

'Dating Coach' Charged in Capitol Riot Gets Prison Term for Gun Crime

Samuel Fisher, who as Brad Holiday traded in conspiracy theories and misogyny online, still faces federal charges related to Jan. 6.



By Sarah Maslin Nir

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A self styled dating coach who prosecutors say participated in the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol was sentenced to three and a half years in prison after he pleaded guilty to a gun possession charge in Manhattan Supreme Court on Monday — a case that emerged through a search warrant related to his apparent involvement in the riot.

In dozens of videos and articles posted online, the man, Samuel Fisher, portrayed himself as Brad Holiday, an expert at picking up women. His posts mixed misogynist remarks with far right messages and support for former President Donald J. Trump, and included accounts of his own participation in the Capitol riot.

When Mr. Fisher was arrested in Manhattan two weeks after the attack on the Capitol, F.B.I. agents found over a thousand rounds of ammunition and several weapons, including an illegally modified AR-15 rifle and machetes, in his Upper East Side apartment and car.

Mr. Fisher had been charged with 17 different counts relating to the weapons cache; on Monday he pleaded guilty to one count of criminal possession of a weapon in the second degree. Mr. Fisher still faces separate, federal charges over his participation on Jan. 6, including entering the Capitol building and disorderly conduct in a restricted building, to which he has pleaded not guilty.

At his sentencing in Manhattan on Monday, Mr. Fisher acknowledged his crime. “I know what I did was wrong and I accept that my actions have consequences,” he said.



In court on Monday, Mr. Fisher took responsibility for his actions and said he was working to better himself. Jefferson Siegel for The New York Times

Wayne Gosnell, a lawyer for Mr. Fisher, told the judge that his client had spent the year since his arrest in therapy, attending narcotics and Alcoholics Anonymous groups daily, and making amends with his family, from whom friends had said he was estranged. His mother, father and brother sat in the audience, his mother occasionally weeping.

Mr. Gosnell asked for a three-and-a-half year prison term for his client, rather than the four years — the maximum penalty for the charge — that prosecutors had sought.

“I have done and will continue to do that hard work; that work does not end today, and does not end when I get out of jail,” Mr. Fisher said in the 15th floor courtroom. “I just hope that day is as soon as possible.”

In sentencing him, Judge Robert Mandelbaum reminded him of the severity of his crime. “The fact remains that the defendant chose to arm himself to the teeth with a large variety of firearms,” he said. “That he didn’t act on any of his many disturbing threats does not take away from the seriousness of the offense.”

Mr. Fisher is one of almost 750 people who have been charged in connection with the riot. Most face misdemeanor charges, and prosecutors almost every day continue to file low-level charges against people who went into the Capitol but are not accused of breaking anything or hurting anyone.

The investigation is one of the largest in the history of the Justice Department, and has also resulted in more serious charges including assault, obstruction of Congress and seditious conspiracy. Two cases have gone to trial so far, both resulting in convictions. Several more trials are scheduled in the coming weeks and months, including one of a former New York City Police Department officer, Thomas Webster, who is accused of attacking the Capitol Police.

Following the attack in Washington, Mr. Fisher appeared to relish the violence he said he had seen — and hinted that the fight was not over. “People died,” but it was great, he wrote, according to court documents. “Seeing cops literally run ... was the coolest thing ive ever seen in my life.”

Mr. Fisher’s boasts caught the attention of the federal authorities, and a search conducted during his arrest led to the state charges.

In addition to the AR-15, F.B.I. agents searching Mr. Fisher’s car and his apartment on East 90th Street found high capacity magazines, as well as a laser scope for a rifle, according to a sentencing memo produced by the Manhattan district attorney’s office, among other items.

Of particular concern to prosecutors was the discovery of a pistol Mr. Fisher had built himself, what is known as a “ghost gun,” that is unregistered and thus untraceable, according to the memo. In addition, although he had purchased his AR-15 rifle legally, he made illegal modifications to it that could increase its deadliness, prosecutors said.

“Samuel Fisher is a dangerous conspiracy theorist who participated in one of the gravest attacks on our democracy,” Alvin Bragg, the Manhattan district attorney, said in a statement after the sentencing on Monday. “Not only did he threaten to commit violence against his fellow citizens, he had the potential to follow through with his arsenal of advanced weaponry and ammunition.”

The arrest surprised people who knew Mr. Fisher as Mr. Holiday, a dating coach who sold his tips and tricks on seduction — things like best face lotions and height-increasing shoes — for \$150 online. But his online footprint had begun to shift in recent years. His tutorial videos increasingly showcased a bitter, adversarial attitude toward women that friends said emerged shortly after his own relationship with a woman with whom he had a child ended.

About that time, the Brad Holiday online video dating tutorials spiraled into anti-government and pro-Trump propaganda, interspersed with invective about the opposite sex. Former mentees, some of whom he had taken on for free in an effort to help floundering men, had begun to distance themselves.

According to the charging documents, investigators used some of the Brad Holiday videos featuring Mr. Fisher brandishing weapons like those that were discovered in his home and car, to establish that the items were his.

Mr. Fisher, who grew up in New Jersey and had worked as a guitar teacher, has no prior history of arrest. In documents filed to the court, prosecutors also laid blame in part on Mr. Trump, mentioning the former president by name.

“While the defendant is ultimately responsible for his actions,” prosecutors wrote, “one cannot help but be concerned about deterring similar future actions or violence by others inspired by the same toxic and politically convenient rhetoric and baseless conspiracies that continue to be peddled.”

Sarah Maslin Nir covers breaking news for the Metro section. She was a Pulitzer Prize finalist for her series “Unvarnished,” an investigation into New York City’s nail salon industry that documented the exploitative labor practices and health issues manicurists face. More about Sarah Maslin Nir

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