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The 7 Stages of Too Much Trump Media Disorder



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A news binge, not a booze binge, is why you'll be starting the New Year with a civic hangover. You've been watching too much TV, and TV has been watching too much Donald Trump.

It's not your fault. You thought you were just doing your good government due diligence — tracking the issues, sampling the pundits, watching the debates on your screens.

You couldn't have known how relentlessly Trump was sucking the media oxygen from the room, couldn't have imagined, for example, that from January through November, 2015, there were 234 nightly news Trump minutes on the broadcast networks, but just 10 minutes for Bernie Sanders.

Nor could you have imagined the self-fulfilling impact of disparities like that. The more attention Trump got, the even more attention he got. The broadcast and cable networks loved the ratings, and the polls, reflecting the spike in media exposure, loved the Donald right back.

So there he was on all the morning shows — on the phone, no less, exempt like no other guest from showing up on the set. There he was on the stump for hours on end, a billionaire showered with hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of free ad time, because, well, you can't blame TV producers and executives for keeping him in the spotlight. He's such damned good TV: so unpredictable, so outrageous, so hard to look away. In other words, so entertaining. And isn't the sale of entertainment audiences' eyeballs to advertisers the business they're in?

Of course other candidates have gotten some coverage, but almost inevitably the Trump narrative has framed it. What's your reaction, Governor Bush, to Trump's calling you a loser? What do you think, Senator Rubio, about Trump's ban on Muslims? What's your response, Secretary Clinton, to Trump's saying your husband is a sexist?

So you've been watching the news, and you've seen Trump's numbers soar, and now, as the election year finally begins, you can't stifle the thought that Donald Trump may actually win the Republican nomination, that he may even, God help us, become the 45th

president of the United States.

You've been here before. Remember when John McCain picked Sarah Palin as his running mate? Remember that media frenzy? Remember your nauseating fear that one awful thing would follow another, and a President Palin would end up in the Oval Office?

You survived that. You'll survive this.

Too Much Trump media disorder (TMT), like grief, has seven stages: shock, denial, anger, bargaining, guilt, depression, acceptance.

Shock. This can't be. This is what fascism looks like when it comes to America. Trump demonizes Mexicans and Muslims. He insults women, mocks the handicapped, jeers at journalists. He dismisses the Bill of Rights as a cover for political correctness. He's obliterated the boundaries of civil discourse. He's a narcissist, a nativist, a vulgarian, a demagogue, and yet he's the frigging frontrunner for the Republican nomination. I can't believe this is happening!

Denial. Surely his bubble will pop. Early polls mean nothing. His supporters don't vote. He has no ground game. He has no firewall to protect him after he loses Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina and Nevada. His lies will catch up with him. His mouth will betray him. Republicans have alienated too many women and minorities to win the White House. There's always been a paranoid style in American politics, but the sensible American people have always rejected extremism. Stop worrying!

Anger. Can't you see? His supporters are the least educated segment of the population, and he pulls their strings like a master puppeteer. He panders to the basest urges of his base. His crowds are seething with rage. He's unleashed something scary — a resentment, a racism, a nativism, a malevolence — that feeds on itself. There's no guarantee that it's reversible, or even containable. Stop them — stop him — before it's too late!

Bargaining. Don't write off Trump voters — negotiate for their support. Don't caricature them — they're your neighbors. Understand where they're coming from. They're hurting. They're the victims of globalization. Their wages are stagnant or falling. Their jobs are being exported. Their middle-class hopes for their kids are going down the drain. They're sick of being pushed around and tired of seeing their country pushed around. Don't just tell them not to fall for "Make America great again." Tell them a better story!

Guilt. It's our fault. We compromised our principles. We were fools to play bipartisan footsie with a ruthless opposition. We abandoned campaign finance reform. We bailed out Wall Street but let the crooks go free. We gave up on anti-trust. We made health care a welfare program instead of an entitlement. We caved on Big Media. We turned our backs on the suffering our trade deals caused. We dropped the ball on comprehensive immigration reform. We saw Bernie's crowds, but we dismissed the power of his message. We made an extremist bully like Trump a plausible mainstream alternative.

Depression. He's going to win. He's going to win. OMG — he's actually going to win!

Acceptance. He's too smart to believe what he's saying. He's a showman — it's all an act. If he gets the nomination, he'll tack to the center. If he wins, he'll be no more radically populist than, no less establishment-friendly as, Obama. You want someone really worth fearing? Ted Cruz!

With TMT disorder, as with grief, "stages" is somewhat misleading. It's rarely an orderly progression. Denial and depression can go hand-in-hand, as can anger and acceptance. The only reliable off ramp from all seven stages of TMT is TMD: Total Media Detox. But if doing that were easy, none of us would know who Martin O'Malley is.

This is a crosspost of my column in the Jewish Journal, where you can reach me if you like at martyr@jewishjournal.com.

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