

# The lessons of bullying

BY DAVID WARREN, OTTAWA CITIZEN    DECEMBER 11, 2011

As Facebook and other "social media" have reminded us, there are many ways to bully, and technology is improving them every day. Plain, direct, physical bullying is just a point of departure, the most elementary form. And even that is contextual. There are such things as necessary evils, and I take it few readers would deny the police the right to "bully" a freshlyarrested felon into a squad car. The law itself requires bullying; which is what makes unnecessary laws such an evil.

One mentions the self-evident because we have come to a time when it is fading from view. On the subject of bullying alone, I have read recently many statements in the media, "pushing the envelope" for a very political cause, that would not bear up to the slightest scrutiny.

Suddenly bullying in schools, which has been with us for as long as there have been schools, has been elevated to a "crisis." When this happens, people who were not born yesterday look for the agenda. And we find it written in large capital letters, in a scheme to impose "gay-straight alliances" on unwilling Catholic and private Christian schools, and otherwise extend the reach of "LGBT" propaganda into places where it is especially unwelcome.

This political method is itself a ripe example of bullying. Victimhood status is declared on behalf of a favoured group, emotionally-loaded examples of apparent victimizing are publicized, and the "crisis" is declared. Powers are sought by activists on behalf of such victims.

Those who resist their power grab are demonized. This is the way every "progressive" cause is advanced. It works, because no one could want to be publicly tarred.

It takes some courage to stand up to bullying, and there is not much available today, in places like the (now nominally) Catholic separate school system. Indeed, very few people who work in there themselves uphold Christian teaching on sexual morality.

And it is perhaps worth reminding that plain teaching on chastity - specifically, no sex outside marriage - was common to all Protestant denominations, to the Orthodox, the Eastern churches, to all Jewish congregations, to all streams of Islam, and throughout Hindu, Buddhist, and other religious traditions.

What these faithful so long considered to be moral aberrations - to be confidently discouraged among the young, unformed, and potentially confused - is now upheld in law as an identity issue. A "right to choose" one's sexual identity, and the presumptive sexual practices that go with it, is now codified. Which means, the jackboot of coercion is on the other foot: for those who uphold received religious teaching may now be convicted under left wing "hate laws."

The moral universe was thus turned upside down, within the space of my own lifetime. It is religious freedom that is now under attack.

And note, the issue here is hardly restricted to propensities encompassed by the "LGBT" coalitions. For traditional moral instruction was intended for everyone. The very idea that children should have sex lives - homosexual, heterosexual, onanist, bestial, or any other - was abhorrent.

That humans have sexual desires was universally understood. That these may run in wild and unpredictable directions, was also generally understood. But the taming and restriction of these desires to their right end was a universally accepted requirement of civilization. Children must be taught "what is right," and confusion over this was itself a source of moral horror.

Whether certain forms of "moral aberration" should be legally tolerated, even sometimes winked at, is another question. "Toleration" does not mean approval. It means putting up with things one does not approve, where intolerance would lead to worse evils. Unfortunately the word has been appropriated in "Newspeak," and is now used in the opposite of its original sense.

"Tolerance" here means, compelling people to publicly approve and support what they believe in good conscience to be moral aberrations.

But behind that overt bullying is a more fundamental subversion, of the ability of a society to establish moral norms, which in turn are ultimately necessary to survival. For those without moral norms die out.

I was not born yesterday, myself, and have the richest memories of schoolyard bullying, from half-dozen schools I attended through my childhood, in quite diverse places. Though I would love to bore my reader with emotive anecdotes - I was myself a natural target of schoolyard bullies throughout my childhood - it should not be necessary to make my clinching point.

It is that the character of a child is forged in his own responses to bullying. He will encounter it throughout his life; he must be taught how to stand up to it.

Bullying is as universal to human nature as sexual desire. (Sometimes they overlap.) The containment and redirection of bullying impulses - turning something bad into something good - is at the root of all education. The impulses can never be "eradicated," for they are part of the raw material upon which educators must work.

Parents and teachers might, individually, succeed or fail, but to intervene in their task with hamhanded central government directives, dictated by political activists and social engineers, is to make their task impossible.

David Warren's column appears on Sundays, Wednesdays and Saturdays.

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