered by the sanction of humiliation in human relations in the general culture in the United States and in schools in particular. Counter-narratives offer a powerful and viable strategy for creating awareness of humiliation and for supporting the rewriting of "master" narratives that encourage and normalize humiliating behaviors.

A first step to understanding the power of counter-narratives is to review briefly how narratives are constructed. Then I discuss why counter-narratives might be useful for resisting the forms of violence that tend to get "internalized" (that is, incorporated into the stories we tell ourselves – and others – about ourselves). To complete the first section of this chapter, I present criteria for recognizing counter-narratives.

Recalling Narrative Construction

In constructing narratives, people ascribe meaning to their experiences through a process that prioritizes which events and details from their lives to keep and which to "let go." Narratives "reflect" the perspectives of the people who construct them as they "select" or favor some actions, events and people from their lives to include in the narrative and

³³¹ White and Epston, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, x.

“deflect” other actions, events and people by letting them “fall away.”³³² It is important to note at this point that even though there are parts of peoples’ lived experiences that “fall away” and that are not storied or expressed, these parts of their lives can become important later in forming counter-narratives.

White and Epston call events not chosen for a narrative, “events that do not fit with the dominant evolving stories that we and others have about us,”³³³ which implies that what we do choose for our narratives is guided by and in line with what we believe and want others to believe about ourselves, as well as by what we perceive others to already believe about us. Humans shape their stories even as they are shaped *by* their stories. In Paul’s case, as is the case with many, if not most young children, his defining narrative was formed for him by others before he had the resources to influence it. The meanings people make from their lives and tell in their narratives about themselves help to form their beliefs, which direct their perceptions, thinking and actions. Humans “perform” the stories they come to believe about themselves. Recall Pecola Breedlove, whose mother Pauline defined Pecola as “ugly” shortly after Pecola’s birth. Pecola believed she was ugly and she “performed” that belief in her wish to be different, to have blue eyes.

The sociopolitical characteristics and constraints of the dominant culture narratives in the society within which individuals live influence the construction of peoples’ individual narratives. The dominant cultural narratives of institutions in peoples’ lives are powerful organizers and preservers of the collected experiences (past and present) and beliefs of those within the institutions, particularly the experiences and beliefs of those who have been or are most powerful or influential. These larger narratives affect the stories told by individuals living within their authority by dictating what is “accepted.”

Criteria for deciding the credibility of stories told within the dominant culture in the U. S. are socially constructed to “favor those who can present themselves in predictable, linear, “left-brain” consumer-efficient ways.”³³⁴ When these criteria are used by those in power to judge people’s value and abilities, those who do not “fit within the dominant culture . . . can easily be discounted, totalized and pathologized.”³³⁵ By the time Paul was 11, I’m guessing that he could see from some of his prior experiences that his nickname

³³² Wertsch, 91.

³³³ White and Epston, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, 11.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ Smith, ed., *Narrative Therapies with Children and Adolescents*, 6.

alone would be reason to be discounted in the larger culture. At this point he became uncomfortable with parts of his personal narrative and made a decision to “re-write” his story.

The Usefulness of Counter-narratives

The counter-narrative Paul constructed to revise his personal story about himself prior to his entry into junior high school suggests several reasons why counter-narratives are useful in resisting humiliation. New voices are empowered to speak in counter-narratives. Gergen asks us, “What alternative stories are removed from view?”³³⁶ He suggests that we make room for the expression of alternative voices “which may represent subcultures otherwise marginalized . . . [and which] can lead to substantially different evaluations of events.”³³⁷ The Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s represents the efforts of many marginalized subcultures (Blacks, women, Hispanics, the elderly, people with special needs, to name a few) in the United States to be heard and to rewrite the narratives that defined and confined them. On a smaller level, but no less important to him, Paul’s narrative, too, represents a “new voice” in shaping his own story.

Counter-narratives can provide individuals and groups a way to get “unstuck,” a way out of problem-saturated stories that oppress or humiliate them and that they may wish to leave behind. For individuals, whether they were born into or “given” their stories in childhood (as occurred for Paul), people often “outgrow” their stories; that is, discover that their stories don’t fit the way they would like to think about themselves. Parry and Doan write,

the experiences that bring individuals or families to therapy represent, in our view, a ‘wake-up call’—a message that the stories that have formed them and shaped their emotional reactions have reached their limit. Although these stories made sense to children dependent upon adults, they are no longer adequate to help the individuals handle present challenges effectively.³³⁸

³³⁶ Gergen, *The Saturated Self*, 232.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

³³⁸ Alan Parry and Robert E. Doan, *Story Re-Visions: Narrative Therapy in the Postmodern World* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994).

People often don't recognize that "the old story is finished"³³⁹ until they are in crisis. Parry and Doan note that in ancient times people routinely shed their formative childhood stories in elaborate tribal rituals, where the "limits of the childhood story were put to death."³⁴⁰ However, except in a few surviving tribes and some religious rituals, such in-depth sanctioned outlets aren't generally available for people today, save expensive therapy.

Counter-narratives allow the examination and comparison of alternative realities to taken-for-granted "mainstream" realities. In direct relation to the writing of counter-narratives, Maxine Greene writes about the function of art in opening the human mind to new ideas. She states, "[Art] can open new perspectives on what is assumed to be "reality," and defamiliarize what has become so familiar that it has stopped us from asking questions or protesting or taking action to repair."³⁴¹ People can become so embedded in social-political-cultural narratives that they lose sight of their own ability to affect and change their lived experiences.

Individuals or groups can create new realities for themselves when they construct and tell counter-narratives to divest themselves of damaging and oppressive master narratives. Freeman, Epston and Lobovits write,

The term narrative implies listening to and telling or retelling stories about people and the problems in their lives. In the face of serious and sometimes potentially deadly problems, the idea of hearing or telling stories may seem a trivial pursuit. It is hard to believe that conversations can shape new realities. But they do. . . . Language can shape events into narratives of hope.³⁴²

Compelling and positive changes can come about for groups as well as for individuals within the groups when new realities are constructed. For example, in the 1940's, 1950's and 1960's, the dominant narrative of Native North Americans was re-storied from a narrative of "a glorious past leading to a future of assimilation" to a new narrative of "the past as exploitation and the future as resurgence."³⁴³ The daily lives of Native Americans might not have changed dramatically at the time, but the new interpretation of their lives energized

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Maxine Greene, "Diversity and Inclusion: Toward a Curriculum for Human Beings," *Teachers College Record* 95 (1993).

³⁴² Freeman, *Playful Approaches to Serious Problems: Narrative Therapy with Children and Their Families*.

³⁴³ White and Epston, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, 10.

them to assert themselves in issues such as land reclamation and fishing rights. Over time, the rewritten narrative that helped Native Americans to see themselves in a more positive light has affected, but not entirely changed, the dominant cultural narrative about Native Americans as well.

Without narratives that include hope, people can have little reason to live. For example, research³⁴⁴ has shown that Native American youth (15 to 24 years of age) commit suicide at much higher rates than youth from other cultural heritages. The primary reasons cited center in their lack of hope that a meaningful future can grow from the circumstances of their daily existence, which includes poverty, low life expectancy, and unemployment. By helping people to focus on what they can do well, counter-narratives get people involved in their own lives in positive ways, build their confidence that they can change, and encourage them to abandon repeating their negative stories. Counter-narratives provide people a positive focus rather than a negative, self-destructive focus.

Criteria for Recognizing Counter-narratives

Counter-narratives can take many different forms, including but not restricted to, personal and group narratives (stories), poetry,³⁴⁵ art,³⁴⁶ music, theater, dance, and literature. Even in their various forms, however, most counter-narratives exhibit a few common characteristics that can be used as criteria for recognizing them:

1. Counter-narratives often represent new, seldom heard or marginalized voices. Therefore, the messages in such counter-narratives would come from folks speaking who seldom speak, who have not spoken before, or who are speaking in unprecedented ways. Critical theorists define counter-narratives as, "the little stories of those individuals and groups whose knowledge and histories have been marginalized, excluded, subjugated or forgotten in the telling of official narratives."³⁴⁷ Among many historical examples is the Japanese-American community effort to rewrite and seek reparations for the U. S. national narrative that resulted in many of their people being villainized and imprisoned and their

³⁴⁴ I attended a scholarly lecture on this subject and unfortunately have no notes for documentation, but it made an impression on me that I've never forgotten.

³⁴⁵ Veronica Gaylie, "Taking (a)Part: Poetic Counternarratives for Troubled Times," *Current Issues in Education* 5, no. 6 (2002).

³⁴⁶ Katonah Museum of Art, "Re/Righting History:Counter-Narratives in African-American Art," *Resource Library Magazine* 1999.

³⁴⁷ Michael Peters and Colin Lankshear, "Postmodern Counter-Narratives," in *Counter-Narratives: Cultural Studies and Critical Pedagogies in Postmodern Spaces*, ed. Henry Giroux, Colin Lankshear, Peter McLaren and Michael Peters (New York: Routledge, 1997).

property confiscated during World War II. Counter-narratives need not necessarily challenge national narratives. They can be located on local and personal levels as well—Paul’s narrative also represents a counter-narrative of someone whose story had not been included in the “official” narrative that described him.

2. Counter-narratives call into question or challenge assumptions and facts in established, accepted narratives. Such narratives seek to counter, disturb, interrupt, replace or modify structures, symbols and beliefs in preexisting cultural or institutional narratives. By exposing incidents and ideas that contradict the “mainstream” narratives, counter-narratives use the previously mentioned, “overlooked experiences that tell a different story.”³⁴⁸ In challenging established narratives, it is important that new stories be interesting, catch the attention of the intended audience and be related to what people already know.³⁴⁹ The work of White and Epston³⁵⁰ in narrative therapy suggests that counter-narratives must be stories of “literary merit,” worth listening to, as well developed, colorful and convincing” as the narratives they seek to replace. In a current example of such a counter-narrative, the counseling department at Cherry Hill High School East in New Jersey decided to turn the school ISS (in-school suspension) program on its head and take a new approach to working with students who are removed from class for breaking rules. Renaming their program “in-school *support*” and redecorating the ISS room using the Chinese art of spatial arrangement (Feng Shui), counselors have created a relaxed, respectful environment for students assigned there. A description of the environment presents a vision of a completely changed structure of typical institutional narratives about ISS, punitive counseling and “rule-breakers” in school:

At Cherry Hill, a wall of blue cloth-covered partitions forms a welcoming vestibule, and a waterfall/fountain at the doorway creates a quieting effect. The room contains a study area, couch, armchair, and lamps. Plants and artwork complete the scene. . . the counselor offers hot tea and granola bars, which help establish rapport.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ Freeman, Epston and Lobovits, *Playful Approaches to Serious Problems: Narrative Therapy with Children and Their Families*, 94-95.

³⁴⁹ J. A. Robinson and L. Hawpe, "Narrative Thinking as a Heuristic Process," in *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*, ed. Theodore Sarbin. (New York: Praeger, 1986), 116-117.

³⁵⁰ Epston, "A Proposal for Re-Authored Therapy: Rose's Revisioning of Her Life and a Commentary."

³⁵¹ Education Partnership Character, "In-School Support and Feng Shui" (2004 [cited April, 2005]), http://www.edsolution.org/Character_ed/files/cep_awards.cfm?c.

Students are guided to use self-reflection, and in individual and group counseling, “ethical values and proper behaviors”³⁵² are reinforced. The program has reduced recidivism by 75 percent with this new counter-narrative to typical punitive school “behavior-management” and counseling programs.

3. The language used in counter-narratives often employs descriptive or poetic language, is arranged in unique ways and is phrased in the subjunctive mood to allow for multiple perspectives and interpretations. The subjunctive mood expresses wishes, doubts, suppositions and conditions that are contrary to fact. White and Epston (1990) provide a thorough explanation of the advantages of “subjunctivizing language” in the construction of counter-narratives:

The narrative mode centers around linguistic practices that rely upon the subjunctive mood to create a world of implicit rather than explicit meanings, to broaden the field of possibilities through the ‘triggering of supposition,’ to install ‘multiple perspectives,’ and to engage ‘readers’ in unique performances of meaning. These linguistic practices bring an appreciation of complexity and of the subjectivity of experience. (81-82)

Freeman, Epston and Lobovits (1997) state that counter-narratives that include language expressing “threads of hope and positive meaning,” allow for multiple perspectives and “refreshing possibilities and potentials.” Davis (2002) suggests that a well-told story “is a creative process that implies certain connections, speculations, and emotional reactions but avoids spelling everything out, inviting the creative participation of the audience in bringing the narrative to life. (16) When the Native North Americans re-storied their narrative, they left “gaps” that allowed them and others to perform the “future as resurgence” in multiple and evolving directions.

4. In counter-narratives, people are actively involved in reorganizing and re-storying their lives and relationships, as well as in telling, retelling and performing their new stories.³⁵³ It would not have been enough for Paul to tell his family and friends the changes that he wanted to make in his story about himself. His active advocacy and participation in the story he wished to live were essential to the success of his efforts to rewrite his new narrative. His refusal to speak to anyone who called him anything other than “Paul” meant

³⁵² Ibid. ([cited]).

³⁵³ White and Epston, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, 217.

that he had to be vigilant in his own regard. Lear writes, “The transformation of one’s orientation to a repressed emotion is often facilitated by a reenactment of it.”³⁵⁴

5. Counter-narratives are often accompanied by written evidence of their existence in various and creative forms including posters, slogans, awards, logos, journals, notes, letters, plays, research projects, and poetry. These various forms of tangible evidence of new stories encourage people to talk about, enact and generally participate in the language of the counter-narrative. White and Epston (1990) state, “the written tradition promotes the formalization, legitimation, and continuity of local popular knowledges, the independent authority of persons, and the creation of a context for the emergence of new discoveries and possibilities.” (35) Jeannie Oakes (2000) writes of an example of the success of using written evidence to produce a counter-narrative. She relates the story of Illinois middle school principal Ben McCall, an active school reformer committed to bringing black and white children together for the first time in a new school venture in a community hostile to the idea. Oakes writes, “Inland [Middle School] didn’t hide its conception of a good school as a socially just place.” McCall hung signs all over the school that read, “different is not deficient.” McCall stated, “That’s one of the things I’ve learned: if you believe it, write it down and put it on the wall. . .in the johns.” McCall’s success with the school staff, the students and most of the parents did not carry over to the school district’s central office. For what Oakes identifies as personal reasons, the district superintendent was unable to support McCall in his work to rewrite the traditional views of “school” for the success of all of Inland’s students. Eventually McCall left the school district to become an assistant superintendent in another district across the state (much to the disappointment of the Inland staff). The difficulties McCall had successfully incorporating a counter-narrative will be taken up in the last section of this chapter when I look at pedagogical implications for efforts to incorporate counter-narratives into public schooling. But now, I turn to another means for resisting humiliation in schooling—democratic pedagogies.

Educating for a Better Future

In Chapter 5, I included a statement by child psychologist Bruce Perry that envisions a better future for all of humankind if adults work together to reduce violence³⁵⁵ in the lives of children. One of the central places where most children spend a considerable portion of their

³⁵⁴ Lear, *Open Minded: Working out the Logic of the Soul*, 68.

³⁵⁵ Humiliation is a major form of violence.

developmental years is in schooling, a place where adults might make a significant difference in children's lives. Teacher educator Walter Parker writes about schools, where under the "right conditions," a better future might begin:

Schools are ideal places to educate citizens for democratic living in a diverse society. . . . places where people from numerous private worlds and social positions come together in face-to-face contact around matters that are central to the problems of actually living together on common ground. When aimed at democratic ends and supported by the proper democratic circumstances, this interaction in schools can help children develop the habits of thinking and caring necessary for public life—the courtesies, tolerance, respect, sense of justice, and knack for forging public policy with others whether one likes them or not. If students are fortunate—if the right conditions, both social and psychological, are present and well used—they may even give birth to critical, postconventional consciousness and, thereby, to better futures.³⁵⁶

I suggest that the quality of human relationships in schools forms a significant part of the "right conditions" Parker mentions. Thus, the next part of this chapter represents an effort to rethink human relationships in schools, specifically how democratic pedagogies might actively work in human relationships as a form of counter-narrative to interrupt humiliation in schooling. I propose that one of the important means that educators have to counter, rewrite, or resist narratives that promote or sanction humiliation in schooling is to be found in the pedagogical methods teachers use with students in classrooms.

As a teacher practitioner, a central concern raised for me during this inquiry is that much of the current pedagogical practice found in public school classrooms is inherently undemocratic (not maliciously so, but undemocratic nonetheless) and therefore "feeds," rather than resists, the persistence of humiliation in schooling. In spite of the availability of teaching methods that exhibit "best practices" and that coincide with what is currently known about teaching and learning, many of the pedagogical methods as they are actually practiced reflect beliefs that stem from societal narratives and metanarratives that sanction

³⁵⁶ Parker, *Teaching Democracy: Unity and Diversity in Public Life*, 160.

humiliation.³⁵⁷ In these prevalent pedagogies, the focus is on a punitive system of control of children, on a “delivery”³⁵⁸ system of teaching to prepare children for tests and “work” (as if all there is to life is tests and work), and on a system of competitive “ranking” of value to separate leaders from workers.³⁵⁹ The focus in the classroom is often on “managing” students’ behavior so that the curriculum can be “delivered,” rather than on maximizing individual student potential, or on the experience the student is having when interacting with the curriculum. I suggest that much or most pedagogical practice and the curricula those pedagogies are designed to teach do not undergo the scrutiny of a democratic lens. Assuming that some significant changes could be made in school environments to interrupt circuits of humiliation, I propose that the conscious and thoughtful practice of democratic pedagogies in schools can work to resist the persistence of humiliation in schooling.

Students may learn *about* democracy while attending school, and even understand that as adults they have a right or even a responsibility to participate as citizens once they are adults.³⁶⁰ What many students may not receive, however, is ongoing immersion into consciously structured and supported experiences that help to develop democratic habits that sustain democracy as a way of life. Dewey³⁶¹ argued that people learn through experiences rather than through direct transfer of knowledge. Learning takes place when people “do” something and see what happens. Thus, democratic pedagogies that seek to provide students opportunities to live democratically, that serve in their enactment simultaneously as exemplars of democratic practice, and that embody the skills and practice essential for democratic living, are necessary to work against the humiliation in schooling that undermines the aimed-for equality central to democracy.

To support my claim, first I draw on literature in the fields of political, psychological and educational theory to extract and describe attributes of what it means to be democratic.³⁶² Then as I describe four specific pedagogies that I suggest are inherently democratic in their makeup, I exemplify how each of the attributes would help to resist

³⁵⁷ Some of the beliefs that both stem from and support these larger narratives were discussed in Chapter 4.

³⁵⁸ I am aware of a superintendent of a large school district who refers to teachers as “curriculum deliverers.”

³⁵⁹ Specifically, the way students are “graded” in school is reminiscent of Lindner’s description of humiliation as “a *downward* movement along a vertical scale,” that includes “ranking” humans on a value scale.

³⁶⁰ I think it is more likely that students come to understand that they have the *right*, rather than the responsibility, to participate, and that they do not understand that democratic government might be at risk without their participation.

³⁶¹ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1916).

³⁶² It is not my intention to undertake a synthesis of the extensive body of work that crosses multiple disciplines available on the subject of what it means to be democratic, only to present what I think is generally accepted.

humiliation in schools and in classrooms, as well as to counter the four beliefs derived from a national metanarrative mentioned in Chapter 3. The four pedagogies discussed are The Socratic Seminar,³⁶³ the Structured Academic Controversy,³⁶⁴ storytelling, described by Paley,³⁶⁵ and the Scottish Storyline Method.³⁶⁶ My purpose is not to provide an exhaustive description of these methods, rather to demonstrate that pedagogies already exist that are democratic and that, combined with other counter-narratives to humiliation, could provide positive means for resisting humiliation in schooling.

Humiliation erodes rather than builds the kind of trusting relationships that are optimal for humans to learn and grow.³⁶⁷ In schools and classrooms where humiliation persists, many students are likely to be as preoccupied with their safety as they are to be involved in learning. Moreover, the presence of humiliation, described in detail in Chapter 1, implies inequalities in relationships related to issues of power, domination and control.³⁶⁸ There is no equality between humiliators and the humiliated. In addition to feeling “less than” one’s peers or associates, the one(s) humiliated must deal with concerns that include rejection, marginalization, exclusion, loss of freedom, loss of control, loss of “voice,” disregard and devaluation. I turn now to consider what it means to be “democratic” and to think about qualities that are important in democratic pedagogies that work to resist the persistence of humiliation in teaching and learning relationships in schooling.

Democratic Pedagogies

What do I mean by “democratic pedagogies,” which are central to my argument? First, pedagogy is variously described as the practice of, or training in, the art or profession of teaching. *Cambridge Dictionary Online* defines pedagogy as “the study of the methods and activities of teaching.”³⁶⁹ Pedagogies might be thought of as both the study and the practice of artfully and thoughtfully conceived procedures, arrangements, methods and

³⁶³ Parker, *Teaching Democracy: Unity and Diversity in Public Life*.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Paley, *In Mrs. Tully's Room: A Childcare Portrait*.

³⁶⁶ Romano, *Forging an Educative Community: The Wisdom of Love, the Power of Understanding, and the Terror of It All*.

³⁶⁷ This fact is well documented: See e.g., Garbarino, "Words Can Hurt Forever"; Perry, "Incubated in Terror: Neurodevelopmental Factors in the 'Cycle of Violence'" and D. Trumbull, "Shame: An Acute Stress Response to Interpersonal Traumatization," *Psychiatry* 66 (2003).

³⁶⁸ It is not within the scope of the effort here to thoroughly explore the dynamics of domination in individual and group relationships. However, Benjamin in *Bonds of Love*, Memmi in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and in *Racism*, and Phillips in *Equals* each offer illuminating perspectives on domination.

³⁶⁹ *Cambridge Dictionary* (Cambridge University Press, 2004 [cited 2004]), <http://dictionary.cambridge.org>.

activities involved in teaching. A key idea behind pedagogies is that all of the above are initiated and guided by the often-subtle efforts of a teacher/facilitator. “Pedagogy” implies far more than “curriculum delivery.” Pedagogy implies all the activities and interactions that define how we treat one another, how we “do business together” in the classroom, including the curriculum.

When people hear the word “democracy or “democratic” they often think of the right or responsibility to vote, perhaps of the right to free speech, or other guarantees in the U. S. Constitution that few Americans remember without refreshers. Seldom do most people think of “democratic” as a *way of being* that requires ongoing active participation for its long term survival, a way of daily thinking and living that includes the practices and habits involved in our lives together as humans. Beyond the general concepts of freedom and equality, it is difficult to find agreement on a precise definition of democracy or what it means to be “democratic” in a world where the meaning is contested and changing; thus, my goal is to use several sources to derive some important qualities of being democratic to guide my discussion of democratic pedagogies.

Parker presents a commonly held idea of democracy as a path rather than as an end in itself.³⁷⁰ He writes, “Viewed as a creative, constructive process, democracy is not already accomplished . . . but a trek that citizens in a pluralist society make together. . . The work called ‘democracy’ is not finished. The need for this work arises anew, within itself continually.”³⁷¹ Greene cites Dewey’s concept of democracy as a “community always in the making.”³⁷² Dewey wrote of democracy as an organic form of associated living where diverse interests are shared and free contact takes place across diverse groups. Greene writes, “Democracy is forever incomplete; it is founded in possibility.”³⁷³ An excellent example of the evolving nature of democracy is embodied in the original idea of “all ‘men’ are created equal” in the U. S. Declaration of Independence in 1776. In a progressively inclusive manner, ‘men’ have evolved from free, white, landholding males to include all free (not incarcerated) U. S. citizens (without regard to gender or ethnicity) over 18 years old.

³⁷⁰ See e.g., Dewey, *Democracy and Education*; Greene, “Diversity and Inclusion: Toward a Curriculum for Human Beings”; Lindner, *Humiliation: A New Basis for Understanding, Preventing, and Diffusing Conflict and Violence in the World and in Our Lives*.

³⁷¹ Parker, *Teaching Democracy: Unity and Diversity in Public Life*, 21.

³⁷² Greene, “Diversity and Inclusion: Toward a Curriculum for Human Beings,” 217.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*

I propose that the concepts of freedom and equality are at the heart of democracy. If to be humiliated means a basic loss of freedom or control,³⁷⁴ then for one to have freedom must mean to have control over one's vital interests, or to have the ability to make decisions about one's life. Of equality, Phillips writes: "A virtual definition of equality, if not of democracy . . . is to behave as if one is on the same footing with others—or on the same footing with regard to certain conditions."³⁷⁵ Winnicott describes equality as "the ability of one individual to enter imaginatively and accurately into the thoughts and feelings and hopes and fears of another person; also to allow the other person to do the same to us."³⁷⁶ Memmi's idea for how to relate positively to "otherness" suggests granting a similar kind of equality: "One must relax and forget oneself; in effect, one needs to abandon oneself to the other to an extent, and identify with him or her. The stranger will not be acquitted until one succeeds in adopting him or her. Without that, the outsider's opacity and recalcitrant autonomy remain irksome, disturbing."³⁷⁷

Lindner writes that equality can exist among humans alongside the obvious inequalities or differences from heritage (height, weight, gender, skin, hair and eye color) or from acquisition (wealth, living conditions, employment, education), as long as there is no ranking of humans along a scale of worth and value.³⁷⁸ Phillips suggests another vision of equality that grants no one guaranteed superiority or authority "in advance." In other words, no one owns the keys to the kingdom; no one has the "mastery of the foundation of society."³⁷⁹ Conflicting answers and opinions are to be expected rather than suppressed.³⁸⁰ In this view of being democratic, ideas of leadership in the school and of the teacher's position in the classroom change as the playing field is flattened and rather than being an "authority," the teacher becomes a facilitator or partner in shared inquiry with the students.³⁸¹ It might be

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Phillips, *Equals*, 6.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 29.

³⁷⁷ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 138.

³⁷⁸ Lindner, *Humiliation: A New Basis for Understanding, Preventing, and Diffusing Conflict and Violence in the World and in Our Lives*, 27.

³⁷⁹ Phillips, *Equals*, 9.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 11.

³⁸¹ It is important to note here that the teacher's "authority" in the legal sense is not relinquished and the "power differential" cannot disappear completely, nor is it desirable for the safety of the students. However, the teacher can dramatically increase the power of students in the classroom in other ways, as the discussion that follows above illuminates.

said that education is a path on which we all travel together rather than a predefined destination a few have decided that all others must reach.

For humans, equality is no simple matter. In fact, humans are anxious and conflicted about equality. As previously mentioned, by nature human beings can't be equal to or measure up to their internalized perfect image of themselves, which in turn makes them feel that their "less than" imperfections are vulnerable to exposure, both to themselves and to others. Living in a conflicted state is uncomfortable and rather than live in conflict, it is far easier for humans to impose an inner inhibiting authoritarian order on themselves or submit to an outside authoritarian order to suppress their inner conflict. A central way that humans hide their vulnerability is by creating distance in their relationships. The paradox is that authoritarian order and relational distance undermine open freedom of expression, mutuality, equality and the "participation in the other"³⁸² described by Winnicott, Benjamin and Memmi.

Democracy is an experiment in what we can bear about one another, as well as about ourselves, according to Phillips.³⁸³ "Bearing conflict" means risking being "known" by others and "being known" means being vulnerable to humiliation. Further, a "precondition for democracy," states Phillips, is "that a person be able to more than bear conflict, and be able to see and enjoy the value of differing voices and alternative positions." He continues, "That a person might want to confer some version of equal status on the conflictual voices that compose and discompose him."³⁸⁴

Benjamin's description of "mutuality" and "intersubjectivity" details the difficulty of living in this conflicted state. Recall that Benjamin writes of the infant's struggle for recognition. The concept of "recognition," and further, of "*mutual recognition*," emerges as the important element in children's initial relationships with their primary caregivers and ultimately, in healthy relationships between people in general. If children can recognize and be recognized by each of their caregivers without either destroying (manipulating) or being destroyed (controlled) by them, then children are off to a healthy start in their psychological development. Benjamin calls this an "intersubjective view" where "we are able and need to recognize that other subject as different and yet alike, as an other who is capable of sharing

³⁸² Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 147.

³⁸³ Phillips, *Equals*, xiii.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

similar mental experience.³⁸⁵ Further, according to Benjamin, a person involved in an intersubjective relationship “sees the relationship between self and other, with its tension between sameness and difference, as a continual exchange of influence. It focuses, not on a linear movement from oneness to separateness, but on the paradoxical balance between them.”³⁸⁶ Implied in an intersubjective relationship is the inclusion of each participant as a subject worthy of attention. It’s in this open-minded space in humans where I visualize that our “edges are soft” rather than hardened, where we can be open to listen to those who are different from ourselves, where we can be open to new ideas. It is, however, where we are vulnerable. Reciprocity in listening to one another and in recognizing one another in our sameness and in our differences is a key aspect of relationships in the intersubjective zone and in a democracy.

I suggest that democracy might not be born in us and also might not be permanently lodged in the psyche, especially in light of such biologically natural tendencies of the human organism to be initially threatened by the unfamiliar (difference), to seek homeostasis or balance by fending off threats and to avoid exposure of its perceived weaknesses. Rather, democracy is a state “between” humans, that is, in their relationships with one another, where they must learn to be able to bear conflict and tension. That said, I would further suggest that democratic pedagogies help to build in humans the strong sense of self that is necessary to live creatively (more than just “survive”) in that conflict and tension.

Proposed Criteria for Democratic Pedagogies

My purpose for exploring what it means to be democratic is not to engage in an exhaustive analysis, rather to provide enough characteristics to begin a discussion of how democratic pedagogies might resist humiliation in schooling. Combining the ideas of what it is to be a decent society presented in the Introduction to this inquiry with the characteristics of being democratic laid out in this chapter, I propose that democratic pedagogies need to employ activities and strategies that together model and foster most or all of the following criteria (in no particular order). I will discuss each criterion briefly and then imagine what it might be like from the perspective of the student’s experience.³⁸⁷

1. Respect for basic dignity of all individuals.

³⁸⁵ Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 19-20.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

³⁸⁷ For this perspective, I draw on student comments made to me in 15 years of teaching experience with students from grades two through graduate school.

Simply, this view assumes that every human has value and worth and deserves to be respected by the fact of being human.

Student's Perspective: I know that I am cared about and safe. I know my teacher is interested in me and watches out for my well-being. I don't have to be in a constant state of readiness to defend myself physically or emotionally. These conditions are extended to each person in the room. I know that if my teacher doesn't like something, she will tell me, but not in front of others, and she won't put me down. There are ways to approach her that are acceptable to me if I have a problem. She can be counted on to deal fairly with any problems and will include me in the solution. She'll talk to me first before she calls my parents.

2. *Recognition of and respect for differences (e.g., in ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, religion, opinions, learning styles).*

What is aimed for here is essentially the mutuality and intersubjectivity Benjamin describes,³⁸⁸ where the focus is on the “paradoxical balance” between self and other. “Differences” are open to thoughtful discussion and investigation and seen as a normal human condition, not swept under the rug to pretend that they don't exist or to imagine that they are “bad.” Activities are structured so students can become aware of both their similarities and their differences. When bias or misinformation comes up in the context of the classroom, it is not shut down or admonished, but openly discussed at the level appropriate to the students. Romano writes, “Conflict held in creative tension does not seek to remake others into our likeness, but instead creates space so we can have our connectedness revealed without losing our sense of integrity and identity.”³⁸⁹ (112)

Harris³⁹⁰ advocates for democratic classrooms that are “public spaces”³⁹¹ rather than “communities,” where “differences are made visible,” where there is “civility, a willingness to live with difference.”³⁹² He is specifically interested in talk in classrooms that “takes place *across* borders and constituencies” rather than being consensual.³⁹³

Imagine instead a class that worked not to resolve differences in reading but to highlight them, that tried to show what might be

³⁸⁸ See Chapter 2, pp. 37-38 of this inquiry.

³⁸⁹ Romano, *Forging an Educative Community: The Wisdom of Love, the Power of Understanding, and the Terror of It All*, 112.

³⁹⁰ James Harris, *A Teaching Subject: Composition since 1966* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1997).

³⁹¹ See also, Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995). Greene calls these spaces, “in-betweens.”

³⁹² Harris, *A Teaching Subject: Composition since 1966*, 109. Italics are Harris'.

³⁹³ Ibid.

involved in arguing for the various ways for understanding a text— as well as what might be at stake in the conflicts between them.

Such a class would not try to get students to agree on what a certain text means but to see how and why various readers might disagree about what it means.³⁹⁴

Harris distinguishes between conflicting views being seen as “negotiations” rather than as “battles:” “We need to learn not only how to articulate our differences but how to bring them into useful relation with each other,”³⁹⁵ to get students to rethink their positions, to keep them in the conversation without a demand to change. He sees the classroom “as a local and shifting series of interactions among perspectives and individuals.”³⁹⁶ Thus, teachers are called upon to pay close attention to the details of how they set up classroom work and how they respond to what students have to say. Finally, Harris urges teachers to find “ways of urging writers not simply to defend the cultures into which they were born but to imagine new public spheres which they’d like to have a hand in making”³⁹⁷ (similar to “better futures” envisioned by Parker and realization of our potential a humane society envisioned by Perry). The pedagogies necessary for classrooms such as Harris proposes give students equal and honored voice, provide experience in living in the reality of human differences, grant no superiority in advance, and create an atmosphere of “agonism” rather than “antagonism.”³⁹⁸

Writer Toni Morrison suggests:

Get rid of awful notions of melting and merging and becoming, I don’t know, mayonnaise, I guess. And begin to recognize the value of a variable culture and that it won’t be pejorative. It will just be more possibilities, more areas for making life in this country rich. The problem is not variety or difference. The problem is hierarchy in ranking difference. The problem is in punishing differences.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 110.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 120.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 122.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 124.

³⁹⁸ Phillips, *Equals*.

³⁹⁹ Swiss, *In Black and White: Conversations with African American Writers; Toni Morrison*.

Student's Perspective: My teacher and the other members of the classroom know I am here, call me by my name and know some things about me. The unique perspective I bring to the classroom from my heritage and experiences is valued and accessed in classroom interactions. I see myself and my experiences, as well as the perspectives and experiences of those not like me, in the materials, activities and experiences in class. I can see that while each of us in this room is different from one another, we also have a lot in common. Because there are no "put-downs" allowed, I feel okay participating.

3. *Reduction or elimination of power differentials and "ranking" that gives some people "superiority in advance" (equality).*

Phillips writes, "Democracy involves redescribing the whole notion of leadership."⁴⁰⁰ When a teacher uses the authority or "rank" of her position to control student behavior in ways that denigrate or humiliate students (as in the example of my fourth grade teacher), Robert Fuller labels such incidents "rankism." The teacher has used her power to benefit her desire for control at the expense of the student, and taken what Fuller terms "unwarranted advantages."⁴⁰¹ Fuller is not suggesting that we must do away with rank, which is legitimate when earned and exercised appropriately. It is not the "use" of authority, but the "abuse" of authority that is the problem. According to Fuller "'rankism' distorts personal relationships, erodes the will to learn, fosters disease, and taxes productivity."⁴⁰² It is not implied in democratic pedagogies that the teacher is not "in charge" overall or even that students don't know this. In structure and activities, democratic pedagogies reduce the perceived power differential between students and the teacher and between students and their peers through group decision making, seating arrangements, student responsibility for the process and built in mechanisms for broad student participation, rather than abdication of responsibility and "authority" by the teacher. The classroom environment transforms when students' equal value as human beings is recognized, even more when they participate in their own evaluations. The teacher is viewed first as a human being and then as an authority figure. The teacher's role becomes flexible in such an environment.

Students graduate from high school with a number that represents their class "rank." Unfortunately, it is not a long step for this rank to be used to value the worth of a student as

⁴⁰⁰ Phillips, *Equals*, 10.

⁴⁰¹ Robert Fuller, *What Divides Americans* (Dignitarian Foundation, 2005 [cited May 5 2005]), 2.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.* ([cited]).

a potential employee or even to question the value of the person altogether (at least academically). Democratic pedagogies often employ assessment tools that do not “rank” students; rather they provide students a measure of their “performance” against a rubric. Students are often asked to reflect on their performance in class activities and to participate in their own evaluations. When it comes time for “grades,” students seldom argue about an assessment in which they have participated.

Student’s Perspective: My teacher’s all right. It’s not like he’s my buddy or anything, but he acts like what I think really matters. He’s interested in what I have to say. He doesn’t mind being challenged or asked difficult questions that he can’t answer. He’s not afraid to say when he doesn’t know something. That helps me to not feel bad when I don’t know something. He says he’s learning right along with us and that he learns a lot from us. The students get to take a lot of responsibility for how the class runs. He had us design our own classroom rules and expectations. We do a lot of group work in class and I feel like we teach each other as much as he teaches us. Lots of times we do the talking and he does the listening. He takes our ideas and suggestions into consideration in planning what we do in class and he gives us a lot of choices about the focus of our learning. I really like that I get to evaluate my own performance.

4. Facilitation of discussion and deliberation rather than debate and competition.

In *No Contest: the Case against Competition*, Alfie Kohn describes the destructive nature of competition in human relationships, especially in school. Competition promotes anxiety, increases aggressive behaviors, diminishes personal responsibility and gives the majority of students (who already know they will be “losers”) little interest or incentive to learn.⁴⁰³ Students who come to school angry or upset are often negatively fueled by classroom pedagogies that stress debate and competition. Morton Deutsch describes competitive relationships:

In a competitive relationship, one is predisposed to cathect the other negatively, to have a suspicious, hostile, exploitative attitude toward the other, to be psychologically closed to the other, to be aggressive and defensive toward the other, to seek advantage and superiority for self and disadvantage and inferiority for the other, to see the other as opposed to

⁴⁰³ Kohn, *No Contest: The Case against Competition*.

oneself and basically different, and so on. One is also predisposed to expect the other to have the same orientation.⁴⁰⁴

Kohn writes that structurally competitive activities are characterized by “mutually exclusive goal attainment,” translated as “my success requires your failure.”⁴⁰⁵ In competitive school relationships, the opportunities for humiliation are magnified as students are “pitted” against one another, focus on plotting one another’s failure rather than on promoting one another’s success, and view one another as “the enemy.”

Kohn advocates for the kind of cooperative learning strategies that underpin democratic pedagogies, where students consider multiple, often conflicting, ideas in a structured environment. In cooperative learning, Kohn suggests, the focus is on “promotive (or positive) interdependence” which translates as “my success is facilitated by, or even dependent on, your success.”⁴⁰⁶ Kohn reports some of the major advantages of cooperative learning strategies over those that are competitive: students feel better about themselves and their abilities; students are more likely to “view one another favorably,” make cross-ethnic friendships, learn about and accept students with disabilities, and develop skills in seeing the world from perspectives different from their own; and student achievement often improves.

Memmi writes, “Domination is not the only possible method of influence and exchange among people.”⁴⁰⁷ He suggests, “Reciprocal dependence must be strengthened as the foundation of the social bond. Whatever the importance of a conflict between individuals or groups, the relative stability of social structures confirms a reciprocal need to engender an inclusive common law of life.”⁴⁰⁸

Student’s Perspective: I know that my voice counts in this class and that I have lots of opportunity to speak. I know I will have my turn and be listened to, so I don’t mind listening to others. If I don’t understand what someone is saying, I can ask them to say it again or ask them to explain what they said in a different way without anyone giving me a hard time about being slow or stupid. I didn’t like Socratic Seminar at first because we have to stick to the text for the discussion and since no one raises their hand to speak, so you just have to kind of “feel” who should go next. That’s awkward, but after a while you get the hang of it.

⁴⁰⁴ Morton Deutsch, *Distributive Justice: A Social-Psychological Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 85.

⁴⁰⁵ Kohn, *No Contest: The Case against Competition*, 4.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁴⁰⁷ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 113.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

We can “agree to disagree” and at first I didn’t like that either. I wanted to know who “won,” but now I like it because people listen to me and no one puts me down for my ideas, even if I have an opinion that is not like theirs.

5. Facilitation of broad and active participation; emphasizes student voice.

Use of a variety of activities, many of which employ small cooperative groups where students have a specific task to perform, gives all students a share in the responsibility for learning, as well as a voice in classroom affairs. Students are invited to participate in a cooperative environment for the benefit of all. In *You Can’t Say You Can’t Play*, Paley thinks about the changes children go through from the possessiveness and jealousy of early childhood to when they begin school. She expresses the inclusive spirit of this transition to public school, “It is the first real exposure to the public arena. Children are required to share materials and teachers in a space that belongs to everyone. Within this public space a new concept of open access can develop if we choose to make this a goal. Here will be found not only the strong ties of intimate friendship but, in addition, the habit of full and equal participation, upon request.”⁴⁰⁹

Student’s Perspective: It’s just expected that everyone will be allowed to participate in this class and pretty soon everyone accepts it. Most of the activities we do make it almost like you have to participate. I thought I wouldn’t like it because I don’t like speaking in front of people. But after a while you don’t think about it anymore because everyone has to do it and what we are doing is usually interesting. We work in small groups most of the time and we make decisions as a group. I’m comfortable speaking there because I’ve been in the same group for a while and I feel like we all know each other pretty well. Everyone gets a chance to have their ideas heard, not like in big class discussions where a few people monopolize the conversation. People can disagree with each other and that’s life. We have to change groups sometimes, but the teacher lets two people out of four stay together so I always start out knowing someone. The next time we change groups I can’t stay with the same person as the last time, so it makes me get to know more kids. I’ve had to work with some kids I didn’t like, but when I got to know them better, they turned out to be okay. The teacher helps us to work through our conflicts.

⁴⁰⁹ Paley, *You Can’t Say You Can’t Play*.

6. *Fosters commitment and responsibility for one's individual actions as well as commitment and responsibility to the group.*

This criterion is interwoven with those already discussed and often occurs as a result of “fallout” from any or all of them. However, a specific focus on individual responsibility and on responsibility to the group is essential in democratic pedagogies and usually takes place as a result of cooperative learning situations. These responsibilities are part of the practice of “living” democracy rather than just learning “about” democracy. Kohn suggests that teachers “should affirmatively help students to become responsible for their own learning and relationships.”⁴¹⁰ He continues, “A child who can make (teacher-guided) choices about what happens in his or her classroom is a child who will be less likely to require artificial inducements to learn and more likely to get hooked on learning.”⁴¹¹

Student Perspective: We work in groups a lot in this class. Everyone has specific responsibilities and not doing your work is not an option because you get called on it and it isn't worth it. I used to like working independently, but now I think it is a lot better to work with other kids because we get new ideas listening to each other and we can help each other if the work is hard. We care how each other is doing because it affects our group. The teacher doesn't give tests that are like other teachers. Instead, we have to rate our own performance and our group's performance. It's hard for me to say I did really well when I know I didn't. At the end of every project or activity, we usually have to “debrief” to think about how it went, what we're proud of and what we could do better next time. How well I do in this class is up to me.

While these criteria or attributes of democratic pedagogies may seem like a “tall order,” I believe that there are already pedagogies available that exemplify most of the above listed qualities and it is to those I now turn for discussion.

Democratic Pedagogies that Resist Humiliation

Realize that humiliation is absolutely a sin when it comes to good teaching. You may have to figure out a new way to deal with kids who defy you, but humiliation has to go out the window . . . dark

⁴¹⁰ Kohn, *No Contest: The Case against Competition*, 221.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*

*sarcasm has to be removed from the teacher's repertoire of strategies.*⁴¹²

For students to experience living in democratic circumstances, the enactment of democratic pedagogies must extend far beyond the school social studies environment that is usually reserved for learning “about” democracy.⁴¹³ Many of the democratic pedagogies mentioned here adapt well to other disciplines. Parker proposes several democratic strategies or pedagogies to include in a “multifaceted democratic citizenship education program” for use in schools. I consider two of his suggested strategies—Socratic Seminar and Strategic Academic Controversy (SAC)⁴¹⁴—and two forms of stories—storytelling, as described by Paley⁴¹⁵ and Tully, and the Scottish Storyline Method,⁴¹⁶ all of which meet the criteria for being democratic in their makeup. I briefly explain how each pedagogy functions in the classroom and in [brackets] highlight how the pedagogy is democratic. At the end of each pair of pedagogies, I engage in a brief discussion of how, specifically, these pedagogies work to resist humiliation.

Socratic Seminar

Developed by Mortimer Adler to foster “an enlarged understanding of ideas and values,”⁴¹⁷ the Socratic Seminar provides a respectful, structured environment for discussion of an enduring question about which reasonable people will disagree. The focus is on the ideas in a commonly shared text, poem or work of art, not on the personalities or character of the people offering the ideas. Critique of the ideas must be based in the text (not textbooks) under discussion. The questions that direct the discussion are developed by the facilitator (usually the teacher, but can be students), arise from a genuine interest or curiosity on the part of the facilitator and are open to interpretation. Speaking and listening skills are developed with the purpose of listening “to understand, make meaning and find common

⁴¹² Herb Kohl Interview, in Scherer, “Discipline of Hope: A Conversation with Herb Kohl,” 9.

⁴¹³ Recall, too, that in many schools even the area of social studies is being given short emphasis or eliminated in favor of test preparation.

⁴¹⁴ Parker, *Teaching Democracy: Unity and Diversity in Public Life*.

⁴¹⁵ See e.g., Paley, *You Can't Say You Can't Play*; Hutchinson, *Students on the Margins: Education, Stories, Dignity* and Romano, *Forging an Educative Community: The Wisdom of Love, the Power of Understanding, and the Terror of It All*.

⁴¹⁶ Romano, *Forging an Educative Community: The Wisdom of Love, the Power of Understanding, and the Terror of It All*.

⁴¹⁷ *Socratic Seminars* (North American Division, Adventist Education, 2000 [cited 2005]), <http://curriculumfutures.org/instruction/a06-07.html>.

ground.”⁴¹⁸ There is an emphasis on respect for all participants as each person’s voice is valued as a contributor to building shared understanding.

Texts are chosen for Socratic Seminar with students’ interests in mind [*recognizes and respects differences*]. Any background information that is important to understanding the text is taught ahead of time so there is no need for interruption during the seminar to provide additional information. Lines in the text are numbered for easy reference and students read the text before the Seminar begins. [*As simple as these procedures may seem, they are often overlooked in typical classroom settings, but are details in preparation that facilitate students’ dignity*]. Desks or chairs are arranged in a circle [*facilitates broad and active participation; reduces power differential and “ranking” and creates equal access, unlike typical seating in classrooms where students often have “positions”*] and the procedure is explained to students. They are told that it is *their* discussion, [*reduction of power differential and ranking*] that the question posed is a starting point and that they can move to other questions and ideas that arise from the text as long as the discussion is focused in terms of the text [*facilitates broad and active participation*]. Students are to direct their comments to one another and not to the facilitator, [*reduction of power differential*] who does not participate except to guide the seminar if students move away from discussion of the meaning they can make from the text. Students are encouraged to listen carefully to colleagues’ comments, not engage in side conversations (no matter how interesting) and to think before they speak. No hands are to be raised, nor does anyone facilitate the order of speakers, so students are asked ahead of time to be sensitive to the amount that they speak to be sure that everyone has an opportunity to speak [*fosters commitment and responsibility for one’s individual actions as well as commitment and responsibility to the group; facilitation of broad and active participation with emphasis on student voice*].

The role of the facilitator is to keep the discussion focused on the text, invite students to participate, manipulate the amount of participation if necessary, divert discussion that turns to debate or that is personally directed, keep students from having side conversations and to facilitate an end to the seminar when it feels done (a student might suggest this as well as students learn how to participate in Socratic Seminars) [*facilitator’s role is to provide respect for the basic dignity of all individuals, help students to recognize*

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. ((cited)).

and respect differences, facilitate broad and active participation and facilitate discussion rather than debate]. A debriefing takes place at the end of every seminar so that students can talk about how they felt in the activity. Questions typically asked in the debriefing include, “What was good about this seminar?” “What was not so good?” and “What could we do to improve the next one?” The regular promise of debriefing lets students who are dissatisfied with any activity know they will have the opportunity to express that dissatisfaction—it gives students a regular way to vent so things don’t build up and provides feedback to the facilitator and to the class.

Respect for the dignity of all students as well as for their differences are fostered in the selection of texts that access various interests of the students in the class. Student differences are also honored in the discussion when the focus is on the text and not on personalities, because the discussion is not focused on “winning” and “losing” or on whose idea is best, but on understanding the meaning in the text. Students can see that various perspectives add to understanding a text in ways they might not think of alone (honoring differences). When students must pay attention to how and when they speak, their responsibility for their personal actions and as well as their responsibility to the group are developed over time. The teacher’s role as a facilitator who does not comment on student’s remarks empowers students in the voice they have in creating meaning. Knowing that they will not be “graded” for their comments and that they will evaluate the quality of their own participation increases student responsibility and reduces power differentials that can cause unproductive power struggles in the classroom.

Structured Academic Controversy (SAC)

In the Structured Academic Controversy (SAC), students work in a basic group of four to study a real-world controversial issue in a structured environment. The teacher/facilitator selects an issue of interest to students for deliberation. The teacher facilitates the timing of all of the following activities in the SAC. All four students in each group are given the background material on the issue to read [*fosters commitment and responsibility for one’s individual actions as well as commitment and responsibility to the group*]. Students are asked to sit at the same table facing one another or to move their desks into positions where they are facing one another. Once students have read the background material, the group of four is then split into two pairs, with each pair assigned either the affirmative or negative position on the issue and provided the documents necessary to study

their position and to prepare a presentation [*fosters commitment and responsibility for one's individual actions as well as commitment and responsibility to the group*]. At this point, students working together put their desks together or sit beside one another. Next, one at a time, each pair presents one "side" of the issue to the other pair [*develops listening skills, which indirectly foster recognition of and respect for differences and respect for the basic dignity of all individuals*]. Then, the two pairs reverse positions and each pair presents the other side of the argument based on what they have heard until each pair is satisfied that their position has been heard and understood [*facilitates discussion and deliberation rather than debate and competition*]. Last, the two pairs reunite as one group of four (and drop their respective positions) to deliberate the issue and take a position as a group. As they deliberate as a group of four they are urged to come into themselves and consider their own feelings and experiences in their discussion. The "goal" of the group is to reason toward consensus, or to "agree to disagree" by clarifying the areas of disagreement. [*fosters commitment and responsibility for one's individual actions as well as commitment and responsibility to the group; facilitates discussion and deliberation rather than debate and competition; fosters respect for the basic dignity of all individuals; and recognition of and respect for differences*]. Each student's responsibilities are essential to the success of the activity. Students must listen to one another carefully. An important goal of this activity is for students to broaden their perspective (stretch their tolerance for multiple viewpoints).

In both Socratic Seminar and the SAC, students are urged into an "intersubjective" zone of mutuality discussed by Benjamin and Phillips. In participating in these pedagogical strategies, students must "live in the controversy" or in the world of conflicting ideas as they hear/experience alternative viewpoints. Students not only "participate in the learning process," they *own* the learning process. The structure is provided, but the students are in charge to a great extent, of their own learning. The structure of both pedagogies and the facilitator's role in overseeing the activities in each assures a safe environment for students to develop and practice the skills for participation in areas where people are usually vulnerable to criticism and therefore to humiliation. In both strategies, there is a specified procedure for the interchanges that is announced and adhered to and a debrief at the conclusion of the allotted session provides students an opportunity to comment on how the strategy worked or did not work for them, again encouraging multiple voices with the expectation that feedback will affect the next session.

The SAC and the Socratic Seminar also significantly limit or raise the consciousness of teachers who may be accustomed to using undemocratic behaviors, such as sarcasm. If the teacher spends the time to adequately research the conflict in the SAC and to present documents that represent a balanced appraisal of the issues in the controversy, the teacher's thinking may be broadened in the preparation. For the SAC to be an effective activity in shared exploration and decision making for students, at least initially, the teacher's viewpoint is out of place. Both the SAC and the Socratic Seminar invite the teacher to be a facilitator of student's exploration rather than a participating or dominating factor. Perhaps inadvertently for some teachers, they must practice the same democratic habits that they ask their students to practice. Over time, this practice most likely influences how teachers treat their students and perhaps one another and others involved in the school community.

Storytelling

I have chosen to highlight Storytelling as described by Vivian Paley because pedagogies such as Socratic Seminar and the SAC are not typically used with very young (two years of age through preschool) or early elementary students. However, humiliation is not restricted to older students and in fact, as Paley has pointed out, begins very early as children are allowed to set up domains of influence that exclude others, especially on the playground. Democratic pedagogies are important for all levels of students in schooling.

Storytelling, as Paley⁴¹⁹ describes it, allows students a safe environment in which to act out emotions they don't understand or that they need or want to process. A simple pedagogy befitting younger as well as older students, Storytelling honors the meaning that students are making in their lives, including the problems they are wrestling with [*respect for basic dignity of all individuals*]. Paley suggests that stories help children with their emotional needs, which, she indicates, we ignore at our and their peril. One "structure" that Paley describes consists of students dictating their stories to an adult during a designated time period. Later the same day, students move to the "rug," a special place where everyone goes to listen and participate. There the stories are read one at a time by the teacher and enacted by the student author and others spontaneously during the reading [*fosters commitment and responsibility for one's individual actions as well as commitment and responsibility to the group*]. Each student gets a turn and full attention from others as they

⁴¹⁹ Paley, *In Mrs. Tully's Room: A Childcare Portrait*.

know that they will also get a turn [*facilitation of broad and active participation; emphasizes student voice*]. Paley writes,

“The pleasure of having one’s story acted out will overcome shyness, language obstacles, immaturity, and discontent. In fact, the presence of these problems often makes it all the more urgent to tell one’s story within a structure that promises the respectful attention of everyone.”⁴²⁰

Students are not coerced to come to the rug and can play quietly elsewhere in the room. At the time of the reading, students might add to the story or suggests ways out of predicaments brought up in the story. Students are encouraged, but not forced, to write stories and to participate in acting them out. As they become more comfortable, even initially shy or reticent students eventually choose to participate [*recognition of and respect for differences*]. Paley quotes Tully, “Stories make children feel less lonely.”⁴²¹ Paley expresses how stories help students to feel part of the group (“the family of man” described by Margalit) and to explore and accept their differences. She writes, “Community is seen and felt when memory and fantasy weave us into a common story. Language meets action and we begin to penetrate the walls that divide us.”⁴²² [*recognition of and respect for differences*].

Another way Paley uses storytelling opens up areas where both children and teachers can experiment with values and beliefs in fictional or fantasy environments. Paley creates allegorical stories filled with characters that struggle with the same dilemmas her students wrestle with to help children consider and deal with issues that are difficult to address directly [*facilitation of discussion and deliberation rather than debate and competition*]. Paley took this approach in the creation of a story about a bird named Magpie when she wanted children to deliberate on the proposal of a controversial new rule for her classroom, “You can’t say you can’t play.” Paley shares her concern with students and ask for their help in considering this important question [*reduces or eliminates power differential*]. The focus is on consideration of the proposed new rule rather than on the individuals contributing ideas [*facilitates discussion and deliberation rather than debate and competition*]. All ideas are welcomed and equally considered [*recognition of and respect for differences*].

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 115.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 34.

⁴²² Ibid., 23.

In the same way that narrative therapy separates or “externalizes”⁴²³ the “problem” from the “people,” Paley’s stories remove the problems to a fictional but engaging realm where the children can be informed and affected by the stories as well as construct the events and outcomes with Paley (as in Miller’s⁴²⁴ “enlightened witness” or guide). Antisocial urges get voice and are open to comment and revision from others [*recognition of and respect for differences; facilitation of discussion and deliberation rather than debate and competition*]. Sometimes children’s fictional experiments are a search for boundaries. Paley writes of her preschoolers’ storytelling,

“I came to understand that most bad-guy scenarios involved characters in search of a plot and that the plot itself seemed a search for rules to play by. Furthermore, when the play was allowed to continue long enough, the children were usually able to rein in the antiheroes and keep the story going. . . . The offending story was replaced by a more acceptable one.”⁴²⁵

Often students’ stories include issues that are troubling. As previously mentioned, Miller contends that if a child is reared in abusive (mental or physical) circumstances, they will repeat the abusive cycle with their children unless a “mentor” or “guide” or “interested person” can have a positive effect for allowing children to deal with emotions they cannot handle alone. The use of storytelling under the mentorship of teachers such as Tully or Paley allows the students to act out emotions they don’t understand or that they need to process and may in fact help to perform the role for children that Miller discusses.⁴²⁶ Memmi observes, “People are both angels and beasts; the angel must be assisted in prevailing over the beast.”⁴²⁷ Storytelling allows teachers to assist the angels to deal with their “beasts.”

Scottish Storyline Method

The Storyline Method, a pedagogy developed in Scotland in 1965 and exported to the United States in the 1980’s, is based on the theory that knowledge is complex and many layered, that learning is guided by one’s prior knowledge and experience [*recognition of and*

⁴²³ “Externalization” of problems is a significant attribute of narrative therapy, described by White and Epston 1990, among others.

⁴²⁴ Miller, *For Your Own Good*.

⁴²⁵ Paley, *In Mrs. Tully’s Room: A Childcare Portrait*, 108-109.

⁴²⁶ My personal experience with a similar pedagogy, the Scottish Storyline Method, instantiates Paley’s experience of children “rewriting” scary stories in which they were clearly dealing in their personal lives.

⁴²⁷ Memmi, *Racism*, 160.

respect for differences], and that learners construct their own meaning through experience and action (reminiscent of Dewey). Engaging student interest by building on what students know rather than what they don't know, Storyline was developed as an interdisciplinary method of teaching that can be used to explore literature, social issues and science themes. A Storyline unit creates a context for learning with the active involvement of the child [*facilitation of broad and active participation; emphasizes student voice*] and incorporates art, writing, research and extended collaborative student involvement in the course of the development of the story. Themes chosen by the teacher are typically interdisciplinary such as "Homelessness," "The Election Campaign" or "The Aquarium." The Storyline experience offers transforming and active learning experiences for all of the participants, including the teacher [*reduction or elimination of power differentials*]. Sallie Harkness, one of the three developers of the method, writes,

A key feature of the approach is the very positive way in which it depends on and builds on pupils' existing experience and knowledge.

Also significant is the degree of pupil involvement, both imaginatively and in practical problem solving. The Storyline method poses problems and asks questions of pupils rather than giving them answers to questions they have never asked. The pupils and the teacher explore ideas together.⁴²⁸

Storyline's underlying design is a simple story structure with the development of five major "episodes which include 1) creation of the characters, 2) creation of a setting, 3) daily rhythms, 4) a problem or incident and 5) a culminating activity or a celebration. The theme and the multiple open-ended questions that guide each of these steps are designed by the teacher. Decisions about the key questions, design of the activities to answer those questions, organization of the students for each activity (small group, large group, individual), resources needed and outcomes desired are planned ahead but are also purposely flexible to adapt to the responses and the direction students take as a group and as individuals [*recognition of and respect for differences*]. Detailed thought and planning lie behind the Storyline design format, but students seldom feel the structure as they "live" the

⁴²⁸ Sallie Harkness, *How the Storyline Method Came to Be*. (1993 [cited June 7 2004]), <http://www.storyline.org/history1.html>.

story, creating physical settings and detailed descriptions and representations of their characters.

Steve Bell, another of the original Storyline method designers, writes that Storyline is “a shared experience because, although the teacher knows the sequence, it is the pupils who create the detail of the story.”⁴²⁹ While the teacher may know that students will create characters, the children actually design the details, including visuals, biographies and physical descriptions, the settings where characters will live or work, and the interests, personality traits and hobbies of characters, etc. [*facilitates broad and active participation; emphasizes student voice; reduces or eliminates power differentials and “ranking” that gives some people “superiority in advance”*]. “So,” Bell continues, It is not just the children who get surprises. Each day is new for the teacher, too.”⁴³⁰ Bell further writes of the respect engendered between students and the teacher, as well as among students:

Mutual respect is encouraged because there are so many opportunities for the teacher to demonstrate the value to the pupils of their work. This can be shown in the way that the teacher listens to the pupils’ ideas and views, by the care with which the pupils work is displayed and by encouraging the pupils to design their own criteria for a task and then evaluating the end-products themselves.⁴³¹

When students participate in formulating the evaluations for their work, either as individuals or within a group, they take a greater interest in and responsibility for their work than when the teacher designs the evaluation tools [*fosters commitment and responsibility for one’s individual actions as well as commitment and responsibility to the group*].

Group questions are displayed on large chart paper clearly visible to all students and are left hanging on the wall for students as a record of the progress of their story. Words on the charts are available as helpful “banks” for writing assignments. Open “brainstorming” is a regular feature of Storyline and responses are listed for open question and discussion. The student engagement factor is high as each student’s voice and experience is welcomed and considered [*facilitates broad and active participation; emphasizes student voice*]. Conflicts are evident, with the words on the chart paper open to be thoughtfully considered and refined

⁴²⁹ Steve Bell, *Introduction to the Storyline Method* (2004 [cited June 7 2004]), <http://www.acskive.dk/sstoryline/introduc.htm>.

⁴³⁰ Ibid. ([cited]).

⁴³¹ Ibid. ([cited]).

by the group. Students learn to address ideas rather than attack one another for ideas held. Students create the story together, which fosters cooperation [*facilitation of discussion and deliberation rather than debate and competition; fosters commitment and responsibility for one's individual actions as well as commitment and responsibility to the group*].

In one of my recent Storyline classes that focused on “The Election Campaign” with 2nd through 7th graders, students broke into “parties” and created candidates, platforms and campaign strategies. Multiple opportunities arose in whole class explorations during the election process to deal with the competitive features of the campaign and to allow students to expose their opinions in a discussion rather than an adversarial format. Even as some students mirrored parents’ extremely competitive behaviors, the environment that fostered discussion and deliberation often softened the competitive or aggressive behaviors and language or stopped it altogether when it was discussed by all the children together in class.

Both Storytelling and the Scottish Storyline Method Storyline honor students’ stories of their experiences. Once students understand that their voices will be heard consistently and that their role in the storying experience is valuable, students show one another respect with very little prompting. Paley describes the feeling of this situation, “You can let these easy, open feelings come out, you know, let down your defenses, because in this activity there are external controls that equally apply to everyone. And no one is likely to cut you down for your efforts.”⁴³²

Hutchinson and Romano suggest that if educators attend to the stories children tell through their conversations with teachers and other students while participating in their schoolwork, then incidents of humiliation will most likely occur less often. They argue that when one is attending to another’s story, stories can be an antidote to humiliation. When we are “curious” about one another, when we understand the unknowability⁴³³ of the other and are open, receptive and curious about the other, we are less likely to humiliate. Hutchinson writes of stories, “Stories have the power to sustain dignity by opening the public conversation for all to become party to culturally negotiated meaning,⁴³⁴ and “Paying attention to core stories sustains dignity, first, by creating connections between persons, and, second, by naming that which dominates/marginalizes, as well as that which enhances and

⁴³² Paley, *In Mrs. Tully's Room: A Childcare Portrait*, 123-124.

⁴³³ Charles Bingham, *Schools of Recognition: Identity, Politics and Classroom Practices*, (Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002).

⁴³⁴ Hutchinson, *Students on the Margins: Education, Stories, Dignity*, 74.

sustains dignity.”⁴³⁵ Storytelling and the Scottish Storyline method, as envisioned by Paley, Romano and Hutchinson, foster the conversations that help students to maintain their dignity and to live with and explore their differences.

Other Issues Addressed by Democratic Pedagogies

School Environment

Democratic pedagogies widely used in classrooms in schools have the potential to change the social environment found in most schools and to address the lack of connection that many students feel when in school. Children bring their social developmental histories with them to school. Baker suggests that the social environment at school determines to what degree violence will be exhibited in that setting.⁴³⁶ When individuals can feel connected to their school, that is, find common ground with others and establish a sense of reciprocity and mutuality, then they will perceive their environment as supportive⁴³⁷ and may exhibit less violent behaviors.

Democratic pedagogies often create and model decision-making communities in the classroom that deal with real issues and problems that humans wrestle with all of their lives. This kind of focus creates awareness of and connects students to one another and to the greater community of which they are a part. Connections are fostered through guided discussion and cooperation rather than through competition.

Missing Link

Democratic pedagogies can address a missing link in intervention programs designed to reduce multiple forms of school violence. Violence intervention programs are often targeted to address *student behaviors* but do not directly address *adult behaviors* toward one another or toward students and may be a partial key to the mystery of the persistence of humiliation in public school cultures. A significant advantage of teachers' using democratic pedagogies in the classroom is that the structure of such pedagogies requires the teacher to teach democratic behaviors (listening, paraphrasing, deliberating, shared decision making). It is difficult to facilitate democratic strategies without careful planning and thoughtful reflection. Paley, who uses storytelling with her students, writes, “I was inventing characters, it would seem, for the purpose of improving my own behavior and

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 94.

⁴³⁶ Baker, "Are We Missing the Forest for the Trees?" 32.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 33.

fulfilling my fantasies.”⁴³⁸ Storytelling not only helps the students to process the issues in their lives, it may help the teacher rewrite her own understanding of democratic teaching. Additionally, students soon expose teachers who espouse but do not practice democratic behaviors. When students have a voice in the affairs of the classroom and reciprocal respect is a goal in classroom relationships, the teacher’s role as “classroom manager” and the need for rigid control of student behavior are reduced as students participate and take responsibility for their own behavior.⁴³⁹ As students have the opportunity to build their own meaning through experience, they feel respected and their dignity is nurtured.

“What would make kids not want to hurt one another?”

Finally, democratic pedagogies may help to address the question, “What would make kids not want to hurt one another?” In an interview Leblanc conducted with a young “outsider” teen in New York, the answer given to her question was, “The only way to get kids not to hurt each other is to get kids not to want to hurt each other.”⁴⁴⁰ Gilligan claims that the desire to do violence to one another erupts from people who don’t feel respected. If the pedagogies in a classroom foster and build respect into the structure of the activities and procedures such that students can *experience* respect first hand, can feel it without necessarily identifying what it is, respectful behavior becomes “the way things are, the way things are done.” Democratic pedagogies are a form of immersion into respect and can be compared to immersion into a language experience that is new. Like any new activity, it needs to be practiced for it to become a “habit.”

Conclusion

As democracy and the “democratic ideal” undergo evolution and constant revision to accommodate far more diversity than perhaps the “founding fathers” ever envisioned for the United States, ideas that were once “acceptable and reasonable” may necessarily become incompatible and awful. I am speaking now of humiliation. Today’s children receive mixed messages about their importance as members of the human community: billboards and magazine advertisements paint children as the future, worthy of our best human and financial resources, while in their lived experiences (including school), children often

⁴³⁸ Paley, *In Mrs. Tully's Room: A Childcare Portrait*, 63.

⁴³⁹ John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, 1938).

⁴⁴⁰ LeBlanc, “The Outsiders,” 40.

receive conditional acceptance as important members of the human community. One student in a class of mine recently described herself as, “passed over.”

Humiliation is not confined to adult-to-children acts. If the adults in the school community humiliate one another, then they may not recognize humiliating acts in their own behavior toward children. Stated another way by a good friend and colleague, “If we don’t know care among ourselves, how can we give care to those really dependent on us for it?”⁴⁴¹ If the adults in the community participate in humiliating one another/children, the children will see humiliation as “normal” rather than as a way of acting that needs to be eliminated, even though they might know that it is harmful. It might also be said that children will have difficulty or will not be able to reconcile the dichotomy between demands for respect for others and acts that do not respect others. What people “do” most often carries more import than what they “say.” Children need support and guidance in recognizing and in eliminating humiliation in their relationships.

I argue that if democratic pedagogies were consciously put into place in schools, that a central factor that works against democracy—humiliation—would be directly and indirectly addressed in powerful ways. Attending school may teach us *about* democracy, but not give us sustained practice in democratic habits that might sustain it. Democratic pedagogies—that is, pedagogies that not only seek to teach democratic enlightenment, but also seek to practice the skills necessary to sustain democracy (which has implied in it the worth and dignity of all humans)—will work against the humiliation that undermines it.

Combined with strategies to expose humiliation directly as an issue worthy of discussion—about what it is, what in the human psyche causes us to humiliate one another and what its effects are on humans—many characteristics of democratic pedagogies offer those in a school community the opportunity to practice civilized and respectful ways to relate to one another across their differences. It is often fears that accompany differences among humans that underlie many humiliating acts. Democratic pedagogies thoughtfully practiced can help humans negotiate (and face) those fears and demystify and honor the differences that separate them, simultaneously acting as a form of counter-narrative (about how we should “be” together in schooling) to resist metanarratives of humiliation. That is, how we treat one another, how we “do business together” in the classroom (and in all schooling relationships),

⁴⁴¹ Sanne Milgaard, in conversation, April, 2003.

can, if conducted democratically, tell a different story of schooling and counter or resist narratives of humiliation. Vivian Paley expresses the power of narrative to heal:

One classmate has revealed his pain and another has risen to comfort him. The children know and we know that this is what we are supposed to be doing in a classroom, but sometimes it must be explained in a story before we can see what it looks like. By long wandering a short way has been found.⁴⁴²

Pedagogical Considerations for Implementation of Counter-narratives

The political reality of education is that consideration of the incorporation of any major change (such as curriculum, pedagogies) into public schooling immediately concerns more than the individual classroom teacher or the students inhabiting a classroom. I believe that any counter-narrative that challenges narratives that sanction humiliation in schools will require a significant shift in attitudes about the purpose of schools and of education by everyone inside and outside of the educational community affected by the new narrative. Relationships and students will necessarily come to the forefront of the educational process and immediately be in conflict with “master” narratives that favor student achievement of standards as a central measure of success (rather than success being measured by the well-being and learning capacity of students that would be enabled with pedagogies that disable humiliation). Incorporating counter-narratives into the classroom “wholesale” through curriculum or pedagogies is unlikely without several other actions taking place that I will outline below. This final section of my inquiry will be in the format of a conversation or discussion, rather than a list, of the pedagogical implications of efforts to incorporate counter-narratives (specifically counter-narratives to narratives that sanction humiliation in human relations in the United States and especially in public schooling) into a classroom.⁴⁴³

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Clearly, counter-narratives are desperately needed to bring healing and cohesion into school communities, counter-narratives that challenge “master” societal narratives that

⁴⁴² Paley, *In Mrs. Tully's Room: A Childcare Portrait*, 123.

⁴⁴³ I want to address incorporation of counter-narratives that sanction humiliation. However, many of the points I will make would apply to the pedagogical implication of the incorporation of any counter-narrative into schooling.

⁴⁴⁴ This section of my inquiry will be a somewhat condensed summary, as a full exploration of this question could become an inquiry of its own.

support humiliation in human relations. Those narratives include (to name those cited in Chapter 4): people (especially those perceived by people in power as less “civilized” or less self-disciplined, such as children and those not “white”⁴⁴⁵) must be controlled by whatever justifiable means are necessary to keep societal order (and to prevent chaos and violence); people who break rules must be publicly punished as examples to deter others and to assist offenders in improving their behavior so they can better fit into society; teachers (educators)/parents are naturally “good” people entrusted with the welfare of children and wouldn’t do anything that is not for children’s own good; “The world is a nasty place” and people/children “have to learn to handle it”⁴⁴⁶ therefore, humiliation is a normal and natural part of being human and it is beneficial (albeit uncomfortable) because it “builds character,”⁴⁴⁷ “toughens people up” (“I lived through it and look at me—I turned out okay.”)⁴⁴⁸; and additionally, all children are the same, achieve the same, develop at the same rate, feel the same, come to school in the same state of readiness, etc.

There is no question that there will be resistance to efforts to incorporate counter-narratives to humiliation on multiple levels that include teachers, other school staff, parents, business interests and the general community, for several reasons. Many people who work in education were reared with and are caught in what Alice Miller (1983) refers to as the “cycle of poisonous pedagogies.” Children whose parents employed child-rearing methods that included physical and mental abuse⁴⁴⁹ repressed and internalized their pain and denied their suffering (because they are either afraid of their parents and/or disbelieving that their primary caregivers would treat them in this way). Unless children were helped to understand and process these experiences, they are likely to normalize such behavior and repeat their experience with their own children (or students). Attempted introduction of a counter-narrative to humiliating practices would threaten the lived experience and beliefs of adults that have normalized such behaviors.

⁴⁴⁵ Jacobsen in *Whiteness of a Different Color*, makes the point that the concept of what constitutes “whiteness” (i.e., “civilized”) has shifted many times over in the political history of the U. S. to suit those in power to keep themselves in power. However, at the “top” has always been the Northern European ideal.

⁴⁴⁶ Phinney, “Sexual Harrassment: A Dynamic Element in the Lives of Middle School Girls and Teachers.”

⁴⁴⁷ This statement was made by a secondary principal who related several personal stories of humiliation in school.

⁴⁴⁸ A second version of this narrative with a different justification rooted in biblical origins is that people are born evil, in sin, and therefore will naturally suffer trials and tribulations. It’s part of being sinful and human.

⁴⁴⁹ An overwhelming percentage of parents employ such pedagogies, as has been documented earlier in this inquiry.

Jeannie Oakes' in-depth study of a Carnegie school reform effort to "create community-like schools that foster meaningful engagement with ideas, as well as with caring people, diverse environments, and democratic processes"⁴⁵⁰ through an initiative called "Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century," provides a substantive look at the obstacles to attempts to change the narratives by which a school culture lives. For ten years, Oakes followed 16 schools engaged in the Carnegie school reform. Even with dynamic leaders, substantial funding and material support, and institution of "best practices," reforms in place at the end of 10 years varied from moderate to nearly non-existent. Typically, the movement was back toward the original status quo. Oakes writes that schools engaged in reform "aroused fundamental contradictions in an American culture that embraces democratic ends for its schools but resists the democratic means from which the ends cannot be separated."⁴⁵¹ The situations Oakes describes exemplify institutional narratives that are older and larger than any group or individual within the institution. The metanarrative of "school" is itself an institution, an artifact that exists on its own, much as Lear describes.⁴⁵² I am also reminded here both of the pervasive and nearly invisible power of established social cultural narratives, and of the "conservative drift" referred to by White and Epston earlier in this chapter.⁴⁵³

Significant and long-term professional development to develop awareness of humiliation is a primary requirement for school staff and especially for teachers for incorporation of pedagogies and curriculum that express counternarratives to humiliation. Additionally, professional development needs to be attractive to teachers and to build in on-going supports, such as smaller and/or fewer classes, paid leave time to take classes where non-humiliating pedagogies are modeled and practiced (and where proof is provided that chaos will not reign if people are treated well instead of controlled by classroom management) and long term mentoring in the classroom for the changes teachers want and are being asked to make. At the very least, implied in significant professional development are generous amounts of time; smaller adult/student ratios that allow for supportive and meaningful relationships between students and teachers (or other designated school or

⁴⁵⁰ Jeannie Oakes, Karen Hunter Quartz and Steve Ryan, "Becoming Good American Schools: The Struggle for Civic Virtue in Education Reform," *Phi Delta Kappan* 81, no. 8 (2000), 569.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵² Lear, *Open Minded: Working out the Logic of the Soul*.

⁴⁵³ White, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, 4.

community personnel); extended commitments and time to work through the difficulties that come with change from school personnel at all levels, parents and the community; and the funding to pay for all of the foregoing. Teacher and school personnel unions, which seldom want change that might impact personnel requirements, would probably require extensive negotiation of such a proposal so that it is not just “one more thing” loaded on the already full plates of teachers and other school personnel.

Additionally, significant changes in many or most teacher education programs are implicated by incorporation of counter-narratives to humiliation into classrooms. A re-visioning or re-storying of what it means to be a teacher or an “educator” in the spirit of Paulo Freire’s idea of “teachers as cultural workers”⁴⁵⁴ rather than “curriculum providers” or “test preparers,” is central to such an effort.

As I mentioned previously in this chapter, there are several excellent pedagogies⁴⁵⁵ available that would compliment such a change, but many of these pedagogies are not currently or widely taught in teacher education or in professional development programs. For example, the storytelling method advocated by primary school educator Vivian Paley opens up areas where both children and teachers experiment with values and beliefs in fictional or fantasy environments. Pedagogies such as this take extended time and support for teachers to learn and require more time and flexibility in the classroom with students than most school schedules allow.

A shift in focus from standardized testing to relationships requires a commitment to include more professionals with an understanding of mental health care within the schools, where mentoring and counseling (not scheduling) services in school communities need to be expanded. School counselor Marie Kecskemeti⁴⁵⁶ writes of teachers’ resistance to intrusion from counselors’ assistance in classroom problems. Kecskemeti had to undergo training herself to become more sensitive to the needs of teachers. However, the need for more counseling assistance in schools is unlikely to be met in a time when the public and the U. S. government are asking schools to provide progressively more services without adequate

⁴⁵⁴ Paulo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach*, trans. D. Macedo, D. Koike, and A. Oliveira, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

⁴⁵⁵ Other promising pedagogies are democratic pedagogies that include the Structured Academic Controversy, the Socratic Seminar, and Deliberation, all described earlier in this chapter. Art, music, dance, literature and poetry are other pedagogical means for introducing counter-narratives into the classroom.

⁴⁵⁶ Maria Kecskemeti and David Epston, “A Proposal for an Interview Format and Practices of Appreciation that Value Teachers’ and Students’ Knowledges in Schools,” (1999).

funding and support personnel are being released to free up funds to improve standardized testing scores.

Perhaps the best chance of incorporating counter-narratives to humiliation into school classrooms is through a one teacher-at-a-time approach, enlisting teachers sympathetic to social justice. These teachers will need support. Peter McLaren writes,

We need to develop a praxis that gives encouragement to those who, instead of being content with visiting history as curators or custodians of memory, choose to live in the furnace of history where memory is molten and can be bent into the contours of a dream and perhaps even acquire the immanent force of a vision.⁴⁵⁷

Reprise: A Better Future

While at 15 I did not understand the import of my discovery about self-selected life changing stories, I realize now that I learned from my brother Paul's convincing demonstration that narratives, in the form of counter-narratives, have the power to resist narratives that sanction humiliation and that direct one's life. In fact, counter-narratives offer a powerful and viable strategy for rewriting master cultural narratives that encourage and normalize humiliating behaviors. James Gilligan offers us a clear signal for specifically recognizing successful counter-narratives to the master narratives that sanction and encourage humiliation in human relations in the United States. He writes,

One sign of a health-giving physical environment, one that is most supportive of individual life and survival, is the absence of physical pain. And one criterion by which to recognize an environment that is most conducive to the survival not only of individuals but also of groups, societies, and the whole species, is the absence of shame. The main precondition for preventing violence then is the establishment of the social and psychological conditions that minimize people's exposure to shame, and that maximize their access to non-violent means of undoing whatever shame they do experience, so that they can maintain their pride and self-esteem

⁴⁵⁷ Peter McLaren, "Multiculturalism and the Postmodern Critique: Toward a Pedagogy of Resistance and Transformation," in *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*, ed. Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren (New York: Routledge, 1994), 218.

without doing so at the expense of the pride and self-esteem of others.”⁴⁵⁸

I began this inquiry with a question: If it is so painful and potentially formative in negative ways in human living and learning, why isn't discussion of humiliation a “front burner” concern, particularly in schools, where we presumably care about our children and where they learn from our example? Why would people involved in schooling, especially adults, participate in, sanction, or look by humiliation if indeed it is so undesirable in their personal estimation? This inquiry, which looks at humiliation through the lens of narrative, suggest that humiliation persists because it is embedded in multiple ways in the narratives we live by – both shared metanarratives and individuals' stories. The narratives that we tell ourselves and one another (abetted by our emotions and memories), combined with the societal narratives (and beliefs that stem from them) that guide us in the formation of our narratives, contribute significantly to the persistence of humiliation.

Most of us, I suspect, are unwitting co-conspirators in the persistence of humiliation. When for any reason we accept humiliation for ourselves, look by or sanction humiliation for someone else, we help it to persist. As long as humiliation is sanctioned in our societal metanarratives unchallenged, it persists. We must become conscious of humiliation and remember every time we see it that although we would like to avoid it, we have a moral responsibility to resist or counter it. The stakes are high for our children, for the realization of our democracy, and for the future of our society.

Damasio suggests that the human mind is an ongoing theater production, a thought that might imply that we are the producers and directors of our conscious reactions to life; that we can interrupt and affect the automatic scripts etched in the narratives of our memories by rewriting them to suit ourselves and the lives we would prefer to live. Margalit writes, “Every human being has the radical possibility of starting life anew at any moment irrespective of his life's previous course.”⁴⁵⁹ We have the freedom to shape our lives. There are ways we can counter humiliation if we remain conscious of it and if we talk openly about it with others. We must drag it out from its “quiet as it's kept” status into the light of day where we can counter or resist it in the stories that we tell (as in the Cherry Hill High School

⁴⁵⁸ Gilligan, *Preventing Violence*, 138.

⁴⁵⁹ Margalit, *The Decent Society* (N. Goldblum, Trans.), 117.

counseling center) and in the democratic habits we practice and teach our children that will help them to write a more humane and just future.

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Vita

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Education

- Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction, University of Washington
 M.Ed. Secondary Curriculum and Instruction, University of Washington
 Secondary Teaching Credential, Chapman University
 California Single Subject Clear Credential
 Washington State Continuing Certificate; Social Studies Endorsement
 B.S. English, Middle Tennessee State University
 Minors: History, Political Science

Professional Experience

- Bellevue School District: Teacher, 2002-Present
 Teacher in Homeschool Resource Center
 University of Washington: Teaching Assistant, Teacher Education Program
 Social Studies and English, 1999-2000, 2001-2003
 High Tech High Charter School: Teacher Leader, Curriculum Design
 Leadership team member in startup charter math, science and engineering high school, 2000-2001
 University of Washington: Research Assistant, Teacher Education Program, 1998-1999
 Sultan School District: Teacher, English and Social Studies, 1993-1998
 Professional development facilitator for teachers in Six-Trait Writing and writing assessment.
 Journalism Advisor, 3 years
 San Dieguito Union High School District: Teacher, English, 1991-1993

Classroom Teaching

- * Implemented writing across the curriculum
- * Variety of teaching experience in CA and WA over past 15 years, including ESL, Honors, teacher education and project-based experimental programs.

Curriculum and School Site Involvement

- * Involved in all aspects of curriculum design in new charter high school
- * Involved in school and curriculum reform for twelve years.
- * Initiated alternative means of student assessment in classroom, including projects, portfolios.
- * Curriculum designer with UW History Department project to write curriculum for high school Pacific Northwest History classes.
- * Created/piloted 9th grade language arts class to facilitate student transition to high school

School District Involvement

- * Teacher Trainer in WA/Oregon Six-Trait Writing assessment.
- * Professional Development: Teacher In-service to align teaching and assessment of student writing with Washington State Essential Learning Goals
- * District Language Arts, Writing Assessment and Technology committees.
- * Professional Development: "Writing Across the Curriculum" in-service to district secondary teachers.

Additional Special Training

- 2001 - Internet and Teens Seminar, CA State Library System
- 1999 - Puget Sound Writing Project, Leadership Institute, UW
- 1996, 1998 - UW Jackson School of International Studies Summer Outreach classes
- 1997 - Truckee River Integrated Curriculum Project
- 1995 - Vanguard Training Team, Puget Sound ESD
- 1994 - 95 - Puget Sound Writing Project Institute, UW
- 1994 - Leadership and Change Seminar, Puget Sound ESD, SPU
- 1994 - Integrated Curriculum Seminar, College Board
- 1994 - Integrating the Internet into the Curriculum, UW
- 1994 - Alternative Assessment Training, Mt. Vernon ESD
- 1993 - Student Assistance Services Training, San Diego County
- 1992 - 93 - Bilingual (Spanish) Intensive Summer Program, San Diego County
- 1991 - 92 - San Dieguito District Portfolio Workshops
- 1991 - UCSD San Diego Area Writing Project, Open Summer Institute
- 1971 - Remedial Reading Training Classes, Pepperdine University

Professional Affiliations

- National Council of Teachers of English
- Washington State Council of Teachers of English
- Pi Lambda Theta
- Washington State Council of Social Studies Teachers
- Association for Career and Technical Education