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Realizing Dignity for Enhancing Intercultural Competence

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the concept of dignity as a reflective concept that may serve as a strategy for enhancing intercultural competence. Within the field of intercultural communication, intercultural competence seeks to impart essential knowledge and skills for engaging in intercultural encounters with cognitive, behavioral and affective competence. Dignity contributes to intercultural competence by enabling persons to view the social world anew.

In this paper, dignity is conceptualized as the development and self-expression of persons free from social categorization, while acknowledging human vulnerability towards the social and material world. In intercultural encounters, a person may indeed sense their vulnerability due to a lack of social orientation, cultural awareness and language skills. Simultaneously, the vulnerability of the Other may be neglected with implications for effective and appropriate interaction between a Self and a culturally dissimilar Other. Accordingly, it is proposed that emotional regulation is essential for realizing dignity as an aspect of intercultural competence.

Research on social dynamics and identity and the emotions is not without its precedence within intercultural communication. This project contributes to the objectives of intercultural communication and competence by theorizing how awareness of social dynamics and emotional regulation may support the realization of dignity during intercultural encounters. Dignity may complement other strategies related to cognitive, behavioral and affective competence for engaging in effective and appropriate communication.

1. Introducing dignity

Intercultural competence is a multifaceted concept within the field of intercultural communication. It includes many different aspects and models for moving beyond one's own worldview in order to understand the thoughts, feelings and actions shaping the worldview of culturally dissimilar Others. According to Spitzberg/Changnon (2009: 7), “[inter]cultural competence is the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive and behavioral orientations to the world.” Similarly, Fantini/Tirmiz (2006: 12) stress the importance of effective and appropriate communicative action, suggesting that the words ‘effective’ and ‘appropriate’ recognize both **etic** and **emic** approaches within intercultural communication. The etic approach is geared towards what is effective in relation to a Self and the emic approach is what is appropriate in relation to the Other.

For Fantini/Tirmiz (2006), intercultural competence requires forms of knowledge and skills that go beyond communicative competences formed through experience within one's own cultural background. Everyone forms the type of knowledge and skills for communicating and acting within their own native language and cultural system. But it becomes increasingly difficult to acquire ‘language-culture systems’ that would enable a person to perceive things in a different way. However, a person with intercultural competence transcends their own system by acquiring a new system and thus can see things anew. The ability to see things anew enables the intercultural competent person to “perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (Fantini/Tirmiz 2006: 12).

Within intercultural communication, there seems to be a tradition that says that effective and appropriate communication and interaction with different cultures involves ‘managing’ the cul-

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turally dissimilar other (See Blasco 2004). As noted above, Spitzberg/Changnon (2009: 7) write that “[inter]cultural competence is the appropriate and effective management of interaction”. In the same way, Elmadssia/Hosni (2012: 36) write that intercultural competence involves knowing “how to analyze and understand the situations of contact between persons and between expanding groups of different cultures, and to know how to manage these situations.” Managing through the acquisition of knowledge and skills seems to be an integral part for engaging with the Other in intercultural encounters of all types of contexts, from classrooms to boardrooms (Sercu 2006 and Bird et al. 2010).

Yet Sercu (2006) provides a perspective on intercultural competence that seems less instrumental. In this perspective, an intercultural competent person is someone who can cross boundaries of all types through the acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitudes. Yet, Sercu (2006) suggests that an intercultural competent person is not satisfied with the view of the outside, but seeks to gain an understanding from the inside and share with the Other their own worldview. Thus we may suggest that one aim of intercultural competence involves an interaction between a Self and a culturally dissimilar Other, whereby the Self takes on more than an instrumental approach to the culture of the Other, but also a stance involving a Self and a culturally dissimilar Other in a more integrated worldview, possibly one that also fulfills an ambition of finding a common humanistic objective transcending social, cultural and language boundaries.

Outside of the academic field of intercultural communication, dignity serves as a type of universal value at the international and national level, framing the obligations of a social structure, like the state, towards persons and groups within and across national borders. The concept of dignity is embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as within the common law of various national constitutions, such as Germany and Israel (England 2000). The aim of this paper is to present dignity at a personal and group level, specifically as a reflective concept for enhancing intercultural competence in regards to what may be considered effective and appropriate intercultural communication and interaction.

Dignity contributes to the construct of intercultural competence by enabling persons to view the social world anew. With its focus on persons as individuals free from social categorization, dignity transcends the constraints of social dynamics on the Self and the Other. In this paper, dignity, inspired by Philipsen (1992), is conceptualized as a social code that stresses the importance of self-development and self-expression, while acknowledging human vulnerability towards the social and material world. In intercultural encounters, a person may indeed sense their vulnerability due to a lack of social orientation or due to their own social position within a social order. This social position may limit their access to symbolic, social and material resources. In intercultural encounters, persons may also sense their vulnerability due to a lack of resources, such as cultural awareness and language skills. At the same time, a person may neglect to perceive the vulnerability of the Other, through such processes as ethnocentrism and stereotyping (See Ting-Toomey 1999). But in order to view the social world anew through dignity, persons arguably need to regulate their emotional responses as they cope with challenging situations. Sercu’s (2006) objectives for effective and appropriate communication, which involves forging a meaning towards the Other, as well as the Self, is not only a cognitive process but an affective one too. As Smith et al. (1993) reveal, appraisal more than knowledge-cognition contributes to how persons perceive themselves and others.

Research on social dynamics and identity and the emotions is not without its precedence within intercultural communication. This project contributes to the objectives of intercultural competence by theorizing how awareness of social dynamics and emotional regulation may support the realization of dignity during intercultural encounters. As a reflective concept (See Schon 2001, Schapiro/Reiff 1993, and Russell 2005) on intercultural encounters, dignity may complement other strategies for achieving cognitive, behavioral and affective competence. But it is slightly different in that it arguably does not involve effective and appropriate communication by managing the encounter through knowledge and skills. Realizing dignity in intercultural encounters in-

volves coping resourcefully through emotional regulation and awareness of social dynamics for sharing a more integrated worldview between a Self and a culturally dissimilar Other. Effective and appropriate communication would involve these elements, while recognizing that the project of dignity emerges from human vulnerability.

The paper begins by presenting a definition of dignity that can be applied on intercultural encounters between a Self and a culturally dissimilar Other. It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to treat dignity as a problem issue to be defined in moral or political philosophy. The current focus is how dignity can be used as a reflective concept for understanding intercultural encounters and as a social code between a Self and Other to realize. The origins of dignity can be culturally traced to such varied sources as the book of Genesis, and Immanuel Kant (Gaylin 1984), Chinese Philosophy (Zhang 2000) and documents within the United Nations as well as various Basic Laws, such as in the Constitutions of Israel and Germany (Englard 2000), and many others, including documents related to the practice of medicine (Chochinov et al. 2002). Despite these many sources, a recent US Presidential Commission on Bioethics (2008) stated that a consensual definition of dignity could not be reached. Nevertheless, it is my humble intention to define the concept of dignity in a way that hopefully will contribute to some thoughts on intercultural competence, specifically what is effective and appropriate intercultural communication.

While conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the United States, Gerry Philipsen (1992) experienced that his own communication style was far from effective and appropriate when interacting with persons and groups from certain subcultures, especially working class cultures. In order to explain the communicative practices of working and middle class cultures in the United States, he theorized that his own middle class cultural background embodies a ‘speech code of dignity’, which views persons as free from social categories, while working class cultures embody a ‘speech code of honor’, viewing persons as social categories in a hierarchical social order.

In intercultural communication, the social construction of identity and the formation of a person’s mindsets are also used to explain communication between persons and groups (See Ting-Toomey 1999). **Dignity** and **honor** can be viewed as two theoretical constructs for analyzing cultural and cross-cultural interaction. After presenting Philipsen’s (1992) definition of dignity and honor, I turn to theories of social cognition (Berger et al. 1972, Cummins 2000 and Zink et al. 2008), to describe the way social dynamics shape identity construction (See Jenkins 2008). These social dynamics may place limiting constraints on enacting dignity. Yet the cognitive processes, specifically the ability to read the intentions of others, involved in social cognition for social orientation may also serve as the psychological base for grounding dignity. Intentional reading enables persons to recognize, among other things, the vulnerability of humans towards their social and material reality, for instance by being able to recognize the suffering of others. Thus, in contrast to viewing dignity as an expression of the high status of humans in relation to nature (Ketab 2011) or as intrinsic worth (Rosen 2012), I suggest that realizing dignity involves, in part, transcending the vulnerability humans face by the social and material constraints placed on them as social beings with physical bodies. But in order to perceive the Other and the Self with individual dignity, I would suggest requires regulating the emotions. Therefore I also present theories of emotional regulation, specifically the constructs of **Emotional Intelligence** (Salovey/Mayer 1990), **Mindfulness** (Hauk 2006) and **Self-compassion** (Neff et al. 2005).

Within intercultural communication, the focus on the emotions is in connection to how emotions are expressed culturally. There seems to be less emphasis on how the emotions mediate cognitive and behavioral processes. The theory of Anxiety and Uncertainty management does, however, examine the affect of negative emotions on cognition and behavior (See Gudykunst 1998). Yet in this paper, it is shown that positive emotional states, as well as negative ones, resulting from social orientation, can have a negative impact on effective and appropriate communication. The concept of mindfulness is also used as a strategy within intercultural communication, for instance Ting-Toomey/Kurogi (1998). In their study, mindfulness is seen as a dimension of **face-work**, involving listening carefully and being extremely attentive to the assumptions of a Self and

the assumptions of the Other. In the current paper, mindfulness is a construct from psychological-behavioral therapy, which attempts to create emotional well-being through helping persons regulate their own emotions by changing the **reference values** that they construct meaning on.

Thus, I will discuss *how dignity may contribute to more effective and appropriate communication by being a reflective concept geared towards viewing the social world anew, for both a Self and a culturally dissimilar Other.*

2. Conceptualizing dignity

In this section, I will introduce the concept of dignity, revealing its multiple definitions. Overall, the presentation will show that reaching consensus on the concept is a challenge. In my view, it is complicated by the observation that its content at times shares elements with the concept of honor. Nevertheless, the boundaries between the two concepts can be drawn, at least for current theoretical purposes.

The tradition since World War II reveals that dignity is associated with ideas such as individual rights and human rights as well as thoughts and feelings about self-worth and pride. Dignity is mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948: “All beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” Dignity is also mentioned in the Basic Law of the Constitutions for Germany and Israel.

Despite its acceptance as a basis for common ground among humans and for humanity, it remains a complex concept. The recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, Liu Xiaobo from China, is reported to have said that affirming dignity conceptually and legally is essential for assuring human rights in China (See Zhang 2000). But even outside of China, defining dignity and legislating is a challenge. A court case in France in 1995 involving dwarf-tossing as a form of entertainment in a local disco went as high as the United Nations. In short, different courts in France ruled for and against dwarf-tossing. In the end the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations ruled that dwarf-tossing was against human dignity, while the dwarf himself argued that he had the individual right to pursue an occupation of his own choosing (Rosen 2012).

Within the United Nations, there are surprisingly different views on how to ensure that the dignity of all persons and groups is protected. A recent amendment in the Human Rights Council (21st session, 3rd Agenda) was passed affirming that traditional values could provide a better understanding of dignity for the protection of persons and groups. At the same time, many member states voted against the amendment arguing that traditional values might be used to protect only certain persons and groups, and thereby limit individual rights for minority persons and groups within a society, denying their dignity. These examples demonstrate that in practice dignity may be a relative concept. Yet the writing of the UN Declaration of Human Rights shows that there may also exist an understanding of dignity as a universal concept. The authors of the declaration came from many different cultures, including Arabic and Muslim nations (Waltz 2002). It seems that for both humanitarian and political purposes, dignity remains difficult to conceptualize and to protect legally.

Philosophically, tradition also shows that there are different views of the concept of dignity going all the way back to Antiquity. The ancients used dignity to ask questions of human worth and standing in relation to nature and the gods (Gaylin 1984). In the philosophical tradition from Kant and onwards, dignity touches on the idea of persons as individuals, free and autonomous (Johnson 1971). Acknowledging persons as individuals seems to be an accepted part of tradition, but what grants humans their individual dignity remains debatable. The debate seems to move between two main positions.

Both Ketab (2011) and Rosen (2012) have recently explored the historical and conceptual origins of the concept of dignity, but have reached different conclusions. Ketab (2011: x) says that human dignity is grounded in “the unique status and high achievement of the human species and

the individual”, involving the break from nature, which grants “humans their high rank above nature”. In comparison, Rosen (2012) proposes that dignity represents the intrinsic worth of persons by being simply human. The development of the intrinsic worth of humans is attributed to a historical process, which he calls an ‘expanding circular narrative’ (2012: 8). The narrative unfolds from a social elite to including other persons in an outward and downward fashion towards fundamental equality for all humans. Thus philosophically, individual dignity can either be grounded in the high status of humans or it can be grounded in their intrinsic worth. In my view both views are problematic conceptually and in relation to social and material reality. Status and worth are not distributed equally.

In order to examine the concept of dignity further, I will present the concept as defined in Philipsen’s (1992) ethnographic study of the communication styles of working class and middle class cultures in the United States. He uses two theoretical constructs to explain these cultures; namely dignity and honor. Defining the content of honor contributes to conceptualizing the content of dignity.

Dignity has no content, values, beliefs or ideologies, according to Philipsen (1992: 117), except that it is against nature and human morality to suppress the development of persons as individuals and their self-expression. Honor, at its core, privileges the social and specifically, prescribes what is honorable behavior by containing a certain set of values for guiding thoughts and behavior. Some of these values can be viewed as present in the conceptualizations of dignity by Ketab and Rosen, as well as in the Universal Declaration. According to Philipsen (1992), honor is defined by social oriented values, such as loyalty, gains and rewards for one’s own self and group, and the recognition for success in various performance contexts. At the same time, these values are moderated and limited by the values of shame and piety. The value of shame places importance on external approval from the social world for internal well-being. Shame limits the pursuit of self and group interests. Piety also places a limitation on the value of the pursuit of high social status. To be honorable, persons acknowledge through their actions that there are always other persons above and below one in the social order. Enacting the value piety includes showing respect for persons of high and low status.

Ketab’s (2011) view of dignity includes the value of high status. Yet in the current conceptualization of dignity, persons with low status can also realize dignity. Furthermore, Rosen’s (2012) view shows elements of piety, in that treating others with respect is a movement downwards and outwards. I would propose that Rosen’s (2012) view of dignity is more a narrative of the expansion of honor, which demonstrates social obligation to first one’s next of kin and then to an outer circle of others. Thus rather than an expanding narrative of dignity, these conceptualizations embody an expanding narrative of honor. The narrative of honor is culturally embodied in Cain’s question to God in the Bible, namely ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’. Whether a rhetorical question or not, (See Paine 2001 on the story of honor), the answer is an affirmative. This social obligation is also present in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, stating that the Other be treated in the spirit of brotherhood.

Dignity does not have these values. Treating the Other with individual dignity, including treating oneself with dignity, is not a social obligation according to the definition above. In fact, obligation to the social may actually place a limiting constraint on realizing dignity as it focuses on social categories and roles, such as ‘brother’ and ‘father’. In extreme situations, some persons may act aggressively and violently in the spirit of brotherhood as in the case of the rape of Jacob’s daughter Dinah by Schechem and the massacre of the Schechemites by her brothers as told in Genesis (Paine 2001: 180). Honor killing in different cultures can also be attributed to a strong obligation to a social order (Eisner 2009).

In order to further define dignity as a concept with no values and content other than allowing for development and self-expression free from the social, theories of social cognition are presented. These theories, I would suggest, show that honor is a cultural frame that most likely emerges from social dynamics, as well as constraining the negative aspects of the social, through such

values as shame and piety, while still embracing the social as of utmost importance for guiding human behavior. Dignity on the other hand, although unrealizable without social structures and institutions to support it, such as the UN and judicial courts, enables persons to seek their individual development and express themselves free from any obligation to the social. Enacting dignity forges individuality, but this is a challenge due to social dynamics and the emotions tied to them.

3. The social constraints on dignity

Achieving dignity for oneself or others may require acting against a social order, since a person's thoughts and behavior are greatly shaped by having to orientate oneself in relation to the Self and Other in a social world. The social world is created at a 'personal', 'interactional' and 'institutional' level (See Jenkins 2008: 56-62). The current presentation of the social constraints on dignity is based on research that would relate to personal and interactional level. Research by Faris/Felmlee (2011) demonstrates that humans, across gender categories, are highly pre-occupied with social status, with implications for how a person may think, feel and act. **Social status**, writes Waytz (2009), is the most important force in social behavior, even more so than material gain. Thus the orientation towards social status may limit the pursuit of dignity.

The dynamics of social status influence the way a person thinks and acts in a number of ways, according to Zink et al. (2008). Although the scope of their study does not include intercultural communication, several of their findings are relevant for developing effective and appropriate intercultural competence. Their study shows that social status shapes the way persons think about themselves contributing to a person's emotional state. For instance, they show that certainty about social status, even low social status, is connected with positive feelings, while negative feelings are associated with uncertainty of status. One implication of this may be that a person who is unaware of the social dynamics of social status may act less open to an intercultural encounter, thus be less inclusive, in order to maintain a sense of positive well-being. These findings suggest that the connection between social status and the emotions may indeed constrain individual dignity and its pursuit.

In social interaction, social status is also an influential factor between persons and groups. A study by Berger et al. (1972) shows that external status characteristics shape human interaction, even more so than direct experience. This finding questions theories of interaction that claim that identities emerge in interaction between Self and Others (See Young 2008: 221-228). Furthermore, based on empirical work on interracial interaction, Berger et al. (1972) found that external status characteristics determine power and prestige in a group more than the nature of the task or the immediate context. Interestingly, a person with a perceived higher status would be listened to more even if that person was objectively incorrect and even if their ability was unrelated to the task. The orientation towards social status may shape thoughts and actions away from perceiving persons as individuals.

Dignity may also be constrained by the **social norms** used for social orientation. Social norms guide all types of activities. According to Cummins (2000), in social interaction, social norms are a type of social structure for prescribing which forms of behavior are permitted, obligated or prohibited. He furthermore writes that social norms contribute to how persons and groups may avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. In order to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts, persons need to learn quickly the social norms for what is permitted and what is forbidden. Furthermore, social norms are developed and maintained by a form of social order, which is typically hierarchical. The hierarchical nature of the social world is arguably also present in liberal societies where progressive social norms have more status than other norms. As Cummins (2000) writes, the coordination of social norms is carried out through dominance relations.

Being aware of social norms is essential for enacting dignity because realizing dignity for the Self and the Other may entail breaking from a social norm. The potential to break away from a social norm and other social dynamics can be found in basic cognitive functions.

In order to navigate the social norms within a social order, Cummins (2000) writes that humans have developed certain cognitive functions, such as recognizing 'dominance relations'. Of the cognitive functions examined by him, monitoring the 'intention of others' is particularly relevant for interaction between Self and Others, and especially for enacting dignity. The ability to read the intentions of others is necessary for cooperation, but he also shows that this ability enables persons to gain social and material resources that might be denied them because of the social order. Reading the intentions of others enables deception, which serves the purpose of outwitting those persons who have the status to constrain or inhibit the behavior of others. Since intention reading also enables persons to recognize the suffering of others, this cognitive function for social orientation may actually contribute to perceiving and realizing the dignity of the Other as well, not only one's own.

Cummins (2000) also writes that the ability to recognize the suffering of others enables one to ground a 'social code' for interaction in structures other than social norms. In this way, we can conceptualize a way of being and acting towards the Self and Other despite the social status characteristic of a person. Thus dignity can be grounded in psychological processes, which are used to recognize the suffering of others, as well as one's own lack of access to social status and material resources.

Based on Cummins (2000), I would suggest that it is not status that grants humans their dignity nor is it intrinsic worth since some persons may be denied dignity because of social and material reality. It is rather the opposite. Vulnerability and awareness of it creates the potential for working towards dignity. The cognitive function of reading the intentions of others makes persons aware of how they may be vulnerable to a certain social order and how others may also be vulnerable. As noted above, orientation towards social status within a social order is the norm, but social norms may cover up an underlying conflict that needs to come to the surface in order to realize individual dignity. Yet the ability to practice dignity within a social world is complicated by the way persons and groups appraise situations and cope emotionally with them. As we have seen, social orientation is closely related to the emotions. A person may seek positive well-being and avoid situations that cause negative emotions, such as uncertainty and anxiety. Thus, acting out a low status category may be desired over the negative emotions evoked by realizing their own development and expression.

In sum, our orientation towards the social both constrains and enables us to interact, playing out our different social identities. Knowing and acting out our place in a social order is a part of our existence, though we may not be aware of it. In a similar manner, we might not be aware of our own vulnerability. Some may actually actively try to cover it up, as in the case of face work, where persons attempt to protect social status in their interaction with others. The theories of social cognition demonstrate that persons will actively try to protect and develop or maintain their social status, even a low social status, through different psychological and social processes. These processes shape a person's emotional life. Unless persons can become more aware of how to regulate and cope with their emotions through awareness of them, a person's ability to realize their own dignity or the individual dignity of the Other may be limited.

4. Enacting dignity through emotional regulation

Within intercultural communication, there are a number of related concepts concerning the emotions, such as intercultural intelligence, cross-cultural awareness, and cultural sensitivity (See Fantini/Tirmizi 2006). Yet developing persons with the competence to act effectively and reflect on their own actions for enhancing the success of intercultural encounters may require more than knowledge of how the emotions may be expressed in different cultures. Acting effectively and appropriately in intercultural encounters may involve an awareness of how to regulate the emotions. Given that emotional well-being is contingent on feelings of relatedness and belonging, typically gained in the context of a social order of some type, freeing the Self from the limiting constraints of social dynamics requires some form of emotional awareness and regulation. Increasing knowl-

edge and communication skills are still essential, yet if we are going to realize dignity, then what is needed is a reconceptualization of the relation of the Self and Other. Constructing a position towards a theoretical framework of the emotions may contribute to this reconceptualization.

The theories presented above on social cognition demonstrate that both positive and negative emotions may stand in the way of enhancing intercultural competence. Therefore, rather than eliminating the impact of the emotions on intercultural encounters for enhancing intercultural competence, a type of emotional awareness whereby persons may regulate their emotional life may in fact contribute to intercultural competence.

Emotional Intelligence (See Salovey/Mayer 1990, and Goleman 1990) is a framework for conceptualizing human abilities and significantly how to enhance them through emotional regulation. Emotional intelligence may contribute to enhancing performance in intercultural situations. Emotional intelligence, also known as EQ, focuses on both intrapersonal skills and interpersonal skills in order to help persons accurately appraise and express their own feelings and that of others (Salovey/Mayer 1990). The construct assumes that the emotions more than intelligence are changeable and that emotional awareness can indeed help regulate the emotions for enhancing performance. In this way, EQ may function as a framework contributing to intercultural competence.

Yet emotional intelligence is not without its critique within psychology and sociology (See for example Schulte et al. 2004). For example, EQ stresses the importance of becoming more extravert and open to experience in social encounters, while trying to minimize neurotic traits. Extraversion might have a high status as a personality trait in some cultures, yet introversion, as a way of being and acting, may have a higher status in other cultures. Both extraversion and introversion may serve the goal of achieving dignity.

In my view, another critique point is that EQ emphasizes performance, for example helping students to perform better or helping smokers quit smoking (Salovey/Mayer 1990). In any intercultural situation, persons may not possess the intercultural competence to perform well and there may be many different reasons beyond their control. Yet a poor performance should not take a person's dignity away from them. It is in such situations that a person from one culture could show dignity to the other by being open to their right to develop and express themselves. Despite these shortcomings in relation to realizing dignity, the theories related to EQ could contribute to intercultural competence as they acknowledge the mediating affect of the emotions on the Self and the Other.

In addition to EQ, two alternative psychological constructs, namely the theory of Mindfulness by Hauk (2006) and the construct of Self-compassion discussed by Neff et al. (2005) may also contribute to a framework of emotional regulation in order to realize dignity. In relation to theories of social cognition, these constructs reveal strategies a person may carry out in order to maintain positive well-being, which might be self-defeating for being and acting interculturally competent. In addition, Mindfulness and Self-compassion also seem better connected to ideas about human vulnerability as an aspect of dignity, especially self-compassion as it recognizes that humans are fallible.

The theory of mindfulness, as presented by Hauk (2006), assumes that all human behavior is goal directed, while recognizing that one of those goals is to maintain positive feelings about the Self. Yet a person's thoughts and actions towards maintaining positive feelings can be problematic for development. Hauk (2006) conveys how persons may orient their thinking and action towards different categories, which he calls reference values, as a cognitive strategy for avoiding negative feelings. Depending on the situation and how a person appraises it, a person may shift attention to such abstract categories, as 'good group leader' or 'good person' to more concrete categories, such as 'eye contact' or 'delegating tasks', for the purpose of maintaining a positive sense of Self. In human encounters or while working on tasks, where there might be a threat to the social status of a person or self-esteem, persons may orientate their thinking and actions towards one category for maintaining positive feelings, while avoiding other actions that might evoke negative feelings. In an intercultural situation, a lack of being mindful of how emotions may affect interaction

can have a negative impact on the perception of the cultural Other. The practice of mindfulness contributes to dignity as an intercultural competence by learning to confront emotions anew by learning how to regulate attention to various values of a situation rather than changing the person.

The psychological construct of Self-compassion can also contribute to a framework of emotional regulation, as it aims to neutralize negative emotional patterns and create more positive feelings of connectedness. As Neff et al. (2005) present it, self-compassion is not the same as self-indulgence, whereby persons are only concerned with their own desires, nor is it related to self-esteem, whereby persons are pre-occupied with their worth in relation to others, while acting out behavior that is directed towards protecting or promoting their own selves. Self-compassion views a person's own experience as part of the larger human experience rather than separate from it. Self-compassion extends kindness and understanding towards the Self, as well as the Other, without harsh criticism and judgment.

The developmental process of self-compassion involves, according to Neff et al. (2005), a **mastery orientation** rather than a **performance orientation**. When persons have a performance orientation towards activities, they are driven by the desire to enhance their sense of social worth or defend it. Self-compassion is a type of relief from the pre-occupation that humans have for social status. The construct does not deny the importance of social status for emotional well-being, but merely demonstrates that the orientation towards social status can be problematic. Persons may indeed achieve success and status for their efforts. But in the face of setbacks and even failure, they might avoid placing themselves in such vulnerable situations. Thus, they might avoid situations, like intercultural contexts, where feelings of uncertainty or anxiety might emerge.

Furthermore, with a performance orientation, a person may sense an increased sense of worth through external social acceptance, yet if the performance is not acknowledged with positive social value, persons may feel disconnected from others. In contrast, a mastery orientation is driven by the desire to develop new skills, master tasks and understand ideas, while its primary motivational source is curiosity and not status. For intercultural competence, which involves enacting effective and appropriate communication, Self-compassion with a mastery orientation and curiosity may support efforts to be more persistent in the face of challenges and setbacks that are a part of intercultural encounters.

Learning to view the Other as an individual also requires much contact with the person. But given the constraints of social dynamics and the emotions connected to social orientation, some form of knowledge concept is also necessary for enhancing communicative competence with the Other for reflecting on that experience. Dignity is one such concept to learn. The reason dignity might be taught as a reflective concept is that contact through communication, as Philipsen (1992: 114) writes, tends to signify established social structures, while also reinforcing social differences between persons and groups. Dignity as conceptualized in this paper attempts to minimize the constraints of the social on a person's self-development and self-expression. As traditionally conceived, dignity, as presented here, recognizes that each person has a uniqueness given their cognitive and affective backgrounds. Yet given that the social and material world does not fairly distribute social status and equality through intrinsic worth, it is argued that individual dignity most be found in the way a person copes. Not all human beings have the social and emotional resources to do so, given their personalities, social position or the culture they live in. It can be said that the opportunity to realize individuality dignity might be found when persons are most vulnerable to the social and material reality of the moment.

5. Effective and appropriate communication with dignity

In this paper, I have aimed to present the concept of dignity as a reflective concept that may serve as a strategy for enhancing intercultural competence. In doing so, I have drawn on theories of social cognition and psychological constructs related to emotional regulation. Although limited in scope, the use of these theories and constructs have functioned to provide some insight into the

constraints and possible avenues for acting out intercultural competence with individual dignity for both the Self and the Other.

The concept of dignity presented in this paper suggests that the only thing dignity requires is the opportunity to think and act towards self-development and self-expression as an individual with a unique cognitive and affective worldview.

This conception of dignity does not deny the relevance of the social for developing and maintaining dignity. For instance, it seems fair to suggest that the United Nations as an institution embodies the concept of dignity. Most of the time it seems successful in promoting it, but when the institution falls short of its primary purpose or fails with disastrous consequences, it is because the institution lacks a strong social structure to ensure the protection of individual dignity in different societies across borders. It might even be the case that force, even military action, is a social necessity for protecting the dignity of others (See Powers 2008). Yet when it comes to using force for humanitarian reasons, individual dignity can be a very controversial project. But then it is no longer a question of dignity, but falls in the boundaries of honor, as in the question ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’.

In the case of communication and interaction in intercultural situations, realizing dignity is not as controversial an idea in the social world as it is in the geopolitical one, but I would suggest it is no less complex. In relation to the aim of intercultural competence, I would suggest that dignity may contribute to reflecting on the question of effective and appropriate communication.

When dignity is a part of intercultural competence than I would suggest that ‘managing the interaction’ is an unsuitable way of construing an intercultural encounter between two human beings with unique worldviews. Managing arguably implies that the Self is a type of subject with specialized skills who can direct and control an object Other for a desired outcome (See Blasco 2004). Managing, in my view, implies an instrumental approach, which might be reasonable in certain intercultural situations, but if understanding and sharing worldviews, as Sercu (2006) suggests, is an ends in itself than, managing is an unfortunate word choice. Based on the presentation of the social constraints on dignity and theories related to emotional regulation, I would use an alternative choice of words, such as “coping resourcefully”. In order to enact intercultural competence with dignity, persons should be able to cope resourcefully in order to communicate and interact effectively and appropriately.

In the relation between a Self and a culturally dissimilar Other, what persons may be coping with is not necessarily another human being with a different worldview, but a more existential sense of Otherness. Intercultural communication assumes that acquiring cognitive, behavioral and affective competence may lead to awareness of the self’s worldview and the worldview of the other contributed to an integrated worldview between Self and Other. Yet in the book *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, the Mexican writer Octavio Paz quotes Antonio Machado, who suggests that “our sense of oneness and being is dependent on an *incurable otherness*” (1985: inside cover). Toward this continuing sense of Otherness coping resourcefully may be a realistic strategy, along with dignity as a reflective concept and social code between a Self and Other. But dignity may also have its limits in regards to the more pragmatic question of what is effective and appropriate communication.

A Self and a culturally dissimilar Other may treat each other with dignity in order to gain an understanding of each other’s worldview and to share their worldview during intercultural encounters. In this way, dignity may enable the Self and Other to transcend social, cultural and language boundaries. The establishment of a more integrated worldview between a Self and Other may indeed contribute to effective and appropriate communication. But not always. It is still essential to recognize that persons are social beings with obligations towards the social. Therefore asserting dignity may not always be effective and appropriate intercultural communication. Nevertheless, the concept of dignity may still serve as a reflective concept and a social code for enhancing intercultural competence in encounters as it creates awareness of the vulnerability of a Self and a culturally dissimilar Other to the dynamics of the social world.

6. References

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