

A Science of Human Dignity: Belonging, Voice and Agency as Universal Human Needs
*Paper Presented at International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) Conference,
Strengthening the Spirit of Community, Detroit, Michigan, October 24-26, 2018*

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Abstract

The desire to be treated with dignity is common to all human relationships. This desire manifests as the need to belong, to have voice, and to exercise agency in one's own affairs. In its concern for these three areas of human need, restorative practices scholarship is beginning to provide a frame for the concept of human dignity that is communicable across cultures and disciplines via the language of the social sciences and testable through experimentation and research.

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Introduction

Over the last eighteen years, I have conducted countless restorative practices courses, talks and events with educators, professionals and community leaders as a speaker, trainer, faculty member, and now president of the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP). In the past decade alone, the IIRP has provided professional development to more than 75,000 people. One the most common group exercises that instructors and I frequently lead revolves around the following question: “What word or phrase best describes how you expect to be treated by people in positions of authority to you?”

The most common answers to this question are invariably “fairly” and “respectfully.” Then, after a little more reflection, someone commonly adds some variation of, “I expect to be treated like a human being.” This exercise is usually intended to lead the group into a specific discussion of a collaborative decision-making model called Fair Process (Kim & Mauborgne, 1997). However, the last answer, “I expect to be treated like a human being,” is worthy of more exploration as it reveals something essential about the nature of restorative practices as an emerging social science.

I find it intriguing that, regardless of nationality, culture, race, gender, life-experience, or many other differences, the phrase “like a human being” nearly always arises naturally from this discussion. This is usually accompanied by thoughtful and approving nods from the rest of the room. This phrase strikes a chord of truth that is easily recognized by diverse groups and rarely begs further justification. The need to be treated “like a human being” carries an inherently positive meaning apparent in every

group with whom I have facilitated this conversation. Why is this the case? What does it mean to be treated like a human being?

History provides some answers. During the U.S. civil rights movement of the 1960s, marchers commonly carried signs with the slogan, “I AM A MAN” – recalling the older abolitionist slogan, “Am I not a man?” (Shurtleff, 2009). Further back in history, Chief Standing Bear of the Native American Ponca tribe asserted his right to habeas corpus during his trial in Nebraska, saying:

That hand is not the color of yours, but if I pierce it, I shall feel pain. If you pierce your hand, you also feel pain. The blood that will flow from mine will be the same color as yours. *I am a man*. God made us both (Starita, 2008).

These are examples of an appeal for justice based on a claim of fundamental human equality. This line of argument in pursuit of justice is effective and powerful because it appeals to the individual desire to be treated with dignity and respect. Civil rights marchers, abolitionists, and Chief Standing Bear rightly reasoned that they would not likely see justice unless they were first seen as equal in dignity and worth in the eyes of their oppressors.

Indeed, the entire modern concept of “universal human rights” is predicated on the inviolability of individual dignity (Rhodes, 2018). This philosophical and moral framework holds that one’s inherent worth is not rooted in one’s race, class, cognitive ability, or even in one’s relative capacity to contribute materially to society. As unique living beings, though different in talents and other characteristics, individuals are nonetheless entitled to be treated with equal dignity by the mere fact that they exist. To place conditions on inherent individual human worth and dignity beyond this universal

qualification is to undermine the inviolability of universal human rights by making dignity something negotiated with others versus something inherent in the person. If this is true, then individuals have a natural right to defend this dignity and pursue its fullest expression in communal relationships. As this paper will argue, those communal and social arrangements will be experienced as just, and should be judged so, according to the extent to which they are aligned with and promote the experience of individual dignity. This does not juxtapose the individual with the communal. Although they often exist in tension, these ideas are not in zero-sum competition with one another. It is not a matter of individual *or* communal dignity, but instead a matter of individual *and* communal dignity. In a deeper sense, individual dignity might be ultimately rooted in one's individual existence, but it is only truly possible to experience and express it via a just community that encourages its flourishing. This is apparent in the African concept of *Ubuntu*, which:

“...links individuality – the essence of “one’s being” to the humanity of others, to a collectivity that is interdependent. Ubuntu is grounded in relationships, a communitarian ethics where individuality and collectivity are symbiotic.” (Moyo, 2016, p. 75)

As a fundamental human reality, these ideas are also reflected in other cultures. For instance, in their seminal book on reclaiming at-risk youth, Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (2002) draw on wisdom from the Native American “circle of courage,” which is based on the medicine wheel spirituality of Lakota and other Native American, First Nations, and indigenous traditions (p. 43). The four quadrants of the circle of courage are belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity (p. 43). These developmental areas

correspond to the four cardinal directions of the Earth and denote the primary areas of youth development that must be balanced to restore one to personal and communal health. In other words, mastery and independence are not developed for their own sake, but so that one can more fully practice generosity and experience belonging. Conversely, the task of community is to encourage its members to master both themselves as well as skills that will serve the community. The goal is the development of strong and independent individuals who put their skills and lives at the service of the community (p.43). Only then can a person be made whole.

One sees similar ideas in the later scholastic tradition of the West, which predated the modernist and hyper-individualistic extremes spawned by the 18th century Age of Enlightenment by several centuries. For instance, Catholic social teaching, rooted in the works of moral and social philosophers such as the 13th century scholar St. Thomas Aquinas, asserts that, “The ultimate source of human rights is not found in the mere will of human beings, in the reality of the state, in public powers, but in man himself and in God his Creator.” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, p. 67). This tradition does not leave the individual standing alone in the universe to experience their dignity in a vacuum. Instead, it naturally follows that all just political and social structures must, by definition, encourage and protect the natural dignity of the individual (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). This is not seen as a dogma to which only Christians are bound. Instead, Catholic social doctrine holds this to be a universal and self-evident reality grounded in “natural law” – those truths that can be directly apprehended by reason alone regardless of one’s faith, culture, or place in history. As in the ancient African and Lakota worldviews, this insight speaks to universal human realities and

necessitates a dynamic interplay between individual and communal dignity, rights, and responsibilities.

In the 20th century, communism, socialism, and fascism all denied the necessity of individual dignity and thus the existence of natural rights (Applebaum, 2012; Payne, 1995). It is no accident that each produced monstrous regimes that dehumanized, violated, and murdered their fellow human beings with horrifying brutality and efficiency. Also, hyper-individualistic global capitalism also poses dangers to the experience of dignity as communal identities and entire layers of civil society are dissolved and commoditized to enable an ever-greater flow of international capital and labor. The great danger of collectivist philosophies is that the individual is subsumed by the will and needs of the faceless collective. The photo-negative danger posed by hyper-individualistic philosophy is that the individual is atomized, isolated, and left without communal root, identity, or support beyond their productive capacity and consumer potential. The collectivist extreme denies the existence of individual dignity. The individualistic extreme degrades the collective means to experience and express one's dignity. The way forward is not to negotiate a compromise between these extremes, but to posit a new way – which, in many aspects, is a very old way. The new social science of restorative practices has developed in the wake of these tensions. In the 21st century, restorative practices scholarship offers the hope of a new direction for civil society that pursues the need for individual human dignity through the development of more just communal engagement and social structures.

It is difficult to imagine a research design that could demonstrate the existence of human dignity concretely. We can, however, observe its operation and test its effects.

This is a psychological and social reality that underpins all human interactions and civil society – much in the same way that gravity underpins our physical reality. We do not see gravity itself with our normal faculties, but we know that an apple falls when we drop it. Similarly, human dignity itself cannot be seen, but it can be inferred. The desire to be treated with dignity is an observable component of the universal matrix of human self-concept and social behavior throughout the world and across the span of history. As such, this reality can be understood using the language of the social sciences. The social sciences provide an effective modern lingua franca to communicate these timeless truths and furnish a means by which to test and gain a more complete understanding of the dimensions of human dignity.

Universal Human Needs

Restorative practices scholarship has the potential to provide civil society advocates with a framework for the concept of human dignity that is communicable across cultures and disciplines via the language of the social sciences and testable through experimentation and research. The following sections will explore some dimensions of human dignity that are evident within restorative practices scholarship and expressed as three areas of universal human need. These are the needs to belong, to have voice, and to have agency.

The Need to Belong

While dignity is inherently rooted in the individual, it is only truly meaningful and apparent when we are in close relationships with others. In his book, *Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect* (2013), Harvard-trained social psychologist Matthew Lieberman argues that deep investigation into the social nature of humans began only in

the past fifteen years or so. We are only at the beginning of our social-scientific understanding of how humans relate in groups. Yet, says Lieberman (2013), every institution or social system is constructed according an implicit or explicit theory of human function. Inevitably, some these theories are partial at best and erroneous at worst. Many of the institutions these imperfect theories have spawned are, to some degree, harmful to human relationships. Conversely, through new fields of study such as restorative practices, we may expand our understanding of the human need to belong, how we function in groups, and the forms of social organization most conducive to human dignity and flourishing.

In *Restorative Practice Meets Social Justice*, I liken the “shape” of human dignity to that of a rowboat on a lake (Bailie, 2016). Like any common rowboat, the front is wedge-like, pointed, and upswept. The back is flat and square. The boat was made as a means to cross the lake. Now, you could row the boat flat side first. Conceivably, you could also push it sideways. You could sink the boat and drag it across the bottom. You might even take it apart and try to swim the pieces to the other side of the lake. However, all of these innumerable possible options would create unnecessary complications, turbulence, and resistance. Some of the options might even destroy the boat. However, if you respect the actual form of the boat as it is, you can glide with great stability and the least amount of effort. The shape of the boat, like that of human dignity, matters. The broadest part of that human shape is circumscribed by our need to belong.

Organizations, systems, or societies not aligned with the human need for belonging will always cause dysfunction and harm to individuals, families, and communities. They will be experienced as "unjust." People will sense the wrongness of

these systems – even if they cannot quite describe the why of it. Even if only subconsciously, humans know that authoritarian and paternalistic approaches to social organization impede the experience of dignity and do not feel right – even if they get results in some fashion or meet our material needs. Unjust systems do not “feel right” because they violate natural rights and therefore impede our ability to belong and form strong relationships with others.

In *The Gulag Archipelago*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (2007) recounts his experience of Soviet terror and oppression. A primary feature of life under this regime was the constant fear that one careless word in the presence of the wrong person would ensure one’s arrest or disappearance. Similarly, an acquaintance of mine who was raised in East Germany in the 1980s shared that the worst part of growing up under communist rule was the ever-present distrust between individuals. He explained that the East German Stasi had developed such an extensive system of informers that one could never be sure that it was safe to speak freely. Loose talk at a family dinner might be just as dangerous as a conversation in a café. You never knew who you could really trust, whether it was a friend, a sibling, or a parent. This had a profound negative impact on my friend’s ability to bond with others and was the most painful part of his childhood and adolescence. At a neurological level, brain scans have demonstrated that the experiences of social and physical pain are nearly identical (Lieberman, 2013, p. 5). For humans, the need to belong is nearly as strong a motivator as the need for food and shelter. Deprivation of meaningful relationships is as painful as hunger or exposure to the elements. Any effort to improve civil society must pay close attention to how our families, organizations, and

systems impact, promote, or impede our ability to form strong and effective bonds with others.

For instance, school-based research has demonstrated that when students feel stronger bonds and levels of connection with those around them, they are less likely to misbehave and harm others (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). A large body of evidence has demonstrated that the highly punitive and authoritarian zero-tolerance policies of the 1990s and early 2000s failed to change student behavior or make schools safer. Environments marked by fear, retribution, and intensive sanctioning actually eroded feelings of safety and belonging – two factors central to the development of prosocial attitudes and behavior in youth (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Commission on Children at Risk, 2003). In response, restorative practices advocates have promoted a “whole-school” approach to behavior management and youth development that focuses both on intensive proactive relationship development and responding to misbehavior as harm done to relationships (Brown & Bailie, 2016). These practices are routinely associated with significant reductions in disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and expulsions, as well improvement in day-to-day classroom behavior (Brown & Bailie, 2016, p. 49). When implemented intensively, such practices even show promise in reducing racial disproportionality in school behavioral sanctioning (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016).

Restorative practices serve an important dual function in the life of a community, school, family, or workplace. The practices offer mechanisms to increase social bonding and proactively strengthen community, while also offering clear methods to repair relational harm in the wake of harm or wrongdoing. Techniques such as circles and

restorative conferencing may take a myriad of forms in different social contexts.

However, individual practices are only important to the extent that they help individuals develop the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive competencies that make one more proficient in developing and managing stronger relationships with others (Bailie, 2016).

The task ahead for civil society advocates is to better understand the shape and dimensions of the human need to belong, so that our practices, systems, and communities enhance our relationships, rather than impede them.

The Need to Have Voice

The assertion that humans have an innate need to be heard, to be understood, and to share emotions with others was one of the most salient features of early restorative justice literature (Zehr, 2002). Later research in the field confirmed that satisfaction for direct stakeholders in the wake of harm rose with the opportunity to be heard through direct engagement in participatory restorative justice processes (McCold & Wachtel, 2003). The need to be heard and have one's experience acknowledged is central to the experience of personal dignity.

In his essay, *The Stories We Are*, William Randall (1997) asserted that we are the main character in our own personal story. It is through this process of storying and re-storying our own life that we make meaning. Our personal stories are more than facts and information about what happened to us when and by what means. Our stories are also constructed by how we tell them and to whom. It is this formation of a personal narrative that imbues events, and life as a whole, with meaning. The same factual events may be told in myriad ways and with a multitude of possible meanings. It is the facts we choose to highlight, and the way in which we choose to relate them, that makes a story truly our

own. This process of making a story ours, argues Randall, helps the individual move from the passive feeling of being only a character carried along by larger forces toward being a reader and eventually an author of our own life – to living with a full sense of knowledge and dignity about who we are in the world. Becoming an author of our own personal story is essential if we are to become who we wish to be. This is the essential arc of any meaningful personal and moral development. It is the process of self-actualization.

In Joseph Campbell's seminal work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2008), he discusses how the understanding of life's tragedies reminds us of that which is fragile within us and around us. Similarly, understanding life's comedies draws attention to that which is invincible. It is only by grasping the reality of both aspects of our personal story that we come to know ourselves and to fully understand others. Even in restorative conferences held in the wake of serious offenses such as murder, victims commonly report that they came to see the offender as an imperfect, broken, even occasionally sympathetic human being, instead of an all-powerful monster (Wachtel, O'Connell, & Wachtel, 2010). More than any other method, humans use storytelling to make sense of emotionally powerful experiences and existence itself. A dignified life is one in which we feel that our story is heard, understood, and matters to those around us.

When I first began working for the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), I was employed as an intern youth counselor at one of our day treatment alternative schools for delinquent and troubled teens. One of the unique aspects of the organizational cultural was something called "basic concepts," to which all staff were required to adhere. These were regularly discussed and reviewed during monthly staff

team-builders and designed to reinforce important organizational norms and ideas. Two of these basic concepts were:

- We believe that others benefit from, and actually welcome, honest feedback.
- If we have a legitimate concern about a fellow staff member's behavior, we should present the concern to them directly or seek supervision.

Prior to the IIRP, I had worked in several settings that claimed to have a similar culture and norms, but those organizations usually failed to put those ideals into practice on a daily basis; as a result, my initial reaction to these early team-builders and proposed basic concepts was somewhat cynical.

Early in my employment, I had a colleague who made me a target for harsh teasing that bordered on bullying. He frequently embarrassed me in front of staff and our students. One day, after a particularly troubling interaction, I asked to speak with the school supervisor. She listened to me patiently and expressed concern for what I had told her, saying, "I'm very sorry that this happened to you. You do not deserve to be treated like this, and his behavior is not acceptable." She then asked, "When would you like to tell him how his behavior is affecting you?" In essence, she wanted to know when I planned to confront him. Surprised, I responded that I thought that, frankly, this was her job! She said she would talk to my colleague as well, but that I deserved the opportunity to confront him directly. Sensing my hesitation, she offered to join me and, together, we would tell him that this behavior needed to stop. I agreed.

In this conversation, we used "restorative questions" as a guide:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking about at the time?

- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected and in what way?
- What's been the hardest thing for you?
- What needs to happen in order to make things right? (Costello, Costello, & Wachtel, 2009, p. 16)

I started by telling my colleague that I was frustrated and angry with him, and recounted several recent incidents when he had teased and embarrassed me. To my surprise, I also shared some of my own history with this type of behavior. I told him how I grew up in a neighborhood where I faced fights, physical threats, and bullying as a regular part of my childhood. I also shared that in the military, I had experience with a few authority figures who regularly abused their power in this way – using their role as training leaders to physically and emotionally abuse their subordinates.

I grew surprisingly emotional during this part of the conversation. I had not planned on sharing anything about these parts of my life story, and I certainly did not foresee the emotions that rose in me. I then said that the hardest part of what happened wasn't his behavior per se, but that I had been trying hard to trust that this organization was different than others where I had previously worked. I asserted that his behavior contradicted the values this organization claimed to uphold. I related how difficult it was for me to trust authority figures and that I had been working to be more emotionally honest and available to others – especially in my desire to be more effective as a counselor and role model for the troubled youth we served. My colleague was supposed to be mentoring and helping me, but was, instead, hindering my professional development.

To my shock, he didn't make excuses. He hung his head and admitted that this kind of behavior had been an ongoing problem for him, both at work and at home, and that this was not the first time he had been confronted about it. He apologized and asked me what I needed from him. I thanked him, and told him that the teasing and bullying needed to stop immediately. I suggested that if he had a real criticism, he should talk to me privately first and refrain from sarcasm.

His behavior toward me changed for the better, and I never had the same issues with him again. This change was not because he was told he would be fired, or that he was formally reprimanded, or because of any aggressive response from me. He changed because by sharing our personal feelings and stories in a very real and human way, we both affirmed that we deserved better. I affirmed my dignity by insisting that I not be treated that way. His dignity was affirmed by me, and the organization, by setting strong limits and high expectations for his behavior. Simply put, we told him that he was a better person than his behavior suggested. We held him accountable while affirming his worth as a person and his potential to change.

One of the great contributions being made by restorative practices as a field is the bringing to full consciousness how personal narratives impact our daily lives, relationships, and work. The restorative-narrative perspective encourages individuals to explore dominant themes and stories surrounding their lives (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2001). Research into adult learners in programs utilizing restorative practices has even found that the sharing of personal narratives helped to reconcile past conflicts, hardships, and trauma (Bailie, 2012).

These techniques, drawn from literary and therapeutic fields, have helped to provide a framework for examining the world in a way that accounts for personal biography, thoughts, and feelings around life experience (White, 1989). Discussion of personal stories often leads people to deeper insight into their perceptions and experience (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Whether in personal relationships, a workplace, or a local community, people bring a lifetime of experience, relational history, and biography with them (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). In short, individuals bring their life story with them wherever they go (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Reissman, 1993). Each of us is unrepeatable and unique. As such, our personal narratives contain the seeds of our dignity as individuals. Sharing those stories in the presence of others builds a more thorough understanding of our own lives and the humanity of others.

The Need to Exercise Agency

In *An Everyone Culture: Becoming a Deliberately Developmental Organization* (2016), adult-learning and organizational change experts Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey explore the unique features of organizations proven to maximize employee potential and achieve exceptional creative results. From hedge funds to tech start-ups to non-profits, Kegan and Lahey discovered that “deliberately developmental organizations” (DDOs) tend to have cultures that encourage radically honest self-reflection and taking of responsibility – not only for one’s work, but also for one’s relationships and personal growth. DDOs tend to accomplish this through intensively collaborative and horizontal employee engagement practices that encourage group learning, decision making, risk taking, and confrontation, regardless of title or position. However, these organizations also utilize vertical lines of authority that, instead of micromanaging and interfering with

the daily functions of units and teams, keep leadership focused on ensuring that lower levels of the organization take active responsibility for decision making and personal growth in pursuit of the organization's goals (p. 112). Kegan and Lahey discovered that when senior leaders focus their time and energy on building a culture that reinforces these consistent relational principles, both people and bottom lines tend to grow exponentially (p. 96).

Each of us has a realm of activity and decision making over which we are the rightful judge of what is best and desired for us. For instance, having direct say and influence over the proper composition of asphalt used in the municipal roads of a neighboring town is a decision most of us happily leave to the expertise of others that are more knowledgeable and directly impacted. However, we do expect to be the primary decision maker in areas of life such as educational planning for our children, where we live, or deciding the proper use and disposal of personal property. We rightly expect to have considerable influence and inclusion in decisions that impact us directly and about which we have meaningful knowledge and expertise. As discussed earlier, we need to belong and feel that our voice matters to experience human dignity. However, we also need to have confidence that our relationships and voice provide opportunities to influence the world around us directly. In Kegan and Lahey's DDOs, employees at all levels felt that their voice and actions mattered *and* made an impact on the company and the world. (Kegan & Leahy, 2016). We must know that we have agency, influence, and a measure of control within our realms of personal and relational responsibility.

In his famous work "Conflicts as Property," justice theorist and philosopher Nils Christie (1977) argues that direct stakeholders "own" their relational conflicts and that

the forceful imposition of lawyers, courts, and other professionals tend to “steal” conflicts away from rightful owners unjustly. Modern society does not have too many conflicts, argues Christie, but too few (p. 1). Every stolen conflict is a lost opportunity for regular people to have increased agency in their own lives by doing the messy work of navigating human relationships.

Christie’s clever and somewhat radical concept provided theoretical support to the new field of restorative justice, which later evolved into restorative practices. Beginning with experiments by mediators and conflict resolution experts in the 1970s, proponents of restorative justice sought to reframe the social view of crime. Instead of viewing crime as an offense against the state, restorative justice theorists held that crime is more accurately viewed as harm done to people and relationships (Zehr, 2002). Through this new lens, the goal of justice becomes the need to restore connectedness and relationships (Zehr, 2002). Thus, restorative justice processes recommended the active engagement of those directly affected by an offense (i.e., victims, offenders, and those who care about them) in repairing harm (Wachtel, O’Connell, & Wachtel, 2010). This new way of viewing wrongdoing challenged the traditional role of authorities and professionals who saw themselves as serving the needs of those affected by crime and wrongdoing. Instead of professionals “stealing conflicts” from direct stakeholders through sanctions and impersonal judicial processes, restorative justice provided opportunities for stakeholders to communicate directly, share their stories, and discuss how the harm might be repaired (Christie, 1977, p. 1). In short, restorative justice restored belonging, encouraged voice, and provided a means to exercise agency at the lowest possible level of social organization.

Multiple studies from the 1990s to the present have found that this approach results in much higher levels of satisfaction, perception of fairness among victims *and* offenders, and reduced re-offending when compared to traditional justice (Abramson & Moore, 2002; McCold, 1999; McCold & Wachtel, 2003; Pennell & Burford, 1994). This led many restorative justice practitioners and criminologists to investigate the mechanisms by which restorative justice provided a more satisfying personal and emotional experience of reparation than traditional responses to wrongdoing. In *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*, Australian criminologist John Braithwaite (1989) posited that the most potent normative force in society was not fear of sanctions, but rather the prosocial influence of those with whom we have the most intimate relationships. These are the people best placed in our lives to exercise meaningful and effective agency concerning our wellbeing and behavior. Braithwaite (2002) suggested that the stronger these relationships become, the less likely people are to offend in the first place. If this assertion is true, then a more holistic view of justice would not only seek to repair harm done to relationships after an offense but also encourage the proactive building of community and relationships in the broader society prior to any wrongdoing. This key insight and concern for increased agency within the context of everyday relationships was the beginning of restorative practices as a field (Wachtel, 2004; Wachtel & McCold, 2000).

In the 1990s and early 2000's, many restorative justice theorists (McCold, 1999; Wachtel, 2004) found these ideas increasingly reflected in new practices developed independently within such diverse disciplines as organizational management (Johnson, 1998; Kim & Mauborgne, 1997), social work (Berg, 1994; Pennell & Burford, 1994),

criminal justice (Braithwaite, 2002), education (Brookfield, 1995), and psychotherapy (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Miller & Stiver, 1997; White, 1989; Yalom, 1995). Ideas such as learning organizations (Senge, 1990), communities of practice (Wenger & Snyder, 2000), family group decision making (Merkel-Holguin, Nixon, & Burford, 2002), restorative school discipline (Morrison, 2003), and client-centered therapy (Freedman & Combs, 1996) all seemed to recognize the power of relationships, connectedness, and agency in giving direct stakeholders the maximum possible role in managing their own affairs, while limiting the role of professionals and intermediaries.

This view of agency has broader implications for social organization and civil society development and tends to orient social innovation toward the decentralization of power and decision-making toward the lowest possible effective level of social organization. This view still leaves a clear role for higher levels of social organization in ensuring social health and order, but only when lower and more fundamental levels of society prove unable or unwilling to play a direct role in decisions or self-management appropriate to their particular realm of concern (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, p. 81). Even in such cases, however, the intervention of higher levels of society should be temporary and expressly aim to restore the ability of the lower level of society meet their needs and exercise their appropriate duties. A more restorative civil society is one that allows for hierarchy, but in which agency is exercised as locally as possible and prudent to the task at hand. Higher levels of organization might have a duty to provide support when needed, but this support should aim to restore the ability of more localized civil society layers, and individuals, to meet their own needs through the exercise of direct and personal agency (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002). To do

otherwise, even with the best of intentions, is to violate the dignity of communities and handicap their ability to produce empowered individuals. Thus, the exercise of direct and local agency is essential to the individual experience of dignity in community.

Conclusion

The desire to be treated with dignity is fundamental to all human relationships. This desire manifests as the need to belong, to have voice, and to exercise agency in one's own affairs. It is imperative that those interested in the improvement of civil society gain a more complete understanding of these needs. The emerging social science of restorative practices is beginning to provide the framework to communicate the dimensions of human dignity across cultures and disciplines via the language of the social sciences that is testable through experimentation and research. These insights will be essential to the restoration of community and civil society in the 21st century.

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