

Science AMA Series: Hi, I'm Rochelle Poole*, and I recently published a Working Life article in Science Magazine that detailed my experience of bullying during scientific fieldwork. Ask me anything!

Rochelle_{poole}¹*andr/ScienceAMAs*¹

¹Affiliation not available

April 17, 2023

Abstract

Hi, I'm Rochelle Poole*, and I recently published a Working Life article in Science Magazine that detailed my experience of bullying during scientific fieldwork. Ask me anything! Last year, I was working toward a PhD with a focus on predator-prey ecology. What seemed like a dream opportunity, however, quickly devolved into a nightmare as my adviser abruptly shifted field resources, denigrated me to others (in a foreign language he thought I didn't speak), and, when I confronted him told me "I have the power to do this. This is how science works; you are just naïve." My entire story is this week's Working Life article in Science Magazine, and it details how my experience with this professor and the lack of support systems at my institute prompted me to leave research and change my focus to science communication instead. I remind myself that leaving research doesn't mean that I "lost." I would have lost if I had accepted bullying as a rite in academe and sacrificed my mental health and quality of life. I know that taking on this bully was right for me, and I hope that speaking about my experience will encourage others to stand up for themselves, too. I feel it's the only way to make academic life more egalitarian. AAAS is facilitating this AMA as an important aspect in the conversation around making science more accessible and welcoming for everyone. Have you experienced bullying or harassment? Are you an administrator or a professor who has worked on anti-bullying policies for your institution? I look forward to answering your questions and continuing this important conversation. *Rochelle Poole is a pseudonym for a scientist who started out on a research track, and now works on science communications. I'll be back at noon EST (9 am PST, 6 pm UTC) to answer your questions, ask me anything!

[REDDIT](#)

Science AMA Series: Hi, I'm Rochelle Poole*, and I recently published a Working Life article in Science Magazine that detailed my experience of bullying during scientific fieldwork. Ask me anything!

ROCHELLE_POOLE [R/SCIENCE](#)

Hi, I'm Rochelle Poole*, and I recently published a Working Life article in Science Magazine that detailed my experience of bullying during scientific fieldwork. Ask me anything!

Last year, I was working toward a PhD with a focus on predator-prey ecology. What seemed like a dream opportunity, however, quickly devolved into a nightmare as my adviser abruptly shifted field resources, denigrated me to others (in a foreign language he thought I didn't speak), and, when I confronted him told me "I have the power to do this. This is how science works; you are just naïve."

My entire story is this week's [Working Life article](#) in Science Magazine, and it details how my experience with this professor and the lack of support systems at my institute prompted me to leave research and change my focus to science communication instead. I remind myself that leaving research doesn't mean that I "lost." I would have lost if I had accepted bullying as a rite in academe and sacrificed my mental health and quality of life. I know that taking on this bully was right for me, and I hope that speaking about my experience will encourage others to stand up for themselves, too. I feel it's the only way to make academic life more egalitarian. [AAAS](#) is facilitating this AMA as an important aspect in the conversation around making science more accessible and welcoming for everyone.

Have you experienced bullying or harassment? Are you an administrator or a professor who has worked on anti-bullying policies for your institution? I look forward to answering your questions and continuing this important conversation.

*Rochelle Poole is a pseudonym for a scientist who started out on a research track, and now works on science communications.

I'll be back at noon EST (9 am PST, 6 pm UTC) to answer your questions, ask me anything!

[READ REVIEWS](#)

[WRITE A REVIEW](#)

CORRESPONDENCE:

DATE RECEIVED:
October 29, 2016

DOI:
10.15200/winn.147765.59051

ARCHIVED:
October 28, 2016

CITATION:
Rochelle_Poole , r/Science ,
Science AMA Series: Hi, I'm
Rochelle Poole*, and I recently
published a Working Life article
in Science Magazine that
detailed my experience of

Hi, I work in the private science industry and have experienced bullying myself. To a certain extent I understand I am a prime candidate for bullying (a shy, quiet, introvert) but that said I feel the particular type of bullying you get in the science world has a unique aspect of being intellectual in origin. When I was in school, bullying I experienced was of the classical type, ie the bigger, cooler (but perhaps insecure) kids bullying the smaller, dorky kids. I found this bullying to be unconscious, almost instinctive, on the part of the bullies (their behavior was more or less expected and I don't think they ever really understood what they were doing and why they were doing it, but only that they were driven to bully).

However as an adult I have noted that bullying in the science industry tends to be a more conscious and active action on the part of the perpetrators. I feel this is because more so than other professions, being a scientist is an identity and professionally threatening the integrity of an established scientist's identity (by being more capable than them, more qualified than them, better liked than them or, god forbid, smarter than them) is very unsettling for them and they will do almost anything to oppose it. I find this form of bullying far more reprehensible than any bullying I experienced as a child (I can more

bullying during scientific fieldwork. Ask me anything!,
The Winnower
3:e147765.59051 , 2016 , DOI:
[10.15200/winn.147765.59051](https://doi.org/10.15200/winn.147765.59051)

© et al. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and redistribution in any medium, provided that the original author and source are credited.



or less forgive the callous stupidity of a child or teenager) as these professional adults should simply know better. Their entire identities are formed around their intellectual abilities and yet they behave like ill mannered children.

Has this been your experience too? Or did you think your bullies were just overgrown children that did not really understand what they were doing either?

[_InTheDesert](#)

I want to first make something clear. You should not describe yourself as a prime candidate for bullying, do not give them permission.

I think you raise some great points and agree that the adult bullying is so much more intolerable. I think a big problem does come from the fact that bullying behaviour doesn't get "checked" if you're from a certain background and the "boys will be boys" attitude takes over. If you consider the average age and cultural make up of most deans/heads... then you can understand how that type of mentality may be selected for.

Did you report your advisor's behavior to any school administrators, such as the provost or a dean? From your piece, it seems like your advisor had a pattern of bullying behavior that people in your department knew about but mostly ignored, which is a huge disservice to incoming students.

Yale Egyptology [recently had a scandal involving bullying and mistreatment of students come to light](#) It was common knowledge in the field, but nothing was done for years until someone finally blew the whistle.

[rl4brains](#)

The answer is yes but it is also important to understand the timing of the issues:

The worst of it happened in the field and then we returned home during Christmas break, so the offices were closed and most heads & deans were on holiday. I expected that we would wait until after the holidays (once we both had time to return to normal) and then he and I would be able to speak about our divergent research interests and find a solution. However, he spent his holiday setting up a disciplinary meeting for the morning of the day we all returned. So, when I did report his behaviours in the field (which I had kept a log of), it looked reactionary. However, my concerns were heard by the funding body, which ended up removing him from the project... and the story goes on.

I have seen this all the time in my wildlife field work, and nobody seems to take it seriously. I have made HR complaints to the University and had nothing done in return. Why do you think adult bullying is not taken as seriously as childhood bullying from an outsider's perspective and what is the proper course of action in dealing with a bully?

[AFlightOfStairs](#)

Childhood bullying wasn't taken seriously until recently because it, too, wasn't spoken about. Now, schools have systems in place to address child bullies where there were none before. Adult bullying needs to follow the same path, especially in academe.

I remember this blog post on [How Academia resembles a Drug Gang](#). There is a very wide gap between people at different levels of pyramids. Such gaps everywhere in work places but is very amplified.

Primarily, I feel that this is due to two reasons - lack of checks and balances which leads to a core-periphery structure as detailed in the drug gang example. This further leads in widening of the gap as power is too concentrated and people do not want to give it up.

The question is - How could one make the power structures distributed?

[denzil_correa](#)

I think this would have to be institution-based decisions and - like you say - checks & balances in place. Bullying seems to be one of these behaviours that's OK as long as you're a well published scientist or multi-grant-recipient. That armour needs to be eliminated.

A few years ago, [a survey revealed that my own field \(anthropology\) had alarmingly high rates of sexual harassment and assault](#). Other sexual assault accusations have been taken seriously in more recent years such as [this one](#) and [this one](#). Sadly, it isn't really a new issue and organizations like the American Anthropological Association have tried to address it for a long time. In 1998, they held a roundtable at the biggest anthro meeting in the country to get together department chairs and talk about how they should set policies, deal with accusations, and resolve these kinds of issues. [Only a few chairs came \(even though this conference is always packed to the brim\) and they were all women who were dealing with cases](#). This seems to be a common pattern - we become aware there is a serious issue, it gets some media attention, organizational bodies host poorly attended events to "fix" it, and then everything goes back to normal.

Anthro, of course, is not the only field dealing with sexual harassment issues for graduate students and faculty. There are lots of recent examples such as [this one](#), [this one](#) and [this one](#). I've had friends in microbiology, chemistry, and sociology talk about their experiences being sexually harassed by professors and colleagues. And about how hard it is to get anyone to give a damn.

I realize sexual harassment is an extreme compared to bullying you experienced, but I think it highlights the larger systemic problems. In a normal job situation, this would get them fired in an instant. Yet, they tend to go unreported for years in part because graduate students and junior faculty feel like they are not empowered to speak up. And if sexual harassment and assault can't get a tenured professor immediately reported, investigated, and fired what will?

In other words, there seem to be larger systemic problems with how academia is set up to deal with these types of problems. Attempts from external bodies and even individual universities don't seem to be making much progress. How can we change the norm of accepting behaviors that would absolutely be unacceptable in non-academic situations?

[firedrops](#)

I think you hit it on the head, students need more leverage. I was "lucky" in that this happened to me a few months into the project. Had it happened to me 2-3 years into my Ph.D., what could I have done then? Walk away from years of research? And how would I ever explain that black mark on my CV and that one supervisor you can't ask for a letter of recommendation? They hold all of the power, there are no checks or balances after tenure (or even tenure-track), and more needs to be done at the student level to address it.

Has the professor who harassed you responded to any of this publicity? Has he tried to contact you?

[joeltrane](#)

Not yet.

I have had my arm twisted in an effort to get me to "collaborate" with researchers with questionable ethics, which felt more to me like giving up intellectual property because someone else didn't have the means or motivation to develop the line of research themselves.

I stood my ground, and am very happy I did. I worked hard for the project and discoveries I made, I didn't need my lab director at the time selling me out for a little more clout in the field.

The difficulty is that there are very limited financial resources, especially in fields like wildlife biology, and PIs become cutthroat and narcissistic to stay alive. My PhD mentor taught me probably the most important lesson of my life: my success and esteem should be measured in the success of those I've trained. I've dedicated my career not to making great discoveries (that's fun too), instead training the next generation of scientists who will make discoveries I cannot imagine at this point.

[Alwaysunnyinarizona](#)

I 100% agree with your mentor! Bravo!

As a woman planning to start graduate studies in the sciences next fall, I'd like to know how best to avoid something like this happening to me. Obviously this kind of thing is not the norm - the professor I'm currently researching under and others I've talked with have been nothing but helpful - but as seen with your case it still does happen.

- Were there any warning signs that looking back might have suggested the advisor would do something like this?
- Your article specified the bullying started on a research expedition, was this the first real interaction between you and the advisor, or had you been able to work together successfully previously, or was this the straw that broke the camel's back?
- When you initially looked at joining the research group, did you talk to the other grad students in the group? Did they indicate anything suspect? Were there any other women in the group?

[Esmyra](#)

Yes, I too have had excellent supervisors in the past and they became great pillars of support throughout this process. Cherish those people. I'm afraid you cannot avoid this, it happens to nearly every woman I know, but it's important to be able to recognise what's going on, recognise their behaviour has nothing to do with you personally or your abilities, and do what is best - for - you. To address your points:

1) No, there were no outright signs. 2) No, we had worked together in the field twice before my Ph.D. started. We got on very well during those trips. 3) Yes I had met many of his students who - after his behaviour came out - shared their stories of what he had done to them with me. Yes there were other women in the group.

My wife was bullied and frequently berated to the point of tears by her male supervisor during her Phd in Cell Biology. He also did this to many of her female colleagues. The University refused to take complaints seriously, to my mind due to the large amount of funding that the supervisor was bringing in. My question, which I hope does not sound too selfish, relates to the partners of those who are bullied in this way. She really went through hell and it was all I could do not to find the guy and physically attack him. The stress he gave her passed on to me in a very real way. She took counselling sessions and I suffered anxiety attacks. We supported each other and it is all behind us now, but as far

as I know the guy is still working in his same position. I just don't know what I'd do if I saw him again. I guess I am asking what you think of partners getting involved in this kind of situation.

[Georgeisthecoolest](#)

Thank you for sharing your side of this. My husband went through the same emotions and I, too, had to encourage him to avoid my former supervisor (although that was difficult for several reasons). The main thing to remember is that bullies want a reaction. If you don't give it to them, then they feel powerless. If you do react, then you are showing how much of an effect they are having, and they can seek satisfaction from that.

When you're in a position of seniority, what will you do to stop this sort of thing from happening around you?

[pm-me-ur-window-view](#)

Thank you for saying "when" and not "if."

I mentioned above how there are systems to address bullying in primary schools that weren't there before. I would want to implement systems that address the bullying to the supervisor and support systems for the students that encourage them to come forward. Anyone who reads my story can see that I bore the brunt of the consequences (i.e. having to move across the country, having to re-research and recreate a Ph.D. project, etc.), and that should not have been so.

Hello Rochelle. Thanks for taking time and doing this AMA.

- Did you at any point think about researching and collecting evidence of his abuse of other students and consider calling into question the mental state of the Ph.D. adviser to other department heads and HR, forcing them to confront this repetitive behavior?
- Even though you were given a new adviser and a location change away from the aggressor, did your situation not improve to the point where you felt you need to abandon your studies? Where you harassed even after your new appointment? Did the previous adviser continue to harass you from a distance?

[SpearOfBitterMercy](#)

1) No, at that time all of my energy was spent trying to defend myself and get far away. Also, other heads and professors there made it pretty clear that his behaviour was well known (and had even been a point of discussion before he was put in a tenure-track position). 2) My new adviser was a collaborator with my old one. They had regular phone conversation about me and my new project (again, in Dutch, thinking I couldn't understand). He would call my new supervisor nearly every week. In our first conversation, my new supervisor made it clear that he and my old supervisor got on very well and he didn't want to know what had happened. He went on to tell me that I shouldn't hold whatever happened against my old adviser... and I literally burst into tears.

I work as an administrator at a Big 12 University. My sister works as a curator at an Ivy League school. My aunt was a program director at a State University. My parents worked as professors at a Big 10 school. We all have stories of bullying, verbal harassment, sexual harassment, ageism, racism, and even assault. We have also worked in the private sector at other times where this is not tolerated. I tell people who ask about academic employment, "great benefits aren't always worth the stress." There are so many incidents I know about that would result in terminations, lawsuits or even jail time at a

business in the private sector. Yet in academia it's all ignored or swept under the rug to prevent "tarnishing the school's image." I personally believe that this is because so many academics have never experienced life outside of a school setting. As a result they conduct their business like they are still in high school.

And I'm just staff. The poor researchers and grad students have it much worse. I'm often shocked at the treatment they must bear.

Academia disgusts me as a place of employment, and I look forward to an opportunity to leave it behind.

[TrustZero](#)

Thank you for sharing this. I struggle with your last point, though. If all the "good ones" leave academia, who is left? Is it worth the fight?

1) What has been the response you have received at large on sharing your story? I can't imagine how difficult (and heartbreaking) it must have been.

2) How did you make the transition from academia to science communication? It's a transition I'm thinking about making myself.

[ellasherlock](#)

1) 99% positive. It is actually very heartwarming.

2) It's an active transition. I am looking into more training.

Thanks for doing this AMA!

Recently on Reddit there was an article posted that discussed how academia fosters an environment of hypercompetition and subsequently lowers the quality of science being done. Do you think that the environment of academia (the publish or perish attitude, etc) plays into this bullying phenomenon you discussed? If so, do you have any recommendations on how I, a future PhD, and others, might combat this?

Thanks!

[Austion66](#)

Ah you're talking about "Blame bad incentives for bad science." This is an excellent read and pretty accurately described my former supervisors attitude of get as many papers out as possible regardless of how valid or even trustworthy they are. Again, this story couldn't fit the many layers of this whole situation without being 6 pages long, but it was clear to me before his bullying that we had two very different mindsets when it came to what a good scientist was. I encourage you to be vocal about what you think a good scientist is. If people know where you stand then they will filter themselves out.

How did you transition from research into science communications? Did you require additional training?

[utsgeek](#)

I am actively transitioning and yes I am looking at more training, but I love school so I don't mind :)

Hi Rochelle,

I was in a toxic lab during my PhD work as well. My advisor was dating an undergrad in our lab, paying her when others weren't paid, being inappropriate with her in the workplace, harassing other women, and retaliating against me for speaking up about it.

I nearly lost my chance at completing my PhD when he was finally fired and my department didn't feel the need to help me find another lab to finish my work (I was ABD).

I commiserate with your experience and commend you for speaking out. How do you think universities can head this kind of problem off? Ombuds and grad school departments (and unions) are helpful to a certain extent, but problems like ours are not extreme rarities. Students should be better supported and protected, but I'm not sure how because it seems that protection sometimes comes in conflict with the interests of the university (bad PR, legal issues with tenured professors, reluctance to incorporate more policy).

[thrombolytic](#)

I am so sorry. That sounds absolutely despicable.

Again, I think a key to this is leverage. There need to be more student-focused grants or student-run evals that carry weight. The first university or institute that makes this a priority will reap the benefits of all of us students flocking to them.

Your experience is more common than I think we would like to admit, and I'm glad you are bringing attention to this issue. What do you think can be done from a systemic standpoint to change/improve how graduate students are treated?

[p1percub](#)

Graduate students need leverage - currently they have none. I was lucky that in my situation the independent funding body sided with me and he lost the grant and me to another supervisor, but had I not had that leverage...

So perhaps there should be more large grants given to promising students.

I really appreciate this. I'm in communication studies, currently working in my phd, but in my masters program my advisor blocked me from graduating. After a year of that, I had to take back channels to switch advisors and graduate a year and a half late.

Have you considered how all of this might impact you in the academy later? I by no means think it should affect you, but I know that it can. For example, I was denied a job because the length of time it took me to receive my masters made the employer doubt my work ethic.

[goolalalash](#)

Of course. I think there are two possible outcomes, one good and one bad:

1) Bad - having a break in your career risks your relevance, your publication record, and now I will carry the burden of having to explain why I resigned from a Ph.D. on my CV, forever. 2) Good - when I explain why I left my Ph.D. to a future institute or university, I will be able to immediately judge if that lab has the same problem or if they find what happened intolerable.

What sort of meaningful consequences could be given to a tenured PI who has been proven guilty of abuse?

[sock2014](#)

2-3 year long suspensions from gaining/advertising for/or attracting new Ph.D. students.

Thank you so much for speaking up and for putting this together. While I had not previously considered my situation to be "bullying" per se, I dealt with a PhD advisor who pushed me out of his lab after my mother died suddenly and he didn't understand why I needed time before I could be productive again. In bullying fashion, he came up with several other issues that were never a problem until I needed space. I left his lab, found a new one, passed my quals, but never really got my wheels turning again amid a period of deep depression so I took a leave of absence. I am interested in science communication as well.

My question to you is regarding the transition you've made and any advice you can supply. I've had a hard time finding opportunities with a terminal masters; I'm either over qualified for entry level museum work (e.g. Science Interpreter), or under qualified without the PhD. Could you please speak about your experiences and the types of opportunities you see for masters in science ?

[Biolobri14](#)

Find another job to pay the bills that gives you enough time to work on scientific communication after work. Then the opportunities can open up. I am still in the transition phase and am looking to complete more training but have an additional job to keep the lights on.

Why do you suppose your advisor took you on in the first place? Things went south in a pretty big hurry.

[Robert_Cannelin](#)

To get the grant attached to me. I know he did not expect them to take my side and I know he expected that I would just quit and he could keep the funding.

Here I am, hoping for the "You understand Valerian?" question by that advisor.

I'm very sorry you had to face that ordeal. People I've worked with in academia never pulled that kind of crap on me. But then again, I carry a Y chromosome. I hope you can swing it around into a positive outcome.

You mention he spoke Dutch. Should you have worked at Ghent University, there are people you can talk to about this sort of malicious behaviour. Even afterwards. We do not tolerate this.

[itkovian](#)

Dank u wel!

Hello Rochelle, did you ever think about how this bullying scenario plays out in children? I was bullied as a kid for many years, and from my personal experience, running away was not the answer- facing

up to the bully was the better option, despite immediate repercussions. And 15 years later I am thankful I took that option because it allowed me the strength to face up to the many bullying situations that present themselves in life and not shy away from them, it is the main thing I attribute to my success thus far. Note: I am not trying to say you are a coward, but I just want to know if you have considered that this might have been a good option for you or anyone but all that was missing was a little push, a little bit of self-encouragement. Thanks!

[neon_chomsky](#)

Unfortunately, there are many layers to this story that could not fit and parts had to be scrapped to make sure the main thrust of my experience was conveyed. I did face up to him. I recorded the audio of all of our meetings. I printed every email. I went and spoke in person to heads of departments that I had only just met a few weeks before. I came into the office every day and sat a few doors down from him working on my project while this situation was being addressed. He had to walk past me every time he wanted a cup of coffee and I did not change my behaviours or patterns to make him more comfortable.

It was incredibly draining but I am glad I did it (and then I wrote this).

I am terribly sorry that you had to deal with that kind of abuse. I wish you success in your future endeavors.

Because so many questions here are focused on the abuse you faced, I want to take my questions in a different direction. You say you left academia and research for science communication. As a current researcher, I get so much pressure to stay in academia. It often seems like there is no other option, even though I see research as a means to an end as opposed to an end in and of itself. So:

- What do you do now?
- How did you adapt from research and academia to a non-research field?
- Are you happy with your decision, or do you intend on trying to find a research program that meets your interests?

Thanks!

[elduderino260](#)

Thank you for your questions!

1) I am teaching and working on scientific communication, teaching pays, scicomm doesn't pay much (yet). 2) SciComm is very research focused, so the same skills apply! 3) I am happy with my decision, but a side of me does want to return to research mostly to correct these wrongs... or study them. :)

Do you think the gaps between degrees (BSc - MSc - PhD) are too big and a smaller milestones should be introduced?

[ohduckyou](#)

Actually, I think gaps between degrees could be larger and I think we should encourage students to move on and work in different labs/institutions rather than stay in the same one. Many of the Ph.D. students in this lab had been there since their undergrad internships, so they had a lot to lose if they walked away or rocked the boat of that institute. I luckily had lots of additional field experience from many institutes that I could (and am) relying on for letters of recommendation and endorsements.

Thank you for posting this article. I have encountered bullying in scientific and medical positions on several occasions. I appreciate you writing this article and doing an AMA on reddit. I personally do not believe there is any acceptable reason for creating a hostile environment for another person. I assume that his treatment of you was not based on a personal issue but was rather an feeling of entitlement to be antisocial.

- What was the response of your peers and his coworkers? Was he ever encouraged openly to mistreat you or anyone else?
- Did you ever get the impression or see any evidence that his behavior was similar to stalking?

[SpaceILLiad](#)

Thank you for your comments. A few coworkers rose to my defence during the episode in the field, which was encouraging. However, those coworkers left and we remained in the field - isolated - for another 1.5 weeks. The other students came to me with their own stories and other students also came to me to commiserate. I have encouraged them all to go report their issues, but considering what happened to me, I am sure they feel quite discouraged to do so. 2) No I wouldn't say stalking.

Not sure if this was asked yet, but do you think that sexism influenced your professors actions?

[laughs_at_things_](#)

I say in the article that he bullied men and women in the lab, so I never considered that an issue. It wasn't until the HR manager, who had many dealings with him, suggested it that things took on a different shade from my perspective.

I have witnessed a number of incompetent grad students and assistant professors claim that they were being treated unfairly and bullied when reality caught up to them and resources were removed and/or they were fired. The post hoc whining after a tenure denile is borderline comedic.

How do you propose distinguishing between legitimate bullying and sour grapes?

[iknowknothing](#)

Bullying is a repetitive thing. It's like having an anxiety attack vs. being diagnosed anxious. Anyone can have an anxiety attack, but if you are having them 4-5 times a week, then you are anxious. Anyone can feel bullied or even bully someone else, but if that behaviour keeps happening across several situations with several different people, then that is a bully.

- Why publish under a false name?
- Are these paraphrases or direct quotes?

"This is how science works; you are just naïve" - Advisor

"I have the power to do this" - Advisor

"I do not think he likes strong women" - HR

- Why do you feel you were bullied out of science when the funding agency and HR supported you after the work place conflict?

[Arthur233](#)

1) To protect his other current students from backlash. 2) Quotes. 3) The whole process took nearly 5

months to be "resolved." This is another problem with reporting issues as most grants have a strict timeline.

As the parent of a very curious 6 year old girl who was recently invited to her school's gifted program things like this concern me. Should she decide that a career in one of the STEM areas is what she wants (she's currently obsessing over catching a wild mantis to have as her first pet) I know to for her to expect these challenges. Are there any things, that in hindsight might have helped circumvent these issues and allow you to pursue your field of study without harassment/interference?

[RONINY0JIMBO](#)

I have full confidence if we keep the momentum going and issues like this continue to be brought forward by journals like Science, your 6-year-old will not face the same issues we are today. The world is shifting quickly, that's why the behaviour of these types of people is becoming more brazen. But to address your question...

I wish an adviser during my undergraduate career would have told me that these bullies exist. I wish I had been taught to learn how to recognise them and how to address them immediately, and to have the confidence not to second-guess myself.

Does peer review ever adversely effect science? If so, how could it be improved?

[chucklyfun](#)

Not really the focus of this discussion, but I could write another article on that one :)

As a female, current STEM grad student, I have experienced a lot of the subtle bullying variety (mostly perpetrated by fellow grads). I suppose bullying of all degrees, especially of females in science, is quite common. After being bullied on a trip to a conference, my anxiety has greatly worsened and I'm afraid to even step foot in the department. It sucks because there's not much I can do about it, other than tell my advisor and ask to be kept separated in the future. This degree better be worth it.

[wicked_gnar](#)

I am so sorry you are going through this. I encourage you to tell your adviser, you would be surprised at what power they can wield.

Did you look into the professor before signing on? Like talking to other grad students that worked with him, looked at his rate my professor comments (if he taught), spoken to him multiple times before taking the position. That's seems like a SOP in the search for graduate school. I almost worked on an MS with a professor until I asked around about him and heard a lot of negative things and of other students quitting that worked for him.

[CaptainBrant](#)

I worked with this supervisor a few times before I began my Ph.D. and we got on really well. It wasn't until I was working under him with a contract that this behaviour came out. I did not have the opportunity to speak with his current students about his behaviour because I was living in another country - but yes... speaking to other students is critical! However, in my case, I doubt any of the students would have been forthright, as they weren't until after his behaviours came out.

What did your adviser say about you? What other types of bullying did you encounter in this lab?

Is this something that has happened in other labs?

[RainbowsarePretty](#)

In the HR meeting, he had loads of incredible claims that were easy to prove false. He said that I was too stupid to be one of *his* students and used an example that I cannot program in R. I was able to produce emails where I sent him graphs from R and we discussed code. He also claimed I was a loner and that I didn't speak with the other students. Again, I could prove that easily false with meetings I had with the other students, especially the post-docs. It was utterly bizarre.

Our school recently was graced with [Dr. Alice Dreger](#), recent author of *Galileo's Middle Finger*, in which she spoke of her own experience of being harassed and bullied by new wave feminist and social justice warriors because of her own research and scientifically based views.

Should research define public opinion, or should public opinion (and it's money) define research?

On the subject of research and bullying, do you think a gay man like myself is at any sort of risk to my sexuality in an otherwise liberal field like Biology? I feel like our faculty has many Out members, but perhaps they are fighting battles that Grad Students and Research assistants can't see.

Thanks

Undergrad, Ecology and Evolution

[IchTanze](#)

Thank you so much for sharing your side of this!

To be honest, I don't know of any LGBT students who have experienced bullying *because* of their sexuality, but that doesn't mean it isn't happening. Perhaps other Redditors can share their experiences here?

As for research and public opinion, I think there is too much disconnect between the two, largely because of the lag in securing funding to do research that the public thinks is valid and the lag of public interest in current research.

(P.S. That sounds like a great book)