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Recommended Citation

Immelman, A. (2002, July). *The personality profile of September 11 hijack ringleader Mohamed Atta*. Paper presented at the 25th Annual Scientific Meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology, Berlin, Germany, July 16–19, 2002. Retrieved from Digital Commons website: http://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/psychology_pubs/32/



“What is remarkable, even chilling, is that the face behind the demonic image is that of ordinary people; ordinary people that form a human arsenal of living bombs secretly awaiting their turn.”
— Dan Setton, *Suicide Bombers: Secrets of the Shaheed* (1997)

THE PERSONALITY PROFILE
OF SEPTEMBER 11 HIJACK RINGLEADER
MOHAMED ATTA

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(Originally released October 11, 2001)

Paper presented at the Twenty-Fifth Annual Scientific Meeting
of the International Society of Political Psychology

Berlin, Germany

July 16-19, 2002

Abstract

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This paper presents the results of a posthumous, indirect assessment of the personality of Mohamed Atta, apparent ringleader in the September 11, 2001 terror attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, from the conceptual perspective of Theodore Millon. Information concerning Mohamed Atta was collected from media reports in the one-month period following the attack and synthesized into a personality profile using the second edition of 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. Atta's primary personality patterns were found to be Conscientious/compulsive and Retiring/alooof, with secondary Reticent/inhibited and Aggrieved/self-denying patterns. In addition, his profile revealed the presence of subsidiary Dominant/asserting and Distrusting/suspicious features.

Atta's profile suggests the presence of Millon's "puritanical compulsive" syndrome. This composite character complex is rooted in deep ambivalence between obedience and defiance, and characterized by the dual ego defenses of reaction formation against forbidden thoughts and sadistic displacement of hostile impulses. The masochistic (Aggrieved) elements in Atta's profile provide a partial, personality-based explanatory framework for his willingness to sacrifice his life as a martyr for his cause.

The major implication of the study is that political socialization experiences that produce a compulsive character structure—one manifestation of which is the classic authoritarian personality—may predispose a person to suicidal acts of terror ("martyrdom") when molded by a political culture that promotes paranoid fanaticism and buttresses religious values that engender an expectation of redemption as eternal reward for "wielding the sword of righteousness."

Introduction

On Tuesday, September 11, 2001 American Airlines flight 11 slammed into the north tower of the World Trade Center. At the controls: most likely 33-year-old Mohamed Atta, apparent ringleader of the meticulously planned al-Qaida terror attack on New York City and Washington, D.C. The personal profile of Atta and several of the other 18 operatives on the four hijacked flights that day defied the profile of suicide bombers that terrorism experts had constructed on the basis of data compiled from suicide bombings in the Middle East, Sri Lanka, and Chechnya over the preceding two decades. Most notably, the September 11 hijackers tended to be older and more integrated in society than the typical 22-year-old, alienated, socioeconomically marginalized suicide bomber (Wilgoren, 2001). Embedded in this larger question of changing demographics is the question of the psychology of these self-proclaimed martyrs.

An important difference between the September 11 attack and previous suicide bombings is the fact that, apart from the extended time frame involved in planning and preparing for the attack—and thus, ample opportunity for opting out of the mission—the scale of the September 11 operation required the coordination of at least four small groups acting in concert. In this context, a heuristic point of departure in coming to grips with the mindset of the new generation of suicide bombers, is to start with a personality study of the linchpin Mohamed Atta, based on informative biographical details that began to emerge in the media soon after the epoch-making attack:

As investigators around the world piece together the mechanics of the attacks on New York and Washington, they are expanding the known biography of one key suspect, Mohamed Atta, the alleged pilot of the first plane to slam into the World Trade Center.

In the details of his life are clues, tentative to be sure, about the making of a suicidal fanatic—a devout, highly intelligent and diligent student who lived and moved easily within Western society while secretly hating it. (Finn, 2001)

The rationale for the present endeavor is explicit in the observation of *The Washington Post's* Peter Finn, that understanding the motivation and psychological development of the September 11 hijackers “will be a key task in the war that the Bush administration has declared on terrorism.”

Conceptually, the present study is informed by Theodore Millon's model of personality (1969, 1986a, 1986b, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1996; Millon & Davis, 2000; Millon & Everly, 1985) as adapted (Immelman, 1993, 1998) for the study of personality in politics. The methodology entails the construction of theoretically grounded personality profiles derived from empirical analysis of biographical source materials.

Millon's Model of Personality and Its Utility for Indirect Personality Assessment

A comprehensive review of Millon's personological model and its applicability to political personality has been provided elsewhere (see Immelman, 1993, 1998, in press). Briefly, Millon's model encompasses eight attribute domains: expressive behavior, interpersonal conduct, cognitive style, mood/temperament, self-image, regulatory mechanisms, object representations, and morphologic organization (see Table 1).

Table 1
Millon's Eight Attribute Domains

Attribute	Description
Expressive behavior	The individual's characteristic behavior; how the individual typically appears to others; what the individual knowingly or unknowingly reveals about him- or herself; what the individual wishes others to think or to know about him or her.
Interpersonal conduct	How the individual typically interacts with others; the attitudes that underlie, prompt, and give shape to these actions; the methods by which the individual engages others to meet his or her needs; how the individual copes with social tensions and conflicts.
Cognitive style	How the individual focuses and allocates attention, encodes and processes information, organizes thoughts, makes attributions, and communicates reactions and ideas to others.
Mood/temperament	How the individual typically displays emotion; the predominant character of an individual's affect and the intensity and frequency with which he or she expresses it.
Self-image	The individual's perception of self-as-object or the manner in which the individual overtly describes him- or herself.
Regulatory mechanisms	The individual's characteristic mechanisms of self-protection, need gratification, and conflict resolution.
Object representations	The inner imprint left by the individual's significant early experiences with others; the structural residue of significant past experiences, composed of memories, attitudes, and affects that underlie the individual's perceptions of and reactions to ongoing events and serves as a substrate of dispositions for perceiving and reacting to life's ongoing events.
Morphologic organization	The overall architecture that serves as a framework for the individual's psychic interior; the structural strength, interior congruity, and functional efficacy of the personality system (i.e., ego strength).

Note. From *Disorders of Personality: DSM-IV and Beyond* (pp. 141–146) by T. Millon, 1996, New York: Wiley; *Toward a New Personology: An Evolutionary Model* (chapter 5) by T. Millon, 1990, New York: Wiley; and *Personality and Its Disorders: A Biosocial Learning Approach* (p. 32) by T. Millon and G. S. Everly, Jr., 1985, New York: Wiley. Copyright © 1996, © 1990, © 1985 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Adapted by permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and Theodore Millon.

Purpose of the Study

The present study is a psychodiagnostic analysis of the personality of Mohamed el-Amir Awad el-Sayed Atta, apparent ringleader of the September 11, 2001 terror attack on the World Trade Center.

Method

Materials

The materials consisted of biographical sources and the personality inventory employed to systematize and synthesize diagnostically relevant information collected from the literature on Mohamed Atta.

Sources of data. Diagnostic information pertaining to Mohamed Atta was collected from media reports of his personal characteristics. The following sources provided useful, diagnostically relevant biographical information:

1. “An Unobtrusive Man’s Odyssey: Polite Student to Suicide Hijacker” by Steven Erlanger, in the September 22, 2001 issue of *The New York Times*.
2. “A Fanatic’s Quiet Path to Terror” by Peter Finn, in the September 22, 2001 issue of *The Washington Post*.
3. “The Shy, Caring, Deadly Fanatic: Double Life of Suicide Pilot” by John Hooper, in the September 23, 2001 *Observer* Special Supplement; complemented by an earlier report by the same journalist, “Student Named as Terror Pilot Said to be Keen on Religious Understanding,” in the September 15, 2001 issue of *The Guardian*.
4. “Atta’s Odyssey” by John Cloud, in the October 8, 2001 issue of *Time*.
5. “A Portrait of the Terrorist: From Shy Child to Single-Minded Killer” by Jim Yardley, with Neil MacFarquhar and Paul Zielbauer, in the October 10, 2001 issue of *The New York Times*.

Personality inventory. The assessment instrument, the second edition of the Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria (MIDC; Immelman & Steinberg, 1999), was compiled and adapted from Millon’s (1969, 1986b; 1990, 1996; Millon & Everly, 1985) prototypal features and diagnostic criteria for normal personality styles and their pathological variants. Information concerning the construction, administration, scoring, and interpretation of the MIDC is provided in the Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria manual (Immelman, 1999).¹ The instrument taps the first five “noninferential” (Millon, 1990, p. 157) attribute domains listed in Table 1.

The 12 MIDC scales correspond to major personality patterns posited by Millon (1994, 1996), which are congruent with the syndromes described on Axis II of the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)* of the American Psychiatric Association (APA; 1994) and coordinated with the normal personality styles in which these disorders are rooted, as described by Millon and Everly (1985), Millon (1994), Oldham and Morris (1995), and Strack (1997). Scales 1 through 8 (comprising 10 scales and subscales) have three gradations (a, b, c) yielding 30 personality variants, whereas Scales 9 and 0 have two gradations (d, e), yielding four variants, for a total of 34 personality designations, or types. Table 2 displays the full taxonomy.

¹ Inventory and manual available upon request from the author.

Table 2
Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria: Scales and Gradations

Scale 1A:	Dominant pattern a. Asserting b. Controlling c. Aggressive (Sadistic; <i>DSM-III-R</i> , Appendix A)
Scale 1B:	Dauntless pattern a. Adventurous b. Dissenting c. Aggrandizing (Antisocial; <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.7)
Scale 2:	Ambitious pattern a. Confident b. Self-serving c. Exploitative (Narcissistic; <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.81)
Scale 3:	Outgoing pattern a. Congenial b. Gregarious c. Impulsive (Histrionic; <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.50)
Scale 4:	Accommodating pattern a. Cooperative b. Agreeable c. Submissive (Dependent; <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.6)
Scale 5A:	Aggrieved pattern a. Unpresuming b. Self-denying c. Self-defeating (<i>DSM-III-R</i> , Appendix A)
Scale 5B:	Contentious pattern a. Resolute b. Oppositional c. Negativistic (Passive-aggressive; <i>DSM-III-R</i> , 301.84)
Scale 6:	Conscientious pattern a. Respectful b. Dutiful c. Compulsive (Obsessive-compulsive; <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.4)
Scale 7:	Reticent pattern a. Circumspect b. Inhibited c. Withdrawn (Avoidant; <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.82)
Scale 8:	Retiring pattern a. Reserved b. Aloof c. Solitary (Schizoid; <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.20)
Scale 9:	Distrusting pattern d. Suspicious e. Paranoid (<i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.0)
Scale 0:	Erratic pattern d. Unstable e. Borderline (<i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.83)

Note. Equivalent *DSM* terminology and codes are specified in parentheses.

Diagnostic Procedure

The current diagnostic procedure, termed *psychodiagnostic meta-analysis*, can be conceptualized as a three-part process: first, an *analysis* phase (data collection) during which source materials are reviewed and analyzed to extract and code diagnostically relevant content; second, a *synthesis* phase (scoring and interpretation) during which the unifying framework provided by the MIDC prototypal features, keyed for attribute domain and personality pattern, is employed to classify the diagnostically relevant information extracted in phase 1; and finally, an *evaluation* phase (inference) during which theoretically grounded descriptions, explanations, inferences, and predictions are extrapolated from Millon's theory of personality based on the personality profile constructed in phase 2 (see Immelman, 1999 for a more extensive account of the procedure).

Cross-Cultural Considerations

Owing to its compatibility with conventional psychodiagnostic procedures and standard clinical practice in personality assessment, psychodiagnostic meta-analysis lends itself particularly well to cross-cultural application, given the relative uniformity of training in professional psychology around the globe. Moreover, the taxonomy of personality patterns assessed by the MIDC is congruent with the syndromes described on Axis II of the *DSM-IV*, with which psychologists worldwide are familiar.

Results

The analysis of the data includes a summary of descriptive statistics yielded by the MIDC scoring procedure, the MIDC profile for Mohamed Atta, diagnostic classification of the subject, and the clinical interpretation of significant MIDC scale elevations derived from the diagnostic procedure.

Atta received 52 endorsements on the 170-item MIDC. Descriptive statistics for Atta's MIDC ratings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
MIDC Item Endorsement Rate by Attribute Domain

Expressive behavior	13
Interpersonal conduct	9
Cognitive style	9
Mood/temperament	11
Self-image	10
Sum	52
Mean	10.4
Standard deviation	1.5

Atta’s MIDC scale scores are reported in Table 4. The same data are presented graphically in the profile depicted in Figure 1.

Table 4
MIDC Scale Scores for Mohamed Atta

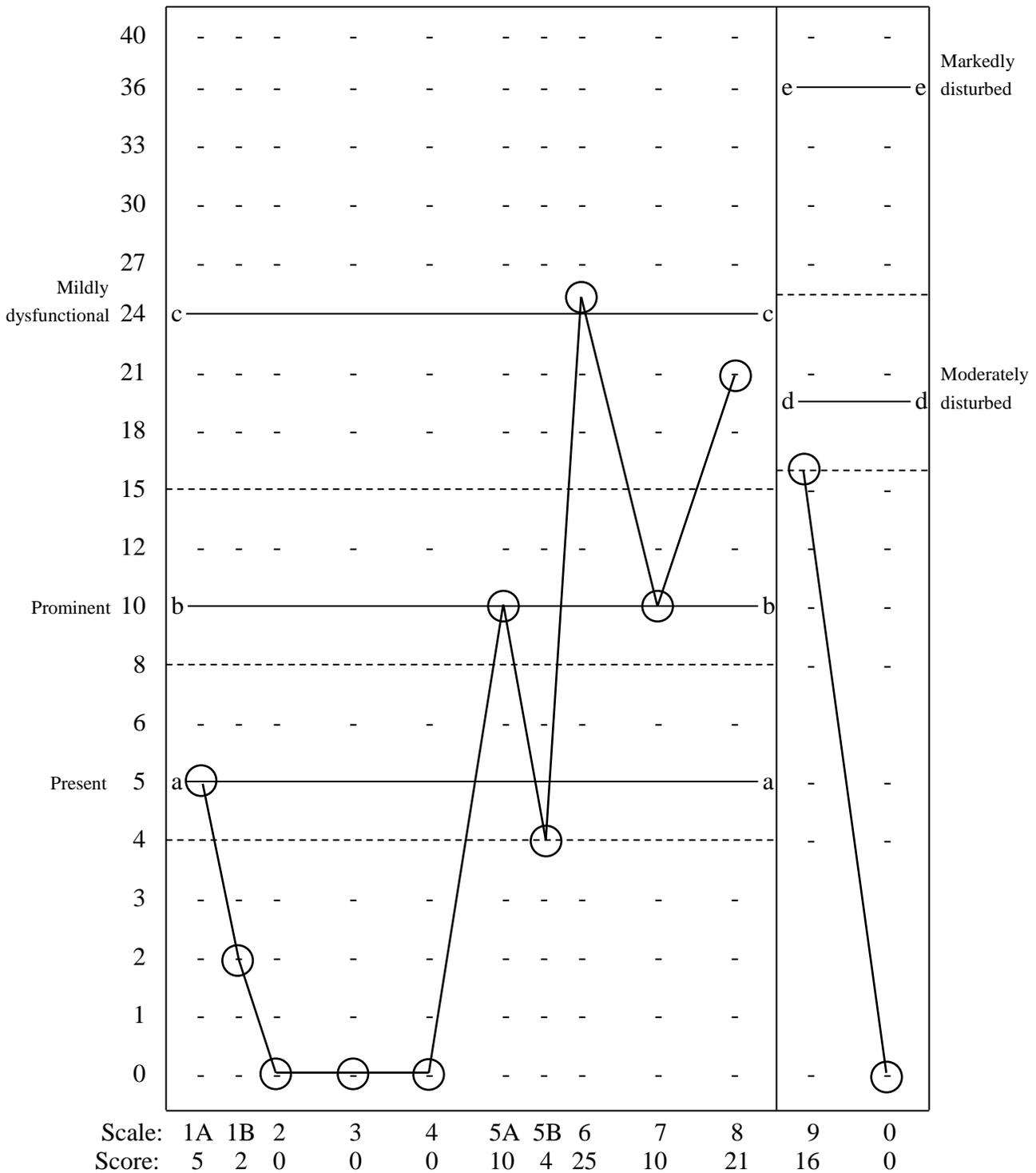
Scale	Personality pattern	Raw	RT%
1A	Dominant: Asserting–Controlling–Aggressive (Sadistic)	5	6.5
1B	Dauntless: Adventurous–Dissenting–Aggrandizing (Antisocial)	2	2.6
2	Ambitious: Confident–Self-serving–Exploitative (Narcissistic)	0	0.0
3	Outgoing: Congenial–Gregarious–Impulsive (Histrionic)	0	0.0
4	Accommodating: Cooperative–Agreeable–Submissive (Dependent)	0	0.0
5A	Aggrieved: Unpresuming–Self-denying–Self-defeating (Masochistic)	10	13.0
5B	Contentious: Resolute–Oppositional–Negativistic (Passive-aggressive)	4	5.2
6	Conscientious: Respectful–Dutiful–Compulsive (Obsessive-compulsive)	25	32.5
7	Reticent: Circumspect–Inhibited–Withdrawn (Avoidant)	10	13.0
8	Retiring: Reserved–Aloof–Solitary (Schizoid)	21	27.3
	Subtotal for basic personality scales	77	100.0
9	Distrusting: Suspicious–Paranoid (Paranoid)	16	17.2
0	Erratic: Unstable–Borderline (Borderline)	0	0.0
	Full-scale total	93	117.2

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 and equivalent *DSM* terminology (in parentheses).

The MIDC profile yielded by the raw scores is displayed in Figure 1.² Atta’s most elevated scale, with a score of 25, is Scale 6 (Conscientious), followed by a score of 21 on Scale 8 (Retiring). Based on cut-off score guidelines provided in the MIDC manual, the Scale 6 elevation is in the *mildly dysfunctional* (24–30) range, followed by Scale 8, well within the *prominent* (10–23) range. Scale 5A (Aggrieved) and Scale 7 (Reticent), both with scores of 10, are just within the *prominent* range. Scale 1A (Dominant), with a score of 5, is in the normal, functionally adaptive *present* (5–9) range. Finally, Scale 9 (Distrusting), with a score of 16, approaches a *moderately disturbed* (20–35) level of scale elevation.

² See Table 2 for scale names. Solid horizontal lines on the profile form signify cut-off scores between adjacent scale gradations. For Scales 1–8, scores of 5 through 9 signify the *presence* (gradation a) of the personality pattern in question; scores of 10 through 23 indicate a *prominent* (gradation b) variant; and scores of 24 to 30 indicate an exaggerated, *mildly dysfunctional* (gradation c) variation of the pattern. For Scales 9 and 0, scores of 20 through 35 indicate a *moderately disturbed* syndrome and scores of 36 through 45 a *markedly disturbed* syndrome.

Figure 1. Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria: Profile for Mohamed Atta



In terms of MIDC scale gradation (see Table 2 and Figure 1) criteria, Mohamed Atta was classified as primarily a blend of the Conscientious/compulsive (Scale 6) and Retiring/alooof (Scale 8) personality patterns, with secondary features of the Aggrieved/self-denying (Scale 5A) and Reticent/inhibited (Scale 7) patterns. Less significantly, the profile indicates the presence of

subsidiary Dominant/asserting (Scale 1A) features. Finally, Atta's profile provides equivocal evidence of Distrusting/suspicious (Scale 9) personality attributes.³

Discussion

The discussion of the results examines Mohamed Atta's MIDC scale elevations from the perspective of Millon's (1994, 1996; Millon & Davis, 2000) model of personality, supplemented by the theoretically congruent portraits of Oldham and Morris (1995) and Strack (1997). The discussion concludes with a theoretically integrative synthesis of the political and ideological implications of Mohamed Atta's personality profile.

With his elevated Scale 6, Mohamed Atta emerged from the assessment as a predominantly compulsive type, an exaggerated, maladaptive variant of the Conscientious pattern. The interpretation of Atta's profile must also account for his concurrent elevation on Scale 8 (Retiring), which modulates his Conscientious pattern. In addition, more modest elevations on Scales 9 (Distrusting), 5A (Aggrieved), 7 (Reticent), and 1A (Dominant) should be considered.

Scale 6: The Conscientious Pattern

The Conscientious pattern, as do all personality patterns, occurs on a continuum ranging from normal to maladaptive. At the well-adjusted pole are earnest, polite, respectful personalities. Slightly exaggerated Conscientious features occur in dutiful, dependable, and principled but rigid personalities. In its most deeply ingrained, inflexible form, the Conscientious pattern displays itself in moralistic, self-righteous, uncompromising, cognitively constricted, compulsive behavior patterns that may be consistent with a clinical diagnosis of obsessive-compulsive personality disorder.

Normal, adaptive variants of the Conscientious pattern (i.e., respectful and dutiful types) correspond to Oldham and Morris's (1995) *Conscientious* style, Millon's (1994) *Conforming* pattern, Strack's (1997) *respectful* style, and Leary's (1957) *responsible-hypernormal* continuum. Millon's Conforming pattern is correlated with the "Big Five" *Conscientiousness* factor, has a modest positive correlation with its *Extraversion* factor, a modest negative correlation with its *Neuroticism* factor, and is uncorrelated with *Agreeableness* and *Openness to Experience* (see Millon, 1994, p. 82). Maladaptive, compulsive variants of the Conscientious pattern are tense and driven, exhibiting a rigid, self-defeating adherence to stringent internalized standards of perfection and external demands to adhere to social convention. Adaptive variants of this pattern are disciplined and organized, with "an unusual degree of integrity, adhering as firmly as they can to society's ethics and morals" (Millon, 1996, pp. 518–519). In the words of Oldham and Morris (1995),

Conscientious-style people . . . [have] strong moral principle[s] and absolute certainty, and they won't rest until the job is done and done right. They are loyal to their families, their causes, and their superiors. Hard work is a hallmark of this personality style; Conscientious types *achieve*. . . .

³ In each case the label preceding the slash signifies the basic personality pattern, whereas the label following the slash indicates the specific scale gradation, or personality type, on the dimensional continuum; see Table 2.

The Conscientious personality style flourishes within cultures . . . in which the work ethic thrives. Conscientious traits . . . [include] hard work, prudence, conventionality. (p. 62)

Being principled and meticulous, Conscientious individuals “tend to follow standards from which they hesitate to deviate, attempt to act in an objective and rational manner, and decide matters in terms of what they believe is right.” They are often religious, and maintaining their integrity “ranks high among their goals” while “voicing moral values gives them a deep sense of satisfaction.” The major limitations of this personality style are its “superrationality,” leading to a “devaluation of emotion [that] tends to preclude relativistic judgments and subjective preferences”; and a predilection for “seeing complex matters in black and white, good and bad, or right or wrong terms” (Millon, 1996, p. 519). Millon (1994)⁴ summarizes the Conscientious pattern (which he labels *Conforming*) as follows:

[Conscientious individuals possess] traits not unlike Leary’s [1957] responsible–hypernormal personality, with its ideal of proper, conventional, orderly, and perfectionistic behavior, as well as bearing a similarity to Factor III of the Big-Five, termed Conscientiousness. Conformers [Conscientious people] are notably respectful of tradition and authority, and act in a reasonable, proper, and conscientious way. They do their best to uphold conventional rules and standards, following given regulations closely, and tend to be judgmental of those who do not. Well-organized and reliable, prudent and restrained, they may appear to be overly self-controlled, formal and inflexible in their relationships, intolerant of deviance, and unbending in their adherence to social proprieties. Diligent about their responsibilities, they dislike having their work pile up, worry about finishing things, and come across to others as highly dependable and industrious. (p. 33)

Strack (1997) provides the following portrait of the normal prototype of the Conscientious pattern, based on Millon’s theory, empirical findings from studies correlating his Personality Adjective Check List (PACL; 1991) scales with other measures, and clinical experience with the instrument:

Responsible, industrious, and respectful of authority, these individuals tend to be conforming and work hard to uphold rules and regulations. They have a need for order and are typically conventional in their interests. These individuals can be rule abiding to a fault, however, and may be perfectionistic, inflexible, and judgmental. A formal interpersonal style and notable constriction of affect can make some respectful persons seem cold, aloof, and withholding. Underneath their social propriety there is often a fear of disapproval and rejection, or a sense of guilt over perceived shortcomings. Indecisiveness and an inability to take charge may be evident in some of these persons due to a fear of being wrong. However, among co-workers and friends, respectful [Conscientious] personalities are best known for being well organized, reliable, and diligent. They have a strong sense of duty and loyalty, are cooperative in group efforts, show persistence even in difficult circumstances, and work well under supervision. (From Strack, 1997, p. 490, with minor modifications)

Millon’s personality patterns have predictable, reliable, and—for the most part—observable psychological indicators (expressive behavior, interpersonal conduct, cognitive style, mood/temperament, self-image, regulatory mechanisms, object-representations, and morphologic

⁴ All Millon 1994 citations in this report refer to the Manual of the *Millon Index of Personality Styles* (MIPS). Copyright © 1994 by Dicandrien, Inc. “MIPS” is a trademark of The Psychological Corporation registered in the United States of America and/or other jurisdictions. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, The Psychological Corporation, a Harcourt Assessment Company. All rights reserved.

organization). The diagnostic features of the Conscientious pattern are summarized below, along with selected illustrative examples of psychodiagnostically relevant data (for the five observable domains assessed by the MIDC) collected from media reports.

Expressive behavior. The core diagnostic feature of the expressive acts of Conscientious individuals is a sense of *duty*; they do their best to uphold convention, follow regulations closely, and are typically responsible, reliable, proper, prudent, punctual, self-disciplined, well organized, and restrained. They are meticulous in fulfilling obligations, their conduct is generally beyond reproach, and they typically demonstrate an uncommon degree of integrity. More exaggerated variants of the Conscientious pattern tend toward *rigidity*; they are typically overcontrolled, orderly, and perfectionistic. Though highly dependable and industrious, they have an air of austerity and serious-mindedness and may tend to be stubborn and stingy. They are typically scrupulous in matters of morality and ethics, and may strike others as moralistic and condescending. They exhibit a certain postural tightness; their movements may be deliberate and dignified and they display a tendency to speak precisely, with clear diction and well-phrased sentences. Emotions are constrained by a regulated, highly structured, and carefully organized lifestyle. Clothing is characteristically formal or proper, and restrained in color and style. Individuals who display the most pronounced variant of this pattern are highly *perfectionistic*; they are characteristically pedantic, painfully fastidious or fussy, and excessively devoted to work and productivity. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, pp. 513–515)

“ . . . the austere **dutiful** life of the pivotal figure in the inquiry into the attacks on New York and Washington” (Hooper, 2001b).

“Smart and **hard-working**” (Finn, 2001).

“In June 1997, Atta was laid off by Plankontor. The partners had bought a CAD system and his draughtsmanship was not needed. ‘When he was given his last sum of money, he got too much from us and he **sent it back**,’ recalled [Plankontor partner, Matthias] Frinken. ‘He said that he **hadn’t earned it** and he didn’t want any more’ ” (Hooper, 2001b).

“He seems to have been the center of gravity, the dour and **meticulous** ringleader” (Cloud, 2001).

“ ‘He was a very **tight** person. . . . I cannot remember him smiling’ ” (Finn, 2001).

“Hauth liked Atta but sensed a **rigidity** in his friend. ‘I knew Mohamed as a guy searching for justice,’ Hauth told the *Los Angeles Times*. ‘He felt **offended** by this broad wrong direction the world was taking’ ” (Cloud, 2001).

Interpersonal conduct. The core diagnostic feature of the interpersonal conduct of Conscientious individuals is *politeness*; they are courteous, proper, and dignified. They strongly adhere to social conventions and proprieties and show a preference for polite, formal, and correct personal relationships. With their strong sense of duty, they feel that they must not let others down or engage in behaviors that might provoke others’ displeasure. They are loyal to their families, their causes, and their superiors. More exaggerated variants of the Conscientious pattern are *exacting*; thus, they are demanding taskmasters in their dealings with subordinates (or their families), insisting that they adhere to personally established rules and methods. In marked contrast, they treat superiors with deference, are compliant, and may ingratiate themselves, striving to impress authorities with their loyalty, efficiency, and serious-mindedness. Individuals with the most extreme manifestation of this pattern are *uncompromising*; they may cloak supercilious and

deprecatory behaviors behind a veil of legalities and regulations, and aggressive intent may be justified by recourse to rules, authorities, or imperatives higher than themselves. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, pp. 514–515, 516; Millon & Everly, 1985, p. 33)

“University administrators said that he had been a dedicated student of town planning and urban development who had specialised in urban renewal. [Thesis supervisor] Professor Dittmar Machule told the Guardian [newspaper] yesterday that the man he knew as Mohamed al-Amir was ‘a very good student.’ He added: He was a very nice young man—**polite**, very religious and with a highly developed critical faculty.’ ” (Hooper, 2001a)

“Mr. Atta was a **polite**, shy boy” (Yardley, 2001).

“He was **polite**” (Erlanger, 2001).

“Mr. Atta remained the same person in Hamburg that he had been in Egypt—**polite**, distant and neatly dressed” (Yardley, 2001).

“What struck . . . most were Mr. Atta’s **good manners** and **respect**” (Erlanger, 2001).

“. . . tolerated **no compromise**. He ate no pork and scraped the frosting off cakes, in case it contained lard. He threatened to leave the university unless he was given a room for a prayer group” (Yardley, 2001).

Cognitive style. The core diagnostic feature of the cognitive style of Conscientious individuals is *circumspection*; they are prudent, risk avoidant, systematic, and attentive to detail. More exaggerated variants of the Conscientious pattern are *unimaginative*; they are methodical, structured, pedestrian, uninspired, or routinized. Their thinking may be constrained by stubborn adherence to personally formulated schemas, and their equilibrium is easily upset by unfamiliar situations or new ideas and customs. Individuals who display the most pronounced variant of this pattern are *cognitively constricted*; they are mechanical, inflexible, and rigid, constructing the world in terms of rules, regulations, schedules, and hierarchies. Perfectionism may interfere with decision making and task completion. All variants of this pattern are concerned with matters of propriety and efficiency and tend to be rigid about regulations and procedures, though, ironically, all too often getting mired in minor or irrelevant details. They are inclined to disdain frivolity and public displays of emotion, which they view as irresponsible or immature. Though industrious, tidy, meticulous, practical, realistic, and diligent, their thinking may be deficient in flexibility, creativity, and imagination, and lacking in a broader vision. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, pp. 515–516; Millon & Everly, 1985, p. 33)

“He impressed his co-workers with his **diligence** and the **careful** elegance of his drafting” (Yardley, 2001).

“He was **diligent**” (Erlanger, 2001).

“When it came to politics and religion, topics no Egyptian can avoid, he offered **mainstream opinions**. His friends [at school] don’t remember ever seeing him pray, and they recall his harsh words for Islamic terrorists—‘brainless, irresponsible people’ ” (Cloud, 2001).

Mood/temperament. The core diagnostic feature of the characteristic mood and temperament of Conscientious individuals is *restraint*; they are dignified, serious-minded, and reasonable, and rarely display strong emotions. Although these individuals often come across as reserved, even stiff, “wooden,” or “heavy,” they may exhibit a dry, self-effacing sense of humor. More exaggerated variants of the Conscientious pattern are characteristically *solemn*; they are

emotionally controlled, tense, or somber. The most extreme variants of this pattern are *grave*; heavy and uptight, they are grim and cheerless, keeping a tight rein on emotions—especially warm and affectionate feelings, though they may occasionally exhibit abrupt, explosive outbursts of anger aimed at subordinates or equals—never at superiors. Few, however, have a lively or ebullient manner; most are rigidly controlled and tight, and their failure to release pent-up energies may predispose them to psychophysiological disorders. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, p. 518; Millon & Everly, 1985, p. 33)

“His emotions were **steady**, and he was not easily influenced or swayed” (Cloud, 2001).
 “And he seemed more **serious** and aloof to those who had known him before [1999]” (Finn, 2001).
 “‘He looked more **serious**, and he didn’t smile as much.’ Those who had known him as a quiet student say his demeanor became more **brooding**, more troubled” (Yardley, 2001).
 “. . . the **dour** and meticulous ringleader” (Cloud, 2001).
 “‘He was a very tight person. . . . I **cannot remember him smiling**’ ” (Finn, 2001).
 “Chrilla Wendt, who knew Atta after he returned [to Hamburg], said she **couldn’t remember him smiling**” (Cloud, 2001).
 “. . . a precise and **disciplined temperament**” (Yardley, 2001).

Self-image. The core diagnostic feature of the self-perception of Conscientious individuals is *reliability*; they view themselves as dependable, disciplined, responsible, industrious, efficient, and trustworthy. More exaggerated variants of the Conscientious pattern accurately perceive themselves as highly *conscientious*, even to a fault; they view themselves as scrupulous, meticulous in fulfilling obligations, and loyal, despite often being viewed by others as high minded, overperfectionistic, and fastidious. The most extreme variants of the Conscientious pattern view themselves as *righteous*; they overvalue aspects of themselves that exhibit virtue, moral rectitude, discipline, perfection, prudence, and loyalty, and are fearful of error or misjudgment. They are excessively devoted to work, with a corresponding tendency to minimize the importance of recreational or leisure activities. All variants of the Conscientious pattern at times experience self-doubt or guilt for failing to live up to an ideal. Given their strong sense of duty and their view of themselves as reliable, conscientious, or righteous, these individuals are particularly sensitive to charges of impropriety, which may be devastating to their sense of self. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, p. 516)

“His acquaintances from . . . [Technische Universität Hamburg–Harburg] still cannot reconcile him as a killer, but in hindsight the raw ingredients of his personality suggest some clues. He was **meticulous**, disciplined and highly intelligent” (Yardley, 2001).
 “The awful efficiency of the [September 11] attack demanded a leader with a precise and **disciplined** temperament, and Mr. Atta apparently filled that role” (Yardley, 2001).
 “Hauth recalled that the only time he saw Atta show any interest in a woman was in Aleppo, where the pair met a self-assured and beautiful Palestinian working in a planning office. Atta, with clear regret, told Hauth back at their hotel that she wouldn’t be suitable because **she was too emancipated**” (Finn, 2001).

Regulatory mechanisms. The core diagnostic feature of the unconscious regulatory (i.e., ego-defense) mechanisms of Conscientious individuals is *reaction formation*; they typically display reasonableness when faced with circumstances that would ordinarily be expected to evoke irritation, anger, or dismay and have a proclivity for engaging in public displays of socially commendable actions that may be diametrically opposed to their deeper, forbidden impulses. Conscientious individuals classically employ a greater variety of regulatory mechanisms than other personality patterns, among them *displacement, identification, sublimation, isolation, and undoing*. Concerning the latter, in more extreme, compulsive manifestations of the Conscientious pattern, perceived failure of these individuals to live up to their own or others' expectations may give rise to ritualistic acts to annul the evil or wrong they feel they have wrought, which induces them to seek expiation or atonement for their imagined transgressions. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, pp. 516–517)

Object representations. The core diagnostic feature of the internalized object representations of Conscientious individuals is *concealment*; there is a tendency for only those internalized representations that are socially acceptable, with their corresponding inner affects, memories, and attitudes, to be permitted into conscious awareness or to be expressed. Thus, personal difficulties and social conflicts anchored to past experiences are defensively denied, kept from conscious awareness, and maintained under the most stringent of controls. These individuals devalue self-exploration, claiming that it is antithetical to efficient behavior and that introspection only intrudes on rational thinking and self-control, or asserting that introspection is indicative of immature self-indulgence and thus anathema to social adaptation. Consequently, highly Conscientious people often lack insight into their motives and feelings. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, p. 516)

Morphologic organization. The core diagnostic feature of the morphological organization of highly Conscientious individuals is *compartmentalization*; to keep contrary feelings and impulses from affecting one another and to restrain ambivalent and contradictory attitudes, the organization of their inner world is partitioned into numerous distinct and segregated constellations of drive, memory, and cognition, with few open channels to permit interplay among these components. Thus, a deliberate and well-poised surface quality may belie an inner turmoil. To prevent upsetting the balance they have so carefully wrought throughout their lives, highly Conscientious individuals strive to avoid risk and to operate with complete certainty. Because they usually have a history of exposure to demanding, perfectionistic parents, a potent force behind their tightly structured world is their fear of disapproval. As their public façade of conformity and propriety often masks an undercurrent of repressed urges toward self-assertion and defiance, they must guard against “detection,” which they achieve through characteristic control mechanisms such as reaction formation, and by favoring the formalistic interpersonal behaviors described in preceding sections. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, pp. 517–518)

Scale 8: The Retiring Pattern

Few people exhibit personality patterns in pure or prototypal form; more often, individual personalities represent a blend of two or more prevailing orientations. As noted earlier, Mohamed Atta's secondary elevation on Scale 8 (Retiring) modulates his primary Conscientious pattern. Atta's loading on Scale 8 classifies him as an aloof type, an adaptive, slightly exaggerated variant of the Retiring pattern.

Normal, adaptive variants of the Retiring pattern (i.e., reserved and aloof types), characterized by low levels of sociability and companionability (Millon, 1994, p. 31), correspond to Oldham and Morris's (1995) *Solitary* style, Strack's (1997) *introversive* style, and Millon's (1994) *Retiring* pattern. Millon's Retiring pattern is negatively correlated with the "Big Five" *Extraversion* factor, positively correlated with its *Neuroticism* factor, has modest negative correlations with its *Openness to Experience* and *Agreeableness* factors, and is uncorrelated with its *Conscientiousness* factor (see Millon, 1994, p. 82).

According to Oldham and Morris (1995), Retiring, "solitary-style" individuals are self-contained people without a need for external guidance, admiration, or emotional sustenance. They feel no need to share their experiences and draw their greatest strength and comfort from within. According to Oldham and Morris (1995),

Solitary [Retiring] men and women need no one but themselves. They are unmoved by the madding crowd, liberated from the drive to impress and to please. Solitary [Retiring] people are remarkably free of the emotions and involvements that distract so many others. What they may give up in terms of sentiment and intimacy, however, they may gain in clarity of vision. (p. 275)

Millon (1994) summarizes the Retiring pattern as follows:

[Retiring individuals] evince few social or group interests. . . . Their needs to give and receive affection and to show feelings tend to be minimal. They are inclined to have few relationships and interpersonal involvements, and do not develop strong ties to other people. They may be seen by others as calm, placid, untroubled, easygoing, and possibly indifferent. Rarely expressing their inner feelings or thoughts to others, they seem most comfortable when left alone. They tend to work in a slow, quiet, and methodical manner, almost always remaining in the background in an undemanding and unobtrusive way. Comfortable working by themselves, they are not easily distracted or bothered by what goes on around them. Being somewhat deficient in the ability to recognize the needs or feelings of others, they may be seen as socially awkward, if not insensitive, as well as lacking in spontaneity and vitality. (p. 31)

Finally, Strack (1997) provides the following portrait of the normal prototype of the Retiring pattern, aspects of which can be expected to modify Atta's primary Conscientious pattern:

Aloof, introverted, and solitary, these persons usually prefer distant or limited involvement with others and have little interest in social activities, which they find unrewarding. Appearing to others as complacent and untroubled, they are often judged to be easy-going, mild-mannered, quiet, and retiring. They frequently remain in the background of social life and work quietly and unobtrusively at a job. . . . [I]n the workplace these people do well on their own, are typically dependable and reliable, are undemanding, and are seldom bothered by noise or commotion around them. They are often viewed as levelheaded and calm. However, these individuals may appear unaware of, or insensitive to, the feelings and thoughts of others. These characteristics are sometimes interpreted by others as signs of indifference or rejection, but reveal a sincere difficulty in being able to sense others' moods and needs. Introversive [Retiring] persons can be slow and methodical in demeanor, lack spontaneity and resonance, and be awkward or timid in social or group situations. (From Strack, 1997, p. 488, with minor modifications)

The diagnostic features of the Retiring pattern with respect to each of Millon's eight attribute domains are summarized below, along with selected illustrative examples of psychodiagnostically relevant data (from the five observable domains assessed by the MIDC) collected from media

reports. The Retiring elements in Atta's profile play an important modulating role with respect to Atta's predominantly Conscientious personality pattern.

Expressive behavior. The core diagnostic feature of the expressive acts of Retiring individuals is their *reserved* nature; they are private, unsociable, introverted, undemonstrative, and undiplomatic. More exaggerated variants of the Retiring pattern are characteristically *solitary*; they seem indifferent, express a preference for being alone, and are phlegmatic, stolid, colorless, or bland, and deficient in expressiveness and spontaneity. The most extreme variants of the Retiring pattern are *impassive*; they are stoical and detached, with a strong preference for being alone. They are deficient in activation, motoric expressiveness, and spontaneity and are seemingly apathetic and unmoved, with an unexcited, lifeless quality, lacking in apparent energy and vitality. Their physical movement may be languid, lumbering, or lacking in rhythm, and their speech slow, monotonous, and deficient in affective expressiveness. They rarely “perk up” or respond animatedly to the feelings of others, which may be wrongly perceived as a lack of kindness or compassion. Being underresponsive to stimulation, they are neither quickly provoked to anger nor easily humored, and rarely report feelings of anger or anxiety, sadness or joy. They are often perceived as passive and lacking in enthusiasm, initiative, or vigor, and others may experience them as boring, unanimated, and wooden, if not robotic. Leisure-time preferences tend toward mental activities such as reading or television watching, or low energy-expenditure physical activities such as sketching, playing electronic games, or Internet surfing. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, pp. 230–231)

“. . . the **introvert**, the meticulous planner” (Yardley, 2001).

“As a kid, his father says, he **liked to play chess and disliked violent games**” (Cloud, 2001).

“The Friday night before the attacks, Atta and two other men . . . spent 3½ hours at a sports bar in Hollywood, Fla., called Shuckums. Atta **played video games**, a pursuit out of line with fundamentalist beliefs. But the manager on duty that night has said that he doesn't recall seeing Atta drink alcohol.” (Finn, 2001).

“Atta made a few friends in school, but he was such a **loner** that when a classmate, Iman Ismail, drew a caricature of their class, she depicted Mohamed standing next to a sign posted on Egyptian military fences: COMING NEAR OR TAKING PHOTOS PROHIBITED” (Cloud, 2001).

Interpersonal conduct. The core diagnostic feature of the interpersonal conduct of Retiring individuals is *unobtrusiveness*; they are private, self-contained, prefer solitary activities, and often fade into the background or go unnoticed. More exaggerated variants of the Retiring pattern are socially *disengaged*; they are aloof and indifferent to others, neither desiring nor enjoying close relationships, and are socially remote and interpersonally detached. The most extreme variants of the Retiring pattern are *asocial*; they are reclusive and unresponsive to the emotions and behaviors of others, exhibiting minimal interest in the lives of others. All variants of the Retiring pattern, where possible, avoid social activities or leadership roles. In mandatory (e.g., occupational) settings, their social communications are expressed in a perfunctory, formal, or impersonal manner. Their primary social motive is to remain interpersonally unattached, but this is a preferred, comfortable state rather than a driving need. When pushed beyond their limits or comfort zone in interpersonal relations, they tend to retreat or withdraw into themselves. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, p. 231; Millon & Everly, 1985, p. 33)

“ . . . an **unobtrusive** man leading an unobtrusive life” (Erlanger, 2001).
 “ . . . **reluctance to engage in conversation** with others was sometimes resented” (Erlanger, 2001).
 “Neighbors say he was polite but **kept to himself**” (Erlanger, 2001).
 “ . . . polite and friendly, but **distant**, a man who kept to himself” (Erlanger, 2001).
 “ “There were some Arabic students who acted loud and went about in large crowds, . . . but Mohamed was **always on his own** when I saw him’ ” (Erlanger, 2001).
 “And he seemed more serious and **aloof** to those who had known him before [1999]” (Finn, 2001).
 “He spoke of a desire to marry, but was **remote** to the point of rudeness with women, considering most insufficiently devout” (Yardley, 2001).
 “ . . . the **reclusive** engineering student” (Erlanger, 2001).

Cognitive style. The core diagnostic feature of the cognitive style of Retiring individuals is *vagueness*; their thoughts are often fuzzy or unclear and communication with others tends to be digressive or unfocused. More exaggerated variants of the Retiring pattern display considerable *impoverishment*; their ideas tend to be sparse, meager, or infertile and their thought processes obscure. Their communication often loses its purpose or intention, particularly in the social and personal spheres—a tendency that does not necessarily hold true for the intellectual domain. The most extreme variants of the Retiring pattern are cognitively *barren*; they are inarticulate or incomprehensible and deficient across broad spheres of knowledge to a degree that is incompatible with their intellectual level. Their communication is easily derailed, conveyed in a convoluted, complex, or rambling fashion, and complicated by circuitous logic or loss of thought sequence. All variants of the Retiring pattern have a diminished capacity to convey articulate or relevant ideas in the realm of interpersonal phenomena. They may grasp grammatical, mathematical, or technical symbols with infallible precision yet falter in their comprehension of nonverbal communication, including facial expressions, gestures, and voice timbre—those affect-laden metacommunicative qualities that suffuse the formal structure of communication. A related cognitive trait is their difficulty in attending to, selecting, and regulating perceptions of the socioemotional environment, which may at times result in inaccurate person perception and imbue their interactions with a socially “tone-deaf” quality. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, pp. 231–232; Millon & Everly, 1985, p. 33)

Mood/temperament. The core diagnostic feature of the characteristic mood and temperament of Retiring individuals is *unexcitability*; they are unemotional and dispassionate, disinclined to express strong feelings and seem mildly agreeable yet somewhat bland. More exaggerated variants of the Retiring pattern are emotionally *flat*; they are temperamentally impassive, gloomy, or apathetic, rarely display warm or intense feelings, and seem unable to experience most affects—pleasure, sadness, or anger—in any depth. The most extreme variants of the Retiring pattern are affectively *bleak*; they are emotionally inert, numb, and affectless, exhibiting an intrinsic unfeeling, cold, stark quality. All variants of the Retiring pattern display a deficit in the range and subtlety of emotionally relevant words. Furthermore, they experience only mild or meager affective and erotic needs. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, pp. 232–233; Millon & Everly, 1985, p. 33)

“He seems to have been the center of gravity, the **dour** and meticulous ringleader” (Cloud, 2001).

“He appears to have had a sometimes **ascetic** existence. Nothing has come to light to suggest that he had a romantic life” (Finn, 2001).

“Chrylla Wendt, [thesis supervisor Professor Dittmar] Machule’s assistant, . . . had plenty of opportunity to study Atta at close quarters, for she had agreed to go through his thesis with him, correcting his German. Starting in June 1999, they met ‘at least once a week’ in her narrow office and sat side by side at her desk. But when the time came to look at the last chapter, Atta refused to go through it with her and Wendt believes he had **found their physical intimacy unbearable**” (Hooper, 2001b).

“Their Venice landlady, Dru Voss, says that while Al-Shehhi was a likable guy, Atta was an **icicle** who never looked her in the eye” (Cloud, 2001).

“[A] neighbor [in Florida] describe[s] him as intense yet **emotionless**. ‘He was not a nice guy, like, he wasn’t friendly,’ says upstairs neighbor Carmen Padilla. ‘He was just **quiet** and had **no emotion** whatsoever, none. You can look at this person, you can feel nothing from him.’ ” (Giese, 2001).

Self-image. The core diagnostic feature of the self-perception of Retiring individuals is its *dispassionate* quality; they are placid and view themselves as uninvolved and unaffected. More exaggerated variants of the Retiring pattern are *complacent*; though recognizing themselves as somewhat unfeeling and socially unresponsive or insular, they view themselves as content and satisfied. They are little affected by others, and respond minimally to either praise or criticism. Their limited interest in the lives of others, in the interpersonal domain, is mirrored in the self-domain by low levels of self-awareness or introspection. Reluctant to engage in self-descriptions, they may be vague or superficial; if pressed they may describe themselves as ordinary, reflective, uninteresting, or introverted. The most extreme variants of the Retiring pattern are affectively *impervious*; they reveal minimal introspection and awareness of self, seem unconcerned by the emotional and personal implications of everyday social life, and are unresponsive or indifferent to praise or criticism. The apparent lack of candor in self-analysis displayed by most manifestations of the Retiring pattern is not indicative of elusiveness or protective denial, but merely reflects an inherent deficit in pondering social and emotional processes. When adequately formulated and accurately articulated, these personalities will perceive and report themselves as being socially reserved and emotionally distant, somewhat lacking in empathy. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, p. 232; Millon & Everly, 1985, p. 33)

“. . . the slender young Mr. Atta remained the same person in Hamburg that he had been in Egypt—polite, **distant** and neatly dressed” (Yardley, 2001).

Regulatory mechanisms. The core diagnostic feature of the unconscious regulatory (i.e., ego-defense) mechanisms of Retiring individuals is *intellectualization*. They describe the interpersonal and affective character of their social and emotional experiences and memories in a somewhat impersonal and mechanical manner. They tend to be abstract and perfunctory about their emotional and social lives, and when they do formulate a characterization, they pay primary attention to the more objective and formal aspects of their experiences rather than to the personal

and emotional significance of these events. They engage in few complicated unconscious processes; being relatively untroubled by intense emotions, all but insensitive to interpersonal relationships, and difficult to arouse and activate, they have little reason to devise complicated intrapsychic defenses and strategies. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, p. 232)

Object representations. The core diagnostic feature of the internalized object representations of highly Retiring individuals is their *meagerness*; internalized representations of past experiences appear to be few in number and diffusely articulated. Low in arousal and emotional reactivity, as well as relatively imperceptive with regard to ongoing events (particularly in the social sphere), their inner life remains largely homogeneous, undifferentiated, and unarticulated. Because Retiring personalities have less of the natural variety of experiences and dynamic interplay among drives, impulses, and conflicts that compose the minds of most people, they are less able to change and evolve as a consequence of their intrapsychic interactions. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, p. 232)

Morphologic organization. The core diagnostic feature of the morphological organization of highly Retiring individuals is its *lack of differentiation*. The structural composition of their intrapsychic world is more diffuse and less dynamically active than that of most personality patterns. Relative to other personalities, they have minimal drives to fulfill their needs. The most extreme variants of the Retiring pattern demonstrate an inner barrenness, a feeble drive to fulfill needs, and minimal pressure either to defend against or resolve inner conflicts or to deal with external demands. (Adapted from Millon, 1996, p. 232)

Scale 7: The Reticent Pattern

Few people exhibit personality patterns in pure or prototypal form. Although the standard diagnostic approach to interpreting MIDC profiles emphasizes the two primary scale elevations, personality functioning in reality involves the aggregation of several prevailing orientations. Thus, Atta's secondary elevation on Scale 7 (Reticent) presumably modulates his primary Conscientious and Retiring personality patterns. Atta's loading on Scale 7 is just within the *prominent* but adaptive (i.e., inhibited) range. This is not surprising, given that the Reticent pattern is conceptually related to the Retiring pattern, the second of Atta's two primary scale elevations; both of these patterns are characterized by a socially detached lifestyle.

Normal, adaptive variants of the Reticent pattern (i.e., circumspect and inhibited types) correspond to Oldham and Morris's (1995) *Sensitive* style, Millon's (1994) *Hesitating* pattern, and Strack's (1997) *inhibited* style. Millon's Hesitating pattern has a strong positive correlation with the five-factor model's *Neuroticism* factor, is negatively correlated with its *Extraversion* factor, has a small negative correlation with its *Conscientiousness* factor, and is uncorrelated with the remaining two factors (Millon, 1994, p. 82). According to Millon (1994), the Hesitating (i.e., Reticent) pattern is characterized by

social inhibition and withdrawal. . . . [and] has some common ground with the self-effacing segment of Leary's [1957] self-effacing-masochistic pattern, notable for its tendency to downplay personal abilities, to be shy and sensitive, and to experience feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. . . . [It is] akin to Factor IV of the Big-Five, usually termed Neuroticism (as opposed to Emotional Stability). Those scoring high on the Hesitating [Reticent] scale have a tendency to be sensitive to social

indifference or rejection, to feel unsure of themselves, and to be wary in new situations, especially those of a social or interpersonal character. Somewhat ill at ease and self-conscious, these individuals anticipate running into difficulties in interrelating and fear being embarrassed. They may feel tense when they have to deal with persons they do not know, expecting that others will not think well of them. Most prefer to work alone or in small groups where they know that people accept them. Once they feel accepted, they can open up, be friendly, be cooperative, and participate with others productively. (p. 32)

Oldham and Morris (1995) add the following perspective:

Sensitive [Reticent] people come into possession of their powers when their world is small and they know the people in it. For this commonly occurring personality style, familiarity breeds comfort, contentment, and inspiration. These men and women—although they avoid a wide social network and shun celebrity—can achieve great recognition for their creativity. (p. 180)

Stephen Strack (1997) provides the following portrait of the normal prototype of the Reticent pattern, based on Millon's theory, empirical findings from studies associating his Personality Adjective Check List (PACL; 1991) scales with other measures, and clinical experience with the test:

As with the introversive style [Retiring pattern], the inhibited [Reticent] personality is marked by a tendency toward social withdrawal. However, for inhibited [Reticent] individuals this pattern is motivated not by indifference, but by a fear of negative consequences. Inhibited [Reticent] persons tend to be sensitive to their own feelings and to those of others. They often anticipate that others will be critical or rejecting of them, and because of this they frequently seem shy or skittish in unfamiliar surroundings. In this regard, family members and acquaintances may see them as being unnecessarily nervous, wary, and fearful. Although inhibited [Reticent] persons tend to get along reasonably well with others, they are often difficult to get to know on a personal level. These individuals usually wish that they could be at ease with others and tend to desire closeness, but they often are just too uncertain of the consequences of closeness and intimacy to let their guard down. As a result, they may experience feelings of loneliness, but be unable or unwilling to do anything about them. Because of their sensitivity to others, inhibited [Reticent] persons are often described as kind, considerate, and empathic by close acquaintances. Inhibited [Reticent] persons often prefer to work alone or in a small group with people they can come to know well. They do best in a stable work environment where stimulation and commotion are kept at low to moderate levels. Persons working with inhibited [Reticent] types need to appreciate their sensitivity to both positive and negative feedback, as well as their need to build trust over a long period of time. (From Strack, 1997, p. 488, with minor modifications)

“... the **mildness** recalled by his friends in Egypt and Germany” (Yardley, 2001).
 “He was so **sensitive** that he could become emotional if an insect was killed” (Cloud, 2001).
 “Atta's father said that despite a politicized environment in study and work, his son was not political. The slight, short young man, he said, was in fact ‘**soft** as a breeze.’ ” (Finn, 2001).
 “Mr. Atta was a polite, **shy** boy” (Yardley, 2001).
 “In Egypt, where Atta grew up, his family and friends describe a **shy**, unassuming young man who struggled to make his mark” (Cloud, 2001).
 “... a shy, **considerate** man who endeared himself to Western acquaintances” (Hooper, 2001b).
 “Echoing the many Germans who experienced Atta's **consideration**, [car rental owner] Warrick said: ‘The only thing out of the ordinary was that he was **nice enough** to let me know that the car needed an oil change’ ” (Hooper, 2001b).

Another secondary elevation in Atta's MIDC profile occurs on Scale 5A (Aggrieved). As is the case with Atta's other secondary elevation, Scale 7, his Scale 5A elevation just reaches the *prominent* level, associated with the "self-denying" range of the Aggrieved pattern.

Normal, adaptive variants of the Aggrieved pattern (i.e., unassuming and self-denying types) correspond to Oldham and Morris's (1995) *Self-Sacrificing* style and Millon's (1994) *Yielding* pattern. It is strongly reminiscent of Leary's (1957) *self-effacing-masochistic* type. The Aggrieved pattern bears some similarity to the Accommodating pattern (with which it shares an element of cooperativeness) and the Reticent pattern (with which it shares the self-effacing tendency to downplay personal abilities). The essential features of the Aggrieved pattern include a disposition to act in a "subservient and self-abasing" manner, to be "unassertive and deferential," "unassuming, self-effacing, and even self-derogating," and "obsequious and self-sacrificing" (Millon, 1994, p. 33). Millon's (1994) *Yielding* pattern has a very high positive correlation with the five-factor model's *Neuroticism* factor, is negatively correlated with its *Conscientiousness* and *Extraversion* factors, and is uncorrelated with the remaining two factors (Millon, 1994, p. 82). Millon (1994) describes the *Yielding* pattern as follows:

Although similar to Factor II of the Big-Five, labeled Agreeableness, the *Yielding* [Aggrieved] bipolarity conveys more than cooperativeness and amicability; it involves a disposition to act in a subservient and self-abasing manner. Placing themselves in an inferior light or abject position, those high on the *Yielding* [Aggrieved] scale allow, even encourage, others to take advantage of them. They are unassertive and deferential, if not servile. Often viewing themselves as their own worst enemies, they behave in an unassuming, self-effacing, even self-derogating manner, and tend to avoid displaying their talents and aptitudes. Obsequious and self-sacrificing in their interactions with others, they can be depended on to adhere to the expectations of those they follow. Most people in this category possess abilities far in excess of those they lay claim to. (p. 33)

Oldham and Morris (1995) add the following perspective:

To live is to serve; to love is to give. These are axioms for individuals who have the *Self-Sacrificing* [Aggrieved] personality style. The way they see it, their needs can wait until others' are well served. Knowing that they have given of themselves, they feel comfortable and at peace, secure with their place in the scheme of things. At its best and most noble, this is the selfless, magnanimous personality style of which saints and good citizens are made. (p. 319)

"In Egypt, where Atta grew up, his family and friends describe a shy, **unassuming** young man who struggled to make his mark" (Cloud, 2001).

"Several of his Egyptian classmates could not accept his guilt in interviews with TIME. 'I **could never imagine him on a plane threatening people, killing people,**' says Ahmed Khalifa, 33, Atta's best friend at Cairo University. 'He would be scared to death. . . He was not a leader. He had his opinion, but he was **modest** in everything.'" (Cloud, 2001).

". . . 'Mohamed was well liked because he **never offended** or bothered anyone.' Says Ismail: 'He was **good to the roots**'" (Cloud, 2001).

"He spoke out impulsively against injustice. He was so sensitive that he could become emotional if an insect was killed. 'He was a little bit **pure,**' says Khaled Kattan, another classmate" (Cloud, 2001).

“[Thesis supervisor Professor Machule] said that thinking back on the thesis, there were some phrases and passages which could indicate that the writer might have been **susceptible to exploitation by others** because of his religious views” (Hooper, 2001a).

“On the front of his thesis, when it was finally ready, Atta included a quote from the Koran: ‘My prayer and my **sacrifice** and my life and my death belong to Allah, the Lord of the worlds’ ” (Finn, 2001).

“He **cared deeply about people**. It is not just that he cared about the Muslim poor. He even cared about the next American to rent his hire car. Brad Warrick, of Warrick’s Rent-a-Car in Pompano Beach, Florida, said that Atta called him to say the car’s oil light was on. When he returned it on 9 September, Atta reminded him about the light” (Hooper, 2001b).

The masochistic (Aggrieved) elements in Atta’s profile provide a partial, personality-based explanatory framework for his willingness to sacrifice his life in martyrdom, as he saw it, for divine perfection.

Scale 1A: The Dominant Pattern

Occasionally, it proves useful to examine less elevated scales that, although not of primary or secondary significance, nonetheless appear to play a subsidiary role in the individual’s overall personality configuration. Such is the case with Atta’s modest elevation on Scale 1A (Dominant), which arguably modulates his more prevailing personality patterns. Atta’s loading on Scale 1A is in the adaptive (i.e., asserting) range of the Dominant pattern.

Normal, adaptive variants of the Dominant pattern (i.e., asserting and controlling types) correspond to Oldham and Morris’s (1995) *Aggressive* style, Strack’s (1997) *forceful* style, and Millon’s (1994) *Controlling* pattern. According to Millon (1994), Controlling individuals

enjoy the power to direct and intimidate others, and to evoke obedience and respect from them. They tend to be tough and unsentimental. . . . [Dominant] types typically make effective leaders, being talented in supervising and persuading others to work for the achievement of common goals. (p. 34)

Caution should be exercised in applying Millon’s description of the Controlling pattern to Atta, given that the Dominant pattern plays, at best, a subsidiary role in his overall personality configuration. This caveat also holds for Oldham and Morris’s (1995) portrait of the Aggressive personality, which supplements Millon’s description:

[Dominant individuals] can undertake huge responsibilities without fear of failure. They wield power with ease. They never back away from a fight. . . . When put to the service of the greater good, the Aggressive [Dominant] personality style can inspire a man or woman to great leadership, especially in times of crisis. (p. 345)

Finally, Strack (1997) provides the following portrait of the normal prototype of the Dominant pattern, aspects of which can be expected to modify Atta’s primary Conscientious pattern:

[Dominant] people seem driven to prove their worthiness. They are characterized by an assertive, dominant, and tough-minded personal style. They tend to be strong-willed, ambitious, competitive,

and self-determined. . . . In work settings, these personalities are often driven to excel. They work hard to achieve their goals, are competitive, and do well where they can take control or work independently. In supervisory or leadership positions these persons usually take charge and see to it that a job gets done. (From Strack, 1997, p. 490, with minor modifications)

In retrospect, Atta was tough and strong-willed in orchestrating the September 11 terror attack and bold and daring in consummating the nefarious plot. He provided strong direction to his fellow operatives and was unyielding in his sense of mission. But, fundamentally, he was not a dominant, aggressive personality. Those subsidiary Dominant traits detected in the assessment can perhaps be more accurately conceptualized as an expression of the driven intensity of his central, compulsive personality orientation.

Scale 9: The Distrusting Pattern

Another subsidiary elevation in Atta's MIDC profile that likely contributes to an understanding of his overall personality functioning is Scale 9 (Distrusting). Atta's Scale 9 elevation reaches a level that provides minimal (but equivocal) evidence of a suspicious personality orientation. Due care should be exercised in interpreting this scale elevation. The "realistic paranoia" of a covert operative, engendered by the situational press of the incentive to avoid detection, should not be confused with a deeply embedded paranoid character structure; nonetheless, some emerging paranoid trends appear to be present in Atta's adaptive functioning, possibly indicative of incipient decompensation in his predominantly compulsive (Scale 6), socially detached (Scales 7 and 8) character composite.

There is no normal variant of the Distrusting pattern; according to Millon (1996),

it is hard to conceive [of] normal paranoids. Although a number of these individuals restrain their markedly distorted beliefs and assumptions from public view, at no point does their fundamental paranoid inclination manifest itself in an acceptable, no less successful personality style. (p. 705)

Oldham and Morris (1995), with their *Vigilant* style, nonetheless attempt to describe an adaptive version of this pattern:

Nothing escapes the notice of . . . [people who have a] Vigilant [Distrusting] personality style. These individuals possess an exceptional awareness of their environment. . . . Their sensory antennae, continuously scanning the people and situations around them, alert them immediately to what is awry, out of place, dissonant, or dangerous, especially in their dealings with other people. Vigilant [Distrusting] types have a special kind of hearing. They are immediately aware of mixed messages, the hidden motivations, the evasions, and the subtlest distortions of the truth that elude or delude less gifted observers. With such a focus, Vigilant [Distrusting] individuals naturally assume the roles of social critic, watchdog, ombudsman, and crusader in their private or our public domain, ready to spring upon the improprieties—especially the abuses of power—that poison human affairs. (p. 157)

This style, essentially, is equivalent to the more adaptive (i.e., suspicious) variant of the MIDC's Distrusting pattern. In addition, the aspect of Oldham and Morris's (1995) description pertaining to hypervigilance ("scanning the people and situations around them") overlaps with the "insecure" variant of the MIDC's Reticent pattern, whereas their reference to the "crusader" role in society incorporates aspects of both the Conscientious and Dominant patterns.

Atta carried a grudge against the increasing secularization of the Egyptian government, for which he blamed the West, and America in particular. He apparently took personal offense and on occasion reacted angrily to the West's cultural corruption, as he perceived it, of the Islamic world. And he was highly insular, perhaps with intense fears of losing his Muslim identity and power of self-determination. At base, however, there is scant evidence of paranoid personality traits in Atta's profile, and no signs of clinical paranoia beyond those arguably delusional elements that one might expect in the belief system of an extreme fundamentalist—or, indeed, anyone socialized into fanatic compliance with the group norms of a religious cult. In this sense, Mohamed Atta may be to Osama bin Laden what the most committed members of the People's Temple were to Jim Jones.

Summary and Formulation: The Puritanical Compulsive

With his obsessive conscientiousness (Scale 6), austere, ascetic aloofness (Scale 8), and substantial dominance (Scale 1A) and distrust (Scale 9), Mohamed Atta is a close match for the “puritanical compulsive” syndrome. Millon (1996) describes these individuals as “austere, self-righteous, [and] highly controlled.” Their “intense anger and resentment . . . is given sanction, at least as they see it, by virtue of their being on the side of righteousness and morality” (p. 520).

The world of puritanical compulsives is dichotomized into good and evil, saints and sinners—and they arrogate for themselves the role of savior. They seek out common enemies in their relentless pursuit of mission. Puritanical compulsives are prone to vent their hostility through “sadistic displacements”; their “puritanical's wrath becomes the vengeful sword of righteousness, descended from heaven to lay waste to sin and iniquity.” Of greater concern in politics, puritanicals instinctively seek ever-greater degrees of fundamentalism, “because literalism makes it much easier to find someone who deserves not only to be punished but to be punished absolutely” (Millon & Davis, 2000, p. 178).

This character complex is rooted in the highly conscientious personality's deep ambivalence between obedience and defiance, and characterized by the dual regulatory mechanisms of *reaction formation* against forbidden thoughts and sadistic *displacement* of hostile impulses. These dynamics provide a context for the five-page handwritten document left behind by Atta, the apparent author, who “reminded the hijackers to ‘be obedient . . . because you will be facing situations that are the ultimate and that would not be done except with full obedience.’” The memorandum continues by exhorting the hijackers to sharpen their knives and to “strike above the necks and strike from everywhere.” Yet, “interwoven throughout the letter is spiritual guidance on purifying one's mental and physical state” (Spiritual guide, 2001). The note offers a chilling glimpse into an irreconcilable ambivalence between total obedience (to the perceived will of Allah) and absolute defiance (of universal social and religious proscriptions against the willful slaughter of innocents), with hostility (displaced onto defenseless members of a despised outgroup) graphically depicted in the missive, yet cloaked in a mantle of purity.

From a psychodynamic perspective, parental overcontrol in early childhood is the critical influence in the formation of compulsive character structures. Mohamed Atta was “the youngest child of a pampering mother and an ambitious father. . . . The father was the disciplinarian, grumbling that his wife spoiled their bright, if timid, son, who continued to sit on her lap until enrolling at Cairo University” (Yardley, 2001). A high school classmate recalled that the young Mohamed “focused solely on becoming an engineer—and following his father’s bidding” (Yardley, 2001). According to this youth acquaintance,

“I never saw him playing.” . . . “We did not like him very much, and I think he wanted to play with the rest of the boys, but his family, and I think his father, wanted him to always perform in school in an excellent way.” (Quoted in Yardley, 2001)

Childhood friends describe Atta’s father as “quite strict” (Cloud, 2001). After graduating from the University of Cairo in 1990, Atta’s father “convinced him that only an advanced degree from abroad would allow him to prosper in Egypt” (Yardley, 2001); once again, Atta followed his father’s dictate, enrolling in Hamburg–Harburg Technical University.

Evidently, Atta’s righteousness was rooted in a caring but controlling, virtuous but moralistic upbringing. Such child-rearing practices can breed adults who “displace anger and insecurity by seeking out some position of power that allows them to become a socially sanctioned superego for others,” whose “swift judgment . . . conceals a sadistic and self-righteous joy” cloaked in the mantle of social virtue (Millon & Davis, 2000, p. 184).

The puritanical compulsive syndrome provides an explanatory theoretical framework for “the essential imponderable,” chronicled by *The New York Times*’s Jim Yardley, in Mohamed Atta’s transformation from shy, unobtrusive, scrupulous devotee to unrestrained mass murderer:

Mr. Atta’s path to Sept. 11, pieced together from interviews with people who knew him across 33 years and three continents, was a quiet and methodical evolution of resentment that somehow—and that now remains the essential imponderable—took a leap to mass-murderous fury.

Noting that Mohamed Atta “came of age in an Egypt torn between growing Western influence and the religious fundamentalism that gathered force in reaction,” Yardley postulated that after Atta arrived in Germany to continue his studies,

his religious faith deepened and his resentments hardened. The focus of his disappointment became the Egyptian government; the target of his blame became the West, and especially America. . . . His vision of Islam embraced resolute precepts of fate and destiny and purity, and, ultimately, tolerated no compromise. (Yardley, 2001)

In this regard, *The Washington Post*’s Peter Finn reported,

The Egyptian government was cracking down viciously on Islamic fundamentalists at the time [1995]. But Atta informed two German traveling companions that he would not be cowed by the country’s “fat cats,” who he believed were criminalizing religious traditionalists while bowing shamefully to the West in foreign and economic policies. (Finn, 2001)

Political Implications

In the larger context of developing a more comprehensive understanding of how political leadership orientations are rooted in underlying personality dynamics, there may be some merit in exploring the nexus of Mohamed Atta's personality pattern and classic models of personality in politics. The profile of the highly conscientious (Scale 6), distinctly introverted (Scale 8), somewhat dominant (Scale 1A) Atta is reminiscent of the "high-dominance introvert" in Lloyd Etheredge's (1978) fourfold typology of personality-based foreign policy role orientations, which he developed with reference to U.S. presidents and secretaries of state.⁵ According to Etheredge, high-dominance introverts in high-level leadership positions (e.g., U.S. presidents Woodrow Wilson and Herbert Hoover) are quite willing to use military force, tending

to divide the world, in their thought, between the moral values they think it ought to exhibit and the forces opposed to this vision. They tend to have a strong, almost Manichean, moral component to their views. They tend to be described as stubborn and tenacious. They seek to reshape the world in accordance with their personal vision, and their foreign policies are often characterized by the tenaciousness with which they advance one central idea. (p. 449)

Etheredge's high-dominance introvert, in turn, shares certain aspects of Margaret Hermann's (1987) "expansionist" orientation to foreign affairs. These leaders have a view of the world as being "divided into 'us' and 'them,'" based on a belief system in which conflict is viewed as inherent in the international system. Expansionist leaders "are not averse to using the 'enemy' as a scapegoat" and their rhetoric often may be "hostile in tone" (pp. 168–169). In short, dominant, introverted, highly conscientious leaders are task-oriented but relatively inflexible. Their characteristic response to political problems is to overlook the human dimension while invoking moral principles and impersonal mechanisms to impose a solution, potentially with self-defeating consequences. Despite divergences in their historical, political, and cultural contexts, conceptual linkages among the motives and mindsets of the fanatical terror operative, Etheredge's high-dominance introvert, and Hermann's expansionist can be discerned through the lens of personality theory.

A possible implication of the present study is that it places in stark relief the political implications of a particular personality configuration. The potential ramifications in international politics, were a leader with Mohamed Atta's personality profile to ascend to a high-level leadership position in a world or regional power, are transparent. Fortunately, as I have attempted to show in the present endeavor, there exist assessment technologies sufficiently advanced to enable a psychological early warning system with respect to identifying persons in positions of power who pose a threat to regional stability and world peace.

⁵ These personality attributes can be expressed either prosocially or antisocially. For example, in his biography of former U.S. vice president Al Gore, who fits Etheredge's profile of the high-dominance introvert (Immelman, 2000), Bob Zelnick (1999) observed: "Gore [while serving in Congress] also had a mind that could run in stubborn ideological channels. . . . He was most motivated when he could play the 'white knight,' galloping to the rescue of those victimized by an evil industry or a disdainful bureaucrat, and his solutions were often punitive" (p. 109). In this case, moralistic dichotomization underlies political activity driven by prosocial motives and constrained by adherence to liberal democratic values.

The major, more direct implication of the study is that political socialization experiences that produce a compulsive character structure—one manifestation of which is the classic authoritarian syndrome (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950)—may predispose a person to suicidal acts of terror (so-called “martyrdom”) when molded by a political culture that promotes paranoid fanaticism and buttresses religious values that engender an expectation of redemption as eternal reward for wielding the sword of righteousness.

Conclusion

The essence of Mohamed Atta’s compulsive, aloof personality is accurately captured in a characterization attributed to Helga Rake, a partner at Plankontor—the planning consultancy in Hamburg where Atta worked part-time during his sojourn in Germany in the 1990s. Rake described Atta as “‘introverted and very reserved,’ but also as ‘flexible’ and ‘very conscientious’ ” (Hooper, 2001b). The introversion of individuals with a Retiring pattern can range from simply being reserved, to distinctly aloof, to profoundly solitary (schizoid). Conscientious people range from being simply polite and respectful, to extraordinarily dutiful, to exceptionally compulsive (obsessive-compulsive). Rake’s description of Atta as “flexible” warrants comment: Conscientious personalities tend to be rigid rather than flexible; however, they may *appear* flexible to superiors in that they are submissive to and eager to please those in authority.

A high degree of conceptual precision also is evident in *New York Times* reporter Jim Yardley’s (2001) descriptions of Atta as “polite [i.e., conscientious], distant [i.e., retiring] and neatly dressed [a distinctively conscientious trait]” and “the introvert [i.e., retiring], the meticulous [i.e., conscientious] planner.” Equally parsimonious and precise, *Washington Post* reporter Peter Finn (2001) characterized Atta as “serious [i.e., conscientious] and aloof [i.e., retiring].” In more clinical terms, Atta’s seriousness reflects an obsessive-compulsive character pattern, whereas his aloofness is indicative of a deeply introverted schizoid tendency.

Of course, the world is full of schizoid compulsives, and certainly the puritanical compulsive syndrome typically is not associated with gross acts of violence; more characteristically, in the words of Millon (1996), such individuals are “harsh and stern disciplinarians, faultfinding and moralistic prigs” (p. 521). Clearly, the present findings are not very useful for profiling and detecting potential terrorists. The real value of the present endeavor comes with the realization that the overcontrol that constitutes the critical childrearing ingredient and socialization process in the formation of compulsive character structures—with the attendant potential for blind obedience to authority—produces a volatile mix when primed with the catalyst of authoritarian, xenophobic political systems. That much we learned from the Nazi holocaust.

Without a massive, sustained public diplomacy offensive to stem the proliferation of diabolical enemy images of the West, which serves as a culture for incubating fringe extremist movements in the Islamic world, more September 11s will surely be visited upon the United States.

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