

The Practice of Ritual Defamation

**How values, opinions and beliefs are
controlled in democratic societies.**

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Defamation is the destruction or attempted destruction of the reputation, status, character or standing in the community of a person or group of persons by unfair, wrongful, or malicious speech or publication. For the purposes of this essay, the central element is defamation in retaliation for the real or imagined attitudes, opinions or beliefs of the victim, with the intention of silencing or neutralizing his or her influence, and/or making an example of them so as to discourage similar independence and "insensitivity" or non-observance of taboos. It is different in nature and degree from simple criticism or disagreement in that it is aggressive, organized and skillfully applied, often by an organization or representative of a special interest group, and in that it consists of several characteristic elements.

Ritual Defamation is not ritualistic because it follows any prescribed religious or mystical doctrine, nor is it embraced in any particular document or scripture. Rather, it is ritualistic because it follows a predictable, stereotyped pattern which embraces a number of elements, as in a ritual.

The elements of a *Ritual Defamation* are these:

1. In a *ritual defamation* the victim must have violated a particular taboo in some way, usually by expressing or identifying with a forbidden attitude, opinion or belief. It is not necessary that he "do" anything about it or undertake any particular course of action, only that he engage in some form of communication or expression.
2. The method of attack in a *ritual defamation* is to assail the character of the victim, and never to offer more than a perfunctory challenge to the particular attitudes, opinions or beliefs expressed or implied. *Character assassination* is its primary tool.
3. An important rule in *ritual defamation* is to avoid engaging in any kind of debate over the truthfulness or reasonableness of what has been expressed, only condemn it. To debate opens the issue up for examination and discussion of its merits, and to consider the evidence that may support it, which is just what the *ritual defamer* is trying to avoid. The primary goal of a *ritual defamation* is *censorship* and *repression*.
4. The victim is often somebody in the public eye - someone who is vulnerable to public opinion - although perhaps in a very modest way. It could be a schoolteacher, writer, businessman, minor official, or merely an outspoken citizen. Visibility enhances vulnerability to *ritual defamation*.

5. An attempt, often successful, is made to involve others in the *defamation*. In the case of a public official, other public officials will be urged to denounce the offender. In the case of a student, other students will be called upon, and so on.
6. In order for a *ritual defamation* to be effective, the victim must be *dehumanized* to the extent that he becomes identical with the offending attitude, opinion or belief, and in a manner which distorts it to the point where it appears at its most extreme. For example, a victim who is defamed as a "subversive" will be identified with the worst images of subversion, such as espionage, terrorism or treason. A victim defamed as a "pervert" will be identified with the worst images of perversion, including child molestation and rape. A victim defamed as a "racist" or "anti-Semitic" will be identified with the worst images of racism or anti-Semitism, such as lynchings or gas chambers.
7. Also to be successful, a *ritual defamation* must bring pressure and humiliation on the victim from every quarter, including family and friends. If the victim has school children, they may be taunted and ridiculed as a consequence of adverse publicity. If they are employed, they may be fired from their job. If the victim belongs to clubs or associations, other members may be urged to expel them.
8. Any explanation the victim may offer, including the claim of being misunderstood, is considered irrelevant. To claim truth as a defense for a politically incorrect value, opinion or belief is interpreted as defiance and only compounds the problem. *Ritual defamation* is often not necessarily an issue of being wrong or incorrect but rather of "insensitivity" and failing to observe social taboos.

An interesting aspect of *ritual defamation* as a practice is its universality. It is not specific to any value, opinion or belief or to any group or subculture. It may be used for or against any political, ethnic, national or religious group. It may, for example, be used by anti-Semites against Jews, or by Jews against anti-Semites; by rightists against leftists or by leftists against rightists, and so on.

The power of *ritual defamation* lies entirely in its capacity to intimidate and terrorize. It embraces some elements of primitive superstitious belief, as in a "curse" or "hex." It plays into the subconscious fear most people have of being abandoned or rejected by the tribe or by society and being cut off from social and psychological support systems.

The weakness of *ritual defamation* lies in its tendency toward overkill and in its obvious maliciousness. Occasionally a ritual defamation will fail because of poor planning and failure to correctly judge the vulnerability of the victim or because its viciousness inadvertently generates sympathy.

It's important to recognize and identify the patterns of a *ritual defamation*. Like all propaganda and disinformation campaigns it is accomplished primarily through the manipulation of words and symbols. It is not used to persuade, but to punish. Although it may have cognitive elements, its thrust is primarily emotional. *Ritual Defamation* is used to

hurt, to intimidate, to destroy, and to persecute, and to avoid the dialogue, debate and discussion upon which a free society depends. On those grounds it must be opposed no matter who tries to justify its use.