

Painless Human Being: A Success or an Aberration ?

Mishka Jambor

Sydney University, Australia

A NEW PHASE IN HUMANITY may be arising in developed Western countries in relation to the massive abandonment of pain. Pain itself has been a tool for moulding the character of the young in society for millennia. This can be seen through the initiation process in traditional societies involving rites of passage as it involves endurance of considerable pain. Both traditional societies and not so traditional ones, such as European societies up to '60s as well as communist societies up to very recently, have all experienced hardships and pain on an almost daily basis. These societies considered pain and suffering as a natural part of life and/or a prerequisite for developing a better future.

In contrast, in developed countries (Western Europe, Australia, Northern America) the situation is very different nowadays (although these countries in the past had a more traditional attitude to pain), both in terms of scientific ideology, popular belief, and more importantly, in terms of general attitude to pain and suffering. Psychological pain is allayed by distraction, entertainment such as TV, video etc. and various drugs. Also physical pain is more quickly disposed of through drugs. Eventually even minor pain is not tolerated, eg injection for every dental intervention. Inadvertently the culture gets fixated on avoidance of pain. Also, the development of human endurance is impeded which may have consequences in school learning; durability of relationships and in the ability to hold down a job. This leads to the development of a culture of unnaturalness.

Examples included the non-allowance of the natural mourning process which extends as far as denying death by putting it out of sight. Further, life is considered to have meaning only when one is happy.

Questions need to be raised such as: How long can such a culture endure? How long can an individual keep up with this unrealistic lifestyle?

If such a pain-denying society can endure for a long time it may be that a new breed of human beings will develop?

What kind of negative consequences are there from that lifestyle?

How have other societies used pain as one factor in moulding immature human beings?

Is technological progress the sole explanation for the culture of pain avoidance?

I will volunteer a few examples of possible negative consequences of painless lifestyle. Those consequences will fall broadly into categories of diseases, mental and physical, specific behaviour pattern and relationship problems. Suppressed pain is likely to eventually result in mental disorders, psychosomatic diseases, mysterious illnesses such as chronic fatigue syndrome and the like. In other areas the negative consequences may show themselves in small attention syndrome. Here, a shift of attention is required so as to avoid getting bored i.e. experiencing a form of pain. Furthermore, manipulative attitudes to people and the environment are likely to proliferate (through manipulation one diminishes chances of being vulnerable and hurt). On the contrary, true friendships, affection and communal bonds seem to require a degree of sacrifice and vulnerability. Both of them, in turn, require willingness to suffer. Avoidance of pain would therefore diminish the frequency and depth of good human relationships.

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