

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

AGE AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

SUBMISSION FROM MAURICE FRANK

Maurice Frank. Writing entirely personally, but as a member of the Asperger society I belong to in Edinburgh who you invited to respond. I was relieved that by making such invitations you removed the idea that you only wanted to hear from folks who were lonely themselves, which surely could have stigmatised anyone responding on the record. I am not lonely, so importantly I can write without stigma or victory for past ill-treaters, on how I was openly threatened with loneliness as a weapon against freeing my life.

On PREVALENCE

Asperger societies, like most types of organised society, emerge more easily in cities, or in the most focal towns in regions without cities, where there is population to support them. Anyone who lacks the confidence or timing instincts to initiate social meets privately, which includes autistic people, consequently have a health need, and should have a health entitlement, to be housed where they are in reach of the organised regular group type of social life that does not require any private initiating. Clearly this will usually be in the more populated and urban regions.

IMPACTS

From age 17 I had to rebuild from nothing from a totally isolated position, to avert, and not on his terms, the loneliness which a controlling person, a school teacher, took a posture of predicting.

After a socially good earlier childhood, by age 10 all my time was swamped by the demands of ambitious and authoritarian educators who had got fixed into a wishful certainty that I would be a high achiever. Homework disciplined by fear left me no time to join an astronomy society. As other children known through the gifted movement had drifted off the radar, often because of having psychological crises with school, I had ended up with only 1 friend outside school, while the openly flaunted ambitions for me did not encourage easy peer relations inside school.

When the position of frightening discipline and having no say over the limits of my own abilities drove me to a stress collapse, with nobody at all safely to turn to, the long dragged out horror of this abusive trap spiralling up to its crunch was totally isolating. It took away from me the liberty to relate to anyone meaningfully or safely. However, then the opposite happened: my resulting year in teenage psychiatry was naturally intensely social, among the other troubled teens. That could have been a good outcome socially, if that service had chosen to be gentle and libertarian in its handling of me. It was not.

I wrote in submission on the Mental Health Bill, how a so-called service took an inflicted school pressure crisis that was not my fault as grounds to cancel all personal liberty and to demand that I make many personal changes, unrelated to the crisis and now proved unsuitable by my then unrecognised Asperger condition. To escape from this agenda being pursued with threats of compulsory powers and removal from home, I had to return to the unsuitable school and use my stress collapse's impact as a restraint on its actions to survive for another 2 years of it, with no possibility of academic success because to try would risk attracting unsurvivable pressure again, and plan for the resulting failure destroyed the school's plan and any expectation from any social service for me to follow it, leaving me free.

This years-long modern slavery experience of adults playing political pawn with my life and prospects, with power they should not have had, left me totally isolated. To need to keep away like the plague from this child psychiatry's danger to my liberty, meant I could not stay in contact with the subculture of troubled teens, which I had formed an emotional bond with around the themes of shared adversity. Until I was free I did not want to make any new friends either: they would only bring bad effects and new dangers. No wonder school reports called me very withdrawn.

The effect was to leave me friendless for the 4 years following escape from those doctors, at ages 15 to 19 the prime of teenage. It was to this background, that when I left school a teacher threatened "you have a lonely and sad life ahead of you" unless I followed his conformist view of reality. He probably realised full well that I had had no social existence outside the high pressure plan I was now leaving and condemning. So that it compared to leaving a cult.

It was a failure of youth protection to be exposed to that loneliness threat, and more so when I have a social-relating disability that was not yet recognised then, and at a time when the threat from doctors made me unsafe to seek any help with isolation. So the loneliness threat was not trivial, it was skilfully timed for the factors giving its maximum chance of winning. It was an immoral extra shadow over the first rebuilding stage of my free life.

* To experience this injustice in the prime of my youth put a sharp focus onto a further injustice for any isolated younger person: generational prejudice. A younger person can not be relieved from isolation by associating with older folks who are emotionally nasty scoffers against the younger person's whole generation and era. This is degrading. It is totally lonely to be in the company of old people treating you like that, and always less lonely to be isolated from that unpleasantness. The old people who behave in this way are making it harder also to solve the old age loneliness problem. They make young people less willing to provide company to the old and to relieve of loneliness for them.

A lot of the return of poverty and economic insecurity has been enabled to happen directly by a generational prejudice that it could not happen, hence refusal to believe it is real. Some old people automatically believe that all modern life is luxurious and no privations at all can exist while all sorts of noble privations to brag about existed in their time, contradictorily while claiming it was a superior time in caring and moral standards! e.g. while many folks who even have homes at all still do not have central heating, and I did not have it for the majority of my life, I saw an old lady's newspaper letter accuse my generation of not knowing what life without central heating is like, while bragging that her generation were big and strong without it.

Ego bragging of this type based on World War 2 is very familiar to everyone who has come after it. Many old people who demand degrading admiration based on everything about it being superlative also rubbish that anything historically big can ever have happened after it or a World War 3 ever be possible. CND citings of Russia's war losses as a reason to refuse to believe in a Russian threat were always an irrational way to judge any undemocratic state's motives, and not how any other threatening powers have ever been regarded.

It has suited alike right wing rubbishers of modern poverty and left wing glorifiers of labour history to encourage generational ego around the 1930s slump and wrongly to date the welfare state only from Beveridge. The very reason why Beveridge was selected to revamp an already started structure was because he had been involved in its earlier starting by the 1910s Liberal governments, and it was because the terrible Victorian regime towards poverty had been ended in the 1910s that accusations of deliberateness of unemployment and softness of benefits existed exactly the same in the 1930s as now. Generational bullies' favourite jibe, bare feet, are cited misleadingly because there was a continuous gradual culture shift away from them from the 1910s right up to 1970s end of the hippie era, so any photos of them from different dates get interpreted differently to fit era prejudice. The present disapproval of them is biologically oppressive, as autistic sensory issues prove the solid biological need for all people to be free in our dress choices and all dress codes a human rights violation. Correlating with this fact, costume histories record that even in some nineteenth century school photos they could be a comfort choice and not caused by poverty at all.

There is another widely resented generational bullying around glorifying the 1960s, claiming that a strikingly short-lived hence failed phase of culture c1966-70 represented a superlative of peace and love to brag about, despite the contradiction that generational braggers are unpeaceful and unloving. These folks' similar excluding offensiveness to later living people and their eras often includes an irrational refusal to agree that most of the cited 1960s features went on long into the 1970s.

* Many people, women particularly heard among them, express total contentment with being single. It is freer and maybe they are busy with causes which a partnership would get in the way of. Music and chat shows, which assume sweepingly that singleness is lonely

and everyone needs partnership, effect an oppression by causing loneliness that would not otherwise exist. Folks who would not be lonely at all on singleness's merits can feel lonely only from wanting to end the hurt of a false peer perception. I have seen this happen to some single Asperger men. This obviously make the assumption an attack on the affected persons' health.

The correct awareness of safety for women and ending a sex object view of them has led to the opposite swing of a PC presumption against men in every boundary colliding situation. Men now perceive that in any dispute over accidental social or physical collisions, whoever actually caused them, we are the ones who are more politically convenient to blame. This has gender unequal impacts on safety of acceptance to be in social spaces, hence to feel secure in them, hence on exclusion and loneliness.

For straight men it has become logically impossible to take any step at all towards acquiring a partnership without risking that the step will count as an offence of sexual harrasment and get us into trouble. No fixed watertight foolproofly reliable exact boundary has ever been given that allows some moves always to count as socially acceptable and safe and impossible to get you into trouble.

It is a total contradiction that this situation exists alongside culture like the film The 40 Year Old Virgin stigmatising men who stay out of trouble. It is a total mixed message and not logically just, that we are supposed to be able to make partnering moves without knowing explicitly in words in advance whether they will be welcomed, and moves made successfully earn the person extra rights to regard for their consenting partnership, but any partnering move at all which after it is done turns out to have been unwelcome can criminalise the person who made it and deemed as sexual harrasment.

What is most macabre about an era so impossibly no win as this, is that it is rarely acknowledged or presented as such in the media, because it is only the voiceless less socially successful, yet rationally nicer, men who the trap catches. Alpha males with unjust animal socially dominant positions get their actions and motives interpreted favourably by their peers and not called sexual harrasment, and often know instinctively when they are safe in their actions because they are fitting in. They become partnered, often repeatedly, where a less mob favoured male would get into PC trouble for exactly the same actions. So it is the folks at any type of social disadvantage, including autistics, who are most up against the contradiction and its dangers. Autistics in particular have no social gut instinct to use to guess the outcome to an action capable either of being welcomed and congratulated or of being most damningly criminalised.

IDEAS

* Your enquiry's basis, evidence of loneliness impacting physical health, gives government a measurable duty to physical health to organise child and youth services such as not to leave it possible for any teenager to be challenged meaningfully with a threat of loneliness

like I was, or to have to become isolated to become free, like I did. This requires school to become libertarian and non-forcing of work, and psychiatry to have no compulsory powers ever. It can mean nothing less because powers resting in doctors' opinions can be misused threateningly, and it can make escape from them isolating.

* The findings on physical health impacts, which prompted your call, make into actions of physical injury all actions that cause lasting loneliness situations. This transforms the position around every situation ever of arbitrary or prejudiced social rejection. This is now a danger to physical health, an inflicted injury, and that creates a responsibility not to do it. To this background, arbitrary rejection can no longer be held to be part of freedom of association. This forces a shift in the picture of that human rights principle. It follows that it does not include freedom of rejection.

All of the formal categories of discrimination now acknowledged by law fit with this already. They all can be committed, deniably and under the radar, if arbitrary group rejection is allowed to happen at all. An entitlement to inclusion in community activities, including in organised associations. It would simply observe the human rights principle, as well as be a measure against loneliness, to prescribe that all local associations with public joining have to allow anyone to join unless they have done some specific relevant wrong. To say that they may not choose who they do or do not think will be suitable. The person will have to have passed criminal thresholds of being a threat to person, damaging property or preventing the association's activities, before they could be excluded.

* A key principle which this will achieve, and it does not appear logically how any lesser measure can achieve it, is to ban discrimination against victimhood. Loneliness is among the several counts of injustice obviously caused, whenever a person has been traumatised by an injustice in one project or voluntary workplace, brings the trauma story to a different place doing similar work which they wish to join, and instead of engaging with preventing the injustice's repetition this second place rejects the person. At worst, even bullies the person's already hurt vulnerable emotions by advising them to give up that line of activity altogether - as the result of an injustice that was not their fault and making its perpetrators win. The unscrupulousness of this, of projects sparing themselves a social responsibility by punishing victimhood and ganging up on trauma, is easily capable of causing suicidality by its scale of injustice.

* There needs to be no compelling of anyone to remain for an extended period associated with a peer group who the person does not find compatible. That this can be a position of loneliness now makes it explicitly a physical assault upon any person's health to make them continue to suffer it. Every identity oppression, every bully suicide, and now every physical health effect of loneliness, totally discredits and makes into an assault all traditionally concocted ideas that folks must get accustomed to this as reality. The schoolmate who spitefully accused a home educated child of only learning "maths and not how to survive ribaldry and other things people have to withstand in order to do anything useful", could

now be placed by the victims' hospital bedsides or graves and challenged to repeat his view. An agenda of social survival of the fittest is associated with fascism.

Regardless of organisational convenience, it follows that all children are entitled, on their own say-so not vetoable by any adult, to removal from any peer group, hence from any school class, whose attitudes they dislike. If this leads to it being impossible to make many of them belong to a class at all, then it does. Every child might potentially belong to a historically oppressed minority, before we discover whether they do. Herding them together like farm animals, into long term classes with the same other children just chancing on their compatibility and forcing them to survive it, was always a misconceived cruelty typical of the nineteenth century careless machine oppressiveness that invented it. Child or adult, to be in a bad peer group is lonely, and to be separated from it, even if not immediately finding better company, is less lonely. If you do not want to cause loneliness, you never herd anyone into the wrong peer group and delay their freedom to find or form a right one.

* How else should a biological precedent for wellbeing, which I have chalked up as an adult worker, be applied to include children in school, the military, and workers in any communities unhealthily dominated by 1 employer which still exist post-1980s? In all the autistic spectrum and related conditions, there is an issue with bodily sensitivities to texture and fabric pressure and heat, they are termed "sensory issues". They affect what textures or weights of clothes the person is able to wear without impairing discomfort, in ways that society had not thought of before this awareness: some are distressed by any label attached to the clothes. It is a basic of wellbeing in any work, that sensory issues give us a need of solid physical wellbeing never to be subject to dress codes. We are bodily assaulted in them and impaired in ability to perform. I was backed by an autism employment service in asserting to the various layers of employment and training structures my biologically serious aspie need to dress according to my sensory issues. I am among the number for whom this means modest sensible shorts.

The biological nature, hence solid physical existence, of these minority dress needs linked to sensory issues, invalidates all dress codes and uniforms at the global human rights level. This takes away all option of seeking a solution to loneliness in machine conformity of dress, one of the traditional arguments for school uniforms. So instead, the threat of loneliness getting caused by peer groups being bigoted against certain clothing choices, such as shorts, has to be annulled by never forcing anyone to stay in any peer group they dislike.

The severe oppression of limb comfort choices that has long existed only for the older male part of the school age population has always been gender discriminatory, including in any loneliness impact it has made. The media entirely ignored this daily visible fact, until in recent years equal opportunities progressed far enough to enable schoolboys to start making prominent challenges to the limb inequality culture, which are utterly envied by many former schoolboys of my generation. It hurts emotionally to be a generation too old to have taken part in that fight from within. I was often affected in concentrating at school by

the physical misery of unsuitable hot black long trousers. That TV comedies have been allowed to actively inflame and take part in the anti-shorts mob psychology in schools, has been an affront to child protection as well as potential cause of utterly discriminatory irrational social exclusion hence loneliness. So it has to be banned, on both these grounds, which are both public health grounds and child protection grounds.

It is not undemocratic to art to prevent comedy from being used to ringlead biologically damaging bullying, child or adult, which is obviously always a hate crime. On exactly the same grounds comedy should be banned from comically portraying loneliness itself as caused by unfashionability or uncoolness or any form of personally targeted peer exclusion.

* Religion as an avoidance of loneliness can unfairly seem out for folks who are interested in religious issues but do not have a belief set matching any organised religion, or Humanist society, within reach. This is unless they have a liberal enough one within reach to accept members with unmatching beliefs, e.g. a liberal Episcopal church. All types of religious interest group which are liberal enough to accept people with non-matching beliefs should be invited to liaise with all forms of state work against isolation, concerning whether they can expand into unserved areas.

Freedom of religion, including to change it, means any religion has to accept any person who wishes to convert to it. However there exists a racist and controlling idea that religion should be hereditary. BBC Question Time once presented a Zoroastrian panelist as from "a religion that accepts no converts", as if this was an innocuous point of interest on a culture preserving itself. But of course it was discriminatory and rejecting against the entire population not born Zoroastrian and lonely for any of them wishing to be Zoroastrian. A religion is a belief system, so it is a contradiction to reject anyone who agrees that the beliefs are factually right. It follows logically that every religion should only be recognised as a religion at all, with any of the accompanying protections, on condition that it accepts converts, from all backgrounds.

I was shocked and offended to hear a BBC radio "thought for the day" in 1998, by a rabbi who claimed, not offering any facts for why, that it is "a tragedy" for anyone to leave the religious tradition they grew up in. She openly boasted with pride that she rejected folks from other backgrounds who came to her asking to convert and join her congregation, and told them to go back to "their own" tradition. That is identical language to racists shoos immigrants back to their own countries. It violated those folks' human right to change religion. It made an apartheid of religions and totally contradicted that they are about factual beliefs. It would terribly hurt and scar those folks, cause them loneliness, and by it assault their physical health. Very topically to write at present, it could dangerously rebound by contributing to anti-Semitism and bad views of Judaism, unjustly to all adherents who do properly welcome converts and not share that attitude. Peaches Geldof was a famous example of a conversion to Judaism, and likewise I had a schoolmate whose mother had converted to Judaism from Catholic. How would that rabbi answer the many Polish people

who reportedly are discovering Jewish ancestries they had not known of, and keen to bond with a culture found in their roots?

Loneliness' health impact now creates a public health duty against allowing any organised religion to cause it intentionally. As well as forcing them to accept converts, this will be an important standard against cults. For it will prevent any religion from the combination of (1) telling its members not to have friendships and associations outside the religion, then (2) socially shunning a member or ex-member and organising its other members to do that.

There is associated with several religions a term "disfellowshipping" for the latter practice. It means to cut off and refuse to speak to, persons who break one of their many prohibitions or who arrive at an unauthorised belief position. It is an attempt to use infliction of loneliness to deter conversion away from a religion or non-compliance with it. This is to use a form of personal harm to prevent persons from exercising a human right. This should be seen as a breach of that human right, hence to ban the practice is entirely compatible with freedom of religion, it is simply a matter of making religions operate a civil coexistence in society. Hence, quite as much as any objection of offending the religions which practice it, it matters that the ostracising itself offends the persons subjected to it, and fellow members of the religions they have converted to, and harms them too."

Frank, M

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