

GIZMODO



HEALTH

The Fake Sex Doctor Who Conned the Media Into Publicizing His Bizarre Research on Suicide, Butt-Fisting, and Bestiality



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Illustration: GMG Art, Photo: Damian Sendler's promotional headshot

Warning: This article includes discussion about suicide and sexual assault. The subject sometimes speaks about sensitive mental health topics with language that departs from best practices.

If you look up Dr. Damian Jacob Markiewicz Sendler online, you might think he has a MD and a PhD from Harvard Medical School. He presents himself as the chief of sexology at a non-profit health research foundation based in New York. His website states he's one of the youngest elected members of the American Psychiatric Association and the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, and that Barack Obama gave him a President's Gold Service Award for his contributions in medicine and mental health.

Based on the information available online, Sendler could be one of the most accomplished 28-year-olds in medicine.

But he's not. Those are all lies.

Sendler is a serial fabulist. The accomplished doctor character Sendler has created has appeared in numerous media outlets—Vice, Playboy, Savage Lovecast, Huffington Post, Insider, Bustle, Thrive Global, Women's Health, and Forbes, among others. Many of these platforms have published Sendler's lies and publicized his bizarre and irresponsible studies on necrophilia, zoophilia, lethal erotic asphyxiation, and sexual assault. And until recently, he was soliciting patients through his website where he offered online psychotherapy and sex therapy.

After weeks of interviewing and corresponding with dozens of sources at universities and hospitals, I've finally parsed fact from fiction. And after interviewing Sendler for several hours, I figured out how he's gotten away with it—until now.

Trust me, I'm a doctor

IFLScience and MEL Magazine featured Sendler's study titled "Similar mechanisms of traumatic rectal injuries in patients who had anal sex with animals to those who were butt-fisted by human sexual partners." Both outlets called it the "most NSFW study of all time."

Dan Savage interviewed Sendler about lethal sexual asphyxiation in May 2018 on his podcast Savage Lovecast, which is revered within the sexual health community.

Huffington Post tapped Sendler's expertise on millennials' relationship with their parents. Insider used Sendler as a source for several articles, including "11 myths you should stop believing about sperm," "12 G-spot myths you need to stop believing," and "7 common infections that can be caused by sex."

Sendler talked to Women's Health about the "7 Ways To Make Missionary Position So Much Hotter" and the "12 Orgasms Every Woman Should Have." He provided Men's Health with his opinion on "how to treat male menopause" and "how barre can improve your sex life."

Bustle quoted him in an article about getting over an ex and Elite Daily included him in a post about getting over insecurities in a relationship.

About a week ago, Forbes published the article, "Why Do Women Fall in Love With Serial Killers?" which includes several quotes from Sendler. "Many women, and some men, idealize criminals and murderers as the type of person who can give them support. It's like a fetish," Sendler told the writer.

Sendler's studies are practically tailor-made for outlets that cover taboo sex news.

Vice's article "Meet the Man Studying Why Some People Are Attracted to Animals" features a Q-and-A with Sendler. The writer presents Sendler as a transgressive scientific visionary. "While the online world has allowed us to have a nuanced discussion about an immense variety of kinks, consent, and the spectrum of sexuality, the urge to fuck animals is one impulse that's pretty off-limits—even in the scientific community," the reporter writes. "Dr. Damian Sendler, a forensic sexologist and research scientist, is one of the few people in the world attempting to change that."

Playboy profiled his research on necrophiliacs on Halloween 2018. The article pulls heavily from Sendler's paper titled "Necrophilia in a Sample of Forensically-Committed Psychiatric Patients," which Playboy reported was under review at the academic publication Omega—Journal of Death and Dying. The article has not been published in Omega and a spokesperson for the publisher of Omega told me the journal has never received a submission with this title or a similar title. Regardless, excerpts of the study were published in Playboy.

The study is supposedly comprised of interviews with three anonymized men in Poland and Ukraine who engaged in sexual behaviors with corpses, according to Sendler.

The three subjects were apparently asked to talk about their "first time with a corpse." A morgue worker named "Matt" describes sexual relations during a night shift:

I unzipped the body bag and started looking back-and-forth at her looks. Eyes were wide open, and her mouth would not shut up. She looked like she was going through some orgasm and that got me excited. I started touching her legs, my hands moving into her vagina. She was pretty wet inside. I'm guessing she had some trauma?

“These narratives seem extremely implausible,” clinical psychologist and sex therapist David Ley told me after reading the study. “The sexual elements read more like Penthouse Letters than clinical narratives.”

It's difficult to know if these tales are real or pulled from Sendler's own imagination.

Spin doctor

When I met Sendler in mid-February at the Gizmodo office, he was impeccably dressed—light gray donegal blazer, gold safety pin-style collar clip, tie clip, patterned pocket square, and a fabric flower in his lapel. He wore strong cologne and a beaded bracelet.

Sendler is dapper in nearly all the photos of him I could find online. Sometimes he adds a white lab coat or drapes a stethoscope around his neck—though there seems to be little reason for him to use this device in his stated line of work.

He seemed eager to meet with a journalist of a publication that hadn't yet featured him. As soon as we sat down in a conference room he launched into a frenzied screed about his research, barely finishing ideas before jumping to the next: BDSM to bestiality to pedophilia to lethal sexual asphyxiation to a theoretical scenario in which a large sex party or the New York Pride parade leads to an increase in HIV infections. He spoke confidently in an Eastern European accent, sitting back, one leg crossed over the other. He maintained direct eye contact with me as he lied about himself and spewed pseudo-psychological bunk.

Despite Sendler's claims that he is a doctor, and despite the stethoscope

in his headshot, he is not a licensed doctor of medicine in the U.S. Two employees of the Harvard Medical School registrar confirmed to me that Sendler was never enrolled and never received a MD from the medical school. A Harvard spokesperson told me Sendler never received a PhD or any degree from Harvard University.

One of Damian Sendler's headshots
Photo: Damian Sendler

“I got into Harvard Medical School for MD, PhD, and Masters degree combined,” Sendler told me. I asked if he was able to get a PhD in sexual behavior from Harvard Medical School (Harvard Medical School does not provide any sexual health focuses) and he said “Yes. Yes,” without hesitation, then doubled-down: “I assume that there’s still some kind of sense of wonder on campus [about me]. Because I can see it when I go and visit [Harvard], that people are like, ‘Wow you had the balls, because no one else did that,’” presumably referring to his academic path.

Sendler told me one of his mentors when he was at Harvard Medical School was Yi Zhang, a professor of genetics at the school. Sendler said Zhang didn’t believe in him when he was studying at Harvard. But, Sendler said, he met with Zhang in Boston just a month prior to our interview. And Zhang was now impressed by Sendler’s accomplishments.

Sendler said Zhang told him in January, “Congrats. You did what you felt was right... Turns out, wow, you have way more power in research now than I do. And I’m just very proud of you, because I have people that I really put a

lot of effort, after you left, into making them the best and they didn't turn out that well."

I asked Zhang if he made this statement that Sendler attributed to him, and Zhang told me he didn't say it and he hasn't seen Sendler since Sendler stopped working at his lab in 2014. Zhang remembers that Sendler didn't do very much work and that he talked a lot. "He will do one thing and claim he has done 10 things," Zhang told me. "He was very talkative. He can sell."

A representative of the Broad Institute, which was affiliated with Zhang's lab, confirmed that Sendler worked an unpaid assignment at Zhang's lab from November 2012 to January 2013. Subsequently Sendler worked as a research technician at Zhang's lab at Boston Children's Hospital from July 2013 to April 2014, as an employee of Howard Hughes Medical Institute, according to a spokesperson from the institute. Sendler then worked as a full-time technician at a different lab at the Broad Institute from mid 2014 until the summer of 2015.

While Sendler worked in Zhang's lab, he co-authored, with Zhang and three others, a genetics study that was published in Nature. But Sendler was not a Harvard student at the time, according to a Harvard spokesperson.

Until right before publication of this article, the biography section of Sendler's

A photo on Sendler's biography page
Screenshot: damiansendler.com

website featured a photo of a group standing in front of Gordon Hall at

Harvard Medical School. Sendler and Zhang stand next to each other in the picture. The caption reads “Dr. Sendler (last row, second from left) during graduate studies at Harvard University and Harvard Medical School.”

Zhang said this photo shows him with his lab technicians, and that Sendler was not a student. It upsets him that Sendler is using a photo of him on his website where he is lying about his credentials. “I hope he is not doing damage,” Zhang said.

Lab rat

Sendler was born in August 1990. He told me he graduated from high school in New York two years early and went to college at the age of 16.

I confirmed that Sendler did get a bachelor’s degree in independent studies at New York University, but he started in 2008, when he was about 18, not 16. When I later asked Sendler about this discrepancy, he said he couldn’t recall what his age was, then deflected.

While at NYU he volunteered at the lab of Jose Silva, who was then an assistant professor at the Columbia University Institute of Cancer Genetics. Sendler was one of many authors of a mammary gland study that was conducted by the lab and published in the journal *Genes and Development*.

Since then, Sendler has inflated that experience at Columbia. His website states he “completed rigorous thesis research at the Institute of Cancer Genetics.” In early February, Sendler’s LinkedIn account showed he was a thesis candidate in cancer genetics, but most of the information

The education section of Sendler’s LinkedIn account
Screenshot: LinkedIn

has now been removed

from the page. In a CV from 2013, Sendler listed Jose Silva as a “thesis advisor.”

Silva told me he was not Sendler’s thesis advisor because Sendler was a volunteer and not a Columbia student. A Columbia spokesperson confirmed Sendler was never a student at Columbia Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons or its Institute of Cancer Genetics.

After graduating with a bachelor’s degree from NYU, Sendler spent the next few years working in the aforementioned Boston labs until the summer of 2015. Soon after that he began spending a lot of time in Europe—mostly Poland—based on his Instagram account. His posts during this time make vague mentions of “doctoring” and “medical school adventures.” Less than a year into this time in Europe, he posted on his Instagram referring to himself as a “budding md-phd investigator.”

In our initial interview, Sendler told me he received some education at the Medical University of Warsaw, but I could not verify that he attended this school. One of two medical departments of the university responded to my inquiry, telling me Sendler was not enrolled in that department.

Sendler did publish at least five papers in which his affiliation is listed as the University of Lublin Medical School in Poland—a much smaller institution. An archived version of Sendler’s site from January 2018 says he studied medicine at University of Lublin Medical School and studied at Jagiellonski Collegium Medicum, a medical school in Poland. Mentions of these schools were scrubbed from his site in early 2018. Neither University of Lublin Medical School nor Jagiellonski Collegium Medicum responded to requests for comment on Sendler’s enrollment. Sendler confirmed to me in a follow-up call he attended both schools.

Sendler seemed to have moved back to the U.S. in the summer of 2017. Two months later, Sendler finally became a Harvard student—sort of. In August 2017 Sendler was admitted into the Harvard Extension School as a Master of Liberal Arts degree candidate, according to a spokesperson for Harvard’s

Division of Continuing Education (DCE). But this is not an institution that can grant MDs or PhDs. “Sometimes people put Harvard on their resume but it’s not really Harvard University or one particular School, it’s DCE—which is still technically Harvard,” Harvard spokesperson Rachel Dane told me. “Damian is a candidate in the Extension School.”

Even though Sendler’s only academic affiliation with any Harvard institution is his current enrollment in the Extension School, he claims he has a MD and PhD from Harvard Medical School. Not only that—Sendler’s website states he is an “elected member” of several mental health organizations including the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law and the American Psychiatric Association.

A representative of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law told me Sendler was in their database as a student, but he is not listed as a member. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) could not share membership information and couldn’t tell me if he is in the database. But an APA representative asked me for his name and typed it into a computer, while I waited on the phone. A moment later, she told me Sendler could be a member since he has a MD from Columbia and Harvard.

I asked how she knew that.

It’s on his website, the APA representative told me.

When I told her his website had many proven inaccuracies and he did not actually have an MD in the U.S., she said he can’t be an APA member if he doesn’t have an MD from a U.S. school of medicine.

I asked Sendler about this and he would not answer whether or not he is an elected member, and asked me to respect his privacy.

A selfie Sendler posted in November 2018
Screenshot: Damian Sendler (Instagram)

According to Sendler's website he is the recipient of the "United States President Barack Obama's Gold Service Award for humanitarian work." There is no such thing as the President's Gold Service Award, but there is a President's Volunteer Service Award. The organization that oversees the award, Points of Light, told me Sendler is not listed as having won the award. Sendler would not provide me with any evidence that he has the award.

Sendler claims he is the chief of sexology at the Felnett Health Research Foundation. I could find no mention of this foundation online outside of Sendler's personal website, articles he has published, and articles that feature or quote him.

The foundation is not registered as a non-profit with the IRS, but Sendler's website refers to it as a "a non-profit scientific organization in public service." When I asked him about this discrepancy, Sendler said Felnett is registered in Germany. I could not verify this and he would not show me proof—but regardless, it is not disclosed on his website. The address that he lists for the foundation belongs to a condominium in Staten Island, New York.

His website features an infographic that suggests his foundation has raised or plans to raise \$500,000 in seed money. Sendler told me he receives money from European grants and private donors. In a final fact-checking phone conversation, Sendler seemed more cautious, saying he didn't receive any money from anyone in the U.S. because he is "well off, financially."

An infographic on Sendler's website
Screenshot: damiansendler.com

The website suggests that he oversees 28 individuals who work in research, administrative, and editorial positions. This staff includes seven "psychology fellows"—but even though they're all listed as having PhDs or a PsyD (doctor of psychology) I could find no proof that anybody by these names have academic credentials or were ever involved in published work. There is virtually no online trace of Dr. Maria Kruber, Dr. Susanna Ranikova, Dr. Marianna Edington-Brown, or any of the others. The only institution they seem to be associated with is the one Sendler created, where he is principal researcher.

Sendler insisted to me that all the people listed are real, but an online search and a public records search of all the supposed associates' names turned up virtually nothing and led me to believe nearly all of these people could be

fabricated.

The only staff member who I know is real is listed as the administrative manager—Agatha Markiewicz. She is Sendler’s mother.

Sendler suggested some of the framing of his career comes from his publicist Jay Krasicki, and that the two don’t always agree—implying Krasicki is to blame for the falsification of his credentials online. Krasicki is mentioned a couple times on Sendler’s website. Like most of Sendler’s “staff,” I found no proof that Krasicki is a real person. Sendler insisted Krasicki is real, but Sendler didn’t want me to talk to Krasicki and he wouldn’t share his contact information.

A search in the New York State Office of Professions database shows that Sendler is not licensed to provide mental health services as a psychologist, psychoanalyst, or mental health counselor. But Sendler told me he is actively seeing patients in New York.

When I first started reporting this story, Sendler’s website offered online psychotherapy, online sex therapy, and relationship coaching. The site claimed: “Dr. Sendler specializes in

A screenshot from Damian Sendler's website where he offered online therapy, taken on February 5, 2019
Screenshot: damiansendler.com

the treatment of patients with psychological and psychiatric conditions, ranging from post-traumatic stress among military veterans, and extending all the way to complex forensic cases involving paraphilias.”

One page on his site, which has since been taken down, contained a portal where clients could enter their credit card information and “experience online therapy offered by a world-class clinician” through video or messages. The page boasts “Ivy League credentials.” It was advertised as starting at \$50 a week.

In December, Sendler posted a selfie on Instagram with the caption “picking the software for my private practice is more painful than anticipated.”

It seems he picked Simple Practice, a medical practice management platform that provides tools for “health and wellness professionals” to bill and interact with patients online. The company states that its software’s data encryption is “HIPAA Compliant.” Sendler seems to have spun that information, referring to his work as “HIPAA-approved video and chat therapy.”

Sendler also told me he was working with patients offline. When I met Sendler, he said he was about to leave for Chicago for a couple months to set up a new clinic.

“We basically work with a local hospital, Jackson Park,” he told me. “And we tried to recruit women who have been suspected of being victims of sexual assault. And we try to very casually introduce them to a support system. I’m very interested in sexual medicine, especially trauma that can occur as a result of sex. It’s really interesting in the reality of the Me Too movement and how it has been affecting women’s ability to come forward.”

A representative of Jackson Park Hospital told me no one at the hospital had ever heard of Sendler and he is not setting up a clinic associated with the hospital.

Do no harm

In the last couple years, academic journals have published about a dozen of his research papers on topics like suicide, sexual assault, lethal erotic asphyxiation, and zoophilia.

I asked David Ley—a prominent clinical psychologist who focuses on sexual health, and is licensed in New Mexico—to look at Sendler’s published papers. He was baffled by what he read, but one article stood out to him immediately.

“This article he published with the word ‘butt-fisted’ in the title? My God!” Ley said to me. “He’s commingling paraphilias and kink—treating basically all people who are interested in kink as though they have sexual disorders. It’s kooky stuff.”

Sendler told me how he comes up with his research topics. “I ask myself usually: Is this the weirdest thing I have done in terms of scientific inquiry?” Then he smirked. “And if this is so weird and it’s going to put me probably in trouble somewhere around the world, or someone is going to call me to do a conference talk and I’m going to get millions of questions about what is this, I think, oh, that’s a cool driver.”

These “weird” topics—which he hopes will stir up controversy—could have serious consequences. Ley told me the paraphilia communities that Sendler focuses on are often comprised of marginalized people who have trouble accessing effective support. “Could somebody read [this research] and think, ‘Wow he’s an expert, he can really help me’? I’m sure they can,” Ley said. “Why is he targeting those marginalized groups?”

Ley also called out a Sendler study on live-streamed suicides. “He is identifying working with people experiencing suicidal ideation and self-harming behaviors,” Ley said, “And my God, I simply can’t come up with a more vulnerable population where we don’t want amateurs involved. That makes me very concerned. If he’s doing anything like that, people could be dying.”

“My God, I simply can’t come up with a more vulnerable population where we don’t want amateurs involved.”

When Sendler told me about this study during our interview, he repeatedly used insensitive language that is strongly discouraged in the suicide prevention field, according to the National Institute of Mental Health and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. For instance, mental health professionals and people reporting on suicide are trained not to use the terms “successful,” “unsuccessful,” or “failed attempt” when discussing suicide. They’re also not supposed to use the phrase “committed suicide,” because that suggests the act is immoral or criminal.

“We have a paper that’s currently under review that looks at teenagers that failed at committing suicide live-streamed on Facebook,” Sendler said. “I’m particularly interested in working with individuals who survived a suicidal attempt and then lived to tell the story. So these are precisely the people that were included in this study—people that failed at suicide.”

Sendler said he found subjects by reaching out to people after he saw their online posts about attempting to end their life, and eventually gathered a “group of over 24 people who unsuccessfully committed suicide.”

“You know they had a good plan for ending their life but they sucked at executing it,” Sendler said. “And most of them tried hanging themselves but somehow the ropes don’t work or they didn’t know how to really tie it up.”

As he described the suicide attempt of one of his apparent subjects, he cracked a smile. “It’s sort of a funny, you know it’s like laughing in tears. I talk with this boy from Indonesia and he told me, ‘Well I took a lot of tablets,’ of some medication that he found. But you know the medication—that didn’t work. He honestly thought that he would just take it and just like

in movies—you drop dead. And no, he said that he got the really bad diarrhea and started throwing up and it backfired. It made him live more vividly in pain than, you know, just die.”

The suicide prevention field strongly discourages discussing methods of suicide. Sendler threw it out like it was a joke, then kept going.

“Well if you’re going to really do this at least double check if your method is effective,” he said. “Honestly, there are sites out there that show you which methods of killing yourself are most effective. So certainly they haven’t done their homework.”

Through the filter

Sendler’s recent papers are published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, meaning they were presumably assessed by experts in a related field. Some of the publications have a high-impact factor, meaning they’re influential in their field, based on how often their articles are cited in other papers. But Ivan Oransky—co-founder of Retraction Watch, a site that monitors scientific journals retractions and reports on scientific integrity—told me, “Peer review is not a magic wand, it’s not a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. It’s a filter.”

I reached out to every publication that I found to have published Sendler’s studies, but all publishers didn’t respond by time of publication or didn’t provide a comment on Sendler’s articles.

Oransky points out that the Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine—which published Sendler’s studies on lethal sexual asphyxiation, and comparing rectal injuries in zoophiles to people “who were butt-fisted”—is one Oransky follows on his RSS feed, but just because “they publish really wacky stuff.”

The articles published in forensic journals are often based on case files. And even if they’re wacky, they could influence legal cases, according to Anna Randall, a certified sex therapist who has researched sexual asphyxiation

and paraphilia. “Oh absolutely. They could use this in court,” Randall told me, referring to Sendler’s published articles.

Sendler’s asphyxiation study concludes that people who kill their partner during an act of erotic asphyxiation could perhaps avoid prison if there is evidence the deceased victim had “kinky needs.” Sendler told me this study was recently used by Harvey Weinstein’s legal team for one line of defense in a sexual assault case against the film producer. I couldn’t confirm if this was true.

Randall has been interviewed by district attorneys and by prosecutors for cases related to asphyxiation and accidental death, and she’s observed that attorneys use sexuality studies to support their perspective. Randall said this is troubling because Sendler is conflating paraphilias with criminal behavior.

It seems Sendler also tries to inflate the scope of his studies. In a few of Sendler’s papers he reviewed a handful of cases that relate to his topic, then he incorrectly refers to this approach as “meta-analysis”—a term that actually means statistical analysis that combine data from multiple scientific studies in an effort to increase the amount of data available in order to make conclusions or see trends. By misusing the term “meta-analysis” he is making his study look broader than it actually is.

Randall laughed when she read the phrase “meta-analysis” used in Sendler’s papers. “The fact that it’s published is mind-boggling to me,” Randall said.

“We all make mistakes sometimes,” Sendler said, when I asked why he misused the phrase meta-analysis in his studies. “We say the definition that might be not correct.” I asked if he ever made the mistake of inventing sources or falsifying information in his studies and he insisted he hadn’t.

“The fact that it’s published is mind-boggling to me.”

Both the certified sexual health experts I consulted for this piece—Randall and Ley—were disappointed that journals would publish Sendler’s work and that media outlets would quote and profile him. They were especially surprised that Dan Savage had interviewed Sendler on his podcast.

On the Savage Lovecast episode “When Kinksters Accidentally Kill: A Look At Choking,” Savage remarks that Sendler’s study on asphyxiation is “fascinating” and “blowing my mind.” Savage expected that—due to sex negativity in the criminal justice system—people who killed their partners during sex would get harsher punishment than people who choke someone to death when it wasn’t a part of a sexual act, but Sendler’s study suggests the opposite is true.

Savage recalls Sendler reached out to him to share his lethal sexual asphyxiation study. “This was Savage Love-bait,” Savage told me, explaining how he often discusses choking and autoerotic asphyxiation on the show.

Now Savage realizes he should have been vigilant. “Clearly we’re going to have to add a layer of vetting that we haven’t had in the past,” Savage said. “I’m sitting here looking back over the last 10 years of podcasts, thinking—who else was on the show who had a published paper, an incredible-looking website, and asserted things about their credentials, and we were like, ‘Sounds good!’”

I had called Savage to ask how Sendler ended up on his show, but Savage quickly turned introspective about the episode. “I’m really annoyed by this—having been duped and exploited like this in this con,” Savage told me. “This is so disappointing. A lot of the people in the sex research community trust me because I try to handle what they are handing me responsibly. Letting down sex researchers is going to mean I have to get super [humble] tonight and lie on the floor and stare at the ceiling for a couple hours.”

The game

After Sendler's third mention during our initial interview that he attended Harvard Medical School, I told him that the Harvard Medical School registrar office told me he had never enrolled.

He shifted nervously and offered a confusing explanation about doing some clinical training at Harvard Medical School and part of it at Warsaw Medical University—a vague combination that he referred to as “diverse” and “sort of an open-minded training path.”

I then told Sendler that he was not licensed to practice mental health in New York, which is concerning since he had told me earlier in our conversation that he is actively seeing patients in New York. He then clarified: “I see them in terms of psychological consultations.”

Sendler seemed to be suggesting he's only offering psychological consulting, not rendering treatment. But New York law doesn't permit anyone to call themselves a psychologist or refer to their services as “psychology” unless they are licensed or properly authorized.

In a final fact-checking phone conversation with Sendler—when he was more guarded than in our in-person interview—Sendler told me he's never seen patients in New York and he actually got his MD from the Medical University of Warsaw. I asked why I couldn't find evidence of that and he told me he asked the university not to release his academic information to me. He told me he was now changing information on his website to be more transparent. He denied lying to me and to other reporters. When I provided examples, he said the conversation was counterproductive and told me, “Do your job. Do what you feel is right.”

When I asked Sendler during our main interview, at the Gizmodo office, if he saw these falsifications as marketing or misrepresentation, his demeanor shifted, and he finally spoke to me in a way that seemed earnest: “That's sort of subjective, right? Isn't everyone sort of misrepresenting themselves in every way?” he said.

Then he seemed to threaten me. “Like I don’t know you, right? You might be working here today but you might not work here tomorrow, right? And I might feel intimidated by you today but tomorrow you don’t have a job, right? And I still have mine, right?”

As his diatribe continued, Sendler helped me realize why people like him believe they can get away with falsifying their entire career and lying to vulnerable people.

“You have to understand that in the world where people use—even the President of this country uses Twitter and creates falsehoods every day,” Sendler said. “How do we then quantify the degree of guilt that you can do, right? Because, you see, if the most powerful man can do this eight, nine thousand times... and he doesn’t care. He still does his thing, and people still support him because they believe in the agenda that he executes.”

He is right, in this case. If someone can inflate their business accomplishments for years, then become a world leader who rules by sowing chaos with constant distortion—what’s to stop a confident, charismatic serial liar from manifesting a psychology career and being treated like a medical luminary?

“Sometimes it really matters how you can sell things and convince people,” Sendler told me, moments before he left my office. “Reality is inflatable and everything is part of the game.”

If you or someone you know is having suicidal thoughts, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255 or text the Crisis Text Line at 741-741.

If you have any information about Damian Sendler or questionable mental health practices you’d like to share with Gizmodo, email jennings.brown@gizmodo.com.

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