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**Bewildering Friends Who Voted for and Continue to Support Trump**

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The fairy tale, *The Emperor’s New Clothes* (Andersen, 1837/2020) serves a useful way of capturing the experience of many who are bewildered by a friend’s allegiance to Donald Trump. If we imagine ourselves in this tale, the experience is this: With a friend we join others awaiting the Emperor’s march to display what his minions have advertised as his resplendent new clothes. Our friend is one who, in all our personal interactions, has shown us intelligence, kindness, and grace. The Emperor appears. He is proudly waving his hands to invite all to see his “new clothes.” A little child in the crowd yells, “But he hasn’t got anything on.” The kid is right. But our friend is part of the crowd who with great passion seeks to censor the boy. We’re dumbfounded. The friend we thought we knew well in the context of intimate association is a stranger to us in this public context. He wants to laud what we seek to decry.

 What’s going on here? In what follows we offer conjecture from a point of view that primarily reflects the clinical and developmental theories of psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan (1966/1977), as well as practitioners within the object relations field of psychoanalysis (e.g. Grotstein, 2007; Klein, 1975a, b; Ogden, 1986, 1989; Winnicott, 1975). What we hope to show is that Trump offers to our bewildering friends a powerfully seductive dynamic. He offers them an opportunity to sustain their wish that there is someone (an-Other) who Knows, who is the arbiter of Truth. He offers them relief from the developmental reckoning with aggression to which we all must reconcile ourselves to challenge authority and so find our own authority (self-authorization).

To accomplish this, however, Trump doesn’t just offer himself singularly as someone to be idealized as, for instance, a “stable genius” (e.g., 6 January 2018, 12 July 2018). If he did, he might more rapidly in the natural course of things become the object of this aggression. Instead, he also offers “substitution.” In exchange for the continuance of our bewildering friends’ developmental impasse, (something which in and of itself can only be partially satisfying), he offers opportunity to them to reclaim the dissociated aggression and provide for its cathartic release by creating scapegoats. He very directly and emphatically sacrifices to these followers’ more vulnerable others who are the sanctioned target for the aggression, which in any full-throated way they, our friends, have constrained and for too long sought expression. In doing this, even if he cannot deliver these friends from all burden, both psychological and material, Trump is able to make them feel, at least unconsciously, deeply understood. In short, to our bewildering friends, Trump offers a near perfect combination of continuance or repetition of an impasse, indulgence and active encouragement of the wish for an idealized other, and cathartic reclaiming of aggression though substitution.

Having gotten ahead of ourselves in our exposition, we now must jump into the weeds so that we can establish some important foundation and context for our hypothesis.

*Why Trump is a Threat*

 Donald Trump arguably presents an unprecedented challenge to the stability of the democracy of the United States. From his leadership position he regularly traffics in conspiracy theories, and he has outpaced any known politician with his lies (e.g., Kessler, 2018, McGranahan, 2017). In fact, his mendacity seemed to accelerate in the face of factual correction or expert analysis. In being a world figure with so many loyal followers, there is undoubtedly disagreement to be found in how to characterize his interpersonal functioning. There is, however, a large chorus of voices that say he functions almost exclusively from a perspective wherein the world and those around him are evaluated in a binary way. You are either with him or against him. Loyalty to him rules supreme. Only his opinion matters, and any disagreement with his view of things is a personal affront to him. For instance, speaking of the recent upset that Trump had over the statement of the previously incredibly loyal Attorney General William Barr, the CNN political reporter, Maeve Reston (2020, December 13), says: “Trump reminded the nation of one of the truisms about the way he has regarded his allies both in business and politics: everyone is expendable if they do not follow his dictates.”

 Simultaneously, Trump praises himself unabashedly. He not only notoriously claims that he is a “stable genius” (e.g., 6 January 2018, 12 July 2018) but that also he is the “least racist person anybody is going to meet” (26 January 2018). If you support his pronouncements, you are described by him with a superlative usually modified with “very;” you are offered what his personal lawyer Michael Cohen calls the “flatter lie” (2020, p. 33). If you have the temerity to disagree with him, you are characterized by him with robust starkness as deficient. Additionally, you likely will be summarily dismissed as severely as he can do within the reach of his authority, especially when he can do so from the distance inherent to a Tweet or an emissary. Both avoid any chance of engagement with you in a personal way. Even his catchphrase, from his time on the reality TV show, *The Apprentice*, “You’re fired,” left no room for relating

**Trump’s Position with Interpersonal Functioning**

*Paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions*

The world of psychology, specifically that of attachment theory, clinical research and treatment and the British school of object relations has described a developmental progression whereby babies move from more simplistic modes of interacting with others

to more complex ones[[1]](#footnote-2). From within this perspective, we believe it is clear to say that Trump functions most frequently from an existential-relational position that is named “paranoid-schizoid”[[2]](#footnote-3) (Rosenbaum & Webb, in press; Webb & Rosenbaum, 2021c). Concordant with what is noted above and which is consistent with the common understanding of paranoia, from this position relationships are seen only in an instrumental way, for how they serve or do no serve. The world is seen in *either-or* or *black or white* terms. Those who are “not me” are experienced in a schizoid way. This means they are not encountered as full subjects with a respectable or truly appreciated “other-ness,” in other words, with thoughts, feelings, and subjective lives of their own. Rather, they are seen as one-dimensional objects to maneuver around when pursuing a goal or desire.

The paranoid-schizoid person stands in contrast to the next existential-relational position, one called the “depressive” position. Whereas in the paranoid-schizoid position, there is little to no appreciation of those other than me, the move to the depressive position is highlighted by the concern for harm we have done to others.(Sometimes the depressive position is referred to as the period of concern). This concern speaks to the recognition that develops between paranoid-schizoid and depressive position that the world is filled with people uniquely and spectacularly different than us.

In other words, in the developmental progression from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position we go from a world of “me/not-me” to a world of “I/you.” We go from a world of binary terms, an either/or mentality, to a world where there are shades of gray, with no shade having the monopoly on what is good or right. Notably, being in the depressive position requires effort, because taking perspective is hard work and movement between paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions is normal and common (sometimes occurring within the span of minutes). Moreover, while in our progression from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position we gain in an appreciation of others’ humanity, we lose certainty about our “knowing,” and we must reconcile with the harm we can do when we are in a more certain position. Accordingly, as the name suggests, this can entail normal depressive feelings which stem from our concern about how we injure others. Trump notably shows neither evidence of having made this evolution nor desire to put in the work to recognize others different from him.[[3]](#footnote-4)

*Differentiating Our Bewildering Friends from Other Trump Supporters*

 Having stated how we see Trump as operating from a particular existential-relational position, we are still left with the question of how to explain the support he garners, especially as it relates to our bewildering friends. On the broad topic of Trump’s appeal much has been said. Harvard professor Joshua Greene, for example, says Trump, in contrast to Biden, is an expert at saying the things his supporters want to hear, that he traffics in “costly signal deployment;” he makes deliberately provocative and divisive remarks that serve a function like getting a gang tattoo (Pazzanese, 2020, September 15). By doing so, Greene says that Trump cements himself to his followers and they reciprocally to him in a way that Biden and Clinton do not or did not with their efforts to cast a wider consensus of support. Thus, while both Biden and Clinton may instill a form of loyalty, they do not require the devotion that borders on the worship that Trump insistently demands. One can be both loyal and critical of them; whereas for Trump criticism is akin to betrayal. As we will discuss below, attempts at conflating typical political loyalty or even “hero-worship” with what Trump insists upon is a false equivalence that Trump seems to exploit purposefully.

 Speaking to this, Jonathan Haidt (2012) concludes in his book, *The Righteous Mind*, that liberals don’t understand the values held by conservatives, and worse yet, don’t recognize this failing, because they are convinced of their own rationality and enlightenment. Haidt goes on to say that a key mistake that liberals make is that they think rationality carries the day rather than reckon with the assertion of Scottish philosopher, David Hume, that reason is “the slave of the passions” (1739/2020). In accord with this, Democratic congresswoman of Michigan, Elyssa Slotkin recently conjectured that Trump supporters feel “not talked down to” by Trump in contrast to how they perceive being treated by liberals (Flood, 2020, November 13).

 Much of what has been written in this effort to explain Trump’s appeal is characterized by interesting observations like those noted above. Some are more comprehensive and psychological in their scope than others. Psychologist and lawyer, Bryant Welch, stands out as one who has attempted a comprehensive exploration. In *State of Confusion, Political Manipulation and the Assault on the American Mind* (2018)*,* he proposes that as a nation we are reeling within a traumatized state that reflects a complexity of factors, including the breakdown of the nuclear family. He says that in this state of confusion and anxiety we are less capable of embracing the fundamental complexities of life and falling prey, therein, to a paranoia, sexual perplexity, and envy that Trump has instinctively been able to address with the skill of the best of con men who persuade with misinformation, misdirection, and relatively empty promises.

 However, none of the writings of which we are familiar delve explicitly into the appeal of Trump from a psychological developmental point of view. Further, in considering what has been said with regards to his followers, we think it is important to not lump them all into one group as it seems clear to us that there are different motivations for different people to support Trump. While our focus is limited here to what we see as a certain category of followers (i.e., our friends at the emperor’s parade who baffle us[[4]](#footnote-5)), we offer a brief description of three other categories into which we see Trump supporters falling. These are: the convinced, the opportunists, and the hard-baked racists and xenophobes. In making our way to our “bewildering friends” category, our fourth category, we will first note the others in a passing way.

**Different types of Trump supporters**

*The Convinced*

In the first category are persons like Olivia Troye. Troye began her career as a homeland security official with the Bush administration, serving first in the Pentagon after 9/11. With the Trump administration she served as an advisor to Vice President Pence on the White House Coronavirus Task Force, a position from which she resigned in July (2020). In explaining her decision to depart from this position, she essentially says that she initially believed in the mission and intentions of the Trump initiative. However, she later came to realize that Trump consistently undermined the hard work of the physician consultants and showed a shocking lack of focus and disingenuous commitment to working to develop and implement effective policy (Shabad, 2020, September 22). Troye clearly fits into a category of supporters who were *convinced*. She was persuaded that Trump would address issues such as: health care, fiscal responsibility, tax reduction, free market economics, expression of religious beliefs, and social conservatism. The integrity of being convinced is, of course, that one is always open to change of mind as view of the landscape evolves. Troye was a believer until she was not, and as such she exemplifies one category of followers, both for Trump and for any other leader.

*Opportunists*

The category of *opportunists* is arguably exemplified by persons like Senator Lindsey Graham, who emerged during Trump’s administration as one of his most loyal political supporters. This was a mind-boggling flop from his comments about Trump during the Republican primaries. Amongst other damning things Graham said is that Trump is a “race-baiting, xenophobic religious bigot” (Camerota, 2015, December 8). Graham is also notorious for public pronouncement in 2016 that everyone could hold him, Graham, accountable for his position that the Senate should not vote on an Obama Supreme Court nominee during the run up to a general election. Of course, Graham conveniently ignored this in 2020 when he supported a vote for a Trump nominee to the Court a week before the general election.

Whether it is Graham or so many other politicians who shock us with their refusal to address Trump’s outrageous behavior, this category seem to enfold within it those who sacrifice principles to personal advantage. They are ones for whom, as George Orwell says in writing about the dangers of nationalism, “[T]here is almost no kind of outrage...which does not change its moral color when it is committed by ‘our’ side” (1945/2018, p.13). This seems to be most dramatically exemplified by politicians in the news, but clearly can apply across a wide spectrum of self-serving others who walk in more common spaces in our world, including our neighbor who seems so singularly focused on his defense of Trump with: “Yeah, I know he’s a piece of work, but have you looked at your 401K lately?”

*The racists*

In the third category are the *racists* who have been encouraged and excited by Trump’s refusal to denounce explicitly and categorically white supremacist groups like the Proud Boys[[5]](#footnote-6). Clearly, this group also includes the *xenophobic* version of racists*:* those who are drawn in by his startlingly demeaning comments about Muslims, Latinx, and African countries while promoting draconian immigration policies. We have here a segment of voters who appear to be largely white voters without extensive formal education and who feel understandably forgotten and “concerned about their place in the world” (Khazan, O., 2018, April 23). Along these lines there seems also be a sense, conscious or otherwise, that previously less empowered groups are now replacing them and usurping their rightful place (C. Mutz, 2018, May 8).[[6]](#footnote-7)

**Bewildering friends**

Our fourth category of Trump followers is our *bewildering friends*. While in this group there might be persons concerned about the maintenance of their wealth or about big government and entitlement programs; friends, in other words, who might be differ from us on some point of political or legislative persuasion, this group seems different than the opportunists like Lindsay Graham. Nor are they splinters or manifestation of racist others that are arguably exemplified by the Proud Boys, the American Nazi Party, or, more generally speaking, applauders of the child/caretaker (parent) migrant separation policy of Trump adviser, Steven Miller.[[7]](#footnote-8) Furthermore, this fourth group are persons who, in contrast to Olivia Troye, seem to remain impervious to reconsideration of their allegiance to Trump even when his comportment as a person shocks even minimal standards of decency and truthfulness and eventuates in incompetence in addressing things like the pandemic. These are the people, however, to whom Trump is speaking when he says (23 January 2016): “I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot someone, and I wouldn’t lose any voters.”

Thinking again of the Emperor, these friends are the people who look at the Emperor, marching around defyingly ignorant or denying of his nakedness, who don’t exclaim in agreement with the courageous boy and adjust their appraisal of the Emperor. Instead, they either denounce the boy, or they rationalize. They might say: “Oh, we’re all naked underneath and he’s just showing us the way it really is” (“Trump just says it likes it is”) *or* “The emperor is just being silly. You can’t take this too seriously” (“That’s just Trump being Trump”). Alternatively, they may create a false equivalence. “Sure Trump is bad but all politicians are” or “Well he’s no worse than Hillary [Clinton] was.”

Stating again what we have stated above, these are the persons who stir the tortured reflection: “How can my good friend so fervently support such a mendacious, vitriolic, and self-obsessed President? How with this friend can I relish everyday interactions and yet reconcile myself to the fact that we seem to live with such splintered rather than convergent consciousness?”

 It is to this friend that we now set ourselves to the task of making some sense. As we do this red lights of caution flash. We must somehow proceed with how we can think about this and yet not fall into the binary thinking that so fully characterizes the paranoia that seems to infuse the hate and lies that spew from Trump. We must try and balance a study of individual psychology shaped through the social without falling into a mirroring arrogance where “My view...my side of the coin” is the shiny, good side and the other side only besmirched and without merit. We are all of the same metal even if we are not in the same state, and we must bear this in mind, especially when we are so gripped with the passions this situation merits. Yet somehow, we also must not pale before the task, because it entails judgment. We must fight against being limited only to one of the three positions that Audre Lorde notes. She says, “We have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate” (1984, p. 115).

**The Bewildering Trump Friend’s Relationship to Self-Authorization**

Our proposal for understanding these bewildering friends is that they have a different relationship to self-authorization than we do. This is not something that normally shows itself in their day-to-day interactions. Instead, it shows itself and perhaps can only really emerge in the tolerance and even outright endorsement of a public person in a leadership role like Donald Trump. Notably, as most leaders are not like Trump in his audacious embrace of the paranoid-schizoid (he truly seems to believe his position as valorous), we, in the United States, were unlikely to have experienced the conditions required for the emergence of these bewildering friends. And indeed, some of the appeal to Trump has been chalked up to his cutting through the bullshit and being “real.” Accordingly, it is their relationship not just to Trump but rather the symbolic properties of Trump; what he represents to them seems to be what is at stake in this difference.

 We are making the claim, in other words, that the allegiance to Trump is not primarily anchored in policy concerns (though these might serve masking and rationalizing functions). Instead, we are proposing that such allegiance should be located primarily within a role or function that Trump plays in our friends' psychological landscape. This function only emerges when the conditions of the social field allow for it (Stern, 2003; 2004; 2013). It requires, then, someone like Trump, with the characteristics we’ve described. The sweep of this landscape does not always emerge in a perceptible way within the confines of our usual personal encounters.

How we change, how different shades of who we are emerge according to prevailing circumstances is something about which Sigrid Nunez comments in her novel, *Naked Sleeper.* She says, "Background is important...Things happen in the country that would never happen in the city...It isn't true that people who cross the sea change their skies but not their natures. We are different, depending on where we are” (1996, preface). We would add to this that not only are we different depending on where we are but also depending on who we are with.

Our bewilderment in part speaks to this emergent part of our friends that had previously not demonstrated itself because of contextual peculiarity. That aside, why this aspect of our friends emerges with Trump has to do, as we say above, with these friends having a relationship with self-authorization that is different than our own, a difference which locates itself in their developmental history.

 By self-authorization we are referring to our task in life of coming to terms with the full range of our feelings and perceptions, accepting them as our own whether they seem to jump out of us at the instigation of outside others or seem to spring unheralded from within us. When we self-authorize, we acknowledge that the sublime and the ignoble characterize not just ourselves but all others, and with this acknowledgement we understand that failure and success is part of being human. Therein we find access to the empathy, grace, and agency that are central to loving, but we also have the ability in a relatively differentiated way to not be subsumed in a passionate loyalty which supersedes rationality and then falls prey to scapegoating others who seem alien.

 How we emerge into leading our lives from this position is complicated and yet important to consider as we seek to better understand the issues with which we suggest our friends are facing in their internal worlds. We ask the reader’s patience. If we are to dive truly into the weeds, we must deal with the snarl of roots and stems and take to heart the assertion of Richard Hofstadter: “The application of depth psychology, chancy though it is, has at least made us acutely aware that politics can be a projective arena for feelings and impulses that are only marginally related to the manifest issues” (p. xxxiii, 2008/1965).

*The Development of Self-authorization and the Name of the Father*

The term-phrase “the Name of the Father” is one coined by Jacques Lacan (1966/1977, p. 67) in his efforts to explain our pathway to self-authorization. While complicated, Lacan essentially is addressing with this term a key element in the process of how we emerge out of our non-differentiation with and our inherent dependency on our care-takers. He is addressing how we evolve into being persons who experience themselves as much authorized and personally responsible as any other fellow being to name our Truths and pursue our own destinies, all with an appreciation of the ultimately constructive reality which our pursuit of identity and Truth reflects since it lives within the confines of culture. These primary caretakers are persons who are naturally disposed to encourage our differentiation but also inclined simultaneously and, mostly unconsciously, to see our existence as the avenue for their own completion as a being. Lacan refers to this as the care-taker’s efforts to make the child their phallus. There is, in other words, an unconscious conflict between our care-takers desire for us to flourish independently and what this means for their own being.

 This is where the Name of the Father comes into play. It is important to note that Lacan uses this term, Name of the Father, in a rather conventional but expectable way given the social epoch in which he lived and the classical Freudian hegemony that he felt compelled to acknowledge. Accordingly, although he didn’t necessarily genderize the developmental process, he succumbed to language that denoted, at least by implication, the primary care-taker as female and the secondarily emergent care-taker as male. Hence, within the most concrete confines of his terminology, the conflict can be stated succinctly as such: we as the child in sync with an aspect of our mother seek to be the phallus, the symbolic phallic completion of the “castrated” mother, and the disruption of this impediment to separation occurs, at least in part, through the “castrating” intervention of the father (Lacan, 1966/1982).

We will elaborate below what we have succinctly said above, but we pause here in our exposition to say that to stay in a realm of terminology that holds the essence of what Lacan is saying but also acknowledges that this care-taking process is not limited by gender, we will use the terms “M-other” and “F-other.” By using “other” we are underlining that the process of coming into a self-authorized being-ness is a coming into an awareness of the other’s “otherness”, our otherness to them, and even our own otherness to ourselves. Notably, this requires the presence of caring and devoted others, people who are separate from ourselves. This other is not delimited by sex, gender, or relationship to us (i.e. important others can be grandparents, friends, teachers and so forth). Hopefully, with this understanding now in place, we can turn back to Lacan to try and explicate more clearly what we think he is saying about development.

 It is important in establishing our foundation through Lacan to not register “castrated” or “castrating” in a literal way. What is being pointed to here by Lacan, albeit with sometimes irritating allegiance to Freud, is that the M-other represents not having the phallus, which is to say that this caretaker as “castrated” represents our fate as humans insofar as we are always incomplete, always destined to have to confront the vertiginous gap in getting what we desire and in even really knowing what we desire. To quell the anxiety that we face in the throes of this gap and this incompleteness, there is a tendency within any caretaker to phantasize and then attempt to position the child as their path to feeling and being, at last, otherwise, i.e. complete. In short, and within the conventionality of Lacan’s gendered terminology, the M-other who lacks the phallus is partly intent on making the child the missing phallus. And this is an intent that the child is receptive to since they are relatively undifferentiated from M-other’s needs and desires. The child needs the M-other for survival and so does all possible to insure it.

 Within this same limitation of gendered language, but in the service of trying to elucidate Lacan’s meaning, we then can look at idea of “castrating.” It is the F-other’s role, as a third factor in the fundamental and primary relationship that the child encounters with M-other, to help support the aspect of M-other that realizes that the child cannot be the missing phallus and that incompleteness is the fate for all of us in life. It is the F-other’s role to “castrate” this illusory dream by M-other of finding (and the illusory dream the child of being able to be) the long lost but never existing phallus that will complete our being-ness. This is a dream, of course, into which the child is most susceptible to being inscribed, because the child is so essentially dependent on the primary care-taker for the elements of living.

Importantly, it is F-other’s role to *not* offer, then, their solution to the incompletion by wanting the child to admire or idealize their phallus as the solution to incompletion. In other words, the F-other should not seek to cut off (“castrate”) the child from efforts at being the completion of M-other (the primary caretaker) only then to demand that the child turn to seek to complete their incompletion through admiration of their F-otherly “solution” to the existential dilemma of incompletion.

 Hence, one of the ways our early development goes astray or gets stuck, is when the naming of who we are as a person reflects in some preponderant way that we are an extension of the M-other’s desire. When this happens, a situation emerges wherein our own entrance into the world as a person who actively participates in his or her own construction of identity is delimited severely. From the perspective of Sartre (1966), we are transformed into an “in-itself,” an object as it were, rather than as a subject “for-itself.” When this happens, functioning is compromised in major ways, sometimes at a psychotic level, and almost always in a way that is accompanied by a sense of deep emptiness, a severe restriction of being-ness (Webb & Rosenbaum, under editorial review).

 Fortunately, what more often happens in normal development is that the M-other with the active support of the F-other shows the child that there is a wider path of possibility for authorizing themselves. With the Name of the Father, we are shown that our destiny lies beyond the intimate connection that is intrinsic to our relationship to our primary care-takers (M-others). F-other supports both the child’s striving away from M-other and M-other’s own feelings of loss that comes from giving up the child as potential completion of themselves.

However, we are not out of the weeds yet. As we note above, the intervention that pulls us out of the possibility of being M-other’s completion must not be so completely encompassing that we essentially jump from the pot to the pan. The Name of the Father must not inscribe itself so profoundly in our being, be writ so large, that we proceed in our fundamental identity from consumption with *being* the “phallus” (for M-other) to devotion to *admiring and idealizing* the phallus (of F-other). The role of the F-other, in other words, is to lead the child out of being the completion another’s being and to recognize ultimately the constructive nature within culture and language of meaning. Staying within the parlance of Lacan, we say that the F-other introduces the child to the “Law,” a process accomplished when the “father (sic) does not make the child the object of his desire and is not the desire of the child” [but understands and communicates that] he does not have the phallus as the satisfaction of desires but as a symbol” (Webb, Bushnell, & Widseth, 1997, p. 9).

 This means that during development the task of self-authorizing entails coming to terms not only with the incompleteness of M-other but also with the inadequacy that is intrinsic to the authority of F-other and so of living. For this to happen the Name of the Father must not ultimately dominate the horizon of our perspective on life. Jane Smiley’s character, Ginny, in *A Thousand Acres* speaks of her “rule-maker” father and characterizes the appropriate perspective this way: “Perhaps there is a distance that is...optimum...for seeing one’s father, farther than across the supper table or across the room, somewhere in the middle distance: he is dwarfed by trees or the sweep of a hill, but his features are still visible, his body language still distinct” (1991, p. 20).

 Gaining this perspective is no easy task. It destroys the precious illusions that we as children have about life and about that on which we can dependably bank upon in order to feel safe. John Steinbeck in *East of Eden* reflects on it this way:

When a child first catches adults out—when it first walks into his grave little head that adults do not have divine intelligence, that their judgments are not always wise, their thinking true, their sentences just—his world falls into panic desolation. The gods are fallen and all safety gone. And there is one thing about the fall of gods: they do not fall a little; they crash and shatter or sink deeply into green muck. It is a tedious job to build them up again; they never quite shine. And the child’s world is never quite whole again. It is an aching kind of growing… (1952/1992, p. 16).

 How this reckoning occurs is complicated. Steinbeck with a writer’s dramatic flair acknowledges this saying: Who knows what causes this---a look in the eye, a lie found out, a moment of hesitation?” (1952;1992, p. 16). However, this reckoning may be a slower fall over time or one of many falls that the parent and child have gone through. What matters is that at some point in development, children can relativize their parents, such that they realize that they are human and thus full of both the good and bad that comes from this condition. While this can ultimately come at a relief to the child, the process and prospect of self-authorization can be dizzying and disorienting.

Whether or not “the fall of gods” always throws us into chaos and confusion as Steinbeck suggests is not as important as that it certainly can. Losing the security and safety that comes from an idealized and all-knowing Other is no small thing. It is part of what is lost in the move from paranoid-schizoid to depressive functioning. Indeed, this need for the feelings of certainty and security is something that Bryant Welch underlines (2018), and we think it is something that is central to why Trump’s followers allow such a “dependency” on him. Per Welch, we know that “A fundamental aspect of human psychology is the mind’s effort, its outright need, to have a reality it feels certain of” (Welch, 2018, p. 18). We know, in other words, that although our trek in development might be towards self-authorization, believing in a “god” who *knows* is powerfully seductive. As Anthony Storr says, “The charisma of certainty is a snare which entraps the child who is latent in us all” (1997, p. 233).

 From our perspective, we think that “the fall of gods” is made easier if the “F-other” already sees him- or herself as “fallen” (and acts in accordance since there are those who see themselves one way and act another) or, better yet, sees him- or herself as never, in fact, a god. In doing so the F-other not only allows for but in some ways facilitates their diminution (repositioning) through the child’s (agentic) efforts to relativize their authority and alter their positioning. If all goes well in development, the posturing of power by the naturally clay-footed F-other can be discerned by the child, who can call out that the emperor has no resplendent clothes, has no phallus which points or connects to ultimate Truth. The F-other, then, is not subsumed in anxious denial but surfaces as someone who acknowledges the truth that they are also someone who knows nakedness. In other words, the F-other is available then to help the child with their own depressive concerns, because they, the F-other, are not destroyed by being told they are naked. In fact, being naked is part of the ultimate joy of life.

Notably, we are simplifying a complicated ongoing relationship. This drama is rarely so easy and clear and takes place over time. F-other might, for instance, deny that they are naked only to then concede the point later. Our point here is to articulate the best-case scenario of what we think happens so that we might allow for the variations of what can happen later. In this regard then, we might say that what matters in this process is that at some point in the child’s development, F-other as god can figure out how to allow for their own “death” and, therein, be resurrected as a human. It is this human quality to which children learn to relate; having to relate to another who positions themselves as a god leaves no room for human intimacy.

The good enough F-other, accordingly, revels in the child’s achievement, both in childhood and beyond, and in the resultant freedom they feel to be the imperfect and the not-all-knowing human being that they really are. In other words, the existential reality is well-served. By contrast, the not-good-enough F-other fights this dismantlement of authority, sometimes with extraordinary vitriol. This F-other deflects the perception of their *unclothe-edness* towards other’s nakedness.

*Coping with the father who refuses to fall*

As a result of the father’s refusal to be relativized we typically do one of two things to cope. We *either* embody the aggression that is integral to this dismantlement *or* we must dissociate ourselves from it. Embodying this aggression is a challenge. To surmount the claims of a F-other who is never wrong, we must contain our anxiety that our aggression will destroy the F-other and possibly ourselves. This is challenging for the child, because a F-other who insists upon idealization also communicates consciously or otherwise that the stability of their well-being, even sanity, hinges on sustained praise of her or his garments of authority. In other words, the F-other requires the child (or other) to idealize them to sustain their (the F-other’s) view of themselves as a god. Just as there is no baby without a mother; there is no god without a follower. Such a F-other communicates that the child’s usurping aggression is tantamount *not* to bringing “death” to the historical placement of authority but to psychological murder of a caregiver, the F-other. Aggression against the F-other is seen as murderous. Accordingly, this cuts off the potential for assertion, leaving the child adrift, still left with their instinctive search for self-authorization and the aggression that goes with it. This aggression must find some other outlet for its expression. For some, substitutes can be found through athletics, competitions, other parent-like figures, and so forth. Others might live in ongoing conflict with their parent – perhaps a bewildered parent who does not see why the child continues to “act out.”

However, for many (even for those who can find substitution) the aggression generated when F-other refuses to be relativized becomes dissociated. When this happens, the child unconsciously distances themselves from their aggressive feelings, intuitively recognizing the threat to stability these feelings pose. This enables them to stay in F-other’s good graces and maintain the idealization or, at the very least, survive in their presence.[[8]](#footnote-9) These individuals, then, have not fully owned their aggression due to its threatening nature. However, this aggression is necessary for them to embody fully, because the capacity to self-authorize requires a working through of the consequences of our agency, i.e. a mourning of the capacity to hurt others. This is not to say that these individuals have no sense of agency. It is to say, however, that it develops in a sideways and not fully formed fashion, because it has avoided the conflict, aggression, and mourning intrinsic to moving through life as a subject.

*Self-authorization and one’s relationship to Trump*

Herein, then, lies the appeal of Trump to these followers. Trump, like so many dictators throughout history, offers a solution to the conundrum for those who have not had a “good-enough” F-other. Trump allows the opportunity to continue sidestepping the fear that recognition of F-other’s nakedness will be murderous, a reflection of our dissociated aggression. He demands admiration and loyalty; he offers a continuance of the relationship to the not-good-enough F-other. Yet, and this is the key point, he *also* provides the opportunity to reclaim some of the dissociated aggression through its displaced expression towards others’ “nakedness.” In other words, while Emperor Trump insists on the charade of his magnificence, something which frustrates the inherent need of followers to see and experience the clay feet of F-other, he also offers them an alternative path for this aggression, a path which intrigues and excites them. This is a complicated but powerful mix of feelings.

 If we look at this more carefully, here’s what we have. There is a frustration, because Trump allows no diminution of himself; he is the “stable genius” who is never wrong. Hence, his followers are wont to say such things as: “I will hold my nose and vote again for Trump” (e.g., H.R. Silverthorne, letter to the editor, *Summit Daily*, Summit County, CO, June 14, 2020). However, the “stink” of Trump’s arrogance is tolerable, because he offers two paths of relief to his followers for the aggression he generates.

First, he allows a throwback to our seemingly intrinsic need as humans to believe that there is somewhere someone who really “knows,” someone who is the embodiment of Truth. As Welch says of Trump when he was a candidate, “[He] offered...the false hope that by believing in him [followers] could lay down the burden.... [of] their psychological confusion and unrecognized trauma” (p. 8). Second, Trump offers a recompense for the frustration of this as well as any feelings of frustration with him and his own narcissism through the offer of a sacrificial lamb. He offers relief from the aggression that he also creates through its redirection towards others who are depicted as the real problem. Again, as Welch says, “[H]e gladly helped them [the followers] fill in the gaps by conjuring a simple, clear, and highly cathartic worldview in which people of different color were eroding their opportunities, men were losing their power, [and] gay people’s rights would mean theirs would be trampled” (p. 9). Hence, we heard and continued to hear comments like this from the “Emperor” about any who questioned the simplicity of his paranoid, we/not-us thinking or who challenged his parade of purported brilliance: “Lock them all up!” (e.g., October 17, 2020). And we heard cathartically joyous followers enthusiastically parroting his words in chants that provide the temporary feeling of togetherness that emerges in any group exercise in scapegoating, an exercise that skips past any reckoning with the clay-feet that are so otherwise close at hand.

Notably, it is precisely this process, the stirring of aggression and the channeling of it; the promise of being one who knows and the scapegoating of others that so differentiates Trump from other leaders. To maintain this illusion of knowing, Trump recognizes that any lie will suffice; what matters is not truth but allegiance to him. This allegiance is based upon the emotional experiences he stirs in others, including our bewildering friends. This stir may also explain the shift of many former Obama voters, especially those perhaps who were disappointed by his measured tone and refusal to be a god-like figure. Moreover, while many Americans remain skeptical of government doing the right thing, after Trump’s presidency an interesting difference between republicans and democrats has arguably emerged with the former viewing government’s role as promoting the party and the latter with developing good policy. Indeed, in the ensuing months since Trump’s loss, the Republican party continues to organize itself around the idea of preserving his godhood and public denying or remaining mute about the realities of his losing. Such a post-election stance is unprecedented, at least in the last century, and it speaks to the difficulties the party has had facing Trump’s demotion; 401K increase be damned.

Accordingly, we propose that with the *bewildering friends* who supported and continue in all likelihood to support him, Trump stirs up the anxieties, both current and old, that come about from having to reckon with the narcissism of their F-other. Relationship to this key care-taker evokes aggressive feelings. Trump, however, redirects these feelings towards admiring him as a god-like figure who can speak the truth and bring relief. This means that these individuals can sidestep having to deal with the depressive feelings that are related to being bounded and human.

In exchange for being acclaimed as the figure who speaks the Truth, Trump authorizes a view that our friends own potentially destructive aggression is not a result of F-others (present and past) who refused de-authorization but rather of being the victim of other’s aggression. That this other was actually “F-other” and now himself (Trump) is not the point, because these targets are not as safe as the more vulnerable others that Trump portrays and sacrifices as the real aggressors. This, in essence, validates what has been dissociated and provides a target which is not-Trump, not-F-other. The target, therefore, becomes one that is not in the room, one that does not push back and one, as our example below will show, that is ultimately hollow. The satisfying nature of this process is demonstrated by the inability to move past Trump and to mourn the care and completeness that one can never fully have.

*Michael Cohen as an Example of the Bewildering “Friend”*

People from all corners of the political spectrum might be inclined to dismiss the value of Michael Cohen’s book, *Disloyal* (2020) because of how besmirched his integrity might seem to them, either because of his service, sometimes servile to Trump or, by contrast, because of his lack of fealty to the “Emperor.” Doing so would be unfortunate, because even if his tale at times smells of being a “cash out,” scandal-mongering effort, it also is a candid self-reflection that should be analyzed. In other words, while the book seeks clearly to indict the character and actions of Trump, it is also something more. To us, it has the feel of being a sincere reflection, an honest attempt by Cohen to come to terms with why he allowed himself to become “a demented follower willing to do anything for him [Trump], including...to take a bullet” (p. 13). And if we are being swindled in writing this then at least we must recognize the skill of the swindler. We encourage the skeptical reader, however, to make their own first-hand evaluation of what and how Cohen says what he says.

 Certainly, Cohen might not fit the obvious bill for being an example of the friend we have described as our bewildering companion at the parade of the Emperor. Cohen would seem to be placed more obviously as one of the Emperor’s minions, an “acolyte, a willing participant in a fantasy” (p. 59). Furthermore, as Cohen himself makes clear, there are aspects of him that seem to coincide with the category of Trump followers who are best designated as opportunists. Cohen, in fact, uses the word “opportunist” (p. 75) as a description of himself in reference to Trump, and he acknowledges his “insatiable desire to please Trump to gain power for” himself (p. 20), the “ugly truth... [being that] ...“I wanted to be able to crush my enemies and rule the world” (p. 105). Nonetheless, Cohen also has the complexity that befits most of us in our plight as flawed beings, and in his reflections, there is much to be plumbed that points in the direction of his dilemma with self-authorization. It is to this part of his story that we turn for the help it gives us in conjecturing about who our bewildering friends are.

*Cohen as Bewildering*

Cohen was, indeed, part of the Emperor’s parade and not amongst those lining the streets. However, he was *bewildering*. Throughout his narrative there is a tenderness for and devoted affiliation to his wife and children that is palpable. It is an aspect of himself that seems often so at odds with his role as “consigliore” (p. 11) who “took a kind of weird pleasure in harming others in the service of Donald Trump” (p. 169).

 It is, however, evident in his tale, that his family was struggling to understand the disjunction between the husband and father they knew in their world of intimate connection with him and the man they occasionally glimpsed him to be in the wider arena of the Trump world. Not only his tolerance of Trump but his sustained embrace of him prompted the “ongoing...disgust of...[his] wife and children” (p. 102) and precipitated repetitive outbursts of incredulity characterized by comments from his kids like: “Why do you give a shit about him?” (p. 181). Cohen befuddled his family, and at times all he could do in response to their utter bewilderment was to say, “I’m not going to talk about this anymore” (p. 212) and then privately, especially after the fact, puzzle about his “obsession” (p. 49) with Trump and his “magnetic force...[which offered] an intoxicating cocktail of power, strength, celebrity, and a complete disregard for the rules and realities that govern our lives” (p. 20). Clearly, Cohen understood the feeling of holding one’s nose while staying put in association with the “stable genius.”

*Cohen Beneath the Veneer of Opportunism*

As we foreshadow above, we think it important to dive into the weeds and to not simply pigeonhole Cohen as a variant of Lindsey Graham seeking power and some imagined glory at any cost to one’s integrity. Cohen reflects that in his heart he wanted to be Trump’s “adopted son” (p. 11). And in a spate of greater elaboration, he says: “To an outsider, my attraction to Trump...my ‘obsession’---seemed to have its roots in money and power...But I knew the real answer, for me and other in Trump’s world, and eventually for a significant percentage of the citizens of the United States. It was physical, emotional, not quite spiritual, but a deep longing and need that Trump filled for me. Around Trump I felt excited, alive, like he possessed the urgent and only *truth*, the chance for my salvation and success in life” (p. 55-56, authors’ italics).

 We suggest that in these words Cohen invites the reader to hear his quest for someone who knew the Truth, someone who would unshakably, even if reality had to be distorted, maintain that he *knew*, that his way was the right way. Trump was the F-other’s phallus. Cohen wanted to satisfy the “deep longing and need” within him, and he says that even if Trump “inhabited a different type of reality” (p. 59) he wanted to be so special to Trump “that he [Trump] would share [it] with...[him] alone.” For this to happen, Cohen realizes, “All I had to do was do what I was told, without question or a second thought” (p. 59). Speaking of himself and others in the Trump organization, Cohen elaborates: “We would repeat what he [Trump] said, as if it were true, and we’d repeat the message to one another so often that we would actually begin to believe the distortions ourselves” (p. 153). In short, Trump, as the not-good-enough F-other, required that no one see him as deficiently holding Truth, even at the cost of one’s own sense of reality. Simply hold your nose and go along to get along with the “narcissistic sociopath” (Cohen, p. 181).

 But what was Cohen’s compensation in this Faustian bargain? Cohen makes clear it wasn’t money, at least not money actually received. Trump short-changed him money-wise over and over again. Tangentially, this aspect of Trump of short-changing others makes sense in our analysis. First, as a “god” what use does he have of regular social norms and contracts. But more to the point, his power is dependent upon first his capacity to aggress, to provoke and generate affect and then his capacity to redirect. Thus, to his followers being shortchanged is not reason enough to distance oneself but rather proof of Trump’s power.

Accordingly, in keeping with this, what Trump gave to Cohen was a chance to express his aggression within the fold of pre-ordained promise that his, Cohen’s, anger would be Trump-approved, i.e. F-other approved. Any infliction of harm that this anger might cause would be absolved away in the bath, even if temporary, of Trump’s, F-other’s, glee at again being able to proclaim himself a winner. Cohen, in other words, could glory in being an essential player in maintaining the psychological equilibrium of the F-other.

 Cohen offers important developmental history that tells us why this was so important. In his nuclear family there was a competing F-other to his domineering surgeon father. The other F-other was his Uncle Morty. Morty, also a physician, was a free-wheeling bachelor with fascinations and investments outside of the world of medicine. “To Morty, the mobsters were funny, irreverent, a little scary...but they had a mystique about them, and there was no question about their willingness to break the rules, or the law. This approach to life was contagious, and I caught the bug just like my uncle had” (p. 63-64). Cohen caught this bug so fully that he describes as a fifteen-year-old beginning to strut and talk “in ‘dems and ‘dos like a Brooklyn mobster” (p. 71), playacting this role so much that eventually his father confronted him and told him, “Cut it out...the whole mafia, gangster thing. You’re not one of them. You’ll be a surgeon like me, or a lawyer like your Uncle Ralph” (p. 71). Cohen’s response to his father was to say “Sure, Pop” while he “kissed him on the forehead” (p. 71). Looking back on this, Cohen says, “I knew I would go to law school, just as my parents wished, a typical well-mannered Jewish boy pleasing his family. Inside, though, I belonged another tradition: the Tough Jew” (p. 71).

 Cohen makes clear here that he was trying to hold onto to a different destiny, a different authorization of himself. And it seems apparent that Cohen’s resolution was to go underground with whatever alternative path or iteration of his being he was trying to find; he went underground rather than bear the challenge of a confrontation with his parents, especially, it seems, a struggle against his father.

 This seems to be the psychological landscape within which Cohen was operating when he entered the world of Trump. Trump recapitulated the F-other who would bear no dissent but who, in contrast to his father F-other, offered an unfettered avenue to more dissociated aspects of himself. Trump, the new F-other, allowed opportunity for this dissociated aggression to find dedicated and approved expression. One might imagine that he even “loved” the expression of this aggression. He allowed opportunity to do this with the promise of fatherly praise (even if “flatter”) and placement in a hierarchy of social recognition and power. Cohen went from being a kid who “hated bullies, or anyone who picked on someone weaker” (p. 63), the acceptable avenue for his aggression at that time in his development, to being Trump’s personal fixer who would take no prisoners on behalf of the “Boss.” And with this role Cohen notes, “It wasn’t just as if I was an alcoholic or drug addict...It was *exactly* (original italics) that” (p. 212). He was someone who was relentlessly and joyfully carrying Trump’s sword.

*The Faustian Bargain Laid Bare*

And so, Michael Cohen had a solution to the Name of the Father until he didn’t, and a reckoning came when another “Name of the Father” in the garb of FBI agents appeared at his door at 7am to do a five-hour search of his possessions. After the agents left, Trump and Cohen spoke by phone, and Trump said to him, “They’re coming after all of us...I have no idea where this is coming from. Stay strong. I have your back. You’re going to be fine” (p. 348). And Cohen says that was the last time that he ever spoke to Trump. The title of Cohen’s book, “disloyal”, leaves unclear to any careful read who the subject of the disloyalty truly was.

 The emergence of Cohen into finally allowing himself to see that the “urgent and only truth” (p. 56) that Trump seemed to possess was built on sand was profoundly momentous to him. The revelation that there would be no fatherly support for him now that he was of no instrumental value to Trump seems to have thrown him into a deep personal crisis that he found resilience to emerge from. He describes that as he waited to testify on Capitol Hill after his arrest, he took some moments to be alone. He “started to cry, a flood of emotions” came over him: “fear, anger, dread, anxiety, relief, terror” (p. 15). He says, “It felt something like when I was in the hospital awaiting the birth of my daughter and son, with so many powerful and unprecedented emotions. Only now, I was the child being born, and all of the pain and blood were part of the birth of my new life and identity” (p. 15). We might say that this was the entrance into a new space of self-authorization. It was an entrance long delayed and one requiring a tragic preface, but it was Michael Cohen now coming into place.

**Summary**

Especially in the era of Donald Trump, which shows no sign of abating, we face important encounters with friends and family members that bewilder us. Our usual affinity with these persons that we love and respect is sometimes shattered by our recognition that our emotional synchrony with them does not sustain itself when we recognize our divergence in how we evaluate Trump. Where we see a naked “emperor” whose commitment to “alternative realities” and support of racist vitriol warrants vociferous condemnation, they see a guy who, even if he acts sometimes like a jerk, merits praise for telling it like it is and shaking things up. To explain this disjunction between us and these friends, requires uncomfortable reflection. It is uncomfortable because such reflection much rest largely in speculation, and with such speculation we must guard against proceeding with such little foundation that we offer, like Trump, a fantastical construction of truth rather than a reasoned point of view worthy of critical review. The line that must be walked here is, of course, a “tight” one, and yet the refusal to fathom the crevasse over which this tightrope extends also seems unacceptable. The threat to cherished concept of democracy that Trump mounts should not be ignored at any level, and our beloved friends warrant our efforts to understand them rather than our resolve silently to dismiss them.

 In our attempt to walk this tightrope, we wonder about the role Trump plays in the psychological landscape of our friends. For this understanding we look in this article with special attention to the ideas of Jacques Lacan to understand our friends’ development of self-authorization. We conjecture about what happened developmentally with our friends and whether they experience through Trump is something akin to what Michael Cohen (2020) candidly offers in his own effort to deconstruct his connection to Trump. Cohen says, even if Trump “inhabited a different type of reality” (p. 59) ...I was his acolyte, a willing participant in a fantasy that heightened my senses and my sense of self (p. 59). Around Trump I felt excited, alive, like he possessed the urgent and only *truth*, the chance for my salvation and success in life” (p. 55-56, authors’ italics).

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1. It is beyond the scope and purpose of this paper to elaborate on the full developmental progression, which entails movement from autistic-contiguous, to paranoid-schizoid, to depressive and finally to the transcendent position. Those who are interested in the evolution of these ideas might wish to read Klein (1975a, b), Ogden (1986, 1989), and Winnicott (1975). Our own contributions which focus on bringing out the existential and relational components of these developmental positions might also be of interest (e.g., Webb & Rosenbaum, 2021a, 2021b).
 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Notably, we are not diagnosing Trump here but rather describing how we see his behavior and conduct from our vantage point. On the topic of diagnosis much has been said (see Lee, 2017), and we do not feel the need to add one way or the other to this discourse.
 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. An important area of concern on these developmental positions is what we do when confronted with an “other” whose apparently intractably located within the paranoid-schizoid position, such that they do not feel discomfort or motivation to change. We have taken up this issue in a discussion of the differences between nationalism and tribalism with an idea of looking for a needed third step globalism (Webb & Rosenbaum, 2021c). We recognize that this is a thorny area since the confrontation with an “other” who threatens our way of living requires a willingness to fight “tooth and nail” for the maintenance of our rights. This effort may entail a move of our own to the paranoid-schizoid position, giving up valued beliefs of self and other. When doing so, we hope to differentiate ourselves from those “others” in the paranoid-schizoid position in our desire to defend and not attack. Of course, what is so pernicious about Trump’s discourse is that his attacks on the other are often cloaked in the language of defense. For these reasons, Solnit (2020) has advocated for a need to fight, writing that “deference to intolerance leads to intolerance.” We would note our agreement but also our caution that once we assume the position of the “knowing other” we also potentially engage in a judgmental process of othering that itself may breed further intolerance. We suggest that a third approach involves recognizing and not tolerating the attempts to reduce our subjectivity, an approach which requires working hard to engage the other in a non-deferential but also non-reductionist fashion.
 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. We note, however, that Elizabeth Schambelan (2016, April 18) writes a quite interesting article which maintains that Klaus Theweleit’s (1978/1987 & 1989) two volume book, *Male Fantasies*, is “a psycho-political investigation of authoritarian manhood in extremis.” We think that from the vertex of the developmental perspective, Theweleit’s ideas offer, as Schambelan says, “a powerful heuristic for our present situation” with Donald Trump. However, we see Schambelan as applying Theweleit’s ideas to a different group of Donald Trump supporters.
 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. In considering the emergence of this group we note that arguably starting in the mid-20th century, certain powerful conservatives created the narrative that liberal elites wanted to elevate lower caste groups at the expense of true Christian Americans. Their desire to maintain a caste system was cynically reframed as a noble effort to protect religious freedom from arrogant and atheistic interfering liberals. Sarah Posner (2020) traces this history in her book, *Unholy*. Into this narrative steps Donald Trump who is authorized by his supporters to be the outlet for their wounds and grievances.  Trump plays his part by engaging the amygdala with paranoid-schizoid operatic dramas wherein the utterly despised “libtards” need to be smashed to smithereens.
 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Schambelan, also offers a fascinating explanation of this third category. She applies the ideas that Theweleit assembled about the *Freikorps*, the ultra-right wing German veterans of World War I on the basis of his exegesis of the literature and commentary produced by these men. She notes that Theweleit’s thesis is that these “solder males” suffer from a traumatic severing of the symbiosis between mother and son with a resultant reaction formation whose “most urgent task...is to pursue, to dam in and to subdue any force that threatens to transform him back into the horribly disorganized jumble of flesh, hair, skin, bones, intestines, and feelings that calls itself human---the human being of old” (Theweleit, 1978/1989, p. 160). These males’ deep fear is disguised behind a mix of an idealized, virginal vision of “white women” and a rage toward any women and the effluence of their being (e.g., blood, urine, sweat) that subconsciously reminds them of this symbiosis. In their effort to escape the threat of a dissolution of their being (a return to the symbiosis), the soldier male in this group identifies intensely with his fellow warriors, acknowledges no authority, conflates gender and race, and lives with the assertion that “All others belong only ‘under’ him--never alongside, behind, or in front” (Theweleit, 1978/1989, p. 160). We can clearly see here how receptive this particular group would be to “an entire industry that’s devoted to convincing white people that liberal elites look down on them...and to “a political party whose leaders all understand that that idea is key to their political project and so join in the chorus at every opportunity” (Solnit, 2020, November 19).
 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. We note the desire here of some of the left to reduce this group based upon their actions to that of the third group, i.e. to support Trump is to make one a racist, homophobic, a bigot and so forth. And while we can appreciate where this is coming from, it is precisely the reduction of the other we are concerned about in that it moves us into the arbitrator of Truth but also the paranoid-schizoid position. More nuanced perspectives, such as to suggest that supporting Trump may bring one in alignment with racist, xenophobic, able-bodied world views without the added character assassination of saying what one is, possibly allows for discussion and elaboration while holding the others subjectivity in mind. We know that this sort of work requires tremendous effort but is also what is required to deal with prejudicial group psychologies (see Volkan, 2020; and Maoz, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Notably, there may be symptoms that all is not well, such as bad performance in school, listlessness in life, failed relationships and so forth. For Lacan, these symptoms are coded language which express the problem. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)