



QNON Re-Issue

[00:00:00] **Dr Bradley Onishi:** Welcome to Straight white American Jesus. My name is Brad Onishi. I am associate professor of religious studies at Skidmore college, and I am thrilled today to be joined by Mark Andre Argentino who is a PhD candidate in the individualized program at Concordia university and is a as, also a 2020 2021 public scholar there.

He's also an associate fellow, with the global network, on extremism and technology Jeanet and that is, located at Kings college in London. And today, Mark Andre is here to talk with me about, Q Anon, the Q Anon info DEMEC as he calls it, and that it's links to Evangelicalism. So, Mark Andre, thanks so much for joining me.

Mark Andre Argentino: Thank you for having Bradley. I'm happy to be here. Quite excited.

Dr Bradley Onishi: Well, you, first of all, I wanted to ask, if you could tell us [00:01:00] you have just a fascinating interdisciplinary you sort of PhD program you're doing so can you tell us about your research and how it works with the program there at Concordia?

Mark Andre Argentino: Yep. So the individualized program at Concordia is a program that is developed for individuals that want to do interdisciplinary work, basically when your project doesn't necessarily fit within one department or you require, you know, to combine multiple disciplines, it's a place where you go. It doesn't require for you to have a very clear plan and clear strategy, and your research requires a bit more from the get go.

And in my case, I've always been interested, with the nexus of technology. religion and extremist ideologies. whether that is, you know, groups like ISIS, which kind of started bugging things started on my PhD a few years ago, two groups in the far right too, you know, Evangelicalism and Christian identity, all that type of stuff.

And right now I'm interested in Q Anon. So I'm in the departments of [00:02:00] theological studies, department of engineering and the department of computer science. Basically I mix qualitative and quantitative methodologies to see not only how these groups, you know, create propaganda, how they recruit members to their ideal illogical causes.

I'll be inspire at times back to violence or, you know, can be a public health hazard now at the times of COVID-19 and also how this impact democratic institutions, when you see, you know, some extremist groups that want it impact. Whatever democratic country may have. So I try to look at it very holistically, try to get everything going.

So if I'd have to put into one second, since it would be, I really focus on a digital ethnographic method. I like to be inside the groups to understand their worldview, to represent the idealist, their perspective. And then I try to use some data science, like quantitative evidence and metrics to the type of work they do online.

Dr Bradley Onishi: Yeah. You know, when I was learning about your research, I was just, I was so impressed. Cause I feel like, when I encountered your work, I encountered [00:03:00] somebody who has the insight and the training of a scholar of religion. But also has the skills, as you just mentioned to do, these digital ethnographies to, be online, play, you know, infiltrated in online platforms and really seeing sort of from the ground level what's happening in terms of radicalization and extremism with various groups.

And so, anyway, this brings me to, some of your recent work and I just want to say listeners that as all of us. Are are, doing, both Mark Andre and I are, at home and working from home. So if you hear noise in the background, there are various family members making dinners and children trying to keep it together.

Well, dads are, you know, doing podcasts, so just bear with us, but that's, that's how things work in the COVID era. So, Mark Andre, you recently wrote a piece that I saw on the conversation. It's titled Q Anon conspiracy theories about the coronavirus pandemic are a public health threat and you have a great opening here, and I'm going to embarrass you just by reading some of your work in front of you.

But, you say first there was the pandemic then came the [00:04:00] info demic a term, the head of the world health organization defines as the spread of false information about COVID-19. The most dangerous conspiracy theories about the coronavirus are now part of the Q Anon phenomenon for months. Now, actors in Q Anon have downplayed the severity of the crisis, amplified medical device information, and have been originators of hoaxes.

so I will admit to you Mark Andre, this is full disclosure to you and to my listeners. I try to keep abreast of so many things that are part of the, Evangelical and, Fundamentalist and Pentecostal and other subcultures. I I'm on Twitter folks. See me there. I'm always trying to learn things. I'm going to, I'm going to be fully open here and say that I have not probably done my due diligence when it comes to fully understanding Q Anon. And I know I've received emails from, from several folks saying, hey, I don't understand Q Anon. I don't know why it's linked to Evangelicalism. I don't know why so many of the Christians in my life are sort of, sucked into it.

So can we open with this? can you give [00:05:00] us, so one minute explainer, two minute explainer on what is Q Anon? you know, w from it's in terms of it just most basic facts, what is this? QAnon is, well,

Mark Andre Argentino: I'll give you an academic term to start with it's what a Michael barcode would call a super conspiracy.

I think that's important to know at the beginning, because it's a conspiracy theory that encompasses a whole bunch of other conspiracies under it. So when you're going to look at this group, you're going to see every type of conspiracy under the sun.

Dr Bradley Onishi: So QAnon at its core however, is the belief

Mark Andre Argentino: that the world is run by a cabal of satanic child sacrificing buildings and they control everything.

So they console our politicians. They control the mainstream media, they control Hollywood. They, you know, they, they have their hands in everything and they would have continued to control the war if it was not for the prophetic election of Donald Trump. And to the nonbelievers that Donald Trump knows [00:06:00] all about the cabal and the elite, and that he's working behind the scenes with a group of military intelligence officials.

That are called QT. And you deem is basically using a messaging board, such as four Chan Chan, and now eight Kuhn to let the public know what's going on in their fight against the cabal, by leaving drops or crumbs on these messaging boards and QAnon nonbelievers are there to decrypt these posts so that they can figure out what's actually going on and.

Q Anon has been very much mainstream recently because they have been making the media more and more. But this didn't begin to back to October 28, 2017 with just a single post. Unfortunately the calm before the storm, which stated Hillary Clinton will be arrested between seven 45 and 8:30 AM EST on Monday morning, October 30th, 2017.

That's the one and it's assigned cute. And that's the message that really started this all. So that's kind of the, the one type of, you know, one [00:07:00] line or one minute explanation queue, but in Q, you'll have theories about UFOs, deep, underground military bases. Reptilians, Astro planes. You have, you know, religious conspiracy theories, which is kind of what we're here to talk about today.

It really brings everything under the sun except platter. If there's, they are not welcome and locked in QA.

Dr Bradley Onishi: Sorry, I don't mean to laugh, but it's just so weird. So they're the one group they're beyond the pale. Huh? Just do not denigrate the spirit, the shape of our earth. That is, that is one line too.

Mark Andre Argentino: Right. You could believe in aliens. You could be even Astro planes, but earth is flat. That's too much.

Dr Bradley Onishi: Right. It's too much. All right. Well now I know not how to get kicked out of the, the Q chat room there. I mean, I guess I have so many questions, but just to follow up on that one minute explainer, Can you tell us how, how many folks are part of this?

I mean, you know, you may not have good numbers on that. Maybe you have numbers on how many posts are made [00:08:00] per day or on how many folks are interacting online with a Q related, you know, communities and channels. But can you give us a sense? I mean, I'm sure there's folks listening to this right now who are thinking there can't be that many people who are really sort of involved, right?

I mean, this cannot be something that a large number of folks have bought into, what does the data say?

Mark Andre Argentino: The data is, so I'd like to disclose that it's hard to predict the size of a community like Q Anon, just on social media data. Right? Some individuals can have multiple accounts. It's, you know, it's very difficult to, to really point to numbers.

I don't want to just go out there and throw some information out. So I'll break it down with, let's say Twitter first. So when I was looking at the data from 2017 to February this year, I kind of slacked a bit on the polluted in the last few months, since, you know, front of Iris happened and I've had other priorities when it comes to research.

We were looking at approximately, you know, 55.1 [00:09:00] million, tweets hashtags posts, everything related to went on on Twitter and that four year period. So volume wise, it does seem like a large amount of data. But in reality, it's kind of a drop in the bucket to what you get every day. When you're looking at like a monthly usage of posts, I'd like to try, I like try to look at the unique amount of users that come out there and you're looking at anywhere from 152, 300,000 unique posters every day. But again, this type of data collection does include, you know, on days when the news is recording on a QAnon event. If you and I tweet about it, that'll be in there. It's really hard to post out. Who's a Q Anon believer and he was not in there. So it represents more topically about how many people are talking about this on a daily basis.

She went on, did have a very large presence on Reddit back in day before they were taken off. Again, you could have an idea of [00:10:00] who was active in that space. I'm just going to try to figure out where my numbers are, because I don't want to lie to you guys about this. So it was approximately. But total to 80,000 people that were subscribed.

Well, you were looking at only 10,000 of those had posted more or less. So you're looking at approximately let's round it up maybe at 12, 13% engagement rate. So it's hard to determine who is lurking. Who's not now there's the numbers have been thrown around depending on what side of the fence I believe in QAnon.

You went on his. You know, it some believe some unbelievable said there's millions and millions and millions around the world. I don't know if that's a true number. Honestly, I don't want to throw those. That's going to bite me the button the end, but let's say between 500,000 and maybe a million people who might engaging in this type of content on a monthly basis.

Now, I don't know if this is like [00:11:00] belief or not, but. You know, it's still a significant amount. Yep. If you're looking at all the social media traffic that happens on a daily basis, you know, there's probably more people talking about the new Star Wars movie that came out yesterday or like, plus then she went on it still.

It's still niche. And even in the recent Pew survey, they did about how many people are aware of Q Anon. It was a very small percent of the population to actually have heard about the movement. So it numbers like that are very difficult to come by. I would love for someone to do a large poll to get a better idea, but the issue too is QA is global.

So we could get the U S numbers. But what about German? Q Anon, Dutch Q and on. UK, France, Canada, you know, there there's at least 15, 16 different countries. How do you get those methods? It's difficult to find.

Dr Bradley Onishi: Yeah, no, I guess one of the things for me when I hear these, these kinds of numbers is in some sense in a, in a global sense, Q Anon is niche for sure.

And it's a, it's a drop in the bucket, but I'm just going to make a quick [00:12:00] analogy. I'm seeing a lot of people say that. The COVID-19, casualties are a drop in the bucket compared to other pandemics across the world. Right. And my response to that is always okay. We might've had a pandemic in the bubonic plague or the Spanish flu or whatever may be that was, you know, that had many, many more casualties, but.

That doesn't mean that what's happening right now with people losing lives and being sick is not important and absolutely demanding of our intention and our plans and our best. right. So I guess my point is, is. We can look at the global death rate from COVID-19 and say, oh, that's nothing compared to what happened in 1918.

My response is it's really significant to every, every one of us who is afraid to go outside, who has lost a loved one who has lost a family member, so on and so forth. It's the same thing with Q, right? It may be niche in a global sense, but there is. So there are people who are so deeply engaged with this, that they are abandoning their families.

They're not engaging with their friends. They're sort [00:13:00] of really drastically going down a conspiracy. Rabbit hole that is not only affecting them individually, but then as leading too, as, as your work shows us an info demic, two people perpetuating misinformation, and that is having an important fact on thing.

So, before we go there, let me ask another question, which is in many ways, Q Anon seems to be a repository for some of the most outlandish conspiracy theories. It's kind of like a nice canvas if you want to everyone, but the flat earthers can sort of paint their brush on this canvas. And you get everything, as you said, from reptilian, reptilian, reptilian, creatures to aliens, to Satan worshipers, right?

Why are Evangelical so intermingled in this phenomenon? I mean, the people that have written to me and said, hey, can you guys do an episode on Q Anon? Have basically been saying, I'd like to know more about this. Cause every time I check my timeline, all of my Evangelical friends are the ones spreading the Q Anon, you know, basically hoaxes.

[00:14:00] What's the connection there. Can you help us with that?

Mark Andre Argentino: Yeah. So I'd have to say that the most it's not, I don't want to put it on a banner under all Evangelicals. Right. I think there's specific denominations within there that are more prone to being present in the Q and on the move movement. So I'd probably put this under a Neo charismatics and, you know, the NAR specifically, which is not necessarily, you know, BNR is very specific.

The new apostolic reformation. It's not necessarily a domination, but is kind of a movement within them. I think these are the two that we'll see more. And I think specifically, even for most, Evangelicals, we could even put it, there was some resonance for people. It might bring them down into this path because, there's those that there's like, theories and Q Anon about satanic cults.

There's the necessity of torture and killing of children for Satan anti-vaccine anti-abortion narratives. You know, baby farming for X, Y, and Z massive networks of Satan say tonic word or leadership, [00:15:00] spiritual warfare. There's a lot of these things and even, yeah. here's a lot of these things that echo them.

And I think , cause I'm researching a little bit more into the NR right now for my. PhD. I'm really hearing some of the Eccles from like the satanic panics that you had in the seventies to the nineties, where, you know, you were talking about, let's say satanic ritual abuse from the NAR that period. That necessarily didn't die out with the NAR kind of died out with the other evangelical movements, but it's kind of a coercive theology and it really depends on spiritual warfare narratives.

And I think that's a key tenant and you're going to see that spiritual warfare narrative come around with Evangelical influencers within the Q Anon movement. even then if you're thinking stuff like historically, Let's say, the, the Pentecostal signs and wonder movement. So where miracles are routinely proof that individuals are on the right path, or it's a sign that you're doing something good or something bad, like Q drops in the QMAP website or whatever.

These type of things are pointing to QAnon believers on whether they are on the right track [00:16:00] or not. And they're really digging for these type of beliefs and even. There's right now, a Q Anon church that I found was found in February that I'm researching. You're still seeing that on their Sunday services where they're doing this, you know, signs and wonders belief type system to kind of explain what's happening in the real world.

Even from there, you're even think about the, how the religious right had political aspirations for a long time. If you're thinking of like the, POTUS shield pack, you know, they're incorporating, potential candidates with these religious languages. So they claim that Trump was a King Cyrus figure or that Sarah paleon had a Deborah anointing, you know, there's some echoes in there that are around then with QAnon.

Now you're seeing this whole. Anointing of Trump into some prophetic figure, really resonating. And I think that really the, the political, figures, the, you know, ideological, spiritual warfare landscape, all of that is kind of bringing them all in. And if it's just your, your, a type of, you know, religious figure or pastor or whatever that believes in this stuff, it's [00:17:00] not too hard for you to make the jump into QAnon, and kind of bring that to your congregation.

if we think of like, Rodney Howard Brown recently, who was just arrested because he made the news for going on tour for running service as well. You know, there were stay at home

orders. He didn't believe it was a hoax. He even sat on line that, you know, the coronavirus was just an attempt to prevent Trump from being reelected.

It's spiritual warfare. Like that type of stuff. You see those echoes from these types of influencers and these leaders. And I think that's what brings them in again, like. I've used the term like radicalization to an ideology. It is a very personal process. And like radicalization in and of itself is not necessarily a bad thing.

It's when it radicalizes the violence, that's a concern. It's still something to keep an eye on, but people radicalized the ideologies on every day and you could get something good out of it. It's how you get, you know, social movements going and change and all that. But. In the case of something like Q Anon, there's a lot more concern, especially in the current COVID landscape where there's a lot of denialism and downplaying of the risks.

Dr Bradley Onishi: Yeah. [00:18:00] I, I take two things away from that. Very nice explanation. You just gave. One is. That, there is an emphasis on spiritual warfare in a, in the Q Anon universe. And that really is sort of consonant with, many Evangelicals. But especially with the groups, you mentioned the Neo Pentecostals, those who are invested in the theme of spiritual warfare, you know, God versus Satan, good versus evil in the spiritual realm, right?

If you have a theology that is sort of saturated by those themes, then the Q Anon universe is not a rival. It's not a challenge. It's actually a sort of a friendly, nexus that can help, further you down that spiritual warfare kind of a pathway. The second thing is something we've been talking about on our show.

Is this a trope in Evangelicalism and fundamentalism is broadly conceived, which as a refusal to accept the authority of the state refusal of science and anti-intellectualism, and [00:19:00] that whole recipe leads to a proclivity for conspiracy. Right. And so you can see in Q Anon, again, a kind of natural repository for people who have that outlook on things.

I guess now I'd want to ask you, you you've really got over this in some of your recent work, but what are the specific conspiracies and hoaxes that are being disseminated by the Q a non-community in the covert era?

Mark Andre Argentino: So if I could give just a little, little bit of a wider overarch before getting to specific Q Anon right now, if you'd have to look into specific themes.

So there's antigovernment conspiracies. So you have the whole 5g causes, Corona virus. That's very present in Q Anon. you have a bio weapon, conspiracy narratives. So the story was created in the lab. It's manmade. It was intentional. social control conspiracy theories, where they're going to be, you know, inserted, they're usually vaccines and sort of chip and track us.

Chaos theories, where it's a great time to rise up against the controlling governments and we want to take them [00:20:00] down. And then you have religious conspiracy theories where you have, you know, this is the second coming of Christ. The end of the world is happening to the apocalypse. This is the signs of what is to come. These are all the type of

categories of conspiracies I've seen, that have happened, and they appear in Q Anon throughout the past few months. Now, Q Anon specifically had a threat narratives. However, that kind of cover all of this, as the, as like the pen that the virus spread and the pandemic broke out.

So the first thing that we had was in January Q Anon made the news as summoned, the visuals were promoting that drinking bleach could cure and prevent the virus. There were promoting products like a miracle mineral supplement or a 2020 spray. Basically the same thing, depending if you're selling it to the prepper community or, you know, a more alternative health community, that was the first place they were going again, really reflecting the fact that this is just a regular virus, like the cold or flu take our little magical [00:21:00] spray.

And you know, I've, haven't had the flu for 10 years. I use this everyday. We're fine. That was the January. And it kind of is reflective to an extent of. A lot of society's reaction to the virus at that point, you know, it was okay. It was a virus it's in China. Some people are sick, but it's not as bad as we think.

So. Not terrible. Minus the fact you're selling bleach to people to cure the virus. That's, that's, that's part of the public health hazard that's going on. Yeah. Then they moved to. Where political individuals were promoting that the virus, this was a hoax. It's not that bad. The mainstream media is trying to make it worse than what it really is.

Q Anon shifted their narrative to focus on the fact that the virus was a deep state plot to take down president Trump and to stop him being reelected. Since, you know, the impeachment didn't work. The Mueller investigation at work and the Corona virus was the deep state going around to stop the successful Trump rallies tank, the economy, and all the gains that Trump made during his election, increased the jobless rate, all that type of stuff to, you know, impact his chance of being reelected. So at this, so let's say the [00:22:00] coronavirus bleach was in January. The deep state is trying to stop Trump from being elected we're in February now. In March, the first week of March, we had a period where again, they shifted their narratives where when the U S closes border to Europe, they were saying, now that, Oh, wait, Trump and the Q team are not control the virus.

It's a good thing. This is the storm they were talking about. So, if we get into around the March 12 area, Mark Taylor, who's one of the leading prophetic figures from the Cuba Evangelical movements. What I like to call the Q Anon Evangelicals, he was up here hearing on a spiritual SmackDown, Christopher McDonald, any claim that virus as part of a covert operation to carry out the arrest over long problems by Trump and quoting him. He's basically saying the virus is not as bad as they're saying. We learned through Q all these things all this time. We've got the prophetic word that God has given us what the end result of this will be, I think is they're using this Corona virus to go in, shut the place in death, places down and start making arrests.

[00:23:00] So we're seeing here the combination of the. Spiritual religious perspective, QAnon and the whole political conspiracy dementia. And then as we get closer to the end of March, that's when we're seeing a lot more of the, Evangelical leaders within Q Anon, but

even outside of Cunanan itself, start talking about, the coronavirus has spiritual warfare and this was once on the narrative that we're really echoing.

I'm within Q Anon at the time. And I think this is kind of some of the interesting stuff for my personal research. Now, where, you know, one day there was a post of, again, looking at satanic panic on eight, someone had posted a map of where all the satanic table temples are in the U S. And it overlapped kind of where all the outbreaks were happening in the U S there's no correlation to temples are located in big cities because that's where people are.

And the viruses congregating where, you know, there's a lot of people, but then at that point you saw influential figures within the QA movement. Like [00:24:00] Mark Taylor, David Hayes was praying medic really coming out and talking about how this is, you know, it's a, it's basically a battle between Patriots and say, tonic forces within the movement.

And, you know, because it's spiritual warfare, you could do like Peter did with his mother when she was sick and you could just exercise authority over the disease and commanded to leave. And you know, basically saying like the spirit of pain is what this coronavirus, then you could just exercise that the pain is from the devil.

It's not from God. So it's something that we can defeat. That's a mentality you saw with other individuals. You, you know, you saw, Oh, Peter Wagner use, people from like, the Patriots, pests, pastors and, Alliance, you know, the Elijah's Liz group, you saw it. And then even if you go on right, wings watch, you got a whole list of the pastors that were really doing that for a week.

It was hard to keep up with them, but you get an idea of how they were perceiving this now. It's hard to it. It's dangerous in the sense of a pandemic to see this type of behavior because of the global scale, but also from the perspective of a religious scholar. It's also important to understand the [00:25:00] worldview of the individuals that are espousing this because it's easy to name, shame, and criticized, but also if you want to be proactive and provide solutions, it's important to understand how these people think.

When you're going to approach discussing pandemic and vaccines, because if you just go to the, shut them down, tell them the wrong and kind of shove the cure in their face. It's not necessarily going to work. And I think that's also like the space we have to get in. When we're talking about this, I it's great, then fun kind of the name and shame people, but it's also important to understand the review and try to find how do you find a collective solution to this?

Dr Bradley Onishi: Well, and that's exactly, to me, the, the role of the. Of the, the public role of the scholar, right? Such as yourself, you know, you are, you're doing the work, you're on the message boards. You're reading the posts and you're really doing the hard work, understand the cosmos and the worldview that these folks are inhabiting in order to then not only report back to the general public, but to provide insight on to how one might go about approaching this group when it comes to [00:26:00] avoiding.

The public health crisis and avoiding them the information of I'm sorry, the, the spread of misinformation. You know, you have a quote here in your piece and I'm going to just

embarrass you again by reading a little bit of it, but you say Evangelicals within the Q Anon movement viewed the pandemic as the promise coming of the kingdom of God on earth David Hayes, who is better known as the praying medic and an influencer in the Q Anon community with 300,000 YouTube subscribers set in a March 14 live stream, that there was no reason to be concerned about COVID-19. Hayes reassured his viewers that they may not be affected by the disease. This, was quote on quote spiritual warfare. Only those who have not been chosen by God will be affected by the disease we see here.

I think just the importance of what you're doing because this person, David Hayes, the praying medic has 300,000 YouTube followers. And is spreading this, sort of spiritual warfare message that says, if you're chosen by God, you will not be affected. Right? Well, that of [00:27:00] course flies right in the face of what we know from public health experts, from, the world health organization and anyone else who is working on the pandemic from a medical or public health perspective, they of course have a much different understanding of the virus than this.

And yet we see why this is as you identify in your work absolutely a public health threat. I mean, this is where the world of the conspiracy in the world of the hopes and the world of, you know, people who believe in reptilian creatures and satanic worshipers controlling the planet really comes into the public square and has to be something that we reckoned with.

Can you talk about that a little bit? Can you talk about the public health threat and ways that, you know, we might think about responding to the Q Anon kind of approach to this pandemic.

Mark Andre Argentino: I'm happy to, I actually recently did a webinar with, one of my supervisors, Andre who's been on your podcast before.

And, another one of my supervisors get Kendra Schmidt about the, the landscape as you see between church state and no conspiracy theory [00:28:00] and the coronavirus, and it kind of fits into the same space. And we need the, the core message we really had during that is kind of what I already just said, but we need to prepare for the future and understand how these groups thinks.

Yeah. Cause ultimately we're going to come to a space where. You know, if there's a vaccine, how do you market that to this type of audience? You know, we're going to need to herd immunity. We're going to need to immunize some populations. If you have a large amount of people that are just going to go down the route of, you know, the anti-vaccine movement and nine, this which we're kind of seeing with Q Anon and other you know, evangelical leaders right now, how do you present the message and how do you present the benefits and how do we approach this? If those were making decisions, do not understand this perspective. And I think when we're coming to this type of area, we need to be, I guess, compassionate, to an extent towards these groups.

And it's very hard when you're looking at individuals like Q Anon, you know, as someone researching this. My comments section, my DMS are terrible place to be at times [00:29:00] when you write about them, between the insults, the death threats and everything else. But

then from my perspective, still trying to understand if you do not reach out to these types of individuals and provide the information they need, ultimately, they will put, you know, my family, my friends, my colleagues at risk because of how our immunity works within the pandemic.

So it's trying to figure out how can we work in this space? And it's also really speaks to. The multidisciplinary work I do, because you need to understand the group and the ideology, but then you need to understand the digital landscape where you're going to be pushing this message and where there'll be pushing back.

And then you need to think about what are the type of policy solutions in, you know, disaster response that you could implement to approach this issue. And then, proper probably structured and thought out responses to this issue. And I do not have all the answers. I am not necessarily paid to have all the answers, but it is something that I try to think too, and try to provide as much information about this, answer it, but it is a very, very difficult [00:30:00] question and challenge and is going to arrive require a whole of society approach.

Dr Bradley Onishi: Well, one of the things that brings up for me is, is something that Dan and I talk quite a bit about is. That oftentimes a religious identity is about way more than belief. And one of the sort of results for me of, of taking that approach is that. It really means that you're not going to out logic somebody in these debates.

Right. That if you know, and I've done this, I mean, if anyone knows, you know, you're listening to this and you know, me personally, you have seen me over the years on Facebook and other places, having the debates, putting the verses up the Bible verses data and the facts and what happens, nothing. Right. It leads nowhere.

And so, you know when we get into something IQ anonymous, folks who are so deep down a, a rabbit hole that has so many moving parts and threads and themes and narratives, and every day, there's a new sort of spin on the events and what's happening, and who's going to go to jail. And what Trump is going to do to control the virus and how the global [00:31:00] elite are trying to stop him and all this stuff.

That, you know, simply showing up with facts and data is not going to be effective. Right. As you're saying, we have to think probably a little more critically about that. And we also have to find the resources for compassion, as you're saying that, you know, for me. When I see folks, especially in the Trump era, as an American who are leveling what I take to be a such harm on our public square, who are helping to support the info demic as you've called it along with the who, passion is a hard thing to come by sometimes.

I'm angry, I'm irritated, I'm frustrated. I want things to change and I want, what I take to be a sort of evidence-based data driven approach to take hold and compassion can be hard to find in those moments. Right. But you really do remind us in your work that that is often a virtue of the scholar, right?

That the scholar and the investigator and all of us must have the compassion to understand. And if we are [00:32:00] going to affect change and I just, I'm really grateful for your work

and for your comments along those lines. Now, with that said, and we can kind of close on this, This kind of last comment here, but it certainly does not help when, Q Anon exists.

And then folks at the highest levels, at least of the American government, if not others are giving subtle, sort of affirmation and credence to it, right. We have seen a subtle kind of like affirmations of Q Anon in American governmental public spaces. We have a president who is willing to engage in conspiracy theories that are unfounded and just simply repeat them until no one questions it.

And so when you have that kind of situation, you see something like Q Anon really sort of get legitimized and it can really have delete radius effects. I mean, the folks who have written to me about this, this phenomenon. Their tone is concerned, right? Their tone is I'm losing my friend or I'm losing my family member to something that just seems completely on based in [00:33:00] reality and also completely out of control. is there anything you can comment on in terms of just how the subtle affirmations of something like Q Anon from government officials in the United States has kind of provided a little bit of fuel for the fire is as the, as the phenomenon continues to March forward to over the last couple of year.

I don't

Mark Andre Argentino: think we could even call it subtle affirmation.

You know, if you're keeping an eye on, what's been going on on social media, you look at Trump he's retweeted Q Anon accounts. Dozens and dozens of times over the past week, while you have elected officials that are running for Congress that are openly Q Anon supporters, and that doesn't even take into consideration those that are kind of flirting with the line, whether to get votes or whether they actually believe in it.

So I don't think you're no longer really flirting with the mainstreaming of the, of the movement. But I think the pandemic has shown that conspiracy theories are [00:34:00] being spoken out at the highest level of power around the globe. And I think that is something that is concerning and you know, it, I still think to an extent you do need to have some compassion when it comes to the individual, when you're going after an entire movement and entire idea, I think it's also important to an extent to be cold and calculated and reasoned because you need to consider the wider threat that this ideology can cause. And I think this is where we are now is when you look at something like Q Anon, you know, you, you know, it's a national security threat where individuals are willing to go offline and.

Pretty like, cause acts of violence, you know, it's a public health threat where these individuals are either downplaying the threat of the disease and are putting their families and their communities at risk by potentially being carried, not digging the measures to protect themselves. They're downplaying the risk they're spreading and I'm flying this [00:35:00] information, which is already a confusing landscape right now.

So to an extent, it is important to present all this information upfront and how it's going and to know shine light on this. And, you know, I think also one of the under examined areas is the religious side to conspiracy theories. It's a growing phenomenon where know now you

have a Q Anon church, and I've seen that grow in the past few months from 30 members on the zoom, a session every Sunday to 300 last week.

No. You've seen religious leaders in the evangelical community spreading and downplaying the pandemic where religious leaders have a role to, you know, provide comfort in these times. And advisor committee, there are, you know, at the small, at the micro local level, these are the people that individuals will turn to for guidance and they have a role to play whether they want to or not.

And [00:36:00] at times some are. Doing a great job and are properly in the community. And at other times there are others that are not, and they are being a risk. And it's, to that extent, it is important to study research and highlight that. But when it comes to your friend and your family, that's where the compassion comes.

Cause you need to think what is leading the individual there? What, what is, why are they believing this? What do they need? What are they trying to find? And to an extent, that's why I think it's important to try to engage with people. To an extent. I never blocked anyone on Twitter. QAnon not, unless you send me a death threat, then you know, that's a whole other ball game, but it seems like a good salt seems like a good reason.

Yeah. I got to have one draw, but if not, I think it's tricky. That line of communication is important because you never know if someone tries to reach out the answer, you provide them what impact it will have on them. So trying to provide facts, trying to find information, at least making them question what they believe.

It is important. And I know on Twitter, there's a [00:37:00] great community of QAnon researchers and observers, and, you know, they're spending hours and hours going out there and it's really, you know, it's, it's there to try to get the message across. And if it's someone, you know, personally, Reach out. Don't, you know, don't cut the line.

I know friends of my family who have come to me was not like, oh, you're studying this. This is what my X person in my life is believing. You know, what do you know about this? How do I've had DMS from people saying yes, you know, experts in my family is there. How do I talk to them about this? And no, it really necessarily isn't about the facts, because like you said, you know, you could throw any factor, you, right?

Any Bible verses, we need to do like an Evangelical or religious leak reliever. Really, it comes down to the conversation, the relationship, the personal level, and that's what you really need to bring to the table at the powers of the highest powers. Then at that point, it's data facts, and it takes a wider community to kind of stand up and create a movement around this and to be like, no, this is enough and this is what we should do.

Dr Bradley Onishi: I really [00:38:00] think that one of the things you highlighted is is that we are living in a time of uncertainty and. Times of uncertainty are opportunities for leadership, right? Yeah. And unfortunately, what we've seen in many places, both local and national has, and, and global has been people willing to capitalize was on fear in order to maintain popularity, to achieve their goals, you know, and so on and so forth.

And I think we've seen that with, with the leadership, from state and national levels in the United States who have, as you said, gone beyond flirting with Q Anon and openly affirmed it. I think that's, that's something to take note of. I mean, I, one of my refrains over the last couple of weeks is that leadership matters and, people will look to their leaders for direction and for how they should react in situations like a pandemic.

And so, I also wanna say that. you know, give a shout out to, your PhD supervisor, who is a professor, Andre Gagne who's come on our show twice and just provided wonderful insight [00:39:00] into the world of new Pentecostalism and charismatic traditions. And, you know, the two of you together and the kind of work you're doing, is, is incredibly important.

So we're really happy to shout out professor. and we're really glad that you were able to join us, today. where can people find you if they, obviously not to send you, you know, nasty DMS or mean things, but, can they reach out to, you know, just learn more about your research and to connect with you online?

Mark Andre Argentino: My main social media for my research is Twitter. So yeah, you could find me at the 4ngle3f1sh My work is there. There's a link to my public scholar profile at Concordia where, my publications webinars and all that will be updated there. And yeah, feel free to DM me, reach out. I'm happy to engage with the poor curious and the research have questions. No, that's part of the public scholarship that I'm doing, it's really too share the knowledge that I've been able to curate over the years as a PhD and the privilege I have, especially in Quebec [00:40:00] where my degree is really paid for by, you know, society due to, from all our tax and everything. So I really have a role to give back to my community. That's one thing that Andre taught me is really.

Taking your research and giving it back and getting out of that ivory tower. So reach out, feel free and yeah, Twitter is good.

Dr Bradley Onishi: Well, and for those of you listening, you can't see that Mark Andres is conducting this interview in a professional and composed manner. He's providing cogent responses, all the wild behind him and around him is swirling a family dinner preparation, and they you know, keeping a toddler and check and, it's, it's really quite impressive. You are quite the public scholar. You have your skills are, you're unflappable. So that's a, it's a very, very much I try. Yeah. Well folks, as always, I'll say you can find us online at straight white JC. You can find me at Bradley Onishi on Twitter.

You can find us on the Facebook page. We are starting our new series, May 26th, the history of the religious rights since 1960. And so we invite you to tune in for [00:41:00] that. you can always email me and you can always email my cohost Dan mills. Well, if you'd like to join us on the Patron, we'd love that we can always use your support.

We're always trying to provide the best scholarship and, content we can. I'm on there a couple of days a week. Providing exclusive content on the feet. So you can join us for as little as \$2 a month. So please check that out. And otherwise we will be back on Friday with the weekly Roundup, but for now I'll just say, Mark Andre, thank you so much for joining me and thanks so much for your work.

It's very important and that, and we appreciate it. Thank you for having me. It was a pleasure to be here to talk with you. .