**Leo R. Sandy**

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When I finished, he deliberately walked on the wet floor instead of doing it before I was finished. When I called him on it, he got very upset that I questioned his authority. He also reminded me of my inferior rank as he pointed to his chief’s anchor numerous times with the rapidity of a woodpecker. I observed him at other occasions doing the same thing to others. Authoritarians have very little tolerance toward difference. They want everyone to look, think and act the same way. The more uniformity, the better. Difference makes them nervous so they often find fault with those who are of a different color or speak a different language. The English only crowd has many authoritarians in it. Insecurity is another trait of the authoritarian. Thus, they are afraid of their own shadow. Their fascination with guns and the military gives them a sense of security. They see everyone as a potential enemy who wants to take what they have even though they may not have anything worth taking. Machismo is common to insecure authoritarians because it hides their unmet dependency needs and their fear of abandonment. They also have to have all the answers to life’s most perplexing questions. They can’t stand mystery or uncertainty. They follow the principle of certainty whereby they create the most ludicrous explanations to complex issues. They put round pegs in square holes and see no problem with it. Authoritarians are particularly drawn to the most dogmatic forms of religion because they give them all the answers and provide no questions. For them the truth never has to be sought because it has already been found. It is easy to understand why universities tend not to attract authoritarians and why professors are a special target for them. When authoritarians do find themselves in the university, they stifle debate, primarily use the lecture method and keep a distance from students. Authoritarians also are very superstitious which tends to support their feelings of insecurity and makes them more rigidly adhere to dogmatic belief systems. Rigid and stereotyped thought patterns are commonly found among authoritarians. They have trouble seeing gray. Black and white thinking provides them with security and comfort while both/and thinking creates anxiety in them because it shows the existence of contradiction. Thus, for the authoritarian, people are good or evil with nothing in between. Often they point to a famous liberal who has some faults and then exaggerate those faults to the point that it wipes out all the good works done by the person in question. Authoritarians also tend to see things out of context. For example, some people justify the attack on Iraq on the basis that Saddam used chemical weapons on the Kurds. Of course, such people leave out the fact that the U.S. gave these weapons to Saddam in the first place and stood on the sidelines while he was using them. Authoritarians interpret history in very distorted and simplistic ways that favor the dominant culture. Minorities are often viewed and described in unflattering ways with much use of stereotypy. Authoritarians tend to have a particular dislike for liberals, diversity, democracy, human rights, educated people and those with disabilities. Other traits authoritarians have include the need to be in control, assertiveness bordering on aggressiveness, nationalism, bigotry, the quest for power, limited imagination, cynicism, arrogance, lack of introspection and insight, narrowness of perspective, polarized thinking and paranoia. Authoritarian parents rule with an iron hand and show little affection. They are judgmental and critical when their children do not meet the high standards set for them. They never explain things to children but respond by saying, “Because I said so”. Children have no choices. These parents often focus on what the child does wrong and rarely acknowledge positive behavior. Harsh punishments are used on children, and the children do not learn how to think for themselves. Such parents stifle growth and creativity and promote submissiveness or rebellion. Hitler was a famous authoritarian who also used dualistic thinking and hated liberals, gypsies, Jews, homosexuals and people with disabilities. It is also noteworthy that someone like Hitler doesn’t just come from nowhere. The education system and the family in Germany at that time were both very authoritarian. The schools were very rigid and undemocratic; the pledge of allegiance was said daily; and parents tended to use corporal punishment. Fathers were the kings of their castles and maintained aloofness from the family. The country was even referred to as the “fatherland”. I often hear people justify obscene military spending by alluding to the possibility of another Hitler emerging. In other words, let’s ignore the conditions that lead to the development of a Hitler but be ready if one comes. If we really want to prevent another Hitler, we need to focus on helping parents all over the world raise children more humanely and by teaching children to think critically and develop an ethic of care. We must give children a truly “liberal” education so that they can have a wide perspective on life and be able to resist the kind of indoctrination that society so successfully provides through the media and major societal institutions. We would all be better off by heeding the following line from Shakepeare’s All’s Well that Ends Well. The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together; our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not, and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues (Leo R. Sandy is professor of counselor education at Plymouth State University and a consulting school psychologist.)