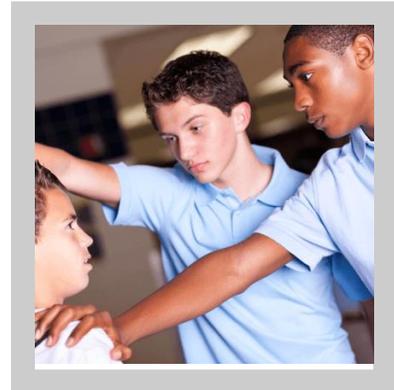


Name _____

Date _____

Being Bullied

ARE YOU A BULLY?—Researchers at Compass Academy have been asking this question for the last eight months, and according to a recent experiment they believe they have found the answer. Experiments show that one's propensity for being a bully is probably not the product of one's personality or background. Bullying may be a natural response to specific situations, hard-wired into the human brain. Given the right environmental conditions, anyone, even the most easygoing person, can quickly turn mean.



To arrive at this conclusion, researchers examined thirty sample populations, or "teams," consisting of twenty individuals each. In each of these teams, a leader was selected. Not just any leader would do. The population of leaders selected had to be very diverse; the researchers did not want their results to be skewed because all team leaders were white males aged 15 –18, for example. Therefore, leaders were selected so to represent a variety of traits. Each leader had a different age and gender, as well as different economic, social, and ethnic backgrounds.

After the teams had been established, researchers began the experiment. The teams were given a goal of forming a line from shortest to tallest, using every person on the team. Sounds pretty simple, right? But there was a catch: the leader was the only one allowed to move team members into position. Absolute power was given solely to the team leader, and team members had to obey him or her no matter what. What is more, in order to incentivize the teams, they were told that a \$2000 prize was to be awarded to the team that managed to form a perfect line in the least amount of time.

Given the relatively large team size, there was almost always a case in which the leader had to make a tough decision regarding who was taller. And, upon the decision, there was likely disagreement on behalf of the team members. Given that a \$2000 payoff was at stake, things often became rather heated. In the shuffle, it was not uncommon to hear team members utter such criticisms as, "Great, we're never going to win now," and "Who picked our team leader?" Researchers found that in roughly 80% of all cases in which such remarks were made, the team leader immediately entered bully mode, disparaging ornery team members with remarks such as "Shut up," and "Just do what I say and keep your mouth shut, okay?" In one such occasion, the team leader was recorded saying, "There's a reason I'm the boss here, buddy," when in actuality, there wasn't. In a particularly tense exchange, the team leader was overheard asking the team member if he "wanted to get hurt"—a classic bullying tactic—and researchers were forced to intervene. Unsurprisingly, this group did not win the prize.

What are we to glean from such a study? The belief that some people are born bullies is certainly shaken; it seems anyone can be a bully, no matter his or her background. So the next time you feel the bully within yearning to come out, don't let it. If you see someone else being a bully, don't judge him or her so quickly. Instead, realize that their bullying behavior doesn't just come from within. Rather, one study shows that it may very well come from without.