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By Cevin Soling

Inevitable Bullying

Modern school deprives a fundamental need



Where bullying is thriving? School, jail, army. What do those have in common? Oppression.

According to a number of studies, there is a high incidence of brain injury among boxers. The American Association of Neurological Surgeons has even claimed that "most professional boxers...have some degree of brain damage." There are a number of reasons this may be

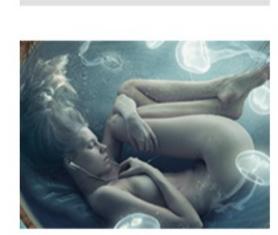
SO. It is possible that boxers might tend to have diets that fail to provide their brains with the nutrients they need to function optimally. Boxers might come from cities where there is a great deal of air pollution. They could experience a higher

Let's focus on one of the symptoms that may accompany brain injury—difficulties with speech. Now imagine that in response to this condition, various contingencies that profit from treatments insisted that the best way to remedy this situation would be through intervention programs involving speech therapists for boxers and a supportive community so that boxers exhibiting speech problems would not feel self-conscious. To execute their proposal, all that would be needed is money for speech pathologists and a never-ending stream of funds for their efforts to raise awareness and promote sensitivity.

prevalence of stress or sleep deprivation than the rest of the population or perhaps

many boxers drink alcohol or take drugs that are conducive to brain damage.

Read: Power Of Bullying



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directed toward treating the symptom as opposed to the disease, and second, while all of the factors listed can contribute to killing brain cells, the most obvious cause is not listed– the fact that when a person is pummeled repeatedly in the head with 50 times the force of gravity, brain damage can result. How does this all relate to bullying? These absurdly inane hypothetical approaches to the dangers of boxing are currently being championed to combat bullying by a host of profiteers who masquerade as though or even as if they genuinely believe they are performing public services.

What is wrong with this picture? First, attention is

An entire industry has recently emerged to exploit bullying. The campaigns have been created by lobbyists, corporations that sell in-school programs, filmmakers, authors, social media marketers and others, hawking their wares and promoting themselves. One consistent element of all of their products is that bullying is never regarded explicitly as a symptom. As such, the reasons why bullying occurs are generally not considered all that important. When causes are discussed, they are couched in terms of character defects. They insist that bullies feel bad about themselves, have deep insecurities and crave attention. In some instances the culture of the school is said to play a role but only to the degree that it allows bullying to thrive.

Just like failing to acknowledge that boxers are frequently punched in the head, the dominant cause of bullying is the elephant in the room. Can you imagine placing a population in a confined environment against their will and depriving them of the capacity to make choices that affect their lives and then ignore that when analyzing their behavior? This is what takes place when student behavior is evaluated. Responsible scientists who study animals are always keenly aware of the possible impact of the captive laboratory environment on their subjects. As inconceivable as this may be, this factor is rarely, if ever, taken into account when addressing children's behavior in compulsory schools.

Read: Bully And Victim

The most widespread catalyst for bullying is subjecting children to an environment where they are held powerless and from which they cannot escape. As much as some people might try to deny this blatant reality, students have absolutely no power in schools. They are forced by law to be in a place many of them do not want to be, where they must associate with people they do not like and where they must take arbitrary orders in a docile manner.

People have a fundamental need for a sense of power over their lives and a need for selfdetermination. Deprived of agency, they will bully others to attain some feeling of control over their lives. This basic understanding of human nature is scandalously absent not just from a bulk of the books and research on bullying but from intervention programs, media coverage and discussions in the classrooms.

From this outrageously distorted conception, approaches to dealing with bullying have been conceived and implemented. Legislators have favored creating a climate of intolerance. In this scenario, bullying is viewed so broadly that even derogatory banter among friends can be regarded as bullying. Another approach involves the creation of a "snitch" culture where everyone is encouraged to report incidents they witness. This breeds anxiety and paranoia because every observation is subjective. The remaining rhetoric places the responsibilities largely on the shoulders of children to find peaceful solutions in an environment where "nobody should be mean to others."

Read: Helicopter Parenting

A variant of this last proposal has been advocated by the Bully Project and has been embraced by a number of city mayors. The stated mission is to change "a culture of bullying into one of empathy and action...to create safe, caring and respectful schools and communities." While this may sound deceptively nice, this vision is among the most despicable. Bullying is treated as if it were an artifact of the culture and not an outcome of the superstructure. The plan is not to fix anything but rather to change how children respond to being powerless. In the antebellum South there were efforts to project the image of the happy slave who sings, dances and willingly serves his or her master. Likewise, these programs train children to embrace helplessness under the ruse that they have the "power" to change their emotional autocracy.

response to their captive state. One can only wonder what the long-term impact will be for our democracy when children are conditioned to cheerfully embrace The appeals to research by these hucksters are also profoundly dishonest. First, the bulk of the studies done on intervention methods, including a meta-analysis, have shown that "anti-bullying programs produce little discernible effect on youth participants." While some studies can be produced that show some marginal impact, "success" is perversely defined because all that is being measured is the

degree to which symptoms are suppressed. This would be akin to determining whether a painkiller is slightly effective at making a brain tumor more tolerable and regarding pain management as being equivalent to treatment. The only way to constructively deal with bullying is to give students appropriate degrees of autonomy and not to compel them to be in oppressive environments deprived of any control over their lives where they are subjected to people they

despise. The very utterance of such a proposition is reflexively dismissed. Instead, we invite the racketeers to control the dialogue—the exploiters of children who sell

easy but costly fixes. Read: Why Is The Kid Mean?

Cevin Soling directed The War on Kids, the first theatrically released documentary on education. He is a graduate of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and lectures on education issues and other subjects. Soling's films have appeared on the BBC, HBO, Showtime, The Sundance Channel, MTV, The Learning Channel and other outlets. His media appearances include being a featured guest on "The Colbert Report."



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