larging our circle and seeing the faces and listening to the intelligent comments and insights of colleagues I've known for so many decades at a distance. It was so good that we could be together, furthering our knowledge while we remained safe from the ravages of the pandemic.

Naturally, not sitting around the seminar room or in a circle in person meant that we lost some sense of intimacy and we could no longer break bread together—usually members, such as Tom Ferraro and Joyce Rosenberg, are known to bring delicious pastries to our meetings. Typically in the past, after an intellectually exhilarating morning, many of us would go for lunch together to continue our exchange.

Given the uncertainty of the virus, it seems we may be reliant on virtual meetings for some time. However, this also offers additional new opportunities. At the Forum/Clio monthly leadership meeting, we started the process of investigating meetings with colleagues in Europe as well as Asia. Together with virtual meetings with colleagues at a distance, these ideas are just being developed and will require the acceptance of our membership. Ultimately, we will get back to in-person meetings, such as on Jim Anderson's much-delayed talk, "Heinz Kohut's Vulnerable Self." Meanwhile, we will continue the building of psychohistory.

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The Episodic Man: Donald Trump

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Abstract: I describe the central thesis of my book on Donald Trump, which is that he is an episodic man, living outside of time and narrative, striving to win in the immediate moment in life, which is a continuous battle.

Keywords: The Atlantic, autobiographical-author, motivated-agent, narrative-identity, personality-development, psychological-biography, social -psychology

In February 2016, right around the time of the New Hampshire primaries, the editor at *The Atlantic* magazine asked me to write a feature-length psychological profile of Trump, which the

magazine would publish if Trump won the Republican nomination. I said there was no way he was going to win, but I jumped at the opportunity, even though I knew next to nothing about Trump at the time. The magazine published "The Mind of Donald Trump" (June 2016), which was read by an estimated 3.5 million that summer. I enjoyed my 15 minutes of fame, thinking that there was no way he would beat Hillary Clinton. A year after he became president, having avoided everything Trump, I started to feel like a moth drawn to the flame. I began taking notes and doing more research. Before I knew it, I was writing a book.

The Strange Case of Donald J. Trump's (2020) argument is structured around a particular theory for understanding persons that I have developed over the past two decades, which has gained widespread currency in personality science as well as developmental and social psychology. The framework conceives of personality development in terms of three distinct lines or layers: the person as, one, a *social actor*; two, a *motivated agent*; and three, an *autobiographical author*.

For starters, each of us is a social actor, an actor on the stage of life, as Shakespeare suggested. We each play our roles in our own inimitable ways. Our repeated performances are guided by not only the demands of the roles we find ourselves in, but also, importantly, by fundamental *dispositional traits*—"the big five traits" that have been repeatedly identified in over 70 years of empirical research. They are extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. From the standpoint of the social actor, Donald Trump is arguably the most extroverted president in history and without a doubt the most disagreeable. This unique temperament combination, apparent in Trump's personality by age seven or eight, renders him a dynamic and combustible force, almost primal in his social dominance and malevolent cruelty.

Dispositional personality traits describe what kind of a social actor a person is, but they tell us next to nothing about what a person wants and values. From the standpoint of the motivated agent, we aim to understand a person's guiding agenda for life. What actually motivates Donald Trump? What are his core values and beliefs? More than anything, indeed to the exclusion of nearly everything else, Donald Trump wants to glorify Donald Trump. Like the mythical Narcissus gazing lovingly at his reflection in the pool, Donald Trump needs to see and admire himself at all times.

Among other things, a narcissistic motivational agenda is about promoting the self at the expense of everybody else. A peculiar feature of Trump's narcissism is how he loves himself as Narcissus did—not as a person, but as a perfect and beautiful *object* or thing. In his mind, therefore, he can never make a mistake, and he must always be a stable genius. Otherwise, his love of self would evaporate. Trump has no values beyond believing in self-promotion. Politically, the only position he can comfortably occupy is that of the supreme autocrat. He is authoritarian, and many of his followers view him as a savior. Indeed, scores on self-report indices of the authoritarian personality were the strongest psychological predictors of voting for Trump in the 2016 presidential election.

Much of what I have said so far may not be especially surprising to psychologists and laypersons who have watched Trump closely over the past four years. But things get really strange at the third layer of personality, the person as an autobiographical author. As I and my students have documented in nearly three decades of research, people become authors of their own lives in late adolescence and young adulthood. At that time, we begin to create stories to make sense of our lives, retrospectively and prospectively. The stories provide our lives with some semblance of unity, purpose, and temporal continuity. Psychologists call these internalized and evolving stories "narrative identity." As a personality psychologist, I basically study individual differences in narrative identity. Like no other president in history or subject I have ever studied, Donald Trump is bereft of a narrative identity.

Unlike George W. Bush's story of overcoming alcoholism or Barack Obama finding his African father and his identity as a Black man, Trump has no story in his head about who he is and how he came to be. I call him "the episodic man" because I believe he lives outside of narrative time, outside the temporal sequence of life that the rest of us all implicitly know and take for granted. In not having a self-defining story in his mind, a narrative to explain his development over time, Trump is less like a person and more like God. God doesn't have a story. God simply IS—the ultimate stable genius. Donald Trump sees himself in this same way. For over 50 years, biographers have been unable to coax more than a few childhood memories out of him, and in each of them Trump is almighty, an eternal force who does not develop but lives all-powerfully in the eternal moment.

Imagine what it is like to be the episodic man, living outside the confines of any discernible life story. You wake up in the morning as if you are the protagonist of the movie *Memento* (2000) with no sense of yesterday and no tomorrow. You have one goal for the day: win. It doesn't matter whom you are fighting. It could be Nancy Pelosi, Joe Biden, or some loser in Omaha, Nebraska, who tweeted something you didn't like. Whatever and whoever it is, you will fight it with your entire arsenal of weaponry, from tweets to lawsuits to naked political aggression. Then you will go to sleep. When you wake up tomorrow, you will start over, fighting to win the day.

Trump's version of the episodic man acts according to what he described, back in a 1980 *People Magazine* interview, as his philosophy of life: "'Man is the most vicious of all animals and life is a series of battles ending in victory or defeat'" (*The Strange Case of Donald J. Trump*, 20). Each day is a discrete battle, resulting in a victory. But the days do not add up. They do not build to form a narrative arc. Instead, Trump proceeds through life angry moment by angry moment with no accumulation, storyline, learning, or development.

Trump's episodic approach to life has proven extraordinarily effective for him in many ways. For one, it gives him a sense of authenticity and immediacy that no American politician can match. Whatever he is doing and wherever Trump is, he is always RIGHT HERE NOW. He's not thinking about yesterday or tomorrow. He doesn't have a hidden agenda. His unexpurgated, unfiltered, dynamic presence—primal in its appeal—projects charisma to millions of his fans even as it repulses millions more.

Let me end with one final metaphor. To be Trump is to be forever a boxer in the ring. When you are in the ring, you cannot afford the luxury of thinking long-term, either retrospectively or prospectively. You cannot be worried about round 23 down the road, or what happened ten minutes ago. You've got to be on your guard the whole time, fighting to win the moment, defending yourself against the vicious opponent who is in your face. Trump is the man fighting three minutes in the ring and when the bell rings, he goes back to his corner for a minute—that is, he goes to bed. Then he wakes up refreshed to do it all over again. Amazingly, it never wears him out. His companies go bankrupt, he loses the election to Joe Biden, and none of this even matters—for Trump never went bankrupt, he will tell you, and Biden stole the election. He can

never lose. Combine this with Trump's dispositional traits, his narcissistic goal agenda, and his authoritarian sentiments, and it all makes for one very, very strange human being—a psychological one-off, I would argue, who is much stranger than any diagnostic category clinicians can invoke or any common personality type recognized by psychological science.

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Book Review

Donald J. Trump: Psychohistorical Perspectives on Our 45th President

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Ingrid Grieger—Iona College

Review of Michal Maccoby and Ken Fuchsman, eds., Psychoanalytic and Historical Perspectives on the Leadership of Donald Trump (London and New York: Routledge, the Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), ISBN 978-0-367-89712-3 (hardback, $155), 978-9-367-42648-4 (paperback, $38.95), 978-1-003-02068-4 (ebook, $38.95), pages 190.

Keywords: American-exceptionalism, competence, disruptive-narcissism, gaslighting, leadership, marketing-narcissism, personality, Trump

Editors Maccoby and Fuchsman have assembled an interdisciplinary and renowned group of scholars to provide rather deep insight into the impact of Donald J. Trump's childhood and adolescence. Topics include his personality development, his style of leadership, the strategies he uses to win and maintain the loyalty of his base, and whether his public behavior is compatible with the presidency. Also addressed by this team of psychoanalysts, historians, psychohistorians, and a sociologist, is how Trump got elected in 2016. That is, what sociological, economic, cultural, and psychological factors coalesced during that election, which led to an individual with no political experience and a host of character