

Picking Sides: One reader wonders why people are so territorial



The End Of The Game Tiger Predator Big Cat Tiger

Dear C and Dr. B;

This summer I was a camp counselor. Despite the effort the camp made to create a culture of camaraderie among attendees, the counselors for older kids wouldn't talk to or associate with the counselors for the younger kids. We were all assigned our groups randomly, and it was purely by chance that I ended up with one of the younger groups. But I'm being treated as lower ranking staff by the snobs who were randomly assigned older kids.

I don't get this at all! Why do they think they are better us? But everyone seems to just swallow this BS. My friend told me that she feels this way all the time - she is often the only Black person in an otherwise white group and when this happens, the other people often wont talk to her. Why are people so messed up? It's just plain mean. Is there anything I can do about it? - Fed Up

Dr. B says: There a great number of studies on this phenomena, and they all point to this: Humans are territorial animals. One study randomly gave a large group of people either green or red shirts. That alone was enough to make the two groups not talk to each other and be mean to each other. Another study separated a group randomly into either jailor or prisoner roles. In this study, the meanness got to

the point where they had to stop the study.

What to do about it? First, you need to know, for yourself, that everything is arbitrary and random and not true at all - then treat both sides as if they are equal. You will probably be challenged by the "higher ranking" group and they will be mean to you. But if you don't take it personally, and stick with it, over time, you will be accepted by both sides.

How YOU decide to accept a given reality affects and can change that reality. With humans, pretty much everything is, in truth, really arbitrary.

C says: I've done my own study on this and it comes to different conclusion: the bigger the car, the smaller the penis. Let me rephrase that: the bigger the brag, the smaller the brain.

Although I agree that it is a natural instinct for humans to be territorial, in this case, there's a flaw in that reasoning - there is no territory here to defend. The councilors for the older kids don't own the damn camp. They didn't earn their positions due to skill and competency. They'll be home again at the end of the summer and it is my guess that there's no one back there who will put up with this crap. I don't see them as territorial. I just see them as being a bunch of tools.

Defending territory can be a noble thing; someone who is protecting their territory has a stake in that plot of land. They see it as their own because it is their home, not because some camp director assigned them to herd a bunch of other people's kids around.

People who are genuinely sure of themselves don't swagger around or blow their own horn constantly. They don't have to. They have no need to convince anyone else of their worth or value. They HAVE worth and value. And they know it.

You are giving these douchebags more attention and weight than they deserve. Just ignore them if you don't have any business with them, and treat them with polite indifference if you do. If they suddenly become super-friendly, don't trust it. People who are basically insecure often try to set their "opponents" up to be mocked and made fun of, but they seldom flip because they've had a sudden epiphany and realize what assholes they've been.

Do your job, have fun, and don't take this so seriously. It's just a game. You don't have to play.

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com