

Cultivating A Dignity Lens

"As soon as you place anyone outside of the circle of "us" the mind/brain automatically begins to devalue that person and justify poor treatment of him (Efferson, Lalive, and Feh, 2008). Feeling unheard, unseen and even a sense of unworthiness are feelings nobody wants to experience, yet everyone has. These feelings tend to manifest in behaviors that are not in the best interest of the individual or society. Researcher and author Donna Hicks Ph.D. attributes these behaviors to "dignity violations". Being treated as unworthy or "less than" violates one's dignity. Hicks' research explains how "dignity violations" are the root cause of all harm. Therefore, with a deep understanding and practice of honoring dignity, we can repair current and prevent future harm and injustice.

A deeper understanding and regard for human dignity requires the distinction between the "human" and the "being". "Human" describes the combination of a person's biological makeup and outward personality. The "being" is the interpersonality and all beings share the same characteristics. The essence of all beings share the desire to avoid suffering and alleviate the suffering of others when encountered. Honoring dignity means seeing beyond (even undesirable/disrespectful) behaviors and accepting the inherent worth and vulnerability of the "human" and knowing beneath that the person shares the same desires as you: The desire to be free of suffering and will alleviate the suffering of others when encountered.

By navigating life through a dignity lens we recognize that to the core, all human beings long for connectedness and ease of suffering. Honoring the dignity of self and others increases personal well-being and elevates all human potential. Keep in mind Psychologist and author Rick Hansen's words, "Pay attention to the number of times a day you categorize someone as "not like me," particularly in subtle ways: not my social background, not my style, and so on. It's startling how routine it is. See what happens to your mind when you consciously release this distinction and focus instead on what you have in common with that person, on what makes you both an "us." Engaging in practices that celebrate our common humanity strengthens the dignity lens attitude. Neuroplasticity demonstrates how the brain changes in shape and function according to one's practices and the environments in which they practice. Therefore, cultivating a dignity lens structures the brain in ways that allow for building an empowered and dignified community, society, and possibly the world.



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