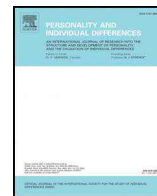




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Is Hillary dishonest and Donald narcissistic? A HEXACO analysis of the presidential candidates' public personas

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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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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

instead, report on whether it would be important to the candidates that their environment be maintained to high standards of cleanliness. We also expected that by using personality psychologists, their reports would exhibit less bias than that of the general public (see Discussion)—each was asked to provide a professional and unbiased assessment.

We predicted that both candidates would be rated as low in Agreeableness. We further expected that Trump would be rated as high in Extraversion, and Clinton as high in Conscientiousness. As well, given the finding that H, E, A, and C are especially important in describing aversive personalities (Book et al., 2015; Book, Visser, & Volk, 2016), we examined whether the ratings for each candidate were suggestive of psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism. However, we expect that Honesty-Humility will be very low for both candidates, and that this may partially explain the public's dislike or distrust of the candidates' public personas.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

We approached 15 external personality psychologists with doctoral degrees who agreed that they watched/read news stories about the American election 3 times or more per week. Our final sample was comprised of 10 HEXACO experts (seven men and three women) who each had published multiple peer-reviewed articles that included the HEXACO-PI. Participants were asked to broadly describe their political orientation as left, center or right, and seven reported being left, and three center.

3. Measures

3.1. Personality

Participants completed the 100-item observer report of the HEXACO PI-R (Lee & Ashton, 2016) on each candidate. Participants respond a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The inventory yields scores on six personality dimensions that were fully described in the introduction: Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience. Each dimension comprises four facet scales as described in the introduction. In addition, the inventory yields one interstitial scale: altruism versus antagonism. Percentiles were calculated based on the normed data for the HEXACO-PI-R observer report and represent the percentage of people in the population who score below you. A percentile of 1 would indicate that only 1% of people score lower than you do. Percentiles were categorized for interpretability; <1 = “exceptionally low”, 1 to 10 = “very low”, 10 to 25 = “low”, 25 to 75 = “normal”, 75 to 90 = “high”, 90 to 99 = “very high”, and >99 = “exceptionally high”.

4. Results

Table 1 shows the HEXACO factor and facet level scores for Clinton and Trump, as well as norms from the original validation of the observer report of the HEXACO-PI. Fig. 1 summarizes how the candidates compare to the norms (in percentiles). As expected, both candidates were relatively low in Honesty-Humility, with Clinton being “low” and Trump being “exceptionally low”. As well, both were rated as very low on Emotionality and Altruism (Clinton was “low” on both, while Trump was “very low” and “exceptionally low” on the two scales, respectively). It is there that the similarity between the candidates ends. Experts rated Clinton as “normal” on Extraversion and Agreeableness, while Trump was “exceptionally low” on Agreeableness, and “high” on Extraversion. With regard to Conscientiousness, Clinton was rated as “high”, and Trump as “low”. Finally, while Clinton was seen as “high” on Openness to experience, Trump received a rating of “low”.

Table 1
HEXACO-PI factor and facet descriptives for Clinton and Trump.

	Clinton	Trump	Norm	SD	Clinton percentile	Trump percentile
Honesty-Humility	2.39	1.32	3.18	0.65	11.31	0.21
Sincerity	2.28	1.75	3.16	0.78	12.90	3.53
Fairness	3.00	1.47	3.35	0.98	36.05	2.77
Greed avoidance	2.08	1.00	2.72	0.95	25.13	3.51
Modesty	2.31	1.03	3.48	0.76	6.11	0.06
Emotionality	2.79	2.29	3.31	0.64	21	5.48
Fearfulness	2.39	2.67	3.17	0.87	18.46	28.14
Anxiety	2.92	1.78	3.33	0.77	29.57	2.19
Dependence	2.94	2.69	3.30	0.86	33.96	24.07
Sentimentality	2.85	2.00	3.42	0.78	23.31	3.43
Extraversion	3.81	4.21	3.51	0.6	69.15	87.9
Social self esteem	3.92	4.72	3.79	0.65	57.73	92.42
Social boldness	4.03	4.69	3.08	0.88	85.93	96.67
Sociability	3.67	3.83	3.57	0.79	54.87	63.06
Liveliness	3.67	3.89	3.58	0.74	54.66	66.18
Agreeableness	2.69	1.45	3.05	0.66	29.12	0.78
Forgiveness	2.47	1.22	2.83	0.78	32.32	1.96
Gentleness	2.69	1.17	3.29	0.82	23.38	0.48
Flexibility	2.67	1.42	2.84	0.86	42.01	4.89
Patience	3.17	1.44	3.24	0.85	46.56	1.73
Conscientiousness	3.87	2.73	3.41	0.63	75.24	23.58
Organization	3.78	3.00	3.30	0.92	69.82	37.22
Diligence	4.67	3.86	3.76	0.75	88.66	55.36
Perfectionism	3.56	1.97	3.41	0.83	56.96	4.16
Prudence	4.08	1.61	3.17	0.79	87.62	2.42
Openness	3.46	2.45	3.18	0.64	76.73	14.01
Aesthetic appreciation	3.64	1.59	3.03	0.92	74.59	5.9
Inquisitiveness	4.00	2.14	3.00	0.90	86.67	16.9
Creativity	3.19	2.72	3.48	0.84	36.69	18.35
Unconventionality	2.92	2.72	3.19	0.68	34.4	24.5
Altruism	3.04	1.62	3.77	0.69	14.46	0.09

4.1. Facet level differences

Given that Clinton and Trump both scored low on H and E, we examined the facet level HEXACO ratings to determine whether there were any differences in how the candidates are perceived on these traits. For Honesty-Humility (Fig. 2), Donald Trump was seen as being very low in sincerity, fairness, and greed avoidance, and “exceptionally low” in modesty. Hillary Clinton received ratings of “normal” on fairness and greed avoidance, “low” on sincerity, and “very low” on modesty. For Emotionality (Fig. 3), Clinton was given “low” ratings for fearfulness and sentimentality, while scoring in the “normal” range for anxiety and dependence. Trump, however, while scoring as “normal” for fearfulness, he was given “very low” ratings for anxiety, dependence, and sentimentality. For the sake of completeness, we have also included profile comparisons for Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and

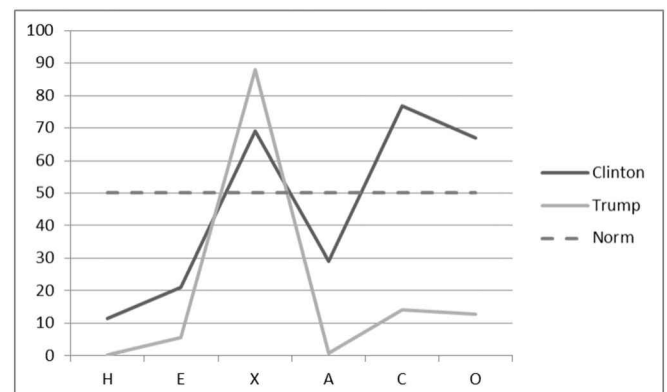


Fig. 1. HEXACO percentiles comparing Trump and Clinton to the norm.

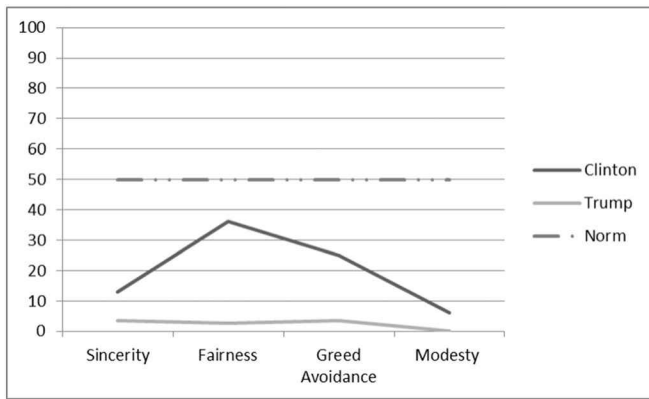


Fig. 2. Honesty-Humility facet level percentiles.

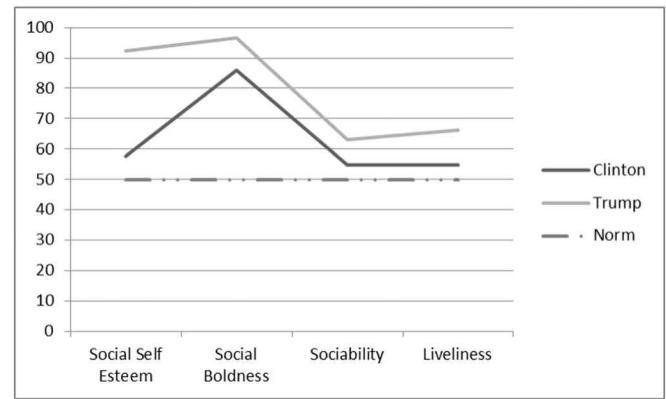


Fig. 4. Extraversion facet percentiles.

Openness in Figs. 4 through 7. Of note, Trump earns his “low” Conscientiousness by “very low” ratings on perfectionism and prudence, indicating a lack of attention to detail and a lack of planning. “Normal” range scores on organization and diligence may help to explain his business success in the face of his other Conscientiousness ratings, as well as “exceptionally low” Agreeableness.

4.2. How “dark” are their personalities?

The Dark Personality Traits refer to clusters of antisocial traits labelled as narcissism, psychopathy (sociopathy is rarely used in some psychological research, but it essentially means the same thing), and Machiavellianism (Book et al., 2015). Both Trump and Clinton have been assessed by others as being high on psychopathy (Dutton, 2016; Williams, 2016). In order to put the scores of Trump and Clinton into the perspective of the Dark Triad categories, we compared their profiles to those of people scoring higher on dark personality measures. We have previously found that narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism were associated with lower Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (Book et al., 2015; Book, Visser, & Volk, 2016) in student samples. Clinton was “low” on Honesty-Humility and Emotionality, scoring in the “normal” range for Agreeableness, and “high” for Conscientiousness. This suggests that of the Dark Triad traits, Clinton most closely resembles a Machiavellian personality, which seems consistent with the public’s perception of her as a career politician who calculates what needs to be done to succeed. Trump was rated as “exceptionally low” on Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness, “very low” on Emotionality, and “low” on Conscientiousness. These results suggest that Trump’s public persona most closely resembles the Dark Triad traits of being both narcissistic and psychopathic (note that the Dark Triad literature describes only non-clinical manifestations of these characteristics).

4.3. Did experts’ political leanings influence their ratings?

There is clear data that, amongst the general American population, one’s political orientation can change the way one views a particular candidates’ personality traits (Bump, 2016). With this in mind, we asked our experts to offer their most unbiased opinions about the personality traits. Evidence that they were in fact unbiased in their opinions comes from their ratings of Sincerity. Unlike Trump supporters who claim he is very honest while Clinton is very dishonest, and vice versa for Clinton supporters, our experts resembled Independents in that they rated both candidates as being very low in sincerity (Bump, 2016).

5. Discussion

Our results indicate that Clinton and Trump both have public personas that are seen as low in Emotionality and Honesty-Humility (cold, distant, arrogant, and dishonest), though to different degrees. As expected, Trump was also seen as very extraverted and disagreeable and Clinton as highly conscientious. However, the facet level information suggests some differences in these generally unlikeable characteristics. For example, although both Clinton and Trump are low in Honesty-Humility, Clinton was close to the norm in the fairness facet. Clinton’s low score appears to be based on “low” sincerity and “very low” modesty, suggesting that she is seen as dishonest and lacking humility. Trump, on the other hand scores “very low” to “exceptionally low” on all facets, appearing to the experts to be insincere, greedy, immodest, and lacking in fairness. We suggest that the public’s perception of both candidates as dishonest (as seen in recent polls) may be one reason for the widespread dislike of both.

Trump’s highest HEXACO facet score was in the eXtraversion facet of social self-esteem. His high score on eXtraversion might also go far in

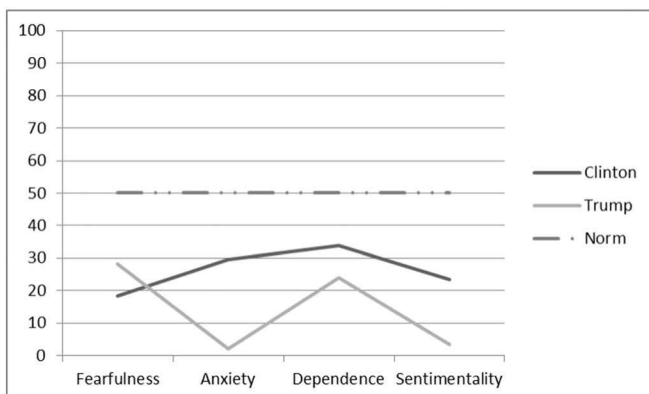


Fig. 3. Emotionality facet percentiles.

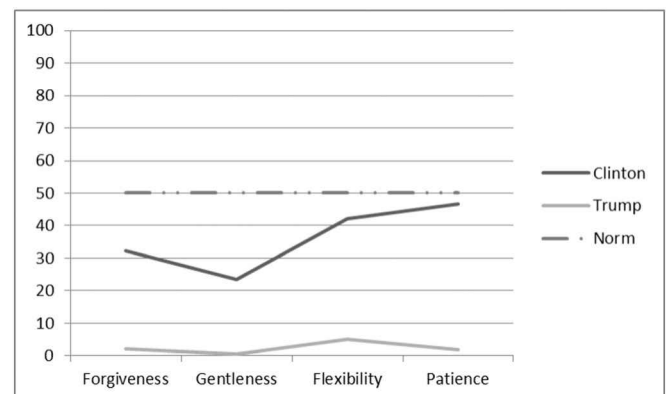


Fig. 5. Agreeableness facet percentiles.

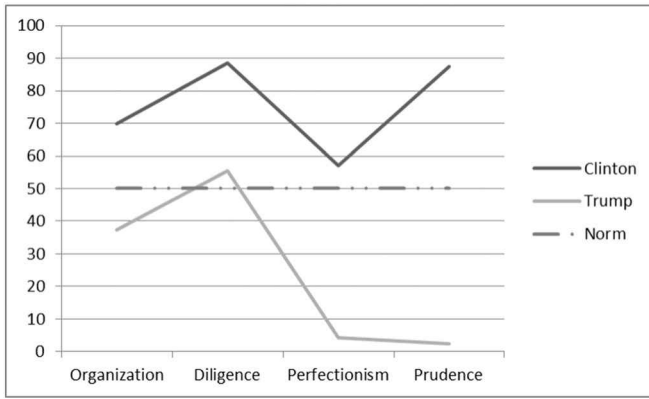


Fig. 6. Conscientiousness facet percentiles.

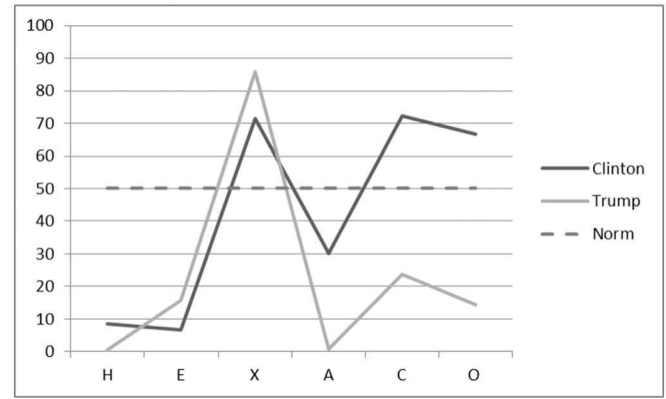


Fig. 8. Clinton and Trump percentile scores using gender specific norms.

explaining how polarizing he is. Social self-esteem can be very attractive and, indeed, many (including McAdams, 2016) have pointed to Trump's charisma. However, for those who also view him as being narcissistic and dishonest, that social self-esteem could be extremely off-putting (e.g., Milbank, 2016).

5.1. The dark personalities

One of the most striking findings was in relation to the dark personalities. To remind the reader, Book et al. (2015; 2016) found that psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism were associated with low scores on Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Hillary Clinton has some features in common with Machiavellian strategists, which fits with her public persona as being cold and calculating (Kutarna, 2016), and untrustworthy; namely, her low scores on Honesty-Humility and Emotionality. Clinton, however, scores as "normal", "high", and "high" for Agreeableness, Openness and Conscientiousness, respectively. It is also worth noting however that her traits of Honesty-Humility and Emotionality are even lower ("very low") when compared to female norms (see Fig. 8), suggesting that the first female presidential candidate may have more in common with the personality of the many men who have been presidential candidates than she does with average female voters. While it may not be surprising that a candidate for the U.S. presidency has similar (dominant callous) traits to previous candidates, the gender abnormality of her traits may make her appear particularly unusual, especially in relation to stereotypically female traits, such as humility, empathy and emotionality.

While Clinton shares two HEXACO traits with the darker personalities, as described above, Trump scores "low" on Conscientiousness, "very low" on Emotionality, and "exceptionally low" on Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness. In other words, his HEXACO profile is much closer to matching those of the darker personalities. Especially with low

conscientiousness, his personality ratings were more in line with that of people scoring high on psychopathy and narcissism. These very antisocial traits make it curious that people support Trump for the American presidency. One possible explanation is that his non-personality skills (e.g., as a businessman) are seen as more relevant than his personality flaws (Jeffress, 2016). Alternatively, perhaps his exceptionally high extraversion allows him to overcome or deflect any perceived flaws.

Trump, interestingly, scored quite low on Openness to experience, which may partially explain his inability to entertain novel ideas and points of view. While viewed as a reasonably diligent and organized individual, Trump's prudence and perfectionism were very low, suggesting that he may be seen as an impulsive individual prone to risk-taking and off-the-cuff comments (Tobak, 2016). His reality-TV fame is consistent with his extremely high scores on extraversion, accounting for how he is viewed by many Americans as an exciting leader (Thomas, 2016). His low Emotionality scores may positively relate to his willingness to engage in entrepreneurial risk (Tobak, 2016), but they may also account for his lack of concern for others' feelings (Jeffers, 2016). Most seriously, his tendency to threaten others (low Honesty-Humility) and react to threats from others (low Agreeableness) are signs of a very antisocial personality. As an example, these traits may help explain why he has by far the most lawsuits, for and against, of any presidential candidate (Penzenstadler & Page, 2016). Trump's emotionality rating in comparison to other men (see Fig. 8) becomes "low" rather than "very low" in the overall sample. However, his Honesty-Humility, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness all stayed the same ("exceptionally low" for Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness, and "low" for Conscientiousness).

5.2. Limitations

A strength and weakness of this study arises from our chosen sample. We deliberately selected HEXACO experts in the expectation that they would be relatively objective in their assessments of the candidates' personalities and able to interpret the "spirit" of the HEXACO items. However, seven of our 10 experts reported a "left" political orientation and none reported "right". It would be of interest to learn whether experts on the political right would complete the candidate personality reports in the same fashion. Also, it would be valuable to conduct a similar poll but with political scientists (to test for any influence of political knowledge) and with the general American public (to determine the extent to which political biases influence personality assessments). Finally, we must underscore that these are ratings of the candidates' public personalities. Given the level of dishonesty both were rated with, it is not unreasonable to question how well their public personalities actually match their private personalities (e.g., Jeffers, 2016). We are also not able to make firm conclusions about specific personality clusters, such as narcissism or psychopathy, without conducting actual interviews with the candidates and individuals who

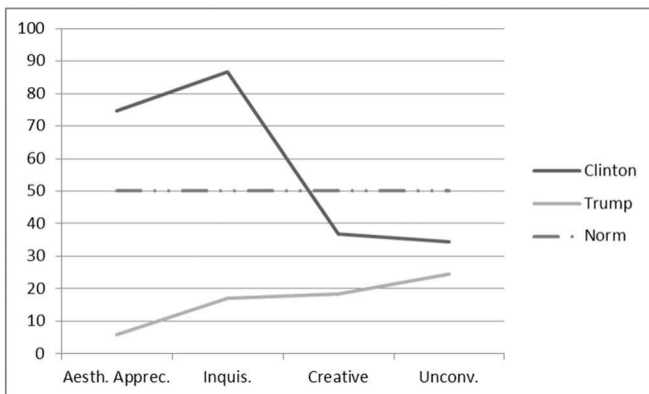


Fig. 7. Openness to Experience facet percentiles.

know them well. It is also very important to note that all of our measures assess personality traits within the normal range.

Overall, our results suggest that there are important differences and similarities between the 2016 American presidential candidates. Both have relatively low levels of prosocial traits, which helps to explain their record low levels of popularity. On the other hand, there are distinctions between the two candidates' personality that may offer important information for voters. For those looking for a steadier hand, Clinton appears to be better suited personality-wise. For those looking for a bold leader willing to make dramatic changes, Trump may appear to have more suitable personality traits. Ultimately, that is a decision that voters, and not academics, will have to decide.

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