**THE INFORMATIONAL CORRLINKS NEWSLETTER (ICON) # 91**

**MAY 2023 – Understanding “Stochastic Terrorism”**

ICoN provides legal, treatment, activism news & practical info for incarcerated SOs. Send inquiries in separate CorrLinks email (iamthefallen1@yahoo.com) or to Derek Logue, 2211 CR 400, Tobias NE 68453. My focus is SO laws; I don’t advise/assist on appeals, sentencing issues, non-SO news, & services like people-finding, penpals & mail forwarding.

NOTE: In the past ICoNs, I have been using “Registered Citizen” (RC) to describe a person who will be forced to register as an “SO.” In “Your Life on The List, Ed. 3” & the ICoN, I have begun using the term “Registered Person” (RP) because many people were confused by “RC”, thinking it referred to an immigration issue. Language is in a constant state of flux & can change again in the future, but for now, the most commonly accepted term among anti-registry activists is RP or Registrant; thus we will be using RP/Registrant to describe persons who will be forced to register on the publicly accessible sex offense registry. However, I still may use RC on occasion, & if you still use that term when writing me, I’ll know what you mean.

**LEGAL ROUNDUP**

*State v. Cesare Decredico*, No. 21-138-Appeal (RI Sup Ct, 4/4/23): appealed a determination by the RI SO Board of Review (board) that Decredico poses a level II, moderate risk of re-offense. Decredico asserted that that the trial justice erred in accepting the decision of the Superior Court magistrate determining: (1) the board used a validated risk-assessment tool for noncontact offenders in deciding that he poses a level II risk to reoffend &(2) the board used reasonable means to collect the information used in the STABLE-2007 risk-assessment tool. RI Sup Ct determined that the trial justice erred in determining that the evidence in the record justified the Tier placement.

**UNDERSTANDING STOCHASTIC TERRORISM**

One day after I delivered a speech at the steps of SCOTUS, reading off the names of many who died because of their status as RPs, a man whose only sex offense conviction was in 1979 was murdered by a neighbor who had been harassing him for years. An outpouring of support for the murderer soon followed, the killer’s family raised thousands for the killer’s defense, & calls for the killer’s release gained traction. Anyone who dared denounce the killer’s actions were labeled as “pedo sympathizers” & threatened into silence. I had written OpEds criticizing the murder that went unpublished. This support was unwavering even after news reports had pointed out facts like the killer had a previous conviction for a violent act, the killer made multiple reports against his victim that were never substantiated, & that the killer posted memes on social media calling for the murder of “pedos.”

We are once again becoming the political football used in the ongoing political culture wars. Much of what some RPs experience today can be summed up by a phrase gaining traction online. The term “Stochastic terrorism” is defined as, “The public demonization of a person or group resulting in the incitement of a violent act, which is statistically probable but whose specifics cannot be predicted.” The labeling of all RPs in society as “chomos” & “pedos” doomed to reoffend at the first opportunity results has resulted in the canonization of the vigilantes. This has also fueled an increase in laws designed to harm RPs; FL passed a death penalty for sex offenses not involving murder with the consent of only 8 out of 12 jurors, & NM attempted to pass chemical castration laws.

To help you understand the current cultural climate, I’m sharing this OpEd from Scientific American. But keep in mind that like every other potential issue you may face after your release, your mileage may vary.

(Source: Bryn Nelson. How Stochastic Terrorism Uses Disgust to Incite Violence. Scientific American 5 Nov 2022. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-stochastic-terrorism-uses-disgust-to-incite-violence/)

*How Stochastic Terrorism Uses Disgust to Incite Violence*

Pundits are weaponizing disgust to fuel violence, & it’s affecting our humanity

A week & a half before the midterm elections, a man broke into Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s house, screaming “Where’s Nancy?” & attacked her husband with a hammer. David DePape, charged in the attack, had posted a slew of rants that included references to a sprawling conspiracy theory known as QAnon, which claims that Democratic, Satan-worshipping pedophiles are trying to control the world’s politics & media.

Several hours before, Fox News’s Tucker Carlson interviewed right-wing activist Christopher Rufo, who claimed drag queens participating in book readings were trying to “sexualize children.” The people who support these events, he said, want to create “a sexual connection between adult & child, which has of course long been the kind of final taboo of the sexual revolution.”

With the support of former President Donald Trump, the pedophile conspiracy theory has contributed to a widening spiral of threats & violence, including the deadly January 6 Capitol insurrection. A revival of the “groomer” smear against the LGBTQ community (a reference to a pedophile) has ramped up the aggression. Right-wing media personalities & activists have created or amplified conspiracy theories about Pelosi, Hillary Clinton, Bill Gates & others.

Dehumanizing & vilifying a person or group of people can provoke what scholars & law enforcement officials call stochastic terrorism, in which ideologically driven hate speech increases the likelihood that people will violently & unpredictably attack the targets of vicious claims. At its core, stochastic terrorism exploits one of our strongest & most complicated emotions: disgust.

In my new book Flush, I describe how psychologists have come to view disgust as a kind of behavioral immune system that helps us avoid harm. Whether in response to feces or rats, disgust triggers an aversion to things that can make us physically sick. The emotion has a darker side, however: in excess, it can be weaponized against people.

Propagandists have fomented disgust to dehumanize Jewish people as vermin; Black people as subhuman apes; Indigenous people as “savages”; immigrants as “animals” unworthy of protection; & members of the LGBTQ community as sexual deviants & “predators” who prey upon children.

That horrifying history is now repeating itself, as political extremists create dangerous new strains of contempt & hatred. During the COVID pandemic, there has been a surge of racism & xenophobia, as well as violence against foreigners who are baselessly blamed for importing disease & crime.

Even when disgust doesn’t incite outright violence, it can still cause harm. Clinical psychologist Steven Taylor, author of The Psychology of Pandemics, told me that the ongoing monkeypox outbreak has further amplified bigotry. The disease’s mode of transmission through close physical contact & its symptoms of pus-filled sores, he says, make it a perfect vehicle for eliciting disgust. Its name & origins in Africa have stoked racist misinformation about how it spreads, & its link to men who have sex with men has fueled stigma & homophobia as well.

People who are trying to outlaw gender-affirming care for transgender kids & purge pro-gay books from library shelves have stirred up disgust by invoking the specter of sexual “grooming”; others have made the same accusations against those speaking out against such legislative efforts, & some have used the idea to fuel disinformation about the cause of scattered pediatric monkeypox cases. The manufactured grooming mythology has spurred another round of moral disgust & outrage.

In response to Rufo’s diatribe, Carlson—who has an average of over three million viewers—explicitly linked drag queens to pedophiles: “Why would any parent allow their child to be sexualized by an adult man with a fetish for kids?” Rufo then suggested that parents should push back & “arm themselves with the literature” supposedly laying out the child sexualization agenda. Carlson replied, “Yeah, people should definitely arm themselves.”

Some people have. Researchers have estimated that transgender people are more than fourfold more likely to be the victims of violent crime than their cisgender counterparts, & while not a direct link to violence, other scientists have linked disgust sensitivity & authoritarianism to a higher opposition to transgender rights. Over the past few months, assailants repeating the groomer slur have threatened to kill drag queens & LGBTQ people, as well as educators, school officials, librarians, parents & lawmakers who have come to their defense.

In the lead-up to the midterm elections, a blitz of far-right radio ads targeting Black & Hispanic stations in swing states has repeated falsehoods about transgender people & a QAnon warning that the Biden administration will make it easier for children “to remove breasts & genitals”—an attempt to evoke disgust. Other ads aimed at white audiences claim minorities are the true aggressors & destroyers of social norms. One decries “anti-white bigotry.” Another warns ominously, “Stop the woke war on our children.”

The cynical appeal to protecting children by attacking minorities has exposed a bitter irony: disgust is an emotion that evolved to keep us out of danger, but people have long misused it to inflict cruelty & catastrophic harm.

No single intervention is likely to reduce the boil of this toxic stew. But a better understanding of how disgust works & how we can be manipulated by our sense of revulsion may help us turn down the heat. Just as we can overcome our fears, Taylor said, we can break free of disgust. Desensitization & habituation can lessen its potency. Other research suggests that interventions based on compassion, empathy & trust-building can help weaken its contribution to prejudice. Awareness & education can uncover unconscious biases & expose the tactics of those who weaponize it, like those inciting the current wave of ugly antisemitism.

A day after the attack on Paul Pelosi, Hillary Clinton reacted to the suspect’s apparent far-right influences by tweeting, “The Republican Party & its mouthpieces now regularly spread hate & deranged conspiracy theories. It is shocking, but not surprising, that violence is the result. As citizens, we must hold them accountable for their words & the actions that follow.” In response, new Twitter owner Elon Musk tweeted a hateful conspiracy theory by a notoriously misleading news site that blamed Pelosi’s attack on the LGBTQ community; Musk later deleted the tweet, but then joked about it.

What can stop stochastic terrorism & break the cycle of disgust-fueled vilification, threats & violence? Turning off the source of fuel is a start. Programs to counter violent extremism, particularly those that emphasize early intervention & deradicalization, have yielded some successes in at-risk communities. Other programs disrupt the ideological ecosystem that creates radical conspiracies through counseling, education & other community interventions. Beyond understanding how our emotions can be exploited to demonize others, we can refuse to buy into “both-sides” false equivalence & the normalization of dangerous rhetoric & extremism. We can do better at enforcing laws against hate speech & incitement to violence. & ultimately, we can disengage with media platforms that make money by keeping us disgusted, fearful & forgetful of our own decency—& shared humanity.

Bryn Nelson is a science writer & author based in Seattle. He is the author of Flush, The Remarkable Science of an Unlikely Treasure.

--Unfortunately, studies have shown that many RPs will suffer social ostracism, denial of services, harassment, acts of vandalism, or assault as the result of inclusion on the registry.

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