



The third reason we need to have a Dignity Revolution and stand up to society's current system of determining self-worth is because it dehumanizes people. Bullying strips people of their dignity. It devalues human beings. It takes advantage of the weak. This is not a new phenomenon in society and we can't let history repeat itself. Some of you might say, "Easier said than done." You may wonder how standing up to the system is possible when life experiences have sent a message saying, "You're worthless." How can you believe you have value when society says, "You don't measure up"? For some, the actions of their own family and friends scream, "You don't matter." Fathers have walked out of their kids' lives. Mothers have turned their heads, pretending to not see the abuse. The very person you used to call your best friend taunts and bullies you after school.

You feel tried and tested, worthless, unfulfilled and invisible. Most often the values a society lives by and is known for come from what the people in that society deem important and, unfortunately, this might lead to being a prisoner versus a product of society. These values often establish the ideals of life, its circumstances, behaviors and responses. When something isn't deemed valuable we throw it away, disregard it or say it's good-for-nothing. What exactly is value?

Value \ˈvɑl-(.)yü\ noun 1: worth, merit, or importance
verb 1: to consider with respect, excellence, or usefulness; 2: to regard or esteem highly

In our environmentally-conscious society, we have seen the need to reuse and recycle. It's sad to say the same society that finds value or worth in trash has left so many people feeling completely worthless. What standards are we using to determine the self-worth of so many people? And why are so many feeling worthless, like they have failed the test of life? I believe our system places a higher value on things (what you own), appearance (what you look like), talent (athletic, intellectual or musical abilities), pleasure (having a good time) and influence (power and control), rather than the intrinsic worth and dignity of each human being. How you treat someone is based on the value you place on them. When society values things more than people, it sees others and themselves as disposable.

Society's problems and social ills come when a philosophy or core belief considers ideology, progress, achievements, products or finances more important than people, more important than love, more important than relationships. This system reduces people to products.

People are to be cherished and loved, not used. Things are to be used, not cherished and loved. The system has it backwards. Our system often declares unless you're at the top, you have no value. Even human life is cast aside when it doesn't fit into someone's plan for success.

The disintegration of value can range from picking on kids in the cafeteria to terrorism, from name calling to school shootings, from feeling pressured to have name-brand clothing to rejecting someone based on the color of their skin or their gender. It may appear as graffiti on school walls or through the inhumane treatment of gay students, from the dismantling of any right or wrong to the eradication of life under Hitler.

You might be thinking, "Aren't you taking this a little far by comparing society's system for determining self-worth to Hitler's reign in Nazi Germany?" Let's explore.

A philosophy declaring certain people more valuable to society than others is what Hitler lived by. His reign wasn't by chance, but driven by a worldview he pieced together from different schools of thought. Studying it, you'll see traces of Nietzsche, Wagner, Greek pagan mythology, Darwin and other German thinkers who preceded him with a goal to "improve the genetic quality of the human race". He even took parts of Christian thought and distorted them to meet his agenda. Hitler twisted religion to promote racism, prejudice and hatred to an extreme the world had never experienced. Hitler believed an entire group of people, an entire race (the Jews), were inferior. It was this core belief that fueled Hitler's desire to destroy them, to wipe them off the face of the earth.

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This is just a little more than 70 years ago. There are Holocaust survivors still alive today who witnessed these atrocities. May their stories never be forgotten. When I share the story of T4 as I travel, I rarely meet anyone in the audience who has heard of it. One person, however, Dr. Jake Jacobs, a professor whose degrees include Judeo-Christian studies, did know about it and gave me much insight and many resources for research. I have now vowed to educate as many people as I can on the reality of T4.

The realities are hard to believe. Disabled children were removed from their homes and families and taken to “special” hospitals, where an arm and a leg would be cut off and surgically exchanged just to see what would happen. Other experiments and exterminations were done using gas, suffocation, lethal injections, poisonings and overdoses of medications just to see how much the human body could tolerate before succumbing to death. For example, they would starve a person just to see how long they could live without food or water. They would measure how long a person could “last” and then document the stages of starvation. They placed children underwater to see how long it would take before they drowned. They did air-pressure tests to see what heights people could withstand before their eyes popped out. If they were not killed, it was mandatory for those whom they considered genetically inferior to be sterilized to prevent their bloodline from “infecting” the next generation.

We would not instill such cruelties on an animal. The torture was horrific and seemingly unbelievable. But again, it happened in modern history. T4 had a slogan used as propaganda to try and justify the program. It was a slogan that became synonymous with T4: “Life unworthy of life.” Did you catch it? The very motto used to rationalize and defend the acts of T4 was “life unworthy of life.” They literally believed it. How could so many people be so blind and not see this evil when it is so obvious to us today? It reminds me of a famous quote:

When Hitler came for the Jews, I was not a Jew,
therefore I was not concerned.
And when Hitler attacked the Catholics, I was not a Catholic,
and therefore, I was not concerned.
And when Hitler attacked the unions and industrialists,
I was not a member of the unions, and I was not concerned.
Then, Hitler attacked me and the Protestant church,
and there was nobody left to be concerned.¹
Martin Niemöller, 1892-1984
German theologian and pastor

I’ve pictured in my mind, maybe from the movies I’ve seen, row after row of men in the Nazi army. They were real people: fathers, brothers, sons and friends, marching in unison, seemingly without thought, to the beat of a madman’s drum. I’ve seen documentaries where Hitler approached to address the soldiers with massive crowds gathered. Everyone stopped and stood at attention in his presence, listening to his every word as if it were a cure to disease.

But here’s the thing. I believe their longings were legitimate. Their yearning was for a new way, a new life and a better life. Their yearning was for some good news. This is a natural desire that cannot and should not be questioned. But I still have to ask, where was their conscience? Where was their common sense, much less rational thought? They seemed mesmerized, as if in a trance. How could they be such fools? How could they not notice in their longing for a more true, more pure humankind, that they were now anything but “human kind?” They turned into animals themselves. Why didn’t people see it? Surely, the church and human rights activists didn’t bow to Hitler’s lies. Yes, there were some who didn’t, including Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others. But sadly, most were either silent, caved in fear or bowed on bended knee at the false promise of power, position, safety and security. They hoped for a better life, rather than standing for the dignity of all people. Friends turned their backs on neighbors when they saw the yellow Star of David marking them as Jews, marking them as damaged goods.

I've never heard it spoken live, but it still rings in my head from the documentaries I've seen—"Heil Hitler! Heil Hitler!" Crowds of people pledged their allegiance, devotion, time, energy and family, giving him their trust and their very lives. It's a salutation for a king (as in "hail to the king"). Actually, to kings who viewed themselves as gods, "Heil Hitler" was more than a declaration. It was like a prayer, a holy vow like that of ordination into the ministry, as if giving one's heart in deepest worship. Their salute of word and action, an arm raised high in the air, was their sign of devotion. Their pledge for all to hear and see declared their life as his to do with as he willed. "Heil Hitler" or "You have all rights to me. I'm yours. I submit to your reign, your kingdom, your worldview and your philosophy. It is not my life."

How could they? It seems so clear in hindsight. Like me, are you thinking we surely would have stood against it, right? Even now if I asked, "Do you believe Hitler was right?" I can almost hear you shouting, "NO, NO." My heart joins with you, bursting with a resounding "NO, of course not."

Many will say they hate war, all war, especially those that do not seem to fit anyone's criteria for a "just war." But, oh, even many who disdain war still offer a "hats off" and heart of gratitude to the men and women who fought to free the world of the rule of this despicable regime and its philosophy in World War II. I often share something with groups of people and it makes them cringe and causes defenses to go up, way up. It's the mere suggestion that certain areas in America's value system are remotely similar to Hitler's horrible agenda.

As you can imagine, when I share the T4 story with groups, there is always an uneasy feeling in the room, a dark cloud of disgust and outrage. You see, we are made to stand up against evil. We are designed to cheer for justice and against injustice. The mere suggestion we may hold some of the same detestable philosophies as did Hitler's regime about the value of life goes against something deep inside us. Still, can you deny we live in a throwaway society where many people believe some of these very things at the core, oftentimes about themselves? Connect the dots. See the writing on the wall. Let's pull our heads out of the sand. I wish it weren't true, but the theory of T4 is alive and well in America today.

"Life unworthy of life."

"How?" you say.

Every year we lose more than 38,000 Americans to suicide because they've been convinced their life has no meaning or significance. They've been convinced their life is unworthy of life. We lost nearly 3,000 lives on September 11, 2001, to terrorism. May we never forget that tragedy—the horror, the fear, the loss, the families affected, the pain or the images of those planes crashing into the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon. Many efforts have been made to protect Americans from terrorism since then, including a defense budget of nearly \$550 billion each year. Yes, 10 zeros: \$550,000,000,000. But I have to ask, "What are we doing to protect our children from the terrorist inside our own borders, inside our own skin, the terrorist of low self-esteem?"

Nearly 3,000 lives were lost on 9/11. Yet more than 10 times as many were lost to suicide in the same year, and every year since. Do the math. For every 10 years, there are another 380,000 or so lives lost to suicide. This is a tragedy of epic proportions. Where are the headlines? Where are the news reports?

Truth is, what society's system told us we needed to have, be, or do to feel good about ourselves is a lie. We need to stand up against it. Estimates show 12 to 23 percent of adolescents engage in self-injury, most commonly in the form of cutting. When asked why they do it multiple times a day, many will say the pain caused from cutting is nothing compared to their emotional pain. The bearable pain of self-injury becomes a distraction from the unbearable pain going on deep inside. It's another wall to hide the hurt, a wall that quickly becomes a seemingly inescapable prison. There are many prisoners of war in our society. It's a cultural war, fought with images coming in at a rate too great and fast to be precise. In fact, many of the images aren't even real, having been Photoshopped and altered beyond the point of recognition. Magazines are full of erased wrinkles and blemishes, reduced waistlines and enhanced muscles.

We're a nation convinced we need to have faster cars, better jobs, higher pay, fuller lips, smaller hips, fewer wrinkles, bigger muscles, thicker hair, better grades, busy schedules, and the list goes on and on. So many have bought into the system telling us if we don't achieve these things, then we're somehow less human, less worthy of life.

Every time you believe and give in to the message, “If I were richer, thinner, prettier, stronger, smarter or more popular, then I’d be okay,” you’re saying, “Hail to the system of T4.” Are we too blind to see what it’s doing to us? Are we afraid to take on the system? Or, are we in a daze, mesmerized not by Hitler but by Hollywood? Are we influenced, not by chance, but by well-thought-out, pieced-together philosophies of the past, modern and postmodern thinkers who preached, “Let’s make a show of the survival of the fittest.” Let’s find the common sense to recognize the philosophies and power ruling over us today, and find the courage to fight against them.

To further research T4, I went to Germany with my son, David, and toured a Holocaust museum. It had to be difficult for them to portray the events and mistakes of their own nation, but they wanted to show the realities of it in hopes it would never happen again. It was heartbreaking. The ache in my soul and pain in my stomach comes back every time I think of it. We also toured sites of concentration camps and saw where people were gassed, and the furnaces where their bodies were burned. We walked along the ditches once filled with their corpses, and along the river where their ashes were later thrown to hide any evidence.

But there was no mention of T4. So, I called several tour guides. Not one of them even knew what T4 stood for, much less offered a historical tour. When I recalled that T4 stood for Tiergartenstrasse 4, the address where the atrocities were planned and organized, David and I decided to go there on our own. We walked up and down the street searching and couldn’t believe there wasn’t anything to mark this place of such historic relevance. I expected a monument or museum.

Finally, we came upon it: a small plaque set in the pavement and a sign indicating where the original building once stood. My son and I stood stunned and in disbelief. This is it? Forbid that they, or we, ever forget a philosophy claiming that any life, like my sister’s, or yours or mine for that matter, is not worthy of life.

Yet, I see it every day. The ache in my soul and pain in my gut I felt while touring the Holocaust museum is the same feeling I get when hearing stories of some of the young people who talk with me after a school assembly program—like the kid from a special needs class who shared how others called him retarded and made fun of him. He shared that the class would probably be his favorite, but he didn’t like going because he felt so bad about himself when people made fun of him and put him down—or the sharp-looking, redheaded kid with freckles all over his face who came up to me. I only saw pain in his eyes, reminding me of a victim of war, which wasn’t far from reality for him. People ridiculed and laughed at him, calling him a faggot. While waiting at the bus stop, kids would throw rocks and make fun of him. He felt like he was alone. “What do I do?” he asked. “How do I deal with it when they call me these names”?

Then a senior in high school came up to me. He began crying. “I didn’t expect to come to an assembly program today,” he said, “but it’s what I needed so bad.” Tears streamed down his face as he began crying uncontrollably. “I had a horrible weekend,” he continued. “Six of the jocks in school followed me to my car and called me names and kept ridiculing me and calling me gay, and they beat me up.” My heart sank as I watched his pain-filled face. “But the worst thing was when no one would stop the junior high kid from spitting on me.” No one, no one deserves to be treated like this. May we be the ones leading the way to a Dignity Revolution by seeking out opportunities to love, understand, invite, care, defend and stand for justice. May we be the ones to stand up against a system that has deemed those who are different as unworthy of our respect, kindness or friendship. Real integrity is found when you care for the dignity of every person, even the person you disagree with the most. There’s an ache in my soul when I hear stories of youth who have been bullied and feel worthless because they’re mocked for how they look, for who they are, or for what they can or can’t do. No one should ever get to the point where they view death as more appealing than life. This is wrong. This is injustice. No one, for any reason, should ever be bullied or stripped of their dignity. We need to declare, not just with lip service, but with our actions toward one another, that Hitler was wrong. We need to rebel against the T4 message of “life unworthy of life” in any way, shape or form, not just as part of a history lesson, but as a vital declaration for today.

We need to declare every life is worthy of life. Can we topple this regime and this system? Or, are we too tightly in its grip?

Excerpt from *Dignity Revolution: Standing Up for the Value of Every Person* (Lenz 24).

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Directions: Underline or highlight characteristics Hitler believed were not valuable to society. Then underline what he did to these individuals.

Hitler believed an entire group of people, an entire race (the Jews), were inferior. It was this core belief that fueled Hitler's desire to destroy them, to wipe them off the face of the earth.

So, Hitler began what has become known as the Holocaust, resulting in the eradication of approximately six million Jews. Their crime? It was their heritage, their bloodline, their religion and their appearance. That's right, their crime included the color of their skin and eyes. Hitler believed the Aryan man was superior—blond hair and blue eyes were best. I have always thought it was ridiculous since he had black hair and that famous mustache. Still, he felt the Jews were inferior to the Aryans and their bloodline was infected, impure and not worthy of life. He believed we should be genetically selective, that some people were not only better at some tasks, but more intelligent and ultimately had more value. He believed in the "preservation of the most-favorite species," the Aryan, white, Caucasian human. In an attempt to prove it genetically, Hitler wanted to show the effects socially and socioeconomically. He believed he could eliminate poverty if these "blemishes of society" were removed. He wanted and preached a new race, a second Adam, a perfect society, an ideal person, a superman, if you will. In Hitler's mind, it would only be possible if he could rid the world of Jews. He implied they didn't have a right to exist.

In 1919, Hitler served as a corporal in World War I and was wounded. While in the hospital he claimed to have had a vision believing he was the chosen one to bring Germany back to victory after the disappointing news they had lost the war. He depicted Jews as a worthless drain on the economy. He was convinced, and therefore was able to convince many people, that the Jews were the problem with Germany and the world.

Imagine someone condemning an entire race as the problem with the world today, forging a campaign against a whole ethnic group or nation; for example, the Dutch, Muslims, Asians, Africans, Christians or Latinos. Imagine the goal was to wipe them out, to purge the world of them completely. We shudder at the thought; yet that was Hitler's aim. His target was the Jewish people. But what many people don't realize is that it didn't start there. As a prelude to his attempts to eliminate the Jews, Hitler began a campaign to eliminate others he believed were inferior, of no worth or less than important, who didn't measure up to his values. There were hundreds of thousands of people other than Jews who were killed, terminated, wiped out and murdered under his dominion. In fact, those whose mindset justified targeting these other groups of people did not believe it was wrong. They believed it was the right and good thing to do. To them, it was not murder. To them, it couldn't be murder if the other group of people they targeted were less than human and had no value. They declared they were not real people, but mistakes, accidents, problems, like a pebble in the shoe or thorn in the side, a hindrance to success, undignified. By getting rid of them, Hitler believed he was doing Germany and the world a favor, a service to country and to those in the religious establishment who preached against Jews, gypsies and heretics, which had been ongoing for centuries.

It is so sad when people use religion to defend crimes against humanity. History continues to repeat itself, from genocide still happening today to the mistreatment of other groups of people because of their race, gender, wealth, status, orientation, religion or political views. Hundreds of thousands more were dead. Why? Because they didn't fit the ideal of what their society deemed "good." Those under Hitler's reign developed a list of over 20 different groups they deemed not valuable. Who fell into this category? Who did Hitler consider less than human? Among them: gypsies, the Slavic and Polish people, Soviet prisoners of war, homosexuals, Christians who would not pledge their allegiance to Hitler, and Germans (yes, even Germans) who were of no "use" to them, like the elderly and the handicapped—like my sister, Lois. Under Hitler's rule, my sister would have been exterminated. Hitler's code name for the program to eradicate these people: T4, the other Holocaust.

“What? I don’t remember reading about T4 in my history books. Why have I never heard of this?” These are questions you may be asking. Today, you can easily look it up online and read about Dr. Karl Brandt who conducted human experiments and euthanized countless victims. He was one of Hitler’s doctors who headed up the T4 Euthanasia Program. He was later convicted of war crimes against humanity and executed in June 1948. I didn’t learn about this in school either. The first time I became aware of it was when I toured the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., a place I think everyone should visit. I entered a section with a display titled “T4.” There I learned T4 was an abbreviation based on the address in Berlin where the headquarters for the program were located: Tiergartenstrasse 4. It’s there they ordered experiments on the elderly, the physically and mentally handicapped, the institutionalized or anyone considered genetically inferior. Hear me. This is fact. I did the research. This isn’t ancient history.

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Reflection

1. How does reading this make you feel?

2. Were there bystanders during the events at T4?

3. Where do we see this devaluing of humans happening today?

4. How can we be an upstander?

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Imagine someone condemning an entire race as the problem with the world today, forging a campaign against a whole ethnic group or nation; for example, the Dutch, Muslims, Asians, Africans, Christians or Latinos. Imagine the goal was to wipe them out, to purge the world of them completely. We shudder at the thought; yet that was Hitler's aim. His target was the Jewish people. But what many people don't realize is that it didn't start there. As a prelude to his attempts to eliminate the Jews, Hitler began a campaign to eliminate others he believed were inferior, of no worth or less than important, who didn't measure up to his values. There were hundreds of thousands of people other than Jews who were killed, terminated, wiped out and murdered under his dominion. In fact, those whose mindset justified targeting these other groups of people did not believe it was wrong. They believed it was the right and good thing to do. To them, it was not murder. To them, it couldn't be murder if the other group of people they targeted were less than human and had no value. They declared they were not real people, but mistakes, accidents, problems, like a pebble in the shoe or thorn in the side, a hindrance to success, undignified. By getting rid of them, Hitler believed he was doing Germany and the world a favor, a service to country and to those in the religious establishment who preached against Jews, gypsies and heretics, which had been ongoing for centuries.

It is so sad when people use religion to defend crimes against humanity. History continues to repeat itself, from genocide still happening today to the mistreatment of other groups of people because of their race, gender, wealth, status, orientation, religion or political views. Hundreds of thousands more were dead. Why? Because they didn't fit the ideal of what their society deemed "good." Those under Hitler's reign developed a list of over 20 different groups they deemed not valuable. Who fell into this category? Who did Hitler consider less than human? Among them: gypsies, the Slavic and Polish people, Soviet prisoners of war, homosexuals, Christians who would not pledge their allegiance to Hitler, and Germans (yes, even Germans) who were of no "use" to them, like the elderly and the handicapped—like my sister, Lois. Under Hitler's rule, my sister would have been exterminated. Hitler's code name for the program to eradicate these people: T4, the other Holocaust.

“What? I don’t remember reading about T4 in my history books. Why have I never heard of this?” These are questions you may be asking. Today, you can easily look it up online and read about Dr. Karl Brandt who conducted human experiments and euthanized countless victims. He was one of Hitler’s doctors who headed up the T4 Euthanasia Program. He was later convicted of war crimes against humanity and executed in June 1948. I didn’t learn about this in school either. The first time I became aware of it was when I toured the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., a place I think everyone should visit. I entered a section with a display titled “T4.” There I learned T4 was an abbreviation based on the address in Berlin where the headquarters for the program were located: Tiergartenstrasse 4. It’s there they ordered experiments on the elderly, the physically and mentally handicapped, the institutionalized or anyone considered genetically inferior. Hear me. This is fact. I did the research. This isn’t ancient history.

This is just a little more than 70 years ago. There are Holocaust survivors still alive today who witnessed these atrocities. May their stories never be forgotten. When I share the story of T4 as I travel, I rarely meet anyone in the audience who has heard of it. One person, however, Dr. Jake Jacobs, a professor whose degrees include Judeo-Christian studies, did know about it and gave me much insight and many resources for research. I have now vowed to educate as many people as I can on the reality of T4.

The realities are hard to believe. **Disabled children** were removed from their homes and families and taken to “special” hospitals, where an arm and a leg would be cut off and surgically exchanged just to see what would happen. Other experiments and exterminations were done using **gas, suffocation, lethal injections, poisonings and overdoses of medications just to see how much the human body** could tolerate before succumbing to death. For example, they **would starve** a person just to see how long they could live without food or water. They would measure how long a person could “last” and then document the stages of starvation. They placed children underwater to see how long it would take before they drowned. They did air-pressure tests to see what heights people could withstand before their eyes popped out. If they were not killed, it was mandatory for those whom they considered genetically inferior to be sterilized to prevent their bloodline from “infecting” the next generation.

We would not instill such cruelties on an animal. The torture was horrific and seemingly unbelievable. But again, it happened in modern history. T4 had a slogan used as propaganda to try and justify the program. It was a slogan that became synonymous with T4: “Life unworthy of life.” Did you catch it? The very motto used to rationalize and defend the acts of T4 was “life unworthy of life.” They literally believed it. How could so many people be so blind and not see this evil when it is so obvious to us today?



The System Dehumanizes
People
Volunteer Opportunities



Use this list to inspire you to find a place to give back and share dignity with everyone:

- Habitat for Humanity: www.habitat.org
- Food Pantries: www.foodpantries.org
- Red Cross: www.redcross.org
- Special Olympics: www.specialolympics.org
- Meals on Wheels: www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org
- Salvation Army: www.salvationarmyusa.org
- United Way: www.unitedway.org

Volunteer for a local organization in your community:

- Homeless Shelter
- Retirement Home
- YMCA
- Public Library
- Animal Shelter
- Churches
- National Parks
- Museums
- Non-Profits
- Nursing Homes

For more information about Dignity Revolution, visit www.DignityPledge.com, or call 1.800.955.5433.

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