The anatomy of an insult: Popular derogatory terms connote important individual differences in
Agreeableness/Antagonism

Courtland S. Hyatt

Jessica L. Maples-Keller

Chelsea E. Sleep

Donald R. Lynam

Joshua D. Miller

Note: as of 7/27/2018, this article is in press at the *Journal for Research in Personality*.

Abstract

In the current series of studies, we investigate the psychosocial connotations of common insults. In Studies 1 and 2, we investigated the most frequently used insults to denigrate men and women (asshole, dick, bitch), and generated trait profiles that can be considered prototypical of each insult. In Studies 3 and 4, we examined how these insults are relevant to other key indicators of interpersonal functioning, including aggression, social information processing, personality disorders, and substance use. We also gathered thin-slice and informant reports. Each of the insults was associated with trait Antagonism, as well as other behaviors that comprise Antagonism's nomological network (e.g., bullying, psychopathy, etc.). Results are discussed in terms of the importance of everyday language to psychological research.

Keywords: insults; five factor model; antagonism; externalizing behavior; lexical hypothesis

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1. Introduction

Language has intrigued scholars across a wide range of academic disciplines, including anthropology, computer science, philosophy, education, and perhaps most obviously, linguistics. Communication is a key function of the brain, the wellspring of the “meaningful...voluntarily produced symbols” that we use to convey thoughts and emotions (Sapir, 2004). In every human culture, an arbitrary set of semantic indicators (e.g., signs, sounds, gestures) has been developed to describe the concepts that are most relevant to a particular society. These complex sets of terms allow people to exchange valuable information and facilitate interpersonal relationships. In the current series of studies, we examine the nomological networks associated with a frequently used and potentially important form of language – insults – colloquial terms that are relatively ubiquitous and may carry important personality-relevant information. By doing so, we are able to speak to the meaning that is being ascribed to a person when they are insulted.

Researchers have used the natural variation in languages as a framework for understanding individual differences both within and across cultures. The predominant models of personality such as the Big Five (Goldberg, 1990), Five-Factor Model (hereafter FFM; McCrae & Costa, 1987), and HEXACO (Ashton & Lee, 2007) have been developed, in part, based around analyses of the natural language. Specifically, these models are rooted in the *lexical hypothesis*, which posits that the most socially relevant characteristics of humans have become encoded in natural language (see Goldberg, 1993). This hypothesis postulates that people have developed a lexicon that permits communication about the individual differences that may be most relevant to survival and well-being of individuals and the groups within which they reside.

The more important the characteristic, the more prevalent the concept will be in a vocabulary. By examining the distributions and covariance of these trait terms, researchers have developed common structures of personality which have proven to be of substantial relevance to our understanding of psychological disorders (e.g., Kotov, Gamez, Schmidt, & Watson, 2010; Samuel & Widiger, 2008), physical health (e.g., Bogg & Roberts, 2004), occupational functioning (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991), substance use (e.g., Malouff, Thorsteinsson, & Schutte, 2006), crime and aggression (e.g., Jones, Miller, & Lynam, 2011), and other important life outcomes (e.g., Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006; Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007).

The domains and facets of trait models such as the FFM can be used to describe traits with both positive and negative social ramifications. *Positive Emotions* (a facet of Extraversion), and *Achievement-striving* (a facet of Conscientiousness) are examples of traits that are generally seen as desirable and adaptive (e.g., Carter, Guan, Maples, Williamson, & Miller, 2016). Conversely, there are traits that are viewed as less desirable and impairing, even to those who possess those traits (e.g., Lamkin, Maples-Keller, & Miller, 2017). For example, Neuroticism is rated as being undesirable and impairing for the self (Miller et al. in press) and in potential romantic partners (Sleep, Lavner, & Miller, 2017). This is understandable, as this domain has been linked strongly to anxiety, depressive, and substance use disorders (Kotov et al., 2010), as well as physical health (Shipley, Weiss, Der, Taylor, & Deary, 2007), subjective well-being (Costa & McCrae, 1980), and poorer marital functioning (e.g., Fisher & McNulty, 2008). Similarly, low scores on Agreeableness are robustly related to socially undesirable outcomes such as aggression and antisocial behavior (Jones, Miller, & Lynam, 2017; Miller & Lynam, 2001), marital dissatisfaction (Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2010) and

intimate partner violence (Hines & Saudino, 2008).

These links between personality traits and the outcomes that comprise their nomological networks (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955) have been investigated in a number of important contexts, including work (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991), romance (e.g., Heller, Watson, & Iles, 2004; Malouff et al., 2010), health (e.g., Marshall, Wortman, Vickers, Kusulas, & Hervig, 1994), and clinical contexts (e.g., Bieling et al., 2003). Personality traits are discussed broadly in a manner not limited to academic or clinical contexts due to their relevance in daily life. In fact, one could argue that everyone (i.e., academics and non-academics alike) uses personality descriptors quite regularly as they engage in dialogues about the characteristics and tendencies of others, including those who wield substantial power such as politicians (e.g., McAdams, 2016; Watts et al., 2013).

1.1 The Current Investigation

In the current manuscript, we examine the use of a relatively understudied type of colloquial term that individuals may use when describing others – insults – especially those considered “curse words.” Insults are negative evaluations that have been studied by sociologists and philosophers of language (e.g., Hughes, 1998; James, 2014), but these terms have received relatively little empirical attention in a psychological or personological framework (for an exception, see De Raad, Van Oudenhoven, & Hofstede, 2005), perhaps due in part to histories of censorship of certain words. Furthermore, many of this type of social description terms have been excluded from lexical-based work previously (e.g., Simms, 2007). Thus, to address this gap, we undertook an exploratory approach in assessing the personality traits and other relevant individual differences that are most closely related to a selection of commonly used insults so as

to better understand the meaning conveyed by these terms¹. In Study 1, we investigated which terms are among the most commonly used insults - for men and women, men only, and women only – to focus our subsequent examination on a small subset of insults. In Study 2, we asked participants to rate individuals whom they felt were prototypical examples of the insults identified in Study 1 (men and women: asshole; men only: dick; women only: bitch) in terms of the 5 domains and 30 facets of the FFM. In Study 3, we asked individuals to rate themselves on these insults and provide ratings of personality, personality disorders and related constructs (e.g., Dark Triad; Paulhus & Williams, 2002), externalizing behaviors, and perceived functioning. Finally, in Study 4, we examined additional self-report correlates (e.g., social discounting, criminal behavior) and expanded the methodology to include informant-reports and thin slice based ratings in which strangers rated the relevance of these insults, likability, attractiveness, and the FFM after watching 60-second video clips (e.g., Oltmanns, Friedman, Fiedler, & Turkheimer, 2004).

Although this series of investigations was largely exploratory, we had several guiding hypotheses. First and foremost, we hypothesized that the insults would be markers of basic trait Antagonism (i.e., the low pole of trait Agreeableness). More specifically, we hypothesized that the insults we investigated would be related to antagonistic personality traits at the general and pathological trait level (e.g., low Agreeableness, psychopathy), as well as a range of behavioral indicators of interpersonal conflict and externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression, bullying). We believed that people would be able to and willing to endorse these terms and that their self-reports would converge with informant reports and thin slice ratings in a manner consistent with

¹None of the current studies were pre-registered. Data cannot be made publicly available, as the informed consent documents obtained from all participants did not include a provision that would allow the broad sharing of data.

general personality traits (Connelly & Ones, 2010). In terms of differences between the individual insults, we had no clear a priori hypotheses as to if and how they might diverge².

2.1. Study 1 Introduction

The lexical hypothesis posits that the more important a characteristic, the more prevalent the concept will be within vocabulary (e.g., Goldberg, 1993; John & Srivastava, 1999). As such, the focus of Study 1 was to identify which insults are relatively most prevalent in use among Americans. We elected to take an exploratory, empirical approach to determine which insults are used the most frequently so as to focus on only three insults in the subsequent studies. By using an open-ended response framework, we allowed participants to generate the insults that are most familiar for denigrating men and women.

2.2. Study 1 Method

2.2.1. Participants and Procedure

Participants included 334 adults from the United States (56.3% female; 84.4% Caucasian, 5.7% African American; *mean* age = 35.37, *SD* = 11.33) who volunteered to participate via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) website. Individuals were compensated \$.25 for completion of the study. IRB approval was granted by the (BLINDED FOR SUBMISSION).

2.2.2. Measures

2.2.2.1. Demographic Form.

²The first author contributed to manuscript writing, study conceptualization, data collection, data preparation and analyses. The second author contributed to study conceptualization, data collection, data analyses, and critical editing of the manuscript. The third author contributed to manuscript writing, study conceptualization, and data collection. The fourth author contributed to manuscript writing and data analyses. The fifth author contributed to manuscript writing, study conceptualization, and data analyses.

A brief demographic questionnaire was administered assessing gender, race, education level, and age.

2.2.2.2. Insult Questionnaire.

Participants were asked three separate questions stating, “What are some insults that are used only or primarily in relation to” men, women, and both men and women. Participants were provided up to 10 open ended answers in response to these questions.

2.3. Study 1 Results

For these analyses, we examined 1) which insults were endorsed first (i.e., the “top” response), and 2) the endorsement frequency of each insult across all responses. For insults used primarily in relation to men, the two most frequent first responses included “dick” (22.2%, or 74/334 of first responses) and “asshole” (9.9%, 33/334 of first responses). For insults used primarily in relation to men across all participant responses (i.e., not just first responses), “dick” and “asshole” remained the most frequent responses with 4.1% (149/3632 of total responses) and 3.7% (137/3632 of total responses) respectively. For insults used primarily in relation to women, the two most frequent first responses included “bitch” (50.3%, or 168/334 of first responses) and “cunt” (12.3%, 41/334 of first responses). For insults used primarily in relation to women across all participant responses, “bitch” and “slut” emerged as the most frequent responses with 13.5% (256/1896 of total responses) and 10.4% (198/1896 of total responses) respectively. For insults used in relation to men and women, the top two most frequent first responses included “asshole” (18.0%, or 60/334 of first responses) and “idiot” (12.6%, 42/334 of first responses). For insults used in relation to men and women to across all participant responses, “asshole” and “idiot” remained most frequent responses with 6.1% (127/2095 of total responses) and 5.7% (119/2095 of total responses) respectively. As such, across both first responses and all participant responses,

“dick,” “bitch,” and “asshole” were the most frequently provided responses for male insults, female insults, and both gender insults, respectively.

2.4. Study 1 Discussion

The results of Study 1 suggest that there is general consensus about the insult terms that are commonly used to describe men and women. Specifically, asshole, dick, and bitch emerged as the most frequently used insults, although there were several other insults that are relatively common (e.g., idiot, slut). Consistent with the lexical hypotheses (John et al., 1999), this suggests that these insults reflect important characteristics for interpersonal functioning.

3.1. Study 2 Introduction

After selecting common insults that pertain to men, women, and both genders, we sought to investigate if these insults contain information about important personality trait differences and whether the information varies across insults. In other words, though each of these terms is commonly used in a derogatory manner, there may be important differences at the domain and the more granular facet level regarding what traits these insults reference. Thus, Study 2 had two aims. First, we conducted reliability analyses to assess the degree to which participants have a shared conception of a prototypical manifestation of a given insult. Second, we asked participants to rate the personality profiles of a prototypical male asshole, female asshole, male dick, or female bitch whom they knew. Additionally, we asked participants to estimate the impairment that the rated individuals experience in their social and occupational relationships due to their personality. For the sake of comparison, we also asked participants to rate a friend whom they knew well on the same personality and impairment items. Finally, we compared the personality profiles associated with each insult with one another (and friend) to assess their absolute similarity via *double-entry q-correlations*, as well as with existing FFM personality

disorder prototypes (PDs; e.g., Miller, 2012).

3.2. Study 2 Method

3.2.1. Participants

Data were collected from 400 participants who participated via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) website. The final sample comprised 392 participants from the United States (52.8% female; 84.4% Caucasian, 5.1% African American; *mean* age 36.32; *SD* = 12.11). Participants were compensated \$0.75 for study participation. IRB approval was granted by the (BLINDED FOR SUBMISSION).

3.2.2. Measures and Procedure

3.2.2.1. Demographic Form.

A brief demographic questionnaire was administered assessing gender, race, education level, and age.

3.2.2.2. FFM-Rating Form (FFM-RF).

The FFM-RF (Mullins-Sweat, Jamerson, Samuel, Olson, & Widiger, 2006) is a measure that uses 30 items to assess each of the facets of the FFM. The facets can then be averaged to form domain level composites. In the current study, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: 1) male asshole, 2) female asshole, 3) male dick, or 4) female bitch. After completing a demographics questionnaire, participants were instructed to complete the FFM-RF for a person who they know who matched the condition (i.e., participants in condition 1 rated a male asshole who they know), and then subsequently, to rate a friend on the FFM-RF.

Cronbach's alphas for the FFM-RF domains ranged from $\alpha = .60$ (extraversion-female bitch) to $\alpha = .89$ (agreeableness-female asshole) with a mean of $\alpha = .78$.

3.2.2.3. Impairment Ratings.

For both the insult prototypes and the friend ratings, participants used a Likert scale (1-5) to provide single-item ratings of impairment that the rated individual experiences in their relationships with friends, romantic partners, and co-workers (e.g., “how much has being an asshole negatively affected their friendships?”).

3.3. Study 2 Results

3.3.1. Reliability among Raters of Insult Prototypes

Table 1 presents several measures of agreement among our raters. The second column provides information on the average within-group agreement, *rwg*, for the FFM facets for each construct. This coefficient has been offered as a means of "assessing agreement among the judgements made by a single group of judges on a single variable in regard to a single target" (James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1984, as cited in James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1993) and represents the proportional reduction in error variance relative to a random process. The third column provides the average interrater correlation (i.e., the average correlation of one rater's profile with every other rater's profile) for each construct. The fourth column provides the average correlation between an individual expert's rating and the composite made without his or her rating contributing to it; as such, it offers information on how well individual ratings agree with the overall composite. The fifth column provides information on the reliability of the composite through calculation of coefficient alpha in which raters serve as variables and facets serve as cases. The top part of Table 1 provides agreement statistics for the current study, whereas the bottom provides these statistics for other previously collected profiles as a standard of comparison. In general, agreement was similar for three of the four constructs, although female asshole showed relatively lower agreement than the other three. All four showed levels of

agreement well below the expert profiles for DSM-based PDs and Machiavellianism, but similar to levels of agreement for lay ratings of narcissism. In general, the average *rwg* was low as were the *average inter-rater r* and the *corrected item total correlations* indicating some lack of consensus across the whole profiles. Table 2 provides information for agreement at the level of the individual facets. This table indicates that agreement, calculated as *rwg*, was variable across the facets. For example, for male asshole, agreement was relatively good for Angry Hostility and Impulsiveness, and Openness to Values, Trust, Straightforwardness, Altruism, Compliance, Modesty, Tendermindedness, and Deliberation. Similar pockets of good agreement can also be identified for the other insult categories, with many such pockets involving facets of Agreeableness. These results provide a more nuanced picture of agreement in which certain facets, particularly facets from Agreeableness, seem to define the consensual core of the insult, whereas the other facets show little consensus, which leads to lower agreement for the profiles as wholes.

3.3.2. Prototype Ratings

In contrast to the insult prototype ratings, participants reported that their friends were most highly characterized by the Warmth facet of Extraversion, as well as by high ratings in the Agreeableness and Conscientiousness domains. Friends of participants were rated as much higher in Agreeableness than the insult prototypes (Table 3). Furthermore, although the insult prototypes were not rated as particularly low in Conscientiousness or Neuroticism, friends were characterized by significantly higher and lower scores on these domains, respectively.

3.3.3. Profile Similarity

We examined profile similarities between the insult prototypes and friend ratings in two ways. First, we generated intraclass correlations between the facet profiles as a conservative

metric that accounts for absolute similarity in direction and magnitude of effects (McGraw & Wong, 1996). Overall, the insult profiles manifested very similar relations across the FFM facets (see Table 4). The relation was strongest for the female asshole and bitch prototypes ($r_{ICC} = .96$), but the relations between male asshole and dick prototypes ($r_{ICC} = .95$) and male asshole and female asshole prototypes ($r_{ICC} = .88$) were also very strong. The friend facet profile was strongly negatively correlated with all insult prototypes: male asshole prototype ($r_{ICC} = -.72$), female asshole ($r_{ICC} = -.55$), dick ($r_{ICC} = -.59$), and bitch ($r_{ICC} = -.65$).

Second, we computed effect sizes (Cohen's d) to quantify the FFM domain differences between insult prototypes and the friend ratings (Table 3). In general, the insult prototypes were not remarkably different from one another, but they were all very different than the friend ratings. Compared to the friend ratings, the insult prototypes showed the largest differences for Agreeableness, such that the insult prototypes were rated almost two and a half standard deviations lower in Agreeableness than friends. The differences in ratings of Neuroticism and Conscientiousness ratings between the insult prototypes and friends were also very large, with the insult prototypes being seen as between one to one and a half standard deviations higher and lower in these domains, respectively. Although the domain-level differences among the insult prototypes were generally very small, the asshole and bitch prototypes were rated as marginally lower on Extraversion than the dick prototype. The asshole prototype was also seen as somewhat lower on Openness than the bitch prototype.

Finally, we compared the insult and friend profiles with existing FFM personality disorder prototypes (Lynam & Widiger, 2001; Miller, Lynam, Widiger, & Leukefeld, 2001) using profile matching approaches (Miller, 2012; see Table 5). We report the average insult profile here for efficiency, given the substantial overlap among the personality profiles of the

insults. As expected, on average, the insult profiles manifested the largest and most substantial matches with personality disorders such as narcissistic (*mean r_{ICC} = .72*), antisocial (*mean r_{ICC} = .66*), psychopathic (*mean r_{ICC} = .55*), and borderline (*mean r_{ICC} = .52*).

3.3.4. Impairment

All insult prototypes were judged to be experiencing impairment in their social and occupational domains as a function of their personality. On a 1-5 scale, where 1 = no impairment and 5 = a very large amount of impairment, average impairment ratings for the insults were highest for dick (mean: 3.49; range: 3.14 – 3.67), followed by male asshole (mean: 3.44; range: 3.21 – 3.66), female asshole (mean: 3.44; range: 3.08 – 3.67), and bitch (mean: 3.37; range: 2.86 – 3.68). Friends were rated to be experiencing very mild, if any, impairment (mean: 1.65; range: 1.56 – 1.84).

3.4. Study 2 Discussion

The results of Study 2 suggest that there is moderate variability among raters about the personality traits that are thought to be associated with asshole, dick, and bitch prototypes, but that Antagonism shows the strongest evidence of consistency and agreement across raters. Across all four rated prototypes, low Agreeableness (particularly the facets of Modesty, Compliance, and Trust) was the trait domain most strongly related to these prototypes. Given the salience of these traits, it is not surprising that – together – these profiles most align with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). That is, these traits are seen as being particularly descriptive of NPD when rated by academicians (Lynam & Widiger, 2001), clinicians (Samuel & Widiger, 2004), and the lay public (Miller, Lynam, Seidor, Crowe, & Campbell, 2018). These results are magnified by comparing these profiles to ratings of friends of the participants. While the insult prototypes were associated with substantial impairment in social, romantic, and

occupational functioning, ratings of friends suggest mild impairment, and unlike the insult prototypes, the friends were rated as agreeable, emotionally stable, and conscientious.

Although there are striking differences between the ratings of insult prototypes and friends, it is also remarkable how consistent the ratings were across the insult prototypes. Examination of the effect sizes comparing the insult prototype domains to one another suggest that the differences are generally small or non-existent. Furthermore, intraclass correlations suggest that the insult profiles were virtually identical. However, there may be important aspects of these insults that are not adequately captured by basic personality traits.

4.1. Study 3 Introduction

In Studies 1 and 2, we investigated the most commonly used insults for men and women, and used a “crowd-sourcing” approach to generate trait profiles considered prototypical of each insult. In Study 3, we aimed to expand these findings by examining how self-reported insult endorsement is related to a range of other relevant self-report variables. Study 2 suggests that Antagonism is the trait most strongly associated with these insult profiles, so we elected to focus primarily on variables that are related to antagonism in an effort to obtain more nuanced understanding of the types of self-reported behaviors (e.g., aggression, intimate partner violence), interpersonal tendencies (e.g., spitefulness, sadism), and DSM-5 PDs (e.g., antisocial, narcissistic) that are related to each insult. Finally, information about various aspects of psychosocial functioning (e.g., occupational, relational) was collected to gauge the amount of impairment that is related to insult endorsement. We hypothesized that the insults would be positively correlated with variables related to interpersonal conflict and impairment, as well as the Cluster B personality disorders (i.e., narcissistic, antisocial, borderline, histrionic).

4.2. Study 3 Method

4.2.1. Participants and Procedure

Data were collected from 447 participants and excluded on the basis of elevated scores on two validity scales from the Elemental Psychopathy Assessment (Lynam et al., 2011). The final sample comprised 421 participants from the United States (54.4% female; 84.6% Caucasian, 5.9% African American; *mean* age 36.31; *SD* = 12.82) who participated via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) website. Participants were compensated \$1.25 for study participation. IRB approval was granted by the (BLINDED FOR SUBMISSION).

4.2.2. Measures

4.2.2.1 Demographic Form.

A brief demographic questionnaire was administered to all participants assessing gender, race, education level, and age.

4.2.2.2. Insult Questionnaire.

Participants were sent insult questionnaires based on their response to the gender item on the demographic form. Male participants were sent a questionnaire asking "To what extent does the word "asshole/dick" characterize you?" and "To what extent would others say that the word asshole/dick characterizes you?" Participants provided a response from 1-5 indicating not at all, a little bit, somewhat, a good bit, or very much. Female participants completed the same four questions for the insults "bitch" and "asshole." Because the self and meta-perception based scores were so highly correlated (asshole: $r = .82$; dick: $r = .84$; bitch $r = .83$), we report on the self-report scores only.

4.2.2.3. Item Response Theory-Driven (IRT) Short Form (IPIP-NEO-120).

The IPIP-NEO-120 (Maples, Guan, Carter, & Miller, 2014) is a 120-item self-report measure of the FFM modeled after the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae,

1992) that assesses the five broad domains as well as the six lower-order facets of each domain.

In the present study, alphas at the domain level ranged from .84 (Openness to Experiences) to .93 (Neuroticism and Extraversion) with a median of .92 (Conscientiousness). Alphas at the facet level ranged from .71 (Morality) to .91 (Cautiousness) with a median of .80.³

4.2.2.4. Personality Diagnostic Questionnaire-4 (PDQ-4).

The PDQ-4 (Hyler, 1994) is 99-item self-report questionnaire of *DSM-IV* Personality Disorders. Items are answered in a Yes/No response format. In the current study, alphas for the 10 PDs ranged from .45 (Obsessive-Compulsive PD) to .80 (Avoidant PD) with a median of .70.⁴

4.2.2.5. Short Dark Triad-3 (SD3).

The SD3 (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) is a 27-item measure of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. In the present study, Cronbach alpha for the scales was .82, .77, and .85, respectively.

4.2.2.6. Short Sadistic Impulse Scale (SSIS).

The SSIS (O'Meara, Davies, & Hammond, 2011) is a 10 item self-report measure of sadism. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .83.

4.2.2.7. Spitefulness Scale.

The Spitefulness Scale (Marcus, Ziegler-Hill, Mercer, & Norris, 2014) is a 17 item self-report questionnaire. The items are rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Alpha

³Of note, the facet names for the IPIP NEO sometimes diverge from those associated with FFM based measures (i.e., Revised NEO Personality Inventory [NEO PI-R]; Costa & McCrae, 1992).

⁴Mean inter-item correlations for the scales ranged from .09 (OCPD) to .37 (Avoidant PD) with a median of .21.

in the present sample was .91. Taken together, the Dark Triad, Sadism, and Spitefulness can be referred to as the Dark Pentad.

4.2.2.8. Crime and Analogous Behavior scale (CAB).

The CAB (Miller & Lynam, 2003) is a 25 item self-reported measure that assesses multiple externalizing behaviors. Count scores were used to create subscales, in which participants were rated a “1” for each item they endorsed (substance abuse: 8 items [$M = 1.84$; $SD = 1.38$], antisocial behavior: 9 items [$M = .59$; $SD = .56$], and intimate partner violence: 6 items [$M = .81$; $SD = 1.39$]). Self-reported scores on antisocial behaviors were log-transformed in order to reduce problems with non-normality.

4.2.2.9. Reactive-Proactive Aggression Questionnaire (RPAQ). The RPAQ (Raine et al., 2006) is a 23 item self-report questionnaire with items assessing proactive and reactive aggression. In the current sample, $\alpha_s = .80$ and $.80$, respectively.

4.2.2.10. Functioning Questionnaire.

Participants were asked to rate how well they felt they were doing in various domains, including work/occupational domain, non-romantic social relationships, and romantic/intimate relationships, from 1 (very poorly) to 5 (very well).

4.2.2.11. Elemental Psychopathy Assessment.

Participants completed the two validity scales from the Elemental Psychopathy Assessment, and were excluded on the basis of elevated scores (Lynam et al., 2011).

4.3. Study 3 Results

4.3.1. Insult Endorsement

Rated on a 1 to 5 Likert scale, the mean endorsement of the three insults – asshole, dick, and bitch – were 1.62 ($SD = .84$), 1.56 ($SD = .80$), and 1.95 ($SD = .99$). Responses ranged from

1-5 for asshole and bitch, and from 1- 4 for dick. Men who endorsed being an asshole also endorsed being a dick, $r = .73$; similarly, women who endorsed being an asshole endorsed being a bitch, $r = .53$, although this correlation was weaker ($z = 3.55$; $p < .01$). Correlational results for asshole are combined across gender unless there was a significant asshole by gender interaction, which was tested for all correlations reported using a *p-value* of .01. Because of the exploratory nature of this undertaking, significance tests are not reported; instead, we simply focus on effect sizes of $|\ .20 |$, although we occasionally note relations smaller than this admittedly arbitrary effect size.

4.3.2. FFM Correlates of Insults

The endorsement of all three insults was negatively related to FFM Agreeableness and several of its facets, including Morality, Altruism, Cooperation, and Sympathy (see Table 6). There was also a general pattern in which the insults were negatively related to Conscientiousness, primarily the facets of Dutifulness and Cautiousness, although relations were smaller for bitch. Finally, all three insults were positively related to the facet of Anger from Neuroticism. The absolute similarity of these trait profiles was computed using double-entry Q-correlations; all three were substantially similar with intraclass correlations ranging from .83 (dick – bitch) to .95 (asshole – dick).

In order to assess the agreement between prototypical conceptions of insults and the empirical patterns of associations, we correlated the insult correlation profiles with the prototype rating scores from Study 2. The results of these analyses suggest that there is strong agreement between ratings of the prototypical male asshole ($r = .84$), female asshole ($r = .71$), dick ($r = .77$), and bitch ($r = .74$) and the self-report endorsement of insult-related traits.

4.3.3. DSM-5 Personality Disorders and the Dark Pentad

As expected, endorsement of the insults were generally positively linked to endorsement of Cluster B PDs including antisocial, borderline, and narcissistic PDs (see Table 7). They were also generally positively correlated with self-reports of Machiavellianism, psychopathy, sadism, and spite, although the relations were somewhat weaker for bitch.

4.3.4. Externalizing Behaviors and Perceived Functioning

In general, endorsement of these insults was positively related with externalizing behaviors including reactive and proactive aggression, as well as substance use and antisocial behavior (see Table 7). There were generally few substantial effect sizes for perceived functioning, although the relations were generally negative in direction with the exception of likelihood of being the recipient of disciplinary action at work.

4.4. Study 3 Discussion

The results of Study 3 support and extend the results of Study 2 in several important ways. First, the insult prototypes generated in Study 2 were supported by self-reported endorsement of insults. The traits most characteristic of the prototypical asshole/dick/bitch (i.e., low Agreeableness and its facets) were the strongest correlates of insult self-endorsement. Furthermore, there were strong correlations between prototypical insult profiles and endorsement of insult-related traits. In other words, individuals who endorse being an asshole tend to report that they have traits consistent with a prototypical asshole.

As in Study 2, Antagonism emerged as the most important trait domain for understanding the personality trait profiles associated with common insults. This was also apparent at the facet level, where Cooperation, Morality, and Altruism were the strongest correlates of self-reported asshole, dick, and bitch endorsement. Additionally, consistent with prototype-ratings, the Anger facet of Neuroticism was also a moderate correlate of insult endorsement. It should be noted that

anger is often considered an “interstitial trait” that cross-loads onto both Agreeableness and Neuroticism (e.g., Griffin & Samuel, 2014), and that other personality models (e.g., HEXACO) include anger/hostility as a facet of Agreeableness (Ashton, Lee, & De Vries, 2014). We believe this underscores the importance of this facet in the insult profiles, as well as the centrality of trait Antagonism. In contrast to the prototype ratings, insult endorsement was moderately, negatively correlated with Conscientiousness. Although the insult prototype ratings were somewhat low in Conscientiousness, self-reported insult endorsement was related to low levels of Dutifulness, Achievement-striving, and Cautiousness. Finally, unlike the prototype ratings, the Assertiveness facet of Extraversion was not an important correlate of insult endorsement.

The second important expansion of Study 3 is the initial construction of the nomological network associated with insults. In other words, although there are clearly important traits that are implied insults, this study allows examination of how insults are related to other important interpersonal tendencies. Consistent with expectations, insult endorsement was positively correlated with antisocial behavior, aggression, substance use, and in the case of bitch, intimate partner violence. Furthermore, insult endorsement was also positively related to several PDs, including narcissistic, antisocial, and psychopathy, as well as PD-related traits such as sadism and spite. The insults also showed strong, negative relations with dependent and avoidant PDs.

Contrary to expectations, insult endorsement showed null-to-small relations with ratings of impairment. Although the relations were generally in the expected directions, the only consistent impairment correlate of insult endorsement was history of disciplinary action at work. Thus, although individuals who endorse that they are well-characterized by an insult tend to report that they have antagonistic traits and engage in relatively high levels of externalizing behavior, they do not report experiencing notable levels of impairment as a result of these traits.

This is surprising, considering that the insult ratings were strongly associated with several PDs, which have been linked to inter- and intra-personal distress (e.g., Miller, Campbell, & Pilkonis, 2007; Skodol et al., 2005). However, the exception to this pattern is that insult endorsement was related to a history of disciplinary action of work, suggesting that there is at least one area of poorer functioning.

5.1. Study 4 Introduction

In Studies 1-3, we demonstrated that 1) there is consensus about commonly used insults for men and women, 2) there is moderate agreement about the traits (i.e., Antagonism) that are most central to prototypical insults, and 3) individuals who endorse being characterized by an insult also endorse antagonistic traits and externalizing behavior, but little functional impairment. In Study 4, we aimed to continue to expand the nomological networks associated with asshole, dick, and bitch by examining a wider range of constructs, such as experiences in close relationships, self-esteem, pathological personality traits included in DSM-5, social discounting, and social information processing. However, in addition, to these self-report variables, we expanded the methodology to include informant-ratings of insults and pathological traits, as well as thin-slice ratings, wherein trained research assistants provided ratings on insults, traits, likability, and attractiveness based on 60-second video clips. This allowed us to investigate the degree of self-other convergence in terms of insult endorsement on two levels: 1) with informants who have relationships with participants, and 2) with strangers who have never met the participant and whose only exposure is a 60-second video clip. In addition to expanding the nomological network of the insults, another primary goal of Study 4 was to examine ratings of impairment made by informants. Study 3 suggests that individuals who endorse insults may experience a “blind spot” in terms of impairment ratings, such that they endorse a range of

antagonistic traits and behaviors, while simultaneously reporting that they are not impaired by these traits. Thus, we included informant-ratings of pathological traits and likeability to investigate whether there is concurrence on impairment ratings.

5.2. Study 4 Methods

5.2.1. Participants and Procedure

The sample comprised 417 participants (74% female; 75% White, 14% Asian; 12% Black; *mean* age = 18.8; *SD* = 1.09) who participated as part of an undergraduate research pool at a large southeastern university in exchange for research credit. Informant-reports from three informants were solicited for all participants, and at least one informant response was received for the majority (74%), the large majority of whom were friends (95%). The informants were primarily female (73%), with a mean age of 20.6 (*SD* = 7.43). Those who had informants did not differ from those who did not in terms of self-rated insults or age. Those without informants were more likely to be male. IRB approval was granted by the (BLINDED FOR SUBMISSION).

5.2.2. Measures

5.2.2.1. Demographic Form.

A brief demographic questionnaire was administered assessing gender, race, education level, and age.

5.2.2.2. Insults.

Participants were administered insult questionnaires based on their response to the gender item on the demographic form. Male participants were sent a questionnaire asking, “To what extent does the word ‘asshole/dick’ characterize you,” and “To what extent would others say that the word ‘asshole/dick’ characterizes you?” Participants provided a response from 1-5 indicating not at all, a little bit, somewhat, a good bit, or very much. Female participants completed the

same four questions for the insults “bitch” and “asshole.” Informants of male participants were similarly asked, “To what extent does the word ‘asshole/dick’ characterize your friend/peer?” and “To what extent would others say that the word ‘asshole/dick’ characterizes your friend/peer?” Informants of female participants were also asked to complete the same four questions for the insults “bitch” and “asshole.” Because the self and self meta-perception and informant and informant meta-perception based scores were so highly correlated (asshole: $r_s = .76$ and $.77$, respectively; dick: $r_s = .69$ and $.77$, respectively; bitch: $r_s = .85$ and $.74$, respectively), we report on the self and informant-report scores only (i.e., not meta-perception).

5.2.2.3. PID-5-Brief Form (PID-5-BF).

The PID-5-BF (Krueger, Derringer, Markon, Watson, & Skodol, 2013) is a self-report inventory developed to assess traits included in the DSM-5 alternative dimensional model. The PID-5-BF contains 25 items taken from the 220-item measure, which are aggregated to yield scores for the five broad domains. Alphas ranged from $.64$ to $.80$, with a median of $.74$ for self-report and from $.54$ to $.81$, with a median of $.77$ for informants.

5.2.2.4. Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R).

The ECR-R (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000) is a 36-item self-report measure of two adult attachment styles: avoidance (18 items; $\alpha = .94$) and anxiety (19 items; $\alpha = .94$). The ECR-R subscales manifest good internal consistency and structural validity, as well as convergent and divergent validity with expected constructs (e.g., worry, avoidance of touch: Fairchild & Finney, 2006).

5.2.2.5. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES).

The RSES (Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item global measure of self-esteem ($\alpha = .91$) in which the items are scored on a 1 (Disagree strongly) to 4 (Agree strongly).

5.2.2.6. Crime and Analogous Behavior scale (CAB).

The CAB (Miller & Lynam, 2003) is a 25 item self-reported measure that assesses multiple externalizing behaviors. Count scores were used to create subscales, in which participants were rated a “1” for each item they endorsed (substance abuse: 8 items [$M = 1.19$; $SD = .94$], antisocial behavior: 9 items [$M = .23$; $SD = .39$], intimate partner violence: 6 items [$M = .23$; $SD = .46$]). Self-reported scores on antisocial behavior and intimate partner violence were log-transformed in order to reduce problems with non-normality.

5.2.2.7. Reactive-Proactive Aggression Questionnaire (RPAQ).

The RPAQ (Raine et al., 2006) is a 23 item self-report questionnaire with items assessing proactive and reactive aggression. In the current sample, $\alpha s = .74$ and $.81$, respectively.

5.2.2.8. Bullying Questionnaire.

The Bullying Questionnaire (Baughman, Dearing, Giammarco, & Vernon, 2012) is a 17-item measure of bullying based on the aggression scale constructed by Taki and colleagues (2008). Items are summed to create three subscales: Physical Direct ($\alpha = .56$; mean inter-item correlation: $.30$), Verbal Direct ($\alpha = .79$; mean inter-item correlation: $.37$), Indirect ($\alpha = .64$; mean inter-item correlation: $.27$).

5.2.2.9. Social Discounting.

Participants also completed a social discounting lab task (Sherman & Lynam, 2017). Participants first wrote the names of people in five concentric circles with each circle representing a relationship degree: closest (1), close (2), neither close nor distant (3), distant (4), and most distant (5). Each participant was instructed to write two names in each circle. Each participant then completed 45 items on which they were given two options: (a) receiving a hypothetical monetary amount for themselves or, (b) receiving a hypothetical monetary amount

for themselves and an individual from a given social circle. It was stated explicitly in the instructions that the hypothetical monetary amount would go to only the person that was selected and could not be shared. In addition, the instructions stated explicitly that if the participant chose the second option (giving the money to the friend), the friend would not reciprocate monetarily or in any other form of favor. Both the hypothetical monetary amounts in option “a” and the relationship degree of the target individual were varied in each question, and option “b” was always \$75 for the participant and \$75 for the target individual. All participants were shown the same pattern of choices in order to determine a common cutpoint.

Level of social discounting was quantified using an equation developed by Rachlin and Raineri (1992): $v = \frac{V}{(1+sN)}$; where v is the discounted value of the reward, V is the undiscounted value of the reward, N is a measure of social distance, and s is a constant measuring degree of social discounting. In this equation, less altruistic/more selfish choices are indicated by higher s values such that the hypothetical monetary amount is perceived as less valuable when shared with another individual and the participant “crosses over” to the selfish option more quickly (Jones & Rachlin, 2006). An s value was found for each participant and used in the analyses.

5.2.2.10. Social Vignettes.

Participants read 6 vignettes (Tremblay & Belchevski, 2004) describing a hypothetical interaction in which another person performs a behavior that might be considered provocative to the participant (e.g., “You are at a bar and a very drunk guy dancing next to you steps on your foot and spills his beer all over your new shirt.”). The participants were then asked questions answered on a “1” (i.e., “not at all likely”) to “11” (i.e., “extremely likely”) scale, which assessed the likelihood of: 1) experiencing anger during the interaction, 2) expressing anger towards the other individual in the interaction, 3) being rude, 4) yelling or swearing, 5) threatening the other

person if the situation was not resolved, and 6) using physical force if the situation was not resolved. The answers for each of these six variables were summed across the 6 vignettes.

Alphas ranged from .72 to .80 with a median of .78.

5.2.2.11. Thin Slices.

Following a similar protocol to the one described by Oltmanns and colleagues (2004), each participant was individually videotaped while answering the following prompt for 60 seconds: “Please tell me about yourself.” Each video clip was then rated by 4 raters who were undergraduate students majoring in psychology. The students rated the following constructs (using one item per construct) on a 1 to 5 Likert-scale: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, physical attractiveness, and likeability. The students also rated male participants on a 1 to 5 Likert scale on the insults “asshole” and “dick”, and the female participants as “asshole” and “bitch”. Descriptions for the five personality domains were consistent with FFM definitions (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992). For physical attractiveness, no descriptors were given. For likability, raters were asked “how likable you find this individual (would you want to get to know him/her better?)”. Interrater reliability was calculated using intraclass correlations, which ranged from .54 (likeability) to .81 (extraversion) with a median of .60. Composites were created for subsequent analyses by taking the mean of all available ratings.

5.3. Study 4 Results

5.3.1. Insult Endorsement

Rated on a 1 to 5 Likert scale, the mean endorsement of the three insults – asshole, dick, and bitch – were 1.67 ($SD = .85$), 1.64 ($SD = .88$), and 1.81 ($SD = .86$). Responses ranged from 1-5 for asshole and bitch, and from 1-4 for dick. Men who endorsed being an asshole also

endorsed being a dick, $r = .73$; similarly, women who endorsed being an asshole endorsed being a bitch, $r = .44$, although the correlation was weaker ($z = 4.03$; $p < .01$).

5.3.2. DSM PD Traits – Self and Informant

In general, self-endorsement of the insults was related to higher scores on a variety of pathological traits including antagonism, disinhibition, and detachment (Table 8). These findings were unexpectedly not supported by informant-reports of these traits, however, where the only regular pattern was that these individuals were rated by informants as being more disinhibited but not more antagonistic (Table 9).

5.3.3. Self – Informant Convergence on Insults

There was moderate convergence for asshole ($r = .28$) and bitch ($r = .32$), and limited convergence between self and informant reports for dick ($r = .11$; see Table 9). The lack of convergence did not seem to be due to substantial under or over-reporting by the self as the means were relatively similar: *asshole* – self: $M = 1.58$ ($SD = .82$); informant: $M = 1.37$ ($SD = .66$), *dick* – self: $M = 1.64$ ($SD = .88$); informant: $M = 1.50$ ($SD = .77$), *bitch* – self: $M = 1.81$ ($SD = .86$); informant: $M = 1.37$ ($SD = .65$).

5.3.4. Attachment, Self-Esteem, and Externalizing Behavior

Endorsement of the insults generally manifested small correlations with these constructs, although there was a pattern of small effects such that endorsement was related to greater attachment anxiety and lower self-esteem (see Table 8). As with Study 3, endorsements of the insults were generally positively correlated with a host of externalizing behaviors including reactive and proactive aggression, various forms of bullying, substance use, and antisocial behavior. There was one instance of gender moderation, such that the relation between asshole endorsement and physical bullying was stronger in men.

5.3.5. Social Functioning: Social Discounting and Information Processing

Consistent with the results for externalizing behaviors, individuals who endorsed these insults were generally more likely to respond to hypothetical social vignettes depicting potentially unpleasant social interactions with greater verbal aggression and physical intimidation. Endorsement of “dick” was related to less altruistic decision making in the social discounting task.

5.3.6. Thin Slice Ratings of Insults and Personality

Thin slice ratings of the insult in which strangers rated the applicability of the insults, as well as likability, attractiveness, and FFM traits on the basis of 60-second clips suggested that some signal about the relevance of these traits is available relatively quickly with convergent insult correlations ranging from .12 (bitch) to .21 (dick; see Table 9). Only men who rated themselves high on the dick insult were rated as being less likable. In terms of FFM ratings, there was a general pattern that these individuals were seen as being less agreeable: dick ($r = -.28$), asshole ($r = -.13$), and bitch ($r = -.13$).

5.4. Study 4 Discussion

In Study 4, we replicated the findings from Study 3 that suggest that individuals who endorse insults report engaging in a range of externalizing behaviors. Although the effects were small, individuals who endorse insults tended to be rated by friends or families as being characterized by that insult. Furthermore, these effects were present even for thin-slice ratings by strangers. Results suggest that in a mere 60-second video clip, strangers are able to “pick up” on certain traits, as evidenced by the modest, but positive correlation between insult self-endorsement and thin-slice ratings. Additionally, individuals who endorsed insults were also generally rated as low in FFM agreeableness and low in likeability.

5. General Discussion

5.1. Summary of Findings

Under the premise that the distribution of trait terms captures socially relevant information about individual differences, the lexical hypothesis has guided empirical work on personality for decades. Building off the idea that adjectives play an important role in understanding the traits - sets of characteristic behaviors, cognitions, and emotions - commonly used to describe others (and ourselves), we set out to study the nomological network of commonly used insult words in the United States. In a set of four studies, we investigated the connotations of frequently used insults using a multimodal approach to examine the general and pathological traits, behaviors, and perceptions by others that are most associated with gendered (i.e., bitch; dick) and non-gendered insults (i.e., asshole).

In Studies 1 and 2, we used a crowd-sourcing approach to understand the most commonly used insults, and the traits associated with prototypical manifestations of these insults. The lexical hypothesis suggests that more important characteristics will be more prevalent in a vocabulary. While dick and bitch are most often applied to men and women, respectively, asshole appears to be the insult most commonly applied across genders. Each of these insults are well-characterized by the facets of Antagonism (i.e., low Agreeableness), as well as specific facets of Extraversion (Assertiveness) and Neuroticism (Angry-hostility). This stands in stark contrast to the participant ratings of a “friend,” who was generally described as warm, straightforward, and placid. Additionally, there appear to be modest gender differences, such that across studies, men tend to endorse being an asshole ($mean = 1.85$, $SD = .95$) at a higher rate than women ($mean = 1.48$, $SD = .75$; Cohen’s $d = .39$). Informant-report is consistent with this pattern: informants in our sample endorsed that male participants were better characterized by

asshole ($mean = 1.59$, $SD = .92$) than female participants ($mean = 1.29$, $SD = .69$; Cohen's $d = .37$). While women endorsed being a bitch ($mean = 1.81$, $SD = .86$) at higher rates than men endorsed being a dick ($mean = 1.64$, $SD = .88$; Cohen's $d = .20$), informant-report suggests an opposite pattern, such that male participants were somewhat more likely to be rated as a dick ($mean = 1.49$, $SD = .91$) than female participants were to be rated as a bitch ($mean = 1.36$, $SD = .72$; Cohen's $d = .16$). The prototypical male asshole was also rated as more extreme on each of the aforementioned facets than the prototypical female asshole, consistent with research suggesting that men exhibit lower levels of trait Agreeableness than women (Costa, Terraciano, & McCrae, 2001). This suggests that while gender is relevant to the conceptualization of insults like asshole, the difference appears to lie in degree of trait manifestation, not in kind.

Our metric of rater agreement suggests moderate variability in the way that participants rated asshole/dick/bitch in terms of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, and Conscientiousness, but much less variability for Antagonism. This suggests that there is consensus that the prototypical asshole/dick/bitch is immodest, non-compliant, and misanthropic, while there is notable variability in the way that individuals conceive of insults relating to the other major trait domains. Of note, previous data suggest that clinicians and academics tend to agree much more on the traits comprising PDs than laypersons agree on insult prototypes. One reason for this relative lack of consensus may be due, in part, to psychometric limitations of our insult measure that used only one item for each insult. While we believe the measure to be face valid, a multi-item measure would likely result in higher levels of agreement and reliability for the latter correlational analyses. An alternate perspective is that insults appear to be used to reference a small number of traits (and to have nothing to do with others), a number much smaller than are relevant to PDs which tend to show impressive cross-expert consensus. As may

be apparent from the descriptions of the traits that were viewed as most prototypical (e.g., anger, assertiveness, noncompliance, manipulativeness/lying, callousness) and confirmed by quantitative matches to expert profiles, the insults are generally related to profiles associated with Cluster B PDs particularly narcissistic and antisocial/psychopathic.

In Studies 3 and 4, we expanded the nomological networks of these commonly used insults by examining how insult endorsement (i.e., reporting that you are an asshole/dick/bitch) is related to general and pathological traits, personality disorder constructs (i.e., DSM-5 personality disorders [PDs], dark pentad), social functioning, and antisocial behavior. Consistent with prototype ratings, insult endorsement generally evinced moderate to strong negative correlations with Agreeableness and its facets, as well as positive correlations with the Angry-hostility facet of Neuroticism. Asshole and dick also manifested small to moderate negative correlations with Conscientiousness, but relations between the insults and other domains and facets were generally small or null in magnitude. In term of DSM-5 pathological traits, insult endorsement was also related strongly to self-reported scores on Antagonism, but was similarly correlated with Disinhibition and Psychoticism, which may, in part, reflect the strong general factor and lack of discriminant validity of this measure of pathological traits (e.g., Crego, Gore, Rojas, & Widiger, 2015; Sleep, Hyatt, Lamkin, Maples-Keller, & Miller, 2018). Insult endorsement was also related to Cluster B PDs, other commonly studied but non-DSM PD constructs (i.e., psychopathy, sadism) and moderately correlated with reports of aggression and antisocial behavior both explicit reports of past behaviors as well as hypothetical vignettes in which future behavior in specific situations was queried. Of note, there was only one instance of gender interaction, suggesting that, in general, the individual differences connoted by the term asshole are the same when applied to men and women. Finally, while the correlations between perceived functioning

and insult endorsement were generally small in magnitude, they were in the expected direction such that insult endorsement was related to lower perceived functioning, particularly in terms of history of receiving disciplinary action at work. Coupled with the uniformly positive DSM-5 pathological trait correlations, the current results suggest that individuals who endorse higher scores on these insults are likely experiencing some degree of functional impairment that may well be related to the traits that underlie these constructs, consistent with the general literature of the correlates of antagonism (e.g., Jones et al., 2011; Miller & Lynam, 2001).

In Study 4, we also investigated the extent to which others agree with self-endorsement of insults. Self- and informant-reports of insult endorsement evinced small correlations in the expected direction that are generally consistent with the agreement found for general traits (e.g., Connelly & Ones, 2010) and PDs (Klonsky & Oltmanns, 2002), albeit lower due, in part, to the use of a single item that results in more attenuated effect sizes. While the self-other convergence observed with our single-item insult measures were not as large as those observed for single-item FFM measures of Agreeableness (e.g., Woods & Hampson, 2005), they were in the expected direction and approached medium effect size. Surprisingly, informant-ratings of Antagonism were not correlated with self-reported endorsement of insults and instead suggested a bigger role for Disinhibition. This may suggest an important aspect of being an asshole, dick, and/or bitch is due to a general tendency to be impulsive, irresponsible, and dysregulated or could suggest that informants are interpreting their behavior through this lens, which may be more “charitable” than assuming the disagreeable behavior is purposeful and planned. That is, informants (friends; family members) may give the participants the benefit of the doubt about their less socially appropriate or kind behavior and see it as being due to disinhibition rather than to a more purposeful and even planned lack of concern for others.

Lastly, self-endorsement of insults also evinced small to moderate positive relations with thin-slice ratings of insults that are comparable in magnitude to ratings of FFM traits made by strangers (Woods et al., 2005). In other words, if an individual endorsed being an asshole/dick/bitch, strangers who watched them talk about themselves for a mere 60 seconds also rated them as higher on these insults. Consistent with prior findings, self-endorsement of insults was correlated negatively with thin slice ratings of Agreeableness (and being less likable), although the relations were fairly modest. Thus, we believe these data speak to the impressive human social capacity to quickly pick up on more antisocial and narcissistic personality traits (e.g., Fowler, Lilienfeld, & Patrick, 2009; Friedman, Oltmanns, & Turkheimer, 2007; Miller et al., 2011).

5.2. Limitations on Generality

There are several limitations to the current studies. First, our samples were comprised of undergraduates and MTurk workers, so generalizability to other populations is uncertain. Second, we are not able to draw a finer distinction between the traits related to asshole, dick, and bitch. While this may be due to a true lack of difference in the way these particular insult terms are used, this also may reflect a failure to consider the criterion variables that illuminate the differences, or a psychometric shortcoming due to the use of a single item to measure asshole, dick, and bitch endorsement. It may be worth adding items to create more reliable scale, but it is difficult to imagine doing so without inadvertently including items that are largely redundant with trait-based measures of Agreeableness and related disorders (e.g., psychopathy, narcissism). A related limitation is that we were not able to adequately speak to use of dick and bitch across gender (i.e., the use of dick to describe a female; the use of bitch to describe a male). Additionally, the effect sizes for our informant-reports of pathological traits were largely

inconsistent with the larger pattern of findings (i.e., lack of relations with Antagonism). This was unexpected, as impressive overlap between self- and informant-report for more well-defined psychological constructs (see Table 1) has been demonstrated. Furthermore, although the relations between self- and informant-report of insult endorsement were positive, they were relatively lower than what may be expected. We believe this divide is an important area for future study, especially as it pertains to which source of information is most predictive of important social outcomes (e.g., interpersonal dysfunction, intrapersonal distress).

Although the current work is grounded in the central tenets of the lexical hypothesis (i.e., important individual differences become encoded in language, and the more important an individual difference is, the more robustly it is encoded), it is not able to speak to additional features of this hypothesis. First, while we suspect that nearly all non-English languages have words for the constructs identified in this study, the current data cannot speak to cross-cultural universality of insult-trait relations. Second, personality models constructed from a lexical approach generally omit valence-laden words (c.f., Simms, 2007). We assumed that insults are used primarily to convey negatively-valenced information, but the current data do not capture the degree to which this is true. Furthermore, these data cannot address whether or not a negative evaluation is the primary intent of an insult (i.e., more important than conveying information about Antagonism). Third, we cannot speak to the temporal or cross-situational stability of insult endorsement – both of which warrant future examination. Finally, lexical approaches to structural models of personality generally use adjectives instead of nouns like the insults examined herein (e.g., Goldberg & Saucier, 1996). However, we note that the insults could easily “convert” to adjective form (e.g., “bitchy”) and are generally used to convey adjective-like information.

5.3. Conclusions and Future Directions

In *Assholes: A Theory*, philosopher Aaron James proposed a model of three requisite features of a theory explaining “assholes” (James, 2014). He proposed that an asshole must be 1) “a stable trait of character” (pg. 8), 2) “*not* morally beyond the pale” (i.e., not a “murderer, rapist or tyrant” who exacts significant “material costs”; pg. 10), and 3) “rightly upsetting...morally outrageous” (pg. 11). Although the current studies were not designed to test this theory, we believe the current results speak to this proposed model. In terms of the first proposition, our results suggest the term asshole (as well as dick and bitch) is well-characterized by trait Antagonism, consistent with hypotheses. The prototypical asshole (and dick and bitch) is described as very low in trait Agreeableness, much less so than a typical friend. Perhaps more importantly, self-endorsement of insults is highly correlated with self-reported Antagonism, and this trait can even be detected by complete strangers in a brief video clip. Considering the well-documented stability of personality traits across assessments and the life-span (Donnellan & Lucas, 2008; Hopwood et al. 2013), we believe it can be argued that insults such as asshole, dick, and bitch can be considered proxies for trait Antagonism that are likely relatively stable (although we note that the current results do not assess the temporal stability of insult endorsement). The consistent finding of the association between trait Antagonism and frequently used insults is consistent with the lexical hypothesis, which suggests that more important characteristics will be more prevalent within vocabulary. The use of colloquial short hand to indicate whether or not an individual is cooperative, trusting, or compliant is clearly important with regard to facilitating interpersonal relationships and cooperation. Of note, there are certainly less overtly offensive ways of conveying similar information about an individual than using an insult (e.g., calling a person “mean” or “rude”), and thus we believe that it is possible that insults

are used to indicate somewhat more pronounced manifestations of trait Antagonism (although this is an empirical question that could be addressed with subsequent studies).

It is more difficult for our data to speak to the second two propositions. James proposes that an asshole is someone who behaves in a despicable way (e.g., cutting a person in line), but not in such a grotesquely atrocious way that they result in significant social tolls (e.g., mass murder). This delineation is perhaps more linguistic than empirical (and beyond the scope of this manuscript; see James, 2014). Nonetheless, we can conclude that the term asshole (and dick and bitch) is indeed related to behaviors that are generally considered socially repugnant, such as bullying and intimate partner violence. Even if we remain morally agnostic, our data suggest that the current insult terms are related to clinically recognized personality disorders, which themselves are related to significant interpersonal consequences (e.g., Miller et al., 2007; Skodol et al., 2005). Thus, a conclusion from the current series of studies is that, as the lexical hypothesis suggests, there is valuable social information conveyed in commonly used insults. The use of asshole, dick, and bitch appear to connote antagonistic tendencies, which have significant interpersonal consequences.

In sum, the current results speak to the importance of considering the use of colloquial expressions to understand how individuals communicate about important individual differences. Although personality psychologists engage in a unique, empirically informed “trait speak,” the current data demonstrate that laypersons also engage in regular discourse about individual differences. The use of commonplace terms like insults conveys a wealth of information about the individual to which the term is ascribed, and there is evidence that the frequency of insult usage is increasing (Twenge, VanLandingham, & Campbell, 2017). On a different note, we believe that the use of insults may signal some information about the *user* of an insult, in

addition to the intended target of the insult. For example, individuals high in narcissistic traits tend to use more curse words and words conveying anger or hostility, as well as argue more frequently in their natural environments (Holtzman, Vazire, & Mehl, 2010). We encourage future work into the way that the use of language conveys information about both the subject using the insult as well as the object of insult.

While we chose to focus on the most commonly endorsed insults, there are many other terms that may carry comparable amounts of valuable information. For example, we did not investigate the insults “idiot” or “slut,” but we suspect that these terms are related to intelligence and sexuality, respectively. If this is the case, then it is likely that a personality trait framework should be supplemented in order to capture the full range of individual difference variables connoted by such insults. We encourage researchers to continue to harness the power of natural language to understand the way that socially and clinically relevant information is communicated.

Funding: This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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