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**45 as a bullshit artist:
Straining for charisma**

by

Marco Jacquemet[©]
(University of San Francisco)

mjacquemet@usfca.edu

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45 AS A BULLSHIT ARTIST: STRAINING FOR CHARISMA

Marco Jacquemet

“He’s nothing but a bullshitter,” President Barack Obama told two friends in November 2016 (Halloway 2017), describing an election night phone call with President-elect Donald Trump, in which the businessman suddenly professed his “respect” and “admiration” for Obama—after years of hectoring. In this chapter I heed the words of the former president, but when I call Trump a bullshitter, I don’t mean it as invective. Rather, I mean it as a technical, linguistic description of his relationship with factual representations.

In the first 200 days of his presidency, Trump made roughly 560 false statements, according to Daniel Dale and Tanya Talaga of the *Toronto Star* (Dale and Talaga 2016). His pace accelerated, however, and by day 993, he’d made 13,435 false or misleading claims (Kessler et al. 2019). That’s an impressive amount of misinformation. Trump says a lot of things that aren’t true, often shamelessly so, and it’s tempting to call him a liar. To be sure, a good portion of Trump’s false claims do not have a direct correlation with factual references, which meets the basic definition of a lie. But calling Trump a liar, besides being a truism, does nothing to advance our understanding of how he uses language, though bullshitting, to portray himself as a charismatic autocrat. In fact, there are distinctions to be made between his various falsehoods. A statement such as, “I’ll build the wall and Mexico will pay for it” (Qin 2019) seems to belong to an entirely different plane than Trump’s tweeted claim that “3,000 people did not die in two hurricanes that hit Puerto Rico” (Sherman 2018), which directly contradicts the figure published in late August by George Washington University’s Milken Institute after extensive research (BBC News 2018). Whereas the second of these statements is clearly a lie, the first is somewhat more ambiguous, leading commentators to qualify it as “bullshit.”

As the Princeton University philosophy professor Harry Frankfurt put it in a famous essay (2005), to lie presumes a kind of awareness of and interest in the truth—and the goal is to convince others that the false thing you are saying is in fact true. Trump, more often than not, isn’t interested in convincing anyone of anything. He’s a bullshitter who simply doesn’t care about the veracity of his statements, as long as they boost his image.

While other commentators have remarked that Trump’s statements comprise a spectrum ranging from “true” to “pants-on-fire” lies (McGranahan 2018, Snyder 2018), several scholars have converged on the claim that Trump is at least sometimes bullshitting (see, for instance, Carter 2018; Gavalier and Goldberg 2017; and Yglesias 2017 for contributions formulated more or less simultaneously with my own first iteration of this claim at the 2017 American Anthropological Association meetings, Jacquemet 2017). Going beyond their arguments, I would contend that lies and bullshit belong to two different, yet converging and at times overlapping, epistemological planes. These planes are shaped by different concerns: a need to deceive in the case of lies; a desire to impress in the case of bullshitting.

Trump’s lies, furthermore, have been portrayed as tactical moves in his two-fold strategy of, first, sowing confusion to create the conditions for an authoritarian regime and, second, creating aspirational communities and motivating them to act. Without denying the importance of these claims, in the following pages, I analyze Trump’s deceptive statements as part of a strategy of impression management to shape his image into the larger-than-life personality which is a necessary condition of all autocratic rulers. I will do so by breaking down bullshitting into its three basic elements: the speaker, the text, and the audience.

The Speaker

Frankfurt (2005) makes an important distinction between lying and bullshitting. Although both the liar and the bullshitter try to get away with something, the bullshitter says things not necessarily with the goal of lying but rather with no concern for their accuracy. This, according to Frankfurt, is the essence of bullshit (BS): it is spoken without any concern for the truth. It can be true or false, but the speaker does not really care. Still, though the bullshitter is indifferent to the truth of what he is saying, he does tell one kind of lie: he implicitly lies about what he is doing with his speech (generic “he” pronoun is intentional here). This is the thing most alike between liars and bullshitters: they both seek to deceive others about themselves. The liar seeks to make us believe that he believes his statement to be true (that is, he knows claim P is false, yet asserts P, and in so doing of course asserts that he believes P). The bullshitter seeks to make us believe that he is saying something that he knows (he makes claims like P, asserts P, and asserts that he believes P, but in fact he does not know or care if P is true or not). Furthermore, a lie is necessarily false, but bullshit is not—bullshit may happen to be correct or incorrect.

What a bullshitter cares about is accomplishing positive impression management through speech. The bullshitter’s goal is not to convince others of the facts. It is, rather, to shape his listeners’ beliefs and attitudes about himself. The liar *knows* what the facts are and tries to mislead. The bullshitter may not presume he even knows what the truth is; bullshit is indifferent to the truth in ways that lies are not.

Trump’s performance as a bullshitter has been an easy target for comedians over the past two years, precisely because of his transparent obsession with impression management. For instance, the *Daily Show* marked the first two years of Trump’s presidency with a competition that asked viewers to vote for Trump’s best “BS statement” (Noah 2018). More than three and a half million people participated in selecting the winner by voting online. Among the top statements were “We had the biggest inauguration crowd ever,” “My response to Puerto Rico’s hurricane was amazing,” and “I’d personally run into a school unarmed to stop a shooter.” All three clearly point to Trump’s desire to shape American beliefs and attitudes about himself: he wants to be seen as a popular, courageous man always ready to respond to emergencies in “amazing” ways.

A more recent example of Trump’s BS provides further evidence of his preoccupation with his image. At a White House event on March 7, 2019, President Trump appeared to refer to Apple CEO Tim Cook as “Tim Apple” (Wang 2019). Video of the slip-up swiftly went viral with social media users and late-night hosts piling ridicule on this slip of the tongue. Even Cook himself got in on the fun, changing his Twitter name to “Tim” followed by an icon of the Apple logo.

Trump responded by telling Republican donors at a subsequent event that he actually said “Tim Cook Apple” really fast, and that the “Cook” part of the sentence was pronounced softly. “But all you heard from the ‘fake news,’ he said, was Tim Apple.” More ridicule followed. Then, in a tweet a few days later, Trump claimed, “I quickly referred to Tim + Apple as Tim/Apple as an easy way to save time and words” (Ross 2019, see also Figure 1).

Figure 1: Bullshitting



This strenuous defense of a somewhat innocuous mistake must be understood in the context of the motivation at the basis of BS, namely the bullshitter's general refusal to admit wrong (Carter 2018). This inability to let go of a gaffe (which Carter identifies as the first step of bullshitting) generates a feedback loop of increasingly dubious BS in an effort to save face and restore the authority of the speaker.

The Text

Numerous commentators on Frankfurt's work (in particular Fredal 2011 and Carter 2018) have pointed out that focusing exclusively on the bullshitter may produce a reification of the autonomous speaker at the expense of understanding the overall ecology of the bullshitting event. Frankfurt's approach also lodges us uncomfortably in the task of trying to understand a speaker's intention, when in fact we often detect bullshit without strictly knowing anyone's state of mind. Instead, we often infer BS, at least in part, from its semiotic features. And, I suggest below, some of the features that allow BS to succeed do so because of how they embed the interlocutors in the text, thus enlisting them in the BS event (see Eco 1981).

How is a bullshitter's indifference to truth expressed in textual and linguistic practices? Do BS statements share particular linguistic features? Although no scholar has yet produced a systematic textual analysis of this phenomenon, we can characterize BS as ego-centered discourse frequently (even if not always) marked by the use of repetitions, intensifiers, superlatives, and ellipsis. Non-sequiturs and non-sensical statements also play a crucial role in this discourse (for Frankfurt, "nonsense" is seen as a foundation for BS).

Moreover, we may want to revisit, for bullshitological purposes, Grice's maxims for ideal conversation. Grice (1975) argued that good communication follows what he calls the Cooperative Principle: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (45). The ideal speaker follows the Cooperative Principle by trying to do the following: to be as informative as possible, giving as much information as is needed and no more (i.e. Grice's "maxim of quantity"); to be truthful, not giving information that is false or unsupported by evidence (i.e. maxim of quality); to be relevant, saying things that are

pertinent to the discussion (i.e. maxim of relevance); and to be as clear, as brief, and as orderly as possible, avoiding obscurity and ambiguity (i.e. maxim of manner).

According to Grice, when a speaker manifestly violates or “flouts” one or more of these maxims, they may be performing an “implicature,” in which the flouting points to some underlying, non-literal meaning. On first being heard, in other words, an utterance may not appear to follow the Cooperative Principle, but it can still be understood as meaningful through implication. If Speaker A, for instance, says “Did you think my piano recital went well?” and Speaker B replies: “You looked great,” Speaker B’s response would seem to violate at least one maxim, primarily that of relevance. Speaker A will likely discern that an implicature is being made; speaker B is implicating that Speaker A didn’t play especially well. Speaker B “means” to say this, but they opt not to state it outright.

Like all speakers, Trump engages in no shortage of implicatures. After one of the presidential debates in 2016, for instance, he criticized debate moderator Megyn Kelly of Fox News, telling CNN’s Don Lemon she had been unfairly aggressive and “ridiculous.” “You could see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever. In my opinion, she was off base” (Rucker 2015). The crucial maxim violation, here, is of quantity; Trump does not speak the name of the last of Kelly’s body parts from which blood was supposedly coming out. This leaves the listener to infer there’s some reason for which he didn’t mention it, and an easy way to square Trump’s meaning is to assume he’s implicating a taboo part of the anatomy. Context informs the implicature, too; Trump’s statements that Kelly’s questions were “ridiculous” and “off base” tap into the widespread, sexist notion that women can be irrational, perhaps especially when influenced by their hormones. Many listeners thus took his underlying meaning, his implicature, to be that Kelly was menstruating. Trump, of course, took advantage of the fact that he didn’t state this directly to deny he was referring to menstruation in a later interview. But at the time, it certainly seemed to behave like an implicature.

Implicature is usually the first explanation for violation of maxims. But in some cases, maxims may be violated because the speaker is not following the Cooperative Principle—not trying to communicate seriously or well—and instead is simply bullshitting. If utterances convey not enough or too much information (maxim of quantity), lack evidence (maxim of quality), are irrelevant to any current topic or issue (maxim of relevance), or are obscure, ambiguous, unnecessarily wordy, or disorderly (manner), *and* if no clear implicature can be inferred, they may be candidates for being labelled BS. And some of Trump’s BS seems bent on violating *all* of Grice’s maxims.

Examples can be found from Trump’s speech during his presidential campaign, which Jennifer Sclafani (2017) closely analyzed. She found much of his talk to be composed of simple words, asides, repetitions, non-sequiturs, intensifiers, superlatives, and ellipsis. Many of these linguistic features can be understood as violations of Grice’s maxims, but without following the Cooperative Principle (and, thus, not making sense by way of implicature). And much of his speech would seem to qualify as BS.

The following excerpt, a nonsensical rambling during a 2015 political speech, contains a clear example of how some of Trump’s BS works:

Look, having nuclear—my uncle was a great professor and scientist and engineer, Dr. John Trump at MIT... good genes, very good genes, OK, very smart, the Wharton School of Finance, very good, very smart—you know, if you’re a conservative Republican, if I were a liberal, if, like, OK, if I ran as a liberal Democrat, they would say I’m one of the smartest people anywhere in the world—it’s true!—but when you’re a conservative Republican they try—oh, do they do a number—that’s why I always start off: Went to Wharton, was a good student, went there, went there, did this, built a

fortune—you know I have to give my like credentials all the time, because we're a little disadvantaged—but you look at the nuclear deal, the thing that really bothers me—it would have been so easy, and it's not as important as these lives are—nuclear is powerful, my uncle explained that to me many, many years ago, the power and that was 35 years ago, he would explain the power of what's going to happen and he was right—who would have thought, but when you look at what's going on with the four prisoners—now it used to be three, now it's four—but when it was three and even now, I would have said it's all in the messenger; fellas, and it is fellas because, you know, they don't, they haven't figured that the women are smarter right now than the men, so, you know, it's gonna take them about another 150 years—but the Persians are great negotiators, the Iranians are great negotiators, so, and they, they just killed, they just killed us. (*Seven Generations* 2017)

In this excerpt, we find both the violations of Grice's maxims and the basic features of Trump's BS identified by Sclafani. Trump began this ramble trying to criticize the nuclear deal the Obama administration had made with Iran, but seems derailed by his frenetic attempts to impress the audience with a cloud of bluster about his own credentials. In some cases, his garbled claims make it hard for critics to ascertain what he's even said in order to evaluate its truth or falsity (Yglesias 2017).

Yet, a simple reading of this same transcript of his speech does not convey the social effectiveness of Trump's spoken BS, achieved through prosody—that is, through paralinguistic features such as intonation, tone, stress, and rhythm. Prosody structures the interactional relationship between speaker and audience, cueing audiences on how to understand and respond to the speaker's words. Much spoken BS would not be successful without proper prosody. If we remove the prosodic features from this excerpt of BS, it falls flat, unable to convey the form and stance of the utterance. Hence, the transcript above immediately appears to be a piece of nonsense of surrealist heights rarely encountered in public life—although it may not have been perceived as such when heard by Trump's adoring audience. As he delivers his ramble, Trump enlivens it with impassioned lilting pitch, wry asides, and a sometimes-exasperated tone—he is clearly affecting the stance of a man sure of his opinions, even if the content of what he says is not entirely sensible. The exercise of stripping Trump's speech of prosody—of his “blindingly confident entertaining delivery”—was used to great comical effect by the comedian John Oliver in his show *Last Week Tonight* on November 12, 2017, when he had the transcript above read aloud by a digitalized voice (*Last Week Tonight* 2017).

I'm not claiming every instance of BS has the textual features I describe above. When Trump said repeatedly that millions of “illegal voters” cost him the popular vote, for instance, he was indifferent to the truth of the claim and patently attempting a kind of impression management, yet his statements were mostly straightforward rather than florid violations of numerous Gricean maxims. But when Trump starts to stuff empty intensifiers, patent exaggerations, repetitions, non-sequiturs and the like into his claims, our bullshit-meters should be clanging.

The Audience

As the preceding discussion on prosody suggests, BS can be sustained through an interactional relationship between speaker and audience (Preti 2006). An analysis of Trump's BS solely focused on author and text is insufficient to explain how his BS appeals to such a sizeable audience—sizeable enough for him to win the presidency.

Social media serves as a dominant channel through which Trump develops an interactional relationship with his audience. Trump’s BS is often delivered to his audience by the “evil mediation” offered by digital platforms—Twitter above all. Fuller and Goffey’s (2012) concept of “evil media” refers to platforms where the format of a message is privileged over content, so that the preformatted nature of the interface (say, a limited number of characters and a limited way to interact with a message via emoticons, likes, and retweets) shapes how people can respond to it. Moreover, the need for immediacy in the current media environment means that misinformation (such as the majority of Trump’s tweeted BS statements) is disseminated in a totally unfiltered fashion. In this environment, the step of fact-checking prior to publication (posting or tweeting) is typically skipped, and the scale of circulation is prioritized over the accuracy of content.

Twitter, in particular, possesses capabilities perfectly suitable for BS. As a broadcast medium, it provides the bullshitter with great reach in an interactive simulacrum, making the audience feel engaged directly in the conversation. It highlights the supremacy of the format and form over content through its 280 character limit. It imposes no editorial control over the quality of most messages. Finally, features such as the mention (i.e. @TwitterHandle; for example, @realDonaldTrump), the hashtag (e.g. #trumpbullshit), and particularly the retweet are ideally suited for amplifying BS. Take for instance his most retweeted tweet in 2018, a rank threatening North Korea with his “bigger and more powerful” “Nuclear Button” (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Bigger and powerful



Here again, we see his braggadocio and desire to impress as expressed in the macho discourse and metaphorical implications. BS is a performance, and good performances echoed by others not only may give those who repeat them some reflected glory but also produce a multiplying effect that extends the reach of the initial performance, exposing in a viral manner more and more people to it, and consequently amplifying the bullshitter’s seduction.

But re-tweeting can also happen by those who are appalled and fascinated by BS. As Richard Grusin (2017) pointed out, Trump’s campaign, spearheaded by his tweets, weaponized formal and informal print, televisual, and networked media to produce a collective national mood that a Trump presidency was a legitimate, possible, and, for many, a desirable and inevitable future. In their endless coverage of his campaign, often telegraphing shock at Trump’s outrageous claims, most mainstream media became amplifiers of Trump’s political BS. They thus unwittingly but incessantly projected the possibility of a Trump presidency.

To explore Trump's use of evil media, Grusin focused on a passage from Felix Guattari's (1989) *The Three Ecologies*, in which Guattari describes Trump's strategy as a real estate developer operating in the media environment of the late 1980s. This passage was gleefully quoted by many commentators opposed to Trump's campaign, for reasons that will be readily apparent.

Just as monstrous and mutant algae invade the lagoon of Venice, so our television screens are populated, saturated, by 'degenerate' images and statements. In the field of social ecology, men like Donald Trump are permitted to proliferate freely, like another species of algae, taking over entire districts of New York and Atlantic City; he 'redevelops' by raising rents, thereby driving out tens of thousands of poor families, most of whom are condemned to homelessness, becoming the equivalent of the dead fish of environmental ecology. (Guattari 2000:45)

Trump's ability to manipulate this environment for personal and political gain has been evident in the way in which he has used Twitter, both during the campaign and during his presidency, to control large swaths of media real estate. Political media watchers have demonstrated that many of his tweets come in response to Fox News reports. In many cases, Trump simply live-tweets his television viewing. But such tweets work to replicate themselves through a cascade of re-mediations in a kind of algal bloom in the media lagoon. His live-tweeting, like all his tweets, is remediated by other social media users through retweets, mentions, critiques, and likes, then remediated again by formal and informal media—blogs, print, televisual, networked, and “fake” news outlets. The end result of this process is that Trump uses tweets to redevelop media neighborhoods under his name and crowd out other competitors for as many news cycles as he can control, sometimes for a short time and sometimes for days, weeks, or even, in rare instances, months.

Trump's tweets (the most appealing ones, perhaps) pass successfully through this process because they have an orally performable dimension. As Jan Blommaert (2018) remarks, “Talk is tweet, and tweet is talk.” When Donald Trump gives a public speech (such as the one quoted above), the units of his speeches are tweets—or at least, he produces chunks of performed rhetoric that can be effortlessly converted into the format of tweets. Some of his tweets appear as chunks of discourse that can be spoken by others. In fact, they contain pointers, such as exclamation marks or all caps, as to exactly how they can be delivered in speech. In other words, they are instructional, showing his followers how to speak like Trump and spread his word.

This mediatized BS then becomes a test of his audience's loyalty, both in terms of personal loyalty and political loyalty. *Vox*'s commentator Matthew Yglesias suggests that Trump's BS is a “loyalty test” precisely because it asks his followers and members of his administration to do something nutty; namely, sign on to his outrageous nonsense. “Trump not only keeps bullshitting, he tends to demand that his team offer a zealous defense of whatever bullshit he happens to spout on any given day — putting staffers and legislative allies in the untenable position of defending the indefensible” (Yglesias 2017: 2). But defend him they do. One thing that BS has in common with lying is its ability to create a community willing to believe (or at least perform belief in) the speaker, provide cover to his statements, and live in the world created by his words. In so doing, communities are glued together and people are incited to act, sometimes violently.

Moreover, Trump appears to customize his BS for the specific affordances of online and offline communication. While some of his confident BS tweets are not only repeatable, but also quotable, his offline communication is more susceptible to the slippery style analyzed above. We can see this in his follow-up to a tweet he produced in March 2017 to

attack Obama for what Trump falsely claimed was his role in wiretapping then-candidate Trump (Schmidt and Shear 2017, see also Figure 3).

Figure 3: Conspiracy



However, when confronted by CBS anchor John Dickerson (JD), host of “Face the Nation,” on the meaning of this tweet, Trump (DT) took a conflict-avoiding (and cowardly) stance (as reported by John Oliver [*Last Week Tonight* 2017]):

DT well you saw what happened with surveillance
and...I think that was inappropriate=
JD =what does that mean, sir?
DT uuh:: you can figure that out yourself
JD well- the reason I ask is- you called him sick and BAAD
DT look you can figure it out yourself
he was very nice to me with words, but-
and when I was with him, but after that-
there has been...no relationship
JD but you stand by that claim about him=
DT =I don't stand by anything
I just- uh- you can take it the way you want
JD I just wanted to find it out that your-
you are the president of the United States
you said that he was sick and bad because he attempted=
DT =you can take it any way, you can take it any way you want
JD but I'm asking you, because you don't want to do fake news, I want to hear it from
president Trump=
DT =you don't have to ask me=
JD =why not?
DT because I have my own opinions, you can have your own opinions
JD but I want to know your opinions,
you're the president of the United States
DT that's enough, thank you, thank you very much.

This passage is fascinating for several reasons. Trump is clearly avoiding the issue of whether his tweet was true or false; indeed, his bizarrely relativistic repeated statement that “you can take it any way you want” almost seems an admission that the tweet wasn't really

about truth or falsehood to begin with (a signature of BS). The exchange seems to concede his past BS, at the same time that it seems itself to qualify as another instance of BS. Trump doesn't care to follow the Cooperative Principle in this exchange, violating maxims of quantity (he repeatedly withholds information about what he was up to with the tweet) and relevance ("I have my own opinions, you have your opinions"—yet Dickerson's query was whether Trump would stand by his own claim that Obama was sick and bad). In its slipperiness, Trump's words again exemplify his indifference to truth, while, he hopes, sustaining his impression management as someone who can simply disregard these harassing journalists. His fans, encouraged by Trump to see mainstream media as "fake" and infected by "liberal bias," might have cheered as Trump evaded capture.

This discrepancy between the bellicose Tweeter-in-chief and the face-to-face slippery interlocutor points to the final characteristic of Trump's BS: it is one-sided discourse, arising in encounters characterized by Trump's arrogance and his desire to insult, becoming essentially the ultimate tool of the strong man:

Bullshit happens, more generally then, when one party in an encounter feels superior enough (in position, authority, or rhetorical skill, for example) to dispense with the rituals of cooperative interaction, leading the other to feel treated without due deference; when one participant in an exchange appears to have been undeservedly slighted; or when one side of a dialogue is unjustly disregarded. Bullshit arises from arrogant gestures of disregard. (Fredal 2011: 256)

What Fredal doesn't acknowledge is the possibility of multiple others: in Trump's case there is an audience that loves his self-presentation as a strong man, and others who feel disregarded, even dehumanized.

BS and Branded Despotism

As Frankfurt pointed out, bullshit is inevitable when someone speaks of something about which they are ignorant. Perhaps there are many such occasions arising from the demand for public figures to speak on everything. But in the case of Donald Trump, bullshitting becomes much more than a tool to cover his ignorance. It is part of his larger *strategy of branded despotism*: he uses bullshit interactionally (for self-aggrandizing and impression management), mediatically (to create the Trump spectacle), and politically (to test loyalty, both in terms of brand loyalty and political loyalty).

In Trump's attempt to deliver a charismatic performance, his total lack of constraint in bullshitting is framed as "authenticity," which supersedes sanity or competence, becoming the index of a politician who "tells it like it is." It's an approach that, like much of the rest of Trump's ideology and policy agenda, assumes (correctly, it appears) that his audiences care more about shock and entertainment value in their media consumption than almost anything else (Debord's 1969 work, *La société du spectacle*, comes to mind here). Trump supporters may wish for more jobs, fewer immigrants, and white supremacy (for instance), but they have gravitated toward his media output in part because of his style.

In promoting his brand, Trump makes false assertions, which he surely knows or could easily ascertain to be false. He also makes statements of whose truth he is uncertain—and he is indifferent to the fact that he doesn't actually regard them as true. In the first case, he is telling a lie. In the second case, it's BS.

Both lies and BS are about deception: in the first case the liar's deception is about facts and events in the world, while in the latter the deception is about the bullshitter himself,

in particular his desire to be perceived in a positive light. In Trump's case, this light is somewhat more sinister: the glow of a would-be dictator.

As multiple commentators have mentioned, Trump's lies aim to rewrite or scramble history. His lies—"Obama was not born in the US" (Farley 2011) or "Arabs in New Jersey celebrated 9/11" (Kessler 2015)—glue communities together and spur them to action, whether at the ballot box or in the streets. His prevarication is highly strategic and functional, pointing to Trump's desire to rearrange society itself.

In this strategy, the use of BS stands out as a second rail, operating in conjunction with the destructive power of his lies to advance the image of a charismatic leader. All major modern dictators—Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler, and Mao—created cults of personality as the embodiment of their despotic policies, visible through their larger-than-life public image. Unable to win World War II, like Stalin, or go for a heroic swim in the Yangtze River, like Mao at seventy-years-old, Trump relies on the BS of self-flattery and self-praise to fashion his own image of an idealized, heroic, and worshipful superman. "Nobody knows politicians better than me," he brags. "Nobody knows the system better than me." "Nobody's bigger or better at the military than I am" (Blake 2016, Black 2016).

It is disturbing to find an important political figure who indulges freely both in lies and in bullshit. What is perhaps even more deeply disturbing is to discover an important portion of the American population responding to this dishonesty with such pervasive enthusiasm.

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