The Power of Right Relationships:

Encouraging Creativity Through Connection

Linda M. Hartling, Ph.D.
Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies

Jean Baker Miller, MD

Personal creativity is of supreme importance, which we have probably barely begun to appreciate...

Personal creativity is a continuous process of bringing forth a changing vision of oneself, and of oneself in relation to the world.

The creative life of unknown people might be a tremendous hidden river.

~ William Stafford
Oregon Poet, Peacemaker
Three Goals:

1. To examine Relational-Cultural Theory as a science of "right relationships."

2. To describe a serious obstacle to right relationships and creativity: "The H-Bomb"

3. To explore essential qualities of right relationships that encourage creativity and healthy, healing connection.

From "Separate Self" Psychology To a Science of Right Relationships

Necesity of Connection...

Robert Putnam, Harvard University (2000):

"...studies have established beyond reasonable doubt that social connectedness is one of the most powerful determinants of our well-being."

Julianne Holt-Lundstad, Brigham Young University (2008)

- 148 studies, 308,849 individuals, followed for an average of 7.5 years.
- People were 50% more likely to be alive if they had strong connections, regardless of age, gender, or health.

Social Neuroscience - Hardwired to Connect

- Human connections create neural connections" Daniel Siegle, 1999
- "We need connection like we need food, air, and water..." Naomi Eisenberg et. al, 2003
Relational-Cultural Theory:
4 Key Qualities of Right Relationships

1. Mutual Empathy
   A bi-directional dynamic process, a joining together based on the authentic thoughts and feelings of all the participants in the relationship.

2. Mutual Empowerment
   Energy for action that grows out of empathic engagement, a central component of psychological growth.

Relational-Cultural Theory:
Qualities of Right Relationships

3. Authenticity
   “Authenticity is ever-evolving, not achieved at any one moment— it is a person’s ongoing ability to represent herself in relationships more fully.” (Miller, 1999).

4. Movement Toward Mutuality
   A dynamic process in which the individuals engaged in a relationship are increasingly able to be authentic and authentically responsive to each other’s thoughts and feelings.

Outcomes of Right Relationships

“The Five Good Things”

1. Zest...
2. Mutual Empowerment
3. Clarity...
4. Increased Sense of Worth
5. Desire for More Connection

Virtuous Cycle of Connection (and Creativity)
Obstacle to Right Relationships
“The H-Bomb”

Humiliation

What is Humiliation?
What one feels when one is ridiculed, scorned, held in contempt, or otherwise disparaged for who one is rather than what one does...

1. Internal Experience (e.g., feeling humiliated)
2. External Experience (e.g., degrading treatment)
3. Conditions (e.g., systemic injustice)

Humiliation: Relational Perspective

Humiliation is a profound relational violation, which instills a sense of condemned isolation. - Jean Baker Miller

Humiliation is the feeling or experience of being made to feel unworthy of connection. - Linda Hartling
Humiliation: Disconnection and Devaluation

Study of Stressful Life Events

Kenneth Kendler et al. (2003) Virginia Institute for Psychiatry and Behavioral Genetics and the Departments of Psychiatry

Study of 7322 twins exploring stressful life events and the onset of major depression.

- Loss
- Humiliation
- Loss + humiliation greater than loss alone

“When we looked at stressful life events that predisposed men and women to the onset of episodes of depression, the most toxic combination was loss and humiliation…”

Humiliation: Relational Violations
Global Perspective on Humiliation

...is the strongest force that creates rifts between people and breaks down relationships

“...the nuclear bomb of emotions”

Humiliation and History of Relationships

Three major types of societies...

- Hunter-Gatherer Societies
- Complex Agricultural Societies
- Global Information Society

- Rigid hierarchies
- Masters-Subordinates
- Using animals, people as tools
- Subjugation viewed as "normal and necessary"
- Humiliation viewed as legitimate

We are here!

Global Information Society

Electronic Communication

Human Rights

Interdependence

Subjugation/humiliation viewed as illegitimate

From an Old to a New Arrangement of Relationships

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”


Dominants

Subordinates

Increased Conflict

Line of Equal Dignity

Human Rights

Right Relationships

Evelin Lindner, Making Enemies, 2006
Humiliation/Fear of Humiliation

- Diminished capacity to be creative

**Robert Sapolsky**
Stanford University

“...creativity in particular has this inverse u-curve...”

---

Two Specific Creativity Killing Conditions

**Sally Dickerson and Margaret Kemeny**

---

Humiliation: Pathway to Violence...

- Extreme Failure of Connection and Creativity
- Relational-Cultural Context
- Humiliation
- Social Pain
- Decreased Self-Awareness
- Decreased Self-Regulation
- Decreased Self-Defeating Behavior

Research on Social Pain and Social Exclusion
Relational Transformation
Tapping into the Power of Right Relationships

Right Relationship Reflection:
With your partners, share an instance when you, or someone you know, helped someone overcome a difficulty and tap into their capacity to be creative!

Virtuous Cycle of Right Relationship
“Five Good Things”

1. Zest...
2. Mutual Empowerment
3. Clarity...
4. Increased Sense of Worth
5. Desire for more connection

10 Quick Tips for Right Relationships

1. Think relationship
2. Radiate respect
3. Emphasize empathy
4. Listen with love
5. Be present
6. Make it mutual
7. Build resilience
8. Respond, repair, reconnect
9. Laugh liberally
10. Say yes to zest!
Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies

Mahatma Gandhi
4 Important Principles of Building Relationships

1. Begin with practicing respect in relationship,
2. Respect leads to understanding,
3. Understanding leads to acceptance,
4. Acceptance leads to appreciation!

Appreciation is a great thing...

...It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.

French Philosopher
Voltaire
The creative life of unknown people might be a tremendous hidden river.

~ William Stafford
Oregon Poet, Peacemaker

World without humiliation dignifies us all.

The Power of Right Relationships:
Encouraging Creativity Through Connection
Linda M. Hartling, Ph.D.
Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies