

Accepting difference as a way to reduce violence:  
validating the *differon*, self-actualization, social-actualization,  
and meeting our human need for recognition

**part 1** the differon as the target of bullying:  
one-size-fits-all as the source of problems in society

a constant issue in the news is bullying...the current big-screen movie *bully* (2012) illustrates the level of concern this human tragedy brings... bullying is such a cheap behavior, it corrupts all concerned: the bully, the one harassed, any on-lookers, and society itself...

bullying means to torment, tease, scare, push around...but why are certain people "picked on"? mainly it's over being "different"...they are too short, too thin, odd, or just plainly "not normal"...terms like nerd, gay, cripple, or "retard" label those who are antagonized...

barrowing from the term "differend" (created by the philosopher jean-françois lyotard) we now have a category for all those deemed "different" as "the differon"...so, the question is: are the "differon" those who gets bullied?

for yaacov hecht, of the institute for democratic education (IDE) [www.c2city.org/en/about-ide](http://www.c2city.org/en/about-ide), the source of problems in society is *we do not know how to deal with difference...but, why?*

--we only see ourselves

--we only see the world from our perspective

--we want everyone to be like us

--we want to expand ourselves, and our point of view everywhere.

**Part 2** One-size-fits-all normalcy: the source of problems in society

The idea that students who are bullied tend to be those deemed "different" is discussed in Part 1. A whole category (the "differon") was introduced to describe/explain those who don't "fit in."

*A major theme of our Universe is variety and diversity. From planets in space to African fabric patterns, from to bacteria to leaves on a tree, or from snowflakes to insects--very few things, if any, are alike. The same is true for people; we are all as distinct as our finger-prints.*

*So, why can being different or "odd" be such a problem in our schools that students are bullied because they are not "normal"?*

Historically, those deemed different were also many times the more vulnerable, thus persecuted: having a minority status in number or age or cultural or color or gender identity, being politically or physically weak, or being handicapped. Even those members of so-called "ethnic" and/or religious minorities were bullied. Our history is filled with stories by or about those who were intimidated, assaulted, or in some cases persecuted or tortured, or even exterminated.

This brings the question: *Upon what is being different based?*

"If such a thing as a psycho-analysis of today's prototypical culture were possible, such an investigation would show the sickness proper to the time to consist precisely in normality."

~ Theodore Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

The IDE recommends a culture based on difference and variety, not normalcy--all in order to:

--recognize the fact of "the differon" and that validating difference benefits everyone

--accept the fact that we don't own the truth

--recognize the importance of self-criticism as a constructive tool for growth.

### **Part 3** What's normal-cy?

Part 1 raises the point that those who are bullied are picked on because they are “different.” Part 2 asks what determines difference and suggests it is normality--aka: “normalcy.” But, what's normalcy?

Normalcy is the social-political construct arising from the Eugenics movement concerning the state of being “normal” (the norm) with respect to body (shape, the 5 senses, physical abilities, looks) intelligence (IQ), race, or gender identity, and its co-created default concepts “abnormal” and “disability.” Out of normalcy came the terms *lookism* and *ableism*.

“The problem is not the person with disabilities; it's the way that normalcy is constructed to create the ‘problem’ of the disabled person.” ~ Leonard Davis, “Constructing Normalcy”

### **Part 4** What is Self-Actualization? Discovering and realizing our uniqueness

Part 3 defines normalcy and thus calls for a discussion on the idea of *uniqueness*. Self-actualization is the intrinsic growth of what is already in the organism, or stated more accurately, of what the organism is. It is the basic motivation we humans have to make the most of our unique abilities--to be who we potentially are. Self-actualized people are moral, creative, and spontaneous. They are problem solvers who lack prejudice and embrace facts.

See: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-actualization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-actualization) and [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-actualization#Criticism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-actualization#Criticism)

“What we can be, we must be. We must be true to our own nature. This need we may call self-actualization.” ~ Kurt Goldstein



Abraham Maslow, in his pyramid of human needs, tries to explain what motivates human behavior. <http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>. The “drive” to be who we are, to self-actualize, is the highest and arises when basic needs are satisfied and psychological needs are considerably met. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzQ9vrvTAtk>

### **Part 5** Self-actualization and violence

“Hungry people can't be good at learning or producing anything, except perhaps violence.” ~ Pearl Bailey

As human beings, we all have levels of power. They range across a spectrum: the basic power to be/to exist, self-affirmation, self assertion, aggression, and finally violence. Babies cry when

hungry or uncomfortable. We affirm our existence when we want to be recognized, respected, and treated fairly. People become assertive as they try to get their basic needs met. They “draw a line” around what they will and will not accept. This self-affirmation is healthy.

“We all know children and youth want our attention. And, they’ll get it...one way or another.”  
~ Anonymous, former school teacher

We need food, shelter, basic regard, and others to survive. If needs go unmet or our assertions about these needs are ignored, a person can “cross the line” and become aggressive. This is healthy. All aggression isn’t bad; we must fight injustice or cancer aggressively. If one’s basic or psychological needs are still disregarded, people throughout history have become violent.

“A riot is the language of the unheard.” ~ MLK

For example, the American Civil Rights Movement had to be aggressive in order to be taken seriously. And, it was. MLK’s non-violence approach worked. It did not work in South Africa against Apartheid. Nelson Mandela took up arms after his non-violent actions were met not only with police dogs/water hoses, and arrests, but torture and murder. In this case, violence against Apartheid was a response to oppression that assertion and aggression failed to end.

The fact that Palestinians and Israelis each want their histories, governments, borders, rights, and cultures to be *recognized* by the other is a way to understand this on-going conflict.

“When we revolt it’s not for a particular culture. We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe.”  
~ Frantz Fanon

#### Appreciating the need for recognition is at the heart of understanding human violence

Self-actualization becomes possible when our basic needs are met. Hungry and homeless people are concerned with survival, not esthetics. The concept implies that self-actualized people/groups also have their psychological needs somewhat satisfied.

While meeting our psychological needs (love and belonging, and recognition and a sense of accomplishment), we are also searching for meaning. And, although we may not know it, we are also clarifying who we are, becoming more authentic as we actualize our unique potential.

“Writing saved me from the sin and inconvenience of violence.” ~ Alice Walker

Thus, with basic needs and also social/esteem needs for *recognition* and *respect* met, the reason/s (since such needs are already satisfied) for the “actualizing” person/group to have to resort to violence is neutralized.

*With self-actualization as the goal, society can reduce the need to be violent;  
and vice versa:*

*when we/society do not make sure the basic and social needs of all citizens are met,  
so self-actualization can be possible,  
we are enabling violence.*

### **Part 6 Social actualization:**

#### Stressing uniqueness to neutralize the power of normalcy

Parts 1-5 said people get bullied because they’re “different” compared to normality. The idea and politics of “normalcy” are not characteristic of a sustainable society. So what do we do?

*We recommend the concept of social-actualization. We question the one-size-fits-all paradigm by embracing the reality of the uniqueness of each person. We need a society based on a culture of principles where everyone:*

- has a right to know/express their uniqueness
- is capable of recognizing the uniqueness of every other person
- is capable of understanding that difference/uniqueness do not pose a threat, but rather a positive opportunity for the individual and the whole community
- is capable of understanding the importance of supporting others in their quest to find uniqueness
- is capable of recognizing that the integration of differences guarantees a world that chooses construction over destruction

All facets of society are responsible for the integration of these differences (Hecht, 2003).

### **Part 7** Normalcy through schooling: Common standards as curriculum

Previous parts of the series on diversity (“the differon”) claimed normalcy as a threat to a sustainable world. This explained bullying as a negative reaction to the differon. Part 7 reviews: 1) how standardization via a common curriculum and testing reinforces normalcy, and 2) what to do about it.

The purpose of traditional education is making sure students acquire the same sets of skills and areas of “factual” knowledge. It’s called the standard curriculum. This one-size-fits-all reality is supported by standardized tests like Indiana’s ISTEP or its soon to be replacement.

Yaacov Hecht (IDE: [www.c2city.org/en/about-ide/](http://www.c2city.org/en/about-ide/)) even argues that the one-size-fits-all “square” (aka normalcy) we all must fit in to *is the source of problems in society*. It’s endorsed by schooling where we are told, “If you want to learn, you have to come inside the square.” We judge everyone by the square. Children are asked, “Why are you outside of the square?” This, Hecht says, is the danger of school. Democratic education, which is based on finding the uniqueness of each student, is one solution. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIECircdLGs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIECircdLGs).

The social-political influence on normalcy is due to its Euro-centric foundations. For example people of color, by definition, are not “normal.” According to the Great Lakes Equity Center, efforts to “normalize” students of color through reducing schooling to standardized activities require adopting a “one size fits all” approach: *“Such a model feeds into deficit thinking. Students who do not respond to the standardized approach are labeled at-risk or dis/abled in some way. When applying a standardized approach, the students who respond best are those who share cultural similarities with those who developed and perpetuate the standardized system. A standardized system is, then, inequitable. It creates unequal outcomes under the guise of creating a fair playing field.”*

The role of standardized tests is to keep us in “the square.” The IDE predicts an era of global testing will arise to promote world standards. This is simply no more than creating a system of competition, power, and money--creating a “Coca Cola” society which will turn individual cultures into one global culture.

Hecht notes that in traditional approaches to standardized testing:

- learning disabilities are dismissed, and
- every grade level has a fixed standard of achievement.

He proposed a democratic self-managed learning approach where testing is not standardized:

- unique learning abilities are recognized, and
- each person has unique areas of strengths and growth.

## **Part 8** Self-actualization: Normalizing difference for sustainability

This last blog of 8 situates the event of bullying around the fact showing in many cases the ones harassed are those with so-called “disabilities” or “differences” like size, shape, color, or gender identity. The support of “normalcy” and its implied “ab-normalcy” fosters a non-sustainable world stigmatizing the “differon.”

“Normalcy” which by definition makes most people “odd,” seems necessary because it appears useful, i.e. identity formation (I know I’m a male when I compare myself to a woman). Yet, what is normal is an “average” that’s not real. The average family may be 4.8 members, yet such a family does not exist in reality. The problem is, what is normal is a political concept. Normalcy represents a deficit model of our humanity and must be discredited and abandoned.

A sustainable society is based on an ethos of providing chances and encouragement for each member to discover and bring their uniqueness to fulfillment. Helping others explore/manifest their passions and develop excellence is a major way to counter normalcy and thus bullying.

This fits well with the concept of “self-actualization,” the intrinsic growth of what is already in the organism, or more accurately, of what the organism is. It’s the instinctual need of humans to make the most of their differentness.

*Thus, the goal of education for sustainability must be normalizing “difference” through providing the social-political conditions for the actualization of the excellence of the uniqueness of each person or group.*

Though many people are not presently excellent, everyone can be excellent, especially if we let a student choose the area they wish to develop by helping them answer these questions:

--What is your uniqueness?

--What do you bring?

Two concepts that foster excellence:

### *Pluralistic Learning*

Hecht (2003) suggests a type of learning acknowledging the originality of each person--each is different with both weak and strong attributes, talents, and abilities.

### *Excellence Centers in an Education City*

Excellence Centers (Hecht, 2003) are places outside school representing many intelligences, and providing citizens exposure to many subjects, interests, occupations/careers, etc. For more on the concept of an “Education City” see the link <http://kinumedia.org/vorcreatex2/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Indianapolis-Destination-City-or-Education-City.pdf> In the Excellent Centers of an Education City, students of all ages can see what they are passionate about learning/doing. They can begin intense personal study and/or engage with others having skills, careers, interests, talents they wish to have. This would be the first of many steps to actualizing their uniqueness.

*The challenge for a sustainable society is having a fluid education system where difference is a “taken for granted” attribute of every student.*

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Hecht, Y. (2003). “The Third Wave: Present, Mission and Vision” is a presentation given during the 11<sup>th</sup> International Democratic Education Conference. Troy, NY. <https://drive.google.com/a/kheprw.org/file/d/0B-MpMEv4NI7nM0pZXzY3T2dmUIU/view> See p. 3.

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