Twitter Thread by Dr. NerdLove

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Watching Cobra Kai, plus a lot of the manosphere plus the insurrectionists has put me in a mind of the idea of "the world's hard, so I have to make you hard to succeed" and how much that's used to justify... well, pretty much everything. But mostly abuse. /1

You see this outlook all over the place if you make even a cursory glance at just about anything, but *especially* media on the right. The outrage over "PC culture" or, as most of us call it "not being an asshole". Railing against things like banning hazing or spanking. /2

Hell, you see it in sports, when football players are lauded for playing with injuries or pushback against trying to reign in CTE. You see it with folks — mostly men — who say "this is too much, I need to step away or go to therapy" getting called weak or pussies. /3

And of course, it's all over the place online, in games, on forums, Twitter, Facebook etc. "Suck it up," "grow a thicker skin," "It's trash talking everyone gets it" and of course, the ever popular "snowflake" and "facts don't care about your feelings." /4

What I find fascinating is how much this comes down to two mindsets that intertwine like horny snakes.

1) I went through this so YOU have to, even though I hated it

and

2) A better world is not possible. This is how it always has been and how it always will be.

/5

The first is not uncommon. We call it tradition, we call it ritual or heritage, but what it ultimately is is the validation of abuse. It's saying "I endured this because I was told it was necessary, and if I reject that, then it means that I suffered for nothing." /6

It's rather like the folks who say their parents spanked, slapped, whipped or hit them and THEY turned out ok.

Except... they didn't. They turned out as people who think that hitting a child is not just acceptable but necessary and laudable. /7

There's also the unspoken "you go through this and your reward is that you get to do this to OTHER people later on. YOU get to be the one CAUSING pain instead of enduring it!"

And that this is both good and a sign of your strength. Now YOU get to dominate others. /8

The underlying message here — again, unspoken — is that empathy and compassion are flaws. That NOT taking the opportunity to harm others means that you don't have the strength to do so. That it just opens you up to being dominated and that you on some level DESERVE to be. /9

You have to stop and think about what it says when someone undergoes pain, trauma and abuse and thinks that the best thing they can do is to be able to inflict that on others. That the mark of character is a willingness to do unto others a thing you hated being done to you. /10

The second mindset is similar in that the abuse is *necessary* because a world where it *isn't* necessary is unthinkable. That the world justifies this abuse because they are otherwise powerless to stop this or break the cycle. That abuse is baked into life, period. /11

Again, it ties into the idea of strength being equated to dominance and a willingness to hurt others. It's the Cobra Kai motto: strike fast, strike hard, no mercy. Mercy is for the weak. Why? Because the world is hard and mean so fuck the other guy. /12

This assumes that cruelty, domination and abuse are immutable. Nature, red in tooth and claw, life is nasty, brutish and short.

But much of this is just self-justification. It's the convenient excuse for choosing to inflict pain on others, not the unfortunate necessity. /13

I mean, it kind of says something when preppers focus more on how they're going to kill other people who want their shit than, say, trying to create contingencies for mutual aid and the survival of the community. It's looking for the *excuse* to cause harm. /14

This is all significant because it requires ignoring all evidence to the contrary. It's not baked into our DNA at *all*. Even in nature, there is evidence of how much frequently this cycle can be broken. Case in point: baboon troops in the African savannah. /15

One particular troop of baboons started scavenging at a garbage pit near a tourist lodge. As with most troops, the aggressive males would eat the most.

The garbage, however, was tainted with tuberculosis. An outbreak occurred in the troop, killing half the males. /16

The males who died were, uniformly, the most aggressive of the troop, leaving an uncharacteristic number of less-aggressive males.

Theoretically, this should mean that new males to the troop would rapidly dominate through aggression and violence.

But they didn't. /17

In fact, new males who joined the troup adopted the more pacifistic behavior. Because of how baboon troops work — males leaving after puberty to join other troops — within a decade, none of the males in the troop were from the outbreak generation. But the behavior remained. /18

(This is all well documented, by the way: https://t.co/sJaU0mzj5K) /18a

This is a great refutation of the idea that dominance, aggression and violence are inherent, natural and necessary. But leaving aside the naturalistic fallacy, look at humans. We are a communal species. We survive because of mutual support, not because of violence. /19

In cases of cataclysm and emergency, our natural instinct isn't to go all Road Warrior. It's to cluster up and help each other as best as we can. We see this over and over again — after earthquakes, after fires, after Katrina, after 9/11. It's how we have survived. /20

In fact, more often than not, chaos and violence has come because of the so-called "elite" panicking and making poor choices, rather than the society "breaking down".

@IwriteOK has a great episode about this in his Behind The Bastards podcast: https://t.co/mrEZe0XXYj /21

I bring these up because they destroy the argument that the world is cruel and hard and mean and to survive, you need to be crueler, harder and meaner.

The advocates of that aren't strong. They're afraid. They don't want to face the truth. /22

The truth is that yes, they were abused for no reason. They weren't tempered in fire, they were tortured because someone thought it was good to torture them. The hardship and pain they went through WAS meaningless. /23

It didn't make them stronger. It didn't bring them closer to others or cemented them as a team. It caused distrust, pain, sadism. It created trauma bonding, justifying their abuse by pretending it was in the name of something greater.

The people who hurt them *lied*. /24

Part of the journey of Cobra Kai is watching Johnny Lawrence realize just how much that outlook fucked him up.

It's recognizing that people hurt him because they just wanted to hurt someone and dressed it up with noble sounding bullshit. /25

The strongest people around are the ones who were hurt and abused and say "I will not allow this to happen to people I care about. I will break the cycle."

But even then, this gets misconstrued by people who want to justify the abuse. /26

You see this in many places: "the abuse you went through made you strong. It made you strong enough to be kind".

No, it didn't. The abuse didn't do that. The PERSON made THEMSELVES kind.

Saying otherwise is just another form of justifying those mindsets. /27

"The abuse made you strong enough to be kind" is just the other side of the coin as "the abuse made you strong enough to dominate." It's still justifying others abusing and harming someone. It's portraying the harm as NECESSARY. And it isn't. /28

And that whole "tempering" argument is bullshit anyway. Leave the metal in the fire long enough and you burn the metal and make it brittle. Quench it wrong, it cracks. It doesn't make people strong, it creates flaws and voids. /29

You only have to look at the most outspoken advocates of that outlook. Look at how brittle they are. How quick they are to anger, how easily they get upset. How fast they become defensive if someone disagrees or challenges them or things don't go their way. /30

We just saw a coup-attempt triggered in no small part by people who can't accept that others don't feel or see the world the way they do. They don't have the strength to take a loss, rebuild and comeback stronger. They can only lash out in a fatal temper tantrum. /31

And it was instigated, incited and cheered on by the most brittle and fragile human being alive. Someone who can't stand criticism OR confrontation. Who needs to surround himself with yes-men because the slightest pushback makes him crumble. /32

Cruelty doesn't breed strength. It teaches distrust. Abuse doesn't temper steel or teach endurance. It just teaches pain. Strength doesn't come from accepting harm and spreading that harm to others.

It comes from compassion. It comes from care. From kindness. /33

The kindest people you know are often the strongest. They're often the ones who went through the fire, came out the other side and resolved that nobody else should have to suffer like that.

The world can be cruel. It can be mean. It can be deeply unfair. This is all true. /34

But true strength isn't about changing yourself to survive and inflict that same cruelty on others. It isn't about assuming that the world is as it is and there is no way out but to join it.

That's weakness. That's justifying the abuse and the desire to continue it. /35

True strength is to look at the cruelty and unfairness and say "it doesn't have to be this way. I can make it better. WE can make it better."

Choosing kindness and compassion is how you choose to become strong. Compassion for others... and compassion for yourself. /fin