

Speaker 1: [00:07](#) [soundtrack]

Speaker 2: [00:07](#) Welcome to behavioral groups. My name is Kurt Nelson

...and I'm Tim Houlihan. Uh, in this episode we're going to discuss a little bit about the why we do what we do issue, but we're going to talk about it in a very specific way.

One that we haven't really tackled before because we're going to talk about a op Ed article from one of our guests.

So, uh, the last night at our behavioral grooves meet up in Minneapolis, uh, our guest was Dr Kathleen Vohs. She is a distinguished professor at the University of Minnesota and a tremendous researcher. And she was asked by the Washington Post to write an op Ed that she titled The psychological phenomenon that blinds Trump's supporters to his racism. And that got us thinking about it. That guy was published today in, in the, in the post. And, uh, it got us thinking about, well, let's talk about cognitive dissonance here in our, in our grooming session.

Speaker 3: [00:58](#) So what started this whole component was a tweet that president Trump made recently and it was, uh, directed at four Democratic Congress, women of color, three of which were actually born in the United States and one was born outside of the, the United States. However, his tweet was to go back to the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came, which many people took as a very racist comment, a racist comment of go back from where you are, you know, you don't belong here. Right.

Speaker 2: [01:32](#) And so even though, and they're all citizens of the United States because they are all congresswoman, well in three of them were born here and the one who wasn't Ilhan Omar, uh, was born in Somalia and she happens to represent us right here in our district in Minnesota.

Speaker 3: [01:47](#) Yes. And so it was an interesting topic. And so we wanted to talk a little bit about it. What Kathleen was talking about is that there are these people who have gone to great lengths to contort and to twist into, to kind of justify why this is okay and why it isn't racism. And she brings up this concept of cognitive dissonance and cognitive dissonance was first kind of talked about by Leon Festinger from the 1950s right? And he's talking about this component that says, you know, in our minds when we hold kind of different beliefs and different ideas about ourselves or how we view the world, that there's this element

called cognitive dissonance and something has to give. And oftentimes it's not a, it's not a pretty thing. And for instance, he talks about, or Kathleen brings up this interesting syllogism to kind of reflect that in, in this section.

Speaker 2: [02:41](#) Yeah. How does that, how does that go in this case with w with, regarding to the Trump

Speaker 3: [02:46](#) story, right. So she saw, she laid it out like this one, I do not support racist or racist actions too. I do support president Trump three president has just made a racist remark. So as she says, these three facts simply don't fit together comfortably in the mind and something has to give. And so she brings up this, this component that says there are three different ways that we typically overcome this cognitive distance. So right. And so the first way is that we change our belief. Basically, we actually change our mind. We say we're not going to support racist, so we're not going to support president Trump or, or I, maybe I am a racist in, you know, I'm just a monster as she says. Right. Which I think is, is the harder, uh, way to change. We don't typically do that and both are extraordinarily difficult to change, right?

Speaker 3: [03:41](#) I mean, we know from neuroscience that changing your mind literally means readjusting neurons and you know, physical aspects of your brain. It takes a lot of effort to change your mind, especially when you're that committed, right? And when those beliefs are such foundational beliefs about who we are and what we believe in, it is very rare. There needs to be some pretty strong rational or a significant moment in your life that will typically tip that scale for you to be thinking about because it's going to be hard, right? Yeah. So, so most likely that's not why, how people are going to be blinded and are there, they're not going to overcome that cognitive dissonance like, right? So the second thing that you could do would be to increase, uh, information or like, uh, introduce new beliefs that really bolster support for the Trump story, right?

Speaker 3: [04:31](#) So in this first one, I don't support racist. Um, I do support president Trump. And then the third part is the part that is causing this dissonance, right? But if you were able to say, president Trump is so great and all these other things, and then it was one little misstep, right? So it's just that one little, you know, you can discount that because you look at all the other great things that president Trump is doing or bringing and all of those factors. And so people are going, you know, wow, but president Trump did x and president Trump did y and president Trump is doing this and that and there, and they're building that

up, but not necessarily addressing that tweet, right? So they are going and saying, and so if in a roundabout way it is this element of putting that person up on a bigger pedestal, which then even makes it harder for people to come back and say, well maybe I'm wrong.

Speaker 3: [05:23](#) It might even allow you to feel like you need to defend president Trump in this case because he's really kind of being victimized here. It's possible that could go that far too to bring in the story that you, that in your mind you start feeling like, wow, he's really getting the short end of the stick on this. Yeah. And the third thing, the third thing that you can do a t in resolving this is absolutely reject the consensus. Just say no, it just didn't happen the way that you heard it and there was no way that that was a racist comment at all going back meant to go back your districts. One Congressman said that Kathleen pointed out, which in fact was not what his tweets said. It was go back to your, where are you? Yeah, the country where you came from. Right. And so, but people distort that information.

Speaker 3: [06:12](#) And this gets into really infer interesting components because this happens a lot in that, in situations like this, but in everyday situations where things don't line up with how we want them to line up and our brain actually starts processing things differently. We hear things differently, we focus in on different things. It's the, it's the component where you show the same people to the same article and they will point out different aspects of that article based upon their previous beliefs. And they will point out that it supports as, as they did supports gun control or supports, you know, having, you know, the second amendment fully, fully out there and everybody gets it same article. But we, we view that very demotivated, reasoning, motivated reasoning. So how do we know we're not falling prey to just subscribing to our, our past beliefs, even though there was new contradictory evidence.

Speaker 3: [07:04](#) Right. So, in other words, you're saying maybe Kathleen is the one who has cognitive dissonance around this, this component and who she's completely wrong. And she is making up this information, uh, to in support of her previous held belief. And I think that's a very hard thing to really try to make sure that people, that, that as an individual, it's very hard to make sure that you're not falling into this trap. Because again, as we said, that motivated reasoning, those things happen at a subconscious level. And so a way to test it could be to flip it around. Exactly right. So, in other words, if you are a strong a Democrat and you said, well, I feel this way about what, you know, president Trump said and felt that it's really wrong. Um,

well flip that around and say, all right, well what if, uh, you know, it was Hillary Clinton, Hillary Clinton and vice versa with what I think is really more interesting on this is if you said quoted that same quote and said that, uh, Barack Obama had said it and asked those same GOP senators and Congress people, you know, the ones that were doing the contortion, would they contort the same way?

- Speaker 3: [08:15](#) Yes. And probably not. Right. They would probably instantly identify him as a racist. Right. And in those situations, you know, is, is that then switching that around and saying those things, that's one way of looking at it. It's not foolproof. No, but it is a way of trying to look at this and say, if this situation were reversed, would I feel the same way? And in that case, then it can get at some of those motivated reasoning elements to say, no, I wouldn't. I would, if that was said by x instead of being said by y, you know, then I'm going to feel that it goes back to the, uh, I think we've talked about this before. The high school Valedictorian gave the speech yet quoted and said it was from the, he was in the south end. He said there was some quote from supposedly president Trump at the time and everybody cheered. And then at a, he goes, oh wait, I'm sorry, that was actually from President Obama. And then they booed. Yes, it was the exact same thing. But you can see where that gets into. Those people were obviously going through some cognitive dissonance on that.
- Speaker 2: [09:19](#) I think they were simply not going to accept that all these great words about patriotism and, uh, and being challenged going forward from their graduation could come from anyone other than president Trump.
- Speaker 3: [09:30](#) Well, and, and going into this gets into, you know, the personality syndrome, right? Where we, uh, believe and put faith in the person who says it more so than what they're actually saying. Right. And that component that comes into it. And that's what, you know, it comes into all of these factors that we're putting on a philosophic
- Speaker 2: [09:51](#) low level. There's always this question of artists versus the art, you know, where do we, do we judge the art in part by the, by the artist or do we separate them and, right. And so do we look at at Trump's words or any politician's words basically for what they are or do we have to take them in the context of who was saying them?
- Speaker 3: [10:13](#) I would love to say we take the words as they are. The fact of the matter is we can't separate them from who says them. And

there are a number of ways that our brain works. So then we interpret things through a lens because of the presenter, because of who is saying it. So there is a lens that we have to view that based on how our brain interprets that. And so if I think politician a is fantastic and you think politician a is a shithead and they say these words, the word should stand by themselves, but they don't, but they don't because what happens is you look through the filter of a shithead. I looked through the filter of this person is great and we then focus in on different things and it gets processed in our, everyone's differently.

- Speaker 2: [11:00](#) So for important things, for important messages, it would be worth trying to step back and pull the artists away from the art to actually look at the words. Well, if on their own
- Speaker 3: [11:11](#) I, I will take that. If that component, excuse me. In politics it's very, that would be very interesting because we have such diet diametrically opposed kind of camps out there and so it's hard to look and see if you can disassociate that from the, you know, the, the words from the the messenger, then that would be really interesting to kind of have that conversation and say and base it on the merit of the words or the policies or whatever that would be going forward. In an artist's case, I might, I might actually separate that. I don't know if you want to because the artist himself or herself has put that out based upon this, this who they are and the component of, of what they do. So if you look at a, um, I, I'm, I don't know the cost of, you know, the, the huge personality, huge personality and these, these paintings that you, you know, or described at the time as well, it looks like my kid drew that, right?
- Speaker 3: [12:15](#) Yeah. And, and to a certain degree, yes. But there is a history behind that and there's an intentional component. And so your kid doing it is very different than Picasso doing it, even if it's the same exact painting. Yeah. You're talking about the body of, of Picasso's work. If you look at the arc of his work and you, you look at things that he did later in his life that were very abstract of, of course they look simplistic just on their own, but considered in the arch of the, the material that he created over the years. It's phenomenal. And maybe this could be applied in the political sense. What is the arc of what that, that, that person has said? What, what, what is the trajectory and the, the history of how, uh, any particularly given political figure has stood on any of these topics, which I, which is why I think it's very hard for longterm politicians to be elected to a higher office, right?

- Speaker 3: [13:14](#) Because they have an arc that is already established and you set these two camps, uh, big history, you know, big history. And so moving to that next level, you're, you're reaching out to a larger audience, but there's still this history in this component. And sometimes that can be very hard, um, because people can pull in and interpret things based upon that arc already, which Trump had as a huge advantage. He had a big, uh, personality and a big persona in the public eye, but not in politics. Right. And you can say the same thing for Barack Obama. Right? When he came in, he was, uh, he, you know, he had not been a senator for even a full term. So, and of course his critics said he doesn't know anything about government. Yeah. His critics said, this guy is, he, he's, he's, he's brand new. He doesn't know anything about governing.
- Speaker 3: [14:02](#) How in the world could he be successful as a president? And those same critics then when president Trump came into it, if, if we're looking at some of those GOP supporters of that, use that as a positive. So Dan [inaudible], he's an outsider. How great is that? Right? And so that's where you get this cognitive component where you look at that and you're going, it's a similar situation, not, not apples to apples, but it's similar. And so how you interpret that and how you respond based upon just who the actor is actually has a big component within that. Absolutely. All right. So we've beat this, you know, politician, horse to death, but sharing some ideas that we hope you find enjoyable. Yes. So with that, thank you. And if you enjoyed this, please, uh, let us know, leaving us a review, various different things and I just want to say thanks. We've had some really great reviews online recently, and just want to thank
- Speaker 2: [14:52](#) the folks who have reached out and taken the 29 seconds that it takes to actually go into the apple app and slide down to the bottom and put a five star and write six or seven words. It goes such a long way in, uh, the apple rating system. So thank you so much for those. And it goes a long way in making Tim feel good,
- Speaker 4: [15:11](#) really good, and smile and not feel all burnt out about all of this stuff. So you're helping Tim. It's like therapy is, you should see him glow after reading those reviews. He sends me emails right away. Did you read this? Did you see this? So with that folks, make Tim happy. Leave a positive review and thank you.