

Post-Election Stress Disorder Isn't Real. Instead, We Have a Childish Society



By Alex Berezow, PhD — February 22, 2017



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Politics makes utter fools out of otherwise rational people. The vitriol aimed at President George W. Bush by his political opponents caused psychiatrist and political commentator Charles Krauthammer to coin the tongue-in-cheek term "Bush Derangement Syndrome." It caught on. Pundits subsequently seized upon the terms "Obama Derangement Syndrome" and "Trump Derangement Syndrome."

Now, it appears as if some psychologists want to give these satirical diagnoses an air of medical authority. An article in [Kaiser Health News](#) [2], which was (unbelievably) reprinted by [CNN](#) [3], claims the existence of a new psychological diagnosis: Post-election stress disorder (PESD).

It is important to note that, like the Bowling Green Massacre, PESD isn't real. It's not in the DSM-5. It's not in any textbook, not even the one on abnormal psychology. It's a "diagnosis" that appears to have been entirely [fabricated by a blogger](#) [4] at *Psychology Today* in November 2016.

PESD's phoniness notwithstanding, the article describes the plight of maladjusted human beings who seem incapable of handling life in a democracy. A 34-year-old male -- who is supposedly well into adulthood -- is consoling himself with Harry Potter books. Others aren't so lucky. One psychologist reported, "I have people who've told me they're in mourning, that they've lost their libido."

Apparently, this needs to be stated: Your ability to maintain an erection should not be dependent on who is occupying the White House.

The Real Diagnosis: A Childish Society

While PESD is not a real diagnosis, there are at least three very real problems plaguing our society.

1) The glorification of victimhood. Claiming victimhood bestows upon an individual the right to avoid scrutiny and criticism. The easiest way to shut down an argument is to exclaim, "I'm offended!" We have created a culture in which dissent has been labeled a "microaggression." Instead of challenging each others' beliefs in the marketplace of ideas, we retreat into our social media echo chambers and safe spaces. As a result, we are a nation of intellectual lightweights.

2) The pathologization of everything. People who were once considered quirky can now be classified as having a mental or personality disorder. An article in [Slate](#) [5] explains that things like shyness and caffeine intoxication are now considered pathologies under the guidelines of DSM-5. The author goes on to write that "the odds will probably be greater than 50 percent... that you'll have a mental disorder in your lifetime." Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised if post-election stress disorder finds a place in DSM-6.

3) A shocking lack of perspective. According to [Freedom House](#) [6], more than one-third of the world's population lives under authoritarian rule. Citizens of many Asian, Middle Eastern, and African nations do not experience the political freedoms and civil liberties that Westerners enjoy. Far worse, every year, the [World Health Organization](#) [7] estimates about three million children will die from easily preventable conditions, simply because they lack access to clean food and water and adequate healthcare. Those of us living in the United States should count our blessings, regardless of who is president or which party is in charge.

All together, the true problem is that America in the 21st Century is a shallow, self-centered, ignorant society. And apparently, there are a cadre of psychologists willing to line their own pockets by serving as enablers of such puerility. They are a shame to their profession.

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[2] <http://khn.org/news/a-new-diagnosis-post-election-stress-disorder/?source=acsh.org>

[3] <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/20/health/post-election-stress-partner/index.html?source=acsh.org>

[4] <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/workings-well-being/201611/post-election-stress-disorder-in-women>

[5]

http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/medical_examiner/2013/04/diagnostic_and_statistical_manual_fifth_

[6] <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016>

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