

From Humiliation to Appreciation: Walking Toward Our Talk

Abstract

Linda Hartling, Ph.D., Associate Director
Jean Baker Miller Training Institute
Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College
106 Central Street
Wellesley, MA 02481
lhartling@wellesley.edu

An educational leader once said, “The number one cause of stress is lack of appreciation.” This observation was based on this leader’s 30-year career working with students, teachers, parents, administrators, counselors, and support staff in diverse communities. What is it about “lack of appreciation,” especially the lack of appreciation of difference, that would lead this community leader to make such a dramatic claim? What is it about lack of appreciation that disrupts well-intended multicultural conversations?

This paper proposes that chronic lack of appreciation is an insidious, invisible, yet highly potent way of inflicting humiliation. Grounded in *Relational-Cultural Theory* (RCT)—which emphasizes the primacy of healthy human connections throughout people’s lives—I will discuss how a chronic lack of appreciation leads to intense feelings of disconnection, devaluation, and stress, especially in relationships in which people are connecting across differences. In addition, I will explore *Appreciative Inquiry* (AI) as a promising approach for reducing these feelings of humiliation. AI communicates to all those engaged in the relationship that they are known and that they matter. It cultivates a sense of worth, a sense of being valued in the relationship *and* in the larger world. Ultimately, AI encourages all of us to “walk our talk” whenever we engage in conversations across differences and cultures.