

Trolls Under the Blog: “Biomed's” war on “neurodiversity”

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Heckenlively blows the irony meter

The nucleus of this essay came when I happened to read an AoA post this week, in which Heckenlively celebrated Oregon legislation based on the “green Our vaccines” potboiler. His comments included the following: “It's my opinion that a good deal of the media fears giving us too much of a voice because they'll be looking down the barrel of a lawsuit like the 100 million dollar claim made against Oprah Winfrey by the cattle industry for going after beef... If it's a political fight, the media is obligated to cover both sides, and their LEGAL protections are just about invulnerable. They could run an entire issue on what we say and the pharmaceutical companies couldn't lay a finger on them. Do you know how many young reporters must be itching to do this story and make a name for themselves? This gives the press the opportunity to do the job it should have been doing for the last fifteen years.”

This mindboggling claim reminded me of an essay I wrote some time ago, but never got around to publishing, on the use of litigation and other forms of censorship against their many critics. Here is a condensed version:

October 2004: Journalist Brian Deer reports being ejected from Autism Society of America convention, after asking questions about claims in a brochure about “transfer factor” autism treatment.

November 2004: Lawyers for Andrew Wakefield initiate lawsuit against Brian Deer.

September 2005: Mark and David Geier sue Drs. [Dr. Sarah Parker](#), [James Todd](#), [Benjamin Schwartz](#) and [Larry Pickering](#) for slander over 2004 paper criticizing 2003 paper by the Geiers.

October 2005: Posting of <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/EOHarm/message/17717>, by bradfordhandley@yahoo.com, to “ND folks monitoring this list”, threatening, “We will sue you for libel and we will go after your homes and assets.”

March 2008: Clifford Shoemaker, attorney for Lisa Sykes in Sykes v. Bayer Pharmaceuticals, subpoenas blogger Kathleen Seidel. The subpoena calls for a large volume of records about neurodiversity.org, including connections with the US government and pharmaceutical companies, alleged by shoemaker and denied by Seidel.

April 2008: Blogger Ken Reibel for Autism News Beat is expelled from Autism One conference, for reasons under dispute.

February 2009, UK: Andrew Wakefield and Thoughtful House make complaint against Brian Deer and Sunday Times with Press Complaint Commission, alleging “false and misleading” statements in article implicating Wakefield for additional fraud in 1998 study. PCC “request” to remove articles from Times website is wrongfully represented as “order” in release by Thoughtful House. Times removes, then quickly restores the articles.

February 2009, US: J.B. Handley sues Paul Offit and Columbia University Press for content of Autism's False Prophets, mainly on the grounds of repeating Oct. 2005 post as direct response to

Kathleen Seidel.

Needless to say, Heckenlively is presenting “revisionist” history (which we may just as well call “*denialist*”). Through the halcyon days of 2004-05, vaccine critics were enjoying favorable notice from the media and also the government, while taking brutal measures to keep their own critics from getting serious attention. But now that the lawsuits which were the thrust of their activism have failed; now that spokesmen like Wakefield and Olmsted have left their posts in disgrace; now that vaccine experts and “neurodiversity” advocates have fought their way to a fair hearing in national media, they want a proverbial “mulligan”. They want (as was admittedly their wont at the best of times) to imagine that it was not their own flaws and misjudgments but the allied forces of government and “Big Pharma” that prevented them from being accepted by science and the public. They want to pretend that the resources and opportunities which they abused and squandered were never theirs to begin with, so that they can ask for new resources and opportunities to refight the same old battles. Finally, and most sinisterly, these bullies who postured as reformers and liberators now want to pose as naïve idealists for some noble lost cause. (Echoes of the southern states after the Civil War, and Germany after the first World War!) This is ironic, to say the least, and it would be shameful if they were allowed to get away with it.

A Biomed blitz

As if to reemphasize the irony, on November 21st, Left Brain/Right Brain received the following posts, mainly in response to articles criticizing Thoughtful House and supporting Juli Martinez's court proceedings (see Wakefield Returns!!):

[slumlord17](#)
[November 21st, 2009](#)
05:05:18

These websites are a coordinated effort by quackwatch, and the insurance companies to not pay for the emerging effective biomedical treatments for autism. Also many ABA therapy practioners are threatened by their treatments because if the children are cured with biomedical treatments they will lose their bread, and butter.

[faithingod](#)
[November 21st, 2009](#)
05:20:06

This whole webiste is a paid pr campaign against biomedical treatments with autism. It is being paid for by AETNA, CIGNA, and quackwatch. Their goal is to saturate the media with their checkbook journalism. We wonder if Mary Ann Rosser is being paid under the table. That is the way the articles I have read sound. Cox enterprises needs to make sure their reporters are only being paid by their salaries. They are using Aspergers adults as their front to be a legitimate website. If Thoughtful House doesnt stand up to Stephen Barrett and Quackwatch they will be in big trouble when Anonymous Complaint Mari Robinson comes their way.

[faithingod](#)
[November 21st, 2009](#)
05:26:58

I hope Thoughtful House sues Stephen Barrett. This whole site is an organized quackwatch site whose

whole goal is to win money in lawsuits by calling people quacks. Barrett is an evil freak who has lost over 40 lawsuits. Please google TIM BOLEN and the truth will set you free.

[Vallhalla](#)

[November 21st, 2009](#)

07:47:26

Oh wow its lets defend playing on the floor as a legitimate treatment for autism. Imagine if they did this for cancer.

Roll around on the floor, and then you get m and m's but your cancer won't go away.

Lets see if we can get the government pay for it too. We can join up with the quackwatchers and get our way. Lets team up with a man who worked at a mental hospital in Pennsylvania where they locked up children with autism for life.

[Leonoid Brezhnev](#)

[November 21st, 2009](#)

07:59:48

Great propaganda! I haven't seen propaganda this good since Joseph Stalin. Great idea use the free press to spread disinformation.

[Anton Chekhov](#)

[November 21st, 2009](#)

08:05:43

The whole purpose of this site is to:

1. Promote ABA
- 2 Put down Defeat Autism Now Treatments
3. Make sure ABA is the only accepted treatment for autism.
4. Help the insurance companies to not pay claims for DAN treatments.
5. Put down Andrew Wakefield.
6. Defend Big Pharma.
7. Support the Allentown Idiots.
8. Make sure people believe autism is purely genetic so people will have no choice but to do ABA.
9. Try to start lawsuits against Thoughtful House and Wakefield by putting incorrect info.

Author: Gerry Spence Lives

Comment:

cute website right brain/left brain

How original and cute.... What if we pretended cancer was a cute cuddly disease that was psychological, and there were no biomedical treatments for it. Do you think the doctors would be sued for malpractice? Whose talking about big pharma anyway? Do you think Aetna wants to pay for any autism treatments? The financial industry stole all the money, the economy popped, and Aetna is scared as hell to pay any claims for autism which is increasing daily. How about those mammograms they pay for everyday though? They only find 2 cases out of 1000 mammograms, and have 98 false positives. Can you imagine the woman that the doc may have started on chemo who didn't really have it. Its all politics. The politically well connected all do mamography, and use it to bring in lots of money.

Out of curiosity, I tried to follow links backward to identify the source bogger(s). “Slumlord17” and “faithingod” both led to the New York Times website. Valhalla brought me to the Wall street Journal site. Most curiously, “Leonoid (sic!) Brezhnev” and “Anton Chekov” led to pravda.com, which is simply a placeholder. (A Network Solutions statement explains: “This 'Under Construction' page is an automatically generated placeholder Web page for a domain that is not yet attached to an active Web site. This page replaces the "Not Found" error pages and notifies visitors that a Web site is coming soon.”) This resolved any doubt in my mind that the five “commenters” are really pseudonyms for one individual, and I expressed this suspicion to administrator “Sullivan” after another “Gerry Spence Lives” also traced back to a site under construction. He confirmed, “I’ve approved 2 of the 9 posts from this troll”, and deleted all but the first and third repeated here. There can also be little doubt that this individual was not merely using multiple handles to circumvent administrative control, but also avoid being identified..

Bolen's vendetta

It is clear that the “troll's” primary concern was to condemn Steven Barrett and quackwatch.org. This was most blatant in a post I didn't get before it was deleted, which consisted of predictions of some imminent personal disaster for Barrett and fellow debunker Dr. Baratz. After some investigation, I am satisfied that the source of these comments is Tim Bolen, a longtime advocate of “Dr.” Hulda Clark, since deceased from the cancers she claimed to have cured, or a close associate. Since November 1999, Bolen and associates have targeted Steven Barrett, proprietor of, with what Barrett calls a “libel campaign”. Among what Barrett characterizes as false allegations: “that I am... engaged in criminal activity ... that I was `de-licensed'... that in 1976, a federal judge had ordered me to stop criticizing chiropractors (or risk imprisonment) that I had stopped until the judge died ...that what he calls the `quackbuster operation' is `run out of a New York Ad agency' that is directed and financed by the pharmaceutical industry. .. that I have been a failure as a psychiatrist and that my allies and I are losing battles with his allies on all fronts, especially in court... ”

Barrett and Bolen and co have filed several lawsuits against each other. Barrett reports initiating the first of these proceedings in October 2000, over allegations which included the claim that he was de-licensed; compare/contrast to the second “faithingod” post. (He states in further explanation, “‘(D)e-licensed' means having one's license taken away by regulatory authorities (but) I merely retired in 1993.”) The main actions against Barrett were two July 2001 filing by attorney Carlos Negrete, alleging misconduct that included racketeering. (There were in fact more than 30 named defendants, of whom Barrett says ““Several... are not legal entities, and at least one did not exist.”) As of end 2002, both of these complaints had been withdrawn or dismissed, and Barrett had filed a [counter-suit](#) against Negrete and Hulda Clark for malicious prosecution. As far as I can determine (Based on information up to , this suit has yet to be formally resolved. The fact that Barrett has had at least some success in in this and other suits against his critics (contrary to typical boasts from said critics) would explain all too well why the “troll” took such pains to obfuscate his identity. If it is Bolen, or someone acting on his part, then experience will have taught him the value of a little discretion.

Of further interest is the use of these events by Bolen et al: “Bolen and his allies immediately distributed messages headlined `Stephen Barrett Charged with Racketeering, and Civil Rights Violations, in California'... Normally, an article of this type would be sufficient to enable the poster to be sued into oblivion. But since the filing of the suit was a `news event,' its contents could be reported as `news' without risk to the reporter.” I would go so far as to suggest that the complaints were filed in part or even primarily to allow such propaganda. I will also say that such propaganda tends to be “sectarian” in circulation and appeal, ie influential mainly within the originating group. Assuming (as is admittedly a big assumption!) that Bolen, Clark, etc appreciated this, it may be that their primary

purpose was simply to counter doubts and declining morale among their followers.

Thus, this series of posts can be accounted for as an example of an ongoing campaign of attacks on Barrett and quackwatch.org by Bolen and/or immediate associates, to whom Left Brain/Right Brain's positions on Wakefield etc. are of only passing interest. But, it is not at all improbable that they are, on some level, carrying out an initiative by Wakefield to attack his opponents. Since Bolen previously worked as “publicist” for Hulda Clark, it is not inconceivable that he (or another survivor of Clark's crew) has assumed the same position *de facto* for Wakefield. It is also possible, if not indeed more probable, that the troll is angling to assume this capacity in the future. Certainly, Wakefield has found use for third-party hatchetmen before. The National Autism Association's disgraceful and libelous piece “Offit's Failure To Disclose Financial Interests on Dateline Jeopardizes Swine Flu Vaccine” was likely handed off to them by Thoughtful house, as evidenced by a) at least one frivolous passage defending Wakefield and b) the dateline of *Austin, Texas*, where Thoughtful House is headquartered, instead of the NAA's own location of *Nixa, Missouri*. But, anyone considering seeking this post would do well to remember the single most convenient thing about agents *provocateur*: If a plan goes south, their master is free to leave them to face their fate alone.

A proactive rebuttal

To these posts, and Heckenlively's earlier nonsense, speaking both for myself and other “neurodiversity” bloggers, I have the following comments:

We accept funds for research from people with an interest in arriving at a specific outcome! No, wait, that's Wakefield.

We try to inject children with dangerous substances even over parental objections! No, wait, that's Wakefield. Again.

We file lawsuits and other complaints against journalists who criticize us! No, wait, that's still Wakefield.

We advertise questionable medical products on our blogs! No, wait, that's Olmsted.

We sue people who criticize our theories in respected scientific journals! No, wait, that's the Geiers.

The world's most influential media venue covers our claims uncritically while ignoring our opponents! No, wait, that's Jenny McCarthy.

We threaten frivolous litigation against private citizens who criticize us pro bono! No, wait, that's JB Handley.

Despite a complete lack of financial resources, you manage to get your message out with nothing but a free blog, a geologically slow internet connect and a computer whose case is patched with duct tape! No, wait, that's *me*.

David N. Brown is a semipro author, diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome as an adult. Previous works include the novels *The Worlds of Naughtenny Moore*, *Walking Dead* and *Aliens Vs Exotroopers*, and the nonfiction ebook *The Urban Legend of Vaccine-Caused Autism*. This and other articles related to autism are available free of charge at evilpossum.weebly.com.