

What's so Funny?  
By Carol Smaldino, CSW

Abstract presented at 2011 Workshop on Transforming Humiliation and Violent Conflict,  
Columbia University New York, December 8-9, 2011

Humor can be so many things, both gentle and aggressive. And in the context of thinking about dignity and humiliation it can be quite strange and even offensive to consider the role of humor in interrupting set ways when it is the latter==less than gentle. And yet it seems that humor, when it becomes play fighting in a particular context, can be a liberating agent. It can be part of a connection of boldness and willingness to take on resistance and arrogance of those people who act in families, for example, as if they own all the other family members.

When someone, even a child, is stuck in the fantasy and at times even actuality of controlling others by outlandish behavior and demands, that makes for a twisted family system, with chaos for all, including he/she who is so controlling. Very often the child in question can feel overwhelmed by guilt and anxiety because there is too much power at least imagined, too much power also to do bad.

The role of irreverence, the politically incorrect nature of questioning everything, even the overly nice which can be a cover for the monster side in all of us.