

The Humiliation Dynamic: Looking to the Past and Future

© Donald C. Klein, Ph.D.

Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Network,
Columbia Teachers College, New York City, December 15-16, 2005

INTRODUCTION

A few weeks ago, as I was starting to prepare for this session in which Evelin had asked me to “look back” and “look to the future” with reference to our work on Human Dignity and Humiliation, I was checking out my purchases at the supermarket when I noticed a screaming child who was in tears because her mother had refused to buy something the girl wanted. As the mother strode ahead pursued by her screaming three-year old, the check-out clerk commented that the mother was to be congratulated for not giving in to the child’s tears, for holding fast to discipline, and not “spoiling her daughter.” Part of me agreed. It would not be in the child’s best interest to learn that a temper tantrum was an effective weapon. That would not be good child-rearing.

And yet, perhaps because I was preoccupied with thoughts about human dignity and humiliation, my mind turned to thinking about the child. She was clearly upset. Every fibre of her being was devoted to expressing outrage. She wanted something she could not get for herself and she wanted it badly. She was small, helpless, and dependent on her mother, who was bigger, stronger, and equipped with far more resources than she. It did not seem unreasonable to think that, in many respects, she was the epitome of the powerless humiliated child. It also was reasonable to think that virtually all human beings, including myself, had been involved in similar pitiful early childhood experiences of feeling powerless, put down, and unable to get something they wanted badly. At some level of our beings, everyone knew what it was to feel such humiliation. I, too, in some internalized corner of my psyche harbored the pain of humiliating impotence. This screaming three-year old was the epitome of the humiliated child within me. And yet of those who witnessed the episode, it seemed likely that most would agree with the check-out clerk: the child’s mother was to be congratulated for not giving in to her daughter’s humiliated rage.

Perhaps as an adult, I thought, this humiliated youngster would witness another

pre-schooler's enraged frustration and, like the check-out clerk, would congratulate the parent for participating so effectively in the humiliation of yet another small person. Clearly, maintaining human dignity and avoiding inflicting humiliation in human affairs was by no means an easy matter. It was, indeed, worth a great deal of thought, inner reflection, and systematic inquiry.

It is also worthwhile, I discovered, to pay attention to the writings of the great American humorist-sage, who had some very wise things to say about humiliation.

Mark Twain wrote: There it is: it doesn't make any difference who we are or what we are, there's always somebody to look down on. - Mark Twain, *3000 Years among the Microbes*

LOOKING TO THE PAST

Origins of My Quest to Understand Humiliation

My quest to understand humiliation began at least thirty years when I observed how I and others dealt with certain circumstances that we wished to avoid. (Klein, 1988) I had what is often called an "aha experience." I suddenly realized that at the heart of my fear of my avoidance of certain situations, such as speaking in large groups, was the desire to avoid disparagement at the hands of others. It occurred to me that I was not alone in this and that other people, too, almost always were motivated, if not to please others, at least to ward off mortification at the hands of others. After observing my own and others' behaviors with this notion in mind, I noticed that both I and others with whom I discussed this matter often ended up not getting what we wanted in life because of our tendency to avoid humiliating ridicule and rejection.

Mark Twain had this to say about avoiding rejection: **"Each man is afraid of his neighbor's disapproval - a thing which, to the general run of the human race, is more dreaded than wolves and death."** - Mark Twain, *The United States of Lyncherdom*

During ten prior years as a mental health worker interested in prevention, I had been involved as a consultant to a variety of both public and private community groups and institutions. My effectiveness depended, in large part, on my ability to move freely within the community, connecting with different sectors and levels of power and prestige. Clients did not come to see me

in my office. It was up to me to learn how to enter their personal and professional settings and to make myself available to a wide variety of public and private groups, ranging from those at the margin to those who enjoyed considerable power and influence. Three breakthroughs resulted from this experience.

The first breakthrough came when, after several years of trial and error, I realized that, in addition to my consulting skills and what I knew as a psychologist about human behavior, my effectiveness depended on my knowledge of two quite different domains that to most people at that time seemed almost at odds with one other: on the one hand, **self-understanding**; on the other hand, in-depth **knowledge of social systems**. I had moved beyond the traditional dichotomy between intra personal psychology and systemic dynamics.

As I came to realize that my effectiveness rested in large measure on my ability to work at the interface between the two, I searched for concepts that intertwined the two foci: individual self-development and understanding of social systems. I deliberately worked on development both of self-understanding (via meditation, Tai Chi, personal growth workshops, LSD therapy) and understanding the dynamics of groups, organizations, communities and other social systems.

The second breakthrough came when I recognized how important it was for individuals to arrive at and maintain a clear and meaningful relationship to the social milieu in which they found themselves. I used the term “significance” to label this fundamental need for social meaning. In this I was guided by the work of anthropologist Eliot Liebow, whose ethnographic study of African American males who hung out with one another outside a take-out liquor store in Washington, DC emphasized how important their association with one another was to these otherwise marginal men. Significance for me was (and is) the opposite of what social activist Saul Alinsky referred to as “social dust.”

The third breakthrough was when I realized that people – individually and collectively – are driven by their thoughts. In other words, the only reality we can ever know is that which exists in our minds. We live in the realm of the stories we tell ourselves by whatever our senses allow us to experience. And those senses screen out a vast amount of potential stimuli that we can neither see, hear, smell, taste, nor feel, even though we know from scientific studies of atoms,

molecules, and other phenomena that they do, in fact, exist. In effect, we are continuously engaged in creating the reality in which we function.

Mark Twain had this to say about the reality in which we function: "**Life does not consist mainly - or even largely - of facts and happenings. It consists mainly of the storm of thoughts that is forever blowing through one's head.**" - Mark Twain, *Autobiography*

This is not the place to develop this point further. It is presented in some depth in my 2001 book *New Vision, New Reality*. I prefer to tell one of my very favorite stories, which makes the point in a single punch line. Three major league baseball umpires are relaxing at a bar after a ball game on a hot summer day. After a few minutes, the youngest of them, a relative newcomer to the majors, puts down his beer and says, "When it comes to calling balls and strikes, I call 'em like I see 'em." This statement can be viewed as a declaration of courage. No matter what the players have to say, no matter what insults are aimed his way by aggrieved coaches, no matter the howls of outraged fans and even a hurled pop bottle or two, he is prepared to stick by his decision. He is a man of courage. He calls 'em like he sees 'em come Hell or high water.

After a decent interval, one of the other two umpires puts down his beer and eyes his partners. He is a middle-aged man of considerable experience, who has presided over fifteen years of major league games. "I tell ya," he says, "When it comes to calling balls and strikes, I call 'em like they is." Now this is an outright claim of infallibility. He's been around a long time. He simply doesn't make mistakes. A strike is a strike; a ball is a ball. He knows the difference. His judgment is beyond reproach.

Finally, it's the third umpire's turn. He's by far the senior member of the trio. He's been around the major leagues for over several decades and soon will be ready to retire. "You know," he said, "When it comes to calling balls and strikes, they ain't nothin' 'till I call 'em."

So it is with every aspect of our lives. As long as we take ourselves and our thoughts seriously, like that umpire our minds are making the rulings on how we will experience each and every event in our lives.

Appreciative Being

Over thirty years ago I discovered that there is, however, a level of consciousness that lies beneath and goes beyond the realm of thought. That is the capacity for awe and even rapture with which we come equipped when we are born. In my book *New Vision, New Reality* I called it the Psychology of Appreciation and contrasted it with what I termed the Psychology of Projection. The latter is the study of thought-based ways of coping with life that have been so well documented by Western psychologists, including behaviorists, psychodynamicists, and cognitive therapists. It is projective in nature because it imposes our beliefs, values, interpretations, and judgments on life events.

By contrast, in a state of appreciative being we experience whatever happens in life with a sense of wonderment, that ineffable feeling of being one with the universe. So far, everyone with whom I've talked, reports experiencing such feelings more than once in their lives, almost always under special circumstances, such as watching a beautiful sunset, being in a place of natural beauty, or skimming over the waves as a water skier.

Unlike their Western colleagues, Buddhists and other Eastern experts in psychology have developed considerable expertise in the study of levels of consciousness. As I have become increasingly immersed in what I call appreciative being, I have felt less and less identified with Western psychological thought, to the extent that these days when asked about my profession or discipline, I sometimes describe myself as a "recovering" psychologist.

"If we're born with the capacity for appreciative being," I asked myself, "What keeps us from living our lives on a daily basis informed by this wondrous way of being? Why cover it over with the world of ideas that makes up most people's everyday reality? What makes us blame, attack, and often kill one another, convinced that we are right and they are wrong?"

The answer came when I realized that the world of thought includes the very core of our images of ourselves: the beliefs, and ideas having to do with who we are and who we want to be. We cling to that world because it defines us in terms both of our individual and collective selves. What would happen if we were no longer that "self" or if we no longer took that self seriously.

The Fear of Humiliation

When I came to the point of deciding to no longer take the self called “Don Klein” seriously, I experienced an intense and all-pervasive confusion and anxiety. At the root of it was the fear that I would cease to exist. Based on my experience and what I’ve learned from others who have experienced it, this existential fear is what keeps us from experiencing appreciative being except under special circumstances, such as sunsets, beautiful natural settings, and other situations. Because of that fear of disappearing, most of us cling to our self-concepts no matter what. We remove ourselves from relationships that threaten that concept. We will even kill others and face death to defend who we are. Especially important for our work here, we will do our best to avoid feeling powerless and put down, being ridiculed, experiencing degradation and a sense of diminishment at the hands of others: that is, being the victims of humiliation.

Mark Twain had this to say about fear of humiliation: **“A sin takes on new and real terrors when there seems a chance that it is going to be found out.”** - Mark Twain, *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg*

It was the realization that the fear of humiliation was a powerful factor that kept us out of touch with our inherent birthright of appreciation, which led me to launch my study of what I called the “humiliation dynamic” – a term that embraces both the personal experience of humiliation and the social dynamic that contains the potential for humiliation. Although the feelings of humiliation are intensely personal, the process itself is located in the relationship between the person and what my mentor Erich Lindemann, a pioneer in the field of preventive psychiatry, called “the emotionally relevant human environment.” (Lindemann, 1979)

The prototypic humiliating experience involves a triangle that includes:

- (1) *humiliators* -those who inflict disparagement;
- (2) *victims* - those who experience it as disparagement;
- (3) *witnesses* -those who observe what happens and agree that it is disparagement.

Methods for Studying the Humiliation Dynamic

The methods for the study were four-fold. They included:

1. extended conversations with informants in the United States from various socioeconomic backgrounds;
2. Review of research and professional literature in psychology, sociology, and mental health;
3. examination of selected works of fiction having to do with humiliation;
4. reading daily newspapers to see what journalists had to say about the topic.

A Paradox

Early on in the study of the psychological literature I discovered a fascinating paradox. On the one hand, humiliation was implicated by a number of different authors in a variety of psychopathologies, including delinquency (Erikson, E. 1987), suicide (Gernsbacher, L. 1985), depression (Lewis, 1976), paranoia (Brink, 1980; Gaylin, 1979), sadomasochism, (Fromm, 1979), anxiety disorders (Beck & Emery, 1985,) and abusive behavior in families (Fossum, & Mason, 1986; Gelles, R. and Straus, M., 1988)). It also appeared frequently in newspaper articles about officials, entertainers, and other public figures. On the other hand, with a few notable exceptions, the dynamics of humiliation did not appear in the work of personality theorists.

One outstanding exception was the work of physician Aaron Lazare, who in 1987 published a telling criticism of the use of shame and humiliation in the education of medical students. (Lazare, 1987) Another was the work of feminist scholar Marcia Westkott, who built on the work of neo-Freudian Karen Horney to implicate rejections, belittlements, and other humiliations within marital relationships as a volatile mixture that often exploded into serious psychological and physical abuse (Westkott, 1986).

The other exception among personality theorists was Helen Lewis' psychoanalytic discussion of the role in psychopathology of what she called the shame-based family of emotions (1971, 1976) and the associated work of Thomas Scheff on what he called the "shame-rage spiral." (19878) According to Lewis, "Feeling ridiculous, embarrassment, chagrin, mortification,

humiliation, and dishonor are all variants of the shame state.” (1976, p. 188)

Although they are lumped together in Lewis’ theory and have certain characteristics in common (such as one’s reaction to others’ disparagement), I decided that it was useful and important to distinguish shame from humiliation. As Miller noted, a key difference is that “humiliation involves being put into a lowly, debased, and powerless position by someone who has, at that moment, greater power than oneself,” whereas “shame involves primarily a reflection upon the self by the self.” (Miller, 1988, p. 42) In essence, they involve quite different dynamics and can be dealt with differently both on an individual and collective level. In everyday practice, the terms are often interchangeable, with the word “shame,” for example, being used as a synonym for humiliation. I knew, however, from my own experience as a Jew growing up in New England and later efforts to deal with institutional white racism in American society, that it was quite possible to experience humiliation at the hands of others without feeling shame either about one’s behavior or identity. It was also quite possible to feel shame about something one had done without experiencing oneself as the humiliated victim of others’ ridicule or censure.

To keep the terms straight in my own mind, I sometimes fall back on what I or my wife might experience if betrayed in our relationship. If I were unfaithful to her and she found out about it, I would feel ashamed but not humiliated. If she were unfaithful to me and I found out about it, I would feel humiliated but not necessarily ashamed.

Findings from the Study

I will mention a few of the general findings from my study. More detailed discussion can be found in a two-part special issue I edited of the *Journal of Primary Prevention*, which appeared in Winter, 1991 and Spring, 1992.

Those whom I interviewed who had felt humiliated themselves, reported that, regardless of when the experience took place, it remained both vivid and fresh in their minds. When the humiliation occurred, they felt helpless and confused, sick in the gut, at least momentarily paralyzed, and with few exceptions, experienced themselves as being filled with rage. The rage

they described brought to mind Scheff's description of "humiliated fury." To quote from the special issue on the Humiliation Dynamic of *the Journal of Primary Prevention*:

“[humiliated fury] seemed akin to the world-consuming rage of a frustrated infant who is prepared to devour the universe but is helpless to do so. Regardless of whether the rage is turned inward in the form of depression and despair or outward in the form of vengeful fantasies, paranoia, or sadistic behavior, those who are driven by such fury almost literally consume themselves - and often others -with rage. They deplete their emotional, intellectual, and physical energies either in attempts to exact revenge or in vengeful fantasies of somehow undoing the wrong.”
Klein, 1991, p. 119)

Especially pertinent to our work in the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Network are the consequences of the Humiliation Dynamic, both to the victims and those who become the targets of their frustration and anger. Again, I quote from the Special Issue of the *Journal of Primary Prevention*:

“ When it is outwardly directed, humiliated fury unfortunately creates additional victims, often including innocent bystanders as is so often the case in war, civil strife, personal and family vendettas, and terrorist attacks. When it is inwardly directed, the resulting self-hate renders victims incapable of meeting their own needs, let alone having energy available to love and care for others. In either case, those who are consumed by humiliated fury are absorbed in themselves or their cause, wrapped in wounded pride and individual or collective righteousness, the very epitome of egoistic self-importance. (p. 119)

Fear of Humiliation

From a combination of what my informants had to say and novels in which the humiliation dynamic served as a major theme (e.g., Greene, 1980,) I came to realize that the fear of humiliation is at least as important as the experience of humiliation itself. Without exception, everyone with whom I talked reported feeling vulnerable to such degradation at the hands of others. It also became apparent that, over and above the earliest childhood experiences of feeling powerless, put-down, and ridicule, one doesn't have to be an actual victim of humiliation to develop the desire to avoid it. Merely participating in or observing someone else's humiliation is enough. Whatever their own experience with it in the past, my informants said they do whatever they can to avoid it.

Indeed, fear of humiliation appears to be one of the most powerful motivators of human behavior. So powerful, indeed, that people kill themselves to escape humiliation and others, even against their deeply held principles, go to war to kill other human beings rather than run the risk of being publicly humiliated by being labelled “coward” or “traitor.”

Humiliation as a Psychic Fury

What I learned from my study convinced me that the Humiliation Dynamic is in a league by itself as the single most pervasive and powerful motivators of destructive collective behavior. Guilt and anxiety, the other more acknowledged and widely studied psychic furies, are simply not in the same league when it comes to precipitating and shaping inter-communal and international conflict.

Many experts suggest that Hitler rose to power because he expressed the humiliated, impotent fury experienced by Germans following World War I and that the Chinese revolution of the twentieth century was fueled by years of humiliating exploitation incurred at the hands of the United States and European powers. (Fairbanks, 1987) Newspaper accounts frequently report resignations of national leaders in response to public humiliation. Palestinian uprisings in territories occupied by Israel; terrorism and wars of liberation in Ireland and the Middle East; vendettas and blood feuds in many parts of the world all reflect what happens when large groups feel that their collective identities have been besmirched.

The sense of national humiliation and resulting rage in the United States over the Iran hostage

crisis, which took place as my study was underway, is another example. It may well have contributed to the later U.S. invasion of Granada and the unseating of General Noriega in Panama, which some have viewed as symbolic ways to restore national honor. Towards the end of data gathering, as I began to write on the topic, the first Persian Gulf confrontation was building to a possible crisis stage and Saddam Hussein was quoted as saying that “Under no circumstances will Iraq allow itself to be humiliated!” and U.S. TV commentators were suggesting that the U. S. would ultimately have to choose between a humiliating backdown or a shooting war. We know what happened. We did not back down and we did go to war.

Prosocial Humiliation?

I came away from the study with a major unresolved question having to do with the prosocial use of humiliation. The issue is embodied in the incident noted at the outset of this presentation: the confrontation between a mother and her screaming, enraged and obviously humiliated pre-schooler. As the check-out clerk noted, the mother was engaged in a critical process of shaping her daughter’s character. Perhaps the unfortunate residues of such humiliating experience, are a necessary cost of the appropriate use of such a powerful tool for character formation. For thousands of years in traditional societies, physical pain and ritualized humiliation or threats of humiliation have been used in a prosocial way as ritualized collective support of children making the transition into adulthood.

In our own society, prosocial humiliation is used as part of ritual hazing practices and in the socialization by the military of new recruits. From an early age, we discover that approval, even expressions of parental love, is conditional, that we get more of it when we behave correctly and that we’re subject to humiliating rebukes and punishments when we do not. The majority of my informants reported experiencing some form of humiliating disparagement as part of their parents’ disciplinary repertoire. In school we must deal with the fact that we are graded for how well we do in our assigned curriculum. As Helen Luke, a Jungian oriented applied anthropologist, pointed out that in the process many people develop a grading orientation to life, in which the quest for

recognition replaces the possibility of joyfully meeting life challenges. (Luke, 1987)

Mark Twain wrote: **There it is: it doesn't make any difference who we are or what we are, there's always somebody to look down on.** - Mark Twain, *3000 Years among the Microbes*

My journeys into my own past, provided illuminating memories of school yard incidents whereby I learned about the potential for humiliation at the hands of fellow students. As I put it in the *The Journal of Primary Prevention*,

“There we learn, if we've not done so already, how deeply wounding can be the pointing finger of scorn, the ritual chant of “nyaa, nyaa, nyaa, nyaa,” and other assaults on our sense of self and significance. Whether or not one is the victim of such humiliation as a child, one has innumerable opportunities to witness or participate in the humiliation of others.” (Klein, 1991, p. 104)

Perhaps these pervasive school yard patterns are part of a socialization process that, putting a high price on individuality and deviance, ensures sufficient conformity to cultural norms.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Questionable Value of Prosocial Humiliation

The matter of prosocial humiliation represents possibly the single most important area for further in-depth study and thoughtful consideration by those of us who are intent on eliminating the humiliation dynamic from the international sphere. In the United States, humiliation is a prevalent socialization mechanism. To what extent is this so in other societies? Are there human groups in which humiliation in one form or another is not incorporated in rituals and other practices designed to incorporate successive generations as acceptable members of adult society. If humiliation bears too high a cost, what other socialization mechanisms are available to take its place? These are complex questions that require thoughtful multi-disciplinary consideration by social scientists, child-rearing experts, and community builders from a wide variety of knowledge and backgrounds.

Promotion of this question of alternatives to the prosocial use of humiliation may be one of the most worthwhile contributions our network can provide.

A more generic approach might be to embed questions having to do with prosocial humiliation into an extensive program of cross-cultural studies that compares ways in which the humiliation dynamic is woven into the culture, the importance of humiliation in shaping the culture, particularly with respect to such considerations as socialization of successive generations into the society, ensuring conformity to social norms, and dealing with such differences as age, gender, sexual preference, socioeconomic status, religion, and ethnic identity. It is reasonable to assume that the humiliation dynamic in all societies affects and to a significant extent is shaped by how each society handles such differences. Indeed, every society consists of institutionalized patterns of roles and relationships in order to handle the significance and power implications of inherent differences in human groups, the most universal of which are differences in age (from birth through old age) and of gender, including those whose sexual preferences do not follow traditional heterosexual patterns expected of both males and females.

Improved Methods for Intervention

As we gain an understanding of the various occasions on which societies employ humiliation as a tool for managing differences and their ways of doing so, we will also gain in our understanding of how best to deploy educational and other kinds of effort in different societies to influence citizens and leaders to reject humiliation as a tool for public policy.

There is, at the same time, an urgent need to create an ever more effective set of tools for intervening in inter-cultural, inter-communal, and international disputes in which humiliation has been inflicted on one or more parties to the conflict. In interventions that I and others have attempted in community situations, we are often called on to work with individuals or entire groups who have been victimized by deeply wounding humiliations, either because of their general life circumstances or because people in power have repeatedly treated them arrogantly or with indifference. It is not unusual in such situations for those who are attempting to be helpful to

find themselves the targets of the humiliated fury of those who experience themselves as victims. There has been a considerable amount of progress made on approaches to third-party intervention in such touchy community situations. And yet, as anyone knows who has faced such rage, there is no single prescription or set of techniques to guide one's intervention. If such is the case in community situations, it's very likely that effective interventions in inter-communal and international conflicts involving a history of humiliation over many generations will prove to be far more challenging. Here again is an important area for comparative multi-disciplinary study of intervention theories and practices.

Psychological Immunization

For me, the single most exciting area for further exploration and development might be considered to be a form of psychological immunization against the dire effects of humiliation. I am dedicated in my own future work to the transformation of public consciousness from the all too common everyday reliance on what I earlier referred to as "psychology of projection" to a "psychology of appreciation," which enables one to experience everyday events, including instances of the humiliation dynamic, with one's inherent sense of awe and wonderment.

I can't think of no better place to further this transformation than with my colleagues in the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Network. At the risk of losing your earnest attention, I'll repeat what, from my experience, one needs to do to move beyond projective psychology into the realm of appreciation. To begin with, I'll summarize what's involved in the everyday psychology of projection.

1. living in the realm of one's own self-created thoughts about oneself and the world;
2. taking one's thought-created idea of "self" seriously, including both those characteristics that describe us individually and those that have to do with our national, religious, and other collective identifications;

3. remaining blissfully unaware of the role played by one's creative self in "making sense" of events in one's life.

To make the transition to a psychology of appreciation, I suggest you start with recognizing that you do, indeed, live in a self-created realm of thought. Having done so, you are in a position to view events in your life through your inherent capacity for feeling awe, wonderment, and a sense of oneness with the universe. Having reached that point, you then face the absolutely essential step of not taking at all seriously your self-created ideas about who you are and what life is all about. To not take myself at all seriously was a frightening step for me and may well be for others. Nonetheless, if you take that step, you will discover that a deep sense of happiness is possible when one lives life with wholehearted dedication to whatever one is doing. In other words, you will find that, although you are thoroughly delighted if you succeed in whatever you're doing, if you fall short, you waste no energy on blaming yourself or others. Because you no longer take yourself seriously, your ego will not get hooked either by the need to succeed or the fear of failure. What a saving of psychic wear and tear! And what an amazing amount of additional energy, heretofore used to maintain that ego, can be devoted to the service of passionate dedication to those activities in which you're engaged. Moreover, your mind, which in the past was busy creating defining thoughts of yourself and your place in the world will no longer be involved in wasting energy on self-doubt, blame, recriminations, hurt feelings, and humiliated rage. That creative, powerful mind will now be free to be called on as needed to figure out what needs to be done.

Creating Global Community

My final thoughts for the future of our network has to do with how it goes about creating a cohesive and coherent global community, which, as I see it, is its bedrock mission. I say "global community" rather than "global village," which also has been used as a metaphor for the ultimate result of a rapidly growing global interdependence in such areas as trade, multinational business,

and preservation of the physical environment. The term “village” in my mind connotes a kind of homogeneity, intimacy, and face-to-face contact on an almost daily basis that doesn’t square with my vision of a possible or even desirable world community. The global community in my mind is a highly diverse, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural entity. Its inhabitants share what Seymour Sarason, a colleague in community psychology, many years ago referred to as a sense of community, that is a feeling of connection, common identity and shared destiny with fellow residents. (Sarason, 1974)

Principles of Community

As our Network goes about helping to remove humiliation as a roadblock to creating such a sense of community on a global scale, we need all the help we can get in the way of principles that will serve as guidelines for our work. Since publication of my book on community dynamics in 1968 (Klein, 1968) I have been searching for bedrock characteristics that define the essential nature of the geographic community, which I consider to be one of humankind’s most wondrous inventions.

I offer the following four characteristics of such remarkable communities of place. Metaphoric in nature, these characteristics are based on my imaginings about how and why human beings, who initially were hunter-gatherers, created geographic communities.

Safety: The first basic consideration that came to mind was safety. I imagined people huddled together around fires, for mutual protection against marauding animals and other bands of people competing for their livelihood in the same general territory. This was the prototypic human community.

Resource Exchange: I also recalled accounts of bands of hunter-gatherers who came together temporarily by mutually agreed upon plan in order to exchange goods and resources which each needed from the other. I presumed that such temporary and recurring communities made it possible for cross-band mate finding to occur so as to reduce the likelihood of dysfunctional

inbreeding. And so, exchange of resources became the second defining characteristic of place-based communities.

Significance: My imagination also suggested that as these communities developed and grew in complexity, their residents gained distinctive, self-defining activities, positions, and relationships. Their lives took on new and special meaning, apart from their roles as members of child-rearing units. Beyond what psychologists have referred to as self-esteem, I hypothesized that communities by their very existence provided the settings within which each individual might develop a sense of social meaning or importance, a quality that, as noted earlier, I referred to as “significance.” And so significance has become another of the defining characteristics of the geographic community.

Celebration: Finally, I recalled an anthropological paper on early folk communities which suggested that their residents engaged in games and celebrations of various kinds. This conclusion made sense in that such occasions served as ritualistic opportunities for building a sense of mutuality, caring, and cohesiveness within the community. Certain of those ritual occasions also presumably provided spiritual grounding, whether religious and theistic in nature or based on a sense of universal life energy. This supposition was reinforced by my own personal experience of feeling like a tiny dot out in space bearing the entire enormous and almost overpowering weight of the universe. I recalled saying, “If Jesus Christ hadn’t been discovered, I’d have to invent him right now.”

Community-Building in Our Network

Perhaps these four basic principles of community building – safety, resource exchange, significance, and celebration – can serve as useful guides to the development of our Network's efforts to encourage the development of a global, inter-cultural community that respects human dignity. In certain respects, they already do. That is, it seems to me that the appreciative

orientation that has guided our discussions has created a remarkably safe place for expression of personal views and exploration of differing viewpoints. In large measure because of Evelin's expressions of love and encouragement of respect for everyone in our orbit, Network members enjoy a special sense of significance and meaningfulness.

There is a remarkable exchange of ideas, experiences, and cultural viewpoints that enriches everyone within the Network. And, finally, our meetings have aspects of celebration that I suspect could be developed further.

As I see it, one of our most important challenges is to learn how to enable others to create such communities. To do so, we will, I expect, continue the search for safe and effective ways to spread understanding of the harmful effects of humiliating negativity, stereotyping, and self-righteous criticism. We will find ever more effective ways to promote human dignity and emphasize the value of all human groups. We will develop programs for enabling participants of all ages to learn from and about differences in culture and life experience. And we will, I expect, discover more and more exciting, joyful, and meaningful ways to honor and celebrate the emerging global community.

A final word from Mark Twain: **“There is no character, howsoever good and fine, but it can be destroyed by ridicule, howsoever poor and witless. Observe the ass, for instance: his character is about perfect, he is the choicest spirit among all the humbler animals, yet see what ridicule has brought him to. Instead of feeling complimented when we are called an ass, we are left in doubt.”** - Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

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