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IMPORTANCE AND DETERMINANTS OF TRAIT USE IN EVALUATIONS OF
CANDIDATES IN THE 1996 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

by

Brooks Aylor

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
WITH A MAJOR IN COMMUNICATION

In the Graduate College

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entitled Importance and Determinants of Trait Use in Evaluations of Candidates in the 1996 U.S. Presidential Election

and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Henry C. Kenski

8/10/98
Date

[Signature]

8/10/98
Date

Sally Jackson

8/10/98
Date

[Signature]

8/10/98
Date

Bill Craver

8/10/98
Date

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copy of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Henry C. Kenski
Dissertation Director

8/10/98
Date

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SIGNED: Bledis A. A. J.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Teresa Aylor, who daily teaches me lessons of integrity, work ethic, and love. For many years she sacrificed her opportunities in life so that I might have the finest educational opportunities. It is her sacrifices that this dissertation honors.

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ABSTRACT

For more than forty years, communication and political science researchers have examined how receivers evaluate sources. Valuable attention to source credibility in the communication literature has yielded numerous categorizations of the dimensions receivers use to evaluate sources. Little recent work in communication, however, has focused on source evaluations, and much of the previous work has been criticized for not recognizing the context-specific nature of source credibility.

Important work in political science has focused on receiver evaluations of political officials. This literature, however, has not produced consistent results as to the importance of individual trait types in the evaluation of presidential candidates. Most of this work did not examine determinants of trait use in the evaluation of presidential candidates, including receiver demographics, media use, and political disaffection. Neither communication nor political science researchers have adequately recognized the commonalities which exist in their separate examinations of source evaluations.

The current study draws upon communication and political science research to examine respondents' use of candidate traits in a specific and important context, the evaluation of presidential candidates. The study explores the importance of competence, character, empathy, and leadership traits in evaluations of presidential candidates during a time of increasingly negative media coverage of presidential candidates and high levels of political disaffection among citizens. Another important contribution of the study to the literature on trait evaluations is its examination of determinants of trait use in evaluations of presidential candidates. The 1996 American National Election Studies pre- and post-

election interviews were used to answer the questions posed in the study.

Results suggest that empathy and leadership were more important than character or competence in respondents' evaluations of Bill Clinton, Bob Dole, and Ross Perot in 1996. Economic conditions and party identification were also strong predictors of the vote in 1996. The results provide strong evidence that empathy and leadership were more important in 1996 than in presidential elections of the last three decades. The study suggests important sex differences in trait use, as well as significant relationships between media use, political knowledge, and political disaffection and use of traits to evaluate candidates.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Introduction

Citizens, candidates, and political communication researchers are operating in a different political environment in the 1990s than in the past. Take, for example, the seemingly paradoxical evaluations of President Bill Clinton. After what some might call a laundry list of presidential scandals, the majority of Americans are quite clear that they do not trust Clinton--many even possessing what Goren (1997) has labeled "widespread visceral disgust" for the President. Yet equal majorities--more than 60 percent of the electorate in most public opinion polls (Jamieson, 1998; Schneider, 1996) believe Clinton is right for the job.

A January 1998 ABC News poll, for example, found that 56% of Americans thought Clinton had the honesty and integrity to serve as president. In that same poll, almost 60% said that they did not trust Clinton. An examination of similar ABC News polls from January 1995-January 1998, as well as similar polling data from December 1995 to October 1997 by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (1998), shows little variance in the approval/distrust rating assigned to Clinton (Jamieson, 1998). These results are consistent with Gallup/CNN/USA Today polls from the last four years which also suggest roughly 60% of Americans simultaneously approve of, and distrust, Clinton.

Jamieson (1998) provides further evidence of this divide. She cites polling data from February and March of 1998, including NBC/Wall Street Journal, Harris, and New York Times/CBS polls, that suggests Clinton's job performance, rather than his personal

life, is the most important issue for many voters.

Much communication and political science literature has identified character and competence as traits commonly used by individuals to evaluate sources. Political scientists have presented evidence that individuals also evaluate presidential candidates based on leadership and empathy traits. Past research suggests that these four trait types, while related, are conceptually distinct (Kinder, 1986).

Kinder's four-factor theory of trait evaluations forms the theoretical backbone of the current study. Each of the four trait types used in the current study subsume a variety of individual traits. For example, competence traits include intelligence, knowledge, general ability, and political experience. Leadership traits refer to decisiveness, optimism, energy, patriotism, and ability to inspire. Character traits include honesty, integrity, morality, and sincerity. Empathy traits refer to compassion, understanding, concern, and interpersonal skills. A detailed description of the operationalization of each trait type will be provided in chapter three of this dissertation. The character, competence, empathy, and leadership traits in the current study are consistent with communication research which has suggested that competence, character, perceived caring, and dynamism are important factors in the evaluation of sources (Teven and McCroskey, 1997).

While it is likely that these traits continue to be used to evaluate sources, it is possible that the relative importance of each has been altered in the 1990s. For example, communication researchers and political scientists have long considered character to be central to source evaluations. The paradoxical distrust-approval evaluations of Clinton, however, suggest that character is no longer as important in the evaluation of presidential

candidates.

Overview

By drawing upon more than 80 years of combined research in communication and political science concerning source credibility factors and the evaluation of presidential candidates, this dissertation will seek to examine individual's use of character, competence, leadership, and empathy traits in three specific ways. First, the frequency with which individuals utilize each trait type will be examined. Second, the study will explore the relative importance of each trait type to respondents' evaluations of presidential candidates. Finally, the study will examine receiver characteristics which may predict the use of each trait type in the evaluations of political sources, including demographic variables (sex, age, political party identification, and religiosity), media use, political disaffection, and political knowledge.

The first goal of the current study is to explore differences in individual's use of each trait type to evaluate presidential sources. Jamieson (1998) and Golden (1997) argue that voters are distinguishing between public and private character when evaluating presidential candidates. Jamieson writes, "As the polls taken since late January have shown with surprising consistency, the public is drawing a clear distinction between private and public character; between the personal and the presidential" (p. CO1).

Jamieson and Golden's operationalizations of public character subsume the leadership, competence, and empathy traits previously noted in the political science literature (Kinder, 1986; Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk, 1986). In other words, individuals' notions of public character may be thought of as a combination of these three trait types. It may be that a private character trait such as faithfulness to spouse is a

character issue which, in the minds of today's disaffected voters with low expectations for the private character of many politicians, is categorized as less important. More important in the evaluations of candidates today may be competence, leadership, or empathy traits.

Crabtree and Danitz (1996) cite a May 1996 Princeton Survey Research Associates poll and suggest that "there is little consensus about the meaning of the word character." Mark Mellman, pollster for the Democratic National Committee argues, as communication scholars have for decades, that character is multidimensional. Mellman's work as a pollster leads him to assert that a major component of credibility for a presidential candidate is a voter's perception that the candidate is compassionate and genuinely concerned about the problems voters must face. This is consistent with Kinder's (1986) operationalization of empathy.

Clinton White House Press Secretary Mike McCurry paints yet another picture as he claims, "There has been a record here of three-and-a-half years of time during which the President has had to stand up and do what is right. That is the essence of character." This suggests that working diligently may be viewed as a valuable public character trait.

Ed Kilgore, senior fellow at the Progressive Policy Institute, claims the reason GOP attacks on Clinton's character have failed in the last two presidential elections is rooted in Clinton's ability to show he cares about ordinary people, also illustrative of empathy traits (Crabtree and Danitz, 1996). The current study will explore the possibility that voters are utilizing multiple conceptualizations of character when evaluating today's presidential candidates, including perceptions of competence, leadership, and empathy.

Second, the study will explore the *importance* of character, competence, leadership, and empathy for politically disaffected voters in the evaluation of presidential candidates. While the first goal of the study is to examine how often individuals utilize each trait type, the second aim is to assess the relative importance of each trait type in predicting presidential evaluations. A possible explanation for the paradoxical approval/distrust ratings for Clinton, for example, is that voters are devaluing character traits in the evaluation of Clinton. Voters may simply be basing their evaluations more on other trait types, such as competence, leadership, or empathy.

Schneider (1996), for example, argues that conceptualizations of character are not the primary explanatory mechanisms for voter reactions to Clinton. Instead, he claims that the majority of voters are choosing competence over character and see the two as distinct dimensions by which to evaluate a president. Considerable work in political science suggests the superiority of either competence or character traits in the evaluation of political candidates, but the results of this work are often conflicting. Due to inconsistent results, many political scientists believe that this question remains largely unanswered (Funk, 1997). The current study explores the role of political disaffection as a potentially important variable in the competence versus character question. It may be that highly disaffected voters make different choices in terms of the use of character or competence traits than less disaffected voters.

A third focus of this dissertation is the identification of receiver characteristics that influence the selection and use of traits in the evaluation of presidential candidates. While past work has focused on the relative importance of character, competence, leadership, and empathy traits in predicting the vote and evaluations of presidential

candidates, little attention has been devoted to the factors which determine which trait types an individual will utilize (Funk, 1996). The current study explores the role of demographic variables (sex, age, party identification, and religiosity), media use, political knowledge, and political disaffection as influential in the selection and use of traits.

Some recent research suggests demographic differences that may help predict the use of certain schema in evaluating presidential candidates. This evidence, however, is limited and conflicting. Trent, Trent, Mongeau, and Short-Thompson (1997) report some differences in the traits males and females desire in an ideal presidential candidate. In their study, males preferred that the candidate be male significantly more than females, and females desired a candidate who had never been convicted of a crime. The sample for the Trent et al. study included 290 high propensity voters attending presidential campaign rallies in New Hampshire prior to the 1996 primary elections and was primarily Republican.

Huddy and Terkildsen (1992) present work which suggests that males devalue stereotypically feminine traits in a presidential candidate, including warmth and expressiveness. In this study females did not, however, devalue stereotypically masculine traits nor did they value feminine traits more than males.

Trent et al. (1997) suggest differences due to party identification of subjects. In this study, Republicans rated military service, moral character, as well as being male and a member of the majority race as more important than Democrats or Independents. Democrats valued experience in office significantly more than Republicans, but no significant differences were found on this trait between Democrats and Independents. This line of research also probed for age differences in trait selection and use. Earlier

work by Trent, Mongeau, Trent, Kendall, and Cushing (1993) found no such age differences. The latest Trent et al. (1997) study in this program of research does, however, suggest that older voters value physical energy, aggressive leadership, and moral character significantly more than younger voters.

The extent to which an individual utilizes media for political information may influence which trait types are used to evaluate presidential candidates. Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk (1986) explored this possibility more than a decade ago with a simple measure of media exposure. Today, several factors warrant a reexamination of the role of media in trait selection, including new media use measures (Rosenstone, Kinder, and Miller, 1997; Zaller, 1992), increased media attention to political events and actors (Hart, 1996), and increased negative media coverage of political actors (Patterson, 1994).

In an age of what Hart (1996) calls "personalized politics," personal attributes of candidates (distinct from traditional views of character) play a larger role in receiver evaluations of sources. Much political science research supports the claim that, for most voters, personality traits of candidates dominate the evaluation process (Bean, 1993; Brown et al., 1988; Funk, 1996; Glass, 1985; Miller et al., 1986).

Hart (1996) argues persuasively that television has increased the opportunities people have to watch political events and candidates. Political images are so pervasive in media that viewers indicate they are more politically active than they actually are. Individuals *see* politics often, and therefore many overestimate the political actions they *take*.

At the same time, television has personalized politics by presenting viewers with

intimate details of candidates personal lives. Hart argues that the combination of these intimate details and the fact that viewers see candidates on such a regular basis, results in pseudo relationships between viewers and candidates. Indeed, Hart contends that television today has become primarily an interpersonal medium, connecting source and receiver in an intimate manner. This is consistent with past communication research that notes the potential of television to literally place a source in the living room of the receiver and to emphasize nonverbal as well as verbal attributes of sources (Golden, 1997; Jamieson, 1988; Keating and Lantane, 1976; Meyrowitz, 1985; Nesbit, 1988; Pfau, 1990).

Due to the intimate environment and social presence of televised political sources created by increased media attention to political events and actors, it is possible that certain "television traits" play a significant role in the evaluations of media users today. Of Kinder's (1986) four trait types, leadership traits tend to be more visually appealing and may be processed more easily and consistently by high media users. Examples of leadership traits examined in the current study include decisiveness, energy, inspirational public speaking skills, patriotism, and optimism. This study explores the possibility that subjects who utilize television more often for political information will use leadership traits more in the evaluation of presidential candidates than will low television users.

While recent work in political science has focused on the measurement of political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1993; Luskin, 1987; Zaller, 1990) as well as the effects of political knowledge on political issue attitudes (Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida, 1989; Rahn, Aldrich, and Borgida, 1994; Sulfaro, 1996) and political learning (Rhee and Cappella, 1997; Robinson and Davis, 1990), less attention has been devoted to the role of

political knowledge in the selection of candidate traits.

Funk (1997) explored political knowledge differences in the selection of “warmth” (operationalized as likeable or friendly) and competence traits. She found that subjects who were more politically informed distinguished more between highly warm and highly competent sources, as well as valued competence significantly more than warmth.

While little application has been made to the selection of candidate traits, much literature suggests that the more politically informed process political information in a more complex way than less informed citizens (Funk, 1996). The current study explores differences in the selection of competence traits and the use of positive and negative traits by more politically informed subjects.

A final variable of import to the evaluations of presidential candidate which is examined in the current study is political disaffection. Much work has focused on defining political disaffection (Erber and Lau, 1990; Pharr, 1997), the origins of political disaffection (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Gans, 1995), and changes in political disaffection levels over time (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1998).

This dissertation is concerned with the effects of disaffection on trait selection and use in the evaluations of presidential candidates. Political disaffection may help explain both the extent to which an individual utilizes candidate traits, as well as which specific trait types (character, competence, empathy, and leadership) are utilized.

To explore the three goals of this study, approximately 80 years of credibility research in communication and political science is reviewed. The idea that the source of a message can have a significant effect on the persuasive outcome of that message is well

documented in communication, political science, advertising, marketing, and psychology literature (Ohanian, 1990). Previous communication research has seriously examined the role of perceived source credibility in the persuasive communication process. Indeed, as McCroskey and Young (1981) note, few subjects have garnered such scholarly attention.

Contemporary communication research has focused on the impact of perceived source credibility in the social influence process (McCroskey and Young, 1981; Teven and McCroskey, 1997). According to Cronkhite and Liska (1976), much of the early work on source credibility utilized an operational definition which assumed source credibility to be a perceptual variable intervening between the speaker and the listener. While most communication scholars agree that source credibility is an attitude about a source held by a receiver, this attitude is typically viewed as multidimensional. (McCroskey and Young, 1981). This continues to be a popular conception of source credibility, which has been referred to as the "single most important variable in determining persuasive effects of communication" (p.63).

An area of study which has received much attention since the late 1960s and continues to be an important issue today is the dimensionality of source credibility evaluations (Teven and McCroskey, 1997). Early work identified two dimensions of source credibility, authority and trustworthiness (Haiman, 1948; McCroskey, 1966). Added to these two dimensions were categories labeled "intention toward receiver" (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, 1953), and "dynamism" (Andersen, 1961; Berlo and Lemert, 1961). The next decade saw a flurry of research (Applbaum and Anatol, 1973; Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz, 1969; Falcione, 1974; Markhan, 1968) which generated varying definitions of the construct with varying numbers of components and labels for those

components. The attention to the construct created what McCroskey and Young (1981) labeled conceptual confusion in the field.

Additional work by McCroskey expanded his previously identified two components to five, including competence, character, sociability, extroversion, and composure (McCroskey, Holdridge, and Toomb, 1974). McCroskey had previously identified competence (labeled authoritativeness) and character dimensions. He distinguished the sociability and extroversion dimensions by defining the former as similar to Hovland's intention toward receiver and the latter as a source's dynamism or charisma. Composure was a dimension not previously identified and labeled in the communication literature. It was at that time that McCroskey and associates called for an end to the quest to discover new dimensions of credibility through factor analytic studies.

Communication scholars are by no means alone in their interest in identifying the impact of a source's perceived credibility on persuasion. Political scientists recognize this as an important concept in studying the persuasive effectiveness of political leaders (Funk, 1996; Glass, 1985; Kinder, 1986; Miller, 1991; Miller et al., 1986; Page, 1978).

One approach to studying voting behavior and presidential approval is to examine the impact of individual traits of political leaders on voter perceptions. This is consistent with communication research focusing on the persuasive impact of a host of socially desirable traits of sources. Because the traits discussed in the source credibility literature of communication scholars and the candidate evaluation literature of political scientists are often similar, the literature in both fields form the basis for this study.

A classic article by Stokes (1966) began the progression of traits evaluation literature in political science. Stokes argued that personality characteristics of candidates,

as well as issues and political parties, exert significant influence on voter approval ratings of presidential candidates. Much research during that time suggested that political party identification was the most significant predictor of voter behavior (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, 1960). Indeed, the effects of party identification have received much scholarly attention and continue to be debated today (Miller, 1991; Rapaport, 1997; Rice and Hilton, 1994).

An impressive body of literature has since emerged to suggest the ability of voters to make trait judgements, the frequency of trait judgments, and the importance of traits in the evaluation process of candidates (Page, 1978; Kinder, 1986; Bean, 1993; Brown, Lambert, Kay, and Curtis, 1988; Funk, 1996; Glass, 1985; Miller et al., 1986). Many political scientists now believe that candidate traits--in addition to political party identification, candidate performance, and candidate issue positions--are critical to explanations of candidate evaluations (Funk, 1997; Wattenberg, 1994).

An exploration of the traits characterizing voters' evaluations of presidential candidates has prompted recent scholarly attention. For example, Golden argues that voters are responding to a new interpretation of character in their evaluations of current presidential candidates. He does not contest, however, the importance of character in the evaluation process. Indeed, like many of his colleagues (Barber, 1985; Wilson, 1995), he notes that character is alive and well as a predictor of presidential evaluations. He argues, however, that because the public's expectations for political leaders have changed in the last decade, many individuals are distinguishing between public and private character. As noted previously, Golden's operationalization of public character is consistent with past research on the use of competence, leadership, and empathy traits (Kinder, 1986).

Trent, Trent, Mongeau, and Short-Thompson (1997) recently examined the candidate traits most utilized by voters and members of the media. In addition, they sought to examine the consistency of the use of such traits over time. Contrary to Golden's assertions, they found that private character was among the qualities most desired in an ideal presidential candidate. The sample for this study consisted of 290 citizens attending presidential campaign rallies in New Hampshire prior to the 1996 primary elections and was primarily Republican.

Nonacademic public opinion researchers are exploring the idea of a new conceptualization of character. For example, Crabtree and Danitz (1996) cite results of a U.S. News and World Report poll by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group suggesting that private character is less important in contemporary evaluations of candidates. In this poll, by a 67-to-29 percent margin, voters thought a political candidate could have "substantial flaws in personal character" but still govern effectively.

Perhaps the most extensive current exploration of this issue is provided by Funk (1997). Funk found that competence played a larger role than warmth (operationalized as friendly and likeable) in the evaluations of candidates overall. She found, however, that political knowledge mediated this relationship such that when this factor was examined, only those subjects with high levels of political expertise significantly favored competence over warmth.

Teven and McCroskey (1997) recently reexamined the components of source credibility in an instructional setting. Their work suggests that competence and character do play large roles in receiver evaluations of sources in a time of widespread distrust of institutions such as higher education. They found a third dimension however—perceived

caring--which figured prominently in receivers' evaluations of instructors.

The recent scholarly attention to this issue is instructive. There are, however, problems with the studies previously mentioned. Golden's claims were never tested empirically. Trent et al. reported serious problems with the representativeness of their sample. Funk explored only competence and warmth assessments of candidates, but not perceptions of candidate character. Additionally, the generalizability of Funk's results could be questioned as her sample consisted solely of college students.

Further, none of these studies examined subjects' levels of political disaffection or media use. Only Funk (1996) examined levels of political knowledge as a factor in the evaluation processes of voters. While much work has focused on traits as influential in the evaluations of presidential candidates and vote choice, little attention has been given to the determinants of such trait inferences. This study explores the role of media use, political disaffection, and political knowledge as determinants of the selection and use of traits in the evaluation process of presidential candidates.

The idea that traits play a role in approval and voting is well documented. As Funk (1997) argues, a problem in the literature is that it does not demonstrate definitively which traits are critical to the process. This parallels the conceptual disagreements of communication researchers concerning the components of source credibility. While the importance of source credibility in the persuasive process is well documented, the specific components of the construct continue to be debated (Teven and McCroskey, 1997).

The literature in political science suggesting which traits are key in the candidate evaluation process is decidedly mixed. Some studies suggest character traits are more

important than competence traits, and others suggest the opposite (Funk, 1996). While there is some agreement in the candidate approval literature that three broad categories of traits are commonly utilized to evaluate candidates (competence, character, and empathy), there is decidedly less agreement as to how important each is in the evaluations of presidential candidates. In addition, there is little consensus concerning what variables influence an individual's selection and use of a particular trait type (Funk, 1996).

Despite extensive scholarly attention to the study of source credibility in the communication literature, this work also faces criticisms. First, many communication scholars have argued that the context-dependent nature of source credibility evaluations makes it difficult to establish a set of dimensions which are utilized to evaluate all sources. (Cronkhite and Liska, 1976; Delia, 1976; Infante, 1980; Powell and Wanzenreid, 1995). A second problem stems from the almost exclusive use of closed-ended questions to measure dimensions of source credibility in the communication literature. It is possible that the dimensions previously discovered have to some extent been imposed on subjects rather than operating as reflections of true dimensions of source evaluations.

The current study seeks to improve upon the literature in communication and political science in a number of ways. First, in its recognition of the context-dependent nature of credibility, the current study focuses on specific conceptualizations of competence and character dimensions of source credibility in a specific context, the evaluation of presidential candidates. It is believed that these components are central to credibility and that the evaluation and selection of the leader of the United States is an important context within which to study the components.

Second, open-ended questions are used extensively in this study. Closed-ended

measures have always been critical to source credibility investigations, and they continue to be important in this study. Closed-ended measures are, however, supplemented with open-ended measures to allow the examination of novel conceptualizations of dimensions of source credibility not previously examined by closed-ended measures.

Using open-ended responses also provides an additional measure of the importance of certain candidate traits to subjects. The more important a trait type to a subject, the more likely that subject is to cite the trait type in open-ended questions. This concept is discussed fully in chapter three of this dissertation. In the current study, both types of measures allow the examination of the importance of character, competence, empathy, and leadership traits in the evaluation of presidential candidates.

Third, the study seeks to explain the relative importance of competence and character traits by introducing political disaffection as a mediating variable. It may be that for individuals who distrust political actors, perceive political actors to be insensitive to their needs, and/or believe they lack the ability to influence the political process, certain types of traits will be more important in their evaluations of presidential candidates.

Fourth, the study explores specific voter conceptualizations of character, leadership, competence, and empathy traits. It is possible that these trait types are being used differently by today's voters. For example, the possible distinction Jamieson (1998), Golden (1997), and others have made between public and private character may reflect a greater use of competence, leadership, or empathy traits that would not be reflected in past research.

It is important to look at the changing perceptions of American voters for a

number of reasons. The following justification is offered for the current study.

1. Political disaffection among American citizens is pronounced. Indicators of disaffection, including administration scandals, negative media coverage, strategic media framing, and negative political advertising, are all at their highest levels (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1996; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1998). Almost every public opinion poll of the last five years indicates that most Americans distrust politicians, have little faith in political institutions, feel they have no input into the political process, and/or are simply apathetic toward the political process.

A report by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (1998) suggests that while distrust in government in general has not increased in recent years, distrust of political officials is at its highest level. For example, by 67-16% people have expressed more trust in government workers than political officials. Almost half of all negative comments voiced about the government were directed at political officials. In 1996, when the data for this study were collected, only 23 percent of Americans trusted political figures.

2. High levels of political disaffection may affect the evaluation processes of voters. It is quite possible that highly cynical voters will utilize different trait types to evaluate candidates and will hold different expectations for elected officials. An alternative explanation offered by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press is that disaffected citizens may express apathy toward the political system and thus utilize few candidate traits of any type to evaluate presidential candidates. Most trait evaluation research in political science has yet to address the role of political disaffection in the trait

evaluation process.

3. Television has increasingly personalized politics, highlighting personal characteristics of candidates and televising very personal components of candidate's lives. Media coverage of presidential candidates has been increasingly negative since the early 1980s. It is possible that this increased personalization of the political process and consistent negativity toward presidential candidates may cause high media users to select different trait types when evaluating these candidates.

Past trait evaluation research addressed this issue, but with general media exposure measures. More recent trait evaluation research in political science has not adequately addressed the role of media usage. This study incorporates more specific television use items to examine effects of television use on the trait evaluations of political sources.

4. There is little agreement in the political science literature concerning the relative prominence of competence and character traits in the evaluation of candidates. In addition, most research on this subject was conducted in the 1980s. It is quite possible that increasing levels of political disaffection have altered what politically disaffected voters consider important in the evaluation of political sources.

5. There is general agreement in the communication literature concerning the importance of competence and character dimensions of source credibility. A problem for this literature, however, is that the source credibility evaluations are often context-specific, making it difficult to generalize components of source credibility across diverse communication contexts. This study will examine two specific components of source credibility in an important, and specific, context.

6. This study should prove useful not only to academic scholars, but also for aspiring political candidates. It is possible that certain personal traits, such as faithfulness to spouse, no longer factor as prominently in the evaluation process of many voters. Should this prove true, it might encourage individuals with imperfect personal lives, yet strong leadership potential, to run for political office.

With these justifications and the previously stated goals of the study in mind, the data set for the current study will consist of the pre-election 1996 American National Election Studies and post-election 1996 American National Election Studies. This data collection is part of the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan.

ANES data has been a staple in political science research since 1952. It has become a popular data source for political communication researchers who have explored such areas as media effects theories of framing, priming, and agenda-setting; media exposure and political learning; the effects of negative political advertising; and interpersonal communication and political learning.

As Rosenstone, Kinder, and Miller (1997) report, these studies are designed to explore Americans' political predispositions and values, social backgrounds and values as they relate to political participation, candidate and group evaluation processes, public policy opinions, and political participation. The 1996 ANES contains both pre- and post-election interviews. The interviews were of two types: face-to-face and telephone. 1714 subjects were interviewed in the pre-election study, with 90% of interviewed again in the post-election study.

The majority of ANES questions are closed-ended. The interviews did, however,

contain several groups of open-ended items. These items are important because a goal of the current study is to compare the answers obtained from closed- and open-ended questions and to explore novel conceptualizations of character. This could not be accomplished were closed-ended questions used exclusively.

ANES items measured standard demographic information (age, sex, religion, race, education, income, political party participation) important to the current study. Other items of interest in the current study are those which measure television attention, subjects' likes/dislikes about candidates, whether a candidate possessed specific traits, political disaffection, political knowledge, candidate approval, and vote choice.

The following chapters provide important details of the current study. Chapter two reviews relevant literature on source evaluations in communication and political science and presents the study's two research questions and eight hypotheses. Chapter three details the methodological considerations in the study, including rationale and specifications for the use of ANES data, operationalization and recoding of variables, and data analysis procedures. The fourth chapter presents the results of the study. These results are discussed in detail in chapter five, implications for theory and research are provided, and limitations of the current study are addressed.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The goals of the current study include an examination of the frequency which individuals' utilize leadership, character, competence, and empathy traits to evaluate presidential candidates. Second, the study will explore the relative importance of each trait type in the evaluations of presidential candidates. Finally, the study will examine receiver characteristics which may determine trait selection and use, including demographic characteristics (sex, age, religiosity, and party identification), media use, political knowledge, and political disaffection.

To explore these goals, the literature from communication and political science is examined. This chapter reviews the literature on source evaluations in communication and political science, identifies unanswered questions in this literature, and details the hypotheses and research questions used in the current study.

The idea that the source of a message can have a significant effect on the persuasive outcome of that message is well documented in fields such as communication, political science, psychology, advertising, and marketing (Ohanian, 1990). While the sources studied in these disciplines may vary from communication instructors to fashion models to the President of the United States, each has devoted significant scholarly attention to the construct of credibility. In addition to the impact of source credibility in persuasion, much research has explored how an individual evaluates the credibility of a source. Most relevant to this study is more than forty years of communication, political science, and social psychology research focusing on individuals' evaluations of sources.

Few constructs have received as much scholarly attention as source credibility in

communication research (McCroskey and Young, 1981). In McCroskey's review of the literature in the early 1980s, he noted that hundreds of studies had focused on the impact of source credibility in the persuasive process and the dimensions which individuals utilized to form evaluations of sources. Since that influential review, communication scholars and scholars from other social sciences have continued to explore the construct. Indeed, McCroskey's latest work (Teven and McCroskey, 1997) calls for a reexamination of much of the source credibility research in the last forty years, which may fuel communication research in this area into the next century.

The Rhetorical Investigation of Source Credibility

For almost half of a century, contemporary communication scholars have examined seriously the role of perceived source credibility in the persuasive communication process. The construct's roots, however, can be traced at least as far back as Aristotle, since which rhetorical theorists have noted the impact of "ethos" in the communication process. As most communication scholars know, Aristotle saw this as the dominant mode of rhetorical proof, and defined the variable as the listener's evaluation of a speaker's character, intelligence, and good will.

Aristotle argued in the *Rhetoric* that a source's character could be operationalized as goodness, virtue, and honesty. The quality of intelligence, in Aristotle's view, consisted more of practical wisdom and shared values than formal education. He argued that strong value identification between source and receivers often resulted in perceptions of intelligence regardless of the cognitive ability of the speaker (Griffin, 1997)

Finally, Aristotle defined good will as a positive evaluation of the speaker's intention toward receivers. Aristotle argued in his three-component theory of source

credibility that rhetorical success depended on identifying all available means of persuasion. Thus it was important that a speaker possess each of the three dimensions of source credibility for maximum persuasive success. (Griffin, 1997; Sattler, 1947).

The Social Scientific Investigation of Source Credibility

Contemporary communication research has focused on the impact of perceived source credibility in the social influence process (Falcione, 1974; McCroskey and Young, 1981). Much of the early work on the construct utilized an operational definition which assumed source credibility to be a perceptual variable intervening between the speaker and the listener (Cronkhite and Liska, 1976). There is widespread agreement among communication researchers that source credibility is a multidimensional attitude about a source held by a receiver. (McCroskey and Young, 1981).

Infante (1980) summarized much of the conceptual work on source credibility when he defined the construct as a set of attitudes about a source held by a receiver which affect the receiver's reaction to the source. Using this definition of the construct, decades of communication research asserts the importance of the variable for persuasive success. As cited by Falcione (1974), McCroskey, largely responsible for the bulk of early literature on the subject, once referred to the construct as the "single most important variable in determining persuasive effects of communication" (p.63).

Dimensionality of Source Credibility. While the voluminous communication literature concerning source credibility explores many aspects of the construct, work investigating the dimensionality of the construct is most relevant for the current study. The multi-dimensionality of the source credibility construct has received much attention since the late 1960s, and it continues to be an important issue today (Teven and

McCroskey, 1997). Table 2.1 is provided later in this chapter as a summary of the following discussion of source evaluation dimensions in communication and political science literature.

Haiman's (1948) experimental work is recognized by many as the beginning of social scientific efforts to examine the multi-dimensionality of source credibility. Haiman reported two dimensions, reputation and competence (McCroskey and Young, 1981), which are analogous to Aristotle's character and intelligence dimensions. However, as McCroskey and Young (1981) reported, Haiman's early attempts to measure the construct were criticized on methodological grounds. During this time, Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957) presented work which many believed argued persuasively for the use of semantic differential scales and factor analysis to examine dimensions of source credibility. For the next two decades, this approach would gain popularity in communication research.

Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) conducted a series of landmark studies in social psychology which would stimulate communication research for decades. Often referred to as the "Yale Studies," this experimental research program focused on source, message, and receiver factors in the persuasive communication process. Hovland and associates suggested that source credibility consisted of three components: expertness, trustworthiness, and intention toward receiver.

Soon after the monumental work of Hovland et al., Andersen (1961) and Berlo and Lemert (1961) responded to the call from Osgood et al. (1957). Berlo and Lemert, as well as Andersen, introduced semantic differential scales for the study of dimensions of source credibility. Both sets of researchers introduced a new component, labeled

dynamism, along with the previously identified competence and trustworthiness dimensions. Dynamism was operationalized by Berlo and Lemert with survey items such as bold/timid, aggressive/nonaggressive, energetic/lethargic, and active/inactive. While the dynamism dimension was statistically significant in these studies, Berlo and Lemert cautioned against blanket acceptance of such a dimension. They distinguished between statistical and psychological independence, arguing that it was unclear from these initial studies if dynamism was a stable, independent factor in the source credibility evaluations of individuals.

McCroskey's (1966) early work used both semantic differential and Likert scales to identify two characteristics, authoritativeness and trustworthiness. He argued that of the methods used to study the construct in the past, Likert scales were most promising because of their efficiency in terms of data collection and analysis. Previous methods, such as Thurstone-type attitude scales, were much more labor intensive and McCroskey argued that they helped to discourage needed work in the area.

Using Likert scales, McCroskey (1966) found that the authoritativeness dimension accounted for 47% of the variance in a receiver's evaluation of a source and the character factor 29% of the variance. To determine if these results were an artifact of the type of measures used, he replicated the study with semantic differential scales.

Authoritativeness items included reliable-unreliable, informed-uninformed, qualified-unqualified, intelligent-unintelligent, valuable-worthless, and expert-inexpert. Character items included honest-dishonest, friendly-unfriendly, pleasant-unpleasant, unselfish-selfish, virtuous-sinful, and nice-awful. In this second test of the dimensions, authoritativeness accounted for 52 percent and character 19 percent of the variance.

These results were inconsistent with earlier research which suggested a more equal influence between authoritativeness and character. McCroskey suggested that Aristotle's "good will" dimension, labeled "intention toward receiver" by Hovland, was not distinct from character. McCroskey also noted that the nonappearance of a dynamism dimension was explained methodologically in that no items in his scale were designed to measure such a dimension.

A flurry of research in the area during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Applbaum and Anatol, 1973; Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz, 1969; Falcione, 1974; Markhan, 1968) generated varying definitions of the construct with varying numbers of components and labels for those components. While such attention to the construct should have been valuable, McCroskey and Young (1981) later reported that the conceptual confusion created by such an array of dimensions and labels was counterproductive to the study of source credibility. In addition, they noted apparent weaknesses in much of this research including very small samples which called into question their internal validity, and a small number of sources used in each study, thus making external validity questionable.

The conceptual confusion in the field as well as the questionable validity of past research led McCroskey and his associates on a quest to facilitate better understanding of the construct. The result of a five-year series of studies was an expansion of McCroskey's previously identified two-component theory of source credibility to a five-component theory including competence, character, sociability, extroversion, and composure dimensions (McCroskey, Holdridge, and Toomb, 1974).

McCroskey had previously identified the character and competence (labeled authoritativeness) dimensions in this five-factor theory of source credibility. He

distinguished sociability and extroversion by defining the former as similar to Hovland's intention toward receiver, and the latter as similar to the previously identified dynamism dimension. McCroskey added the composure dimension as distinct from previously identified dimensions. This five-factor theory of source credibility is popular with many communication researchers today.

In addition, McCroskey and associates attempted to develop specific scales for the measurement of each of the five components, and to differentiate source evaluations based on the source type involved, including employers, public figures, spouses, and teachers. (McCroskey, Scott, & Young, 1971; McCroskey, Jensen, Todd, and Toomb, 1972; McCroskey, Jensen, & Todd, 1972; McCroskey, Jensen, & Valencia, 1973; McCroskey, Holdridge, & Toomb, 1974).

Having addressed the conceptual confusion in the field with what McCroskey argued were definitive dimensions of source credibility, he and his associates called for an end to the quest to discover new dimensions of credibility via factor analytic studies. Following this assertion, attention to the construct in the communication literature lessened but did not disappear. While less scholarship focused on the dimensionality of the construct, communication researchers continued to explore the role of source credibility in the persuasive process and the interaction effects of credibility and any number of persuasive communication variables.

At the same time, source credibility work became more popular in marketing and advertising literature (Ohanian, 1990). The new research directions explored in the communication literature and the new interest in source credibility in related fields assured that credibility research continued into the present. Despite their previous call to

discontinue dimensionality research, Teven and McCroskey (1997) recently reported the results of work which suggest what they label a "new" dimension of source credibility. The "perceived caring" dimension was identified as independent of competence and character dimensions in the evaluations of college professors. This finding prompted Teven and McCroskey to retract as premature their earlier call for an end to work in this area, noting that it "would be appropriate to revisit the question of dimensionality of source credibility/ethos."

Indeed, communication researchers have spent much energy identifying what characteristics make a source credible. The results of more than forty years of communication research on the construct have been numerous components of the source evaluation process and numerous labels for those components. While conceptualizations may vary, there is widespread agreement among communication researchers that the two components of competence and character are central to most source credibility evaluations (O'Keefe, 1990). Stiff (1994) speaks for many in the field when he writes that most communication researchers now agree that competence and character dimensions best represent the source evaluation process.

Traits as Central to the Evaluation of Political Sources

While communication researchers were among the first to apply social scientific methods of inquiry to the construct of source credibility (as noted earlier, much of this work was prompted by work in social psychology), they are by no means alone in their interest in identifying the impact of a source's perceived credibility on persuasive success and the evaluation process which generates such perceptions of credibility. Political scientists have long recognized this as an important concept in studying the persuasive

effectiveness of political leaders. Large and impressive bodies of literature on presidential approval and voting behavior have accumulated (Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk, 1986). But as Miller and his colleagues noted a decade ago, "Candidate evaluations are one of the most important but least understood facets of American voting behavior" (p. 521).

The rich tradition of the study of presidential approval and voting behavior in political science can be characterized by four dominant perspectives (Miller, et al., 1986; Piroth, 1996). These perspectives attempt to explain how people evaluate presidential candidates.

First, political scientists have focused attention on issue voting. These researchers focus on the impact of a presidential candidate's stand on various issues as a determinate of an individual's vote choice (Cook and Jelen, 1994; Goren, 1997; Macdonald and Rabinowitz, 1995). Indeed, as Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk (1984) noted, the topic of issue voting is one of the most widely researched areas in American politics.

Additionally, researchers have focused on candidate evaluations based on party identification. While the extent of such identification in national politics is often debated, it has long been known that party identification influences candidate evaluations for many voters (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, 1960; Converse and Markus, 1979; Kinder and Sears, 1985; Miller, 1991; Rapaport, 1997; Rice and Hilton, 1994).

Researchers have also focused on what may be labeled performance voting (Butler and Stokes, 1974). Some individuals largely base their candidate evaluations, and subsequent vote choice, on how well they perceive the president to be leading the country. Among performance voting studies, voters' evaluations of economic conditions

has received the most attention and has resulted in a variety of explanations for voter evaluations of the economy including retrospective, "pocketbook," sociotropic, and group voting. (Kinder, Rosenstone, and Hanson, 1983). Recent work has continued to explore the relationship between economic evaluations and presidential approval (Funk and Garcia-Monet, 1997; Krause, 1997).

Finally, a growing body of research on candidate evaluations and voting behavior has focused on candidate images as defined by trait inferences of voters. This body of research is often subdivided into two areas of study: examinations of the traits candidates convey, and examinations of the emotions they elicit (Funk, 1996, 1997; Kinder and Sears, 1985; Markus and Converse, 1979). Interest in candidate trait evaluations has increased in what some have called a candidate-centered era of politics (Funk, 1996, 1997).

While each of these traditions has added to the literature on candidate evaluations, the approach to studying voting behavior and presidential approval most relevant to this study is the examination of the impact of individual traits of political leaders on voter perceptions. This is consistent with communication research focusing on the persuasive impact of a host of socially desirable traits of sources.

Work over four decades in communication that identifies source credibility factors (McCroskey and Young, 1981; Teven and McCroskey, 1997) reveals a variety of dimensions with varying labels. The work, however, has consistently suggested the importance of competence and character in most source evaluations. An equally instructive literature in political science has identified a more limited number of trait types used to evaluate political sources, including competence, character, leadership, and

empathy (Brown, Lambert, Kay, and Curtis, 1988; Glass, 1985; Kinder, 1986; Miller et al., 1986).

Competence and character traits in political science work are directly comparable to the source credibility dimensions of the same labels in the communication literature. Leadership and empathy dimensions are more context-specific than dimensions of source credibility in the communication literature. They are, however, comparable in operationalization to the dynamism and perceived caring dimensions previously examined in the communication literature. Because the traits identified in the source credibility literature of communication scholars and the candidate evaluation literature of political scientists are similar, literature from both fields will form the basis for this study.

Table 2.1
Source Evaluation Dimensions in Communication and Political Science Literature

Researcher(s)	Year Published	Dimensions Examined
Andersen	1961	Safety, qualification, dynamism
Applbaum and Anatol	1972	Trustworthiness, expertness, dynamism, objectivity
Bean	1993	Competence, integrity
Berlo and Lemert	1961	Safety, qualification, dynamism
Brown, Lambert, Kay, and Curtis	1988	Character, competence, integrity, dynamism, empathy
Funk	1997	Competence, warmth
Glass	1985	Competence, character, attraction
Haiman	1948	Reputation, competence
Hovland, Janis, and Kelly	1953	Expertness, trustworthiness, intention toward receiver
Kinder	1986	Character, competence, empathy, leadership
McCroskey	1966	Authoritativeness, character
McCroskey, Holdridge, and Toomb	1974	Competence, character, sociability, extroversion, composure
Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk	1986	Integrity, competence, charisma, reliability, personal qualities
Mondak	1995	Competence, integrity
Mondak and McCurley	1995	Competence, integrity
Teven and McCroskey	1997	Competence, character, perceived caring

Candidate Traits Literature

A classic article by Stokes (1966) began the progression of traits evaluation literature in political science. Stokes argued that personality characteristics of candidates, as well as issues and political parties, exert influence on voter approval ratings of presidential candidates.

Page (1978) found that voters with low levels of candidate-specific information or even very basic political knowledge, often were able to make trait judgements about political figures. Page also argued that many voters make quick judgements about candidates based on the personal qualities of the candidates, and that these impressions tend to endure after the specific details of the situation during which the judgement was made have been forgotten.

Miller et al. (1986), suggested that more than 70 percent of subject responses to ANES candidate likes/dislikes questions since 1952 were focused on candidate traits. Candidate traits were mentioned significantly more often than a candidates political party or a candidate's stance on domestic or foreign policy issues.

This is consistent with the majority of research in the last twenty years in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, which collectively suggests that when subjects are asked to evaluate candidates in an open-ended manner, the majority of responses are references to personal traits of the candidates, as opposed to issue positions or party identification (Bean, 1993; Brown, Lambert, Kay, and Curtis, 1988; Funk, 1996; Glass, 1985).

Miller's work produced a five-dimensional scheme for classifying which traits were utilized by voters in the evaluation of presidential candidates. A similar

conceptualization was suggested earlier by Rusk and Weisberg (1972). Miller et al.'s five components, based on a factor analysis of open-ended N.E.S. responses from the 1950s to 1980s, included competence, integrity/trustworthiness, reliability, charisma, and personal (a catch-all category describing physical appearance and communication style).

Competence, integrity, and reliability were the most mentioned dimensions, with competence references being the single most popular response. Miller (1990) replicated this work, examining open-ended responses to candidate likes and dislikes questions in N.E.S. and Senate Election Surveys of 1988. Again, Miller reported competence, integrity, and reliability as the most common responses.

Kinder (1986) analyzed open-ended responses to the 1980 National Election Studies surveys. He found that more than 90 percent of respondents were able to rate presidential candidates based on traits such as intelligence and trustworthiness. He also found that most of the 90 percent who were able to do this possessed low levels of political knowledge.

Kinder (1986) identified four candidate trait types, including competence, leadership, integrity, and empathy. While Kinder's dimensions of competence and integrity match those of Miller et al., Kinder operationalized leadership as the ability to inspire people and command respect. Empathy was operationalized as compassion toward people and a concern for solving their problems. Because of high correlations between empathy/integrity dimensions and between competence/leadership dimensions, these four are often collapsed into two dimensions, competence and integrity (Funk, 1996; Mondak, 1995). In Kinder's work, integrity accounted for the most variance in candidate evaluations, with competence and leadership also significant predictors.

Other researchers have built on Kinder and Miller's work. Most did not replicate Kinder and Miller's factor analytic work, but instead used the four and five-dimensional schemes they invoked to establish their own a priori dimensions within which to code voter responses. Glass (1985) coded N.E.S. responses from 1952-84 using three dimensions: competence, character, and personal attraction. The personal attraction category subsumed Miller's charisma and personal dimensions, while character subsumed the integrity and reliability dimensions. In Glass's analysis, 50 percent of responses were character references, 33 percent competence, and 17 percent personal attraction.

Bean (1993) also utilized Miller's five dimensions to analyze voter responses in Australia and New Zealand to similar likes/dislikes questions. Bean reported competence and integrity to be the most common responses.

Brown et al. (1988) attempted to synthesize the dimensions of both Miller and Kinder's work. This research focused on responses of Canadian voters in the Canadian Election studies from 1974-84. Brown et al. subsumed character, competence, integrity, dynamism, and empathy into one category (labeled "political traits") and, not surprisingly, found this category of traits to be most frequently cited by Canadian voters.

Recent Examinations of Source Evaluations of Presidential Candidates

As Funk (1996) notes, there exists a renewed interest in the study of candidate traits in the political science literature. For example, Golden (1997) suggests that many voters today are responding to traits other than character. He writes that many Americans are utilizing leadership or empathy traits as opposed to character traits in their evaluations of Bill Clinton. Golden does not, however, claim that private character is no longer a factor in candidate evaluations for many individuals. Indeed, like many of his

colleagues (Barber, 1985; Wilson, 1995), he notes that character is alive and well as a predictor of presidential evaluations. He concludes that utilizing leadership and empathy traits may be a response to a candidate's public character, distinct from private character.

Trent, Trent, Mongeau, and Short-Thompson (1997) recently examined which image traits were most utilized by voters and members of the media. In addition, they sought to examine the consistency of the use of such traits over time. Trent et al., by surveying journalists and individuals attending political rallies, suggested that honesty and talking about problems facing the country were the most important candidate traits for both members of the media and individual voters. Previous research by the group also suggests that these traits and the importance of each have been consistent across the last three presidential elections.

Nonacademic public opinion researchers have explored the idea of the importance of various schema in the evaluation of political candidates. For example, results of a U.S. News and World Report poll by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group (Crabtree and Danitz, 1996) suggest that private character is less important in contemporary evaluations of candidates. By 67 percent to 29 percent, voters thought a political candidate could have "substantial flaws in personal character" but still effectively govern. Results suggest that competence, leadership, empathy, and lack of negativity matter most to voters.

To further explore the deemphasis of private character traits in the evaluation political sources, one might contrast the previously noted survey results to series of surveys between 1987 and 1992 conducted by CBS News/New York Times (Funk, 1997). Both sets of polls suggest that almost 50 percent of all Americans a decade ago believed

private character traits such as honesty to be the most desired quality in a presidential candidate. Competence (20 percent) and public character (10 percent) traits were rated considerably less important.

Perhaps the most extensive current exploration of the selection and use of traits to evaluate candidates was done by Funk (1997). Using college students as subjects and an experimental design, Funk varied the warmth and competence of hypothetical political candidates. She operationalized warmth as "friendly," "good-natured," and "understanding," and competence as "skillful," "knowledgeable," and "hardworking." In addition, Funk examined the role of political expertise in this voter evaluation process, as defined by the number of correct responses to a series of political knowledge items.

Funk (1997) found that competence played a larger role than warmth in the evaluations of candidates overall. She reported that political knowledge mediated this relationship such that when this factor was examined, only those subjects with high levels of political expertise significantly favored competence over warmth.

While not directly related to the evaluation of political officials, Teven and McCroskey (1997) present evidence of the importance of empathy traits in evaluations. They reexamined the components of source credibility in an instructional setting. Their work suggested that competence and character played large roles in receiver evaluations of sources in a time of widespread distrust of institutions such as higher education.

They found a third dimension, perceived caring, which figured prominently in receivers' evaluations of instructors. While political scientists have studied the effects of empathy for quite some time, Teven and McCroskey (1997) labeled perceived caring as a newly discovered component of source credibility and called for a reexamination of all

past work on dimensions of source credibility.

The recent scholarly attention to this issue is to be commended. There are, however, problems with the studies previously mentioned. The current study seeks to improve upon many of these problems and add to the growing literature on trait evaluations and perceived source credibility in political science and communication.

Golden (1997) claims that character is a major predictor of presidential evaluations today, while noting that many voters are defining character differently than previous generations, are insightful. Indeed, they form the theoretical backbone of much of this study. Unfortunately Golden's rhetorical claims were not tested empirically.

Trent et al. also offer an important empirical look at the traits voters use to evaluate candidates today. This study also explored the stability of traits as predictors of evaluations across elections. The sample for this study, however, was problematic in that subjects were drawn from crowds of individuals attending political rallies. It is quite possible that individuals attending political rallies are at extreme levels of the political participation continuum and may not be representative of the nation as a whole. More specifically Trent et al. admit that almost 75 percent of their subjects were Republicans, clearly not consistent with the ideological makeup of the nation. In addition, to examine the effect of age on trait evaluations, a broad categorization was utilized (18-50 and 50-and-over) which decreased the author's explanatory power.

Funk's (1997) work sheds light on the conflicting evidence of the importance of competence versus character in presidential evaluations. Though the author argues that college students may be acceptable as subjects when studying the evaluation of candidates, this argument is not without its opponents. Indeed, many communication

scholars argue that generalizability from a sample of college students is suspect. In addition, Funk's experimental design, in which subjects read one-time descriptions of hypothetical candidates, may be of questionable representational validity (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). This experimental procedure may not accurately reflect the actual candidate evaluation and information processing patterns of most voters.

Also relevant to this study, Funk does address the relative importance of competence traits in evaluations of presidential candidates. However, her operationalization of warmth is broad and encompasses traits more specifically labeled in the current study as leadership, character, and empathy. Thus a more specific examination of these traits is needed.

Further, the studies previously mentioned did not examine media use as a factor in the trait evaluations of candidates. Only Funk (1996) examined levels of political knowledge as a factor in the evaluation processes of voters. The current study seeks to offer further insight into the effects of media use and political knowledge on the selection and use of candidate traits. Finally, none of the studies cited previously specifically examined subjects' levels of political disaffection. While political disaffection may be widespread, it is necessary to distinguish between individual levels of disaffection and the effects of varying levels of disaffection on the use of candidate traits.

Political Disaffection: The Final Piece of the Puzzle

Defining Political Disaffection. An additional factor of significant importance in the changing evaluation processes of voters is the high level of political disaffection among today's voters. As Austin and Pinkleton (1995) note, political disaffection can be described as three related, yet conceptually distinct, aspects. These include the belief that

the president and government do not deserve respect and support, low investment of effort in the general political process, and perceptions that campaign advertising by political candidates are overly negative, deceptive, and uninformative. Gans (1995) defines political disaffection as cynicism toward political officials and institutions and disengagement in the political process.

Erber and Lau (1990) distinguish between two types of political cynicism. They found that individuals with a person-oriented perspective ("person chronicity") of politics become cynical largely because of dissatisfaction with the candidates themselves. Individuals who possess an issue-oriented perspective ("issue chronicity") of politics become cynical largely because of dissatisfaction with the policy alternatives offered by the candidates.

Pharr's (1997) conceptualization of political disaffection is most relevant to this study. She defines the condition as distrust of government and political actors, lack of confidence in government responsiveness to citizen concerns, and disbelief that one can affect change in the political process. As used in the current study, political disaffection is distinct from political cynicism. Political disaffection is distinguished from political cynicism by its focus on distrust, perception that political actors are not concerned, and low efficacy. Political cynicism is often defined more narrowly in the political science literature as distrust of political officials.

Extent of Political Disaffection. Most public opinion scholars would agree that most Americans today report serious distrust and doubt toward the United States' political institutions. Indeed, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (1998) reports that Americans' participation has atrophied in almost every aspect of

voluntary collective action, from church attendance to league bowling. According to Pharr (1997) widespread disaffection with political institutions and public officials exists today in most advanced industrial nations.

Cappella and Jamieson (1997) cite a July 1994 Washington Post/ABC News Poll indicating overwhelming majorities of Americans believed political candidates care more about special interests than average citizens and make promises they have no intention of keeping. In addition, 37 percent responded in the most negative manner possible in terms of their evaluations of candidates honesty, ethics, and integrity. Only 15 percent expressed few reservations with political candidates. Cappella and Jamieson also report 19 other polls conducted in the last five years in which disapproval ratings outnumbered approval ratings for congressional candidates by at least two-to-one.

Gans (1995) summarizes the cynical pulse of America when he writes that "Every new poll seems to report decreased confidence in and increased cynicism about the major institutions of American democracy." National Opinion Research Center surveys from 1973 to 1993 suggest sharp declines in public confidence in a variety of institutions, from organized religion to education to Congress.

Gans (1995) notes several specific indicators of increased political disaffection during this decade including decreased turnout in the 1994 elections, including an all-time low turnout for 18-24 years olds; all-time low figures for political interest among college students, and declining numbers of individuals who report confidence and/or allegiance political parties. Possibly the most revealing poll result was an August 1995 *New York Times*-CBS poll in which almost 60 percent of respondents indicated that there was not a single elected official they admired (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997).

Certainly political disaffection is not a new phenomenon. As Cappella and Jamieson (1997) note, historically political institutions and officials have been distrusted by large portions of the population. While distrust of politicians has existed for decades, many of the individual indicators of disaffection, including negative media coverage of candidates, negative political advertising by candidates, strategic media framing of news stories, and political corruption and scandal, are at their highest levels today (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1996). Collectively, these provide strong evidence of extreme levels of disaffection among today's voters.

In addition, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (1998) reports that while distrust of government in general has not increased in recent years, distrust of politicians is at record levels. They report that in 1996, when the data for this study were collected, less than 25 percent of Americans reported trust in political officials.

To illustrate this, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) cite David Broder, syndicated columnist for the Washington Post, who proclaimed, "Cynicism is epidemic right now. It saps people's confidence in politics and political officials, and it erodes both the standing and standards of journalism. If the assumption is that nothing is on the level and nothing is as it seems, then citizenship becomes a game for fools and there is no point in trying to stay informed" (p. 17).

Origins of Political Disaffection. As Cappella and Jamieson (1997) note, some blame the high levels of political disaffection among today's voters on a "corrosive individualism." The idea here is that the private citizen has become so entrenched in individualism as to weaken the social connectedness necessary for a fully functional democratic society.

Pharr (1997), like many political scientists, attributes much of the political disaffection to corrupt officials, political scandal, and unkept campaign promises. As Schneider (1996) writes, many have argued that the Clinton presidency has endured more scandalous events than any other presidency. Schneider notes that while individual scandals in other administrations may have been larger in scope, the frequency of controversial events in the Clinton administration is unparalleled.

Patterson (1994) presents compelling evidence from two decades of research-- including Pomper and Lederman (1976), Krukones (1984), Budge and Hofferbert (1990) and Fishel (1985)--that suggests that presidential candidates keep the majority of their campaign promises. Cappella and Jamieson (1997) note that while such evidence exists, many voters and journalists do not share the perspective.

Patterson (1994) presents the pattern of increasingly negative media coverage of presidential candidates as a possible culprit. Since 1980, no major presidential candidate has received more positive press coverage than negative. Patterson's content analysis of 4,263 Time and Newsweek articles from 1960-1992 suggested a consistent increase in negative coverage from a low of 23% negative coverage for candidates in 1960 to 60% of press coverage in the 1992 presidential election. Bennett's (1995) analysis of increasingly negative coverage for political candidates in general is consistent with Patterson's evidence.

Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) experimentally point the finger of blame at negative political advertising. They indicate, for example, that expenditures on political advertising, a majority of which is negative, far exceeds expenditures on getting-out-the-vote activities, direct mail, and other forms of voter contact.

They write, "The electorate has reacted with frustration and anger. In recent years, the political pulse takers have registered record lows in political participation, record highs in public cynicism and alienation, and record rates of disapproval for politicians and political institutions. The single biggest cause of the new, ugly regime is the proliferation of negative political ads on TV" (p. 2).

Cappella and Jamieson (1997) present experimental work indicting the manner in which media frame stories as a catalyst for voter cynicism. They argue that strategically framed stories imply negative, self-interested motives on the part of politicians. Such framing, which research has suggested is more common than other types of media framing, activates negative trait attributions among viewers.

Unanswered Questions in the Source Evaluation Literature

While communication researchers and political scientists have progressed in their study of source evaluations, both literatures, nonetheless, are plagued by unanswered questions. This section will detail specific challenges for each literature.

First, as many communication scholars have noted, a problem for the conceptualization of dimensions of source credibility is that credibility is often context-dependent. That is, while certain characteristics of a source might prove beneficial to credibility evaluations in one context, others might prove more important in a different situation. The evaluation of a presidential candidate might for, example, be based on characteristics quite different from those used to evaluate a college professor.

As noted previously, in the late 1960s communication researchers began to develop credibility measures for specific source types, including employers, spouses, teachers, etc. Attention in the communication literature to context-specific credibility

measures ended, however, almost as quickly as it began. A thorough review of the literature reveals a paucity of such studies in the communication literature after the early 1970s. The studies that did attempt to address the context-specific nature of source credibility evaluations largely used preexisting measures and failed to utilize open-ended measures to examine novel conceptualizations of credibility dimensions based on the context in question.

Second, the literature on source credibility can be criticized for the almost exclusive use of closed-ended measurement items. Most credibility studies have employed only closed-ended measures which, as many survey methodologists have asserted (Fowler, 1993), may themselves dictate what responses individuals provide. It might be that an individual recognizes a credibility dimension only because it was included in the researcher's list of items, as opposed to the credibility dimension being an accurate representation of how that individual would evaluate a source in a more natural environment.

A third problem for the source credibility literature is that communication researchers have offered so many possible dimensions of the evaluation process as well as an abundance of labels for these dimensions as to create what McCroskey labeled conceptual confusion in the field. In addition, communication researchers have speculated about the effect of such a wide array of socially desirable traits in the evaluation process that it is often more difficult to locate a trait that does not seem to add to a source's credibility in some situation (Stiff, 1994).

What some have labeled overzealousness on the part of communication researchers to study this construct may have caused more confusion than clarification.

Indeed, in their most recent work Teven and McCroskey (1997), who initially noted the problem of conceptual confusion, have called for a renewed interest in discovering new dimensions of the source evaluation process and labels for those dimensions.

A final challenge for the communication literature is that it has failed to adequately address similar work being done in other fields. This is a criticism which can be applied throughout the social sciences. As Doris Graber, editor of *Political Communication*, noted at the 1997 National Communication Association, many communication researchers fail to acknowledge political scientists who are doing similar work, and vice versa. Failing to acknowledge similar work, Graber said, threatens the future productivity of both fields.

For example, Teven and McCroskey (1997) recently reported what they labeled a "new dimension" in the source credibility evaluation process and labeled this dimension as "perceived caring." Teven and McCroskey noted the importance of this dimension in the process and called for research attention to this construct in the work of researchers in other fields. This dimension, labeled as empathy, has been studied for twenty years in the political science literature with no mention from Teven and McCroskey. Rather than being an attack of McCroskey, who has made monumental contributions to the communication literature, the author of the current study believes this to be an example of a tendency of many social scientists. The current study seeks to utilize literature from political science and communication to advance knowledge in both fields.

Just as unanswered questions exist in the communication literature on source evaluations, so too political scientists face challenges in explaining the evaluations of presidential candidates. First, there is little agreement as to the relative importance of

competence and character traits in the evaluations of presidential candidates (Funk, 1996). While the importance of candidate traits to candidate approval and voting behavior has been well documented, which traits are most important in these evaluations is less clear. For example, the influential work of Kinder (1986) suggested integrity was the most important predictor of presidential candidate evaluations, while Miller et al. (1986) suggested competence was most important in the evaluations of presidential candidates.

A second criticism of the trait evaluation literature in political science is that much work has examined the effects of candidate traits on voter behavior, yet little work has examined the receiver characteristics which determine an individual's selection and use of traits. It is important to know not only that candidate traits affect evaluations of candidates, but also what receiver characteristics influence the use and selection of traits.

A final criticism of this literature is one that was previously applied to the communication literature. Graber, at the 1997 annual meeting of the National Communication Association, noted the tendency of communication researchers to fail to acknowledge the accomplishments of political scientists who are doing similar work. Graber also made clear that this criticism can be equally applied to political scientists who often fail to acknowledge the work of communication researchers.

The current study seeks to improve upon these two voluminous literatures on source evaluations in a number of ways. First, this dissertation will examine specific conceptualizations of competence, character, leadership, and empathy dimensions of source credibility in a specific context, the evaluation of presidential candidates. It is believed that these components are central to source credibility evaluations, and that the

evaluation and selection of the leader of the United States is an important context within which to study the components.

Second, this study will employ a data set that includes closed-ended and open-ended items. Closed-ended items will make possible the measurement of previously identified competence, character, empathy, and leadership traits. The inclusion of open-ended items will provide an additional measure of the relative importance of each trait type in the evaluations of presidential candidates. Closed-ended items will also allow the measurement of novel conceptualizations of candidate traits in the evaluation of presidential candidates.

Third, this study will specifically examine the relative importance of each trait type in the evaluation of presidential candidates. While the importance of character and competence has been articulated in political science and communication literature, the relative importance of these trait types to today's disaffected voters has yet to be examined outside public opinion polls.

Fourth, the current study will examine receiver characteristics which may influence the selection and use of candidate traits. Specifically, this study examined demographic variables (sex, age, party identification, and religiosity), television use, political knowledge, and political disaffection as potential determinates of candidate trait selection and use.

Finally, this study seeks to recognize and synthesize work in communication and political science which attempts to explain source evaluations. It is believed that literature from both fields is instructive in the examination of source evaluations. Recognition of common work may help facilitate the examination of yet unanswered

questions concerning source evaluations. The theoretical basis for this study, therefore, comes from work in both communication and political science.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

While voluminous, the literature in communication and political science on source evaluations has endured criticisms. Valuable knowledge has been gained concerning source evaluations, and the current study will attempt to further this body of knowledge. Previous and current examinations of source credibility will form the basis for the predictions in the current study.

The first goal of this study is to examine the frequency of individuals' use of competence, leadership, character, and empathy traits. There are several reasons to think that the frequencies of use of particular trait types to evaluate candidates may have changed from those suggested by research more than a decade ago.

First, as Hart (1996) and Cappella and Jamieson (1997) note, media coverage of presidential candidates has increased in the last decade. Hart writes that in addition to increased coverage of political candidates and events, coverage focuses on more intimate details of a candidate's personal life than it did in the past.

As noted earlier, Patterson (1994) presents a content analysis of media coverage of presidential candidates from 1960-1992 which suggested an increase in the amount of negative coverage of presidential candidates. More recent work (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Schneider, 1996) suggests that the trend in negative coverage continues. In addition to being primarily negative, media coverage of candidates is increasingly strategy-focused (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). Cappella and Jamieson note that the use of strategy-oriented framing of news stories of presidential candidates may emphasize the

self-interested motives of some politicians and compound the sheer amount of negative candidate coverage.

Finally, changes in political disaffection warrant the examination of individual's use of candidate traits to evaluate today's presidential candidates. As Schneider (1996) notes, voters in the 1990s are exposed to more controversial political stories than they were in the past. While the importance of individual "scandals" in the Clinton White House may be debated, the sheer number of such occurrences dwarf those of other recent administrations. Other indicators of political disaffection are also increasing in the 1990s, including negative political advertising (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1996).

The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (1998) suggests another interesting trend in political disaffection in the 1990s. The report contends that while distrust of government in general seems to be decreasing, distrust of politicians specifically continues to increase. In this study, nearly half of respondents evaluated government in general positively, yet only 22 percent of respondents reported trust in politicians. The majority of open-ended responses in the report focused on negative assessments of politician's character.

RQ1: What is the frequency of subjects' use of competence, character, leadership, and empathy traits to evaluate presidential candidates?

The second goal of this study is to examine the relative importance of each trait type to evaluations of candidates and vote choice. As noted previously, a problem for the literature in political science is that it has yet to demonstrate the relative importance of competence and character traits (Funk, 1996). Some research suggests the superiority of competence traits, while other research suggests the opposite (Funk, 1997). In addition,

communication research has consistently identified competence and character dimensions, but has also provided conflicting accounts of their relative importance (McCroskey, 1966; McCroskey and Young, 1981; Teven and McCroskey, 1997).

Jamieson (1998) and Golden (1997) argue that voters are responding to a different interpretation of character, thus explaining the apparent inconsistency between low ratings for Clinton on traditional character measures such as trustworthiness and honesty and high approval ratings. Some voters, for example, may be utilizing competence, leadership, or empathy traits in lieu of character traits in their evaluations of presidential candidates. Jamieson (1998) and Golden (1997) label these traits as public character.

Recent public opinion polling data suggests that character is less important to today's voters. For example, ABC News polls from January 1995-January 1998 report that Americans simultaneously approve of Clinton as president and do not think he possesses honesty or integrity. Jamieson (1998) cites further examples from polling done by NBC/Wall Street Journal, Harris, and New York Times/CBS News which all contend that many Americans feel Clinton is right for the presidency yet does not possess private character traits.

At the same time, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (1998) reports that the majority of open-ended comments about politicians in their study were references to private character, suggesting that character is an important in evaluations of candidates. In addition, Trent et al. (1997) suggest that trustworthiness and integrity are qualities which many Americans desire in an ideal presidential candidate.

H1a: That subjects perceive a candidate to possess competence traits is a more significant predictor of positive candidate evaluations than the perception

that the candidate possesses character traits.

H1b: That subjects perceive a candidate to possess leadership traits is a more significant predictor of positive candidate evaluations than the perception that the candidate possesses character traits.

H1c: That subjects perceive a candidate to possess empathy traits is a more significant predictor of positive candidate evaluations than the perception that the candidate possesses character traits.

A final goal of the current study is the examination of receiver characteristics which may determine the selection and use of candidate traits. While much past research has focused on the importance of candidate traits in evaluations of candidates, little work has focused on what receiver characteristics influence the use and selection of candidate traits (Funk, 1996). The current study will explore the effects of demographic variables (sex, party identification, age and religiosity), television use, political knowledge, and political disaffection in the selection and use of candidate traits.

It is possible that males and females select and use traits differently in their evaluations of presidential candidates. Much academic research and public opinion polling has focused on various "gender gaps" in an attempt to explain the voting patterns of males and females. A growing body of literature suggests that voters, regardless of sex, perceive stereotypically "masculine" traits as more important for a presidential candidate to possess (Best and Williams, 1990; Deaux and Lewis, 1984; Huddy and Terkildsen, 1992). While categorizations of "masculine" and "feminine" traits vary in the political science literature, most of these studies argue that qualities of assertive leadership are masculine in nature, while qualities of warmth and compassion are

stereotypically feminine qualities.

Huddy and Terkildsen (1992) found that male voters devalued "feminine" traits such as warmth and expressiveness in a presidential candidate. Their research does not, however, provide evidence that female voters value "feminine" qualities significantly more than male voters. They argue that this is consistent with Kinder's (1986) earlier work on trait evaluations of presidential candidates. One implication of Huddy and Terkildsen's work is competence and leadership traits, which in some work in political science are characterized as stereotypically masculine, are more important in the evaluations of presidential candidates than empathy traits.

Trent et al. (1993, 1997) found significant, albeit limited, differences in the traits males and females described as most important for an ideal presidential candidate. In their earlier work, females felt it was more important that the candidate had never been accused of violating the law, while males felt more strongly than females that the candidate be male. In their later work the only significant sex difference was that males more than females felt the candidate should be male.

While the role of party identification in and of itself to predict voting behavior on the national level has been debated in recent years (Miller, 1991), it is possible that party loyalty plays a role as a determinate of traits voters select to evaluate a president. Recent research has suggested that there may be differences in trait inferences of voters based on party identification.

For example, Trent et al. (1993, 1997) found some differences between Democrats and Republicans in the traits they considered important for an ideal presidential candidate. In their first study, four of the nine candidate characteristics

differed in the importance ratings assigned to them based on subjects' party identification. Republicans differed significantly from Democrats and Independents and felt it was more important that the candidate be male, a member of the majority race, of the highest moral character, and had served in the military. The most recent work of Trent et al. provides evidence that Democrats value experience in office more than Republicans or Independents, while Republicans rate being male, a member of the majority race, and of the highest moral character as more important than Democrats or Independents.

The research of Trent et al. (1993, 1997) reports mixed results concerning age differences in the traits voters view as most important for an ideal candidate. In their early work they found no significant age differences, but in their 1997 study nine of the 15 characteristics varied in importance based on age. Older voters (61+ years) attributed more importance to aggressive leadership, physical energy, membership in the majority race, and honesty.

The recent attention to individual voter differences in the use of traits to evaluate presidential candidates appears to be decidedly mixed. Much of this research also suffers from the sampling problems previously mentioned and does not specifically explore the traits of interest in the present study. The current study seeks to improve upon this understanding by using 1996 ANES data to examine differences in the use of competence, leadership, character, and empathy traits based on receiver characteristics such as sex, party identification, age, and religiosity of subjects.

RQ2: What effects, if any, do sex, political party identification, age, and religiosity have on subjects' use of competence, leadership, character, and empathy traits to evaluate presidential candidates?

Miller (1991) notes that politics is primarily a mediated experience. He argues that the focus of journalists on the "horse race" aspects of politics primes voters to utilize candidate traits more than issues or ideology when evaluating candidates. This assertion is consistent with much work in political communication on the effects of "horse race" media coverage of political events (Bennett, 1988; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Kenski, 1996; Patterson, 1994).

Some research suggests that mediated information about politics, particularly television coverage of political actors, primes voters to consider traits which are more easily portrayed visually in their evaluations of political sources (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). Leadership traits (decisiveness, energy, strength, charisma, inspirational public speaking, patriotism) may be particularly well suited for a visual medium and thus more frequently primed for viewers by television coverage. This would be consistent with Miller et al. (1986) who found that exposure to media in general was a significant predictor of references to candidate charisma.

At the same time, some have argued that a large portion of the negative coverage politicians receive focuses on character traits (Patterson, 1994; Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1998). According to this research, character traits, rather than leadership, should be most primed in the minds of heavy television viewers. The current study seeks to test these rival predictions to address which candidate traits are most utilized by high television viewers.

H2: The more an individual utilizes television for political information, the more they utilize leadership traits in the evaluation of presidential candidates.

As noted previously, there is much research that suggests an increase in television coverage of political events and sources (Hart, 1996). There is also ample evidence to suggest that the increased coverage is primarily negative. (Bennett, 1995; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). As Patterson (1994) notes from his content analysis of media coverage of presidential candidates from 1960-1992, since 1980 no major presidential candidate has received more positive media coverage than negative media coverage. Cappella and Jamieson (1997) and Schneider (1996) suggest that the disproportionate negative media coverage of presidential candidates has continued since 1992.

Research on media framing of news stories suggests an impact of media framing on the political judgements of viewers. Cappella and Jamieson (1997) argue that negative, strategically framed media coverage of presidential candidates primes voters to utilize negative character traits more often in the evaluations of political actors. Iyengar (1991) presents convincing evidence that episodically framed events alter viewers attribution of responsibility and world view.

More than two decades of research by Gerbner and colleagues (see Gerbner, 1973; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 1980; and Chandler, 1996) suggests that television viewing cultivates significant differences between high and low media consumers. The work developing and refining Cultivation Theory specifically suggests that heavy media consumers view the world more negatively than individuals who watch television less.

Taken together, this research suggests that heavy television viewers, fed a consistent diet of negative coverage of presidential candidates, will view presidential candidates more negatively. Little recent work has explored the relationship between

television viewing and use of traits to evaluate candidates. This study examines the idea that negative television coverage of presidential candidates will be associated with negative trait evaluations of presidential candidates.

H3: The more an individual utilizes television for political information, the more they utilize negative traits (leadership, competence, character, or empathy) in the evaluation of presidential candidates.

Funk (1996) argues that political knowledge plays an important role in trait evaluations of political sources, but has received little attention in the context of trait evaluations. Voters with high levels of political knowledge differ from less informed voters in a number of ways (Krosnick, 1990).

First, they process information in a more complex way (Fiske, Kinder, and Larter, 1983; Glass, 1985; Fiske, Lau, and Smith, 1990). Funk found that subjects with higher levels of political knowledge distinguished more between the content and valence of trait information provided about a candidate than did the less informed subjects. The less informed reacted more to the valence of the trait information, rather than the specific trait involved. Thus, well informed subjects differentiated more between highly competent and highly caring sources than did the less informed.

A second difference between individuals based on levels of political knowledge they possess is that more politically informed individuals tend to organize and process information more schematically (McGraw and Pinney, 1990). In addition, the schemas they utilize tend to be more differentiated than those of less informed voters.

Utilizing competence in the evaluation of political sources may require and reflect a deeper level of information processing than the use of other candidate traits. In

addition, competence assessments tend to be multidimensional based on various issues and performance considerations, and thus may reflect a more differentiated system of information processing on the part of those with higher levels of political knowledge.

Political knowledge may indirectly affect the valence of subjects' trait inferences. The interaction of political knowledge and television use is examined in the current study. Presidential candidates receive more negative than positive media coverage (Patterson, 1994). It is plausible that viewing negative media coverage of presidential candidates would produce more negative evaluations among media viewers, including those with higher levels of political knowledge. In other words, media effects on trait use may be consistent for respondents at different levels of political knowledge.

Some evidence suggests, however, that while those high in political knowledge may be more attentive to media coverage, they bring with them what Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt (1998) call a "stock of political information that lessens the media's persuasive effects." This "stock" may minimize negative effects of media on candidate evaluations such that those with more political knowledge may utilize more positive traits to evaluate candidates than those with less political knowledge.

H4: The more political knowledge an individual possesses, the more they utilize competence traits in their evaluation of presidential candidates.

H5: The more political knowledge an individual possesses, the more they utilize positive candidate traits (competence, leadership, character, and empathy) in the evaluation of presidential candidates.

As Funk (1996) notes, the literature concerning the relative importance of competence versus character traits is decidedly mixed. A potentially key factor yet to be

explored in the competence versus character debate is political disaffection. High levels of political disaffection indicate distrust for political officials and institutions, the perception that political actors are not genuinely concerned about the needs of typical individuals, and the belief that one cannot affect change in the political process.

It is possible that extreme levels of political disaffection alter those individuals' evaluations of presidential candidates. No recent work in the trait evaluation literature has focused on the role of political disaffection, thus little direct theoretical explanation currently exists for the role of disaffection in trait selection. Due to the lack of work in this area, the following predictions about relationships between disaffection and trait selection are largely exploratory and examine rival explanations. First, this study explores the role of disaffection in the selection of competence and character traits to evaluate presidential candidates. At least two plausible predictions exist for the relationship between disaffection and trait selection.

Political disaffection indicates a lack of trust for politicians and the political process, thus highly disaffected voters may utilize character traits more than competence traits in their evaluations of presidential candidates. Highly disaffected respondents may feel no politician is to be trusted ("they're all bums" mentality), and thus character traits would be more frequently activated in their evaluations of candidates.

This is not, however, the only plausible prediction. Highly disaffected respondents might be expected to utilize competence traits in their evaluations of candidates. If, for example, a person believes no politician is to be trusted, that person might utilize traits other than trustworthiness, honesty, morality, and integrity to evaluate these candidates. In other words, if a respondent believes no candidate possesses these

traits, it might be logical for that person to choose traits other than these with which to evaluate candidates. The current study tests these rival predictions.

H6: Subjects high in political disaffection utilize competence traits more than leadership, character, or empathy traits in their evaluations of presidential candidates.

Disaffection may affect not only the trait types chosen to evaluate presidential candidates, but also the valence of those trait types. Highly disaffected voters should utilize negative traits (competence, character, leadership, or empathy) more often than disaffected voters. Highly disaffected voters should think more negatively about politicians and the political process. That negativity should be reflected in the traits they use to evaluate candidates.

A plausible rival hypothesis exists however. The motivation levels of disaffected voters may be lower than less affected voters when processing political information and evaluating political sources. Lower motivation might be associated with a decrease in disaffected respondents use of traits of any kind in their evaluation of candidates. Disaffected respondents may lack the motivation to seriously appraise a candidate based on any criteria. These rival hypotheses are tested in the current study.

H7: As disaffection increases, individuals utilize negative traits (competence, leadership, character, or empathy) more to evaluate presidential candidates.

H8: As disaffection increases, individuals utilize traits (competence, character, empathy, or leadership) less in their evaluation of presidential candidates.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The goals of the current study include the examination of subjects' use of competence, character, leadership, and empathy traits in evaluating presidential candidates; the relative importance of the four trait types in the evaluation of presidential candidates; and the effects of receiver characteristics (sex, party identification, age, and religiosity), media use, political disaffection, and political knowledge in determining individuals' selection and use of competence, character, leadership, and empathy traits. This chapter details the methodological considerations to be used to examine these goals.

Participants

Participating in the 1996 ANES pre-election survey were 1714 United States citizens of voting age on or before November 5, 1996, residing in housing units other than on military reservations in the 48 coterminous states. 1544 of the 1714 (90%) were reinterviewed in the post-election survey.

Fifty-two percent of the sample were female. The average age of respondents was 45.5 years (SD=16.9). Sixty-one percent of respondents were married, 20 percent were widowed, divorced, or separated, and 19 percent had never been married. Eighty-five percent of the sample were Caucasian, 12 percent African-American, two percent Asian-American, and one percent American Indian. Thirty-seven percent had college degrees, 18 percent attended college but did not earn degrees, 32 percent had high school diplomas, and 13 percent had not earned a high school diploma. Sixty-seven percent of the sample were currently working at least twenty hours per week, while 16 percent were retired.

Procedure

Secondary data analysis will be performed on the 1996 American National Election Studies pre- and post-election surveys. As many have noted, secondary analysis is a common procedure used when creating an original instrument and collecting original data is either impossible, impractical, or inferior to previously existing data (Babbie, 1998; Fink and Kosecoff, 1985; Weisburg, 1989).

There are several reasons why the 1996 ANES data was chosen for use in the current study. First, national, multistage probability sampling was used to yield a large, nationally representative sample. Second, ANES response rates exceeded 70 percent which, as Babbie (1998) notes, is quite good for survey projects administered in the 1990s.

Third, ANES used both face-to-face and telephone interviews. These modes of survey administration have been shown to allow more subject elaboration and clarification of subject questions about potentially confusing survey items (Fink and Kosecoff, 1985; Weisburg, 1989), often resulting in more detailed responses relative to the use of self-administered surveys.

Fourth, while secondary analysis rarely provides the researcher with a perfect measure of the variables of interest, ANES data does allow measurement of all variables of interest in this study. A fifth advantage of using ANES is that it includes both open- and closed-ended items. As noted previously, open-ended items will be valuable as additional measures of the importance of competence, character, leadership, and empathy traits in the evaluation of presidential candidates.

Sixth, 1996 ANES surveys utilized computer assisted interviewing. CAI allowed

the names of the three major presidential candidates, as well as the candidate traits being studied, to be randomized for inclusion in the surveys. CAI prevents ordering effects common in many self-administered, pen-and-paper survey projects.

Finally, the general credibility of ANES should be emphasized. This was the twenty-fourth in a series of ANES projects conducted during the last 45 years. Funded by the National Science Foundation, the studies have been used extensively by political scientists and political communication researchers. The 1996 project was designed by twelve ANES Board members with extensive input from the academic community, pre-tested in multiple stages, and managed by a team of experts in political science, political communication, and survey methodology (Rosenstone, Kinder, Miller, and the American National Election Studies, 1997).

Description of ANES Surveys

Study Population. The study population for the 1996 ANES Pre/Post Election Study included all United States citizens of voting age on or before November 5, 1996. Only residents residing in housing units in the 48 coterminous states were used.

Sample Design. National, multistage area probability sampling was utilized. Subjects were identified in four stages of sampling. Primary stage sampling units (PSUs) were selected from 46 United States Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). These ranged in size from the six largest MSAs--New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, and San Francisco--to relatively small MSAs such as McAllen, Texas, and Steubenville, Ohio.

The second stage of sampling consisted of "area segments," made up of census blocks in the MSAs. These were stratified by geographic location and size. In the third

stage of sampling, for each area segment a listing was compiled of all housing units located within the segment. Finally, within each housing unit a complete listing of all eligible household members was prepared, and a single respondent was randomly selected to be interviewed (Rosenstone, et al., 1997).

Questionnaire Specifications. The 1996 ANES utilized computer-assisted interviewing (CAI). This afforded several advantages not possible using a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. Most relevant to the current study, CAI allowed randomization within batteries or sequences of items.

Series of questions about the same object or person were presented in randomized order. The example most relevant to the current study is the randomization of the series of the questions probing the likes and dislikes of the three major presidential candidates where the names of Clinton, Dole, and Perot were used randomly as the first, second, or third person to be asked about in a series.

In addition, closed-ended items probing respondents' perceptions that a candidate possessed certain traits were also randomized. Both candidate position and order of traits were randomized to avoid ordering effects which may have occurred had questions been asked in the same order throughout the study. As Rosenstone et al. (1997) noted, randomization procedures were preprogrammed into the computer application of the questionnaire so they were independent of any events which may have occurred during interviewing.

Study Administration. The data set to be used in the current study was collected in two phases, one for the pre-election survey and one for the post-election survey. Data were collected for the pre-election survey from September 3, 1996 through November 4,

1996. The average length of interview was 74 minutes. The response rate for the pre-election survey was 71 percent. Respondents were randomly assigned to telephone or face-to-face interviews. For both modes, the same computerized questionnaire was used and the same individuals conducted the interviews.

The same subjects interviewed in the pre-election survey were used in the post-election survey. Data was collected for the post-election survey from November 6, 1996 through December 31, 1996. Average interview length was 70 minutes, and the reinterview response rate was 90 percent. The 180 subjects who could not be reinterviewed were treated as missing data in the current study (see section on missing data procedures for elaboration). Again, subjects were randomly assigned to either face-to-face or telephone interviews.

Weighting Procedures and Sampling Errors. An equal probability sample of U.S. households was obtained in the 1996 pre- and post-election surveys. However, as Rosenstone et al. (1997) noted, at the final stage of sampling one member of a household was randomly selected for interview. Since the number of eligible adults varied depending on the household, certain types of respondents may have been unequally selected. A respondent selection weight was constructed by ANES administrators. This weight is used in all analyses in the current study to compensate for unequal selection factors. Readers interested in how the particular weight was calculated are referred to Rosenstone et al (1997).

To assist ANES analysts, administrators utilized the PC SUDAAN program to compute sampling errors for the current data set. The following table summarizes this information.

Table 3.1
Approximate Standard Errors for Percentages

For percentage estimates near:					
Sample N	50%	40	30	20	10
		60	70	80	90
The approximate standard error of the percentage is:					
100	6.73	6.59	6.17	5.38	4.04
200	4.76	4.66	4.36	3.81	2.86
300	3.89	3.81	3.56	3.11	2.33
400	3.37	3.30	3.08	2.69	2.02
500	3.01	2.95	2.76	2.41	1.81
750	2.48	2.41	2.25	1.97	1.47
1000	2.13	2.09	1.95	1.70	1.28
1250	1.90	1.87	1.75	1.52	1.14
1500	1.74	1.70	1.59	1.39	1.04
1714	1.63	1.59	1.49	1.30	0.98

Operationalization of Variables: Independent Measures

The study incorporates 24 independent variables to help answer the eight hypotheses and two research questions of interest. Only three of these variables are single-item measures. The remaining 21 are comprised of multiple items based upon previous theory and research and acceptable levels of internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha, among the most conservative of reliability estimates according to Carmines and Zeller (1979), is used to calculate internal consistency for each measure.

Television. To examine the effects of television viewing on respondents' use of traits in their evaluations of presidential candidates, four variables were created. First, a 20-point, four item measure of both attention and exposure to television newscasts will be included (Cronbach's alpha= .81; M=8.04; SD=4.38; 0=no television use; 20=highest television use). Respondents were asked how many days in the last week they watched national newscasts (0=none; 4=every day) and local network newscasts (0=none; 4=every

day). In addition they were asked how much attention they devoted to their viewing of the national and local newscasts they watched. Attention items were five-point scales (0=none; 4=a great deal).

Television attention items were included for the first time in the 1996 ANES survey and represent what some deem more precise measures of media use than simple exposure items (Bartels, 1993; Rosenstone et al., 1997; Zaller, 1992). Thus it was decided to combine the two measures into one television use variable. The items included were developed in the 1995 Pilot Study and pretested for that study and again before being used in the 1996 surveys.

Many Americans receive some of their political information from sources other than evening newscasts. To supplement the television news attention scales, items measuring exposure to television programs featuring news about the presidential campaign (other than regular newscasts), presidential debates, and negative political advertising are included.

A single, 4-pt item (0=no programs watched, 3="a good many" programs watched; $M=1.2$, $SD=1.0$) measures exposure to campaign programs. A variable measuring exposure to the presidential debates is also used in the current study. As many political communication researchers have argued, televised debates often have a strong impact on candidate images, facilitate political learning, and are especially conducive to facilitating the trait inference processes of voters in the current study (Graber, 1987; Hellweg, Pfau, and Brydon, 1992; Jamieson, 1988; Zhu, Milavsky, and Biswas, 1994). The three-point debate scale includes two dichotomous variables in which respondents indicate if they have watched the first and/or second presidential debate (2=watched

neither debate, 4=watched both debates; $M=2.98$, $SD=.85$).

It is also important to measure exposure to negative political advertising. As Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1996) and Pinkleton (1997) note, negative political advertising in presidential campaigns has continued to increase. Pinkleton writes that there is much evidence to suggest that negative political advertising affects candidate evaluations. For example, Kaid and Boydston (1987) reported that as subjects' exposure to negative political advertising increased, negative evaluations of candidates in the four areas critical to this study--competence, character, leadership, and empathy--increased significantly. Indeed, much work in political communication supports a positive relationship between exposure to negative advertising and negative candidate evaluations (Shapiro and Reiger, 1992; Johnson-Cartee and Copeland, 1991).

A variable was created to measure exposure to political ads. An ANES item asked subjects to provide information about political advertisements in the presidential campaign that they recalled. Up to five responses were accepted, and each was coded according to the political advertisement to which it referred. Recall of all specific details of the advertisement were not necessary for the response to be coded. These responses were recoded to create one summary variable in the current study. The political advertising variable created for the current study measures the total number of advertisements recalled and ranged from 0-5 ($M=.57$; $SD=.73$).

Political Knowledge. Consensus continues to build in the political science literature that political expertise is best measured by political knowledge scales (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1993; Goren, 1997; Zaller, 1992). The 1996 ANES post-election survey included four items which measured respondents knowledge of political and

government officials. Respondents were asked if they knew what job was held by Al Gore, William Rehnquist, Newt Gingrich, and Boris Yeltsin and answers were coded as correct or incorrect. Answers of "Don't Know" were coded as incorrect (see section on missing data procedures for elaboration). These items were deemed by the author to be far superior to a self-report measure of political knowledge included in the pre-election survey. The four political knowledge items are combined in the current study to create a four-point political knowledge scale (Cronbach's $\alpha=.70$, $M=1.98$, $SD=1.3$).

Political Disaffection. A series of items designed to measure respondents' attitudes toward government, political officials, and the political process is included in the 1996 ANES pre- and post-election surveys. As Pharr (1997) notes, political disaffection is often operationalized in the political science literature as a combination of (1) distrust of government and political officials, (2) perception that government and political officials lack genuine concern for average citizens, and (3) low levels of political efficacy. Accordingly, these three dimensions of disaffection are included in the current study.

The political distrust variable was created by combining four items measuring respondents' trust in government in general, trust in the federal government's ability to "do the right thing," trust that political officials manage tax money appropriately, and the perception that politicians are "crooked." The reliability of the 9-point distrust scale was .61 (4=high trust in government, 12=low trust in government; $M=10.3$, $SD=1.5$).

An important component of disaffection is the perception that political officials lack empathy. A two-item, 5-point scale is used with a reliability of .66 (0=politicians are very concerned about people like me, 5=politicians are completely unconcerned about

people like me; $M=3.8$, $SD=1.1$).

Political disaffection also encompasses what is often referred to in the political science literature as political efficacy, or the extent to which an individual believes they are capable of influencing government and/or political processes (Austin and Pinkleton, 1995; Erber and Lau, 1990; Gans, 1995). A two-item, 9-point scale (Cronbach's $\alpha=.67$) is used which examines respondents' perceptions of the value of voting and their influence in the political process (0=high efficacy, 9=low efficacy; $M=5.9$, $SD=2.3$).

Candidate Traits. Several closed-ended items were included in the 1996 ANES pre-election survey to measure respondents' perceptions that the three major presidential candidates possessed certain traits. The order of Clinton, Dole, and Perot were randomized as was the order of the traits. The ANES item measuring perceptions that candidates possessed certain traits were recoded to represent the four candidate trait types of interest in the current study. This recoding was accomplished in the following manner: leadership skills (leadership); intelligence and knowledge (competence); morality and honesty (character); and really cares about people like me and compassionate (empathy). Each of the eight traits previously mentioned were included in the ANES survey for Clinton. However, for Dole and Perot, ANES included all items except intelligence and compassion.

ANES items were recoded to create 12 new variables for the current study. These variables measure respondents' perceptions that each of the three candidates possesses competence, character, leadership, and empathy traits. For example, a scale was constructed to measure respondents' perceptions that competence traits accurately described Clinton by combining two, 4-point (3=describes Clinton extremely well, 0=not

well at all) items tapping intelligence and knowledge. The theoretical justification for the use of the four candidate trait types and the operationalization of each is consistent with a history of influential work in political science and communication (Kinder, 1986; McCroskey and Young, 1981; Miller et al., 1986) as well as more recent work (Funk, 1996, 1997).

For Clinton, Dole, and Perot, character is operationalized using the morality and trustworthiness items. For Clinton, competence includes the intelligence and knowledgeable items. Since ANES did not include intelligence items for Dole and Perot, competence for these two candidates was operationalized as knowledgeable. For Clinton, two items measuring empathy are used, including really cares about people and compassion. ANES did not include a compassion item for Dole or Perot, so empathy for these two candidates is operationalized using the really cares about people item. For all three candidates, leadership is operationalized using the leadership skills item. Table 3.2 summarizes statistics for the 12 variables.

Table 3.2
Summary Statistics for Candidate Trait Variables

Variable	Alpha	Mean	Scale Range	SD
Clinton competence	.80	4.3	0-6	1.3
Clinton character	.85	2.4	0-6	1.7
Clinton leadership	*	1.6	0-3	.9
Clinton empathy	.84	3.4	0-6	1.6
Dole competence	*	2.0	0-3	.7
Dole character	.81	3.8	0-6	1.4
Dole leadership	*	1.7	0-3	.8
Dole empathy	*	1.3	0-3	.8
Perot competence	*	1.8	0-3	.8
Perot character	.72	3.5	0-6	1.2
Perot leadership	*	1.3	0-3	.9
Perot empathy	*	1.2	0-3	.9

* Indicates one-item variable

Receiver Characteristics: Age, Sex, Party, and Religiosity. In order to examine the effects of receiver characteristics on respondents' use of traits to evaluate presidential candidates, four variables are included in the current study. Single-item measures of respondent age ($M=45.5$) and sex (52% female) are used, as is a cumulative variable for party identification (while a single item, this 7-point item is a summary of three ANES variables measuring party preference and strength of that preference; 0=strong Republican, 6=strong Democrat; $M=2.7$, $SD=2.1$).

Because religiosity is a more complex concept than age or sex, a three-item, 8-point scale was constructed using items which measure the amount of guidance the respondent received from religion, amount of time spent reading the Bible, and amount of time spent praying. The reliability for this scale is .72 (0=low religiosity, 8=high religiosity; $M=5.9$, $SD=2.1$).

Operationalization of Variables: Dependent Measures

Four measures of the importance respondents' attributed to competence, character, leadership, and empathy traits in the evaluation of presidential candidates were created. These serve as criterion measures for several of the study's hypotheses.

Thirty ANES items were used which examined responses to two questions: (1)"Is there anything that would make you vote for CANDIDATE NAME?" and (2)"Is there anything that would make you vote against CANDIDATE NAME?" A maximum of five "likes" and "dislikes" were coded for each respondent for Clinton, Dole, and Perot. The likes/dislikes items have been crucial to many candidate traits studies (Bean, 1993; Kinder, 1986; Kinder and Sears, 1985; Miller et al., 1986; Page, 1978).

The logic behind using these items, as Miller (1991) articulates, is that respondents are likely to talk about the things that are important to them, be they positive or negative pieces of information. Much research in political science has coded these responses into three categories--references to candidate traits, issues, or political parties--in an attempt to determine the importance of each to candidate evaluations. Research has also examined the relative importance of competence, character, leadership, and empathy traits by utilizing the likes/dislikes items.

Responses to the 30 likes/dislikes items were coded by ANES researchers into more than 400 categories. To construct the variables for the current study, relevant ANES likes/dislikes categories were recoded to represent one of Kinder's (1986) four candidate trait types: competence, character, leadership, and empathy. These variables represent how often respondents use a candidate trait type in their evaluations of the three candidates. The more important the trait to the respondent, the more likely they are to use

that trait when asked to evaluate the candidate via likes/dislikes questions. While scores on each scale could have ranged from 0-30, the competence variable produced a 0-7 range (0=no references to competence traits, 7=seven references to competence traits; $M=.9$, $SD=1.2$), character a 0-6 range ($M=.8$, $SD=1.1$), leadership a 0-7 range ($M=.5$, $SD=.9$), and empathy a 0-2 range ($M=.1$, $SD=.3$). See Appendix A for frequency distributions for each of these variables.

The four candidate trait types were chosen based on Kinder's (1986) influential work in the trait evaluation literature. They are consistent with work by Miller et al. (1986) which suggests the importance of competence, integrity, reliability, and charisma traits. Kinder's work is also largely consistent with McCroskey's enduring research program in communication studies which contends that competence, character, and perceived caring are important dimensions of source credibility (Teven and McCroskey, 1997; McCroskey and Young, 1981; McCroskey, 1966).

ANES subcategories for the candidate likes/dislikes items were recoded into the four candidate trait types of interest in this study. The recoding was guided by ANES coding procedures and past theory and research in political science and communication.

Items coded by ANES researchers as "candidate experience and ability" were recoded as competence. This is consistent with work by Glass (1985), Kinder (1986), and Miller et al. (1986) as well as McCroskey's work on competence in the communication literature (Teven and McCroskey, 1997). Six additional categories, originally labeled by ANES as "personal qualities" of candidates were also coded as competence. These included well informed/not informed, intelligent/unintelligent, experienced/inexperienced. The inclusion of each is consistent with past

operationalizations of competence.

Character responses were drawn from the ANES category "personal qualities." This recoding is also consistent with past work in political science and communication identifying character as a dimension of source evaluations (Kinder, 1986; McCroskey and Young, 1981).

Responses in the ANES category labeled "leadership" were recoded as leadership traits. In addition, the following items were coded as leadership: energetic leader, political judgement, inspiring public speaker. These are consistent with current conceptualizations of leadership abilities (Jamieson, 1998; Golden, 1997).

Finally, responses from the ANES category "personal qualities" were coded as empathy traits. Work in political science suggests the importance of empathy traits to candidate evaluations (Funk, 1996, 1997; Kinder, 1986). In addition, recent work by Teven and McCroskey (1997) in the communication literature suggests that perceived caring is a significant dimension of source evaluations. While the ANES "personal qualities" category was used for recoding of character and empathy traits, the character and empathy traits used in the current study are conceptually distinct and mutually exclusive. Table 3 summarizes the specific ANES items and how each was recoded.

Table 3.3

ANES Candidate Likes/Dislikes Responses Recoded as Competence, Character, Leadership, and Empathy

Competence

Qualifications/general ability

Qualified/not qualified for office

Experienced/inexperienced

Dependable/undependable or reliable/unreliable

Political record (includes campaign promises kept/not kept)

Political/government/military experience or lack thereof

Foreign affairs experience or lack thereof

Hard-working/getting things done/dedicated or lazy/not ambitious/not getting things done

Intelligent/unintelligent

Well informed about issues/uninformed about issues

Character

Honest/dishonest or trustworthy/not trustworthy

Sincere/insincere

Integrity/no integrity

Principles/morals or lack thereof

Religiosity

Selfless/craves power/uses office for personal gain

Emotionally stable/unstable

Devoted to family

Good/bad person

Humble/proud

Racist/not racist

Leadership

Strong/decisive or weak/indecisive

Inspiring/charismatic/person you can follow or uninspiring/not charismatic

Makes people feel good about country

People have confidence in him

Able to communicate with different groups/interests

Good/bad at explaining his positions to the people

Inspirational public speaker or lack thereof

Youth/energy or lack thereof

Optimism/pessimism about the future of the country

Dignified/not dignified

Empathy

Listens to what people have to say

Cares about solving people's problems

Kind/Cold

Compassionate/Aloof

Priority is to help people

Cares about the common man

Cares about involving people in the process

General references to interpersonal skills

Finally, four dependent measures are utilized in the current study to examine liking, feeling, and likelihood of voting for the three major candidates. Each is a single-item measure. An 11-point like/dislike scale (0=strongly dislike, 10=strongly like) is used for Clinton ($M=5.7$, $SD=3.0$), Dole ($M=5.3$, $SD=2.3$), and Perot ($M=4.1$, $SD=2.4$). In addition, traditional "feeling thermometer" measures are used for each candidate. Both pre-election and post-election feeling thermometers are used in an attempt to examine changes in the importance of candidate trait types over time. The voting item asked respondents who they were most likely to vote for and included responses for the three major candidates, none of the above, and specific candidate names other than the major candidates.

Missing Data Procedures

Several possibilities exist for handling missing survey data (Babbie, 1998; Fowler, 1993; Weisberg, 1989). Rather than employing one solution for each variable the current study treats each variable separately in determining how to handle missing cases. It is the belief of the author that because missing data in ANES appear for varying reasons, and because each variable used in the study is conceptually distinct, employing one classification scheme for all missing data would be unwise and potentially misleading. The following section details missing data procedures for the three major sources of

missing data in the current study.

A common challenge confronting survey researchers is to determine how to classify "don't know" responses. A variety of alternatives are available to deal with this challenge, including the common practice of recoding these responses as a value in the scale (Babbie, 1998). It is important to note that, except for measures of political knowledge, the items eliciting "don't know" responses in the current study did not conceptually support assigning values to these responses. In other words, in the current study there is no logical justification for assigning values to these responses, thus they are classified as missing. The one exception is political knowledge to which responses of "don't know" are coded as incorrectly identifying the political figure.

Since the reinterview rate for the post-election survey was 90 percent, 180 subjects were not reinterviewed. These are coded as missing data in the ANES codebook. As Rosenstone et al. (1997) note, there were no systematic patterns for the inability to reinterview these 180 subjects, thus they will be classified as missing in the current study.

Finally, some observations were coded as missing by ANES and deemed "inappropriate" because respondents answered in a particular manner to a prior question. For example, if a respondent claimed religion was not important to them, they were not asked how much guidance religion provided in their life. Several of these instances were examined, and a decision was made to assign values to these observations because such a decision is supported conceptually. For example, missing cases for the religiosity item previously cited are labeled "inappropriate" because respondents indicated that religion was not important to them. These are assigned values of 0 in the following item because this suggests that religion also provided no guidance in their life. This decision was also

made concerning missing values for the television attention and campaign programs variables (watching no programs suggested the respondent also paid no attention to programs).

Data Analysis Preview

The first goal of the study is the examination of how often respondents use competence, character, leadership, and empathy traits (RQ1) in their evaluations of presidential candidates. Descriptive statistics will summarize the number of references to each of the four trait types (positive and negative), number of subjects who used each trait type (positive and negative), number of positive traits used (four trait types combined), number of subjects who used positive traits, number of negative traits used (four trait types combined), and the number of subjects who used negative traits. In addition, references to each trait type (positive, negative, and total) will be calculated for each candidate.

The second goal of the study is to examine the relative importance of each trait type in predicting candidate evaluations and vote choice (H1a-H1c). Five dependent measures will be used, including candidate liking (1-10), pre-election feeling thermometer ratings (0-100), post-election feeling thermometer ratings (0-100), job performance (for Clinton only; no ANES item measured this for Dole or Perot), and vote choice (Clinton/Dole/Perot). Independent measures will consist of the 12 closed-ended items measuring perceptions that each candidate possesses each of the four trait types (see Table 2). In addition, variables representing respondents' party identification and evaluations of economic conditions will be included in the model.

Multiple regression equations will be calculated for each candidate, with the

independent variables representing perceptions that the candidate possessed each of the four trait types. Standardized regression coefficients will be used to compare the importance of each independent measure relative to the five dependent measures, and the multiple correlation coefficient will be reported for each equation. Unstandardized regression coefficients will also be reported. Logistic regressions will be calculated for the categorical dependent measure of vote choice. The 12 independent variables mentioned previously, along with measures of party identification and evaluations of the economy, will be used as independent measures for the logistical regressions. Both regression coefficients and odds-ratios will be reported for the logistic regressions.

The final goal of the study is to identify variables which may affect the selection and use of traits in the evaluation of presidential candidates. To measure the effects of receiver characteristics (RQ2), several measures will be employed. T-tests with Bonferroni corrections (Hays, 1997) with sex as the independent variable and the total number of references to each trait type (positive and negative) as the dependent measures will be calculated. To measure effect sizes, Cohen's *d* statistic will be calculated for each significant t-test.

The full model to examine the determinants of candidate trait type use will include receiver characteristics (sex, party identification, age, and religiosity), four television use variables, three disaffection variables, and the political knowledge measure, and will be tested using multiple regression. The dependent variable in each multiple regression equation will be the number of references to each trait type.

To test the hypotheses concerning television use as a determinant of trait inferences, multiple regression equations will be calculated. For hypothesis two, the

number of references to leadership traits will be regressed on the full model previously specificized. For hypothesis three, the dependent variable will be use of negative traits.

To test the hypotheses concerning the effects of political knowledge on use of candidate trait types, the use of competence traits (H4) and the use of positive traits (H6) will be regressed on the full model. Finally, disaffection will be examined as a potential determinant of trait inferences. Multiple regression equations will be calculated by regressing the use of competence traits (H6), negative traits (H7), and traits in general (H8) on the full model.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter provides the results of the current study. The results are organized according to the three goals of the study. Chapter five will provide detailed interpretations of these results, as well as implications of the results for theory and research.

Results from part one of the study include summary statistics for the use of character, competence, empathy, and leadership traits in the open-ended likes/dislikes questions. Results for part two of the study consist of ordinary least squares and logistic regression analyses of the effects of the four candidate trait types on candidate approval. The results in part two are a product of the closed-ended candidate evaluation measures. Results for part three of the study include regression analyses and T-tests for the effects of receiver characteristics on trait selection and use.

Use of Candidate Traits

Research Question One. The first research question explored the use of character, competence, empathy, and leadership traits in the ANES open-ended candidate likes/dislikes items. The rationale for the use of these items and recoding procedures were detailed in chapter three. It is possible to describe the use of each trait type in a number of ways. The following section details the number of trait references across subjects, references to each trait type across subjects, subjects who utilized each trait type, and references to each trait type by candidate.

The total number of trait references was 3,884. The mean of trait references for each subject (N=1,714) was 2.3. Seventy-two percent of subjects made at least one trait

reference. Of the 3,884 trait references, 51% were negative (N=1,995). Fifty-seven percent of subjects cited at least one negative trait, and the mean use of negative traits was 1.1.

Competence traits were the most commonly cited trait type. Thirty-eight percent of trait references were references to competence (N=1,482). The majority of competence references across candidates were positive (67%). Character traits comprised 36% of trait references (N=1,419), while the majority of those were negative across candidates (65%). Twenty-two percent of trait references were references to leadership (N=852). The majority of leadership references across candidates were negative (57%). Only 3% of trait references pertained to empathy (N=134), with 74% positive.

Table 4.1
Trait References Across Candidates

Trait Type	Total		Positive		Negative	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Character	1419	36	497	35	922	65
Competence	1482	38	995	67	487	33
Empathy	134	3	99	74	35	26
Leadership	852	22	365	43	487	57

NOTE: All references were coded as either positive or negative. Percentages in the positive and negative columns represent percentage of references to the particular schema. Percentages in the total columns represent percentage of total trait references.

The use of candidate trait types can also be calculated according to the number of subjects who utilized each. Forty-nine percent of subjects (N=839) made at least one competence reference, while 48% (N=823) referenced at least one character trait. Thirty-three percent of subjects (N=567) utilized at least one leadership trait, while only 7% of subjects (N=113) cited empathy traits.

Character references were the most common type of negative reference. Thirty-

nine percent of subjects (N=667) made at least one negative character reference. Twenty-three percent of subjects made negative competence references (N=392), and 22% (N=379) of subjects made negative leadership references. Only 2% of subjects offered a negative reference to empathy (N=34).

Competence references were the most common type of positive reference. Thirty-six percent (N=609) of subjects cited positive competence traits. Positive references to character (14%; N=246), leadership (10%; N=168), and empathy (5%; N=83) were much less common. Competence and empathy were the only traits for which positive references outnumbered negative references.

Two important differences emerged between the results of this study and past candidate evaluation work. In the work of Miller et al. (1986), character traits were not cited as often as in the current study. In Miller's analysis of ANES likes/dislikes questions from 1980 and 1984, for example, his integrity dimension (labeled character in the current study) accounted for only 16% of trait responses. In the current study, character references represented 36% of all trait references. Clearly, ANES respondents in 1996 cited character references more often in the likes/dislikes items than respondents in the past.

A second difference concerns the valence of the references cited in the likes/dislikes questions. In Miller's (1986) work, competence and leadership were the trait types most often used negatively in 1980 and 1984. In the current study, negative character references were most common and were cited by almost 40 percent of all respondents. Negative competence traits were used by only 23% of 1996 ANES respondents, and negative leadership traits were cited by only 22% of respondents.

Table 4.2
Number of Subjects Who Utilized Candidate Trait Types

Candidate Trait	Total		Positive		Negative	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Character	823	48	246	14	667	39
Competence	839	49	609	36	392	23
Empathy	113	7	83	5	34	2
Leadership	567	33	168	10	379	22

NOTE: Since categories were not mutually exclusive (ie., a subject could cite any combination of positive and negative traits for each schema), percentages do not equal 100.

It was also possible to calculate the number of times subjects attributed trait types to each of the three candidates. Clinton received more overall trait references and negative trait references than any candidate. Thirty-five percent (N=1,346) of all trait references pertained to Clinton. Forty-two percent (N=812) of all negative trait references pertained to Clinton. Clinton received almost three times as many negative references as Dole, and more than twice the negative references directed toward Perot.

Forty-one percent of references to Clinton were character traits (N=547), and 82% of those were negative. Indeed, more character references were directed to Clinton than any candidate. Thirty-one percent of references to Clinton were competence traits (N=415), and 63% of those were positive. Clinton received more leadership references than any of the three candidates (N=321), but 64% of those were negative. Forty-seven percent of all empathy references pertained to Clinton and almost all of these (97%; N=63) were positive.

Dole received 33% of trait references (N=1,282), but only 19% of negative trait references (N=362). Dole received the most competence references of the three candidates (N=578) and 82% of those were positive. Dole was the only candidate to

receive mostly positive character references. Of the 404 references to Dole's character, 77% were positive. However, 70% of leadership references to Dole were negative (N=259) and empathy references to Dole were almost evenly split with 51% negative (N=41).

Perot received 32% (N=1,256) of trait references and 39% (N=755) of negative trait references. Perot received 489 competence references, and 53% of these were negative. Perot was the only candidate to receive more negative than positive competence references. In terms of character references, 465 were directed to Perot and, like Clinton, 82% of those were negative. Perot was the only candidate with more positive than negative leadership references. He received 273 leadership references, and 63% were positive. Perot received only 29 empathy references and 59% were positive.

Table 4.3
References to Candidate Trait Types by Candidate

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Character	97 (18%)	450 (82%)	547 (39%)	312 (77%)	92 (23%)	404 (28%)	83 (18%)	382 (82%)	465 (33%)
Competence	260 (63)	155 (37)	415 (28)	510 (88)	68 (12)	578 (39)	228 (47)	261 (53)	489 (33)
Empathy	61 (97)	2 (3)	63 (47)	20 (49)	21 (51)	41 (31)	17 (59)	12 (41)	29 (22)
Leadership	116 (36)	205 (64)	321 (38)	78 (30)	181 (70)	259 (30)	173 (63)	100 (37)	273 (32)
A=Clinton positive	D=Dole positive		G=Perot positive						
B=Clinton negative	E=Dole negative		H=Perot negative						
C=Clinton total	F=Dole total		I=Perot total						

NOTE: Percentages for total columns (C,F,I) represent percentage of references to that schema. Percentages for all other columns represent percentage of references to that schema which were positive or negative for each candidate. For example, negative character references were 82% of Clinton character references.

Table 4.4
Valence of Trait References by Candidate

	Clinton	Dole	Perot
Character	-	+	-
Competence	+	+	-
Empathy	+	-	+
Leadership	-	-	+

Importance of Trait Types in Candidate Evaluations

The following section details the results of part two of the current study. The results for hypotheses 1a-1c were obtained by using the 12 closed-ended, candidate evaluation measures as independent variables and measures of liking, feeling, and vote choice as dependent measures. Recoding and operationalization for these measures was discussed in detail in chapter three of this dissertation. Table 4.5 is included to summarize the following section of results.

Hypothesis One. The first hypothesis predicted that competence (H1a), leadership (H1b), and empathy (H1c) traits would be more important predictors of candidate evaluations than character. Five measures of candidate evaluation were included in the study. These measures included liking for the candidate, pre-election "feeling thermometer" measures, post-election "feeling thermometer" measures, rating of job performance, and vote choice. The results of hypothesis one will be discussed relative to each measure of approval and for each of the three candidates. For clarity, in the following sections hypothesis 1a will be labeled the competence hypothesis, 1b the leadership hypothesis, and 1c the empathy hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1a stated that competence would be more important than character as a predictor of candidate evaluations. Relative to liking for Clinton, this hypothesis was not supported. In fact, character ($B=.29$; $p<.0000$) was the second strongest predictor of liking for Clinton, and competence was the only variable in the model which was not significant.

Hypothesis 1b predicted that leadership would be more important than character in predicting candidate evaluations. This hypothesis was supported in relation to liking

for Clinton. Leadership ($B=.19$; $p<.0000$) was, in fact, the strongest predictor of liking for Clinton.

Hypothesis 1c predicted that empathy would be a more significant predictor than character in candidate evaluations. This hypothesis was not supported for liking of Clinton. While empathy ($B=.17$; $p<.0000$) was a significant predictor of liking for Clinton, character ($B=.29$; $p<.0000$) was a stronger predictor.

Perceptions of Clinton's economic performance and party identification were included in the model. Both were significant predictors of liking, but not of the magnitude of leadership and character. Party identification ($B=.24$; $p<.0000$) was the third strongest predictor of liking, and economic performance ($B=.13$; $p<.0000$) was the fifth largest predictor behind empathy.

The competence hypothesis (1a) was not supported relative to liking of Dole. Character ($B=.14$; $p<.0000$) was a stronger predictor of liking than competence ($B=.05$; $p<.04$). Both leadership (1b) and empathy (1c) hypotheses were supported for liking of Dole. Empathy ($B=.24$; $p<.0000$) and leadership ($B=.17$; $p<.0000$) were the strongest predictors of liking for Dole. Economic performance ($B=-.06$; $p<.01$) and party identification ($B=-.25$; $p<.0000$) were significant, albeit weaker, predictors of liking for Dole than empathy and leadership. The negative standardized regression coefficients for these two variables suggested that as perceptions of Clinton's economic performance and identification with the Democratic Party increased, liking for Dole decreased.

Competence (1a), leadership (1b), and empathy (1c) hypotheses were all supported for liking of Perot. Character and party identification were the only predictors in the model which were not significant. Leadership ($B=.28$; $p<.0000$) was the strongest

predictor of liking for Perot, followed by empathy ($B=.24$; $p<.0000$), competence ($B=.13$; $p<.01$), and economic performance ($B=-.11$; $p<.01$).

Hypotheses 1a-1c were also tested in relationship to feeling thermometer measures taken before the election. The competence (1a), leadership (1b), and empathy (1c) hypotheses were all rejected for pre-election measures of feeling toward Clinton. Competence ($B=.03$; $p<.03$), empathy ($B=.18$; $p<.0000$), and leadership ($B=.20$; $p<.0000$) were each significant predictors of feelings toward Clinton, but the magnitudes of the coefficients were smaller than the magnitude of the coefficient for character ($B=.27$; $p<.0000$). Character was the strongest predictor of pre-election feelings toward Clinton. Economic performance ($B=.20$; $p<.0000$) and party identification ($B=.18$; $p<.0000$) were also significant.

Relative to pre-election feelings toward Dole, leadership (1b) and empathy (1c) hypotheses were supported, but the competence hypothesis (1a) was not supported. Empathy ($B=.28$; $p<.0000$) was the strongest predictor of pre-election feelings toward Dole. Leadership ($B=.19$; $p<.0000$) was of slightly greater magnitude than character ($B=.17$; $p<.0000$), while perception of Dole's competence was not a significant predictor of pre-election feelings. Party identification ($B=-.24$; $p<.0000$) was a particularly strong predictor of feelings toward Dole. Economic performance ($B=-.09$; $p<.0001$) was significant but the weakest of significant predictors of pre-election feelings toward Dole.

Competence (1a), leadership (1b), and empathy (1c) hypotheses were all supported for pre-election feelings toward Perot. Character ($B=.12$; $p<.02$), while significant, mattered less than leadership ($B=.27$; $p<.0000$), empathy ($B=.19$; $p<.0000$), and competence ($B=.14$; $p<.003$) for feelings toward Perot. Economic performance ($B=-$

.15; $p < .002$) and party identification ($B = .19$; $p < .0000$) were both significant predictors. This suggests that prior to the election subjects who approved of economic conditions felt more negatively about Perot, Democrats felt more favorably toward Perot than Republicans.

Few differences in pre- and post-election feeling measures were found. The influences of character, competence, empathy, and party identification remained almost constant from pre-election to post-election feeling thermometer measures for each candidate. For Clinton and Dole, empathy and leadership continued to be stronger predictors of feelings than character. Character, however, continued to be a stronger predictor than competence, which was not significant for either candidate.

Leadership remained constant for Clinton and continued to be the strongest predictor of feelings toward Clinton. In post-election measures, the effects of leadership increased for Dole and decreased for Perot. The only other notable difference in pre- and post-election feeling measures was the effect of economic performance. This became a weaker predictor of post-election feeling measures for each candidate and was not significant for post-election feelings toward Dole.

Hypotheses 1a-1c were also tested relative to job performance ratings of Clinton. No equivalent ANES measures existed for Dole or Perot. Economic performance was the strongest predictor of job performance ratings for Clinton ($B = .32$; $p < .0000$). Party identification ($B = .16$; $p < .0000$) was also a significant predictor. Only the leadership hypothesis (1b) was supported relative to job performance ratings of Clinton. Character ($B = .15$; $p < .0000$) was a significant predictor, but competence was not significant. Empathy ($B = .12$; $p < .0000$) was significant but the coefficient was of smaller magnitude

than the coefficient for character. Leadership ($B=.19$; $p<.0000$) was a stronger predictor of job performance for Clinton than character. Table 4.5 summarizes the effects of trait types on candidate evaluations for each candidate.

Table 4.5
Multiple Regression Analyses of Effects of Candidate Traits, Economy, and Party Identification on Candidate Evaluations

	Liking	Pre-election Feeling	Post-election Feeling	Job Satisfaction
Multiple R (Clinton)	.75	.76	.73	.51
Clinton Character	B=.29 p<.0000	B=.27 p<.0000	B=.27 p<.0000	B=.15 p<.0000
Clinton Competence	B=.01 p<.42	B=.03 p<.04	B=.01 p<.43	B=.04 p<.09
Clinton Empathy	B=.17 p<.0000	B=.18 p<.0000	B=.21 p<.0000	B=.12 p<.0000
Clinton Leadership	B=.19 p<.0000	B=.20 p<.0000	B=.21 p<.0000	B=.19 p<.0000
Economy	B=.13 p<.0000	B=.20 p<.0000	B=.15 p<.0000	B=.32 p<.0000
Party Identification	B=.24 p<.0000	B=.18 p<.0000	B=.20 p<.0000	B=.16 p<.0000
Multiple R (Dole)	.45	.52	.41	NA*
Dole Character	B=.14 p<.0000	B=.17 p<.0000	B=.15 p<.0000	NA
Dole Competence	B=.05 p<.04	B=.03 p<.17	B=.05 p<.07	NA
Dole Empathy	B=.24 p<.0000	B=.28 p<.0000	B=.23 p<.0000	NA
Dole Leadership	B=.17 p<.0000	B=.19 p<.0000	B=.24 p<.0000	NA
Economy	B=-.06 p<.02	B=-.09 p<.0001	B=-.04 p<.10	NA
Party Identification	B=-.25 p<.0000	B=-.24 p<.0000	B=-.21 p<.0000	NA
Multiple R (Perot)	.30	.34	.30	NA*
Perot Character	B=.09 p<.07	B=.12 p<.02	B=.12 p<.03	NA
Perot Competence	B=.13 p<.007	B=.14 p<.003	B=.14 p<.005	NA
Perot Empathy	B=.24 p<.0000	B=.19 p<.0001	B=.22 p<.0000	NA
Perot Leadership	B=.28 p<.0000	B=.27 p<.0000	B=.20 p<.0001	NA
Economy	B=-.11 p<.009	B=-.15 p<.002	B=-.10 p<.04	NA
Party Identification	B=.08 p<.09	B=.19 p<.0000	B=.16 p<.002	NA

NOTE: Values are standardized regression coefficients. For readers interested in unstandardized regression coefficients, see Appendix A. Strongest predictor of each dependent measure for each candidate bolded.

* No ANES items measured job satisfaction for Dole or Perot.

Finally, hypotheses 1a-1c were tested relative to vote choice. For Clinton, party identification ($b=.51$; $p<.0000$) and economic conditions ($b=.48$; $p<.0000$) were the strongest predictors of actual vote. Logit odds ratios suggested that Democrats were 1.67 times more likely to vote for Clinton, while those who approved of economic conditions were 1.62 times more likely to vote for Clinton.

Competence (1a), leadership (1b), and empathy (1c) hypotheses were all supported relative to the Clinton vote. Leadership ($b=.45$; $p<.0000$) predicted slightly less of the Clinton vote than economic conditions but was a much stronger predictor than character, which did not reach significance. Those approving of Clinton's leadership abilities were 1.56 times more likely to vote for Clinton. Empathy ($b=.30$; $p<.0001$) and competence ($b=.19$; $p<.01$) were stronger predictors than character of the Clinton vote.

Table 4.6

Logit Analyses of Effects of Candidate Trait Types, Economy, and Party Identification on Clinton Vote

Variable	b	se(b)	p	exp(b)
Character	.05	.07	.4220	1.06
Competence	.19	.07	.0070	1.21
Leadership	.45	.13	.0005	1.56
Empathy	.30	.08	.0001	1.36
Economy	.48	.06	.0000	1.62
Party	.51	.04	.0000	1.67
Constant	-5.95	.36	.0000	
Chi-square		1036.32	N 1637	
Significance		.0000	df 6	
Percent predicted correctly		83.23		

Party identification ($b=-.83$; $p<.0000$) was the strongest predictor of voting for Dole, as Republicans were more likely to vote for Dole. The economic variable was also a strong predictor of the vote for Dole. Those who viewed the economy as poor were

1.84 times more likely to vote for Dole.

For Dole, unlike Clinton, character ($b=.46$; $p<.0000$) emerged as a stronger predictor of vote relative to competence, which was not significant. Thus, the competence hypothesis (1a) was not supported. Leadership (1b) and empathy (1c) hypotheses were supported for the Dole vote, as empathy ($b=.75$; $p<.0000$) and leadership ($b=.52$; $p<.0005$) were among the strongest predictors of a Dole vote. Those who viewed Dole as an empathetic candidate, were 2.12 times more likely to vote for Dole, and those who approved of his leadership skills were 1.69 times more likely to vote for him.

Table 4.7

Logit Analyses of Effects of Candidate Trait Types, Economy, and Party Identification on Dole Vote

Variable	b	se(b)	p	exp(b)
Character	.46	.10	.0000	1.58
Competence	.00	.19	.9989	1.00
Empathy	.75	.15	.0000	2.12
Leadership	.52	.15	.0005	1.69
Economy	-.61	.06	.0000	.55
Party	-.83	.06	.0000	.44
Constant	-1.4867	.46	.0011	
Chi-square		1117.02	N	1539
Significance		.0000	df	6
Percent predicted correctly		89.07		

For Perot, only leadership ($b=1.28$; $p<.01$) and empathy ($b=1.26$; $p<.01$) reached significance. The magnitude of the logit coefficients were noteworthy. Those approving of Perot's leadership skills were 3.59 times more likely to vote for Dole. Those who viewed Perot as an empathetic candidate, were 3.52 times more likely to vote for Perot.

Table 4.8
Logit Analyses for Effects of Candidate Trait Types, Economy, and Party Identification on Perot Vote

Variable	b	se(b)	p	exp(b)
Character	.04	.31	.8937	1.04
Competence	.47	.50	.3503	1.60
Empathy	1.26	.47	.0072	3.52
Leadership	1.28	.44	.0034	3.59
Economy	-.17	.18	.3196	.84
Party	-.05	.14	.7276	.95
Constant	-8.56	1.39	.0000	
Chi-square	62.35		N 477	
Significance	.0000		df 6	
Percent predicted correctly	94.38			

To summarize the results of hypotheses 1a-1c across candidate approval measures, character was more important than competence in predicting liking and feeling for Clinton and Dole, constituting a reversal of the competence hypothesis (1a) for liking measures. For liking and feeling for Perot, the effects were reversed. However, competence was more important than character for predicting vote for Clinton and Perot, thus the competence hypothesis (1a) relative to the Clinton and Perot vote was supported. For predicting the Dole vote, character remained stronger than competence.

The leadership hypothesis (1b) stated that leadership would be superior to character in candidate evaluations. The leadership hypothesis (1b) was supported relative to feeling and liking measures for Dole and Perot, but was reversed for Clinton. In predicting the vote, the leadership hypothesis (1b) was supported as leadership was superior to character for each candidate.

The empathy hypothesis (1c) stated that empathy was superior to character in predicting candidate evaluations. The empathy hypothesis (1c) was supported for liking and feelings for Dole and Perot, but was reversed for liking and feeling for Clinton. In

predicting vote, the empathy hypothesis (1c) was supported for each candidate as empathy was a superior predictor of vote relative to character.

Receiver Characteristics and the Use of Candidate Trait Types

Research Question Two. The second research question explored the effects of sex, party identification, age, and religiosity on the selection and use of candidate trait types in the evaluation of presidential candidates. Dependent measures were obtained by recoding candidate likes/dislikes items as discussed in detail in chapter three. Significant differences were found relative to sex, age, and party identification. No significant effects were found for religiosity.

Sex Differences. Significant differences in trait use were found between females and males. Since multiple T-tests were calculated, the Bonferroni correction was utilized to protect against increases in Type I error rate (Hays, 1997). Thus, the .05 error rate was divided by the number of individual T-tests performed and the resulting conservative error rate was utilized in the analysis (.05/10=.005).

In addition, it was necessary to measure the effect size of the differences in mean trait use between females and males. With a large sample (N=1,714) it was possible to observe significant relationships which were of little practical importance. Effect size is an estimate of the degree of departure from the null hypothesis, and was calculated using Cohen's d effect size estimate (Cohen and Cohen, 1983). According to Cohen (1977), an effect size smaller than .20 is considered small, and the difference between the two means in a "real world" setting would be difficult to detect. While statistically significant, these differences may be of less practical importance to the social science researcher. Cohen wrote that effect sizes above .20 and below .80 would be "visible to the naked eye," and

of more practical importance. Cohen labeled effect sizes approaching or above .80 as “grossly perceptible.”

Male respondents used traits ($t=3.25$; $p<.001$; $d=.05$) and negative traits ($t=2.86$; $p<.004$; $d=.03$) significantly more than female respondents, but effect sizes for both differences were small. In terms of the use of specific trait types, after employing the Bonferroni correction, the only significant sex difference was that males utilized competence traits more than females ($t=3.42$; $p<.001$; $d=.06$). This effect size was small. There were no trait types that females cited significantly more than males, although the mean use of empathy traits for females was higher than that of males.

Utilizing the initial error rate of .05, several sex differences in trait use were significant. Male respondents cited character ($t=2.14$; $p<.03$; $d=.04$), negative leadership ($t=1.98$; $p<.05$; $d=.04$), negative competence ($t=2.23$; $p<.03$; $d=.02$), and negative character ($t=2.04$; $p<.04$; $d=.06$) traits significantly more often than female respondents. All effect sizes were small.

Table 4.9
Mean Difference in Candidate Trait Use by Sex

Trait Type	Females		Males		t value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Character	.77	1.02	.88	1.11	2.14*
Competence	.77	1.08	.96	1.25	3.42**
Empathy	.09	.33	.07	.29	-1.06
Leadership	.46	.82	.54	.90	1.90

* $p<.05$ ** $p<.001$

Additionally, sex differences in the perception that each candidate possessed a trait type were analyzed. Again, the Bonferroni correction was utilized to compensate for inflated Type I error rates when utilizing multiple T-tests. This correction resulted in a

conservative error rate (.05/12=.004).

Significant differences in perceptions of Clinton were found based on sex. Female respondents rated Clinton significantly higher on leadership ($t=-5.83$; $p<.000$; $d=.45$), character ($t=-5.9$; $p<.000$; $d=.24$), and empathy ($t=-6.58$; $p<.000$; $d=.31$). Effect sizes were at or approaching moderate levels. Male respondents perceived Dole to possess character traits ($t=2.98$; $p<.003$; $d=.33$) with a moderate effect size.

Using the initial error rate of .05, three additional sex differences relative to Dole were found. Male respondents, more than female respondents, perceived Dole to possess empathy ($t=2.26$; $p<.03$; $d=.07$), competence ($t=2.0$; $p<.05$; $d=.05$), and leadership ($t=2.14$; $p<.03$; $d=.04$) traits. Effect sizes were small. Males more than females perceived Perot to have possessed leadership ($t=3.68$; $p<.000$; $d=.17$) and competence ($t=2.86$; $p<.004$; $d=.13$) traits, and effect sizes were small. The results provide strong support for the gender gap hypothesis, and their implications for the study of voting patterns of males and females will be discussed fully in chapter five of this dissertation.

Table 4.10
Differences in Candidate Evaluations by Sex

Candidate Trait	Females		Males		t value	Scale Range
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Clinton						
Character	2.65	(1.7)	2.17	(1.6)	-5.90**	1-6
Competence	4.37	(1.3)	4.30	(1.4)	-1.08	1-6
Empathy	3.60	(1.6)	3.08	(1.6)	-6.58**	1-6
Leadership	1.74	(0.8)	1.49	(0.9)	-5.81**	1-3
Dole						
Character	3.72	(1.4)	3.93	(1.4)	2.99*	1-6
Competence	2.01	(0.6)	2.07	(0.7)	2.00	1-3
Empathy	1.29	(0.8)	1.38	(0.8)	2.26	1-3
Leadership	1.63	(0.8)	1.71	(0.8)	2.14	1-3
Perot						
Character	3.47	(1.2)	3.49	(1.1)	.15	1-6
Competence	1.76	(0.8)	1.88	(0.8)	2.86*	1-3
Empathy	1.25	(0.9)	1.24	(0.9)	-.35	1-3
Leadership	1.21	(0.9)	1.37	(0.9)	3.67**	1-3

*p < .005 **p < .000

Age Differences. Significant differences in the use of traits to evaluate presidential candidates were found based on respondent age. Multiple regression analyses suggested that age was the second strongest predictor of the use of character traits to evaluate candidates ($B=.21$; $p<.0000$). As age increased, respondents cited significantly more character traits in the evaluation of candidates.

An interaction between age and party identification was the strongest predictor of the use of character traits ($B=-.30$; $p<.0000$). To interpret this interaction, the relationship between age and use of character traits was examined separately for Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. There was virtually no relationship between age and use of character traits for Democrats ($B=.004$, ns), and the relationship between age and use of character traits for Independents ($B=.07$) was not significant. There was a strong, positive relationship between age and use of character traits for Republicans ($B=.20$;

$p < .0000$) such that older Republicans utilized these traits more than younger Republicans. Indeed, for Republicans, age was the largest predictor of use of character traits. Implications of these results will be discussed fully in chapter five of this dissertation.

In addition to age differences for the use of character traits, age affected the overall use of traits to evaluate candidates. Age was the third strongest predictor of the use of traits in general to evaluate candidates ($B = .15$; $p < .0000$) and the fourth strongest predictor of the use of positive traits ($B = .09$; $p < .001$). As age increased, respondents cited significantly more traits in general and more positive traits in their evaluations of the candidates. No age differences were found for the use of negative traits.

Party Identification. Significant differences in trait use were found based on party identification. Party identification was the strongest predictor of the use of negative character traits ($B = -.22$; $p < .0000$), such that Republicans cited negative character traits significantly more than Independents and Democrats. Much of the party identification findings can be attributed to Republicans' strong feelings toward Clinton. Republicans were significantly more likely to cite character traits and negative character traits, and many of the character (39%) and negative character (49%) references were directed to Clinton.

Significant effects of party identification were also found for the use of competence ($B = -.05$; $p < .05$), leadership ($B = -.06$; $p < .02$), and positive traits in general ($B = -.08$; $p < .001$). However, the magnitudes of the standardized regression coefficients for these effects were relatively small given the sample size ($N = 1,714$) in the current study.

Multiple Regression Analyses

Multiple regression analyses were performed to test the remaining hypotheses in the study. Independent measures in the full model included the four television variables (television use, campaign programs, political advertising, presidential debates), three disaffection variables (distrust, candidate concern, efficacy), political knowledge measure, as well as respondent age, sex, party identification, and religiosity. The model predicted the use of leadership traits (H2), negative traits (H3), competence traits (H4, H6), positive traits (H5), negative traits (H7), and traits in general (H8). The dependent measures were obtained from the open-ended likes/dislikes survey items. Variables were entered into the equation using the stepwise method (Hays, 1994).

Hypothesis Two. The second hypothesis stated that as television use for political information increases, the use of leadership traits to evaluate candidates increases. This relationship was supported. The variable measuring exposure to non-newscast programs about the presidential campaign was a significant predictor of the use of leadership traits ($B=.12$; $p<.0000$). This variable was the second strongest predictor in the model.

Hypothesis Three. The third hypothesis stated that as television use for political information increases, the use of negative traits to evaluate candidates increases. This relationship was supported as two media variables, including exposure to non-newscast programs about the campaign ($B=.12$; $p<.0000$) and presidential debates ($B=.07$; $p<.01$), were significant predictors of use of negative traits. This finding should be interpreted with caution because the variable measuring exposure to non-newscast programs about the campaign was also a significant predictor of use of positive traits ($B=.16$, $p<.0000$) and was of larger magnitude when predicting the use of positive traits.

Hypothesis Four. The fourth hypothesis stated that the more political knowledge respondents possess, the more they utilize competence traits to evaluate presidential candidates. This relationship was supported. Political knowledge was the strongest predictor ($B=.17$; $p<.0000$) of the use of competence traits.

Hypothesis Five. Hypothesis five stated that the more political knowledge respondents possess, the more they utilize positive traits in their evaluations of presidential candidates. Hypothesis five was supported. Political knowledge was the strongest predictor of the use of positive traits ($B=.17$; $p<.0000$).

This relationship, like the relationship in hypothesis three, should be interpreted with caution. Political knowledge was also a significant predictor of the use of negative traits ($B=.16$; $p<.0000$). The standardized regression coefficient for political knowledge as a predictor of the use positive traits was larger relative to its role as a predictor of the use of negative traits. Employing Cohen and Cohen's (1983) test of significance of standardized regression coefficients across equations, however, indicates the two coefficients were not significantly different ($z=.08$; $p=.48$).

Hypothesis Six. That subjects high in political disaffection utilize competence traits more than character, empathy, or leadership traits was predicted by the sixth hypothesis. This hypothesis was not supported. While one disaffection variable (perception that subjects could influence the political process) reached significance ($B=.08$; $p<.0003$), two disaffection variables, including perception of influence ($B=.08$; $p<.003$) and distrust of politicians ($B=.13$; $p<.0000$), were significant predictors of the use of character. Additionally, the standardized regression coefficients for the two disaffection variables predicting the use of character were both larger than that for the

disaffection variable predicting use of competence.

Hypothesis Seven. The seventh hypothesis stated that the more disaffected subjects are, the more they will utilize negative traits to evaluate presidential candidates. This relationship was supported. The disaffection variable measuring distrust of politicians was the model's strongest predictor of the use of negative traits ($B=.18$; $p<.0000$) and the disaffection variable measuring influence was the fifth most significant predictor ($B=.12$; $p<.0000$).

Hypothesis Eight. The final hypothesis stated that as the level of disaffection increases, subjects utilize traits less in their evaluations of candidates. This relationship was not supported. In fact, the relationship was reversed as two disaffection variables, influence ($B=.12$; $p<.0000$) and distrust ($B=.10$; $p<.001$), were positive predictors of trait use.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a discussion of the results detailed in the previous chapter. The results are discussed relative to the three goals of the study, including the examination of the use of candidate trait types to evaluate presidential candidates, the importance of trait types in candidate evaluations, and the determinants of candidate trait selection and use. The chapter also provides implications of the findings for theory and research. The reader is left with a discussion of the limitations of the current study, as well as calls for specific examinations of trait evaluations of presidential candidates.

Use of Candidate Traits to Evaluate Presidential Candidates

In the open-ended likes/dislikes questions, competence traits were the most frequently cited traits (N=1,482; 38%). Character was referenced almost as often as competence (N=1,419; 36%). Leadership was the third most cited trait type (N=852; 22%), while only three percent of the sample referenced empathy traits in their evaluations of candidates (N=134).

It is interesting to compare the results of responses to the open-ended likes/dislikes items with those obtained a decade ago by Miller et al. (1986). Direct statistical comparisons are not possible because there are some coding differences in the work of Miller et al. and that of the current study. For example, Miller's reliability and charisma dimensions, taken together, approximate the leadership dimension used in the current study. Direct comparison is not advised because Miller included references to a candidate as hardworking in his reliability dimension. In the current study this was coded as competence, which is consistent with work by Kinder (1986). While direct statistical

comparisons are unwise, because so few differences exist between code categories in the two studies it is possible to compare the general patterns of results.

Two notable differences emerge in comparing the results of the two studies. First, character traits were cited more often in the current study than in the Miller study. In Miller's analysis of ANES data from 1952-1984, the mean percentage of responses which referenced character across years was 17%. In 1976, character references were 27% of all responses, but in seven of the nine elections character references were less than 18% of responses. In the current study, character references were 36% of all references. A general examination of these overall patterns suggests that character was cited more in 1996 than in election years between 1952 and 1984.

A plausible explanation for the differences noted is that they are largely a response to Clinton. For four years, 1996 ANES respondents witnessed a Clinton presidency. Many voters hold strong positive or negative opinions about Clinton. Indeed, a more specific examination of 1996 results indicate that Clinton received the largest share of character references (N=547; 39% of any candidate. Forty-one percent of references to Clinton were character traits, and 82% of those were negative. An examination of the frequency of character references in ANES data for presidential elections following the influential work of Kinder (1986) and Miller (1986) might confirm or disconfirm this explanation.

A second notable difference in the results of the two studies relates to the trait types which received more negative than positive references. In Miller's analysis, competence and leadership references were the most negatively cited trait types. In the current study, negative character references were utilized by almost 40% of respondents.

Again, Clinton may have played a role in the larger number of negative character references.

A number of interpretations are possible for the patterns of results in part one of the current study. One might argue that because respondents in the current study cited competence and character more often, these traits were more important in their evaluations of candidates. A literal interpretation of these findings would be consistent with some previous work on trait evaluations of candidates (see Glass, 1985; Miller, et al., 1986). Four alternative, and more plausible, interpretations of these results are possible. These interpretations are, of course, speculative as they are based solely on frequency counts of responses to candidate likes/dislikes questions.

First, in the current study competence references are operationalized as the general ability, intelligence, or knowledgeableability of a candidate. It is possible that many respondents assume that presidential candidates who receive the nomination of their political party possess these basic qualities. For example, most respondents do not expect an unintelligent person to be the presidential nominee of a major political party. Thus it is possible to interpret these results not necessarily as an indication of the relative importance of competence in the evaluations of presidential candidates, but instead as an indication of the most basic expectations for presidential candidates held by many of the ANES respondents.

This assumption was particularly widespread in 1996. ANES respondents in 1996 evaluated Clinton, whose presidency they had witnessed for four years, and Dole, as front runners. Many respondents felt positive about what the Clinton administration had accomplished in the last four years. For example, 64% of respondents in the current

study evaluated Clinton's economic performance favorably. Many respondents also rated Dole positively in terms of competence (see appendix A) partially because of the previous political experience he possessed. It is plausible to think that in 1996 the competence of Clinton and Dole was largely assumed by many voters.

In addition, the candidate likes/dislikes items were part of a series of questions which required an average of 70 minutes to complete. It is quite possible that because traits such as general ability, intelligence, and knowledge are largely assumed for the major party presidential nominees, these traits require less effort to recall and cite in response to an ANES researcher's probing. Some respondents may have fatigued prior to the conclusion of the 70-minute interview, and competence references may have been more easily recalled by subjects relative to other types of traits. This may have contributed to their increased use.

A third noteworthy aspect of these results underscores the importance of character in the evaluations of candidates, but not private character traits such as honesty and integrity. Many in political science and political communication argue that Americans are distinguishing between the public and private character of candidates (Golden, 1997; Jamieson, 1998; Miller, 1993). Golden operationalizes public character as compassion and the ability to inspire the electorate. Jamieson argues that public character is largely about the ability of the candidate to do the job of president.

The arguments of these researchers and the results of the current study suggest the importance of a combination of empathy, leadership, and competence traits. Many citizens may be responding not to the honesty or morality of a candidate, but to their perception of the candidate's public character, operationalized as competence, leadership,

and empathy. A literal interpretation of the frequency of citations of the three trait types (N=2,468; 64%) suggests that they were cited more often than private character (N=1419; 36%). A frequency count alone, however, is not sufficient to document these claims. The theoretical implications for operationalizations of public and private character, as well as the need for research which explores respondents' conceptualizations of the four trait types, will be discussed later in this chapter.

A final noteworthy aspect of these results focuses on the small number of references to empathy. As noted previously, only three percent of respondents (N=134) used empathy traits to evaluate the candidates. The majority of empathy references were positive (N=99; 74%). A literal interpretation of these results would suggest that empathy was not important to ANES respondents when evaluating the candidates. According to this literal interpretation of the results, a candidate's compassion and concern for the problems of Americans was relatively unimportant in the evaluation of the candidates.

One might argue that the lack of empathy references could also have meant that, while empathy was important to respondents, they did not perceive the three candidates to possess these traits. Were this interpretation correct, however, a larger number of negative references to empathy would have been expected. Only 35 negative references to empathy were provided.

Intuitively, it would seem that another interpretation must exist for the lack of use of empathy traits. The infrequent use of empathy traits can be attributed to social desirability concerns of respondents. As Funk (1996) noted, it may be that empathy traits are important to evaluations of candidates but are less likely to be reported by respondents

because of social desirability concerns.

ANES respondents were asked about their likes and dislikes of the candidates as part of a survey which also probed respondents' stances on various political issues, levels of political knowledge, and placement of candidates based on their position relative to political issues. It may be that respondents did not cite empathy traits because they did not think they were as appropriate in an academic research setting as answers pertaining to the competence, character, or leadership abilities of a candidate. This interpretation is consistent with research on the importance of perceived empathy in the evaluation of sources (Funk, 1997; Kinder, 1986; Teven and McCroskey, 1997).

Importance of Traits in Candidate Evaluations

To be sure, the possible interpretations of responses to the ANES open-ended likes/dislikes items do not paint a clear picture of the importance of individual candidate traits in the evaluation of candidates. A clearer picture does emerge, however, when one examines the results of multiple regression and logistical regression analyses of the 12 closed-ended items which measured respondents' perceptions that a candidate possessed certain traits.

Before beginning the interpretation of these results, it is instructive to review how each of the 12 candidate evaluation variables was operationalized. As detailed in chapter three, the operationalizations of the variables are consistent with work examining source evaluations in communication and political science. Table 5.1 summarizes these operationalizations.

Table 5.1
Candidate Evaluation Measures

Variable	ANES Items	Scale Range
Clinton competence	Intelligent, knowledgeable	1-6
Clinton character	Moral, honest	1-6
Clinton empathy	Compassion, cares about people	1-6
Clinton leadership	Leadership skills	1-3
Dole competence	Knowledgeable	1-3
Dole character	Moral, honest	1-6
Dole empathy	Cares about people	1-3
Dole leadership	Leadership skills	1-3
Perot competence	Knowledgeable	1-3
Perot character	Moral, honest	1-6
Perot empathy	Cares about people	1-3
Perot leadership	Leadership skills	1-3

Hypotheses 1a-1c stated that the perception of candidate character is a less important predictor of candidate evaluations than the perception of competence, leadership, and empathy. These hypotheses were tested relative to five dependent measures of candidate approval including liking for the candidate, pre-election feeling thermometer measures, post-election feeling thermometer measures, job performance, and vote choice. For the dependent measure of job performance, the hypotheses could only be tested for Clinton, because no ANES items measured evaluations of job performance for Dole or Perot. Hypotheses 1a-1c received mixed support relative to the four measures of candidate approval that pertained to each candidate.

For liking and feeling toward Clinton, character was more important than

competence, while the reverse was true for Dole and Perot. However, competence was more important than character as a predictor of vote for Clinton and Perot. Character was superior to competence in predicting the vote for Dole.

Leadership was found to be a larger predictor of liking and feeling than character for Dole and Perot. This relationship was reversed for predicting liking and feeling for Clinton. In predicting the vote, leadership was superior to character for each candidate.

Empathy was superior to character for liking and feeling for Dole and Perot. This relationship was again reversed for liking and feeling for Clinton. In predicting the vote, empathy was a larger predictor than character for each candidate. Tables 5.2-5.4 are instructive because they visually represent the patterns of results for each candidate.

Table 5.2
Competence Versus Character as Predictors of Candidate Approval

	Clinton	Dole	Perot
Liking	<i>CHARACTER</i>	<i>COMPETENCE</i>	<i>COMPETENCE</i>
Feeling	<i>CHARACTER</i>	<i>COMPETENCE</i>	<i>COMPETENCE</i>
Vote	<i>COMPETENCE</i>	<i>CHARACTER</i>	<i>COMPETENCE</i>

NOTE: Table includes the strongest predictor of each dependent variable for each candidate.

Table 5.3
Leadership Versus Character as Predictors of Candidate Approval

	Clinton	Dole	Perot
Liking	<i>CHARACTER</i>	<i>LEADERSHIP</i>	<i>LEADERSHIP</i>
Feeling	<i>CHARACTER</i>	<i>LEADERSHIP</i>	<i>LEADERSHIP</i>
Vote	<i>LEADERSHIP</i>	<i>LEADERSHIP</i>	<i>LEADERSHIP</i>

NOTE: Table includes the strongest predictor of each dependent variable for each candidate.

Table 5.4
Empathy Versus Character as Predictors of Candidate Approval

	Clinton	Dole	Perot
Liking	<i>CHARACTER</i>	<i>EMPATHY</i>	<i>EMPATHY</i>
Feeling	<i>CHARACTER</i>	<i>EMPATHY</i>	<i>EMPATHY</i>
Vote	<i>EMPATHY</i>	<i>EMPATHY</i>	<i>EMPATHY</i>

NOTE: Table includes the strongest predictor of each dependent variable for each candidate.

The pattern of these results is interesting. Many public opinion pollsters and political pundits argue that character is a less important predictor today of evaluations of presidential candidates (Crabtree and Danitz, 1996; Jamieson, 1998; Schneider, 1996).

The results of the multiple regression and logistic regression analyses in the present study suggest that character did matter to respondents, but in very different ways.

First, character mattered in the evaluations of Clinton, but not in respondents' evaluations of Dole or Perot. Though Clinton and Perot both received more negative character references than positive in the ANES likes/dislikes questions used to answer the first research question, character was only a strong predictor for evaluations of Clinton.

Second, character mattered to respondents, but only for liking and feeling toward Clinton. With the exception of the competence-character comparison for Dole, character was never the superior predictor of the vote for any candidate. While perception of character was the most important predictor of liking and feeling toward Clinton, and most in the sample did not believe Clinton possessed character (see appendix A), Clinton still received the majority of the vote in part due to the influence of perceptions of leadership, competence, and empathy.

The picture presented by these findings is that many respondents were voting for Clinton based upon something other than character. One explanation often cited by pundits and pollsters is that voters chose Clinton in 1996 because they perceived economic conditions to be favorable. While this explanation was also frequently cited for the 1992 presidential results, as Miller (1993) notes, the influence of economic assessments on candidate vote and approval is rarely tested in multivariate models. A variable measuring perceptions of Clinton's economic performance was included in the model of candidate approval. It is important to discuss the relative importance of candidate traits and economic performance on candidate approval. Table 5.5 summarizes these results.

Table 5.5
Candidate Traits Versus Economy as Predictors of Candidate Approval

	Clinton	Dole	Perot
Liking	<i>CHARACTER</i>	<i>EMPATHY</i>	<i>LEADERSHIP</i>
Feeling	<i>CHARACTER</i>	<i>EMPATHY</i>	<i>LEADERSHIP</i>
Vote	<i>ECONOMY</i>	<i>EMPATHY</i>	<i>LEADERSHIP</i>

NOTE: Table includes the largest predictor of each dependent variable for each candidate.

The effect of the economy on candidate evaluations was significant, but may not have been as strong as some have claimed. In the logistic regression analyses, economic performance ($b=.48$; $p<.0000$) was the strongest predictor of vote for Clinton, but it was not significantly different from the contribution of leadership ($b=.45$; $p<.0005$) in predicting a Clinton vote. While respondents based their decisions partially on perceptions of Clinton's economic performance, a significant factor in respondents' evaluations of Clinton was their perception of his leadership abilities.

Economic performance was not the strongest predictor of a Dole or Perot vote. Perceptions that Dole was empathetic ($b=.75$; $p<.0000$) and that Perot possessed leadership skills ($b=1.28$; $p<.0000$) were the strongest predictors of voting for those candidates. These findings are consistent with the claim that many respondents were less certain about Dole's warmth and concern and Perot's leadership abilities. Thus, perceptions that the two possessed these traits were strong predictors of a vote for that candidate. Economic performance was, however, the second strongest predictor of a Dole vote ($b=-.61$; $p<.0000$). Economy was not a significant predictor of the Perot vote ($b=-.17$, ns).

In 1996, was it "the economy stupid" as Clinton campaign strategists had predicted in 1992 (Schneider, 1996)? The results of this study suggest that the economy was one of several significant factors in respondents' evaluations of Clinton. The economy played a large role in the Clinton vote and was also a significant predictor of the Dole vote. But the multivariate analyses in the current study suggest that it would be a mistake to overemphasize the effect of economic conditions on the 1996 results. As these analyses indicate, leadership, empathy, and party identification were also strong predictors of vote for each candidate.

To assess the relative importance of candidate traits, economic performance, and party identification, it is instructive to view the effects of each on candidate approval across candidates. For ordinary least squares regression analyses, standardized regression coefficients are reported throughout this study. For readers interested in unstandardized regression coefficients, see appendix A. Standardized regression coefficients represent scale-free indices of the effects of variables and can be compared across variables in the same sample (Pedhazur, 1997). Thus, it is possible to calculate the mean of the standardized regression coefficients for each candidate trait, economic performance, and party identification across candidates. While it is not recommended that standardized regression coefficients be generalized across populations, the purpose of this study is to make comparisons within the same sample.

As predictors of liking and feeling across candidates, empathy ($B=.22$) and leadership ($B=.22$) had the highest mean coefficient values. Party identification ($B=.19$) and character ($B=.18$) also had relatively large values across candidates for predictions of liking and feeling.

The mean coefficient values from the logistic regression analyses on vote choice also suggest the importance of empathy and leadership. Leadership (.77) and empathy (.75) had the highest mean coefficient values of the six factors. Party identification (.46) was the third strongest predictor, while economic performance (.42) was also a large predictor of vote choice across candidates. Table 5.6 summarizes these results.

Table 5.6
Effects of Candidate Traits, Party Identification, and Economy on Candidate Evaluations Across Candidates

Variable	Liking/Feeling	Vote Choice	
	B	b	ln(exp(b))
Character	.18	.18	.19
Competence	.07	.22	.22
Empathy	.22	.75	.78
Leadership	.22	.77	.75
Party Identification	.19	.46	.46
Economic Conditions	.11	.44	.41

NOTE: Values for liking/feeling represent the mean of the standardized regression coefficients across candidates for the three measures of liking and feeling (liking, pre-election feeling, post-election feeling). As detailed in DeMaris, 1992, two measures of effect size are presented for vote choice, including means of logistic regression coefficients and odds ratios across candidates. To compare asymmetrical odds ratios, it was necessary to take the natural logarithm of each and then calculate means (see Pedhazur, 1997).

To interpret these results further, it is important not only to view the relative importance of each predictor for liking and vote choice, but also to examine respondents' evaluations of each candidate in each area. Empathy, leadership, party identification, and economic performance were all strong predictors of vote choice across candidates.

Respondents evaluated Clinton more positively relative to Dole and Perot in terms of empathy. Since two ANES items measuring perceptions of empathy were included for Clinton, but only one each was included for Dole and Perot, respondents' evaluations

were standardized on a scale ranging from 0-1 by dividing the mean evaluation for each candidate by the number of units in the scale for that candidate. The standardized results suggest that Clinton (.56) was rated more favorably on empathy relative to Dole (.44) and Perot (.42).

Dole was rated slightly more favorably than Clinton and Perot on leadership. One ANES item was included for each candidate which measured respondents' perceptions of the candidate's leadership skills. The mean evaluations suggest that Dole (1.67) was rated more favorably on leadership than Clinton (1.62) or Perot (1.29).

While not the only significant factor in respondents' evaluations of the candidate, the regression analyses in the current study suggest that economic performance was a strong predictor of vote choice across candidates. An examination of respondents' evaluations of Clinton's economic performance provide another piece of the interpretive puzzle. Sixty-four percent (N=1101) of respondents approved of Clinton's economic performance, while the remaining 36% disapproved of his economic performance.

The findings of the current study relative to economic performance are consistent with 1996 Voter News Service exit polls that suggest 56% of voters perceived economic conditions in the United States to be "excellent" or "good." Clinton received the support of a majority of these voters. Forty-three percent of voters labeled the economy "not so good" or "poor," and the majority of those voters supported Dole over Clinton (Kenski, Chang, and Aylor, 1998).

The examination of the relative importance of candidate traits, party identification, and economic performance across candidates, as well as respondents' evaluations of each candidate, are informative. Taken together, these suggest the relative

importance of economic performance, empathy, leadership, and party identification for vote choice.

The results are particularly interesting because more public opinion and scholarly work has focused on the impact of economic performance and party identification in candidate evaluations, than on the effects of empathy. As Funk (1996) notes, the work which has focused on the impact of perceptions of empathy suggests that empathy is often a significant predictor, but of less importance, relative to other candidate traits. This is consistent with Kinder's (1986) findings.

A comparison of the results of the current study with Kinder's findings for the election of 1984 reveals interesting differences. Kinder utilized feeling thermometer variables as dependent measures of candidate evaluation. The current study examined the impact of trait types on feeling measures (pre- and post-election), liking, and vote choice. However, if the comparison is limited to only feeling measures, results of the current study are still inconsistent with those in Kinder's study. In the current study, character was a strong predictor of feeling for Clinton only. In Kinder's study, character was the strongest predictor across candidates. These results were reversed in the current study for Dole and Perot (and across candidates), as empathy and leadership were the strongest predictors of feeling measures.

An interpretation of these findings requires an examination of the 1996 presidential election as it relates to that of 1984, the basis for Kinder's study. Clinton campaigned as a candidate who was empathetic to the problems of Americans. Throughout his first term, he was also skilled at controlling media coverage such that he was often portrayed as a compassionate leader during times of crisis (Denton, 1998).

Dole was not as often portrayed by media, nor evaluated by respondents in the current study, as possessing empathy. Indeed, many Clinton advertisements capitalized on Dole's image as a cold, angry politician (Kaid, 1998).

In contrast, in 1984 Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale campaigned more on issues of national security and the need for strong foreign policy (Barone, 1990). Images of a strong, forceful leader were more common in 1984 than images of a leader who was compassionate and caring. This explanation is consistent with a weaker role for empathy as a predictor of candidate evaluations in 1984.

An examination of ANES data for presidential elections after Kinder's influential work in 1984--using Kinder's four-factor theory of trait evaluations--is needed to further examine the roles of empathy and leadership in candidate evaluations. If the results of 1996 are largely due to Clinton, an examination of 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000 data might suggest a less prominent role for these trait types before and after the Clinton presidency. The theoretical implications of these findings are important and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Determinants of Candidate Trait Use

Sex Differences. Limited sex differences were found relative to the use of candidate traits. Males were significantly more likely than females to utilize competence, character, negative traits, and traits in general. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the effect sizes for each of these findings were small and suggest that these differences are of less practical importance relative to sex differences found for candidate evaluations. It appears from these results that males and females did not differ substantively in the trait types they utilized to evaluate the candidates, but they did differ

in their perceptions that the candidates possessed the four candidate trait types.

Differences in the voting patterns of males and females have attracted media and scholarly attention since 1980 (Kenski, 1988). Much literature has suggested a "gender gap" in which females are significantly more likely than males to support Democrats (Bendya and Lake, 1994; Kenski, et al., 1998; Wirls, 1986). The results of the current study provide support for the "gender gap" hypothesis. Females, significantly more than males, evaluated Clinton positively in the current study.

Even more interesting, this pattern persisted across three candidate trait types. Females, therefore, did not merely offer significantly higher overall approval ratings for Clinton, they did so in terms of character ($t=-5.90$; $p<.000$), empathy (-6.58 ; $p<.000$), and leadership ($t=-5.81$; $p<.000$). These results provide important support for the gender gap hypothesis. The current study may be viewed as furthering previous knowledge on the voting patterns of males and females because the pattern of evaluations for females in the current study persisted across substantively different indicators. In other words, the current study makes a significant contribution to important gender gap literature because it provides more specific support for the gender gap hypothesis than provided by previous work.

The examination of female respondents' perceptions of Clinton is only half of the gender gap story told in the current study. Male respondents evaluated Dole and Perot more favorably relative to female respondents in terms of character, competence, and leadership. Male respondents offered significantly higher evaluations of Dole's character ($t=2.99$; $p<.000$) and Perot's competence ($t=2.86$; $p<.005$) and leadership ($t=3.67$; $p<.000$). In fact, the only instance in which mean evaluations of Perot and Dole by

female respondents were higher than those of male respondents was concerning empathy. Female respondents more than male respondents perceived Perot to be empathetic but this difference was not significant.

To interpret these differences substantively, it is instructive to examine effect sizes. While according to Cohen's classification (1977) the sex differences found previously for the use of candidate trait types were generally small, effect sizes for the sex differences in candidate evaluations were larger. Female respondents' higher evaluations of Clinton's leadership ($d=.45$), character ($d=.34$) and empathy ($d=.31$) were all at or approaching moderate levels of importance. Male respondents' higher evaluations of Dole's character were also approaching moderate levels of importance ($d=.33$), while male respondents' higher evaluations of Perot's competence ($d=.13$) and leadership ($d=.17$) were relatively small.

The sex differences in candidate evaluations found in the current study are consistent with more macrolevel sex differences in the patterns of actual voters in 1996. VNS exit polls suggested the largest "gender gap" for major presidential candidates in modern history, as Clinton held a 16-point (54-to-38%) advantage over Dole among female voters. Male voters supported Dole slightly more than Clinton by 44-to-43% (Kenski et al., 1998).

Table 5.7
Sex Differences in Candidate Evaluations

Candidate Trait	Clinton	Dole	Perot
Character	<i>FEMALES**</i>	<i>MALES*</i>	<i>MALES</i>
Competence	<i>FEMALES</i>	<i>MALES</i>	<i>MALES*</i>
Empathy	<i>FEMALES**</i>	<i>MALES</i>	<i>FEMALES</i>
Leadership	<i>FEMALES**</i>	<i>MALES</i>	<i>MALES**</i>

* $p < .005$ ** $p < .000$

Age and Party Identification Effects. Age was the second strongest predictor ($B = .21$; $p < .0000$) of the use of character traits to evaluate candidates. This suggests that character traits are more important for older respondents than for younger respondents. Interestingly, an interaction between age and party identification was the strongest predictor ($B = -.30$; $p < .0000$) of the use of character. Additional analyses were performed on the relationship between age and use of character traits separately for Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. The results suggest that the relationship between age and use of character traits is strong only for Republicans.

Additionally, party identification was the strongest predictor of use of negative character traits ($B = -.22$; $p < .0000$) and of the use of negative traits in general ($B = -.18$; $p < .0000$). This strong negative relationship suggests that Republican respondents utilized negative character traits significantly more than Democrats and Independents in their evaluations of the candidates.

Taken together, these findings are not difficult to interpret. Older Republicans tend to be more politically conservative, possess more negative opinions of Clinton, and value traditional conceptualizations of character more than younger, less politically

conservative respondents (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1996). Therefore, older Republicans used character, particularly negative character, more in their evaluations, and many of those references were directed at Clinton.

The remaining significant party identification effects are more difficult to interpret. Republicans used competence ($B=-.05$; $p<.05$), leadership ($B=-.06$; $p<.02$), and positive traits ($B=-.08$; $p<.001$) significantly more than Democrats. Theoretical explanation for these findings is lacking, but one methodological explanation is offered. The standardized regression coefficients for party identification in each of these relationships are relatively small. With a large sample size, it may have been possible for an otherwise insignificant difference to reach significance (Pedhazur, 1997). For example, many significant relationships in the current study are significant beyond the .0000 level. It is unlikely that these findings are due to a large sample size alone. Comparatively, a significant difference at the .05 level (such as Republican's use of competence traits) with a large sample is more likely to be a product of sample size (Hays, 1994).

Television Effects. The second hypothesis stated that as television use to obtain political information increases, use of leadership traits to evaluate candidates increases. This hypothesis was supported. There was a significant, positive relationship between television use for information about the presidential campaign and the use of leadership traits ($B=.12$; $p<.0000$).

Hypothesis three stated that as television use to obtain political information increases, the use of negative traits to evaluate candidates increases. This hypothesis was also supported as both exposure to campaign programs ($B=.12$; $p<.0000$) and presidential

debates ($B=.07$; $p<.0000$) predicted the use of negative traits. Support for this hypothesis was qualified, however, as television use was also a significant predictor of the use of positive traits ($B=.16$; $p<.0000$).

The findings are interesting for a number of reasons. First, of the four television use variables, only attention to non-newscast presidential campaign programs and presidential debates were significant predictors. These were both single-item measures so their reliability was unclear. The 20-point television use scale created by combining television exposure and attention variables (Cronbach's $\alpha=.81$) was never a significant predictor in this study. In fact, it never neared significance in any multiple regression equation. The measure of exposure to political advertising also never reached significance.

One possible explanation for these findings is the superiority of the campaign programs variable as a measure of television effects. It may be that this one-item variable measured exposure and attention to television more accurately than the television use, presidential debates, and political advertising measures.

A more plausible explanation, however, exists for these findings. As Bartels (1993) noted, a problem for media effects research is that it is often difficult to determine how much of the measured influence is truly a product of media use as opposed to other factors that the viewer brings to the situation. To some extent, the findings in the current study using the campaign programs variable are a reflection of the type of person who typically watches non-newscast programs devoted to the presidential campaign. Viewers of these types of programs tend to be more politically knowledgeable and interested in the campaign process than the general public. In the current study, there was a moderate

correlation between the campaign programs variable and political knowledge ($R=.42$). Thus it is difficult to determine to what extent the findings in the current study are a product of television versus the type of person who watched those types of programs.

Another interesting facet of the television effects results is that while attention to televised campaign programs did significantly predict the use of leadership traits ($B=.12$; $p<.0000$), it was also a significant predictor of the use of competence ($B=.16$; $p<.0000$) and character ($B=.15$; $p<.0000$) traits. An inspection of these effects makes clear that the standardized regression coefficient for the use of leadership traits is the *smallest* of the three. Thus, attention to campaign programs was a significant predictor of the use of candidate trait types, but failed to discriminate between the use of particular trait types.

In the current study, respondents who watched non-newscast campaign programs were likely to use a number of candidate traits more than those who did not watch such programs. However, these findings could be a result of the type of person who watches these specialized programs. Those with more political knowledge and interest, for example, would seem to be more comfortable using a variety of traits to evaluate candidate. Respondents with less political knowledge and interest might not be as able to do this. Bivariate analyses of the use of each trait type by level of political knowledge support this explanation, as respondents with higher levels of political knowledge utilized competence, character, and leadership traits significantly more than those with lower levels of political knowledge (see appendix A).

The theoretical justification for the predicted association between television use and leadership traits was in part that leadership traits are more visually appealing and well represented in a visual medium (Hart, 1996). While leadership traits are well represented

in a visual medium, this justification may be lacking. Character traits, while not as visually appealing, may also be represented in a visual medium. Indeed, as Patterson (1994) argues, much coverage of political actors is devoted to character issues. Thus, there exists theoretical justification for the positive association between television use and use of character traits to evaluate candidates.

It may be that the prediction in the current study that viewing a particular trait type on television will directly effect the use of that trait type is unrealistic. Such a prediction may ignore indirect effects of television use on trait selection use. For example, some literature suggests that increased media use generates increased political knowledge in viewers (Neuman, Just, and Crigler, 1992; Price and Czilli, 1996; Price and Zaller, 1993). It may be that media have an indirect impact on the use of candidate traits by providing the viewer with additional political information. The more programs focused on the presidential campaign one watches, the more campaign information one possesses, and the more likely viewers are to utilize this information in the evaluation of candidates. It is important that future research explore indirect relationships between television use and trait selection.

Political Knowledge Effects. Hypotheses four and five were both supported in the current study. Hypothesis four stated that as political knowledge increases, use of competence traits increases. Political knowledge was a significant positive predictor of use of competence ($B=.17$; $p<.0000$). Hypothesis five stated that as political knowledge increases, the use of positive traits increases. Political knowledge was a significant positive predictor of the use of positive traits ($B=.17$; $p<.0000$).

The increased use of competence traits among the politically knowledgeable is

consistent with what little work has been done in this area (Funk, 1996). As Funk notes, those with increased political knowledge tend to be able to process more complex political information and seek out political knowledge significantly more than individuals with low levels of knowledge.

In addition, the politically knowledgeable possess a more comprehensive understanding of the political process relative to those with less political knowledge. This expanded understanding of the requirements of successfully holding national political office may allow the politically knowledgeable to be less judgmental of the process and its actors. This would explain the increased use of positive candidate traits by those with higher levels of political knowledge when evaluating the candidates.

Previously in this dissertation it was stated that some political communication literature suggests that the politically knowledgeable bring with them a storehouse of information when making political decisions. This information is not typically present in the decision making of individuals with lower levels of political knowledge. Some work supports the idea that this additional information provides a buffer for the political knowledgeable such that they are less susceptible to the primarily negative television coverage afforded major presidential candidates (Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt, 1998).

While intuitively appealing, the current study found no support for this relationship. Specifically, there was no significant interaction between political knowledge and television use in predicting the use of candidate traits. The insignificant interaction suggests that in the current study level of political knowledge did not moderate the effects of television use on respondents use of candidate traits.

Political knowledge does seem to be associated with increased use of candidate

traits in the evaluation of candidates, but support for hypothesis four is qualified.

Significant positive relationships were also found between political knowledge and use of character ($B=.11$; $p<.005$) and leadership ($B=.15$; $p<.0000$). While the standardized regression coefficient for use of competence was larger than those for character and leadership, it was not significantly different. In the current study, political knowledge was the strongest predictor of the use of candidate traits, but political knowledge did not discriminate between respondents' use of particular candidate trait types.

The explanation for these findings is similar to that provided previously for television effects. Politically knowledgeable respondents possess more political knowledge, and that knowledge may allow them to utilize candidate traits more often in their evaluations of candidate. This suggests that individuals who possess more political knowledge have an increased ability to recall information and use it in the evaluation of candidates. Contrary to the findings of Funk (1997), however, this study found no support for the claim that the politically knowledgeable utilize a particular trait type significantly more often than other trait types.

Political Disaffection Effects. Hypothesis six stated that highly disaffected respondents utilize competence traits significantly more than character, leadership, and empathy traits. This hypothesis was not supported. While the variable measuring political efficacy was a significant positive predictor of use of competence ($B=.08$; $p<.0003$), variables measuring distrust ($B=.13$; $P,.0000$) and efficacy ($B=.08$; $p<.003$) were also significant positive predictors of the use of character.

These findings, while not consistent with the predicted relationship between disaffection and use of competence, may be consistent with each other. A person who

distrusts political actors and feels they have no control over the political process, is likely to evaluate candidates in one of two ways. First, they may be so disenchanted with the character of political actors ("They're all bums" mentality) that they choose to evaluate candidates based upon other factors, such as competence. This relationship was found in the current study.

Second, a person may be so disenchanted with political actors that they evaluate them based on the factors with which they are least satisfied, namely the character of political actors. This is consistent with the positive relationships between distrust and efficacy and use of character traits found in the current study. One might argue that the latter explanation is more plausible in the current study, because two disaffection variables reached significance as predictors of character and the average of their regression coefficients ($B=.11$) was larger than the coefficient for the one disaffection variable which predicted the use of competence traits ($B=.08$).

Hypothesis seven stated that as disaffection increases, the use of negative traits increases. This hypothesis was supported. Variables measuring distrust ($B=.18$; $p<.0000$) and efficacy ($B=.12$; $p<.0000$) were strong predictors of the use of negative traits. The interpretation of these results is not difficult. Highly disaffected persons, by definition, are dissatisfied with the political process and/or its actors. Thus these individuals were significantly more likely to use negative traits in their evaluations of presidential candidates.

Finally, hypothesis eight stated that highly disaffected subjects utilize traits in general less than respondents with lower levels of disaffection. The rationale for this prediction is that disaffected individuals may be so disenchanted with the political

process, its actors, and their inability to affect change, that they lack the motivation to utilize any candidate traits to evaluate candidates. This hypothesis was not supported. In fact, the relationship was reversed as both efficacy ($B=.12$; $p<.0000$) and distrust ($B=.10$; $p<.001$) were significant positive predictors of trait use.

These findings are interesting and consistent with the results of the previous two hypotheses. Disaffected respondents in the current study were more motivated to use traits than less disaffected respondents, and their use of traits was primarily negative. Respondents' dissatisfaction with the political process and its actors was not so great as to prevent them from evaluating political actors, but was large enough to produce more negative evaluations of candidates.

Implications for Theory and Future Research

Candidate Trait Evaluations. The most influential work in identifying candidate trait types comes from Kinder (1986) and Miller et al. (1986). Indeed, Kinder's four candidate trait types form much of the theoretical basis for the current study. In the current study, respondents cited competence ($N=1,482$) and character (1,419) traits most often in open-ended likes/dislikes items. Leadership traits were also cited often by respondents ($N=852$), but empathy traits were cited only 134 times in response to the open-ended items.

As Funk (1996, 1997) notes, it is now common for researchers to collapse character and empathy into one category labeled character, and to collapse competence and leadership into a category labeled competence. (see, for example, Bean, 1993; McCurley and Mondak, 1995; Mondak, 1995; Mondak and McCurley, 1994). Some researchers have argued that high correlations between character and empathy, and

between competence and leadership, in past studies justifies this action (Funk, 1996). Others have simply used the two categories with little explanation. Indeed, researchers who utilize open-ended ANES responses to candidate likes/dislikes items and find that not all trait types are equally represented in respondents' comments, might find collapsing the data into two large categories appealing.

The findings in the current study suggest strongly that collapsing trait types into two broad categories representing competence and character is a mistake. While convenient for many researchers, this practice ignores important conceptual, statistical, and predictive differences among trait types suggested by the current study.

Past research suggests that the four trait types used in the current study are conceptually distinct. Operationalizations of character, competence, empathy, and leadership traits in the current study are consistent with much past work (Kinder, 1986; Miller et al., 1986; Glass, 1985) as well as more recent work (Funk 1996, 1997). In the current study, for example, competence traits such as intelligence, experience, and knowledgeability are conceptually distinct from leadership traits such as energy, charisma, and inspiring public speaker. Because of their conceptual distinctness, they are operationalized as separate trait types. Collapsing leadership and competence traits into one broad competence category ignores these conceptual distinctions.

Some past work suggests that high correlations between the four trait types warrant collapsing them into two broad categories. For example, Funk (1996) reports that correlations between trait types in ANES data from 1984-1992 ranged from .85 to .95. The results of the current study are not comparable to ANES data from previous elections. Thus, the recommendation here to forgo the collapsing of candidate trait types

is based only on the 1996 ANES data and is in no way an attack of Funk's data analysis. The current study, however, does not provide evidence of the high correlations between trait types that were reported in previous election years.

The average inter-item correlation across candidates for the four trait types in the current study is .51. For Clinton (.59), the average correlation of the trait types is somewhat higher but still far below Funk's estimations. The mean correlation for trait types in the evaluations of Dole is .51, while it is lower for Perot (.41). See appendix A for correlation matrices for each candidate.

The results of the current study suggest *moderate* levels of correlation between the four trait types, but not the extreme levels reported in previous election years. Thus, it would be prudent to resist the temptation to collapse candidate trait types into two broad categories at least until examination of the 2000 ANES data can be accomplished. It may be that the moderate correlations found in the 1996 ANES data will be consistent with the 2000 ANES data. This would provide stronger evidence for the conceptual and statistical distinction of the candidate trait types and should be explored.

A final argument against collapsing candidate trait types into two categories is that, in the current study, the four trait types have distinct effects on candidate evaluations across candidates. For example, in the current study leadership and competence traits have very different effects on candidate liking and vote choice. Leadership is one of the strongest predictors of both measures, while competence is one of the weakest predictors of liking and vote choice. Past research, however, has aggregated the two into one category. Such a decision may be ignoring the distinct effects of the trait types. Were researchers justified in collapsing leadership and competence into one broad competence

category, for example, one would expect the effects of the trait types on candidate evaluations to be more similar.

Public Versus Private Character. Results of the current study also provide tentative support for the distinction many scholars are drawing between the public and private character of candidates (Golden, 1997; Jamieson, 1998; Miller, 1993). These scholars argue that character is multidimensional. An individual's evaluations of a candidate's character, therefore, may not be limited to candidate integrity and morality. Notions of public character may include evaluations of leadership, empathy, and competence. This is consistent with the most recent work on source evaluations in the communication literature (Teven and McCroskey, 1997) which suggests that perceived caring is independent of integrity and morality judgements.

The current study cannot determine how respondents conceptualized each trait type. No ANES items attempted to measure this, if indeed it is possible to do this in mass survey research. The current study does, however, suggest that competence, empathy and leadership traits--in combination--were more frequently cited than traditional conceptualizations of character in predicting liking and vote choice across candidates.

Results from the current study are consistent with 1996 VNS exit polling results. VNS respondents were asked what *one* trait mattered most to them from a list of possible candidate traits. Forty-eight percent chose either "vision for the future" (16%), "stands up for what he believes" (12%), "cares about people like me" (10%), or "is in touch with the 90s" (10%). Each is included in Golden's (1997) operationalization of public character. Only 20% of VNS respondents chose honesty/trustworthiness, which is an operationalization of private character (Kenski et al., 1998).

Future research should explore how voters conceptualize character in an attempt to examine the representational validity of candidate trait types (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). It is important to determine if individuals' conceptualizations of the candidate trait types used in the candidate evaluation literature are consistent with the definitions researchers attach to those trait types. This goal probably will not be realized through large sample survey research. One option is to utilize focus groups and in-depth interview settings which may allow more elaboration on the part of the respondent and more follow up questions by the researcher. Such methods have proven successful in other areas of political communication (see, for example, Neuman, Just, and Crigler, 1992).

Determinants of Candidate Trait Use. As Funk (1996, 1997) notes, very little theoretical or empirical work exists on determinants of candidate trait use. This was a primary motivation for including this as a focus of the current study. What little recent work has been done in this area has focused on the role of political knowledge in trait use. This work suggests that those with higher levels of political knowledge process political information in a more complex manner, seek out more political information, and better understand the political system (Funk, 1996).

The results of the current study support the role of political knowledge as a determinate of candidate trait use. The study improves upon previous theory and research in this area by addressing the relationship between political knowledge and television use. In the current study, both television use and political knowledge were significant predictors of trait use. Political knowledge was a stronger predictor relative to television use across trait types.

It may be that the political knowledge and television exposure variables used in the current study are not conceptually distinct. As mentioned previously, the only television use variable which was a consistently significant predictor was exposure to non-newscast programs about the presidential campaign. General television exposure and attention variables were never significant in the current study.

It may be that in the current study the campaign programs variable was also measuring the political knowledge of respondents. It is plausible to think that respondents with high levels of political knowledge, significantly more than respondents with low levels of political knowledge, would seek out programs devoted to the presidential campaign. Many researchers (see Bartels, 1993, for an excellent treatment of this subject) have called for increasingly sensitive and distinct media effects measures, and that call is echoed here.

The current study also found support for sex differences in the use of candidate trait types to evaluate candidates. The results of the current study extend our knowledge of the "gender gap" in American voting by documenting male and female voting differences across specific candidate trait types. Limited theoretical explanation is available for the "gender gap" hypothesis, and the current study does not seek to add to this. Researchers have, however, argued that females have voted more than males in recent elections (Kenski, 1988; Kenski et al., 1998) and that males and females may associate themselves with different issues (Bandy and Lake, 1994; Shapiro and Mahajan, 1986).

Significant differences were found in candidate trait use based on age and party identification of respondents. For example, an interaction between age and party

identification was the strongest predictor of the use of character. Both were also significant predictors of the use of negative character traits. The results suggest that older Republicans used character traits significantly more often than younger Republicans, Democrats, and Independents.

These findings are important because very little research has focused on determinants of trait use. The work which has been done in this area has not focused on age and party identification as potential determinants of trait use. Future research should explore age and party identification effects across elections. It is important to determine, for example, if the effects of these variables are largely a result of Clinton, or if they are more generalizable across elections and candidates.

Limitations of the Study

Cautious interpretation is required of the results from the first part of the current study. Respondents' answers to ANES open-ended candidate likes/dislikes items were used to determine the extent to which respondents used each trait type to evaluate the candidates. The use of these items is consistent with previous research on candidate evaluations (Bean, 1993; Funk, 1996; Glass, 1985; Kinder, 1986; Miller et al., 1984; Page, 1978) in the political science literature. Several aspects of these dependent measures do encourage a careful interpretation of the findings.

First, the mean use of each trait type was relatively low (see appendix A for frequency distributions). Thus, while the mean use of traits in general across subjects was 2.3, most respondents did not use most of the candidate trait types in their evaluations of the three candidates. While in theory each respondent could have cited each trait type as many as 30 times (up to 10 likes and dislikes for each candidate were

coded for each subject), most respondents either did not use a particular trait type or used it only once. Thus the actual range of each variable was much lower than the possible 1-30 (see appendix A).

The limited range of each variable deserves attention as it relates to the interpretation of the findings. Since most of the sample did not utilize any particular trait type, it is possible that those respondents who did utilize a trait type constitute a nonrepresentative subset of the sample. While this demands caution when generalizing findings relative to the use of traits to the sample as a whole, it is consistent with the third goal of the study. The third goal of the study is to examine the determinants of trait use and selection. If, for example, those respondents with more political knowledge cited certain trait types more than those with less political knowledge, the identification of this nonrepresentative subsample is precisely the aim of the third part of this study.

A second limitation of the current study is also methodological and largely the result of secondary data analysis. The candidate evaluation measures in the current study were created by selecting from closed-ended ANES items which measured respondents' perceptions that each candidate possessed certain traits. For example, the candidate evaluation measure for character in the current study is a combination of items measuring candidate honesty and morality.

While the data allow each trait type to be represented in the current study, the researcher was forced to narrowly define candidate evaluation measures based on the available items in the data set. For example, the measure of competence for Dole and Perot included only one item which measured candidate knowledge. While operationalizing competence as knowledge is consistent with past research, it excludes

other competence traits which were not available in the ANES data set. Future studies, and indeed future ANES projects, should incorporate a larger battery of items representing each candidate trait type.

A third limitation of the current study is one of generalizability. As Denton (1998) notes, the presidential election of 1996 was marked by unusually low interest levels on the part of many journalists and voters. Schneider (1996) writes that of the more than 200 polls broadcast by major news networks during the final months of the election, none portrayed Dole as leading. The results in 1996, to a greater extent than any other modern presidential election, were determined early and did not deviate from initial predictions.

Denton (1998) writes, "A consensus soon developed among members of the media that voters simply did not care about the campaign. Prediction of low voter turnout and interest became part of the coverage. Lack of interest was explained by likely outcome of the race, lack of enthusiasm for the candidates, good economic times, and general dislike of the mediated campaign process...Media organizations, detecting a lack of interest by the general public, reduced their coverage of the contest" (p. 45-46).

While the results of the current study extend knowledge of trait evaluations in important ways, caution is recommended when generalizing to other elections. It is unclear if respondents' use of candidate trait types, the importance of trait types to candidate evaluations, and determinants of trait types are unique to 1996 or generalizable across elections. Future research should build on the important results presented here by utilizing Kinder's (1986) four-factor theory of presidential trait evaluations to analyze ANES data for the presidential elections which followed Kinder's important work. Such

work examining the 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000 elections might also extend knowledge of the effects of receiver characteristics on trait use identified in the current study. As discussed previously, work identifying determinants of trait use is rare.

Finally, the present study is unable to establish if trait references were the reasons respondents evaluated candidates as they did, or if they were post hoc justifications for previous evaluative decisions. For example, in the current study a positive reference to Clinton's competence could be a basis for an evaluative decision or a rationalization for a respondents' previous decision to support Clinton.

This issue has been raised previously in trait evaluation work (Funk, 1996, 1997; Kinder, 1986). As Funk notes, all correlational work on candidate traits is hindered by this question. As an alternative to correlational designs, Funk (1997) incorporated an experimental design which allowed her to control the information a respondent possessed about hypothetical candidates in an attempt to directly establish the causal impact of trait inferences on candidate evaluations. There are, of course, problems with this design as well (see chapter two for a discussion of Funk's design), and future research should continue to address this issue.

Conclusion

An extensive history of research on source evaluations exists in the communication and political science literatures. This work suggests that individuals utilize specific dimensions when evaluating sources. Research in communication suggests that competence, character, and perceived caring dimensions are critical in the evaluation of sources. Work in political science has identified character, competence, empathy, and leadership traits as critical to the evaluation of political sources. The most

influential trait evaluation work in political science, however, appeared in the early 1980s. Several factors warranted a more contemporary examination of the use of candidate trait types in the evaluation of presidential candidates, including persistent levels of political disaffection, increased candidate-specific disaffection, increased media attention to political events and personal aspects of a candidate's life, and multidimensional conceptualizations of candidate character.

The present research adds to the impressive body of work in the candidate evaluation literature in a number of ways. The present study focused on specific dimensions of trait evaluations (character, competence, empathy, and leadership) in the specific context of evaluating presidential candidates. The study utilized open- and closed-ended items, drew from communication and political science literature, examined the relative importance of character and competence traits in evaluations, and examined determinants of trait use.

The results of the current study suggest that empathy and leadership were more important than character or competence as predictors of liking and vote choice across candidates in 1996. Past research has not suggested such large effects for these trait types. Additionally, important determinants of candidate trait type use were identified, including differences in sex, political knowledge, television use, cynicism, age, and party identification. Future research should further examine potential determinants of candidate trait use across elections utilizing Kinder's four-factor theory of trait evaluations. In addition, future work should explore the representational validity of the trait types used in the current study by examining individuals' conceptualizations of the trait types.

APPENDIX A
SUPPLEMENTARY TABLES

Frequency Distributions

Table A.1

Variable: Traits	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	473	27.6	27.6
	1	336	19.6	47.2
	2	261	15.2	62.5
	3	224	13.0	75.5
	4	153	8.9	84.4
	5	91	5.3	89.7
	6	79	4.6	94.3
	7	32	1.9	96.2
	8	31	1.8	98.0
	9	17	1.0	99.0
	10	9	.5	99.5
	11	3	.2	99.7
	12	2	.1	99.9
	15	2	.1	100.0
	Total	1714	100.0	

Mean 2.27
SD 2.32
Median 2.00
Mode 0.00

Table A.2

Variable: Negative traits	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	730	42.6	42.6
	1	471	27.5	70.1
	2	266	15.5	85.6
	3	125	7.3	92.9
	4	72	4.2	97.1
	5	36	2.1	99.2
	6	7	.4	99.6
	7	7	.4	100.0
	Total	1714	100.0	

Mean 1.13 Median 1.00
SD 1.35 Mode -0.00

Table A.3

Variable: Competence		Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
		0	875	51.1	51.1
		1	457	26.7	77.7
		2	215	12.6	90.3
		3	118	6.9	97.1
		4	21	1.2	98.4
		5	15	.9	99.3
		6	9	.5	99.8
		7	4	.2	100.0
		Total	1714	100.0	
Mean	0.86				
SD	1.16				
Median	0.00				
Mode	0.00				

Table A.4

Variable: Character		Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
		0	891	52.0	52.0
		1	421	24.5	76.5
		2	256	14.9	91.5
		3	109	6.4	97.8
		4	29	1.7	99.6
		5	5	.3	99.8
		6	3	.2	100.0
		Total	1714	100.0	
Mean	0.83				
SD	1.07				
Median	0.00				
Mode	0.00				

Table A.5

Variable: Empathy

	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	1601	93.4	93.4
	1	92	5.4	98.8
	2	21	1.2	100.0
	Total	1714	100.0	
Mean	0.08			
SD	0.31			
Median	0.00			
Mode	0.00			

Table A.6

Variable: Leadership

	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	1147	66.9	66.9
	1	368	21.5	88.4
	2	137	8.0	96.4
	3	49	2.9	99.2
	4	7	.4	99.7
	5	3	.2	99.8
	6	1	.1	99.9
	7	1	.1	100.0
	Total	1714	100.0	
Mean	0.50			
SD	0.86			
Median	0.00			
Mode	0.00			

Table A.7

Variable: Clinton Competence

	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	25	1.5	1.5
	1	27	1.6	3.1
	2	102	6.0	9.1
	3	168	9.9	19.0
	4	675	39.4	58.6
	5	276	16.1	74.9
	6	427	25.1	100.0
		13	.8	Missing
	Total	1714	100.0	
Mean	4.34	Median	4.00	
SD	1.33	Mode	4.00	

Table A.8

Variable: Clinton Character	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	323	19.3	19.3
	1	172	10.3	29.6
	2	387	23.2	52.8
	3	257	15.4	68.1
	4	384	23.0	91.1
	5	99	5.9	97.0
	6	49	3.0	100.0
		43	2.5	Missing
	Total	1714	100.0	
Mean	2.42			
SD	1.67			
Median	2.00			
Mode	2.00			

Table A.9

Variable: Clinton Empathy	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	112	6.7	6.7
	1	133	8.0	14.6
	2	260	15.5	30.1
	3	266	15.9	46.0
	4	535	31.9	77.9
	5	200	11.9	89.9
	6	170	9.9	100.0
		38	2.2	Missing
	Total	1714	100.0	
Mean	3.35			
SD	1.63			
Median	4.00			
Mode	4.00			

Table A.10

Variable: Clinton Leadership	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	202	11.9	11.9
	1	490	28.8	40.7
	2	764	44.9	85.6
	3	245	14.4	100.0
		14	.8	Missing
	Total	1714	100.0	

Mean 1.62
 SD 0.87
 Median 2.00
 Mode 2.00

Table A.11

Variable: Dole Competence	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	28	1.7	1.7
	1	235	14.2	15.9
	2	1040	62.9	78.8
	3	351	21.2	100.0
		60	3.5	Missing
	Total	1714	100.0	

Mean 2.04
 SD 0.65
 Median 2.00
 Mode 2.00

Table A.12

Variable: Dole Character	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	34	2.2	2.2
	1	40	2.5	4.7
	2	218	13.7	18.4
	3	258	16.2	34.6
	4	615	38.6	73.2
	5	192	12.1	85.3
	6	234	14.7	100.0
	Total	1714	100.0	

Mean 3.82
 SD 1.40
 Median 4.00
 Mode 4.00

Table A.13

Variable: Dole Empathy	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	255	15.6	15.6
	1	693	42.4	58.0
	2	572	35.0	93.0
	3	114	7.0	100.0
		80	4.7	Missing
	Total	1714	100.0	

Mean	1.33
SD	0.82
Median	1.00
Mode	1.00

Table A.14

Variable: Dole Leadership

	0	99	6.1	6.1
	1	554	34.0	40.1
	2	763	44.5	87.0
	3	213	13.0	100.0
	Total	1714	100.0	

Mean	1.67
SD	0.78
Median	2.00
Mode	2.00

Table A.15

Variable: Perot Competence	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	111	6.8	6.8
	1	392	24.2	31.0
	2	795	49.1	80.1
	3	322	19.9	100.0
		94	5.5	Missing
	Total	1714	100.0	

Mean	1.82	Median	2.00
SD	0.83	Mode	2.00

Table A.16

Variable: Perot Character	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	128	8.5	8.5
	1	317	21.1	21.1
	2	584	38.8	68.4
	3	190	12.6	81.0
	4	215	14.3	95.4
	5	46	3.1	98.4
	6	24	1.6	100.0
		211	12.6	Missing
	Total	1714	100.0	

Mean 2.12
 SD 1.32
 Median 2.00
 Mode 2.00

Table A.17

Variable: Perot Empathy	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	333	20.9	20.9
	1	636	40.0	60.9
	2	519	32.6	93.5
	3	103	6.5	100.0
		122	7.1	Missing
	Total	1714	100.0	

Mean 1.25
 SD 0.86
 Median 1.00
 Mode 1.00

Table A.18

Variable: Perot Leadership	Value	Freq	Percent	Cum Percent
	0	285	17.8	17.8
	1	705	41.1	61.9
	2	471	29.4	91.3
	3	139	8.7	100.0
		114	6.7	Missing
	Total	1714	100.0	

Mean 1.29
SD 0.86
Median 1.00
Mode 1.00

Table A.19
Correlations for Candidate Trait Types in Evaluations of Clinton

	Character	Competence	Empathy	Leadership
Character	1.0000	.4349	.7383	.6848
Competence	.4349	1.0000	.5184	.5027
Empathy	.7383	.5184	1.0000	.6928
Leadership	.6848	.5027	.6928	1.0000

Table A.20
Correlations for Candidate Trait Types in Evaluations of Dole

	Character	Competence	Empathy	Leadership
Character	1.0000	.5633	.5842	.5308
Competence	.5633	1.0000	.4235	.5072
Empathy	.5842	.4235	1.0000	.5060
Leadership	.5308	.5072	.5060	1.0000

Table A.21
Correlations for Candidate Trait Types in Evaluations of Perot

	Character	Competence	Empathy	Leadership
Character	1.0000	.4705	.5290	.4352
Competence	.4705	1.0000	.3897	.4671
Empathy	.5290	.3897	1.0000	.4582
Leadership	.4352	.4671	.4582	1.0000

NOTE: Inter-item correlation across candidates: .51

Table A.22
T-Test Analyses of Use of Traits by Political Knowledge

	<i>High Political Knowledge</i>			<i>Low Political Knowledge</i>		
	Mean	SD	se(M)	Mean	SD	se(M)
Traits*	2.93	2.45	.09	1.78	2.10	.07
Negative Traits*	1.46	1.46	.05	0.88	1.20	.04
Character*	1.03	1.14	.04	0.68	0.98	.03
Competence*	1.14	1.26	.05	0.66	1.04	.03
Empathy	0.10	0.36	.01	0.06	0.27	.01
Leadership*	0.66	0.95	.04	0.38	0.76	.02

* p<.000

Table A.23
Bivariate Analyses of Use of Traits by Political Knowledge

	<i>Political Knowledge Level</i>		
	<u>High</u>	<u>Med</u>	<u>Low</u>
Traits	83%	74%	56%
Negative Traits	69	57	42
Character	56	49	37
Competence	62	47	34
Empathy	8	7	4
Leadership	42	34	20

NOTE: Column percentages represent percentage of respondents at each level of political knowledge who used the trait at least once.

Table A.24
 Unstandardized Regression Coefficients for Candidate Evaluation Measures

Clinton	Liking	Pre-election feeling	Post-election feeling	Job Performance
Character	.53 (.04)	4.74 (.36)	4.60 (.39)	.10 (.02)
Competence	.03 (.04)	.69 (.32)	.28 (.35)	.04 (.02)
Empathy	.32 (.04)	3.28 (.38)	3.42 (.40)	.09 (.02)
Leadership	.65 (.07)	6.75 (.64)	6.83 (.68)	.26 (.03)
Economy	.26 (.04)	3.95 (.32)	2.84 (.35)	.25 (.02)
Party	.34 (.03)	2.59 (.23)	2.64 (.25)	.08 (.01)
Constant	.50 (.10)	4.26 (1.24)	10.30 (.95)	.92 (.07)
Dole				
Character	.24 (.05)	2.84 (.39)	2.30 (.40)	NA*
Competence	.19 (.09)	1.12 (.81)	1.50 (.84)	NA
Empathy	.68 (.08)	7.96 (.70)	5.91 (.71)	NA
Leadership	.50 (.08)	5.60 (.66)	6.44 (.67)	NA
Economy	-.09 (.04)	-1.33 (.33)	-.54 (.34)	NA
Party	-.27 (.05)	-2.61 (.25)	-2.00 (.23)	NA
Constant	3.31 (.23)	33.34 (1.86)	32.72 (1.85)	NA
Perot				
Character	.03 (.05)	.96 (.46)	.75 (.45)	NA
Competence	.30 (.08)	3.27 (.75)	4.59 (.74)	NA
Empathy	.87 (.08)	9.01 (.74)	7.41 (.72)	NA
Leadership	.65 (.08)	6.58 (.74)	5.89 (.74)	NA
Economy	-.10 (.04)	-.75 (.41)	-1.01 (.41)	NA
Party	.01 (.03)	.78 (.25)	.61 (.39)	NA
Constant	1.90 (.17)	9.99 (1.62)	18.22 (1.33)	NA

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

*ANES job performance item for Clinton only.

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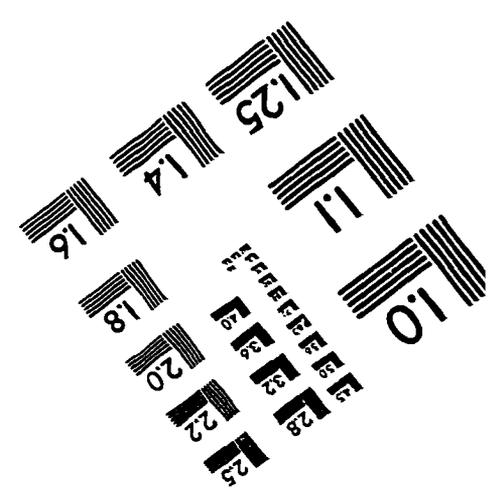
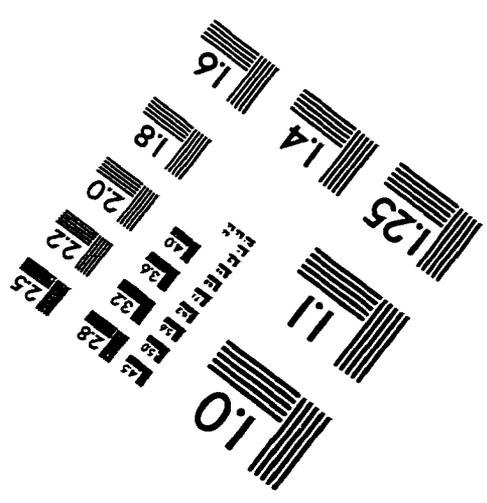
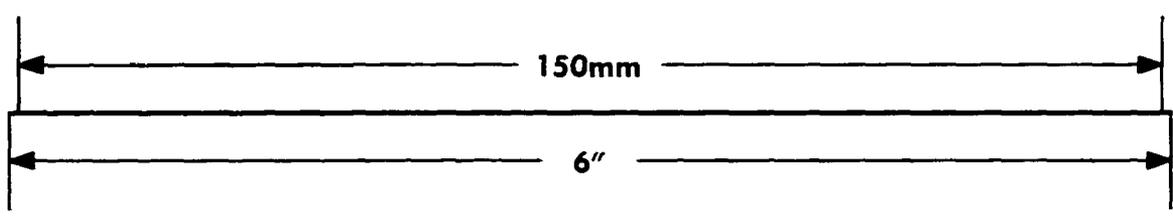
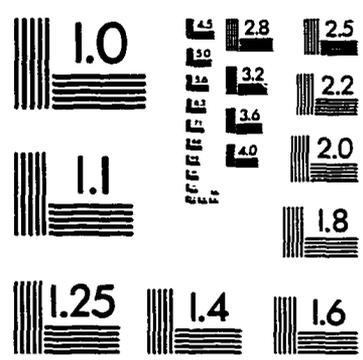
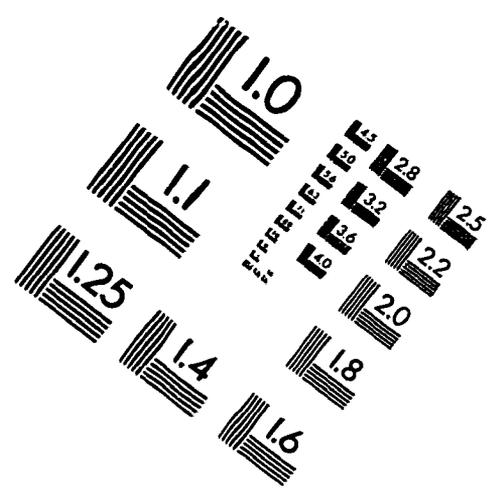
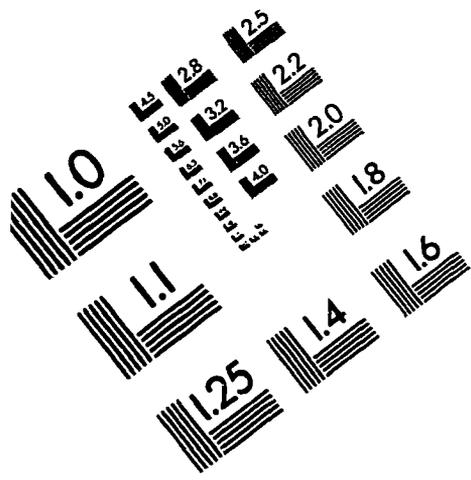
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IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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