

# Psychology of Insults And Why Some Hurt More Than Others (Succession TV Show)

## Description

## Why do some insults hurt more than others?

**Answer: Some hurt more than others because for 4 reasons. First, they remind people how short of our ego ideal we fall. Second, they cause a status dive. Third, they confirm a deep belief. Fourth, they hijack the brain's desire to process and analyze, making the insult burrow deep.**

Today, we are breaking down the psychology of insults using the TV show Succession, by answering the question "why do some insults hurt more than others?"

If you thought painful insults came only from highlighting people's obvious flaws, you'd be mistaken. For example, just because someone has massive hands doesn't mean they are bothered by it. In fact people who value strength and intimidation might be proud of large hands, while people who value being slim and dainty wouldn't.

## Why some insults hurt more reason 1.

This takes us to the core of what makes insults hurt. Insults are most painful when they attack the ego ideal. The [ego ideal](#) is basically a perfected version of yourself. It is inherently impossible to live up to. **Thus, the 1st reason some insults hurt more than others is that some insults do a better job of reminding us how we fall short of perfection.** Well targeted insults get strong emotional reactions like this painful scene in Succession.

Shiv is talking to her father. Her father says she is a Coward for marrying her fiance since the fiance doesn't really push back at her much.

Logan is close enough to his daughter to know she values courage. He deploys a harmful insult by reminding Shiv how her behavior is inconsistent with her ideal. This reminder causes feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability. These feelings are important because they bring about the second negative effect of powerful insults.

Also, stay tuned till the end if you want to know a simple technique for always having a comeback when someone insults you.

## Why some insults hurt more reason 2.

**Another reason some insults hurt is because they cause a status dive.** Studies show that some insults can cause a person to feel strong negative emotions in addition to the sharp increase in stress

hormones. These emotions and hormones combine to tell our body that our status has dropped. In some situations where insults are more frequent, the brain will even begin rewriting major life narratives to fit and explain the current experience of increased negative emotions and stress hormones. Here is an example of Logan purposefully using an insulting act to remind people of their lower status.

He forces a few people in the Senior manager team to crawl on the floor and fight for a hotdog. The loser is in trouble.

Previously, the Senior management of the company has been hesitant about a decision Logan has made. He uses this scene to remind them who is in charge. He intimidates them into playing a humiliating game. This self insulting behavior makes them feel embarrassed. This embarrassment lowers their perceived status and reminds them how powerless and needy they are.

Keep in mind this is only the second reason some insults hurt more than others. You'll find the other reasons even more interesting.

We see a similar pattern in the interaction between Greg and Tom. In this scene, Greg, the character with the darker hair color, is new to the family business. Tom is using his knowledge and experience to remind Greg how vulnerable and helpless he is. He does this by telling Greg he is willing to help. Then when Greg starts to say thank you, Tom says he is kidding and that Greg is stupid to ask him for help. He repeats this process until Greg is very hesitant.

Let's cover the next reason why some insults hurt more than others. Make sure you listen carefully as this next point will truly change how you look at insults forever.

## Why some insults hurt more reason 3.

We already know insults hurt more when they target a person's failure to achieve their ideal. But what I didn't mention is that **insults are more powerful when they confirm a specific belief the person already has about themselves**. This plays on the brain's confirmation bias. (See confirmation bias.) In other words, an insult will be most effective if the person already thinks you are right.

But here's the curve ball. If you listened carefully to the last few sentences you might have noticed this. People don't actually have to have a flaw for an insult to work. They just need to THINK they have the flaw. This should change how you look at insults because it means people who appear to be outwardly perfect could actually be quite susceptible to insults if they feel like a complete disaster internally.

We see this clearly in eating disorders and other psychological issues where people believe their reality is one way when in actuality it is another. This is why some insults should hurt but don't, and why some insults that shouldn't hurt, do. A person's belief about how they measure up to their perfect ego ideal is all that matters. That is why in the next scene you see how Kendall isn't phased because he knows he is useful, especially when compared to Roman. But in the second scene we see it bothers him deeply because his very accomplished father is questioning the intelligence of one of his leadership decisions.

## Why some insults hurt more reason 4.

**The next reason some insults hurt more than others is because the more powerful ones hijack the brain's problem solving system by being indirect.** When someone uses a simple insult, it is obvious you are being attacked. But when an indirect insult is used, the brain isn't so sure. Since the comment at first appears neutral or even friendly, the brain lowers its defenses. It then takes time to process the insult over and over again, like a puzzle with no clear answer. Were they really insulting me? As your brain analyzes the content, the message burrows into the brain from repetition. Thus the indirectness makes it difficult to respond quickly because your brain hasn't decided if it is being threatened, and it burrows the message deep into your processing system.

Another way for insults to be indirect is for them to attack objects, identities, and other things associated with the perfect ego ideal.

For example, a person could comment on how your car is actually last year's model, how it is sad that you weren't the first person invited to the big party, how your friend is awkward, or how your job position is worthless. These attacks appear to be simply critical and factual comments, but they can also be disguised insults. Since comments like these that are not clearly direct attacks, they can leave people up at night, mulling it over and over again to try to reason out your intention.

## So how do you respond to insults?

If you think turning the other cheek and letting it go are regularly good ways to handle insults, you are going to be mistake much of the time. Since purposeful insults seek to lower your status, not responding shows that you accept your reduced role.

Sure, there are times where people don't mean to insult you, or are so much lower in the social ladder that it isn't worth really responding. Here is a situation where a full response by Tom isn't really necessary. The two are talking about important papers and Tom insults Greg. Greg tells Tom to shut up, so Tom warns him by saying "careful."

Yes, in those situations let it go. Maybe even give them a strong stare to let them know that behavior isn't acceptable. But fully responding with an insult would probably make you look sensitive and petty. But you probably aren't searching for insult videos on the internet for situations like that. Keep listening to learn what to do in the more common situation.

When someone is purposefully insulting you, you must respond with an equal or greater insult. This shows that you don't accept their definition of your place in the social ladder and that attacking you will be costly. We see Kendal make this mistake in the next scene where his siblings just insult him for about 20 seconds straight. He doesn't respond.

Kendal's failure to attack leaves him looking like he is lower in the social hierarchy. This happening once or twice probably won't affect much, but repeated attacks can change the social landscape.

## So how do you always have effective insults to defend yourself with?

Since many people insult others based on a projection of their own values, try mirroring their insult back to them. In other words, if someone insults your looks, it could be because they value physical appearance. Choose some element of their appearance that is less than perfect and comment on that.

One way to easily do this is to simply fill in the blank in this sentence. "Says the person who \_\_\_\_\_. After they finish insulting you retort, 'says the person who can't figure out how to dress like an adult.'

If you need to stall while you come up with something to criticize, say "is that really the best you could come up with? Do you want to try again?" We will more fully cover this and other techniques in our upcoming post on how to always have a comeback.

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1. Manipulation

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