

Dignity, Leadership, and the Ecological Crisis

by Brian D'Agostino, Ph.D.

from *Psychohistory News* 38, 1, Winter 2019 <http://www.psychohistory.us/archive.php>

The 32nd biannual conference of the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies (HumanDHS) network occurred at Columbia University Teachers College on December 6th and 7th, 2018. Like previous HumanDHS events, this was less a traditional academic conference and more a workshop in multi-cultural relationship and community building. This report only scratches the surface of the conference and focuses on two of the presentations.

HumanDHS was cofounded in 2001 by transdisciplinary scholars Evelin Lindner and Linda Hartling. Lindner, who holds doctorates in medicine and psychology, is the author of five books, most recently *Honor, Humiliation, and Terror: An Explosive Mix—And How We Can Defuse It with Dignity* (Dignity Press, 2017). Hartling, a psychologist and former Associate Director of Wellesley College's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute, created the Humiliation Inventory, a self-report scale for assessing the internal experience of humiliation.

The first presentation reviewed here was "The Language of Leading with Dignity," by Richard Slaven, Ph.D. A nuclear engineer by training, Slaven made his career in public school teaching and administration, then as Administrator for the Brandeis University School of Physics. His theme was that effective leaders in all fields are not people who elevate themselves, but who educate and

empower those around them. He illustrated the transformative power of relationships with a moving story about his own lifelong struggle with ADHD. Rick described the cumulative negative and positive impacts of encounters with teachers during his adolescence and felt his life was on a trajectory of failure when he graduated from high school. At this critical time, a single teacher's expression of love and recognition of him as an individual had a powerful impact on Slaven and turned the tide in his inner struggle. This story and his presentation as a whole illustrates the primacy that HDHS places on emotional intelligence and relationships in diagnosing what is wrong with the world and charting a way forward.

Psychologist Michael Britton, Ed.D., gave the Don Klein Memorial Lecture. His topic this year was the ecological crisis in the 21st Century. He discussed the 2018 report *Global Warming of 1.5 C* by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the inadequacy of mainstream responses to this scientific consensus. Global warming of 1.5 C above pre-industrial average temperature is expected to greatly exacerbate the unusually severe wildfires, droughts, precipitation and storms the world has encountered in recent years. Such temperature rise threatens to flood 80% of the world's major cities. And yet the 2016 Paris Agreement (from which the Trump Administration is withdrawing), even with supplements, will not suffice to maintain the 1.5 C cap.

Alexandria Ocasio Cortez's proposed Green New Deal, America's most ambitious ecological proposal, would allocate two trillion dollars over ten years to building green infrastructure, while the scale of investment actually required to avert ecological threat is more on the scale of 2.4 trillion dollars *per year*, more than ten times as much. Britton did not pretend to have easy answers to this looming crisis. He suggested that the solution, if there is going to be one, will come from a grass roots response of billions of people, not from political and corporate leaders invested in the existing system. He suggested that each individual in attendance could begin by tapping experiences of our love of nature and come to terms with the profound feelings of loss that accompany an awareness of the ecological devastation that is occurring. He suggested that the principle of love is going to be paramount as we navigate the mass suffering that the 21st Century will bring.

Brian D'Agostino, Ph.D. is an educator, researcher, and the Editor of Psychohistory News. He is the author of numerous publications on political psychology and public affairs including The Middle Class Fights Back: How Progressive Movements Can Restore Democracy in America. Visit his website at bdagostino.com