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## Commentary on A New Definition of Tolerance

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**M**y grandfather, Clarence Titensor, a sage general store manager, postmaster, and bus driver from rural Wyoming who had little formal education, had two astute sayings that connect with ideas of tolerance highlighted by Williams and Jackson. My grandfather used to tell his children and grandchildren, “You are not any better than any one else, and no one’s any better than you.” Occasionally I would hear Grandpa say, “He puts his pants on one leg at a time just like every one else,” when a story was told about a person who may have thought they were better than others. Taking his sayings as a combined way to view others, my grandfather taught that essentially, we are all human; we are more alike than we are different. We all start our day the same way: we all put our pants on, one leg at a time. We are not better or worse than others. We just are. Be gentle with yourself and with others. There is no need to let others intimidate you.

When we begin to see the similarities among us, we see connections and we build relationships; the differences have less meaning. Williams and Jackson (this issue) highlight the tendency to use culturally driven stereotypes, categories, and ideals to understand others. It is our need to have something concrete, familiar, something we can understand that drives us to use stereotypes; stereotypes that separate us and highlight differences.

When we are practicing self-awareness and being reflective, we may begin to question the stereotypes,

categories, and preconceived ideals. We can question how well those stereotypes are or are not working for us. How well are they helping us to make thoughtful, human connections with others? As we explore and deconstruct our stereotypes, we can begin to see others as infinite. And maybe we begin to see ourselves as infinite when we release others and ourselves from categories and ideals. And when we relate from positions of being infinite, we seem to be relating from positions of seeking tolerance, understanding, acceptance, and peace. We see what is similar before we see what is different.

When we project our expectations on others, we begin to define and limit them and our relationship. We make them better or worse than us and ignore the infinity of both. Ignoring that infinity seems to lead to relationships that can be mundane, boring, mechanistic, and self-serving. In contrast, when we honor and are responsible for others we honor the infinite in both of us. We honor the God-like pieces of the other, which brings us connections and meaningful living. What Williams and Jackson are asking us to do is to see others and ourselves as God sees us.

When we answer the call to be responsible for others, how do we do that in a way that sets and maintains healthy boundaries? Is it compassionate or tolerant to help others put on their pants one leg at a time? Or to actually put their pants on for them? Or is this something we all need to do for ourselves. How do we

make those decisions? When we answer the call to be responsible, what are the limits of that call? Or are there limits? Brene Brown (2010) discusses the relationship between healthy boundaries and compassion. She proposes that we cannot to be truly compassionate unless with have and maintain boundaries. When relationships or environments turn toxic, how do we see the infinite? How do we harmonize our emotions of anger or disgust to get to the moral pursuit of honoring the infinite? When relationships are toxic or abusive, aspiring to this kind of care seems incredibly compassionate and godlike, but as humans it may put us in dangerous positions.

As highlighted by Williams and Jackson, when we practice honoring the infinite in others, we make connections. Having meaningful, positive personal relationships is a vital part of a healthy emotional life. And those relationships also teach us about ourselves, what is infinite about each of us. As we see in the infinite in ourselves, we may increase our capacity to be compassionate and connect with the humanity of others.

While Williams and Jackson's ideas hold great promise in contributing to the research in psychology, the practical applications have an even larger contribution to make in helping humanity to become connected. I suspect the dialogue will lead us back to my grandfather's wisdom, and the journey will be intriguing.

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## References

- Brown, B. (2010). *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*. Center City, MN: Hazelden.