

CULTIVATING DIGNITY DEVELOPMENT IN OUR GRANDCHILDREN

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Abstract shared at the 2015 Workshop on Transforming Humiliation and Violent Conflict, Columbia University, New York City, December 3-4, 2015.

The future of global dignity must rest with our grandchildren. There is so much to accomplish that our vision must be passed on to them for long-term success.

Fortunately, research now confirms that all babies are born with the capability and predisposition for the building blocks of dignity. By the age of one year old, babies can show loving kindness and empathy.

The challenge is to support the development of these character traits. If we do, over time they will inevitably lead to respecting the dignity of others. Though there is overlap, this is a much more positive conclusion than the Freudian theory that we are born with aggressive and sexual drives that need to be tamed by the development of the superego.

However, outside forces can not only support dignity development, but also thwart it. Problems during pregnancy, inadequate early bonding with the mother figure(s), a dysfunctional home environment, and prejudicial parents can all contribute to conveying disrespect and indignity.

Later, the influence of school, or the lack thereof for girls in many countries, and the relationship with peers becomes increasingly important. What is taught in school and what peers value can enhance or detract from the development of dignifiers. So can social policies for children, including premature child labor.

Key figures in enhancing dignity development are grandparents. They not only typically convey unconditional love, but are also usually free from the conflicts that children have with parents.

Grandparents should not only be thought of as biological grandparents, but also societal grandparents, the wise elders who should view all the young as their honorary grandchildren. They can address such global threats as war, global warming, and poverty. Now that grandparents are living longer in many societies, they have more opportunity to give back to the world.

To make these challenges come alive, a variety of grandparent-grandchildren interactions will be shared. They will be discussed in terms of moral developmental stages. Developing dignity, at least in many countries, is one of those moral values. Both positive and negative examples will be shared.