

THE REPUBLICAN CULT AND ITS LEADER: A DIAGNOSIS

BY

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It is unprofessional to judge the psychopathology of the President of the United States without personal interview analysis, and so forth. That's why, on the nose or not, calling president Trump a psychopath is bad form and has to stop. On the other hand, it is fine to assess the social pathology of groups and individuals from a distance. So...

If the Republican party—by all accounts now “Trump’s party”— were a cult, Donald Trump is a cult leader. Cult leaders are almost always sociopaths. By the balance of probabilities, as leader of a cult Trump is a sociopath. That’s a danger to not only cult members but to society at large.

But *are* the Republicans a cult? You judge.

Cults are social groups defined by beliefs and affinities, and while often (pseudo-) religious or spiritual, the common interest can be an individual, object, or goal. Any group can be a cult, although some do not appear so. They present as legitimate common interest groups—or political parties that tie themselves to the marble presidents populating the National Mall. Does something bind Republicans? Yes: plutocracy-benefitting tax cuts, a right-wing Supreme Court, and political power at any cost.

It's the behaviour of leader and followers that checks the boxes on whether a group is a cult or something more benign. Let's explore.

People usually join cults to fill psychological voids; members tend toward attachment disorder, low self-esteem, or fragility in the wake of a major negative life event. Vulnerable people because of age, social status, economic condition, or state of mental health are likely to become cult members. Research shows that cults represent safe havens of meaning and happiness for some. Midwestern, white, blue-collar workers—and Christian Evangelicals—answer to these qualifications.

Members' psychology is altered by the cult (leader) and they are psychologically manipulated to remain dependent on and stay in the cult. By the time people are active cult members, chanting "lock her up" at rallies and such, psychological dispositions have been reset. Their new values align to the group's values and their affect (feelings) is reduced to neutral rather than positive.

A cult is strong when members are kept from influence by the outside world. They are actively prevented from social engagement, information, and reasoning that differ from that of the cult, that could undo the psychological programming. Members are trained to be willfully ignorant of the world around them by tuning to Fox News rather than "fake news." Thinking becomes binary, unaccepting of others' beliefs and values. Members refuse to even consider there could be more than one "right" way. If the cult leader (repeatedly) says or Tweets that something—say, obstruction of justice—is not so, then it is not so.

Studies of former cult members reveal disassociation, obsessive thoughts, and delusions as the most common of many problems. Anger becomes the signature emotion, with trust issues and feelings of guilt close behind. Admittedly, except by Michael Cohen there hasn't been much guilt. But Republicans and their leader don't even trust each other,

they genuinely see a “big beautiful wall” solving global structural problems, and compensate with unjustified, excessive, hypocritical anger even at their own.

Leaders of cults take on a divine role, speaking and behaving to convince members of their god-like, “I alone” power. They brag about criminal pussy grabbing and ruminate on Fifth Avenue murder. Members treat the leader as all-knowing—despite visible evidence—and submit to him/her. Research conducted on former cult leaders (usually while in prison) reveals tendencies toward narcissism and antisocial personality disorder, causing grandiosity and absence of empathy or consideration for others, least of all refugees.

The leader asserts authority over members through a parent-child relationship. Perceived authority becomes actual authority when members become accustomed to it, accept it, and then strive for the leader’s approval. They do not question the leader’s actions because while they know something is wrong, they fear punishment. Or, the leader has groomed them to self-rationalize it. Despicable, self-destructive, anti-social behaviour is excused by Mitch McConnell, Paul Ryan, Ted Cruz, and every other Republican trying to be Toady of the Month because of “the policies and Justices.”

Leaders need members to be completely dependent to be completely in control. Dependence on the cult leader, like when the leader’s political machine has a lock on all the material right-wing money, ultimately holds a cult together.

Cult leaders are often hypocritical, expounding on the creed of the cult while openly doing the opposite. They heap scorn on others use of non-White House email while sloughing off their daughters’ own email hijinks. They exult in their role as Commander in Chief without irony. They call other world leaders liars and weak while backing down from tin-pot Asian hermit dictators. Of course they lie unrepentantly, or at least more than 10,000 times in two-and-a-half years.

Cults are pervasively secret. Release of information, especially externally, is a risk—especially to the leader. Pre-cult tax returns are especially off limits and government-paid White House aides stonewall then ignore Congressional subpoenas. Meetings with genuine enemy leaders and possible patrons are kept off the record.

The leader adds pressure for members not to leave by threatening humiliation and other consequences. Horrid White House staffers and soulless, weakling Cabinet secretaries are leashed. They are forbidden from questioning because questioning threatens leaders' sense of control. The only way a cult leader willingly allows a member to leave is by banishing them at any sign they have ceased believing in the leader or are being disloyal. On their way out, war heroes, governors, FBI directors, Attorneys General, hapless Communications Directors, dissipated Svengalis, and even reality TV regulars are childishly vilified.

Are Republicans a cult?

To me, the evidence is compelling. If your answer is yes, then because the evidence also points to cult leaders being sociopaths, logic alone obliges us to diagnose with high probability and treat Donald J. Trump as a raving, dangerous sociopath. Intervention is warranted.

God bless America.

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