

'Dealing' with Bullies

'These town hall meetings get more exciting with every week,' journalist Sue gushes. 'These public intellectuals can certainly generate conversation ... even if it gets ever harder to cram what is said down into to a précis summary.'

'I've heard there's a line-up for tickets now,' says the editor. 'What were they discussing this week?'

'The topic was *'Dealing' with Bullies* but that's a play on two meanings of *dealing*. In this transactional world, 'dealing' can mean managing a situation but also closing a financial agreement.'

'Right. Let's see how you summarise that little lot. Our readers will be interested in your article.'

'Dealing' with Bullies by Sue Donym

The panel of public intellectuals started with: *Bullying* is using the perception of power to influence, threaten, intimidate or harm people who are less powerful.

So **bullying is about power.**

Lord Acton, a 19th century English politician and historian, said, 'Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' He might have known a bit about it because, throughout his life, Queen Victoria's Great Britain ruled much of the planet, backed up by the power of the British army and navy.

At the highest level, dictators **do** wield absolute power to control the life or death of their subjects. In those countries, without the restraints of the separation of powers (executive from legislative and judicial functions), leaders can intimidate as they choose.

There are also currently many millions of people suffering the full range of modern slavery across the world ... where the slaves have no power to resist. Others are trapped in controlling family and community relationships where rights and freedoms are denied. Domestic violence incidents are rising sharply.

It all starts with **a lack of respect for people with less power.**

At the much lower levels, as children move through the developmental stages of growing up, they often feel the imbalances of power as they **jockey for friendship groups** based on physical strength, personal skills and attractiveness.

That is a normal part of learning how to manage relationships but when it becomes threatening, that is **unhealthy bullying.**

The panel drew audience responses to establish **some characteristics of the bully**: aggressive personality, physical strength, group intimidation, need for acknowledgement, narcissism (look at me), money, weaponry, arrogance, feeling no need to abide by other people's rules, enjoying hurting and controlling their targets.

The panel also asked the audience for **the weaknesses of bullies**: cowards, full of bravado, frightened of losing face, all front with no substance, will usually back off when challenged, childlike tantrums, loss of normal control.

Popular advice to children is often to *stand up to bullies*.

The panel asked what the audience understood by that: challenge the bullies, call their bluff, fight back, tell someone in authority to help resolve the matter, gather enough mates around to dissuade the bully from intimidating ... or just see through the bully tactics ... and laugh at them – they don't like being ridiculed.

Frequently **bullies use illogical stereotypes to isolate, scapegoat and 'gaslight' their victims** (the victims are 'other', not like the *in-crowd*) and so they are more easily targeted by lies, fallacies and their vulnerability.

The **lies** may also conflate issues to create phobias (eg Israel's military actions being used to mean *all* in the Jewish faith, terrorists meaning *all* in the Islamic faith, *all* immigrants with taking your entitled jobs, *all* Russians being brainwashed communists) branding innocents with false logic and playing to self-interest fears. That is confirming prejudice and reinforcing negative populist perceptions based on untrue sweeping statements with **fallacies** – appeals to ignorance or popularity or tradition, hasty generalisations, thin *end of the wedge* slippery slopes, illogical paradoxes.

Then, at a **national or global level**, if you were involved in business or diplomatic negotiations, how do you '*deal*' with bullies who have been used to intimidating to get their own way?

This is not about appeasement – but rather, asserting agreed national and international laws. It may involve bargaining for a compromise – which will be an agreed fair deal not an intimidated submission.

Sometimes, the difference between parties needs independent mediation. But when diplomacy fails, usually parties call on like-minded supporters and alliances to resolve the matter in much the same way as two stags in the rutting season or two bull elephant

seals – **they fight it out for dominance**. That has been the pattern in recorded animal history.

At the end of World War 2, in Tokyo Bay 1945, General MacArthur accepted the surrender of Japan with *'We are gathered here, representatives of the major warring powers – to conclude a solemn agreement whereby peace may be restored. The issues involving divergent ideals and ideologies have been determined on the battlefields of the world.'*

While world war is the **extreme result of international bullying**, the better course of action is to recognise the signs early (in individuals, groups and nations) and take proactive action to educate the young and the general community in how to peacefully intervene to resolve conflict and the abuse of power before it can escalate.

It all comes back to **attitudes to power**, in the rearing of children, in the respectful tolerance of people who have different customs and cultures.

Apart from lies, fallacies and negative stereotyping, perhaps the biggest challenge is to recognise **the danger of cultures that foster winning at all costs or the need to dominate non-threatening 'others'**. Characteristics of that culture are greed, self-interest and the amassing of personal wealth ... rather than being content with sufficiency.

Life is ephemeral. We arrive in the world with nothing and we are taken away from it at death ... with nothing – *without any amassed wealth*.

Living on a finite planet with fragile natural ecosystems requires an awareness of the need to live in harmony with other forms of life and to care for the planet that we all use as our base. We also need to be educated that the world is not perfect nor is it necessarily formed in our preferred manner. Others **do** choose different ways of governing and believing. So ... if we are to avoid the precursor to that speech in Tokyo Bay in 1945... we may need to intervene early using the structure of agreed civilised behaviour.

Live humble, respected ... and die regretted! What do you think?

'Wow, Sue! That's a bit more dramatic than your usual town hall articles! Well done!' the editor says, lifting his head from reading the précis. 'There are so many examples in everyday news that our readers can relate to.'

'Thanks. It's not easy summarising all that was said into a few words.'

'We are here to inform and to encourage serious thought. It will be interesting to read the responses from our readership.'