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CHAPTER 2

Can Systemic Humiliation Be Transformed into Systemic Dignity?

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The United States has reached a boiling point. We are not only awakening to a growing environmental climate crisis (EPA 2016; IPCC 2014), we are facing a *social-climate crisis* inflamed by a glaring economic gap between the rich and the poor (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009), a criminal justice system struggling to address unwarranted race-related shootings by police (Leadership Conference on Civil Rights 2016), retaliatory attacks on police (Fernandez et al. 2016), mass incarceration of marginalized populations (Gaskew 2014), a proliferation of gun violence (Gunviolencearchive.org 2016), the relentless drumbeat of terror, terrorism, and intractable conflict (Lindner 2006, 2009a, b, c), and a global refugee crisis (IDMC 2015a, b, c, d; UNHCR 2015). These contentious conditions are shaping social relations in the United States and are also evident in the atmosphere of heated interactions surging throughout the world.

The shooting in Orlando, Florida, considered at that time to be the “deadliest mass shooting by one person in United States history” (Barry et al. 2016), illustrates an urgent need to reflect on the complex social factors that precipitate violent crises. Was the shooter primarily a self-radicalized

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terrorist, a religious extremist, a child of first-generation immigrants caught in a “clash of cultures,” a bullied and troubled adolescent who failed to receive urgently needed mental health services, a homophobic young man in the midst of his own sexual identity crisis, a disappointed security guard who was unable to realize his career goal of becoming a police officer, a misogynist who suffered from “toxic masculinity,” or all of the above (Marcotte 2016; Sullivan and Wan 2016)? If one looks deeply, the disparate descriptions of the Orlando shooter challenge us to look beyond an individual actor and take a panoramic view. Understanding tragedies, such as this one, requires investigating the complex conditions contributing to a contentious and combustible social-global climate, raising our risk of acts of violence at home and around the world.

This chapter is an initial exploration of a deeply embedded social dynamic that we suggest plays a powerful role in fomenting and intensifying contentious conditions: *systemic humiliation*. This dynamic is a force that degrades our social infrastructure and disrupts our immediate and long-term communal cohesiveness. Public policies and practices poisoned by unacknowledged cycles of humiliation generate hot embers in our society, resulting in potentially explosive conditions that frequently go unrecognized until it is too late. More than ever before, the elements that constitute systemic humiliation should be recognized as fundamental mechanisms in the formation of modern society. We will describe how the meaning of humiliation has changed as our sense of human dignity has grown. Then we will explore relational ways to transform and replace systemic humiliation with the proliferation of systemic dignity. We suggest that cultivating dignity—at home and around the globe—can deescalate the contentious conditions poisoning our social climate and simultaneously create space for mutually beneficial arrangements of relationships to emerge, relationships that protect and provide for the full participation, growth, and development of all members of society.

HOW HUMAN HISTORY SHAPES THE MEANING OF HUMILIATION

For most of human existence, *Homo sapiens* likely thought they lived in a world of limitless land and abundant resources. When crises occurred during this time, humans could migrate to a new location and create new living arrangements. As long as the human population on planet Earth was small, there was always untouched land available. However, starting

around 12,000 years ago, the situation began to change. Human experience began to be affected by what anthropologist Robert Carneiro (1970, 1988, 2012) calls *circumscription*, which means humankind started to become aware that the next valley could be “occupied” by others, limiting the space to roam freely in search of food and resources. From then on, circumscription began to indirectly “inform” humanity of the fact that resources and planet Earth are finite.

Within the context of circumscription, humans began adapting by developing complex agricultural systems that would intensify the yield of resources through innovations that made it possible to produce more food in a confined territory (Boserup 1965; Cohen 1977, 2009; see also Ury 1999). This was the beginning of the strategy of not only taking control over land and resources, but also taking control over people and animals to work the land in this new system (Gepts et al. 2012). Some groups discovered they could acquire resources through more brutal means, such as raiding and conquering others’ lands. The introduction of this strategy triggered what political scientists call the *security dilemma* (Herz 1951, 1957). The security dilemma arises when in-groups are caught in fear of potentially hostile out-groups, who, if not killed, may kill. It may be summarized as: “We *have to* amass weapons, because we are scared. When we amass weapons, they get scared. They amass weapons, we get more scared.” It is predicated on the horizontal differentiation of inside versus outside relationships, making it an honorable duty to kill outsiders in defense of insiders (Lindner 2017).

The security dilemma pushes also for the vertical differentiation of up versus down, organizing human activity around dominant/subordinate interactions. For the past thousands of years, this evolved into a male dominant collectivist and ranked-honor societies with “strongman” elite at the top. Ranked honor is not a code of law, but a normative paradigm a set of informal values that keeps people bound to remain within its confines. In ranked-honor hierarchies, elites have a duty to defend their honor not only by killing enemies who attack from outside, but also by keeping their peers in check with duel-like combat if their status is challenged and by holding down their inferiors (e.g., women, servants, slaves). Overtime the horizontal in-group/out-group fears became wedded to powerful up-down, honor-based social arrangements (e.g., empires, monarchies, dictatorial regimes, military powers, etc.). Thus, the appearance of the security dilemma marks the dawn of what Riane Eisler (1987) calls the

dominator model in which superiors are served by underlings, and this is accepted and enforced by stringent “codes of honor.”

Psychiatrist Jean Baker Miller (1976/1986) would call the dominator model a system of relationships organized around “permanent inequality” (6). There are many political sociologists (Bourdieu 1996, 1998), neo-Marxists (Marcuse 1969), and critical social scientists (Foucault 1977, 1991) who describe similar notions. Miller’s formulation bridges the gap between personal-private systems of relationships (i.e., in the home, in the family) and the political-public systems of relationships (i.e., in politics, in the culture, in society). Like others, Miller suggests that once a subordinate group is defined as inferior, the superiors tend to label them as substandard and even defective by virtue of their birth. Furthermore, superiors relegate the least desirable roles to subordinates while saving the more desirable activities for themselves. In dominator systems of permanent inequality, “all human beings are born unequal in worthiness and rights—people are born into their rank and they are meant to stay there, only some might move up or down due to their own doing or undoing—and, as an unavoidable consequence, there will always be some who are more free than others, there will always be elites who preside over their subordinate collectives” (Lindner 2017, xxxix).

Beyond being socialized to stay in their place, underlings are enlisted in perpetuating the vertical arrangements of the dominator model. This involves not only coopting subordinates to voluntarily accept and maintain their own bondage; it also involves teaching them to misrecognize these arrangements as “honorable” behavior. This is the ultimate refinement of what Lindner (2009a) calls the *art of domination*; it results in subordinates participating in voluntary self-humiliation. Through the art of domination, whole societies can be held in collective capture, a collective Stockholm syndrome (when hostages identify with their captors) (Lindner 2009a; Ochberg 2005). These practices are invisibly woven into the fabric of societies in ways that make these social arrangements appear unquestionable, normal, and necessary. Thus, the dominator model becomes a self-perpetuating system of permanent inequality.

Despite the expansion of dominator arrangements over millennia, alternative ways of organizing human relationships and activity continued to evolve. In the middle of the eighteenth century, individuals began moving away from collective hierarchies. Travelers, for instance, began to insert themselves as subjects with a personal perspective, and eventually individuals began to envision the possibility of overcoming rigid hierar-

chies. In other words, at first, space opened up for human relationships to be organized around individual honor, then around equal dignity. This transformation closely preceded the American Declaration of Independence (July 4th, 1776)—“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal” (Jefferson 1776)—and the French Revolution (August 4th, 1789).

As ideas about social arrangements began to shift, the year 1757 is of particular significance (Lindner 2016). This was the year of the earliest recorded use of the term “to humiliate” and its meaning “to mortify or to lower or to depress the dignity or self-respect of someone” (Miller 1993, 175). Prior to that time, what we would call humiliating methods were accepted as a prosocial practice necessary to humble underlings, to keep them in line, and to ensure their continued service to God and the elites in the hierarchy (e.g., public humiliation inflicted on individuals in medieval times by placing them in devices known as the stocks or the pillory). In a world organized around “dominate or be dominated,” humiliation was seen as a *legitimate tool* for managing subordination. For example, early American Puritans believed they were justified in using extremely brutal forms of public humiliation to manage the behavior of servants and other lower-status members of the community (Cox 2016).

Lindner (2016) suggests that the word “humiliation” provides us with an important linguistic marker for this historical shift in human arrangements of relationships, the shift away from collectivist honor/dominator arrangements of society, first toward the honor of an individual, culminating in the ideal of equal dignity for all. In this new social framework, humiliation becomes an *illegitimate tool* of social control, a relational violation, a violation of one’s inherent sense of worth as a human being. In the twentieth century, this momentous social shift was globally affirmed in Article 1 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 10th, 1948) “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (UN 2007, 5).

Although vast swaths of human relationships continue under the specter of the dominator model today, we are seeing the rise of new ways of organizing life on this planet under the principles of equal dignity and human rights ideals, toward what Eisler (1987) would call a *partnership model*. This doesn’t mean the end of hierarchy. Unlike structural hierarchies that are organized to maintain domination (North Korea comes to mind), functional hierarchies remain useful in providing an effective way to conduct some forms of human activity. The example is the pilot team

(pilot and copilot, for instance) that flies a plane and provides leadership. This is not the kind of leadership that looks down on members of the crew or the passengers as lesser beings. Rather, functional hierarchies can be arrangements in which leaders take primary responsibility for organizing conditions and activities that lead people into effective partnership and cooperative action (Morrell and Capparell 2001). An orchestra conductor provides the leadership that energizes and guides individual musicians to perform great symphonies. Carrying this further, we would suggest that an atmosphere of equal dignity enhances outcomes in functional hierarchies because it strengthens collaboration.

Although a partnership model—cultivated in the spirit of equal dignity—may be a promising path forward, humanity has a long way to go to leave behind modes of domination, and this transformative journey is riddled with risks. Raising people's awareness that they are deserving of equal dignity brings conflict to the surface. It allows subordinated groups to reinterpret treatment they acquiesced to under the hands of more powerful others in the past as painful indignities and humiliations in the present stir their resentment and desire for retaliation. At the same time, elites begin to fear the indignities and humiliations they could suffer when losing their privileged positions, stirring up their efforts to retain systems of domination. Growing feelings of humiliation from the top-down *and* the bottom-up magnify social tensions, increase deadly aggression, and threaten world affairs. These cumulative feelings of humiliation can become a “nuclear bomb of emotions” (Lindner 2006, 32) that could even lead to the unleashing of real nuclear bombs. If humanity is to survive this journey toward equal dignity, we urgently need to understand the experience of humiliation and do everything we can to clear it out of our social systems.

WHAT IS HUMILIATION? WHAT IS SYSTEMIC HUMILIATION?

The field of psychology initially conceptualized humiliation as a variant or subset of shame (Lewis 1987; Stolorow 2010), but recent research affirms that humiliation is distinct (Collazzoni et al. 2014a, b; Elison and Harter 2007; Hartling and Luchetta 1999; Kendler et al. 2003; Klein 1991; Leask 2013; Otten and Jonas 2014). In the context of modern human rights ideals, “humiliation” can be understood as “the enforced lowering of any person or group by a process of subjugation that damages their dignity or sense of worth” (Lindner 2006, xiv). With this in mind, we see

that humiliation manifests in countless ways that are highly influenced by the cultural context in which these experiences occur. To help us grasp the far-reaching nature of this phenomenon, Brazilian peace linguist Francisco Gomes de Matos (2012) offers this mnemonic list of humiliating experiences: degradation, dehumanization, demoralization, denigration, depersonalization, deprivation, discrimination, dislocation, domination, exploitation, incrimination, intimidation, objectification, subjugation, terrorization, and vilification.

Broadly speaking, humiliation can be studied as (1) an internal experience (e.g., a feeling, an emotion), (2) an external event (e.g., a degrading interpersonal interaction, bullying, abuse, violent conflict, or genocide), or (3) as systemic conditions (e.g., systemic discrimination and economic injustice) (Hartling and Lindner 2016). These overlapping and intersecting dimensions make the study of humiliation complex: systemic conditions can trigger external events that generate feelings of humiliation *and* feelings of humiliation can generate external events that trigger humiliating systemic conditions.

This chapter is primarily focused on systemic humiliation, the type of humiliation that can poison our lives through degrading social policies, practices, and arrangements. Philosopher Avishai Margalit (1996) explains why societies should be concerned about this powerful dynamic: “Humiliation is mental cruelty. A decent society must be committed not only to the eradication of physical cruelty in its institutions but also to the elimination of mental cruelty caused by these institutions” (85). He contends that the “psychological scars left by humiliation heal with greater difficulty than the physical scars of someone who has suffered only physical pain,” (87), and “a decent society is one that eradicates abuse, where humiliation is a particular form of abuse” (88). Humiliation undermines the fabric of society, disrupting our social cohesion and human development as individuals, families, communities, and as an entire civilization.

Looking back on slavery in the United States (Wyatt-Brown 2006) and apartheid in South Africa (Lindner 2009c), most would agree that these are obvious examples of brutal systemic humiliation. Yet, it is only after the fact that the full extent of these events became painfully obvious. Therefore, it is helpful to remember that investigating systemic humiliation frequently begins with studying the “tip of the iceberg.” The tip of the iceberg means observable patterns of mistreatment, for example, insults used as tools of humiliation, as astutely described by Karina Korostelina in Chap. 3 of this volume; individuals being repeatedly pulled over by police for “driving while

black" (Birzer and Birzer 2006; Kowalski and Lundman 2007), or similar visible events. It also includes the largely invisible operations of institutional abuses of power, social neglect, and infrastructure failures, such as the lead contamination causing a widespread water crisis in Flint, Michigan (Hanna Attisha et al. 2016). One can be systemically humiliated not only by active practices of cruel or unjust mistreatment, but also by passive institutionalized forms of social exclusion (Baumeister et al. 2002, 2005; Baumeister and Tice 1990; Eisenberger et al. 2003; MacDonald and Leary 2005; Twenge et al. 2002), by policies that obstruct access to services or resources (Silver et al. 2006), or by being systemically treated as insignificant or invisible (Griffin 1991).

Consequently, in this discussion let's propose a broad and ambitious definition of systemic humiliation: *policies, practices, traditions, attitudes, beliefs, or social arrangements that damage, deny, neglect, obstruct, or fail to support the equal dignity of all humans, thus preventing their full development and participation in society.* By this standard, systemic dignity would be *policies, practices, traditions, attitudes, beliefs, or social arrangements that affirm and nurture the equal dignity of all humans, providing for their full development and participation in society.* Although bold, these "working" definitions are a synthesis of decades of research on the dynamics of humiliation (Lindner 2006, 2007b, 2009a, 2010, 2012) and human dignity (Lindner 2007a) combined with a relational-cultural theory of psychological health and development (Hartling 2008; Hartling and Lindner 2016; Jordan 2010; Jordan and Hartling 2002; Jordan et al. 2004; Miller 1988, 2003). Naming and defining systemic humiliation/dignity clearly, even if these are unfinished definitions, provides a springboard for future research and practical action.

It is also helpful to be specific about what we mean by "equal dignity" in these definitions. Equal dignity should not be misconstrued as a strategy to equalize individuals through social conformity. Quite the opposite, equal dignity means appreciating that people are highly diverse in their abilities, backgrounds, and experiences, *and*, concomitantly, equal in worth. Meeting in equal dignity allows us to create relational space for human engagement that is mutually enriching, enriched precisely by differences (Surowiecki 2004). Therefore, fostering conditions of dignity is profoundly practical. It welcomes and encourages diversity of thought, creativity, and cooperation that can lead to a better future for humanity. Rather than uniformity, equal dignity generates a social biosphere that is enriched by *unity in diversity* (Bond 1999). Although current political

events are tarnishing the realization of this ideal in the United States (Balz 2016), it remains present in the motto on the Great Seal of the United States: "E pluribus unum," Latin for "out of many, one" (Putnam 2007). On a global level, the adoption of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights inspired many human rights conventions designed to uphold the dignity of diverse and vulnerable groups. This includes the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (UN General Assembly 1965, December 21), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UN General Assembly 1979, December 18), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly 1989, November 20), and the Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide (UN General Assembly 1948, December 9).

Systemic humiliation obstructs our ability to benefit from diversity by limiting possibilities for each person's full development. This is an inevitable outcome of systems that subscribe to the dominator model of permanent inequality. Not only do these systems deprive subordinates of the opportunity for full participation and growth, even the elite members of these systems are deprived of fully unfolding in important domains of human activity (Miller 1976/1986). For example, historically, women have been hindered from realizing opportunities to develop in ways that would allow them to participate in the economic life of their families and communities. Furthermore, women were inculcated with the inherently contradictory message that family care work was "priceless," yet, by economic measures, "worthless" (Grace 1998; Miller 2006). Simultaneously, men were deprived of the opportunity to develop in ways that would allow them to fully share in the social and emotional activities of caring in their families, this "priceless/worthless" work. As the United States and other countries move toward the ideals of equal dignity—not only in theory, but also in practice—*both* women and men can chose to develop skills that allow them to participate in all aspects of family and community life. Societies can create arrangements that move everyone in the direction of realizing the mutually enriching benefits of equal dignity!

SYSTEMIC HUMILIATION INFILTRATES OUR LIVES

Unearthing overt and covert forms of systemic humiliation may be one of the greatest challenges for our social-global infrastructure today. Systemic humiliation infiltrates all levels of society and continues to reproduce itself.

One way it invades social arrangements is when powerful elites make decisions without the participation of the less powerful who are affected by those decisions. Often these decisions are in the economic interests of the more powerful (Kasperkevic 2016; Parker-Pope and Peachman 2016; Pollack and Creswell 2015).

An illustration of this dynamic might be found in recent developments in the General Educational Development (GED) test in the United States, which is offered as a high school equivalency examination for students who were not able to complete the requirements for a standard high school diploma. The GED program was originally implemented in 1942 as a way for soldiers returning from WWII to complete their high school requirements, creating a pathway for them to continue their education in college, attend a trade school, or find a better job (GED Testing Service 2016). Today, individuals who do not earn a standard diploma can choose to take the GED test to demonstrate they have met the requirements for a high school diploma. Many of these students have not been able to complete high school because of personal or social problems, including economic difficulties, behavioral problems, family dysfunction, and other hardships (Hahn et al. 2015; Lehr et al. 2003).

On January 1, 2014, the not-for-profit GED testing program was turned over to for-profit corporations. *The Washington Post* reporter Valerie Strauss describes this development as “what was once a program run by the non-profit American Council for Education is now a for-profit business that includes Pearson, the largest education company in the world” (Strauss 2016). This resulted in a new test that dramatically raised the requirements for passing. In an interview on National Public Radio, Anthony Carnevale, from the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University, claimed that the new GED test was designed to be in alignment with new demands required for a more modern workforce (Martin 2016). Yet, in effect, the consequences of this corporate takeover of a public program led to what should be called a *hurricane of humiliations* for students trying to improve their lives.

In the case of Oregon, students (often low-income) who take the new test have to pay double the amount they paid previously, from \$60 to \$120. In addition, they must pay for practice tests and retests; previously, they could take two free retests. Most dramatically, the rate of students passing the new formulations of this test drastically declined, not only in Oregon, but throughout the United States. In 2012, a total of 401,388 people passed the GED test (Kamenetz 2016). In 2013, people rushed to

take the old test in its final year, creating a bump, with a total of 540,535 students passing. In 2014, 58,524 students passed the new test, essentially a 90 percent decline (Turner and Kamenetz 2016).

This case illustrates how systemic humiliation can infiltrate educational infrastructure and reproduce conditions of humiliation. A public program that one might say was designed to facilitate systemic dignity (in support of WWII soldiers) was hijacked. Powerful elites in government and in corporations allied to create an arrangement that rapidly led thousands of students to descend into a chain of humiliations: not being able to pay for the test; not being able pass the test; not being able to pay for the retests or practice test; having to pay test-prep companies for extra help; possibly still not being able to pass the test; then not being able to get into college, get financial aid, find a better job, or enter trade school; then not being able to find full employment, a living wage, or economic stability; and, quite likely, feeding into the “school to prison pipeline” (Gaskew 2014, 42).

Powerful corporate leaders are mastering the *art of domination-for-profit* by becoming what Lindner describes as “humiliation entrepreneurs” (2002, 128). They have sophisticated skills to coopt the actions of government elites. This makes it possible for them to take over public programs, capturing and expanding their territory for profit, regardless of the humiliating impact of their actions. In response to educator outcries, Pearson eventually lowered the passing score for their new GED test (Kamenetz 2016). This might have been a corporate admission of the injustice of their test, or it might have been a clever way to avoid losing lucrative revenue if critics insisted that the GED testing program be returned to a nonprofit provider. Whatever the case, this example illustrates how systemic humiliation—especially when driven by profit maximization—can infiltrate our social infrastructure, leading to what Saskia Sassen describes as “social and economic expulsions” (Sassen 2014). When humiliating arrangements like these are allowed to unfold, whole groups of individuals are denied the dignity of personal and educational development.

BLINDED BY FEAR AND EXTREME INDIVIDUALISM

Our blindness to the operations of systemic humiliation is a key obstacle to naming and replacing these deeply complex systems. Particularly when the security dilemma induces or intensifies fear, individuals and groups can develop a type of blindness in the form of mental and behavioral “tunnel vision” (Holbrook et al. 2015). Tunnel vision makes it all too easy to

return to outdated dominator strategies of problem solving—"might makes right," "shock and awe"—triggering cycles of humiliation and conflict that can persist for generations. The 2003 US invasion of Iraq may be one of the most notable examples of our time (Fontan 2006).

In conditions of fear-driven tunnel vision, not only are we more likely to remain blind to forms of systemic humiliation, we are more likely to be "blind to our own blindness" (Lindner 2012, 96). In other words, we become less likely to see the social arrangements that inflict humiliation, we are less likely to realize that we are becoming blind to these arrangements, and, on top of all this, we are less likely to see more dignifying possibilities for solving problems. Our blindness allows systemic humiliation to thrive.

The shooting of an unarmed teenager on April 9, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri, followed by weeks of protests, was a reminder of the urgent need to overcome such blindness to humiliating practices and how catastrophic they can be (Buchanan et al. 2014). Waking up might begin with overcoming blindness to the *implicit bias* (Greenwald and Banaji 1995) that contributes to the brutal mistreatment of blacks and other marginalized groups (Spencer et al. 2016). We can also work to dissolve our blindness to structural humiliations embedded in our methods of offering support and services in communities, like those associated with the responses to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Elliott and Pais 2006) or the 2010 earthquake in Haiti (Katz 2013). Furthermore, we can work to dissolve our blindness to the millions of *microhumiliations* that wound people every day (e.g., words, attitudes, beliefs, and practices that devalue the dignity of others). All this may sound like "mission impossible," but it simply means doing what we can to enrich society with mutual dignity by cultivating systems that provide for the healthy development and participation of all people.

No one is immune to the problem of being blind to systemic humiliation, not the most intelligent, nor the most educated, the most psychologically minded, or the most politically powerful members of society. Indeed, many powerful, educated, and intelligent members of society may have built their wealth, status, or power by directly or indirectly profiting from their blindness to forms of systemic humiliation. Many are blind to how the Western political-military-industrial complex profits from, embodies, and perpetrates systemic humiliation around the world (Mehta 2012). Even charitable organizations are not exempt: those who dedicate

their lives to working for the greater good may discover they are working in a system that unwittingly fans the flames of humiliation (Maren 1997).

How is this possible? There are likely many factors that make us blind to systemic humiliation, but let's examine one likely culprit, *extreme individualism*:

In contexts that promote extreme individualism, the boundaries of the security dilemma have shrunk down to each individual's personal life. Through this shrinkage, every person is separated from her fellow beings. Everyone is forced into Machiavellian *hominus hominem lupus est* (man is a wolf to man, or, more colloquially, dog-eat-dog) relationships (Lindner 2017, 67–68).

Extreme individualism shrinks the boundaries of a security dilemma; threat is not just political or national, it is personal. Lindner suggests that the dog-eat-dog individualism we see gaining ground today in many parts of the world may be a perfect extension of the traditional ranked culture of the dominator model because it coopts people into thinking they are fighting for an honorable cause while they are participating in their own subjugation (Hardisty 1999). For example, extreme individualism may have been the blinding force that inspired the 41-day siege of Oregon's Malheur National Wildlife Refuge by an armed militia on January 2, 2016 (Zaitz 2016). The militia leaders claimed they wanted to liberate protected public lands from "government tyranny" and return it to "the people," even though "the people" already owned the land. A deeper analysis suggests that this group was guided by an ideology of extreme individualism that had seamlessly transformed them into useful tools in the long-term corporate initiative to privatize public lands (Gallaher 2016, 295). Associate Professor Carolyn Gallaher, who studies patterns of violence of militias, paramilitaries, and private military contractors, offers a perspective on this incident:

because the occupiers framed their take-over as a fight *against* government tyranny instead of as a fight *for* privatization, they did not have to address the inequities that often attend privatization or to explain why those inequities would be preferable to government ownership. Indeed, though the occupiers claimed they wanted to give Malheur "back" to the region's ranchers, privatization is usually governed by neoliberal principles that favor corporate over producer interests (295).

The script of extreme individualism seems to have made the militia members blind to the possibility that they were being used as tools to serve corporate interests. Furthermore, it made them blind to the history of systemic humiliation of the original “owners” of the land, the Indigenous Paiute Tribe (House 2016). The US government seized 1.5 million acres of Paiute tribal lands in 1879 (for which the tribe was reimbursed nine decades later at a rate of \$743.20 per tribal member).

Philip Cushman’s book (1995), *Constructing the Self, Constructing America*, provides another view of how Western individualism idealizes self-sufficiency and independence and thus obstructs recognition of policies and practices that sustain or expand systemic humiliation. Hyperindividualism in a consumer economy leads people to believe they can—and should—liberate themselves from humiliating dependence through consumption and materialism. Thus, extreme individualism coopts people into participating in their own enslavement to an unsustainable economic system. Taking this further, Cushman describes how professional helpers may unwittingly perpetuate the ideals of extreme individualism:

Psychotherapy is permeated by the philosophy of self-contained individualism, exists within the framework of consumerism, speaks the language of self-liberation, and thereby unknowing reproduces some of the ills it is responsible for healing (6).

There seems to be double blindness here. First, there is the macro-level blindness created by extreme individualism that generates feelings of deficiency that turn masses of people into servants of a consumer economy. Second, there is the meso-level blindness of a professional system that provides services that affirm individualism as a standard of healthy development. Fortunately, today there are signs in the field of psychology indicating that the script of extreme individualism is moving in the direction of more relational thinking (Hartling 2008; Jordan 2010; Lieberman 2015).

BLINDNESS AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS

But blindness to systemic humiliation can be even more abhorrent. Powerful professional organizations can present themselves as having the highest standards of scientific objectivity, political neutrality, and ethical

standards, yet be agents of humiliating interventions that strengthen the security dilemma, trigger brutal dominator strategies, and spark cycles of humiliation that can even circle the world. Perhaps this can best be illustrated with the case of the American Psychological Association (APA) colluding with the US intelligence community. The APA is the world’s largest professional association of psychologists. According to their website, the mission of the APA “is to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people’s lives” (APA 2016). Among other goals, this mission is to be accomplished by: “Improving the qualifications and usefulness of psychologists by establishing high standards of ethics, conduct, education and achievement” (Ibid.).

Despite espousing high ethical standards, in the years following the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York City, the APA secretly worked with representatives of the US Department of Defense (DoD), under the administration of President George W. Bush, to develop policies that would allow psychologists to “ethically” consult on brutal military interrogations of detainees (Hoffman 2015). Equally troubling, the APA launched a public relations strategy to give the impression that these new policies were concerned with the welfare of detainees and consistent with human rights standards (Soldz and Reisner 2015).

Finally, after allegations arose inside and outside of the organization, particularly the allegations made by *The New York Times* reporter James Risen (2014, 2015a, b), the APA initiated an independent investigation that resulted in what has become known as the “Hoffman Report” (Hoffman 2015):

Our investigation determined that key APA officials, principally the APA Ethics Director joined and supported at times by other APA officials, colluded with important DoD officials to have APA issue loose, high-level ethical guidelines that did not constrain DoD in any greater fashion than existing DoD interrogation guidelines. We concluded that APA’s principal motive in doing so was to align APA and curry favor with DoD. There were two other important motives: to create a good public-relations response, and to keep the growth of psychology unrestrained in this area (9).

The report notes that “[t]he DoD is one of the largest employers of psychologists and provides many millions of dollars in grants or contracts for psychologists around the country” (14). Perhaps this was one of the

key reasons that the “APA remained deliberately ignorant” (11) about the damage to the organization and the field of psychology that would result from their secretive and coordinated efforts to appease and please the DoD. Even more troubling than the damage to the institution of psychology (Pope 2016), the APA’s decisions provided systemic justifications for inflicting profoundly disturbing physical damage to human beings in the form of humiliating arrests, brutal captivity, renditions, torture, and, in some cases, horrific fatalities (Risen 2014).

How could some of the brightest minds in the APA hierarchy get caught up in an activity that is not unlike the dynamics that allowed sexual abuse to be kept secret in the Catholic Church (Terry 2008)? Psychologists Jennifer Freyd and Pamela Birrell (2013), in their book *Betrayal Blindness*, can help us understand some of the dynamics involved. They note that betrayers who hold a dominant position of power “help” those whom they betray remain incognizant of the betrayal by grooming unawareness and denial. For example, perhaps the DoD, in effect, groomed the leadership of the APA through decades of lucrative contracts and funding. Then, perhaps, the APA leadership groomed a cooperative committee, the Presidential Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security (PENS), to support the DoD’s interests, starting with intentionally weighting the committee with members who had direct ties to the military (Hoffman 2015). If so, this grooming worked, accomplishing the mission of influencing the APA leadership to loosen ethics policies in service of the DoD’s interests (Mayer 2008). All the while APA members and the general public were blinded to APA’s link to the DoD’s use of enhanced interrogations techniques, which we now acknowledge amounted to torture.

On the other hand, perhaps the leaders involved in this APA-DoD collusion suffered from another type of blindness, what law enforcement literature refers to as *noble cause corruption*: “corruption committed in the name of good ends” (Caldero and Crank 2011, 2). After the 9/11 attack, it is possible that APA leaders felt it was their patriotic duty to support the DoD’s antiterrorism efforts by loosening ethical standards. If so, this type of blinding loyalty, even in the service of patriotism, would not be so unlike the devotion that evolves in ideological organizations and cults (Jemsek 2011). Loyalty, especially driven by fear, fuels conditions in which people will comply with harmful activities in support of a cause (Olsson 2005). Ironically, terrorism is implemented by many blinded by loyalty to what they define as *their* noble cause.

Although the APA is the example under discussion here, we are by no means using this example to disparage this particular organization or any others. Rather, we think this example illustrates the all-too-common vulnerability of many organizations (e.g., professional, governmental, educational, social, financial, etc.) to unwittingly or directly spread the virus of systemic humiliation. And let’s not forget that a primary force behind this virus is the long history of the security dilemma along with its organizational handmaiden, the dominator model, which leads individuals and organizations to believe that if “you want peace, you must prepare for war” (IPublius Flavius Vegetius Renuatus and Reeve 2004). The escalation of the security dilemma gives rise to ever more sophisticated variations of the dominator model that then generate and spread the contagion of systemic humiliation. What is the antidote to this contagion? We suggest that cultivating systemic dignity provides both a method of inoculation *and* an antidote to systemic humiliation.

ENVISIONING SYSTEMIC DIGNITY

What if social arrangements were organized around the motto, “If we want we want peace, prepare for dignity”? What kind of world would that be? Let’s begin by asking an essential question, “What is dignity?” Western philosophers of many eras have explored the nature of dignity (Lebech 2009). Contemporary figures include Charles Taylor (1989, 1992; Taylor and Gutman 1994), Martha Nussbaum (2004), Hannah Arendt (1951), and others. Discourse analyst Michael Karlberg (2013) observes that “human dignity—like all concepts—takes on different meanings within different interpretive frames” (1). He describes three contrasting deep interpretive frames for understanding the meaning of human dignity: the social command frame, the social contest frame, and the social body frame. The *social command frame* is a legacy of patriarchal and authoritarian modes of thought, fitting with Riane Eisler’s (1987) dominator model of society. It also fits with what cognitive scientists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999) call the pedagogical framework of the “strict father.” Human dignity in the social command frame signifies the status or rank of “dignitaries.”

The *social contest frame* emerged in response to the injustice and oppression that resulted from the social command frame (Karlberg 2013). It draws on the social Darwinist metaphor of the “survival of the fittest” and is characterized in metaphors of war, sports, fighting, and market

competition. It assumes that society needs to harness everyone's self-interested and competitive energy into contests, which will then produce winners and losers. In the long run, it assumes that (surviving) populations will be better off (Ibid., 7). Human dignity within the social contest frame denotes self-determination or autonomy (to compete for survival).

The *social body frame* is an understanding that society can be viewed as an integrated organic body. The well-being of the entire body is achieved by enhancing the possibilities for every individual to realize their potential to contribute to the common good within empowering social relationships and institutional structures that foster the growth of human development. Although it has roots in diverse cultures, Karlberg observes, this concept "has been reemerging in a modern form over the past century, in response to the ever-increasing social and ecological interdependence humanity is now experiencing on a global scale" (Ibid., 4). Within the social body frame:

dignity can be understood in terms of the intrinsic value or worth of every human being as a member of an interdependent community—or social body. Moreover, the social body frame suggests that this intrinsic value is realized as individuals develop those latent capacities upon which the well-being of the entire body depends (Ibid., 6).

The social body frame is consistent with our definition of systemic dignity: *policies, practices, traditions, attitudes, beliefs, or social arrangements that affirm and nurture the equal dignity of all humans, thus providing for their full development and participation in society*. If we want to generate systemic dignity and reduce systemic humiliation, especially in today's highly interconnected world, the social body frame of human dignity seems like a necessity. If we want to weaken the influence of the security dilemma along with the genocidal/suicidal risks of the dominator model, realizing the social body frame of human dignity presents itself as our very obligation. Most of all, if we want peace, the social body frame helps us understand that we must prepare for dignity.

DESIGNING A FUTURE OF DIGNITY

This chapter began with the question: Can systemic humiliation be transformed into systemic dignity? In the United States and around the world, we are seeing signs that social relationships have reached a boiling point.

Present-day Western culture seems to be fraught with risks, risks flowing from a blissful, even triumphant, overdoing of domination in all its forms, intensifying the security dilemma and creating cycles of systemic humiliation (e.g., extreme gaps in income, education, health, security, and alike). Despite the risks, competition for domination is rapidly globalizing. Cooperation between people is being weakened systemically. Increasingly, every individual is being sent into competition against everybody else, with the arena of cooperation shrinking until there is no other space left except the inner psyche of a person. Self-help books and business seminars teach better time management and efficiency training to "improve" people's ability to align their various inner parts so as to function more smoothly in the race, a race that ultimately does not serve them, but increases systemic humiliation. As a result, vulnerable individuals navigate "war zones" of insecurity fueled by systemic humiliation. The complex experience of Orlando shooter, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, can be understood as an illustration of the risks of today's social war zones. We are in the midst of a social-climate crisis of systemic humiliation that heats up relations at home and around the world. But it doesn't have to be this way. We can replace systemic humiliation with systemic dignity. Now the question is, how?

Dignity Through Language

One secret to realizing systemic dignity comes right out of our mouths: words. We have inherited language (English in this case) that continues to carry messages of domination/subordination as a normative paradigm for arrangements in society. In 2006, Lindner wrote:

Language was, perhaps, the first application of the idea that something can be put down; after all, we subject nature to our linguistic labels. The Latin root of the word *sub-ject* reveals it: *ject* stems from *jacere*, to throw, and *sub* means under (25).

The message of extreme individualism, discussed earlier, is easily evidenced by over 700 compound words in the *Oxford English Dictionary* that begin with the prefix "self" (OED 2016). This illustrates how language can carry the message of extreme individualism. Moreover, the plethora of self-focused words in the English language may underwrite what researcher and educator Jean Twenge describes as the US epidemic

of narcissism (Twenge and Campbell 2009). Some would say that this narcissism was particularly evident in the language and actions of candidate Donald Trump (Nutt 2016), who was elected the 45th President of the United States.

In an interconnected world, more than ever before, we need a language of relationships, specifically a language that encourages mutually empathic, mutually beneficial relationships (Jordan and Hartling 2002). As Lindner suggests, we need to strengthen the language of *Homo amans*, the loving being (*amans* is the present participle of Latin *amare* or to love) (Scheler 1913/1923/1954). For a start, Oregon poet and writer Kim Stafford challenged Linda Hartling (2016) to compile a list of relational alternatives to the tyranny of “self” talk:

Self—> Relational Being

Self—> Beings-in-Relationship (Miller 1991)
 Self-Actualization—> Mutual Actualization
 Self-Development—> Mutual Development
 Self-Esteem—> Social-Esteem (Jenkins 1993)
 Self-Confidence—> Relational Confidence
 Self-Defense—> Relational Safety—> Protective Connection
 Self-Image—> Relational Images
 Self-Made—> Co-Created
 Self-Awareness—> Relational Awareness
 Self-Care—> Mutual Care
 Self-Responsibility—> Relational Responsibility—> Universal Responsibility
 Self-Worth—> Mutual Worth—> Mutual Dignity
 Self-Help—> Connected Caring
 Self-Serving—> Community Serving
 Self-Respect—> Relational Respect

Relational language provides the linguistic infrastructure for rethinking all human activity, opening the way to new cooperative engagement rooted in mutual dignity. Meeting in dignity is the seed to new possibilities. Francisco Gomes de Matos (2013, 36) sums this up in “A Dignity Acrostic”:

Dignifying
 Interaction
 Globally
 Nurtures
 Interdependence
 Togetherness
 Yes

Dignity Through Dialogue

Beyond the words that we use, we need to look at how we use words. Within academia and many other organizational frames, the verbal battle of win/lose debate has been the dominant model of engagement. S. Mike Miller (2012), former chair of Boston University’s Department of Sociology and a cofounder of United for a Fair Economy, observes: “Debates might change your mind, but not very often” (18). Rather than debate, Miller urges the practice of *dialogue*, in which: “The aim is to build together rather than to block one another. We change others by changing ourselves in the course of dialogue” (4).

Based on more than a decade of global conferences and workshops, the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies (HumanDHS) network has found that dignifying dialogue—what it calls *Dignilogue*—can lead to new paths of understanding and generate creative ideas to address real problems. In preparation for the 2015 Annual Workshop on Transforming Humiliation and Violent Conflict at Columbia University, working with S. Mike Miller’s ideas, Linda Hartling and Philip Brown (Miller et al. 2015) compiled these quick dialogue tips:

Dignifying Dialogue

1. Presumes that every idea deserves a fair hearing.
 - Encourages us to do our best to understand the comment, assertion, or suggestion, rather than jumping to conclusions based on preconceived ideas or because of known or unconscious bias.
 - Refrains from verdict thinking; refrains from “yes” or “no” verdicts. Instead, it draws out the speaker or the discussion by asking clarifying questions and adding useful information that builds the outlook under discussion.

- Doesn't assume bad motivations on the part of the proponent (even people or ideas that you detest can be sometimes partially right).
2. Emphasizes appreciative enquiry, for example asking kindly, "How would that work?" or asking thoughtfully, "What are the best reasons for doing this in that way?" or exploring, "How might we build on, or add to, this idea?"
 - Encourages us to *ask ourselves* questions, for example, "What could make this person's idea workable or valid?" (Do mental experiments with the idea).
 - Involves exploring ideas/recommendations/suggestions before jumping to conclusions. Later, if you must, you can come to a conclusion.
 3. Is a way to enjoy working with and building on others' ideas! Trying out a new idea can be exciting!
 - Is about *adding to*, rather than subtracting from, the discussion. Ask yourself, "What can I say that will be helpful to the dialogue?"
 - Is an opportunity to enjoy the challenge and the excitement of exploring a new idea or approach together with colleagues of diverse backgrounds and personal histories!

To reverse cycles of systemic humiliation, dignifying dialogue is a promising way to cultivate the conditions and plant the seeds for systemic dignity. As Miller (2015) notes, "Dialogue leads to dignity; dignity leads to dialogue."

LET'S SAY "YES" TO DIGNITY

Can we transform systemic humiliation into systemic dignity? Can we deescalate the dynamics of the security dilemma that incubates so much systemic humiliation in the world? Can we move away from kill-or-be-killed dominator models of organizing human activity toward dignity models of local and global cooperation? Not only do we emphatically answer "yes," we propose that we *must* transform systemic humiliation

into systemic dignity if humanity is going to survive on this planet. Cognitive behavioral psychologist and Tibetan Buddhist practitioner Christina Clark (2016) points out, "If we learn to start with the assumption of equal dignity, people wouldn't have to grab at it through the back door" or fight for it in ways that will lead humankind into global suicide or ecocide (Lindner 2017). Working together, we can create global and local systems that generate dignity systemically, that provide for the development and participation of all people (Miller 1976/1986), and that build "decent" societies, as Margalit (1996) puts it.

There is no time to lose in this shared effort. We have reached a boiling point in social relations in the United States and around the world, intensified each day by the dynamics of humiliation. To turn this rising tide around, we can *make dignity our first thought*, not an afterthought. We have all the seeds of equal dignity we need. We can plant those seeds in every word we use, in every interaction, in every conversation, and then plant again. Together, we can make systemic dignity our new destiny.

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