Kim Jong-un: A Neo-Analytical and Cognitive Personality Analysis

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Abstract

This study examined the personality of Kim Jong-un, the ruler of North Korea. Owing to the isolated nature of the country in which he resides and the known bias of its media behavioral evidence was derived from multi source reporting. The analysis applied basic neo-analytic and cognitive theories of personality construct to assess underlying and foundational attributes of his personality. The research found that from a neo-analytical viewpoint Kim Jong-un suffers from a fractured psyche leading to internal conflict. Cognitively he was found to display volatile characteristics to others while simultaneously exhibiting actions of an overprotective nature to his immediate family. The study determined that Kim Jong-un holds a personality construct that leads him to exhibit indecisive, short tempered, and insecure attributes.
Introduction

North Korea is a land of extreme secrecy with a historically low tolerance for outsiders. Internally, the tolerance for its own citizens is not any better, in many circumstances it is much worse. The entirety of the civilian, military, and political population rotate around the desires and demigod status of the ruling Kim family. This reverence has occurred through decades of intense indoctrination often reinforced through violent means (Harden 2012). As a result the country is led and lives within a cult like structure centered on the personality of the ‘dear leader’; one of the many titles held by the ruling Kim. Today Kim Jong-un, the grandson of North Korea’s first leader Kim Il-sung, rules the country though a cult of personality just as his father and grandfather did.

The cult of personality is well documented and very visible. Keeping in line with a Stalinist tradition of communism a picture of each of the Kims are hung in every home. Whenever photographs are taken or released from within homes in the country these portraits are always prominent. There are also the tear-full proclamations of gratefulness for all the dear leader has graciously bestowed the people. And the utmost reverence and awe for any of the titles that reference the ruling Kims. These overt and publicized traits are a combination of fables, half-truths, and myths. Each of these are part of a systematic plan to strategically control the population (Byman & Lind 2010). But, what isn’t well documented is the actual personality of Kim Jong-un.

Some have endeavored to analyze his father, Kim Jong-il, or his grandfather, Kim Il-sung, to varying degrees (Hart 2007; DailyNK 2005). There has been very little done to understand Kim Jong-un from a personality perspective. Most analysis aims to understand his youth which, unlike his father, has been shrouded in mystery.
Important to first address why understanding the personality of Kim Jong-un is important. Kim Jong-un is the third ruler of North Korea. He is the second to achieve the position based on hereditary succession – the only known instance in a communistic state.

The country allows very few outsiders to cross its borders every year, it is an isolationist nation that is often referred to as ‘the hermit kingdom’. Those few who are allowed to cross into the country contend with strict rules and heavy security that controls what they see and who they talk to. When an individual travels into the country they are treated as and suspected of being a spy. Many of those who travel there report being under constant surveillance, being forced to delete photographs, and have to contend with threats of arrest or worse.

The treatment outsiders receive can be considered a luxury when compared to the scrutiny country’s citizens live under, who are all considered guilty of some crime against the supreme leader, Kim Jong-un. He single handedly runs the politburo, military, police, schools, and all businesses within the country. There is no rule of international law or scrutiny that is able to reach into the borders of the country. Kim rules the country as an absolutist dictatorship where his word and desires are above that of any person or divine being.

Anyone with such unquestioned and unchallengeable power at their fingertips can be extremely dangerous. The entirety of the 24.9 million people living in North Korea are subject to an authoritarian rule where national law and international policy is at the whim and desire of a singular individual (Central Intelligence Agency 2015). It is critically important to understand anyone who wields such power. Doing so will assist in better understating their motivations, stressors, and actions. Such a blueprint of an individual’s psyche could be used to not only forecast and alter potentially dangerous altercations, but to completely prevent them from occurring.
This research will apply the most basic neo-analytic and cognitive theories of personality to Kim Jong-un with the goal of providing the most basic structure of his psyche and personality. Future research should consider the continued application of more advanced theory in unlocking the internal influences and perceptions that drive the actions of such an obscure and powerful individual. This paper is broken into several sections. First, there is a discussion about the facts known about Kim’s life which provides the basis for the profile. Some of the accounts are anecdotal, but allow for a limited ethnographic approach and are critical to the formulation of an understanding of his early development. This is then followed by a brief theoretical discussion of basic neo-analytic and cognitive theories. The theoretical basis provided by neo-analytic and cognitive theory then provides lenses for guiding the analysis of Kim’s personality.
I. Life Profile

There has been no official birth record made public for Kim Jong-un, but the North Korean government maintains that his birth date is 8 January, 1982. South Korean intelligence agencies however, speculate that Kim Jong-un was actually born on 8 January 1983. Regardless of the precise age he is extremely young at only 32 years old. This age was later confirmed by Dennis Rodman who achieved unprecedented access to Kim and his family in 2013 (Sang-Hun 2013). The date mismatch may look like an attempt at a propaganda to over emphasize the importance of his birth, much in the same way was done for Kim Il-sung (Cha 2012). However, in this instance it is not the case, at least not outwardly. In North Korea a birthdate is set one year prior to live birth, thus encompassing time in the womb (Jin-sung 2014). This unique method of dating is very likely an attempt to make the population seem older and thus more respectable than their South Korean counterparts. As this mismatch birthdate demonstrates, much of the information available on Kim Jong-un’s life prior to 2009 is available only through individual testimony of defectors and the rare few who knew him. One such individual, Kenji Fujimoto, was not only Kim Jong-il’s personal sushi chef, he had also become a close friend and confidant of the family (Johnson 2013).

Family and Childhood

Kim is the youngest of his father’s five children. Kim Jong-il’s eldest child Kim Jong-nam was born in 1971, who was the assumed heir apparent until 2001 when he was arrested using a fake passport to enter Japan for a Tokyo Disneyland tour. Kim Jong-un’s eldest sister, Kim Sul-song, was reportedly Jong-il’s favorite child and born in 1974. She was given many of the opportunities her father had, including the coveted governmental position as head of.
literature and propaganda. It is important to note that both of these siblings are half siblings to Kim Jong-un. Kim Jong-chul, born in 1981, is Kim Jong-un’s oldest full sibling who in 2001, flowing Jong-nam’s falling out, became the suspected heir to Kim Jong-il. This however, was not the case as his father thought he was too effeminate to rule the country. It wasn’t until 2010 that Kim Jong-un was considered the heir apparent within North Korea. He has one other full blood sibling, a younger sister Kim Yo-jong, born in 1987. She was largely absent from public appearances and duties until 2014 when she aided her brother while he was ill. Both Kim Jong-chul, Jung-un, and their sister Yo-jon’s mother was Kim Jong-il’s second, of three, mistresses while he was still married to his wife and mother of Kim Sul-song.

If this complicated succession and home life wasn’t turbulent enough Kim Jong-un’s mother was the daughter of Korean citizens who worked for the Japanese. In North Korea, heritage and associations are the building blocks of an individuals’ sociocultural status. For example, there is a small group of people in the north known as the ‘admitted’. These individuals are the rare few who have been alone with either Kim Jong-un or his late father and been served wine by them (Kang and Rigoulot 2005). These individuals exercise significant power within their local community and display the glass within their homes as a priceless artifact. In many of the citizen’s minds they were served the wine by a demigod, only because no one person can surpass the status of Kim Jong-un’s grandfather Kim Il-sung who is revered as a god.

At the very bottom of this social structure is anyone who has crossed the Kim family and are considered traitors or the scourge of the state. Just one rung above this, is anyone of Japanese dissent or those that worked for the Imperial military during the occupation. These individuals are known as the ‘hostile class’ (Cummings 1997). Kim Jong-un’s mother was originally from this class. Her grandfather having worked for the Imperial Japanese Military. This status conflict
leaves Kim Jong-un as the illegitimate son of a mother who is a member of one of the lowest possible social class in North Korea.

Being the son of a dictator gives a person unique access to just about anything they want. The exact limits of this access and desire are nearly limitless. Kim Jong-il’s personal sushi chef Kenji Fujimoto is one of the few people who knew Jong-un as a child. He has given few interviews, and the ones he has given offers significant insight into the excess Kim Jong-un enjoyed while growing up in North Korea. One such extravagance that was revealed, was his learning to drive at age seven. To accomplish this he was given a box to sit on and blocks on the pedals (Al Arabiya 2014). There is no discussion on how well he drove, but by his own demands was given instruction in a new Mercedes.

Adolescence and Switzerland

The exact age when Kim Jong-un traveled to Switzerland to study in unclear but, it is widely accepted to be in the early 1990’s. We do know he remained there until he was in his late teens coming back to North Korea in late 2000. While studying in Switzerland he was registered as a son of an Embassy worker under the pseudonym ‘Un Pak’. He wasn’t alone in Switzerland though. His biological mother and siblings were there for a period of time and his father would join the family on the occasional holiday. Kim Jong-un was placed in a class where he was two years senior to his class mates, citing a poor command of the German language. This was reflected in his scholastic ability where he either failed or achieved the minimum score in most of his classes. This is especially true of his last two years at the International School of Bern where he missed a combined 180 days of class (The Telegraph 2012).
It was also during his last two years abroad that he not only developed a smoking habit but, he discovered a love of alcohol. His choice at the time was described as “Russia’s Finest vodka” (Al Arabiya 2014). Not only was he drinking as a young teenager, he wasn’t bashful about it nor was he generous. On regular occasion Fujimoto noted Kim Jong-un would consume an entire bottle on his own. Of all his vices and access to the wants of life there was one that never seemed to interest him, young girls. His father was known for keeping a pleasure squad comprised of young teenage girls for his own personal entertainment. The exact nature of this group of girls ranged from singing and dancing to outright sexual abuse. There are no reports that Kim Jong-un ever interacted with the girls in a demeaning manner.

The American government spent considerable time investigating his school aged peers once he came to power in North Korea. The exact details of the research has never been fully revealed. A few highlights have been cited in the public sector noting general themes including dangerous, unpredictable, violent, short tempered, and delusions of grandeur were paramount (Fisher 2013).

Near the end of 2000 Kim Jong-un went back to North Korea where he studied an unspecified major at Kim Il-sung University until 2002. Later in 2007 he studied at Kim Il-sung Military University. During this later stint his biological mother is thought to have traveled to Paris to undergo treatment for breast cancer. She passed away in 2004 either in Paris, France or Pyongyang, North Korea after falling into a coma the details of her illness and death and vague and, like most information on the Kim family, considered to be state secrets (Hart 2007).
Succession

As discussed above Kim Jong-un’s political career or role within the country was never clear until 2010 after his older half-brother fell out of favor. It was this same year that his first official photo was released, in it he can be seen seated in the front row next to his father. This was a significant revelation, in North Korea positioning in official photograph denote rank structure. The closest to the supreme leader one sits, the more powerful they are. Throughout the latter months of 2010 and into 2011 Kim Jong-un was bestowed numerous official titles and positions of power in very quick succession. Many of these including ‘Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the Workers’ Party of Korea’ were created to increase his resume in a very short period of time.

While this political maneuvering was occurring relatives and protégés of Jang Sung-taek and O Kuk-ryol were either imprisoned in political education camps or executed in an attempt to curb any potential rivals to Kim Jong-un’s ascent to power. The final step to complete rule over North Korea occurred sooner than most had anticipated. With the death of Kim Jong-il on 17 December 2011 Kim Jong-un officially became the third ruler of North Korea.
II. Psychological Theory

Neo- Analytical Approach

Neo-analytic psychological approaches were developed as almost a rebuttal to Freud’s psychosexual approach to development. The founders argued that an individual’s psychological development was reliant on more than sexual motivation (Friedman & Schustack 2003). For this reason this paper will treat neo-analytic approaches as a refinement or evolution of psychosexual determinism. One of the principal advocates of neo-analytic approaches was C. Jung. Jung met with and developed a significant professional relationship with S. Freud in 1907. It eventually culminated with Jung taking presidency of Freud’s Psychoanalytic Association. This relationship was short-lived and eventually terminated in 1914 (Friedman & Schustack 2003).

Ego, Personal and Collective Unconscious

Neo-analytic approaches focus on the ego. It strives to understand how the ego develops within the individual and what affects external influences such as culture have on it (Mowrer 1956). To better understand Jung’s take on the ego we need to discuss what role the Id, ego, and superego have in the psyche.

Of the three parts of personality the Id is the only one that resides completely within the subconscious (Friedman & Schustack 2003). The Id is also unique to each individual. There may be some commonalities by virtue of a shared culture, but more over the Id is shaped by an individual’s first experiences in psychosexual and psychosocial development and defined by them. It is completely unconscious and controls precognitive motivation and traits (Lindzey, Gilbert, & Fiske 1998). Instinctually speaking survival is paramount. Likewise the id is one of the primary motivators when considering the pleasure principal (Friedman & Schustack 2003).
The ego is motivated by the reality principal (Friedman & Schustack 2003). It is arguably the element that puts the ‘I’ in the ‘individual’. The reality principal works with motivation and problem solving attributes needed to resolve conflicts presented to the individual. This is the conscious actively engaged parts of an individual’s thought processes.

The id and ego differ by being entirely unconscious (id) or predominantly conscious (ego). The superego transcends both of these by covering all aspects of the conscious and unconscious. This portion of personality is often articulated as the cultural brain. It incorporates an individual’s perception of cultural nuances and understanding (Friedman & Schustack 2003). It is unique to understand that because the superego is the seat of culture many people will share similar traits and others will have extremely different ones. When individuals of different moral backgrounds meet they can often experience social identity threat and categorization threat (Nelson 2009). The reaction to these threats can be very visceral and understanding the role of the super ego in cultural identity it is easy to see why.

Neo-analytic approaches deemphasize the roles of the id and superego instead discussing a personal unconscious and collective unconscious. The position and responsibility of the ego remains the same throughout the theories. Jung used the ego to emphasize the individual characterizing it as the seat of personality. The personal unconscious is akin to the id in the sense that many of the processes are acted out without intervention of the ego (Williams 1963). It serves to balance many of the desires and options afforded to the ego. It can do this through complete timeline introspection. This means looking objectively at aspects of past, present, and expected future revelations to determine a balanced response.

Jung discussed the collective unconscious as an aspect of personality deeper than any portion of the id or the personal unconscious. The collective unconscious, however is unique to
this personal acquisition of traits (Moreno 1967). It is the summation of a lifetimes of reinforced Id traits ultimately passed on to a new generation by inheritance (Jung 1936). Even though in the 1930s genetics was not even a theory it is what Jung eluded to. This unconsciousness is defined by archetypes that serve as a corner stone to larger concepts and experiences throughout life. These archetypes are not learned or developed as we grow and age. Erikson’s first stage of psychosocial development discusses how infants define weather the world can be trusted solely on the actions of their caregivers (Friedman & Schustack 2003). This is a developed aspect of personality, hope. The collective unconscious assumes instinctually that an infant recognizes they cannot care for themselves and crying is a method to attain survival. Of course no one taught the child to cry nor did we have to learn how to tell we are thirsty.

Psychosocial Development

Neo-analytical approaches further defined themselves from traditional psychosexual thought by redefining and expanding the developmental stages of personality development. Freud’s approach highlighted only three while E. Erikson outlined eight that encompass the entirety of an individual’s life cycle.

Erikson’s eight stages of psychosocial development discusses conflicts between the ego and super ego highlighting the importance of culture in an individual’s social development (Friedman and Schustack 2003). He demonstrated how an individual is challenged by a social dilemma that causes development either towards or away from social interaction and that each is championed by a core virtue (listed in parenthesis below). A chief difference between Freud’s psychosexual developments is Erikson believed development continued well past early adult
hood and well into latter years of life. His eight stages are listed below. Two are discussed in further detail as they specifically apply to later analysis.

1. Trust vs. Mistrust (Hope)
2. Autonomy vs. Shame (Will)
3. Initiative vs. Guilt (Purpose)
4. Industry vs. Inferiority (Competency)
5. Ego identity vs. Competency (Fidelity)
6. Intimacy vs. Isolation (Love)
7. Generativity vs. Stagnation (Care)
8. Ego vs. Despair (Wisdom)

Similar to Freud’s Oral stage the Trust vs. Mistrust stage occurs during infancy. This stage is when we all develop our underpinnings of trust. Our basic underlining that the world is either better or worse overall is founded based on our interactions with our primary providers. During infancy a child is completely dependent on their care givers, if this fails and the child does not receive adequate care their ego is impressed with a since of mistrust (Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore 1981). Such an impact can cause significant developmental issues later in life.

The sixth stage, Intimacy versus Love, does not directly correspond with any of Freud’s stages as the id has been fully developed with an identity by the end of the genital phase. Erikson discusses life in terms of the ego which is always learning and developing. It is this stage were individuals begin to seek enduring companionship (Friedman and Schustack 2003). The Superego along with the Id is well developed in this stage, but the Ego is still malleable. The telltale sign of successful navigation of this stage is the realization of long-term familiarization of strangers (non-familial). In this stage individuals will become comfortable with themselves and
share that identity with others. The virtue described by this is the attainment of love or the idea of being safe and secure with another person.

**Cognitive Personality Approach**

The cognitive approach takes a step away from the rigid developmental ideals of neo-analytic theory and discusses explicitly how an individual interacts with their environment. Tracing its roots to Gestalt psychology of the 1930’s it didn’t see its own movement like behaviorism until the 1980s or 90s (Heffner 2015). Gestalt psychology is founded on three principals. These include that a) individuals seek meaning of their environment, b) individuals will make meaning of their environment, and c) complex environments are not equivalent to the sum of their parts. These three facets all comprise modern cognitive approaches. They concern themselves with the individual and their internal elucidation of the environment in which they reside. Cognition refers to automatic processes that take place without an individual actively engaging in them.

**Schema and Categorization**

A major component of cognitive theory is the internal elucidation or simply put; perception (Heffner 2015). Perception is a process in which the mind categorizes and defines situations with either a reaction or emotion based on how they were experienced. This is the exact reasoning why two individuals can experience the same traumatic event and report significantly different impacts to their ongoing experiences.

Perception is more than just observing and reacting. There are two distinct processes, schema and categorization. Schema makes up the cognitive structure of perception. Schema is
the translation of expectations of varying environments into organizational structure. This is the moment when individual experience, bias, thought, and belief can influence how an event is interpreted (Fiske 2009). The organizational structure that perception relies on is referred to as categorization. This process encompasses taking overly complex menageries of information, stimulates, and events associated with an individual’s environment and breaking them down into smaller bits of information. The information is categorized into memory banks based on familiarity or similarity to other events the individual may have encountered.

Perception can do more than just offer explanations for what is observed in an environment, it also influences learning. Unlike classical and operant learning that relies on cause and effect relationships to instill behavioral patterns cognitive based learning takes into account the schema and categorization of the learning.

Social –cognitive learning

Social –cognitive learning relies on an individual’s perception of a situation. This form of learning involves the superego and may also involve the id, depending on the situation. As individuals observe others acting in a particular way it is noted and stored in memory banks as a script. This script is a notion or perception of behavior and will guide us through situations that fit its template (Gioia & Manz 1985). If an individual accumulates enough of these scripts over time by witnessing different people preforming the same act then it will affect the cultural processing center of the superego. If the observed behavior is in some form primal as well as cultural then the script will affect both the superego and id, a potentially lethal combination where the ego is almost powerless. In this situation a schema has led to categorization that in turn developed a vicariously learned behavior. Now when the individual is presented a similar
situation they will act based on what they have been thought is acceptable. The motivation in this circumstance comes from the id. When one learned behavior is confronted with another behavior that is in conflict with the original behavior the individual experiences a conflict. This conflict is termed a social identity threat. However, if the behaviors are similar a pattern of interdependence may develop (Fiske 2009).

Social identity threat occurs when someone either explicitly or implicitly challenges another’s way of life (Fiske 2009). Commonly individuals react in a protective manner either violently or debasingly towards the perceived threat. The basis of this reaction can be based on vicariously learned scripts from seeing other people doing the same. Interdependence however could be considered the opposite of social identity threat. This is when the continued survival of two or more individuals is reliant on the behaviors of the other (Fiske 2009). Without getting off topic and into cognitive proximity chains and similarities interdependence over an extended period of time leads to learned behaviors that mutually aid the dyad or group. These learned behaviors are based on the observation, recognition, and reciprocation of actions that will ensure the other individual remains as interdependent as the observer. These two concepts are easily seen when thinking of a couple that has been married for an extended period of time. When the young couple first moves in there is a significant amount of social identity threat occurring. After a number of years a strong interdependence has developed that encompasses both individual’s behaviors.

Locus of control

The severity or intensity of both reactions to social identity threat or interdependence is reliant on an individual’s core orientation of motivation. This orientation of motivation is termed
locus of control. Locus of control defines the perception an individual holds of who is in charge of or responsible for outcomes to given situations. This is a perception, it does not matter who truly is in control or what the true cause is. Locus of control concerns itself with how the individual processes the situation. An individual who has a generalized internal locus will view consequences or results as a product of their actions while an externally focused individual will view others as the cause (Friedman & Schustack 2003). This is not to say that one can’t feel or act differently, variances in situations and perception will guide the individual’s response.

For example a study of US Navy sailors investigated the internal-external locus of control’s effect on the individual’s mental health. The study showed individuals with an internal locus of control demonstrated a greater general satisfaction with the navy but, reported higher levels of strain associated with separation during deployments (Butler & Burr 1980). This contrasted individuals with a general external locus of control who reported less strain during deployments but a lower overall job satisfaction (Butler & Burr 1980).

People are always observing and making conclusions based on their environments. These conclusions further intertwine and motivate individuals to act in ways they have learned through social-cognitive learning (Kelly 1977). Cognitive personality approaches offer significant opportunities to deconstruct an individual’s actions to understand how they would react to new or unfamiliar situations. It also offers insight on how a person perceives the outside world and what general motivating factors inspire them to act in a given or particular way.
III. Neo-Analytical Analysis

As discussed above North Korean society is constructed on the premise that the ruling Kim family members are demigods beyond the reproach of anyone else. Kim Jong-un’s grandfather had the Soviet Union to back him both politically and financially. Kim Jong-il also had many close associates that he helped bring to power as he succeeded his father in 1997 after decades of working from within the party as an authoritative figure. Kim Jong-un has had none of these backers, mentors, or experience.

In August of 2015 there was a significant exchange between South and North Korea. It started when two South Korean soldiers were severely wounded by landmines that were reportedly from the North. It is common for buried mines to shift during rain. It is also not unheard of for North Korean soldiers to move them intentionally. The South responded in an unprecedented manner by sending propaganda messages via loud speakers over the DMZ to which the North retaliated with its own unprecedented response; artillery fire across the mainland portion of the DMZ. The South then escalated the situation in a manner that had not been seen before by firing a barrage artillery fire back into the North. Luckily political processes prevented any further escalation. This was a significant chain events as the South has not engaged in speaker propaganda in roughly 11 years. Also since the armistice the South and North have never exchanged artillery fire in the mainland. Using this situation as a primer the Neo-Analytic construct of the Ego can be explored and help lay the foundation to better understand Kim Jong-un’s personality and motivations. This scenario is significant because in North Korea there is no interaction with the South unless Kim Jong-Un gives direct approval which implies that all the actions were at the direct order of Kim Jong-un.
The Neo-Analytic Ego

Neo-Analytic theory suggests a person’s personality is constructed of a constant internal struggle to manage internal and external influences and attain fulfillment (Friedman & Schustack 2012). Despite being the most powerful person in the country Kim Jong-un has been physically molded to appear more like his grandfather, Kim Il-Sung. This is likely an attempt to reassure the populace that despite his age he will bring similar prosperity that his grandfather had. This is important to note when comparing photos of him during his schooling in Switzerland to those since he returned to North Korea reflect a significant transformation. In Switzerland he had a tall and slender appearance with a sharper profile this is in direct contrast to the entirely round physique he carries now.

Kim’s internal ego is very likely in direct conflict with his outward appearance due to the unnatural amount of weight he has gained in a short period of time. Furthermore, considering a cultural aspect of comparison the country’s military first policy places great importance on battlefield achievement. His grandfather was a notable revolutionary during the Korean uprising against the Japanese and a national leader during the Korean War. His father also showed an unprecedented skill when it came to employing propaganda and brinkmanship while negotiating with both friendly and unfriendly nations. Kim Jong-un has not only demonstrated that he has none of these skills. He has also demonstrated that he is unwilling to take advice from those who learned from and advised bot Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il.

Jung suggested that an individual’s psyche is a summation of both their ego and personal unconscious (Jung 2014). The inner workings of both of these aspects has led Kim Jong-un into a quandary wherein he has to fulfill a position which by definition he does not fit. He is torn and may further suffer from inferiority complexes which would account for the mass executions of
top military officials who understand his father’s delicate brinkmanship (Moritz, Werner, and Collani 2006).

A key tenant of the Neo-analytic self-hood describes how an individual is programmed to accept attributes as truths based not only on their own experience but that of their ancestor’s through the notion of collective unconscious (Friedman & Schustack 2012). Applying this notion it would reinforce Kim Jong-un’s internal believe that he does not possess the requisite experience to lead the country. The summation of the conflicts between his ego, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious suggests that Kim Jong-un may face a fractured psyche. The impact of this fracture on his personality would be unpredictability, quick to judgment, and hostility towards those around him.

However, an exploration into the ego only offers a partial view of the neo-analytical approach. To fully examine neo-analytic personality theory one must consider the eight stages of psychosocial development.

Neo-Analytic Developmental Stages

When taking a neo-analytical approach it is almost obligatory to consider Erikson’s eight stages. Kim Jong-un is about 32 so he would only be expected to be in the sixth stage, intimacy vs. isolation (seeking Love) (Friedman & Schustack 2003). However he is not in stage six, intimacy vs. isolation, owing in part to his position and power in the country. Kim Jong-un was reportedly married by arrangement in 2009 only to be publicly seen with her in 2012 after he had become the ruler of the country. Kim Jong-un has taken dramatic steps to keep his family hidden away from publicity and political ongoing. His child was a closely held secret until Dennis
Rodman revealed who she is. He may have wanted to conceal this fact because he would need to bear a son in order to continue the fraternal succession of supreme leader not a daughter.

Another unique aspect in Kim Jong-un’s life is the existence of the North Korean ‘pleasure squad’. An infamous legacy of his father is the ‘pleasure squad’ of handpicked young ladies whose job is his every want and desire (Demick 2010). Kim Jong-un’s reported actions with the ‘pleasure squad’ is surprising to say the least. However, the analysis is more indicative of a cognitive approach rather than a neo-analytic and will be revisited later in the essay.

Stage 7, where he would be expected to reside is characterized as generativity vs. stagnation (Care). He has shown little compassion or empathy for anyone even close family members since taking power. Kim Jong-un has shown the world a very violent becoming through numerous executions of his top advisors. A pattern of inability to manage international relations was shown not only with the land mine incident in August of 2015 but, by the announcement shortly thereafter that the country was restarting a nuclear weapon processing plant.

Sage five, Identity vs. Confusion (fidelity) is characterized by finding an individual identity. For comparison this is similar to but different from Freud’s latency phase where social dynamics are formed (Friedman & Schustack 2003). The personality profile discussed Kim Jong-un’s quick succession into a position that he was not only ill prepared for but, one that does not only mismatch with cultural mandates and his material heritage it also mismatches with his father’s preference for him. Kim Jong-un is stuck in an identity crises where he is unable to define himself. This means his own internal struggles will manifest as a constant of inconsistency and unreliability to those around him. This will likely sew discontent as his followers need predictability and sound judgement when the country’s international standing is
balanced on a very delicate system of brinkmanship. This skill set has kept the country aloft since the Soviet Union was unable to continue its aid to the nation in the 1970s.
IV. Cognitive Personality Analysis

Perception rules not only cognitive personality theory it also rules North Korea. As was eluded to in the personality profile all things in the country are done to glorify the supreme leader Kim Jong-un (Kang & Rigoulot 2005). To understand the cognitive personality traits of Kim Jong-un it is best to work from the outside in. First by considering the population’s locus of control. By understanding how Kim Jong-un has affected the population’s perception of control over their own lives a better grasp on his own motivations can be attained.

As a dictator Kim Jong-un relies on his subjects having an external locus of control. The underlying goal is to instill a negative of self-evaluation in the follower’s minds (Luthans, Peterson, & Ibrayeva 1998). This negative self-view makes the individual more malleable and less prone to revolt. When a person holds a strong external locus of control they feel their fate is in the hands of others or another (Friedman & Schustack 2003). Consider the North Korean regime itself. It has absolute control over the media, societal norms, propaganda, and even all forms of entertainment. All persons in North Korea are required to give a personal oath of allegiance to Kim Jong-un whereby they thank him personally for all they have received. In 2006 Lisa Ling traveled to North Korea to film a documentary on cataract surgery within the country. She showed individuals who had been blind for years and decades bowing and thanking images of the Kim family for the gift of sight – no one thanked the doctors.

This level of control leaves individuals with not just reinforced but, arguably mandated, external locus of control. As a result of living in such a system for their entire lives are often unable to comprehend life without such a control (Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser 2007). Many of the defectors living in South Korea them feel they are living out of place and are without a since of direction (Harden 2012). This feeling is a result of living their entire lives under conditioning of
external locus of control. External locus of control orientation has been cited as having a negative relationship on an individual’s ability to operant re-conditioning, also referred to as actively altering behavior (Goesling et al. 1974).

With such a significant impact on individuals it is no wonder the North Korean politburo keeps such close tabs on all aspects of society. Even though these controls are attributed to the politburo’s governance the entirety of the laws and constrains originate with Kim Jong-un himself.

In direct contrast to the everyday lives of the population Kim Jong-un lives his life with a high external locus of control when things go poorly and an internal locus of control for those things that go well. Taking several recent events in North Korea into account when the outcome does not fit what Kim Jong-un desired the official in charge are often executed publically. Sadly the official individual is only following the exact orders they were given. The execution of his uncle, Jang Dong-theak, is a prime example of the external control. Economic relations with China have been strained since the death of Kim Jong-il with little opportunity of improvement. Jang had been one of the principal architects of economic relations with China. When a crab fishing rights deal was botched Jang was officially charged with treason and shortly thereafter executed.

Understanding perceived locus of control within a population can be a key aspect in not just determining how the government rules the country it offers significant insight into the motivations of its rulers. These motivations are based on thoughts and perceptions the rules have. These considerations allow for Kim Jong-un’s own motivations and cognitive biases to be derived from the control exerted over the North Korean population. Locus of Control is a starting point in the reverse engineering of Kim Jong-un’s cognitive personality. Understanding
how he attributes control over situations will frame his cognitive development of schema and categorization. The afore mentioned pleasure squad his father kept can offer a very unique insight into what Kim Jong-un truly values.

He is willing to spend untold amounts of money to enjoy a basketball game with some of the former members of the Chicago Bulls. He has flown team members across the world, entertained them with lavish parties and over the top accommodations. One such individual, Dennis Rodman, was able to broker this event. He was even able to enter into North Korea and spend an unprecedented amount of one on one time with Kim Jong-un. Yet this all came to a very sudden stop when he revealed that Kim Jong-un had a daughter. Kim had gone to great lengths to keep the existence and identity of his daughter a closely held state secret.

North Korean society is relatively archaic in their views of females. Kim Jong-un grew up in an environment that valued male influence over females. This benefited him because his father favored one of his older sisters as a potential successor. However, she was culturally unable to assume any true leadership role because of her gender and eventually led to Kim Jong-un’s assentation to power. Another cultural trait Kim Jong-un was exposed to while growing up was his father’s womanizing. Not only did he have several mistresses, three in all, he had an entire brigade of young girls that were ‘hired’ at a young age to come ‘entertain’ him wherever and however he desired. The group is often referred to as the ‘pleasure brigade’ or ‘pleasure squad’. Kim Jong-un had almost unfettered access to these girls from a very young age. Kim Jong-un father had a very low opinion of women as was reflected in his treatment of them (DailyNK. 2005). This provided the framework of the roles and value of women in which Kim Jong-un was exposed to while growing up.
Of all the negative publicity and ethically questionable things Kim Jong-un has been accused of committing—abuse of women has never been mentioned. It seems that an individual who was allowed to drink and smoke as a teenager, who as an adult has ordered the execution of numerous generals for infractions as mild as dosing during a speech would have no internal qualms about treating women as objects. Considering that this stance not only culturally is it acceptable but, he also witnessed his father behaving in such a manner it is surprising that he would not follow in the same path.

Today his sister has an important political post in the politburo that runs North Korea. It is also thought that while he was recovering from a suspected skiing accident in June of 2015 she ran the country from behind the scenes. Not only recently, but, when Kim Jong-un had access to his father’s pleasure brigade it has been said by those close to him noted his demeanor was very shy and often nervous around the girls. Kim Jong-un has also gone to great lengths to protect his wife and daughter from the international media. Kim Jong-un grew up seeing the repercussions of his father’s actions. These actions also personally affected Kim Jong-un through his mother who was forced by Kim Jong-il to divorce her original husband and become his mistress.

Sometimes culture informs the individual to what is normal and acceptable, but in a few cases it inspires individuals to push for social change. Of all the bad about Kim Jong-un that has been discussed in the media, this may be the one facet of his personality that proves he is not entirely psychopathic.

The schema Kim Jong-un was exposed to highlighted and reinforced that culture and his status within the country allowed him to treat women as objects. However through these experiences and his own characterization of the events he saw led him to reject the cultural norm of objectifying women as his father did.
V. Conclusion

A large portion of this study relied on reported information from individuals other than the subject, Kim Jong-un. This is owing to the isolated nature of North Korea and the dubious credibility of the country’s media outlets. Unfortunately, the majority of the information pertaining to Kim Jong-un himself came from non-peer reviewed or scholarly sources. However, the study only relied on information that was widely available, from credible sources, and reported from more than one individual. This gave a more conclusive and rounded definition of Kim Jong-un in which to work with. Information that was available only from one source represented outlying information and disregarded. It is also important to note that even though the theories employed in this study are old when compared to the modern body of psychological knowledge. They do serve as a foundation for that modern knowledge, just as this research serves as a foundation for understanding the psychology of Kim Jong-un. It is not a definitive or encompassing analysis, but it does provide a vector and starting point for future research to expand upon and apply newer theory to.

Based on the preceding analysis Kim Jong-un is an individual fighting not only cultural influences but internal conflict as well. The research found that from a neo-analytical viewpoint Kim Jong-un suffers from a fractured psyche lending him to internal conflict. Cognitively, he was found to display volatile characteristics to others while simultaneously exhibiting actions of an overprotective nature to his immediate family.

Insecurity stems from the cognitive roots that surround the overprotection of his immediate family. As a youth he felt his family was not valued and only a political tool employed by Kim Jong-il to fulfill his desires. This family life not only leads to insecurity trends it is also forms the basis of addictive personalities (Ball & Cecero 2001). The study determined
that Kim Jong-un holds personality constructs that leads him to be indecisive, short tempered, and insecure.

In light of these considerations and those previously discussed the conclusion of the study is that Kim Jong-un will continue to rule North Korea in a manner that reflects his own internal conflicts. The best way to manage these conflicts is to effectively manage the roles he holds as ruler of North Korea. The socially destructive precedents set forth by his grandfather and especially by his father feed into the growing conflict. To overcome these faults and realize his potential he has do the same with the troubles facing the North Korean population, culture and economy.
References


