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Aubrey Immelman

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The Political Personality of 2008 Democratic Presidential Contender John Edwards

Aubrey Immelman
 Saint John's University
 College of Saint Benedict
 St. Joseph, MN 56374, U.S.A.

[Unit for the Study of Personality in Politics](#)



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The Personality Profile of John Edwards

Brent Crawley, Katie Merkley, Andy Obritsch, Andrew Gustafson, David Wutchiett, Sean Wold, and Steven Poppler



Photo credit: lary6154.666.wordpress.com/2010/01/johnedwards

Introduction

We conducted a psychodiagnostic case study of former North Carolina Sen. John Edwards, Democratic contender in the 2008 U.S. presidential election. The object of the study was to construct a Millon-based personality profile of Sen. Edwards.

Method

The assessment instrument was the 170-item Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria (MIDC; Immelman & Steinberg, 1999), which assesses the attribute domains of expressive behavior, interpersonal conduct, cognitive style, mood/temperament, and self-image. The instrument contains 12 scales, yielding 20 normal and 14 pathological personality styles.

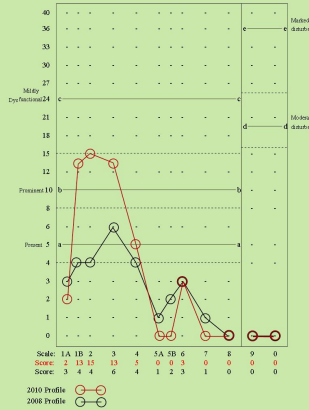
Personality Type

Ambitious Extravert ("Amorous Narcissist")

Primary pattern: Ambitious/self-serving and Outgoing/gregarious

Secondary pattern: Dauntless/adventurous and Accommodating/agreeable

Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria Profile for John Edwards in 2008 and 2010



Results

Table 3
MIDC Item Endorsement Rate by Attribute Domain

Attribute domain	Edwards '08	Edwards '10
Expressive behavior	NA	8
Interpersonal conduct	NA	7
Cognitive style	NA	8
Mood/temperament	NA	6
Self-image	NA	9
Sum	NA	38.0
Mean	NA	7.6
Standard deviation	NA	1.0

Table 4

MIDC Scale Scores

Scale	Personality pattern	Edwards '08		Edwards '10	
		Raw	RT%	Raw	RT%
1A	Dominant: Asserting—Controlling—Aggressive	3	10.7	2	3.9
1B	Dauntless: Adventurous—Dissonant—Aggrandizing	4	14.3	13	25.5
2	Ambitious: Confident—Self-serving—Exploitative	4	14.3	15	29.4
3	Outgoing: Congenial—Gregarious—Impulsive	6	21.4	13	25.5
4	Accommodating: Cooperative—Agreeable—Submissive	4	14.3	5	9.8
5A	Aggrieved: Unpressuring—Self-defending—Self-defeating	1	3.6	0	0.0
5B	Contentious: Resolute—Oppositional—Negativistic	2	7.1	0	0.0
6	Conscientious: Respectful—Dutiful—Compulsive	3	10.7	3	5.9
7	Reticent: Circumspect—Inhibited—Withdrawn	1	3.6	0	0.0
8	Retiring: Reserved—Aloof—Solitary	0	0.0	0	0.0
Subtotal for basic personality scales		28	100.0	51	100.0
9	Distrusting: Suspicious—Paranoid	0	0.0	0	0.0
0	Erratic: Unstable—Borderline	0	0.0	0	0.0
Full-scale total		28	100.0	51	100.0

Note: For Scales 1–8, ratio-transformed (RT%) scores are the scores for each scale expressed as a percentage of the sum of raw scores for the ten basic scales only. For Scales 9 and 0, ratio-transformed scores are scores expressed as a percentage of the sum of raw scores for all twelve MIDC scales (therefore, full-scale RT% totals can exceed 100). Personality patterns are depicted with scale gradations.



Reference
 Immelman, A., & Steinberg, B. (Compilers) (1999). *Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria (2nd ed.)*. Unpublished research scale, College of St. Benedict and St. John's University, Collegeville, MN 56321.

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 Research assistants: Logan Schwinghammer, Joe Johnson, Shee Xiong, Matt Draxler, Allison Wagner, Nate Orr, Michelle Pickle, and Allison Hornstad
 Faculty Advisor: Dr. Aubrey Immelman



This brief research report presents the results of an indirect assessment of the personality of former North Carolina Sen. John Edwards, a contender for the Democratic Party nomination in the 2008 U.S. presidential election, conducted in 2007–2008¹ and 2010² from the conceptual perspective of personologist Theodore Millon.

¹ Anthony Odland assisted with data collection.

² Brent Crawley, Katie Merkley, Andy Obritsch, Andrew Gustafson, David Wutchiett, Sean Wold, and Steven Poppler assisted with data collection.

Psychodiagnostically relevant data concerning Edwards was extracted from biographical sources and media reports and synthesized into a personality profile using the Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria (MIDC), which yields 34 normal and maladaptive personality classifications congruent with Axis II of *DSM-IV*.

The personality profile yielded by the MIDC was analyzed on the basis of interpretive guidelines provided in the MIDC and Millon Index of Personality Styles manuals. Edwards's primary personality patterns were found to be Ambitious/self-serving and Outgoing/gregarious — a personality composite Theodore Millon has labeled the “amorous narcissist” — with secondary features of the Dauntless/adventurous and Accommodating/cooperative patterns.

A distinctive feature of the *amorous narcissist*, with its blend of narcissism and extraversion, is an erotic and seductive orientation, which in public office renders leaders with this particular personality composite especially vulnerable to sex scandal. They tend to be overconfident and take inordinate, self-defeating risks. Typically, however, their risk-taking behavior is self-indulgent and portends neither a broader recklessness nor malfeasance with reference to discharging the duties of public office.

People with an *Ambitious* pattern are characteristically competitive, self-confident, audacious, bold, and clever. They are charming and skilled at winning others over to their causes and purposes, fully expect others to recognize their special qualities and cater to them, lack social reciprocity, and have a sense of entitlement. In extreme cases they may be viewed as exploitative and arrogant.

People with an *Outgoing* pattern are characteristically sociable, with a warm, likeable personal style. Though image-conscious and needing validation, they are confident about their social skills and their ability to charm and influence others. They tend to be easily bored with routine activities, are prone to shifting moods, and may be viewed as inconsistent or undependable.

People with a *Dauntless* pattern tend to flout tradition, dislike following routine, sometimes act impulsively and irresponsibly, and are inclined to elaborate on or shade the truth and skirt the law.

People with an *Accommodating* pattern tend to be considerate, cordial, and cooperative and are willing to reconcile differences to achieve peaceable solutions and to concede when necessary.

Leaders with an *amalgam of Ambitious and Outgoing characteristics* in their primary personality pattern — as does Edwards and, notably, former president [Bill Clinton](#) — are driven by a need for excitement, stimulation, and challenge. They are self-promoting and self-serving, motivated by a need for achievement and public recognition; are socially clever, charming, and skilled at attracting and seducing others; and display a tendency to be overly but transiently attached to one thing or person after another.

It is precisely this combination of primary personality traits that renders political leaders susceptible to scandal by contributing to neglect of the role demands of public office, low resistance to corrupting influences, and impulsiveness, as well as favoring loyalty and friendship over competence for the position in making political appointments.

Based on the assessment of his personality, it could have been foreseen that a worst-case scenario for John Edwards, had he been elected president in 2008, was his potential for committing errors of judgment stemming from a combination of strong ambition, a sense of entitlement, and inflated self-confidence; that he would have been predisposed to dissemble or equivocate, not only ego-defensively to bolster an admirable self-image, but instrumentally to have his way with others; that he would have had a strong need for approval and validation, along with a willingness to use his social skills to influence and charm others; and ultimately that he might have been neglectful of political role demands relating to oversight and prone to ethical fumbles or lapses of judgment, with the attendant failure to guard protocol and morality against violation and physical resources against improper and unwarranted use.