



Issue Advisory: It's About POWER, Not SEX – Trump as Aggressor

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Newt Gingrich, one of Donald Trump's surrogates and former Speaker of the House, was congratulated by the candidate Wednesday for taking down Fox News' Megyn Kelly. During an interview Gingrich exploded, shaking his finger at Kelly and accusing her of being "fascinated with sex" because she brought up the allegations of sexual assault against Trump. And, then began lecturing Kelly on what words she could or could not use – obviously not "sexual assault."

Some of the more outspoken women leaders in the Republican Party, especially younger women, have publicly condemned Trump for what they believe is truly offensive behavior. Gingrich (not actually an angel, himself) and Trump represent an outdated and widely discredited view about relations between the sexes and what is generally accepted as appropriate social behavior and the treatment of women. Apparently, they just don't get it...and maybe never will.

A Show of Power - Behind these vulgar displays is the implicit view by the GOP old guard that one of the perquisites of holding power is an unlimited license to pursue their sexual impulses. But, to be clear, these ritual demonstrations of male power and dominance have little to do with sex.

Donald Trump's audio recorded boasts of sexual groping and getting away with it because he is a "star" have made it very obvious that such actions are all about exercising power. In Donald's case, it is power over someone – women, employees, business partners, contractors, reporters, political opponents – to do and say whatever he wants.

Trump's Abusive Behavior - Everything about the Donald's life, including his childhood misbehavior (he admitted that as a kid he liked to get into fights), indicates that Trump gets pleasure from engaging in activities that demonstrate his assumed power. Be it calling his former Republican presidential contenders demeaning names, stiffing employees and contractors out of millions, exploiting Trump University students and aspiring models and leaving behind him a wake of hundreds of persons and companies who've lost investments, become financially ruined, or had their careers derailed by the man.

Trump's abuse of women fits squarely with his narcissistic, bullying, deceitful, exploitive and manipulative personality. As others have described him, Donald Trump is a classic sociopath. Numerous psychiatrists and clinical psychologists have called him that and have been quoted in print about Trump's character issues.

Inflated Sense of Self – A number of psychologists and psychiatrists say that it is an indication of a personality disorder that whenever Trump is criticized or challenged, he experiences this as a personal attack and responds in like manner. "Extreme narcissists... like Donald Trump rely on a characteristic set of defenses to evade painful truths about themselves and to shore up that inflated sense of self: righteous indignation, blame and contempt," according to therapist Dr. Joseph Burgo, who has written a book about narcissists.

Clinical psychologist Ben Michaelis, interviewed in Vanity Fair, explains, “In the field we use clusters of personality disorders. Narcissism is in cluster B, which means it has similarities with histrionic personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, and antisocial personality disorder. There are similarities between them.” Michaelis added, “Narcissism is an extreme defense against one’s own feelings of worthlessness. To degrade people is really part of cluster-B personality disorder: it’s antisocial and shows a lack of remorse for [what he says or does to] other people. The way to make it O.K. is to attack someone verbally, psychologically, or physically to lower them. That’s what he’s doing.”

A Fun Game - Deriding his Democratic opponent with the most extreme verbal attacks imaginable has revealed Trump’s deep misogyny (and that of many of his loyal followers). For him, it’s just such fun to invade personal boundaries, to defy social norms, to embarrass and degrade women. He’s really at the top of his game – and in some respects he acts like it’s just a game – insulting, degrading, condemning, threatening and lying about, a former First Lady, Secretary of State and presidential candidate!

(House Republican leaders aren’t ready to let Trump outmatch them in their desire to destroy Hillary Clinton: recent reports are that they are preparing for impeachment hearings should Clinton win the presidency. We will have to see if the Republican women are willing to let them do that.)

Abuse of Women - A rich man is to be excused for having a large sexual appetite, at least that’s the myth. Male media commentators have misunderstood Trump’s sexual aggression and braggadocio as centering on the sexual objectification of women and simply responding to normal male sexual impulses. But most people would agree that it’s not irrepressible sexual attraction or locker-room banter, but actually is the aggression and abuse of women by a powerful individual.

Women have been a convenient target for Trump’s inflated feelings of self-worth and importance. The shock of being groped by someone of celebrity status whom you may have just met would leave most women speechless and feeling powerless. Given Trump’s own explanation of his modus operandi with full-mouth kissing, breast-touching and genital-grabbing of women he barely knows, this is strong evidence of his inability to see women as deserving any respect.

Uninformed and Possibly Dangerous - It is this specter of the abuser that many women voters now see in Trump – a man with no morals, no sense of personal responsibility, low impulse control and who appears prone to anger and violence – certainly urging others to be violent in his cause -- and ready to abuse power. They have correctly concluded that he is an individual who is unfit for the presidency. Their reasoning is in addition to what is also very obvious: Trump is woefully uninformed about the powers of the presidency and its limitations, about the most important public issues of the day, about possible solutions for the country’s social and economic problems; and, not only is he ignorant of world affairs, but spouts dangerous foreign policy views.

How a person so poorly qualified for the presidency – and potentially dangerous for the country – came to be nominated by a major political party is a question yet to be satisfactorily answered. There is one theory, ventured by Dr. Burgo, the narcissist expert that suggests there is a melding of a new populist sentiment with Trump’s narcissism. Burgo writes, “for voters who may feel small and helpless in the face of rapid change, who are worried about their economic future

and social standing, or frightened by a complex world beset by intractable problems. Trump models a simplistic way to vanquish self-doubt and defend oneself against existential anxiety.”

Supporters Like Those Traits - Burgo continues, “Like Mr. Trump, populists engaged in battle have traditionally ridiculed their opposition, but in the endeavor to prove himself a winner at the expense of all those “losers” Trump relies on righteous indignation, blame and contempt as weapons of war. Many disaffected voters are drawn to him precisely because of those traits and not in spite of them.”

Reportedly, Trump’s aides and supporters from the extreme right are working to build a huge political force composed of those millions of anxious Americans who have signed on to his campaign for the presidency. These are the folks who would form the new extreme right or alt-right and, as several observers have noted, are mostly men. In addition to being aggrieved by being left behind in a changing economy, they are also very misogynistic and not at all upset by Trump’s abuse of women. And, in fact, see this as evidence of his power. Unknown are their political and policy objectives. If they follow Trump’s leadership, it they may be intent on advancing an agenda of divisiveness and hatred of certain groups, opposed to government action that would advance social and economic equality and contemptuous of recognizing human rights, civil rights and women’s rights.

We may be in for a very rough ride in the next few years.

More Information

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