

Redwood Nation  
Earth  First!

# Stopping Infighting



## **Infighting** by Greg Bourget

Infighting is defined in this essay as fighting inside a group. Fighting is often defined as conflict involving anger or violence. So infighting can be defined as using angry or violent discourse internally. Another form of infighting is fighting members of one's own group, or other groups or their members with allied interests. Fighting in this context suggests escalating beyond respectful conflict to include noncooperation, disruption, or misinformation.

For the purposes of this essay, violence is defined more broadly than just physical violence. Dr Martin Luther King defined nonviolence well by writing: "a characteristic of nonviolence is that it does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win their friendship and understanding." Earth First defined nonviolence for our campaign by requiring all campaign participants to be "open, honest, and friendly to all persons we meet."

Fighting should not be confused with conflict. Conflict, or disagreement, can be friendly and lead to either understanding, or respectfully agreeing to disagree. Groups or individuals who have a conflict can still cooperate, or at least coordinate, without causing trouble for each other.

Infighting can be overt, such as face-to-face name calling, media attacks, etc. However most infighting is covert and the most likely form of attack is a smear campaign.

## **Smear Campaigns** from Wikipedia

A smear campaign, smear tactic, or simply - a smear is a metaphor for activity that can harm an individual or group's reputation by conflation with a stigmatized group. Sometimes smear is used more generally to

include any reputation-damaging activity, including such colloquialisms as mudslinging.

Common targets are public officials, politicians, and political candidates. Smear campaigns are often based on information gleaned from opposition research conducted by paid political consultants. To a lesser degree, the term can refer to an attempt to damage a private person's reputation; for example, during a trial, the opposing counsel may attempt to cast doubt on the reliability of a witness.

The concept of the smear campaign is related to the concepts of propaganda, media bias, yellow journalism, and other falsehood-related terms such as libel and pejoration. In extreme cases, smear campaigns may lead to widespread persecution, such as in the case of the Dolchstoßlegende before WWII.

A smear campaign is an intentional, premeditated effort to undermine an individual's or group's reputation, credibility, and character. "Mud slinging", like negative campaigning, most often targets government officials, politicians, political candidates, and other public figures. However, private persons or groups may also become targets of smear campaigns perpetrated in schools, companies, institutions, families, and other social groups.

Smear tactics differ from normal discourse or debate in that they do not bear upon the issues or arguments in question. A smear is a simple attempt to malign a group or an individual and to attempt to undermine their credibility.

Smears often consist of ad hominem attacks in the form of unverifiable rumors and are often distortions, half-truths, or even outright lies. Smear campaigns are propagated by gossip spreading. Even when the facts behind a smear are shown to lack proper foundation, the tactic is

often effective because the target's reputation is tarnished before the truth is known.

Smears are also effective in diverting attention away from the matter in question and onto the individual or group. The target of the smear is typically forced to defend his reputation rather than focus on the previous issue.

Smear tactics are considered by many to be a low, disingenuous form of discourse; they are nevertheless very common.

From:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smear\\_campaign](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smear_campaign)

### **How an Incorporating Organization Stops Infighting by Greg Bourget**

American workplaces stop infighting through the disciplinary process up to and including termination of employment or dismissal of a volunteer. Most workplaces have policies that do not allow harassment and a grievance procedure so workers can protect their rights. Political nonprofits enforce such policies with a centralized leadership - required due to fiduciary and employment-related responsibilities. Ultimately the Executive Director must provide consequences for infighters requiring them to either end the behavior, or to remove infighters from the workplace.

### **How a Political Movement Stops Infighting by Greg Bourget**

Infighting in a political context is using abuse as a political tactic. For a vivid description of political infighting see Jo Freeman's article *Trashing: The Dark Side of Sisterhood*:

<http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/trashing.htm>

Unlike in incorporated organizations, grassroots political movements often lack a centralized authority who can take

administrative action. When a person in a political movement becomes aware that another participant is infighting, action is required. Often the most simple and effective action to talk to the person infighting. Educating a person what infighting is, how destructive it is to all participants, and how to stop it is often enough. Reasonable people may infight due to a lack of training in alternative modes of conflict.

If asking a person infighting to stop doing so is either problematic, or ignored, a third person may help. Often a participant the infighting person trusts can be called upon to intervene and request an end to destructive infighting.

When a grassroots political movement involves a person who will not stop infighting, the group(s) involved can isolate the infighter. Isolation entails all participants ending participation with the infighter(s). In such a scenario the infighters can continue their bad behavior but the rest of the movement continues on without them. Such a consequence often removes the entire audience required for the behavior.

Non-engagement with the infighter does not need to include non-action. Examples of action against infighter(s) could include obtaining a restraining order, notifying ISPs of webpages used for infighting that violate rules or laws, a slander lawsuit, or objectively informing other participants why the movement is choosing to disengage. Such information should stay confidential and internal.

Non-engagement does not include rehashing infighting incidents, sharing emotional responses to past abuse from the infighter, attempting to humiliate the infighter, or attempting to damage the reputation of the infighter.

Sometimes the abuse is targeted on an individual. Ideally the group protects individuals from abuse resulting from infighting. Sometimes a person must protect themselves. This essay does not intend to conflate those who infight with sociopaths; victims of actual sociopaths have a lot to offer in regards to understanding abusers, and how to personally defend oneself against a smear campaign.

## **The Smear Campaign of the Abuser** By Psychopathsgroup, a Yahoo Group for abuse survivors, pages 3-6

“Criticizing others is a dangerous thing, not so much because you may make mistakes about them, but because you may be revealing the truth about yourself.”

- Judge Harold Medina

“Abusers increasingly use a tactic I call “preemptive strike,” where he accuses the victim of doing all the things that he has done.” - R. Lundy Bancroft, author of *Understanding The Batterer In Custody* and *Visitation Disputes, from Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*

To avoid exposure of his abusive behavior, the abuser begins a smear campaign against his victim. Directed at her closest friends, coworkers, even children and family, he accuses the victim of being the abuser. Here's a typical scenario: Your abuser has been emotionally/physically cruel to you. He's cheated on you, lied, and usually much, much more. So, you break up or end the relationship only to find that he has gone around to your friends/family telling them that you are the one who has been cruel to him, lied/cheated. This is the favorite publicity stunt of the abuser.

An Abuser's typical lie: “I love her so much, but now she's going around telling people I hit her, lied to her and cheated on her and she told me we're finished. I'm just devastated. I need someone to talk to who can help me get over this.”

Your abuser has already anticipated what you will do. He beat you to the punch. You soon find others believe his convincing tales of being the victim. He works hard to present himself as “Mr. Perfect”. Therefore, people believe him. They ally themselves against you. This was his plan all along. Brace yourself. Emotionally anticipate this common response from the mentally disordered. Hang on tight, it's going to be a very cruel and bumpy ride.

Do you feel you want to warn others or defend yourself? Your abuser has anticipated this. If you do this, you will likely only be validating what the abuser has already said about you. Without knowledge of the strong psychological defense mechanisms of the personality disordered could put you in danger or at the least, being discredited by an abuser who has already anticipated your actions.

An abuser will quickly 'devalue and discard' his target claiming he is the victim of your cruelty. His victims are now put in a defensive role by his lies and character assassination. By involving others he is enlarging his circle of those who give him attention. Any attention you may have given him is now replaced and multiplied by other people he manages to fool. A win/win scenario for a narcissist.

He will increase his attempts to provoke his victim into some reaction - the more emotional the better to make her look crazy and him sane. For heaven sakes, don't fuel this behaviour by taking his bait. Do NOT take his bait. It is his

trap and setup. Provoking you into a reaction is his goal.

Abusers abuse in private. They fear exposure of their abuse. So they need to discredit anyone who can point the finger at them. You may be left with little more than police, lawyers, accountants, and your protective zone of No Contact.

An abuser's preferred tactic is the Smear Campaign. They spread lies, character assassination, malicious gossip, backstabbing with factless innuendo and cruel insinuation. Smearing the reputation of someone else (often using projection accusing them of doing what the abuser has done) is a major indicator of personality disorders.

Sadly, some ignorant people believe the abuser's lies that you are the abusive person and without proof of any kind, will, like the flying monkeys in the Wizard of OZ, defend the abuser by harassing his target. The abuser has orchestrated this knowing these people may commit illegal acts while the abuser himself is protected. They believe him and see him as the injured party, pitiful and in need of help. The abuser is now thoroughly enjoying all the resultant chaos and attention he has created.

Dr. Vaknin explains: "Even the victim's relatives, friends, and colleagues are amenable to the considerable charm, persuasiveness, and manipulateness of the abuser and to his impressive thespian skills. The abuser offers a plausible rendition of the events and interprets them to his favor. Others rarely have a chance to witness an abusive exchange first hand and at close quarters. In contrast, the victims are often on the verge of a nervous breakdown: harassed, unkempt, irritable, impatient, abrasive, and hysterical.

Confronted with this contrast between a polished, self-controlled, and suave abuser and his harried casualties it is easy to reach the conclusion that the real victim is the abuser, or that both parties abuse each other equally. The prey's acts of self-defense, assertiveness, or insistence on her rights are interpreted as aggression, liability, or a mental health problem."

Narcissism by Proxy, FAQ#42 By: Dr. Sam Vaknin <http://samvak.tripod.com/faq42.html>

The abuser certainly does not care about the hurt and emotional devastation he creates. He will never know this pain. He will only be able to pull it off temporarily because other people don't understand this first-strike tactic of the personality disordered. They have no personal experience with it and are unable to recognize it. Previous victims may be able to help you - they may have encountered his smear campaign.

## **Defense Against Smear Campaigns**

If anyone tries to talk to you about the abuser, hold up your hand (like a stop-sign) and say something like "I don't want to hear anything about him. He's lying" Say no more. If it continues: "My lawyer recommends I warn people they may have to testify about where they heard information in case this turns into a libel/ slander lawsuit." Watch them scatter quickly when hearing this. This can cause people to stop cold and have another look at what they've been told. It's not necessary to defend ourselves at all.

Can you find it funny? While very difficult, we hope so. When people tell you what s/he's saying, try the good old-fashioned knee-slapping belly laugh at what s/he says. Friends, when confronted with your laughter reaction will find it funny too. Very effective. You say nothing. You just laugh. It works. You will

need, of course, to conduct yourself perfectly to discredit the abuser's claims.

The abuser is now at his summit, and about to topple. This abuser will not engage in a fair fight, and it will ultimately backfire on him. Slowly his newly-recruited allies become aware of the truth. Suspecting his real motives and questioning his actions, they slowly remove themselves and walk away. The ones that hang on are the most dim-witted. Their bad judgement in supporting him is easily transparent. They support the abuser for their own Mephistophelian goals.

"Our credulity is greatest concerning the things we know least about. And since we know least about ourselves, we are ready to believe all that is said about us. Hence the mysterious power of both flattery and calumny." - Eric Hoffer

"Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny."  
- Shakespeare, Hamlet

"Joseph was a man of God. He was purchased by Potiphar to serve in Potiphar's house. However, Potiphar's wife made advances to Joseph. When Joseph rejected her she went to her husband claiming Joseph had tried to rape her. Joseph landed up in jail."  
- The Bible, Genesis 39

## **Smear Campaigns on Message Boards:**

Have you ever seen how abusive members, banned from a message board, will begin a smear campaign against that message board and its managers? It happens quite often. The first thing they do is try to involve other members.

The best defense is to completely remove yourself from the abuser and those he is able to fool. Unfortunately, this often includes our

closest friends and family. He will work hard to keep these groups of people separated. Naive, easily-deceived people, may be forever lost to us. Conducting ourselves with grace and dignity will get us through this. Do not engage in retaliatory mud-slinging that can be used against us, but do let these proxies know they can and will be subpoenaed in a potential defamation of character action to provide evidence of the origin of the lies he spreads.

## **So what, if anything, can we do?**

Thinking about trying to warn others? Some verbal response suggestions...

"I was told he would start a smear campaign of lies against me - he apparently did this with his previous X and the one before that too."

On a funnier note, some 'rebuttal' comments we've heard from our members: "That's the same thing he said about you!" "I'm not surprised he said that. He said the same thing about his x-wife." Suggested Response: (chuckling with a grinning wink) "Do you believe him?" "It's lies, it is a smear campaign."

Or, simply, how about... "I'm sorry he feels that way. I prefer not to talk about him at all actually." Then change the subject.

## **you are asked say:**

"I should have listened to the people who tried to warn me to stay away from him. They told me they wouldn't go near him with a ten-foot pole."

"I've been told he starts a smear campaign about anybody who dares to say no to him." "It was brought to my attention that he's going around spreading lies about me."

"I'm glad I was told to look up information on pathological liars/ perhaps you should look up some of that information too."

"He told me himself that he would smear my good name and said he can always find people stupid enough to believe him."

"Watch out for your gold teeth around him. I've been told he likes to makes a beeline right for the wallet."

"Friends recommended I warn you about him. At least I can tell them I tried."

"I've been advised to warn people, even where I work, that he may try to smear my good name."

"I've been told he was able to fool quite a few people."

"Apparently he's been smearing my good name with a lot of people, but nobody is buying his story."

### **People calling?**

"I need to interrupt you here, but I am going to have to stop any discussion with you about \_\_\_\_ and anything s/he says or does, as I have been advised that s/he is using this tactic to discredit me and involving other people to try to have contact with me. So, I need to stop this discussion and, unfortunately, should it continue, I've been advised to just hang up on anyone who does this." Stick to your guns on this. Keep it near your phone and if anybody tries to elaborate, repeat it word for word with no further explanation. Repeat once, then hang up. Your credibility will shine through.

Do you call him Psycho? You may be getting involved in a reverse smear campaign. Don't do that.

Be careful, the mentally disordered, facing exposure of his abuse, can be dangerous.

We have used the male gender. Your abuser may be female.

From: <http://health.dir.groups.yahoo.com/group/Psychopathsgroup/message/20671>

## **Solidarity Instead of Infighting**

by Greg Bourget

The most common form of infighting is a smear campaign. The best form of defense against infighting is movement-wide, or individual disengagement from the infighter. Disengagement allows the tactics of an abuser to inevitably backfire. The individual, group, or movement disengages while avoiding the use of either inadvertent or intentional infighting in response.

Solidarity can replace infighting. Dr Martin Luther King wrote about this: "The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness." In Earth First we found the best way to deal with infighters, besides disengagement, was an alliance among everyone who does not infight.

In Earth First we excluded infighters but included any participating group that did not infight. We did not always agree on each issue, except we all agreed to never infight or to upset each other by paying attention to the ongoing antics of infighters. As soon as we diverted our attention away from infighting incidents, the drama stopped in our day-to-day work. We were all relieved. Although the infighting continued, it had little power without the rest of us involved. Once we ignored it together, eventually infighting withered away.