Personality and Individual Differences xxx (2016) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/paid

Is Hillary dishonest and Donald narcissistic? A HEXACO analysis of the presidential candidates' public personas

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 13 October 2016
Accepted 27 October 2016
Available online xxxx

Keywords:
HEXACO
Personality
Honesty-Humility
Hillary Clinton
Donald Trump
Presidential candidates

ABSTRACT

The 2016 American election campaign has seen an exceptionally negative view of both candidates (Clinton/Trump), and what seems like passionate support for one side or the other. Approval and honesty ratings of <50% throughout the campaign suggest that neither candidate is viewed positively. In a campaign that is increasingly focused on temperament and personality, we examined the public personalities of the two candidates. Ten HEXACO personality experts completed HEXACO-PI-R observer reports for Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump based on public personas. Scores were transformed into percentiles based on normed values for HEXACO observer reports. Clinton was rated as low on H, E, and Altruism, normal on X and A, and high on C and O. Trump, on the other hand, was rated as exceptionally low on H, A, and Altruism, very low on E, low on C and O, and high on X. Facet level scores clarify the specific traits lowering or raising the candidates' scores. Previous research has shown that narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (the Dark Triad) were associated with lower Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Clinton scores low on the first two of these, while Trump scores very low to exceptionally low on all four traits.

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1. Introduction

The 2016 American presidential election has been characterized by two candidates with likeability problems. For example, in an opinion essay in the New York Times, David Brooks (2016) claimed that Clinton was disliked for having an exclusively professional public persona. According to Brooks, voters simply do not know who Clinton is as a private person, and what she does for fun. Brooks argues that without glimpses into a vulnerable, personal side, Clinton's public service strikes voters as Machiavellian and untrustworthy. Brooks claimed that Trump, on the other hand, was disliked for being "obnoxious, insulting and offensive". Observers have questioned Trump's honesty (Levingston, 2016a) as well as his recklessness and potential support for violence (Levingston, 2016b).

Many authors have tried to explain Trump's personality. In a recent piece in *The Atlantic*, personality psychologist Dan McAdams (2016) described Donald Trump as being highly extraverted, disagreeable, angry, charismatic, untruthful, and narcissistic – a man who is constantly ready for a fight and who is driven to win. Fewer have tackled Clinton's personality, despite the fact that the 2016 election seems to have focused largely around temperament as opposed to policy. In the first debate between the two presidential candidates, Trump accused Clinton of having the wrong temperament to be president while claiming a winning temperament as one of his greatest assets (Collins, 2016). This caused a surge in internet searches for the definition of temperament—suggesting that people are uncertain of its definition but they view it as worthy of attention (Collins, 2016). We therefore view it as important to offer an informed view of what the two candidates' temperaments may actually be. Thus, in this report, we explore the two candidates' public personas in an attempt to better understand American voters' dilemma.

1.1. Existing personality analyses of the candidates

Temperament refers to persistent individual traits that influence behavior, are stable over time, and have some genetic component to their origins or genesis (Farrell, Brook, Dane, Marini, & Volk, 2015). Generally speaking, within psychological research, temperament is used to study individual differences in younger individuals, such as infants, children, or adolescents. In contrast, personality is an analogous concept that is used to study individual differences amongst adults. Personality and temperament are in fact strongly correlated with each other (Farrell et al., 2015), making the choice of which to use a decision about what individual factors may be most important to emphasize. Given that personality accounts for factors that are present in adults and not necessarily in children (e.g., Honesty; Farrell et al., 2015), we have

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.10.053
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Please cite this article as: Visser, B.A., et al., Is Hillary dishonest and Donald narcissistic? A HEXACO analysis of the presidential candidates' public personas, *Personality and Individual Differences* (2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.10.053

decided to examine the presidential candidates' personalities rather than their temperaments.

The Big Five (or Five Factor Model) of personality refers to five relatively orthogonal personality factors identified in lexical studies (e.g., Saucier & Goldberg, 1996): Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience. It is perhaps the most common general measure of adult personality (Goldberg, 1990). In relation to the Big Five personality factors, McAdams (2016) concluded that Trump had "sky-high" levels of Extroversion and "off-the-chart" low Agreeableness, a combination that McAdams described as rather unexpected in a presidential candidate. Certainly other American presidents were highly extraverted—McAdams notes that George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and Theodore Roosevelt were also very high in this personality factor—but Trump's very low Agreeableness is extraordinary. Donald Trump has gotten into public feuds with other media figures, such as Rosie O'Donnell, who he has referred to as a "loser" on multiple occasions, a term he has also applied to Cher. McAdams does not specifically address Trump's levels of the other three personality factors, except to note that his personality is not characterized by the very low Openness of George W. Bush. As such, McAdams concludes that Trump may be more flexible in his decision-making style than Bush and more willing to change his mind.

Less recent attention has been given to Hillary Clinton's personality. Almost ten years ago, Fitch and Marshall (2008) reported that Clinton's cardinal Big Five trait was her extremely high Conscientiousness. These authors note that her skills in "organizing, maintaining energy and focus, and single mindedness in her goals are unparalleled", (p. 6). In the other four dimensions, Fitch and Marshall describe Clinton as being generally high in Openness. They describe her as being high in Neuroticism, due to her propensity to *express* anger, but these authors note that it is not clear that she *experiences* more anger than others. They describe Clinton as high in extroversion in the context of her work life, but only moderate in her social life. Finally, Fitch and Marshall describe Clinton as being low to extremely low in Agreeableness, due to her reputation of being argumentative and intimidating.

1.2. Limitations of the Big Five

Thus, researchers have examined the personality traits of Trump and Clinton, and report that they indeed are different across several personality dimensions. Unfortunately, using the Big Five to summarize Trump's and Clinton's personalities may be leaving out important information. In particular, the Big Five does not easily discriminate between various antisocial tendencies, such as a propensity for lying or for being vengeful. Fortunately, there is a personality measure that is able to better analyze and account for dark, or antisocial, personality traits: the HEXACO personality model (Book, Visser, & Volk, 2015; Lee & Ashton, 2012).

1.3. HEXACO personality

The HEXACO personality model (Ashton & Lee, 2007) proposes that there are six rather than five personality factors: Honesty-Humility (H), Emotionality (E), eXtraversion (X), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), and Openness to Experience (O). A relatively new measure of personality, the HEXACO appears to have better theoretical, empirical, and cross-cultural support than the Big Five (de Vries, Tybur, Pollet, & van Vugt, 2016). In particular, the HEXACO delineates antisociality more clearly than the Big Five.

To begin with, people with low scores on Honesty-Humility are more likely to manipulate and exploit others, feel entitled and important, and are more likely to break rules for personal gain. There are 4 facets within the Honesty-Humility domain, namely: *sincerity*, *fairness*, *greed avoidance*, and *modesty*.

Low Emotionality scorers are emotionally detached and low on empathy, making them less likely to be concerned with the effect of their behavior on other people. They are also less likely to be worried in stressful situations, which may improve their crisis management skills. Facets within this domain include *fearfulness*, *anxiety*, *sentimentality*, and *dependence*.

High scores on eXtraversion are correlated with confidence, charisma, and sociability. The four facets in the domain of eXtraversion are *social self-esteem*, *social boldness*, *sociability*, and *liveliness*.

Agreeableness relates to the ability to forgive, being tolerant, and willing to compromise/cooperate with others. Low scorers tend to be vengeful, stubborn, and are more likely to react to provocation with anger. This domain is exemplified by facets measuring *forgiveness*, *gentleness*, *flexibility*, and *patience*.

People who are high on Conscientiousness are organized, disciplined, and make thoughtful decisions, whereas low scorers are impulsive in their decision making and are less concerned with quality of work. Conscientiousness is further split into facets measuring *organization*, *diligence*, *perfectionisms*, and *prudence*.

The final subscale, Openness to Experience, is related to intellectual curiosity and the tendency to be interested in new or unconventional ideas. This domain includes 4 facets measuring *aesthetic appreciation*, *inquisitiveness*, *creativity*, and *unconventionality*. There is also an interstitial scale directly measuring Altruism. People who score low on this scale are hard-hearted and less likely to engage in helping others.

As mentioned above, the HEXACO model offers several advantages over the Big Five model of personality including a plausible evolutionary basis (Lee & Ashton, 2012), replication in many languages and cultures (Ashton et al., 2006), and superior prediction of behavior, particularly deceitful, dishonest, and antisocial behavior (Lee & Ashton, 2012), largely due to the inclusion of Honesty-Humility (de Vries et al., 2016). Further, in two large scale studies, the HEXACO has been shown to be an excellent predictor of particularly aversive personality types, namely psychopathy, narcissism, Machiavellianism, and sadism (Book et al., 2015; Book et al., 2016). More specifically, all of these personalities were predicted by low Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness.

These findings make the HEXACO an ideal choice for comparing the public personality profiles of two unpopular and untrusted presidential candidates. Most saliently, the trait of Honesty-Humility appears to have the potential to uniquely account for the candidates' behaviors. Trump appears to exhibit particularly low levels of greed-avoidance (disinterest in lavish wealth and indicators of high social status) and modesty (claiming he is the "only one" who can fix America; Trump, 2016). Similarly, many Americans (particularly Republicans and Independents) seem suspicious of Clinton's propensity to tell the truth given her responses to some political scandals (Bump, 2016). Both Clinton and Trump appear to be lower in prosocial traits than many previous American presidents (Lee & Ashton, 2012). Thus we believe an analysis of their public personas using the HEXACO may shed important light on what their actual personality or temperamental tendencies are.

1.4. The current study

Therefore, in the current study, we approached other personality psychologists who had published with the HEXACO personality inventory and asked them to use the HEXACO observer report to describe the candidates' public personalities. Like the American public, our raters do not have access to the candidates' private thoughts and feelings, or how they behave in the privacy of their homes and with their families. Instead, we were interested only in how the candidates' public personas might be summarized in terms of HEXACO personality as their public personalities are what are most salient in a general election.

Although it would be of interest to conduct a similar poll amongst the general public, we used HEXACO experts because they understand the nuances of the items. For example, in a Conscientiousness item that refers to the candidate cleaning their home, we assume that the HEXACO experts would not interpret the item literally, but would

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