

## Politics and Insights

Public interest issues, policy, equality, human rights, social science, analysis

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# How bullying works: projection and scapegoating.

Written by *Kitty S Jones*







([http://www.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-fM9zpOre\\_pw/URIxApZ0gKI/AAAAAAAAAJcI/LiX0yTvde-g/s1600/Cyber%252Bbully%252B2.png&imgrefurl=http://fruitsofsuccesswithhugh.blogspot.com/2013/02/selling-privacy-social-media-and.html&h=360&w=480&tbnid=BN2YsLLFPW0SxM:&zoom=1&docid=mmZfcac1znOtUM&ei=FlnAVMqbHeeE7gbd9oHgBw&tbm=isch&ved=0CF0QMMyhVMFU4ZA](http://www.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-fM9zpOre_pw/URIxApZ0gKI/AAAAAAAAAJcI/LiX0yTvde-g/s1600/Cyber%252Bbully%252B2.png&imgrefurl=http://fruitsofsuccesswithhugh.blogspot.com/2013/02/selling-privacy-social-media-and.html&h=360&w=480&tbnid=BN2YsLLFPW0SxM:&zoom=1&docid=mmZfcac1znOtUM&ei=FlnAVMqbHeeE7gbd9oHgBw&tbm=isch&ved=0CF0QMMyhVMFU4ZA))

Very few people, when put to the test, have the integrity and moral courage to stand up against bullying, harassment, abuse, threats and corruption. The targets of adult bullying are selected often because they DO have the moral courage to challenge; many people will pass by on the other side.

A target of adult bullying is most often chosen because of their *strength*, not their *weakness*. Research shows ([http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/why\\_me.htm](http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/why_me.htm)) that targets of bullying tend to have highly developed empathy, and sensitivity for others, a high degree of perceptiveness, high moral values, a well-developed integrity, a strong sense of fair play and reasonableness, a low propensity to violence, a reluctance to pursue grievance (One%20of the bully's tactics will often be to isolate you from

fellow workers by encouraging gossip about you, by allowing fellow employees to bully you, as well. ), disciplinary or legal action, a strong forgiving streak and a mature understanding of the need to resolve conflict with dialogue. Often, targets of bullying are independent, self-reliant and “different” in some way (<http://www.workplacebullying.org/individuals/problem/who-gets-targeted/>). Weak people often disingenuously confuse these hallmarks of character with weakness.

Bullies aim to inflict psychological injury more often than physical injury. Their main aim is to control, discredit, isolate and eliminate their target. ([http://bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm#definition\\_of\\_bullying](http://bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm#definition_of_bullying))

The word “victim” also allows disingenuous people to tap into and stimulate other people’s misconceptions and prejudices (<http://www.gradientlair.com/post/60872221917/melissa-harris-perry-just-world-fallacy-quote>) of victimhood which include the inference (<http://www.gradientlair.com/post/60872221917/melissa-harris-perry-just-world-fallacy-quote>) that the person was somehow complicit in the abuse. (See just-world fallacy and victim-blame narrative (<http://psychology.about.com/od/jindex/f/just-world-phenomenon.htm>)). So I use the word “target”, which is also accurate because bullying involves the intentional singling out of a person for abuse.

Bullies, who have no integrity, are vindictive, aggressive, demanding, and regularly violate others’ boundaries; displaying aggression does not respect peoples’ rights, and a bully’s “requests” come with a negative consequence if the course of action demanded by the bully is declined. A bully’s bad behaviour is **entirely** his or her responsibility, they intend to cause their targets harm, to undermine them and damage them socially, emotionally, psychologically and sometimes, physically. And they often do.

Bullies typically isolate and dehumanise their targets in order to disempower them ([http://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Isolation\\_A\\_Bully\\_s\\_Most\\_Harmful\\_Weapon.html](http://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Isolation_A_Bully_s_Most_Harmful_Weapon.html)). It’s a key tactic of control used by all abusers, it can be particularly injuring, emotionally.

The major triggers for bullying come from the bully’s own sense of inadequacy, according to research ([http://bullyonline.org/workbully/serial\\_introduction.htm](http://bullyonline.org/workbully/serial_introduction.htm)). Feeling envious and threatened by others with competence, integrity and popularity, (<http://www.bearessentialnews.com/archives/2013/Apr13/BullyBreakers-Apr13.php>) the bully will project onto them their own inadequacy and incompetence, and often the bully will use their own behaviours and thoughts, attributing them to their target, to rally support for their “cause”. The inadequacy or envy of a bully is often translated into negative language used intentionally to completely diminish the target’s positive qualities, socially.

Using unwarranted criticism and threats, the bully tries to control their target and subjugate them, without a thought for that persons’ contributions, reputation, well-being, health or self confidence. Sooner or later this person – the bully’s target – realises that they are not only being “managed” but bullied, and they will start to show signs of resistance to that. Often, anything said in the target’s self-defence will be distorted and used by the bully, too. Gaslighting involves attempts to either negate or redefine a target’s experiences, and abusers often use this method.

The bully often fears exposure of his/her own incompetence (<http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/ppd.htm>) and inadequacy, and takes steps to disable the the target, typically by isolating them and/or destroying their credibility and reputation among peers and decision-makers, putting them out of the picture in the workplace through dismissal, forced resignation or even early retirement. Once the target has gone, within about two weeks, the bully’s focus turns to someone else and the cycle starts again.

Some people enjoy the sense of power and control that bullying others gives them.



Online bullies aim to isolate the target, destroy their credibility and force them out of established communities and groups.

When faced with a bully, your **only** responsibility is to protect yourself from the emotional, social and/or physical harm that the bully intends to cause you.

I've noticed an increase in online bullying, which some of my friends are experiencing, too. That is what prompted this article. It's a myth that only vulnerable and weak people are targeted by bullies. Most often it is strong people – articulate and decent people who think independently, who have conviction in their beliefs, who are intelligent, cogent and coherent and strong-minded – that are targeted, as they are most often perceived as a threat because their qualities tend to inadvertently highlight the inadequacies of bullies.

Vulnerable people and bystanders are, however, often manipulated and sucked into the bullies' strategies. Bullies are more likely to stop if their audience shows disapproval, but most bystanders (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/cutting-edge-leadership/201101/why-workplace-bullies-thrive-the-bystander-effect>) are reluctant to do so, studies show (<http://www.eyesonbullying.org/bystander.html>), for a variety of reasons. Bullies rely on bystander apathy (<http://psychology.jrank.org/pages/101/Bystander-Effect.html>) and this often leads to the target feeling a further sense of isolation.



Much of the bullying I have witnessed recently has been entirely political, with articulate and conscientious activists being targeted for very personal attacks, discrediting, smear campaigns and trolling. I see that those who are particularly adept at debate and providing well-evidenced, well-reasoned responses, posts and comments tend to get the attention of bullies and trolls, who are most often supporters of either right-wing or occasionally, minor and "alternative" left wing political parties that frequently employ negative campaigning and lies to try to gain credibility.





Bullying is a form of scapegoating and projection (<https://psychopathy101.wordpress.com/2009/07/04/projection/>). We know that scapegoating is a hostile socio-psychological discrediting operation in which people move blame and responsibility away from themselves and towards a target person or group. It is also a practice where angry feelings and inappropriate accusation are placed on others. Quite understandably, the target feels persecuted and receives misplaced vilification, blame and criticism; and the victim is likely to suffer rejection from those who the perpetrator seeks to influence and again, an increasing feeling of isolation. We live in a society where bullying has become increasingly acceptable, and certainly, as form of doing politics.

A major contributing factor to this increase in bullying is the collective behaviours of the current government, which has perpetuated, permitted and endorsed prejudices against marginalised social groups, such as disabled and unemployed people, with a complicit media amplifying these prejudices. Their policies embed a punitive approach towards the poorest social groups. This in turn means that those administering the policies, such as staff at the Department for work and pensions and job centres, for example, are also bound by punitive, authoritarian behaviours directed at a targeted group.

As authority figures and role models, their behaviour establishes a framework of acceptability. Parliamentary debates are conducted with a clear basis of one-upmanship and aggression rather than being founded on rational exchange. Indeed, the prime minister sneers at rationality and does not engage in a democratic dialogue, instead he employs the tactics of a bully: denial, scapegoating, vilification, attempts at discrediting, smearing and character assassinations. This in turn gives wider society permission and approval to do the same.

Scapegoating has a wide range of focus: from “approved” enemies of very large groups of people down to the scapegoating of individuals by other individuals. The scapegoater’s target always experiences a terrible sense of being personally *edited and re-written*, with the inadequacies of the bully inserted into public accounts of their character, isolation, ostracism, exclusion and sometimes, expulsion and elimination. The sense of isolation is often heightened by other people’s reluctance to become involved in challenging bullies, usually because of a bystander’s own discomfort and fear of reprisal.

Bullies don’t like to have their lies exposed. That’s not to say that all supporters of those minority parties

are bullies: they're not. On a personal level, despite the fact that most of my political criticism in debate and on my site has been directed at the Conservatives (evident on this site, for example, which is actually identified as a Human Rights site (<http://com.wordpress.kittysjones.qirina.com/>)) most of the bullying I have personally encountered this past twelve months has been from a small group of Green Party members, curiously.

This is possibly because the Green Party regard the Labour Party as their "enemy" in elections – in that they compete for supporters with similar values – rather than the Conservatives, and therefore spend a lot of time vilifying Labour. This has fuelled some grassroots Green supporters in attacks on key Labour supporters, particularly the ones who are adept at challenging lies and point out the Green Party's negative campaigning and electioneering strategies.

I'm an anarchist, but have decided to vote Labour, because the alternative – 5 more years of such a destructive and authoritarian Conservative government – is untenable. People are dying because of Tory policies. I can't in good conscience turn away from that and pretend it isn't happening. I've been quite vocal about this on social media and on this site.

I was also targeted by "Tommy Robinson" (real name is Stephen Christopher Yaxley-Lennon), the ex-leader of far-right English Defence League (EDL). He used my account details on Twitter and Facebook, designed and shared a malicious meme, claiming I had made comments that I hadn't, and invited people to "let her know what you think of her". I had hundreds of messages that included death and rape threats from the far-right, and one threat from Combat 18. I involved the police, but Robinson claimed several people had access to his account, and denied any knowledge of the meme. It was shared in and among groups like the National Front, Britain First, some UKIP groups, and even a couple of Tory councillors reposted it.

My sin? He was harassing me on Twitter, wouldn't engage in reasonable debate, he was quite abusive and I told him to do one and leave me be. He didn't like that.

Bullying becomes obvious when you scrutinise who is actually doing the attacking on a personal level. Debate and political criticism are one thing: personal commentaries, character assassinations, attacks, threats, abuse and harassment are bullying. I have seen that quite often, bullying tactics include manipulating people's perceptions to portray themselves as the injured party (<https://newworkplace.wordpress.com/2013/05/02/when-workplace-bullies-claim-victim-status-avoiding-the-judo-flip/>), with their target being the villain (<http://www.whybulliesbully.com/page/81/FAQ.htm>). However, again, scrutiny of who is actually instigating and doing the personal attacking will reveal the real bully or bullies.

Bullies show a complete lack of remorse (<http://www.risk-within-reason.com/2013/01/18/just-a-joke-and-things-bullies-say/>) for the damage they are intending to inflict on their target. Victim-blame narratives ([http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why\\_do\\_we\\_blame\\_victims](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_do_we_blame_victims)) aside, it's never wise to ignore bullying; bullies use provocation to elicit a response (<http://www.bullyonline.org/schoolbully/myths.htm>) from their target and if you ignore it the provocation will simply get worse (<http://solutionsforbullying.blogspot.co.uk/2011/04/ignoring-bully-never-works.html>). That is the nature of bullying. Ignoring a bully actually gives him/her permission to continue bullying. Ignoring a bully sends the signal that it is acceptable to bully that person.

Furthermore, ignoring a bully tells bystanders that is acceptable to bully that person and inevitably, this becomes embedded in our culture. It's worth looking at Gordon Allport's Ladder of Prejudice (<http://http://www.mentalhealthforum.net/forum/thread94031.html>) to see exactly how that process

works. If a bully's audience or peers show disapproval and don't become complicit, the bully will be discouraged from continuing their abuse. The biggest fear a bully has is that of being exposed for what they really are.

Bullies project their inadequacies ([http://bullyonline.org/workbully/serial\\_attitudes.htm#immunity](http://bullyonline.org/workbully/serial_attitudes.htm#immunity)), shortcomings, behaviours, anger and spite on to other people to distract and divert attention away from themselves and their own inadequacies and to avoid facing up to the same scrutiny. The vehicle for projection is blame, criticism and allegation ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological\\_projection](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_projection)). Once a target realises this, they can take comfort from the fact that every time they are blamed, criticised or subjected to another specious allegation by the bully, the bully is implicitly admitting or revealing something about themselves. Not that it is much of a comfort.

A target's awareness of projection can help them translate whatever they are being accused of into an awareness of the bully's own misdemeanours. Again, the bully may be identified by the fact that they are the ones loudly criticising and attempting to discredit the target, rather than there being any evidence of the converse.

Vilifying the target ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victim\\_blaming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victim_blaming)) is the most frequently used as a gaslighting tactic in bullying. This is a powerful means of putting the victim on the defensive while simultaneously masking the aggressive intent of the manipulator, the bully then falsely accuses the victim of being an abuser in response when the victim stands up for or defends themselves or their position.

Nobody's behaviour is perfect, and many balanced, well-intentioned people will at some time unjustifiably or inadvertently upset others. When this is drawn to their attention, they are usually horrified and will do what they can to make amends and ensure it isn't repeated. That's what reasonable and mature people do.

Serial bullies, on the other hand, do not want to know about the negative effects of their behaviour. Denial, retaliation and feigning victimhood are some of the ways that bullies express their antipathy for anyone who is able to describe their behaviour, see through their mask of normality or help others to do the same.

Here are some recognisable bullying traits and tactics, designed to damage, isolate, discredit and eliminate the target:

- bullies are adept at exploiting the trust and needs of individuals, organisations and groups, for personal gain.
- bullies react to criticism with denial, retaliation, feigned victimhood ([http://bullyonline.org/workbully/serial\\_attitudes.htm#feigning\\_victimhood](http://bullyonline.org/workbully/serial_attitudes.htm#feigning_victimhood)).
- the bully grooms bystanders, and the target, to believe the target deserves the treatment they are receiving and attempts to limit contact between others and their target. Often the bully will use communications that exclude the target so that there is no opportunity for them to defend themselves and present their truth.
- the bystanders see only the Dr Jekyll side of the bully, but only the target sees the Mr/Ms Hyde side; Dr Jekyll is sweet, manipulative and charming, Mr/Ms Hyde is evil; Mr/Ms Hyde is the real person, Dr Jekyll is an act.
- bullies exert power and control by a combination of selectively withholding information and spreading lies and disinformation, therefore everyone has a distorted picture – of only what the bully wants them to see.

- the target finds that in any response, everything they say and do is twisted, distorted and misrepresented.
- bullies are adept at manipulating people's perceptions with intent to engender a negative view of the target in the minds of others – this is achieved through undermining and discrediting, including the creation of doubts and suspicions and the sharing of lies.
- bullies use other people to further the aim of discrediting their target, creating a false impression of consensus.
- bullies poison the atmosphere and actively poison people's minds against the target when close to being outwitted and exposed, the bully feigns victimhood and turns the focus on themselves as previously stated – another example of manipulating people through their emotions such as guilt, sympathy, feeling sorry for the bully. Many bystanders are hoodwinked by the bully's ruses for abdicating responsibility and evading accountability, they may say, for example: "that's all in the past", "let's focus on the future", "you need to make a fresh start", and "forgive and forget", "you've got to move on", "sticks and stones" and so on.
- bystanders often feel cognitive dissonance and usually minimise their discomfort by reasoning to avoid any responsibility, it usually goes this way because they themselves don't want to become targets. They may say things like: "just ignore them", "stand up to them", "I've personally never had any problems with him/her", "Oh I never get involved in personal differences" and so on. Even worse, they may imply that you did something wrong to "attract" the bullying.
- the bully encourages and manipulates as many bystanders as possible to lie, act dishonorably and dishonestly, withhold information and spread lies and misinformation, the bully manipulates bystanders to punish the target for alleged infractions, so the bystanders also become instruments of harassment.
- some people gain gratification (a perverse feeling of satisfaction) from seeing others in distress and thus become complicit in the bullying and a few people think that bullying is funny.
- some observers regard behavioural responses that are reasonable and civilised as a sign of weakness rather than maturity. Many seem to lack critical thinking skills and analytical abilities and so cannot see through the facade or the bully's mask of deceit. Even when it is obvious, sometimes. There's very often an element of not wanting to see, too. Other people fear becoming targets themselves, and so "go along to get along." Complicity because of fear of reprisals.
- bullies are extremely vindictive and will do everything in their power to damage and destroy anyone who can see through their mask of deceit. In very rare cases you may receive information from a bystander who wants to help but is afraid to do so publicly for fear of retribution – and fear of becoming the next target.
- apathy and indifference to the distress of others are widespread. The bully relies on this.

*"Bullying is a compulsive need to displace aggression and is achieved by the expression of inadequacy (social, personal, interpersonal, behavioural, professional) by projection of that inadequacy onto others through control and subjugation (criticism, exclusion, isolation etc). Bullying is sustained by abdication of responsibility (denial, counter-accusation, pretence of victimhood) and perpetuated by a climate of fear, ignorance, indifference, silence, denial, disbelief, deception, evasion of accountability, tolerance and reward (eg promotion) for the bully."*

Tim Field, 1999

## **The Law and Cyber-bullying:**

As cyber-bullying is a relatively new phenomenon, the UK courts are still trying to catch up with it and sentence offenders effectively. Though no laws specifically apply to cyber-bullying alone, there are several laws which can be applied in cyber-bullying cases:



- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
- Malicious Communications Act 1988
- Communications Act 2003
- Breach of the Peace (Scotland)
- Defamation Act 2013

In 2012 The Crown Prosecution Service published guidelines on how cyber-bullying cases would be assessed against current laws, which you can find [here](http://www.cps.gov.uk/consultations/social_media_consultation.pdf) ([http://www.cps.gov.uk/consultations/social\\_media\\_consultation.pdf](http://www.cps.gov.uk/consultations/social_media_consultation.pdf)).

On January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 the Defamation Act 2013 came into order, and can be read [here](http://www.ditchthelabel.org/dealing-with-cyberbullying) (<http://www.ditchthelabel.org/dealing-with-cyberbullying> /[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/26:contents:enacted](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/26/contents/enacted)).

### Examples of bullying:

[What a bully might say when held to account](http://bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm#bully_behaviour_when_held_to_account) ([http://bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm#bully\\_behaviour\\_when\\_held\\_to\\_account](http://bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm#bully_behaviour_when_held_to_account))

[One day in the life of a blogger.](https://kittysjones.wordpress.com/2014/12/30/one-day-in-the-life-of-a-blogger/) (<https://kittysjones.wordpress.com/2014/12/30/one-day-in-the-life-of-a-blogger/>)

Someone else's perspective: [A few words about respect](http://voxppoliticalonline.com/2014/12/24/a-few-words-about-respect/) (<http://voxppoliticalonline.com/2014/12/24/a-few-words-about-respect/>) and: [One day in the life of a blogger – kittysjones](http://voxppoliticalonline.com/2014/12/31/one-day-in-the-life-of-a-blogger-kittysjones/) (<http://voxppoliticalonline.com/2014/12/31/one-day-in-the-life-of-a-blogger-kittysjones/>). It's worth reading the comments thread on these articles by Mike Sivier, too.

### Related

Interesting article on the empath, apath (bystander) and sociopath triangle: it's a useful model of analysis for those who have experienced abuse and wondered: why me? – [EMPATHIC PEOPLE ARE NATURAL TARGETS FOR SOCIOPATHS – PROTECT YOURSELF](http://www.addictiontoday.org/addictiontoday/2013/10/empathy-trap-sociopath-triangle.html) (<http://www.addictiontoday.org/addictiontoday/2013/10/empathy-trap-sociopath-triangle.html>)

[psychopathy101: Projection](https://psychopathy101.wordpress.com/2009/07/04/projection/) (<https://psychopathy101.wordpress.com/2009/07/04/projection/>)

– “Beware of individuals spreading rumors about others behind their back, psychopaths are cowards, know that they are telling lies, enjoy hurting others and very afraid of being found out of who they really are, thus everything takes place in the “shadows”/behind the “targets” back. To remember; the “bully” is telling everyone about him/herself (thoughts and actions) what he/she has done, is doing or is about to do.”

[Introduction to the Serial Bully](http://bullyonline.org/workbully/serial_introduction.htm) ([http://bullyonline.org/workbully/serial\\_introduction.htm](http://bullyonline.org/workbully/serial_introduction.htm))– “Perhaps the most easily recognisable Serial Bully traits are:

- Jekyll and Hyde nature – Dr Jekyll is “charming” and “charismatic”; “Hyde” is “evil”;
- Exploits the trust and needs of organisations and individuals, for personal gain;
- Convincing liar – Makes up anything to fit their needs at that moment;
- Damages the health and reputations of organisations and individuals;
- Reacts to criticism with Denial, Retaliation, Feigned Victimhood;
- Blames victims/targets;
- Moves to a new target when the present one burns out.”

What is a Bully (<http://www.lifeafteradultbullying.com/1616/>) – “Projection behaviour and denial are hallmarks of the serial bully. It is believed by some that bullying is present behind all forms of harassment, discrimination, prejudice, abuse, persecution, conflict and violence.

*What bullies fear most is exposure and being called publicly to account for their behaviour so they can go to great lengths to keep their target (victim) quiet from misdirection when it is reported to using threats of disciplinary action, dismissal, gagging clauses and fear.*

*Despite the façade that such people put up, bullies have another side to them. What complicates matters is that the bully may not be aware or acknowledge to themselves they very often suffer from one or more of the following:*

*# Envy# Jealousy# Low self-confidence# Low self-esteem# Feel insecure# Seething with resentment# Bitterness# Hatred# Anger# Inadequacy# And may have a wide range of prejudices as a vehicle for dumping anger onto others.”*

About the impact of abusive language: Sticks and stones: abusive labels, self concept – when words become weapons (<https://kittysjones.wordpress.com/2014/09/20/sticks-and-stones-abusive-labels-self-concept-when-words-become-weapons/>)

### **Further information:**

Bullying can cause injury to health and make people ill, with some or all of the symptoms below. Many, if not all of these symptoms are consequences of the **high levels of stress and anxiety** that bullying creates:

- shattered self-confidence, low self-worth, low self-esteem
- reactive depression, lethargy, hopelessness, anger, futility and more
- hypersensitivity, fragility, isolation, withdrawal
- obsession, not being able to stop thinking about the experience in all its detail
- hypervigilance (feels like but is not paranoia), being constantly on edge
- uncharacteristic irritability and angry outbursts
- tearfulness, bursting into tears regularly and over trivial things
- sweating, trembling, shaking, palpitations, panic attacks
- bad or intermittently-functioning memory, forgetfulness, especially with trivial day-to-day things
- poor concentration, can't focus on anything for long
- skin problems such as eczema, psoriasis, athlete's foot, ulcers, shingles, urticaria if prone to them
- irritable bowel syndrome
- flashbacks and replays, obsessiveness, can't get the bullying out of your mind
- tiredness, exhaustion, constant fatigue sleeplessness, nightmares, waking early, waking up more tired than when you went to bed
- headaches and migraines
- frequent illness such as viral infections especially flu and glandular fever, colds, coughs, chest, ear, nose and throat infections (stress may play havoc with the immune system.)
- suicidal thoughts, self-harm.

For the symptoms of injury to health caused by prolonged stress (such as that caused by bullying, harassment, abuse etc) click [here](http://bullyonline.org/stress/health.htm) (<http://bullyonline.org/stress/health.htm>). For details of the trauma that can result, click [here](http://bullyonline.org/stress/ptsd.htm) (<http://bullyonline.org/stress/ptsd.htm>).





(<https://kittysjones.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/changeworld2013.jpg>)

## Related

*Conservatives, cruelty and the collective unconscious* (<https://kittysjones.wordpress.com/2015/04/22/conservatives-cruelty-and-the-collective-unconscious/>).

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January 22, 2015September 28, 2019 · Posted in Psychology · Tagged #bullying, gaslighting, Projection, scapegoating, stigma, target ·

# 66 thoughts on “How bullying works: projection and scapegoating.”

1.  **misspoppy2013** says:  
January 22, 2015 at 5:12 pm

A timely piece, thanks, I have seen evidence of the tactics you speak of with accelerating frequency on social media in the run up to the GE. Surprisingly the perpetrators are often shocked when their behaviour is challenged, they do not recognise what they do is bullying and are reluctant to examine how their behaviour is destructive despite the fact that their very intention is to destroy and their attacks do appear to focus on Labour supporters. Let's hope they are not crying over spilt milk if the Tories aren't thoroughly and completely ejected in May, the biggest bullies in UK political history.



[Reply](#)

1.



**kittysjones** says:

January 22, 2015 at 5:24 pm

I've just added a paragraph about how the Tories, with a complicit media, have established a framework of permission and acceptability with their own behaviours as role models and the open scapegoating of social groups, contributing to the growth in bullying behaviours everywhere. People don't see the connections with bullying, Allport's Ladder of Prejudice and the unfolding of social events leading up to the Holocaust, but there are clear parallels. It happens in stages, the bullies' ultimate aim is to destroy the target and eliminate them.

Yes, the Labour Party are currently being attacked by the Tories, Lib Dems and all of the fringe and minor parties, who prefer electioneering and grandstanding to real politics. Real politics would entail opposing and fighting the Coalition, not Labour and Labour supporters.

[Reply](#)

1.



**Anonymous** says:

January 23, 2015 at 5:09 pm

I know from experience just how a bully's mind works, I suffer bullying constantly from my elderly neighbours, they use their family as a weapon against me because I have health problems.

It all boils down to the main culprit being unhappy married to a drunk "projection" I have the right weakness so I get the stick,,,,, even heard her husband shouting "you're a trouble causer" one night at her!

Hopefully our day will come and we'll move away and she'll get someone next door that'll be healthy, she'll have no one else to blame but herself.

2.



**prayerwarriorpsychicnot** says:

January 22, 2015 at 5:29 pm

Reblogged this on [Citizens, not serfs](#).

[Reply](#)

1.



**kittysjones** says:

January 24, 2015 at 3:29 pm

Many thanks for sharing this

[Reply](#)

1.



**prayerwarriorpsychicnot** says:

January 24, 2015 at 3:40 pm

A pleasure. Excellent informative article.

3.



**prayerwarriorpsychicnot** says:  
January 22, 2015 at 5:32 pm

Superb article and totally agree with your reply to miss poppy. Bullying is being normalised.

[Reply](#)

1.



**kittysjones** says:  
January 22, 2015 at 5:41 pm

Thank you. It's based on my own experiences too, hoping that in recognising the processes involved, people will be able to defend themselves and change the culture that has developed. I want other people to feel they are not alone, too.

[Reply](#)

1.



**prayerwarriorpsychicnot** says:  
January 22, 2015 at 5:54 pm

Let's hope so. The cultural changes going on are horrible.

4.



**curi56** says:  
January 22, 2015 at 5:38 pm

Reblogged this on [HumansinShadow.wordpress.com](http://HumansinShadow.wordpress.com).

[Reply](#)

1.

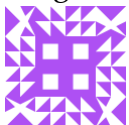


**kittysjones** says:  
January 24, 2015 at 3:28 pm

Thank you

[Reply](#)

5. Pingback: [How bullying works: projection and scapegoating. | spiritandanimal.wordpress.com](http://Howbullyingworks:projectionandscapegoating.1spiritandanimal.wordpress.com)



**Florence** says:  
January 22, 2015 at 6:08 pm

May I add my voice to the others in thanking you for this thoughtful piece. I was subjected to horrendous bullying in the workplace, that started with a Board member which effectively gave permission for all others to join in. The worst were the HR department. A particularly low point was when on compulsory "back to work" sessions with an OT (of their choosing) she tried to say that I had attracted the bullying, citing a previous incident – told in confidence – that I had been the victim

of random stranger violence! She was told what I thought of that pathetic attempt to bully me too. Unless you have been subject to this type of bullying, it can seem somehow trivial, but as your piece shows, it is destructive and becoming more prevalent outside the workplace too. With the most bullying of governments in place. It has poisoned the entire political debate and our social relations in the wider society, and empowered many to start behaving like East Germans under the Stasi. We can all work as individuals to try and make our society more decent.

[Reply](#)

1.



**kittysjones** says:

January 22, 2015 at 6:45 pm

Thank you Florence. I agree that it isn't trivial, sometimes people try and minimise and trivialise a persons' distress to reduce their own discomfort in witnessing the bullying. That way the responsibility to intervene is diffused. Bullying is so very destructive emotionally and psychologically, and it's impact should never be underestimated by others, but it so often is, unfortunately.

Yes from political debate to social relationships to wider society, this government have poisoned us. It's our responsibility to try and address this and shape our society into one that is civilised, equal and positive.

[Reply](#)

2.



**Julie Gardiner** says:

January 25, 2015 at 11:57 am

I totally understand your feelings towards an HR Dept that behaves in this way. As a former HR Manager this attitude does not help to value the "human resources" of an organisation, it also does not help the view people have of an effective HR Department and it is the totally wrong attitude to have. I don't know this person but would like to apologise for her treatment of you. When you are in this situation you need support not criticism. She should have helped you to stand up to the Board member and explained the consequences of this continuing behaviour towards you. I hope you are able to recognise that it was her fault not yours and gives you a chance to accept her wrongful treatment of you and move on in a positive way. I think this excellent article which explains why she behaved towards you in the way that she did. Although I don't condone her attitude and am not making excuses for her but I do believe she was probably taking advantage of the power her position gave her due to her own feelings of inadequacy. Good luck for the future.

[Reply](#)

7.



**sdbast** says:

January 22, 2015 at 7:05 pm

Reblogged this on [sdbast](#).

[Reply](#)

1.

**kittysjones** says:





January 24, 2015 at 3:28 pm

Thanks Sb x

8.



**jaynel62** says:

January 23, 2015 at 7:02 am

[Reply](#)

Great post Sue, as a fellow target for Bullying I recognise your description well; your reference to the manner in which the DWP behave towards the huge number of disadvantaged and poorer people in society is an interesting angle to even further exploration, the empowerment of even a percentage of these individuals has the power to annihilate the ConDems in May. Keep on writing lady, in Unity xx

1.



**kittysjones** says:

January 23, 2015 at 1:56 pm

[Reply](#)

Thanks Jayne. I've always made connections between micro and macro-level social attitudes and behaviours. Once we permit prejudice – as the Coalition has – it becomes acceptable, and provides a frame of behaviour and attitudes that others also draw on. It's embedded in policies, it's embedded in attitudes and it becomes embedded in our language, too. It becomes all pervasive.

In unity xx

9.



**Chris** says:

January 23, 2015 at 7:26 am

[Reply](#)

Since when in the history of politics have not politicians not been the ideal job to dump the bully, as this is the best place for them as they are not team players, and are best when lone workers. As described by someone only a political activist, a MP need balls of brass.

Bullies are indeed born not made. They think differently to us, having a sadistic enjoyment of inflicting on strong people the most emotional / psychological pain. Let the MPs fight each year.

You have enough as a political activist.

The Germans are the ones who call bullying by its right definition of Psychological Terrorisation.

It is the occasional dripping tap that drives you crazed from trying to make sense of what is senseless torture.

This year of all general elections, the fewest people will come out to vote of any general election in

UK history.

The pundits predict a hung parliament with no single party having enough votes to form a majority government, so back to coalition again.

A bullies victim may lose the ability to ever work again. A fatal thing to happen now as pension and welfare 'reform' has wiped out food or fuel money for all ages. So as an activist don't let it overload you.

But the bullying this year between politicians and political activists is going to be heavy and will get worse as the days tick closer to the general election.

Someone in this blog had a long article calling The Greens a Neo-Nazi Fascist party. That made me laugh like a drain, from relatives abroad who lived under the occupation of the Gestapo.

The Greens I am sure replied in kind.

You are going to have to realize that politics is not for the faint hearted and have to let the words of the politically motivated wash over you like water off a duck's back.

You are walking through live-fire assault course, in emotional torment if you do not.

I don't care.

I have discovered the flat rate pension now offers me no state pension for life, after a lifetime in work paying National Insurance. So politics is irrelevant to me, and millions like me retiring next year onwards.

The state pension is the sole money for food and fuel for many, with no works or private pension.

Find out why in my Why this is important below my petition:

<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/state-pension-at-60-now>

Reply

1.



**kittysjones** says:

January 23, 2015 at 1:41 pm

"Someone in this blog had a long article calling The Greens a Neo-Nazi Fascist party. That made me laugh like a drain, from relatives abroad who lived under the occupation of the Gestapo."

There is no blog on this site that "calls" the Green Party "Neo-Nazis." There IS a critical article which says that the Green Party are not socialists or 'left'. It seemingly hit a nerve. Instead of responding to the issues raised in the article, Green supporters continued to attack me personally. No democratic debate, no genuine politics, just bullying and behaviour associated with far-right politics. See here – <https://kittysjones.wordpress.com/2014/12/30/one-day-in-the-life-of-a-blogger/>

The technique you use, claiming someone did something that they didn't, is called "gaslighting". It's another tactic in the repertoire of the bully and abuser. It's also a tactic bystanders sometimes use to make themselves feel more comfortable – see just-world fallacy and victim-blame

narratives.

As for the Greens “replying in kind”, can you show me where I threatened anyone to warrant the threats and abuse from the Green Party members? Bearing in mind that abuse has been happening for the past 2 years and preceded the critical article?

Oh, I think I’ll decide what I’m “going to have to realise.” 😊

10.



**dainagregory** says:

January 25, 2015 at 10:55 am

[Reply](#)

Reblogged this on [dainagregory](#).

1.



**kittysjones** says:

January 25, 2015 at 11:04 am

[Reply](#)

Thanks Daina x

11. Pingback: [How bullying works: projection and scapegoating.](#) | [dainagregory](#)

12.



**Nutter Butter (@PTNutterButter)** says:

January 26, 2015 at 1:03 pm

[Reply](#)

I agree thoroughly with this well written and researched article with the exception of linking political bullying to PTSD. I have PTSD, from complex traumas and I think you’ve misunderstood the types of trauma that can lead to this rather extreme anxiety disorder. Plenty of people have serious traumas that lead to PTSD like symptoms from other mental health conditions. Also many people who have the extreme traumas that can lead to PTSD, often still don’t have this disorder. This isn’t about invalidating trauma – as these people equally also need help to overcome their experiences. Rather it is about misdiagnosing a disorder which is a lifelong affliction, changing at a genetic level their ability to cope with stress.

The “Criterion A: stressor” has to include real, witnessed or serious personal threats death, life threatening injury or sexual violence. However, the professional interpretation of this criterion is actually far more limited than most realise otherwise nearly everyone could have PTSD. In reality it’s actually a fairly rare condition for which other disorders (conversion disorders and acute stress disorder for example) are often mistaken. In the case of bullying -it’s not so much about stress that triggers pre-existing mental health conditions, even when causing suicide or governmental manslaughter. It’s about being violently threatened, hunted and targeted relentlessly and deliberately, with the intent to cause maximum distress. I know that this can be seen to prove your point exactly, but what it actually means is quite different. I almost hope that you are not able to understand my point, as I wouldn’t wish that on anyone.

[Reply](#)





**coreluminous** says:  
July 31, 2016 at 12:03 am

I have outlined a variation.

PTSS – Post Traumatic Stress Symptoms

and

PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

The first relates to symptoms of distress, which most people go through after a trauma, and I feel these are natural symptoms that are a call for help, for healing, for resolution...

“Given all you have lived through, and the kind of Society you live in (or were born into) it’s no wonder you feel the way you do.”

The latter relates to behaviours like bullying, abuse of all kinds, grooming, manipulation etc, especially when they are institutionalised, as in war by States, Prison regimes, economics of poverty etc.. because those behaviours are a pathology, a genuine disorder.

Does this make sense to you?

1.



**Kitty S Jones** says:  
August 7, 2016 at 7:25 pm

Reply

It makes perfect sense.

13.



**cannabisforautism** says:  
January 30, 2015 at 7:13 pm

Reblogged this on Cannabis For Autism and commented:  
Cannabis for Autism is having February as Anti-cyberbullying month.

1.



**kittysjones** says:  
January 30, 2015 at 7:18 pm

Reply

Thank you for sharing this

1.



**cannabisforautism** says:  
January 30, 2015 at 7:19 pm

Reply

Thank you too! We've just had a mad two months fighting cyberbullying in the Autism Community.

It'll be months before we can fully collate and slickly blog all the results but hopefully it will be worth it.

2.



**cannabisforautism** says:  
February 19, 2015 at 10:18 pm

Now all we need is for a few people to surf the #AutismGate tag on FB and like a few posts to show the defeated bullies that the kids from fame are all turning up to stand behind the (previously alone) victim.

3.



**kittysjones** says:  
February 20, 2015 at 1:27 pm

Yes, let's go do it 😊

4.



**cannabisforautism** says:  
February 21, 2015 at 5:26 pm

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/AutismGate/338921242978339> 😊

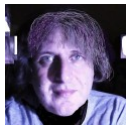
14.



**mcshedna** says:  
January 31, 2015 at 7:15 pm

I've just escaped a boyfriend who showed all signs of this (and he claimed to be aspie but don't know if that was true) – he turned all his friends against me so I've no one online now – and had just escaped a stalker who'd joined every group I'd joined in real life so had to leave all them – and am totally isolated again.

15.



**donniedarko13** says:  
May 10, 2015 at 2:15 pm

Reply

What an insightful article 10 from 10

The police threads on the net are the worst, two trolls always work together, and what they do is invalidate the grief and suffering that people had experienced at the hands of the thugs hired by the state, that can find no expression within the crooked system, and that is what the boards represent to them, validation of the serious wrong they have suffered. This just fuels my hatred of trolls even more....because they are often dealing with traumatized vulnerable people....how many have been pushed over the line and taken their lives as a result...none, thousands, who knows, they certainly don't care? And I am often singled out as an unstable radical....and all I do is site shoot to kill laws that exist here, and question how these laws help protect the public? That war criminals write the

laws that idiots in blue don't have the sense to question, and how they are being used as moronic wage slaves to act on behalf of the rich who pay them a pittance to risk their necks, so they don't have to risk their own.....and it's bye bye fuckers.

I will repost, thanks again

[Reply](#)

16. Pingback: [Stigmatising unemployment: the government has redefined it as a psychological disorder](#)

17. [Politics and Insights - kittysjones](#)



**[stewilko](#)** says:

[June 11, 2015 at 11:04 am](#)

Reblogged this on [stewilko's Blog](#) and commented:  
Excellent article

[Reply](#)

1.



**[kittysjones](#)** says:

[June 11, 2015 at 2:00 pm](#)

Thanks

[Reply](#)

18. Pingback: [Tory Majority Day 35: CBT Necessary To Aid Claimants With Mental Health Issues? You're](#)

19. [Having A Giraffe.. | Disabled In Tory Britain](#)



**[megsy13](#)** says:

[August 3, 2015 at 6:45 am](#)

Thanks so much for your blog and for making sense of Bullying, Projection & Scapegoating. I have experienced Bullying in the workplace (not politics) twice now. Have been in my current job for around 10 months and feel like I'm being scapegoated. I am a strong, independent woman and am being targetted by a female colleague 20 years my junior. Your blog has helped me make sense of the dynamic which is playing out in our team and has validated my experience and confirmed that I am "not going mad". Thanks again.

[Reply](#)

1.



**[kittysjones](#)** says:

[August 9, 2015 at 9:29 pm](#)

I'm glad it's helped you make sense of being bullied, it's why I wrote it – to make sense of my own situation. I've also been bullied at work, and like you, I'm a strong independent woman and have come to realise that it is precisely those qualities that make us much more likely to be targeted. No, you are not going "mad", though bullies like to try and make you doubt yourself, and preferably, not be yourself. But you are not the one with the problem. x

[Reply](#)

20. Pingback: It's truly priceless that Iain Duncan Smith can accuse anyone of misrepresenting statistics with a straight face. | Politics and Insights
21. Pingback: Cameron ridiculed for hypocrisy and quoting Corbyn out of context | Politics and Insights



**tigr2** says:

December 4, 2015 at 1:34 pm

Reblogged this on [piccallilihill](#).

23.



**coreluminous** says:

July 30, 2016 at 11:57 pm

[Reply](#)

Superb. Truly useful. Ought to be a standard text in our secondary schools, even if it discomfits many teachers and heads, and Education ministers....

I am deeply grateful to your work on this and other matters, Kitty.

Thank you!

I know from experience that naming the behaviour, identifying it and outlining the adverse outcomes is critical to confronting and challenging the bully – the bully might not get it, yet if we do this we get it, and we make ourselves more robust, as individuals and as communities.

I have been sharing this and citing it in my own work...

Bless!

24.



**mknight309** says:

August 2, 2016 at 9:59 am

[Reply](#)

Here we are, 18 months on. I was searching for something to help me decide about the extraordinary behaviour of a few, loud ( and the leader, an ex-Green) and offensive members of my political party in my local area. He always claims he is being bullied, he is aggressive and only resorts to insults (we are fascists, McCarthyists, the equivalent to various right wing terrorists and so on). However, no matter what you reply with, no matter how logical, he just continues and turns what's been said around and uses it against you (or whoever he is going for. Most often women rather than men). Sometimes he 'likes' statements against a continuation of bad behaviour etc and you just know he doesn't mean it but is playing a game. He has a few followers and protectors from his political wing who occasionally come out to explain how he is misunderstood. I am glad to be able to be sure that he is a bully from your well-thought out essay here, rather than uncertain about his status. So thanks!

25.

**Cheryl Fox** says:

October 29, 2016 at 1:43 pm

[Reply](#)





Thank you, this explains a lot! it also confirms my strength and why my whole family do what they do and why I went low contact years ago. It especially hurts when you're one of 6 children and they all criticise you and your Mum joins in because she's triangulating what you say to her. I was starting to think they thought I was weak because of how I'm treated but now thankfully know I'm strong. Although I've been feeling weak and bruised because of the length of time they've been doing it. I've just recently gone no contact due their behaviour and have felt free of their judgment and criticism of me so no contact is good for me. But 18 years of low contact to no contact has helped...but it hurts nonetheless! Thankfully I have an army of friends and a few very good friends who are all there for me when I need them and have just recently shown their worth. We need more of this information being spread about to help those that suffer as it hurts like hell and to try to inform those that want to improve their awful behaviours.

[Reply](#)

1.



**Kitty S Jones** says:  
[October 29, 2016 at 3:09 pm](#)

That you've coped so well with this painful and very distressing situation shows your absolute strength. It's not uncommon, either, this sort of family scapegoating, where one person is held responsible for everything – every negative event and feeling. It is often the strongest person too – the one that people feel on a deeper level will “contain” it and bear the burdens of and for others.

We need more people like you telling us all as it is, and more friends like your friends, who sound pretty wonderful too. x

[Reply](#)

26. Pingback: [How bullying works: projection and scapegoating.](#) | [ShevaBurton. Cross of Change Blog](#)

27. Pingback: [Beyond shame, violence, and terror](#) | [Engage Minnesota](#)



**Linda Turner** says:  
[June 1, 2017 at 11:29 am](#)

Reblogged this on [Parental Alienation](#).

29.



**daveyone1** says:  
[June 1, 2017 at 4:21 pm](#)

[Reply](#)

Reblogged this on [World4Justice : NOW! Lobby Forum](#).

30.

**Mama Bear** says:  
[June 18, 2017 at 3:00 pm](#)

[Reply](#)



Reblogged this on [Things I have learned...](#) and commented:

This one line says it all. "We live in a society where bullying has become increasingly acceptable, and certainly, as form of doing politics." Excellent article.

31.



**mike hamblett** says:  
[June 21, 2017 at 8:49 am](#)

[Reply](#)

Interesting – I have received a fair amount of bullying for being introvert, independent and refusing to jump on band-wagons.

I guess you wrote this with Corbyn in mind; his earlier reluctance to engage with MSM did provoke even the so-called intelligentsia to go for him. His refusal to conform was eventually an asset.

I would counter your view on Lab/Green interaction. Labour have always been lacking in environmental knowledge and interest, hence the paranoia of Greens and the hostility.

1.



**Kitty S Jones** says:  
[June 21, 2017 at 9:18 am](#)

[Reply](#)

Labour came up with the first ever Climate Change Act, for the record. It was Miliband's, when he was environmental Secretary

2.



**Kitty S Jones** says:  
[June 21, 2017 at 9:18 am](#)

[Reply](#)

I wrote it before Corbyn became leader, because I could see the way the wind is blowing back then

32.



**mike hamblett** says:  
[June 21, 2017 at 8:51 am](#)

[Reply](#)

Previous comment should read '....paranoia towards Greens' – can you amend?

33.



**Julie** says:  
[July 14, 2017 at 11:23 am](#)

[Reply](#)

I'm so glad I found your article I have been through 12 months of hell at the hands of a work bully, I did the typical thing of trying to ignore her comments and back stabbing ways until it reached the stage I wanted to leave, I reported the facts to my line manager ( A person I had considered a friend) who was sympathetic and assured me she knew what this woman was like and that she had full support for me and persuaded me to stay. However the bullying didn't stop it got worse and the support from my 'friend' was basically negligible, it all finally ended when the bully made such a ridiculous accusation that the bosses got involved and the woman realising she had finally gone too far was forced to resign. This is a very recent thing so I am still reeling a little. Your article has made me feel alot better about things and I have learnt a few lessons, I won't be bullied like that again.

[Reply](#)

34.



**Craig Downer** says:

November 29, 2017 at 10:20 pm

This is an outstanding expose re that moral illness and maliciousness in society known as bullying. The bullies really need to read this! As well as the bullied.

[Reply](#)

35. Pingback: [The anti-social public relations of the PR industry – Politics and Insights](#)

36. Pingback: [Emotional Bullying and Being a 'Winner' in Life | Engage Minnesota](#)



**Marilyn J Melville** says:

March 4, 2018 at 3:04 pm

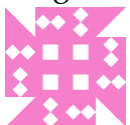
This was an eye opener for me. I am an independent female and I choose to live alone, I have been subjected to bullying in the workplace, by boyfriends and most recently by new neighbours and their family. I have also been the victim of stalking which lasted a year. I have always perceived that I was target, because maybe I came across as weak, leading me to question and despise myself, or because I was a woman living alone, and they thought "what can she do", or because I was just plain vile and intolerable. After reading this I realise it is the absolute opposite, it is because, I am independent, in control of my life, have opinions outside of the box, am a free thinker, do not need to rely on a man or a 'mate' am at ease with my own company, own my own house, I realise these things make me 'different' a strong woman, not vile...I often get asked if it was with money from a divorce settlement – absolutely No....I have even been accused of only affording my house because I have children that do not live me, that I supposedly claim for and social security pay my bills, neither is true. ....I am so grateful for the insights I have gleaned from this article. I suddenly feel empowered and determined to 'shine' even brighter and really let my bullying neighbours see I am not phased by them.

[Reply](#)

38. Pingback: [Antisemitism and the growth of prejudice and oppression in the UK – Politics and Insights](#)

39. Pingback: [Om te baklei – Stand United](#)

40. Pingback: [Opvolg: Ons bevindings – The Green Family](#)



**Emma** says:

September 15, 2020 at 10:32 am

Well said.Let's make a documentary.

Now I understand why it happend to me and why people it down 0laying it by telling me I'm a strong woman.....

Just these comments are a sad reflection of people's state of mind.

A societal disease , devastating.

[Reply](#)

[Blog at WordPress.com.](#)