

Podcast #42—Trump's Psyche Under Pressure

It sometimes seems almost like a parlor game to sit around and try to psychoanalyze Donald Trump. His psychology is hiding in plain sight and everyone has an opinion. There is even a large group of psychologists and other mental health professionals who have diagnosed Trump with “Malignant Narcissism” and called for the implementation of the 25 Amendment aimed at removing a psychiatrically impaired President. Never before has the psychological makeup and disturbance of an American President been the topic of so much public discussion.

Now as a psychologist and psychoanalyst, I'm all in favor of attempting to decode Trump's mind. I think we can both better understand and predict Trump's behavior with the use of psychological concepts. In the end, however—such analyses will never get rid of him. In the end, it will always be about power—who has it, and how can the anti-Trump forces acquire more of it. And that will ultimately be about electoral politics and about building a progressive political movement. Impeachment

may well be an important step along the way to just such an outcome. That remains to be seen.

Still, the wisdom of clinical psychology can help us stay sane in dealing with someone who acts insane. It can also help us resist the gaslighting that will inundate the airwaves as the impeachment process advances.

Ultimately, of course, it's about knowing your enemy.

[[Somewhere around here there should be a quote from Sun Tzu's the Art of War where he says something like "if you know your enemy you need not fear the results of a thousand battles."]] Well, what do you know..there's the very quote that's called for here.

So, I'm going to talk briefly today about 3 dimensions of Trump's psychology. First, his need to lie all the time. Second, his inability to separate his private from public life. And, third, I'll offer some thoughts about his disturbed relationship with women. These discussions will be brief because, frankly, I think that they will be obvious to listeners who think about them for even a moment.

Donald Trump lies all the time. Th Washington Post has documented over 12,000 false or misleading

statements since he was elected. Clearly, what's happening is this: Trump creates an alternative universe in which there is no objective reality, but only what he *says* is reality at any given moment. I don't believe, however, that Trump is psychotic, despite what some people say. He can usually tell the literal difference between his private thoughts and the external world. People who are truly psychotic can't reliably do this.

No--INSTEAD, his compulsive lying is explained by his severe narcissistic personality in which the following is obvious: Trump urgently needs to experience the world as a place in which he's admired and a winner, rather than disdained and a loser. So, he continually spins and twists reality to make it so. Facing limitations, criticism, imperfection, or failure, is intolerable.

No one likes to feel these things--- but Trump's illness makes these negative things unbearable. Under the sheer force of this need, Trump has to lie all the time.

We're seeing this on display especially vividly now in his reaction to Impeachment. The potential for humiliation is so great, that Trump is under tremendous internal pressure to create and try to make us believe in

an alternate reality that serves him. He frantically asserts, over and over again, that his call with the President of the Ukraine was “perfect” when – on its very face, in plain sight, it was not only not perfect, but obviously corrupt. We will see him making more and more outlandish claims as impeachment progresses. He’ll have no choice. When reality is potentially shameful, Trump has no choice—internally—but to simply try to change reality.

Now, on to this matter of the public and private. ALL leaders—Especially political leaders—need to be able to separate their public from their private selves. They need to be strategic and subordinate personal impulses, fears, and reactions to a broader purpose. They need to be able to be objective about themselves and others, to step outside themselves to look at the big picture. No one is perfect at it.

But Donald Trump can’t do it at all. He personalizes everything. He has schoolyard fights all the time with foreign leaders like the Prime Ministers of Canada and Denmark or, currently, with Adam Schiff. He’s incapable of controlling his impulses and subordinating his immediate emotional reactions to a bigger public purpose.

The most intimate aspects of his psyche are on continual display. Private struggles swamp his public self. For example, he easily feels shamed by the least little challenge and has to defensively punch back, regardless of the consequences. We can see this happening now in the face of potential impeachment. He strikes out at Adam Schiff in a manner that's not only vicious and infantile, but he's clearly coming from a place of deeply personal shame, hurt, and rage. He can't set up a "war room" because that would involve restraint and an ability to react as a public figure and not simply an injured private party. He's always flooded with feelings he can't contain, that spill over in public on a regular basis.

We all have to pay a very public price to watch Trump's private psychodrama.

Finally, I want to say just a word or two about Trump's psychological relationship to women. Donald Trump is notorious for degrading women, frequently mocking them on the basis of some physical characteristic. Let me just go down the list: Hillary Clinton, Stormy Daniels, Rosie O'Donnell, Katarina Witt, Mika Brzezinski, Christine Blasey Ford, Megan Kelly, Carly Fiorina, Ted

Cruz' wife, Heidi, Cher, and Arianna Huffington to name a few. And of course, he becomes especially scornful of African American women, frequently calling Maxine Waters stupid.

And, of course, Trump's overt misogyny was revealed in his famous remarks about grabbing women by their pussies.

Now, it's clear that Trump is far from rare in this regard. But here's the point—like many men, Trump's need to denigrate and devalue women stems from fear rather than some intrinsic hardwired cruelty. See-- Men like Trump are afraid of women. They fear a woman's power to shame them, to make them feel small. Trump and his kind are more vulnerable to the critical judgments of women than they are to those of men.

Think about it this way: As much as Trump needs the flattering adoration of women, this very need exposes him to the danger of being rejected or, worse, belittled. In fact, Trump's need to make women into sexual objects reflects his anxieties about the vulnerability of his own masculinity. Objectifying women and disparaging them are

defensive attempts to feel momentarily safe from castration and humiliation.

This is why I think that he is becoming especially unhinged now because the move to impeach him has come from a woman, Nancy Pelosi. For Trump's embattled and insecure masculinity, this is the perfect storm.