

Why do people hate each other? Are there any justifiable reasons as to why a person has the right to ridicule and mock another? Does the fact of being different promote cause for being the target of terrorizing by others?

I am consistently baffled by what the correct answers are to these questions. I doubt that there are any. What I am certain of, is the fact that teasing and bullying exists in all schools.

Every school is filled with cliques of some sort. There are the popular kids, the kids who want to be popular, the athletes, the musicians and artists, the kids who walk to the beat of their own drum, and those who are considered to be geeks and freaks, just to name a few. Of course they are also the kids who don't belong to a clique and choose to be a part of everyone's group. Nonetheless, within each of these circles, there are leaders and followers.

Historically speaking, leaders are those who demonstrate admirable qualities. They are able to make decisions on their own, direct themselves, and are usually regarded as someone of great importance. Organizing, controlling, managing, and supervising are skills leaders possess. The significance of being a leader is that other people follow you.

Followers choose a leader based on their beliefs, personality, actions, and ability to be influential. Many times leaders are unaware of their power of influence over others who try to keep up with them. Unlike leaders, followers usually lack the desire to make their own decisions, feel they are unable to direct themselves, and don't consider themselves worthy of any title.

People decide for themselves, most often through experiences, whether or not they fit the qualifications as leader or follower. During the formative years of childhood and the world of being a teenager, many students have a difficult time being a leader, even when they possess leadership qualities. Too often, students fear being different.

When students act and think in ways contrary to popular beliefs, the possibility for teasing and potential bullying increases. There are several reasons why this occurs. One of the most common is that the "teasers" and "bullies" are under the impression that putting down others makes them better, cooler, and appear more important than their victims. Another reason is that when students don't like each other, they expend unnecessary energy in letting the other know their feelings of dislike. Lastly, some people are just downright mean.

I frequently ask students what is gained by putting down others and making them feel bad about themselves. I further prod the necessity of putting forth the energy to do so. The answer is always the same: nothing is achieved and there is no reason for it. When I follow up with requiring their explanation of why this exists, they respond with the

reasons stated in the previous paragraph. My point is that everyone, whether they be an adult or student has a determined level of tolerance; a threshold for pain and discomfort. When this boundary is continuously tested, eventually it will break, with a possible explosion of emotion as a result.

It is horrifying to learn of this week's most recent events in Minnesota and those of Columbine back in 1999. Students often think that teasing is a joke and that their victims need to behold a greater sense of humor. What needs to be considered are the effects of name-calling, teasing, and bullying. Tolerance of poor behavior and social skills is limited. Students who demonstrate positive and appropriate conduct with others are always cool, whether they are leaders or followers.