

Things Are Looking Up Down Under, Or, Sensitivity Training Follies

by Hugh Fitzgerald

An Australian researcher, Charles Miller, has just published a report on the effect of cultural sensitivity training, intended to improve attitudes toward Muslims among members of the Australian Defense Forces.

The study was conducted in a way that preserved the anonymity of those questioned, which meant that, since they did not have to reveal their identities, and thus no longer feared repercussions, the soldiers could answer truthfully about how they viewed Islam. The need for such measures must have been prompted by past experience, when those who had dared to express anti-Islam sentiments on questionnaires, and whose identities *were* known, suffered as a consequence. Anonymity was thus essential to eliciting truthful answers from those asked to describe their views of Islam, and it seems to have worked.

The results were not what anyone expected. According to a report in [The Guardian](#), Miller said:

“This study has found strong evidence that many members of the ADF’s elite units simply do not buy the official line presented by Western leaders from George W Bush on that ‘Islam is a religion of peace.’ Anti-Muslim sentiment is strong at least among some of the elements of the ADF at the forefront of deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq.”

The Guardian report adds:

Anti-Muslim sentiment is “strong” and “probably quite

widespread" among [Australian defence force](#) members and was higher among those who had undergone cultural sensitivity training, according to research commissioned by the army.

Soldiers from four special operations units based at Holsworthy army base were asked whether they believed "the Muslim religion promotes violence and terrorism".

Of the 182 people who took part, an estimated 80% agreed with the sentiment, according to lead researcher Charles Miller from the Australian National University...

Miller estimated that the proportion of soldiers who had undergone cultural sensitivity training and agreed that [Islam](#) promoted violence was about 91%.

"The corresponding figure for those who have not had cultural sensitivity training is a mere 17%," he wrote in a paper published in the [autumn edition of the Australian Army Journal](#) (pdf)."

What could possibly explain why the Australian soldiers who had undergone the sensitivity training exhibited a much higher incidence of "anti-Muslim sentiment" than those who had not? Could it be that the "sensitivity training" presents a view of Islam, and of Muslims, quite different from what these military men experienced when fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, both with Muslim allies and against Muslim enemies (and sometimes those allies could become deadly enemies overnight), and that the more this "cultural sensitivity training" was pushed down their throats, the more they gagged on it? Attempting to force the soldiers to believe what for them was the opposite of what they had experienced likely pushed them even further toward adopting their "anti-Muslim sentiments."

Furthermore, Miller noted that among those who served and underwent the sensitivity training, anti-Muslim sentiment was

more pronounced among men who were “at the forefront of deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan,” served in the Australian army’s most elite units, saw combat more often, and had more experience with Muslims (enemies, allies, the civilian population). Neil James of the Australian Defence Association replied to those who flung the word “Islamophobic” at these troops:

“When these blokes live cheek by jowl with the problem on a daily basis...they have a more sophisticated understanding than people back here in Australia. Now the idea that this somehow makes our diggers Islamophobic, the Defence Association finds it outrageous.”

Those who had *not* been forced to endure “cultural sensitivity training” sessions about Muslims were much more likely to exhibit the very attitudes that this “training” was designed to elicit, that is, views more favorable to Islam, such as disagreeing with the statement that “the Muslim religion promotes violence and terrorism.” They were more open to, or more exactly, easier prey for, such training. They were being fed a line that for most did not contradict their own experiences with Muslims, because, unlike “the elements of the ADF at the forefront of deployment,” they lacked any such experience.

What’s a poor cultural sensitivity trainer to do? The more he imposes pro-Muslim “training” on those who have actually learned, in Iraq and Afghanistan, about Muslim behavior and attitudes, the more he finds the soldiers express the anti-Muslim sentiments the sensitivity training was meant to eliminate.

As head researcher, Charles Miller sounded his own note of caution about the value of the training enterprise when he reported “that many members of the ADF’s elite units simply do not buy the official line presented by Western leaders from

George W Bush on that 'Islam is a religion of peace.'" "Do not buy the official line" suggests his, Miller's, own skepticism about the assertion that "Islam is a religion of peace."

But at the same time, Miller feels compelled to offer possible changes in the cultural sensitivity training to ensure the desired result, suggesting that perhaps one day of training was too short:

He [Miller] cautioned against declaring the one-day cultural sensitivity training a failure, noting that only soldiers who were deployed to the battlefield underwent the course. "It could simply be that this [positive] effect is being comprehensively drowned out either by the effects of overseas deployment or by whichever factors caused individuals to join units which would be deployed overseas in the first place," Miller said.

What does this mean? The "[positive] effect" of sensitivity training is "drowned out" by "the effects of overseas deployment" – that is, by encounters with Muslims, military and civilian, enemies and allies, which makes the soldiers much less inclined to accept what they are taught in the cultural sensitivity course. And along with that "overseas deployment" (to Muslim lands), Miller suggests that the same "factors" that "caused individuals to join" the front-line combat units make them more likely to give the "wrong answers" about Islam on questionnaires. What kind of people join the "units which would be deployed overseas in the first place"? Obviously, those imbued with patriotic fervor, the people who are most gung-ho for taking the fight to enemies abroad. In other words, the wrong kind of Australian for today's Australia, those most impervious to "cultural sensitivity training" and most likely to give "the wrong answers." These are the kind of men who, in the two world wars, would have been held up as exemplars of Australian fighting men. Now, with their refusal to call Islam a "religion of peace," their

views are cause for alarm, and great efforts (“cultural sensitivity training”) need to be made to change their minds.

What is to be done to ensure that this “cultural sensitivity training” does the job it’s supposed to do? Miller suggests that a “higher dose of the training” – it’s talked of as if it were a kind of mind-altering drug which, in truth, such training aims to be – “could” lead to better results. But isn’t it at least as likely that if more time is devoted to the training – a few days, or even a week or two of earnest brainwashing – the more it will have the opposite effect of what was intended, especially among those who, having been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, had acquired their own knowledge of Muslims and Islam? Those who resist now at having a day’s worth of politically-correct views forced on them will be far more resistant if they must endure a week’s worth of the same, as they see it, nonsense.

What can be done to achieve the “right” results? Perhaps giving the “cultural sensitivity” training only to soldiers who have not been deployed abroad and actually learned something about Islam? After all, not having had experience fighting with or beside Muslims, or experience with Muslim civilians in Iraq or Afghanistan, means that they are more open to being given a sanitized view of Islam billed as “cultural sensitivity training.” It’s all so confusing. Less is more, and more is less.

So, cultural sensitivity trainers of Australia, doing your best for Islam – keep it up. Do your damndest. Your “training” is getting results. Just not the results you wanted.

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